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## 'Next Man Up'



**BSB'S 2020 MICHIGAN MEMORIES ISSUE**

COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**FILLED THE GAP** – Although head coach Ryan Day and 17 scholarship players were sidelined due to a coronavirus outbreak within the program, Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson, left (pictured with Enokk Vimahi), led the Buckeyes to a 52-12 win at Michigan State.

# Johnson Leads Buckeyes To Victory Against Spartans In Day's Absence

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

The Ohio State football program has long prided itself on the idea of "Next Man Up." When someone goes down, the person below them on the depth chart is expected to step forward and fill that role without a dip in production.

When the Buckeyes – who had their previous game against Illinois canceled due to a coronavirus outbreak within the program – traveled to Michigan State on Dec. 5 while missing 23 players and four coaches, that mantra was put to the test. But led by defensive line coach Larry Johnson, who served as the interim head coach after Ryan Day was among those who tested positive for COVID-19, Ohio State aced

the exam with a resounding 52-12 win in East Lansing, Mich.

"I thought our leadership did a great job the entire week just keeping everybody focused and continuing what Coach Day has done," Johnson said after the game. "He's built a great culture with guys that believe in each other and believe in the brotherhood and (believe in) the next man up. We had some guys down today, but our young players stepped up and played a great game. It was a great team effort. The coaching staff did a great job all week long preparing the guys for this game."

Behind a rebuilt offensive line that was missing three starters in center Josh Myers and tackles Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere, the Buckeyes rushed for a season-high 322 yards on 6.7 yards per carry against the Spartans and allowed just three sacks of quar-

terback Justin Fields.

"I think those guys played a great game for being the first game," Fields said of first-time starters Dawand Jones, Matthew Jones and Max Wray. "I'm just proud of those guys and proud of the way they stepped up."

Ohio State was also missing two starters on the defensive side of the ball in linebacker and three-time team captain Tuf Borland and safety Josh Proctor, as well as a trio of assistant coaches in quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis, co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison and secondary coach/special teams coordinator Matt Barnes. Their absence seemingly provided the Buckeyes with extra motivation, however.

"I think this week really brought us together as a team," Fields said. "I think our leadership

**Continued On Page 8**

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# FAN FORUM

## Buckeye Leaves

*Even with multiple players unavailable, Ohio State went to East Lansing and came out with a dominant 52-12 win over Michigan State.*

*The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff distributed Buckeye Leaves to the players who stood out the most against the Spartans, and we asked subscribers on the BSB Fan Forum to hand out leaves of their own.*

**Wyatt Crosher, BSB:** "Sometimes the obvious choice is the right one, and that was the case for quarterback Justin Fields during this lopsided win, even if his passing numbers weren't quite up to the level they had been in earlier games this season.

"Fields completed 17 of his 24 passes and threw for only 199 yards and two touchdowns but made up for it in the ground game, rushing for a career-high 104 yards and two scores on 13 carries.

"Those numbers are impressive enough to merit a Buckeye leaf, but to do it with three starting offensive linemen out in front of him made it even more special.

Fields did not lead the team in rushing, though, with senior running back Trey Sermon's 112 yards on 10 carries leading the way there.

"I also want to give an honorary Buckeye leaf to Larry Johnson, who became the first Black head coach in Ohio State football history and did it while leaving East Lansing with a 1-0 record."

**Joe Dempsey, BSB:** "Ohio State junior wide receiver Chris Olave deserves a Buckeye leaf for his performance in the Buckeyes' 52-12 victory at Michigan State. Olave hauled in 10 receptions for 139 yards and one touchdown.

"The standout Buckeye receiver helped his team pick up six first downs, including one on third down. Olave, a solid blocker, also made several blocks to spring long runs for Justin Fields, Trey Sermon and Master Teague. He also downed a punt at the Spartan 1-yard line as a gunner.

"Ohio State fifth-year punter Drue Chrisman also deserves a Buckeye leaf for a phenomenal performance

in East Lansing. After dropping five punts inside the 6 in 2018, Chrisman made his return to Spartan Stadium and did not disappoint.

"Chrisman punted five times for a 53.4-yard average, downing the Spartans inside the 20 three times, including two inside the 2. His long punt went 74 yards and downed Michigan State at the 2."

**Andrew Lind, BSB:** "Based on his play this season, it's easy to forget that senior defensive tackle Haskell Garrett's season – and, quite possibly, his career – was in jeopardy after he suffered a gunshot wound to the face while allegedly breaking up an off-campus altercation this summer.

"His resolve paid off when he recorded Ohio State's first sack of the season in the opener against Nebraska and against Michigan State when he tipped a pass in the end zone and came down with it for the pick-six to put the Buckeyes up 28-0 in the second quarter.

"It was a tremendous moment in a game that felt otherwise routine and another reason why I think Garrett might find himself being selected in the late-first or early-second round of next year's NFL draft. Cameron Heyward, anyone?"

**Patrick Mayhorn, BSB:** "Ohio State's showing against Michigan State might have been the best of the season so far for the Silver Bullets, though it's hard to know how much of that can be attributed to improvements from the Buckeye defense and how much of it falls on the putrid Michigan State offense, but it's worth noting nonetheless.

"Even without several starters, including safety Josh Proctor – who has stood out all season in the secondary – and middle linebacker Tuf Borland, the Buckeyes looked competent, cohesive and confident against the Spartan offense save for one or two badly blown plays.

"The best player of the bunch of the defense was senior linebacker Pete Werner. The Indiana native has been impressive in the outside linebacker spot all season, but he rose to the occasion in filling in for some of those missing teammates on Saturday. He had eight tackles (three solo) on the day and helped to force a Payton

Thorne fumble at the end of the first half, though it was attributed to his batterymate Baron Browning.

"Outside of the stat sheet, Werner just always seemed to be in the right place at the right time, and it was rare to see a tackle made without him at least within the frame, if not fully involved with the tackle. Ohio State's linebacker play has been a roller coaster at times in recent seasons, but Werner's play against MSU was reminiscent of the kind of linebacker play that earned Ohio State a real claim for the "Linebacker U" title in the late 1990s and early 2000s"

### BSB Subscribers

"Trey Sermon played very well, had some nice carries. The best plays included a couple of blocks. The first one I saw enabled Justin Fields to cross the goal. I would think he should get a Buckeye leaf."

– CWbuckeye

"Head coach Larry Johnson for his team's razor-sharp focus throughout the game. Justin Field's superlative game and especially for his block on Trey Sermon's TD run. The whole offensive line – are they really backups? The defensive line and the linebackers for another excellent game, especially Haskell Garrett, Tommy Togiati, Tyreke Smith, Baron Browning and Pete Werner. Safety Marcus Hooker for breaking up the TD pass and for his fumble recovery. The two No. 1 wide receivers Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson. And the offensive coaches for an excellent game plan."

– Anthony Buckeye

"Larry Johnson. He is one of the unsung heroes of the program. He received a well-deserved Gatorade shower. Haskell Garrett. You know his story. You know what he did against the Spartans."

– Poster That Harley Built

"How about leaves for Drue Chrisman for pinning the ball on the 1-yard line and the returning Blake Haubeil for his field-goal success."

– PeyoteBuck

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN.COM

## From The Message Board

**Ohio State was without numerous players for its game against Michigan State, and though the number was not disclosed, many were likely out due to positive COVID-19 tests. Because of that, the Buckeyes had multiple new contributors who had to step up in order to take down the Spartans 52-12. We asked readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum, as well as the BSB staff, which of those new contributors had the best performance against Michigan State?**

**Here are some of the responses:**

"Could it possibly be Miyan Williams? He ran well late in the game when MSU had to know OSU was going to run the ball. He was much more elusive than I expected. That late in the game, I don't think he was running behind the Dallas Cowboys offensive line, either. Impressive."

– Terrier Buck

"I wasn't expecting to see Max Wray starting at right tackle. I though he held his own. Maybe Max Wray."

– kybuck

"The backup offensive line was unbelievable! The pass protection and the run-blocking for a total 521 yards of offense against a good defensive team like MSU was exceptional. There are a number of future NFL players among these backups!"

– AnthonyBuckeye

"Dawand Jones. He looked great!"

– Tiffin Buckeye

"Miyan Williams. He seemed to come from nowhere."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I'll say Max Wray, as well. He's kind of been the forgotten man along the offensive line despite coming in as a four-star prospect, and I think he more than held his own at right tackle. Sometimes not hearing an offensive lineman's name called is a good thing, and he played the best among the three new starters along the offensive line. He made the most of his playing time, and that could springboard him into a pivotal backup role next season at either tackle spot behind presumed starters Nicholas Petit-Frere and Paris Johnson."

– Andrew Lind, BSB

"I want to give a shoutout to Ronnie Hickman, who really stepped up in the secondary for Ohio State. While I do think he was helped by a pretty lackluster Michigan State passing attack, Hickman played really well on a part of the defense that has struggled this year, and I think it may earn him some real time in future games, even with everyone back."

– Wyatt Crosher, BSB

"Not sure if he technically started, but I'll go with Dallas Gant filling in for Tuf Borland. He looked quick coming out of that middle linebacker spot and there was little to no drop-off, even with the Buckeyes down a three-time captain. It was a bit of a platoon with Gant, Justin Hilliard and Baron Browning, but I feel Gant deserves some credit."

– Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

# Buckeyes Make Statement; Was It Their Last?



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**2020-21 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 40)**

No. 1	Sept. 19	No. 7	Nov. 21
No. 2	Oct. 3	No. 8	Nov. 28
No. 3	Oct. 17	No. 9	Dec. 5
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. 19 cover date) will be mailed on Dec. 15.

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Ohio State somehow overcame the coronavirus-related absences of head coach Ryan Day, a trio of full-time assistants and 23 players including three starting offensive linemen and a starting linebacker who happens to be one of only two three-time captains in program history as well as a litany of bad snaps, mental mistakes, questionable play-calling, seven penalties and a lost fumble ... and still managed to run away with a 52-12 victory against Michigan State that put the Buckeyes within a victory of playing in an unprecedented fourth straight Big Ten Championship Game.

About the only obstacle that didn't present itself in front of Ohio State was the Spartans, who put up only token resistance after falling behind by a 35-0 margin midway through the third quarter.

Day's absence afforded the chance for defensive line coach Larry Johnson to assume OSU's head-coaching duties for the afternoon, symbolic in that the 47-year coach who has logged 25 years of that service as an assistant in the college ranks became the first Black head coach in Ohio State program history.

Along with the obvious symbolism on the sideline, what happened between the lines allowed the Buckeyes to remain on course toward the goal they set for themselves when they led the charge to play a shortened Big Ten season that began in late October – namely to make a return trip to the College Football Playoff.

Whether that mission can be accomplished remains anyone's guess. As I am writing this column, the Michigan football team remains in a COVID-19 lockdown, placing the rivalry game between the Wolverines and Buckeyes – a series that dates back to 1897 with the two combatants meeting every year since 1918 – very much in doubt.

But as with every other fabric of our lives, a pandemic couldn't care less about college football rivalries or traditions. If Michigan is unable to play the game, it jeopardizes Ohio State's chances of appearing in the conference title game as well as its chances of making the four-team national championship playoff.

Trying to juxtapose that possibility against the tragic loss of more than 281,000 souls in this country and more than 1.5 million worldwide is foolish. While football remains a pleasant diversion from the seemingly never-ending scourge of the pandemic, it remains simply that – a diversion. It borders on cruelty to even attempt to equate the insignificant sacrifices college football players and coaches are making to the ones already made by families who either have already lost a precious family member or have loved ones isolated away in ICUs or assisted living facilities.

Still, this is a sports newspaper and when the choice is between discussing reality and diversion, the preferred topic of conversation is the latter.

In that vein, it would be a shame if Ohio State was not afforded an opportunity to take on West division champion Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game and then measure its talent against the likes of Alabama, Clemson and Notre Dame in the CFP. So far, at least, the Buckeyes have done about everything they can do on the field to prove their worthiness.

Michigan State was little more than a speed bump as Ohio State amassed 521 yards of total offense, including 322 on the ground, the highest total since a 383-yard effort during last year's 73-14 rout of Maryland. For a team whose calling card is a high-octane passing attack, it marked the second straight 300-yard performance from the running game, something the Buckeyes have managed to pull off

only three times since 2013.

Graduate transfer Trey Sermon showcased some of the talent that allowed him to rush for more than 2,000 yards in three seasons at Oklahoma, finishing with 112 yards on only 10 carries. It was the fourth 100-yard game of his career, but his first at Ohio State. The performance included a 64-yard touchdown run on which Sermon got an assist from quarterback Justin Fields, who sprinted down the sideline and delivered enough of a chip on Michigan State safety Tre Person to ensure the score.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

It was part of an all-everything afternoon for Fields, who rebounded from perhaps the poorest performance of his career two weeks before against Indiana. The QB completed 17 of 24 attempts (several of the incompletions were throwaways) for 199 yards and two touchdowns.

And as strange as it might sound, the mobile Fields turned in the first 100-yard rushing performance of his Ohio State career, totaling 104 yards and two TDs on 13 carries. That gave him a game in which he accounted for 303 total yards and four touchdowns.

Sophomore Garrett Wilson had his streak of four consecutive 100-yard receiving games snapped, but junior teammate Chris Olave started one of his own with a career-best 10 catches for 139 yards and a touchdown. Wilson had to be content with only three receptions, but they were worth 59 yards and a touchdown, a pinpoint throw from Fields dropped in between a cornerback and safety that Wilson turned into a 28-yard score late in the first quarter.

All of that offense was accomplished behind a makeshift offensive line, three members of which were making their first career starts, and several early errant shotgun snaps from guard-turned-center Harry Miller that turned Fields from quarterback to shortstop.

Defensively, the Buckeyes – perhaps still smarting a bit from the criticism leveled after a pedestrian performance against Indiana – limited Michigan State to 261 total yards with most of that coming well after things had been decided. None of Sparty's first seven possessions lasted more than four plays, and Ohio State led in total yards by a 270-80 margin at halftime while enjoying a 28-0 advantage on the scoreboard.

The last of OSU's four first-half touchdowns came when defensive tackle Haskell Garrett batted a pass from Spartans QB Rocky Lombardi in the air and then came down with it in the end zone.

The play not only underscored the kind of outstanding season Garrett has put together so far, but also the type of harassment Lombardi endured from the Ohio State defense. He managed to complete only 5 of 11 passes for 33 yards before being knocked out of the game when OSU defensive end Tyreke Smith sacked him late in the second quarter. It was Smith's first sack of the season and one of three for the Buckeyes in the game.

All in all, it was a decisive statement from a shorthanded team that had played only once over the previous three weeks. Now, the question remains: Was that statement the last one the Buckeyes can make or will they get another chance?

### Anything Can Happen

The hot rumor making the social media rounds during the past week suggested that Michigan would use COVID-19 as a convenient excuse to prematurely end a season that could be most generously described as disappointing.

To be brutally honest to those believing such a rumor, the idea that Michigan would fudge its positive test numbers in order to get out of playing Ohio State is ludicrous. Rest assured that university officials, Jim Harbaugh, his coaching staff, his players and countless alumni throughout the world take The Game every bit as seriously as their counterparts from Ohio State.

Besides, no matter how easily you think you can predict the outcome in this series, there have been some monumental upsets through the years. For example:

**1939** – The Buckeyes entered the game ranked No. 6 in the nation while the Wolverines had suffered back-to-back losses to Illinois and Minnesota to fall out of the top 25. QB Don Scott threw for a pair of touchdowns to stake Ohio State to an early 14-0 lead, but Michigan scored a touchdown on a fake field goal with 50 seconds remaining to score a 21-14 victory.

**1969** – Unquestionably the biggest upset in the history of the rivalry came when No. 12 Michigan and first-year head coach Bo Schembechler managed to topple No. 1-ranked and defending national champion Ohio State by a 24-12 final. The Buckeyes held a 12-7 lead early in the second quarter, but the Wolverines were aided by a defensive performance that included grabbing six interceptions and stopping OSU's vaunted running game twice on fourth-and-1.

**1993** – With a Rose Bowl berth well within their grasp, the fifth-ranked Buckeyes went to Ann Arbor and laid a dinosaur-sized egg, losing a 28-0 verdict to the unranked Wolverines. Michigan enjoyed a 421-212 advantage in total yardage and came up with four sacks and four interceptions on defense. The game stands as the most recent time Ohio State has suffered a regular-season shutout.

**1996** – An undefeated season and possible national championship went by the boards when the second-ranked Buckeyes squandered a 9-0 halftime lead and fell to the No. 21 Wolverines by a 13-9 score. OSU made three trips inside the Michigan red zone during the first half, including two inside the 5-yard line, but had to settle for field goals. On the third play of the third quarter, cornerback Shawn Springs slipped in coverage of Michigan receiver Tai Streets and watched as Streets turned the miscue into a 69-yard reception for the game's only touchdown.

Of course, the Buckeyes haven't always been the upset victims throughout the series.

**1987** – Though technically not an upset since both teams were unranked, the 1987 game was still a stunner because Ohio State was thought to be playing out the string on a season of disaster. Three straight losses had led to the firing of nine-year head coach Earle Bruce just six days before the game, but somehow the Buckeyes rallied from an early 13-0 deficit to send Bruce out with a 23-20 victory.

**2001** – For much of Jim Tressel's first season in Columbus, the unranked Buckeyes had been searching for an identity. They found it in Ann Arbor, racing out to a 23-0 halftime lead and then holding on for dear life to win a 26-20 win against the No. 11 Wolverines. As unbelievable as it sounds today, the victory was only the third for OSU since sending Bruce out in style in 1987.



**Michigan AD Says Wolverines Want To Play**

Michigan didn't suit up to take on Maryland on Dec. 5 and has paused team activities until at least Dec. 7, after an increase in positive coronavirus tests within the program, which has thrown into question Ohio State's Dec. 12 match-up with the Wolverines.

The Buckeyes would need a sixth game to qualify for the Big Ten Championship Game. According to an AP report, Michigan had "at least 12" positive tests within its program, though not enough to force a shutdown, similar to Ohio State's cancellation against Illinois.

"The decision by our medical professionals to stop practices and cancel this Saturday's game against Maryland was made with the health, safety and welfare of the student-athletes, coaches and staff as our utmost priority," Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel said in a news release. "We have seen an increase in the number of student-athletes unavailable to compete due to positive tests and associated contact tracing due to our most recent antigen and PCR testing results."

The cancellation in Ann Arbor created concern in Columbus about the possibility of not playing the annual season-ending rivalry game between the two teams and even sparked the occasional con-

spiracy theory that the Wolverines were looking to dodge Ohio State, including one that was shared by former OSU quarterback Kirk Herbstreit on ESPN.

"I still think Michigan waves the white flag, potentially avoids playing Ohio State next week, and then they'll potentially get a game on the 19th," Herbstreit said. "Is that fair, (co-host) David (Pollack)? Michigan could opt out, basically, of that game and keep Ohio State out of six games to qualify for the Big Ten championship. That doesn't make sense to me."

"I don't know all the numbers as far as COVID is concerned, but we live in such a strange world that they really feel teams are opting out to avoid playing games. They don't want to get humiliated or lose with the team they have. They don't want to get embarrassed. There's a lot of that being talked about around the country."

Manuel was quick to shoot down any such theories, saying that he was infuriated by comments implying that Michigan is trying to purposefully miss games.

"I think it's ridiculous," Manuel said. "I have to pause because my words, the anger, I was infuriated by the insinuation that Michigan would do anything other than play a football game. We've been playing this game since 1879. We're the winningest program for a reason, because we play whoever's in front of us. And the only way we want to keep anybody from moving on is to beat them on the field of play. And to insinuate that, to say something other than that, is a statement by a fool."

"It is something that just, I can't tell you how embarrassed I am for the Big Ten Conference to have one of their representatives who played this game to say that about any team in this conference, and to say it about college football and the student-athletes around this country who are trying to play games during a pandemic is ridiculous and sad."

Herbstreit was quick to apologize for his comments in a video posted to his Twitter account shortly after he made his initial statement, which sparked significant backlash.

**Follow The Status Of The Michigan Game, COVID**

Readers who want to keep up on the status of Ohio State's game with Michigan amid the pandemic, as well as the status of the Buckeyes, Wolverines and other teams around the Big Ten, will want to check the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be monitoring the situation and posting updates regularly.

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

Assuming the game with the Wolverines is played, the staff have its predictions the morning of the game.

The BSB staff also provides electronic recruiting coverage with the early signing period rapidly approaching, other daily stories and updates, as well as presenting reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives on BuckeyeSports.com. We are 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. If something interesting, troubling or exciting happens in a game, share your thoughts in real time.

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"I had no business at all saying that," Herbstreit said. "I have no evidence of that. It was completely unfair to the University of Michigan, to Jim Harbaugh, to his players and coaches, and I just wanted to apologize."

As for the potential of the Ohio State-Michigan game going off without a hitch on Dec. 12, much of that seems to depend on the status of Michigan's outstanding tests, as the Buckeyes have seen a decrease in positive tests since their cancellation against Illinois.

"We want to play," Manuel said on Dec. 2. "Those student-athletes want to play. And this was an opportunity that we have to pause, and we all understand it. But they are disappointed, because they worked so hard to get this far in the season, and nobody wanted this to stop this way."

"We have over 100 tests that are coming back today to be analyzed by our medical staff. We hope to play, as we hope to play every game this year, and any team in our league who has stopped thus far had the goal of playing every game this year, and it is disheartening that we (were not able) able to play Maryland, and our hope is that we can play Ohio State and finish the season in the final week."

**Buckeyes Receive Nearly Clean Bill Of Health**

Ohio State announced on Dec. 4 that after an increase in COVID testing and a good week of results, it felt comfortable enough to head to East Lansing to take

on Michigan State on Dec. 5. After the Buckeyes were unable to play Illinois on Nov. 28 following an increase in positive tests, the status of the matchup with MSU was in doubt through much of the week leading up to the game, even as the Buckeyes returned to practice early in the week.

"We are very confident that we are heading to East Lansing with a team that can safely compete and whose health, safety and well-being have been our utmost concern," team doctor Jim Borchers said. "We've tested, monitored and evaluated our results daily and have advised the student-athletes, coaches and performance staff accordingly."

According to Borchers, Ohio State's population positivity rate – meaning everyone within the program, not just players – had dropped below the threshold for participation, allowing for a safe return to play. With daily testing, the Buckeyes were able to monitor the positivity rate as much as they possibly could.

"Our population positivity rate, which exceeded the threshold for participation at this time last week, has now returned on the seven-day rolling average to a level that allows us to compete safely this weekend," Borchers said.

Buckeyes who did receive a positive result on both rapid-response and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing will remain in quarantine protocols, with a 21-day waiting period for a return to play for athletes and 10-day wait for coaches.

"We currently have student-athletes

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**2020 Ohio State Football Schedule**

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2020 Record
Oct. 24	NEBRASKA	W, 52-17	FOX	2-4
Oct. 31	at Penn State*	W, 38-25	ABC	2-5
Nov. 7	RUTGERS	W, 49-27	BTN	2-5
Nov. 14	at Maryland	Canceled	N/A	2-2
Nov. 21	INDIANA*	W, 42-35	FOX	6-1
Nov. 28	at Illinois*	Canceled	N/A	2-4
Dec. 5	at Michigan State*	W, 52-12	ABC	2-4
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)

and staff in either isolation or quarantine protocols right now,” Borchers said, “and everyone is recovering and doing well.”

Ohio State did not release any specifics about which players tested positive or the percentage of positive tests within the program, but starting linemen Josh Myers, Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere, along with linebacker Tuf Borland and safety Josh Proctor, were among the significant contributors included on Ohio State’s weekly status report as unavailable for the first time this season and have not suffered injuries – at least not any announced publicly.

The Buckeyes are the first Big Ten team to return to play just one week after a COVID-related cancellation. Maryland, Minnesota and Wisconsin were all forced to miss two weeks.

**Alvarez Would Like To See Rule Changed**

If Ohio State is unable to get its sixth game of the regular season in, it may not be the end of the Big Ten title berth hopes for the Buckeyes, at least not if Wisconsin athletic director Barry Alvarez gets his way.

Alvarez, a powerful force within the Big Ten, told The Detroit News on Dec. 2 that he would like to see Ohio State get a shot at the conference title even if it doesn’t hit the six-game requirement.

“I think if something were to happen to Ohio State and they’d have to cancel another game, that’s something that we’ve got to revisit,” Alvarez said. “They’re sitting up there still ranked No. 4. Our league can’t keep them from having the opportunity if they have a chance to be in the finals.”

He also mentioned that a rule change has been a frequent discussion topic among Big Ten athletic directors in their weekly meetings.

“We meet weekly. Those are things we discuss,” Alvarez said. “We may make some adjustments on that last week. That’s sort of a flexible week of scheduling. But those are things we talk about and certainly you’ve got to consider, or reconsider.”

While Alvarez indicated that the Big Ten would consider a change, he seems to be just about the only person in the conference thinking that.

In fact, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith directly contradicted Alvarez during a Nov. 28 teleconference.

“No, the conversations have not occurred,” Smith said. “I understand that question and understand that people are thinking about that, but that’s not where we are.

“My concern today is making sure our players get fed, making sure if they need a sports psychologist’s help, they get that. I get the question. I’m very sensitive to that. But that’s not where we are. I mean we made a decision late last night to do what we did (not play Illinois), so a lot of things occurred late last night. So

the last thing on my mind was (potential changes to the protocol).

“Might that come up later at some point? No question. But right now, I haven’t even thought about it. I want to make sure (head coach) Ryan (Day has) what he needs, and I want to make sure the young men that have tested positive have what they need, and 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.”

**Johnson Makes History As First Black OSU Head Coach**

Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson made history on Dec. 5 during Ohio State’s win over Michigan State when he served as the acting head coach in place of Day, who was still in the midst of his required quarantine period after testing positive for COVID-19 in the week leading up to the canceled Ohio State-Illinois game.

Against the Spartans, Johnson became the first Black acting head coach in the history of Ohio State football, making the Buckeyes the seventh team with a Black acting head coach in the Big Ten through the years, along with Illinois, Maryland, Michigan State, Northwestern, Penn State and Purdue.

In picking Johnson to fill in for Day during his brief absence, Ohio State hoped to find a steadying force during a time of immense uncertainty.

“Larry’s years of experience working with our student-athletes is phenomenal,” Smith said. “He understands our culture and what we’re all about.

“This is a time when you really have to have the ability to truly relate to the student-athlete and the group. We’re at a time when they’re under tremendous stress. It’s a very fragile situation with them. He’s the perfect fit for where we are right now.”

While Johnson’s stint in the head coaching spot for the Buckeyes was a first in school history, that was not at the front of his mind or at the front of Smith’s, who said that he didn’t even realize that Johnson would be the first Black head football coach at Ohio State until someone told him after the decision was already made.

“I didn’t think about that until someone mentioned that to me,” Smith said. “If there’s anyone that’s deserving, it’s him. I’m happy for him and proud he has that opportunity. I’m sure he won’t even think about that, but that’s a great honor.”

Johnson was quick to deflect from himself during his appearance on the “Ryan Day Radio Show” on Dec. 3 as well, saying that all coaching is a team effort and that he just wants to play his role.

“That was the mind-set from the beginning,” Johnson said. “It’s not going to be just me. It’s going to be the guys – (offensive coordinator) Kevin (Wilson),

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certainly (defensive coordinator) Kerry Coombs and (co-defensive coordinator) Greg (Mattison). All those guys will be around me. So it’s not going to be one decision. It’ll be a collective decision if it comes to that.”

The Buckeyes never found themselves seriously challenged against Michigan State in Johnson’s first appearance as a head coach since he served in that role at T.C. Williams High School in Virginia, where he coached until 1993.

He was briefly Penn State’s interim head coach before it hired James Franklin in 2014 but never coached a game.

**Buckeyes Stay Put In Both Polls**

Ohio State’s 52-12 victory over Michigan State wasn’t enough to sway voters in the Amway coaches poll into a move up from No. 4 into the No. 3 spot, but it was enough to keep the Clemson Tigers at bay in the Associated Press top 25, where the Buckeyes remained at No. 3.

In the coaches poll, the top four remained untouched, with Alabama, Notre Dame and Clemson checking in ahead of the Buckeyes. Texas A&M

Continued On Page 6



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Continued From Page 5

moved up one spot to No. 5 while Florida dropped a spot to No. 6, followed by Cincinnati, Miami, Indiana and Georgia.

The Buckeyes and Hoosiers were joined as Big Ten representatives by No. 14 Northwestern, No. 18 Iowa and No. 25 Wisconsin.

No other Big Ten schools received votes.

In the AP poll, Ohio State sits behind Alabama and Notre Dame but ahead of Clemson, Texas A&M, Florida, Cincinnati, Indiana, Miami and Iowa State. No. 15 Northwestern, No. 19 Iowa and No. 25 Wisconsin round out the Big Ten.

#### OSU Still No. 4 In CFP Rankings

Not much changed in the Dec. 1 College Football Playoff rankings after Ohio State's off week following its cancellation against Illinois due to positive COVID-19 tests, with the Buckeyes staying put at No. 4 behind Alabama, Notre Dame and Clemson.

Following Ohio State was, once again, Texas A&M and Florida at No. 5 and No. 6, with Cincinnati also staying at No. 7. Georgia, Iowa State and Miami rounded out the top 10.

Ohio State was one of five Big Ten teams ranked in the top 25 for the sec-

ond straight week, with the others being Indiana (No. 12), Northwestern (No. 14), Wisconsin (No. 16) and Iowa (No. 19).

Barring any surprises, the Buckeyes will likely remain at No. 4 following their win against Michigan State on Dec. 5, as Alabama, Notre Dame and Clemson were all victorious over the weekend, as well.

However, the Buckeyes may not be entirely secure in that spot, despite a perfect 5-0 record. Committee chair Gary Barta – also the athletic director at Iowa – spoke at length about Ohio State's lacking résumé and said that the committee has discussed the possibility of moving a one-loss Texas A&M or Florida team above the Buckeyes, though it was not yet comfortable with that move.

"It was talked about a lot and specifically talked about in the room about whether or not Ohio State (stays at) No. 4 or if Texas A&M flips and goes to No. 4 and Ohio State goes to No. 5," Barta said. "At the end of the day, the offensive firepower of Ohio State, all the weapons they have ... at the end of the day, the committee just decided that Ohio State was still a better team than Texas A&M and deserved to be No. 4."

While the committee has said that it won't be taking into account the number of games played when determining the final playoff field, Barta said that Ohio State's lack of games has played a role in the judgment of the team.

"It's not anybody's fault, but trying to evaluate a team that has four games in vs. a team that has seven, eight or nine games in is definitely a problem, and it's created by the pandemic," said Barta. "The more games a team brings to the committee, the more we have to evaluate."

The Buckeyes will likely find themselves in a far more difficult situation if they're unable to qualify for the Big Ten championship.

Barta mentioned specifically that the committee is looking to factor conference titles into its equation, as it has in years past.

That will present a problem for Texas A&M as well, which is set to finish behind Alabama in the SEC West, but Barta mentioned that the lack of a confer-

### 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, 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.

ence title can be made up for by impressive regular-season wins.

The Aggies knocked off No. 7 Florida on Oct. 10.

"If you play a highly ranked team at any time in the season, obviously we pay a lot of attention to that. So if you have two highly ranked teams playing each other, that's a variable, that's a measurement, that's a game that makes for good evaluation," Barta said. "One of our tie-breakers is conference championships. So those are two separate variables, both of which are really important."

"It is absolutely something we talk about and have to consider as one piece of the evaluation, because the more games we're able to watch, the more we're able to evaluate as a team. And so while there's not a set number, there's not a minimum requirement, it is one of the factors that's talked about when we talk about comparing different teams."

"That said, you still have wins and losses, and you still have teams against who they compete. You can look at the strength of the teams they play against, and then the final piece of that puzzle is you watch every one of those games and you just determine who has the better team to the best of your ability."

#### Four Buckeyes Accept Senior Bowl Invite

At least four current Buckeyes are set to participate in the annual Reese's Senior Bowl, scheduled for Jan. 30, meaning that they will not be taking advantage of the free season of eligibility and their Ohio State careers will be coming to a close following the 2020 campaign.

The first two Buckeyes to join the event on Dec. 1 were linebacker Tuf Borland and Oklahoma transfer running back Trey Sermon. Borland, a three-time captain and four-year starter for the Buckeyes, picked up praise from Senior Bowl director Jim Nagy on Twitter after accepting his invitation.

"Excited to add Tuf Borland to the roster," Nagy wrote. "(His) 2020 tape got him this invite. One of the most improved players from junior tape we evaluated this fall. Rarely see this kind of late-career jump from a guy that entered his senior season with 34 starts."

Borland has 19 tackles on the season, while Sermon has carried 55 times for 344 yards.

Defensive end Jonathon Cooper joined the fold a day later, as did linebacker Baron Browning on Dec. 3. This is Cooper's fifth season in Columbus after a surprise redshirt in 2019 due to an ankle injury. He has 14 tackles on the year. Browning is in his first year as a full-time starter and has impressed in the outside linebacker spot, racking up 23 tackles and rising up mock draft boards in the process while impressing draft writers and scouts.

"Browning is an explosive height/weight/speed linebacker who offers impressive physical skills and the promise of a bigger impact as he's weaned into a bigger role in the defense," wrote The Draft Network writer Kyle Crabbs. "Was typically reserved for faster matchups in 2019 with the Buckeyes and allowed to make an impact as a fast to flow and attack style linebacker implemented frequently on blitzes. Browning has prototypical size, effective length and high end first step quickness – all of which blend for a toolsy prospect who should continue to mature and has the potential to become a splash player. Many of his 2019 reps ended in big plays, too – he logged 5 sacks and 11 tackles for loss while showing twitch, fluid hips and sideline to sideline potential on the second level."

With at least four seniors departing for sure, and many expected to follow suit, Day's estimation from October that Ohio State would not struggle to enter 2021 under the 85-man scholarship limit is beginning to take shape.

"There's a process," Day said. "It's a long process. It's very confusing metrics that, boy, it took me about three hours to sit down with (director of player personnel) Mark Pantoni and figure it all out. It's kind of a plus-one based on seniors and years of eligibility. It's confusing. It's not easy. But I don't see us being over 85, even next fall as I project it all out. With guys leaving to go to the NFL, guys graduating, different things, I still project it at 85 for us. But we'll see. It's going to have to be something we continually talk about and work through."

#### Werner Named Butkus Semifinalist

One senior linebacker yet to accept a Senior Bowl invite is outside linebacker Pete Werner, but that doesn't mean that the Indiana native isn't still pulling

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in national attention. For his 32 tackles – including 14 solos, 2½ tackles for loss and one sack – as well as one forced fumble on the season, Werner was included on Nov. 30 as one of the 16 semifinalists for the Butkus award, which is given to the nation's top linebacker. He's one of two Big Ten representatives, along with Rutgers' Olakunle Fatukasi.

If he wins, Werner would be the third Buckeye to claim the award, along with James Laurinaitis in 2007 and Andy Katzenmoyer in 1997. Finalists will be announced Dec. 7.

Shortly after being included as a semifinalist, Werner got some praise from ESPN draft analyst Todd McShay in an article breaking down the draft's biggest questions, under a question about his favorite prospects who likely won't be picked in the first round.

"A few jump out to me, but if I had to name one, it's Ohio State linebacker Pete Werner," McShay wrote. "I love his game.

He has the length and recognition skills to match up in coverage, he can be disruptive as a pass-rusher when turned loose and he closes so quick as a run-stopper."

### **Roby Suspended For Six Games**

Former Ohio State and current Houston Texans cornerback Bradley Roby was suspended six games by the NFL for the use of performance-enhancing drugs which violate the NFL's banned substance policy.

"I apologize to my family, my teammates, the Houston Texans organization and the fans," Roby wrote in a statement that was sent out in a tweet by NFL Network's James Palmer. "A few months ago I unknowingly used a product that was contaminated with a banned substance by the NFL. I recognize that it is my job to know, and be responsible for, everything I put in my body. I will be suspended for six games ending my season.

"I will take the necessary steps in the future to prevent this from ever happening again. I look forward to rejoining my teammates next season in our goal to bring a championship to Houston."

Roby was having a strong year with the Texans thus far, tallying 37 tackles (33 solo), seven passes defended, a pair of tackles for loss, a fumble recovery and an interception.

This was Roby's second season in Houston and seventh in the NFL, with his first five coming with the Denver Broncos, where Roby won a Super Bowl in 2016.

The suspension to Roby was not the first that Houston has dealt with of this kind. Wide receiver Will Fuller will also miss the remainder of the season for the same use of PEDs.

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mail for the remainder of football season. We traditionally recommend it for out-of-state readers in particular, and many of you upgrade annually. In these unique times, we are recommending the upgrade even more vigorously. With the pandemic, the post office is more short-handed than ever, and the holiday mailing season has arrived.

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## From The Pages Of BSB

### **35 Years Ago – 1985**

The thought of Ohio State meeting Brigham Young in the Florida Citrus Bowl had Dylan Thomas licking his chops.

"It's excellent," said Thomas, executive director of the Florida Citrus Bowl, of the matchup of the Big Ten Buckeyes and the BYU Cougars of the Western Athletic Conference. "There's a general consensus in the area, and probably around the country, that this can be one of the best matchups of any bowl this side of the Orange Bowl. Few can match this one.

"The offensive prospects of BYU in the game is going to be a highlight for a lot of people," continued Thomas. "Then again, Ohio State is not exactly without its own weapons. It should be a good, high-scoring ballgame."

High-scoring games had been common in the Florida Citrus Bowl, which had changed its name from the Tangerine Bowl in 1983. Recent games found Florida State outscoring Texas Tech 40-17 in 1977, Oklahoma State outlasting BYU 49-21 in 1976, Toledo holding off Davidson 56-33 in 1969 and Richmond handling Ohio University 49-42 in 1968. The 1984 rendition saw Georgia and Florida State playing to a 17-17 tie.

Were Thomas and his fellow committee members pleased to land the Buckeyes in their game?

"In three letters, y-e-s, absolutely," Thomas said. "We set our goal at the front end of this football season that we wanted a Big Ten team in our game. I don't think we would have preferred any other than Ohio State."

### **30 Years Ago – 1990**

Ohio State was exploring the possibility of expanding Ohio Stadium to include approximately 5,700 more seats in the south stands.

Reports circulated around the university that stated that the expansion would be completed in time for the 1991 football season, but athletic director Jim Jones told BSB that those reports were premature.

"It is not a done deal by any means, and any report that says otherwise is erroneous," the OSU athletic director said. "We are looking into the possibility, and we are requesting help with ways to expand the stadium. But as far as the project being done in time for next season, I think that is very premature at this point."

If the expansion were to take place, Ohio Stadium would increase from its 86,071 capacity to approximately 91,771. That would make it the second-largest collegiate stadium in the United States, keeping it behind Michigan (101,701) and pushing it just ahead of Tennessee (91,110).

### **25 Years Ago – 1995**

Even the prim and proper crowd in the Heisman Room at the Downtown Athletic Club got into the act.

"Eddie, Eddie!" the crowd chanted.

No, this wasn't Ohio Stadium, and, no, this wasn't a dream – although it was the fulfillment of Eddie George's boyhood dreams – as George had just been named the 61st Heisman Trophy winner on Dec. 9 in New York City.

"I'm glad this is over," George told the group at the DAC

and a national television audience on ESPN. "First and foremost, I would like to thank God almighty for giving me the strength and health to be here tonight."

OSU's "big number 27," as coach John Cooper frequently referred to him, became the school's sixth Heisman Trophy winner and its first since Archie Griffin won back-to-back Heisman trophies in 1974 and '75.

George won the Heisman by a surprisingly large margin over Nebraska quarterback Tommie Frazier and Florida quarterback Danny Wuerffel. Northwestern tailback Darnell Autry and Iowa State tailback Troy Davis finished fourth and fifth respectively.

### **20 Years Ago – 2000**

Several OSU assistant coaches had their names linked to head coaching jobs.

First, assistants Bill Conley and Jon Tenuta were among a wide group of candidates for the Bowling Green job. It was believed, though, that neither interviewed with BG athletic director Paul Krebs, who ended up hiring Notre Dame assistant Urban Meyer.

After Gary Pinkel left Toledo for Missouri, a number of coaches with OSU ties were bandied about, including Conley, assistant head coach Fred Pagac, former assistants Mike Jacobs and Bill Young and former OSU player Bo Pelini, then an assistant with the NFL's Green Bay Packers. But that job ended up going to Tom Amstutz, who served as Pinkel's offensive coordinator at UT.

### **15 Years Ago – 2005**

Six consecutive wins to close the season earned Ohio State a share of the Big Ten title and an at-large bid to the BCS where the Buckeyes learned they would play resurgent Notre Dame under first-year coach Charlie Weis.

Senior linebacker A.J. Hawk was named the team's most valuable player, while Troy Smith and Mike Kudla earned the team's respective offensive and defensive MVP nods. The BCS berth came after that furious six-game winning streak, following a challenging start to the season that inspired Hawk and his teammates to buckle down and focus on salvaging their season.

"We got together and decided that we weren't going to lose another game," Hawk said. "We had six more games to play and we decided we were going to treat every one of them as its own season.

"If we did that – concentrated on making them one-game seasons – we knew that everything else would take care of itself."

### **10 Years Ago – 2010**

Ohio State's big winners on the national awards scene for 2010 were cornerback Chimdi Chekwa and center Michael Brewster. Both were named first-team All-Americans by the Football Writers Association of America, and they were the only Buckeyes to receive first-team recognition by any of the five groups that made up the NCAA's annual consensus All-America team.

"I'm impressed with the fact that those are two guys who really didn't get that much hype but were very good players this year," OSU head coach Jim Tressel said. "Those writers must have been doing their research because these are two good players, and if you match them up on film they match up favorably against anyone."

### **Five Years Ago – 2015**

The Buckeyes were hoping for chaos during championship weekend. Instead, they got chalk.

With three higher-ranked teams emerging as conference champions Dec. 5, Ohio State lost any hope of backing into the College Football Playoff and would instead play Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl on Jan. 1 at 1 p.m. EST at the University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Ariz.

It was the 47th bowl game in program history and the seventh time that Ohio State would play in the Fiesta Bowl. Head coach Urban Meyer said the team no longer felt regret over the loss to Michigan State that had cost them a shot at the playoff.

"I think that's gone," he said. "I think that found its way out the week of rivalry week and then the way they played that week, I'm pretty sure it's gone. Now it's let's go play our tails off one more time. They're a great football team and let's finish this thing the right way."

Ohio State was No. 7 in the final College Football Playoff rankings, dropping behind Stanford, which won the Pac-12 Championship Game. Notre Dame finished eighth in those rankings.

### **One Year Ago – 2019**

As expected, LSU quarterback Joe Burrow was named the 2019 recipient of the Heisman Trophy on Dec. 14, receiving a record 90.7 percent of the total first-place votes to break the mark set by former Ohio State quarterback Troy Smith in 2006.

But before he headed to the stage at the PlayStation Theatre in New York City to give his acceptance speech, Burrow made an unexpected detour. He shared congratulatory hugs with the other finalists – including Oklahoma quarterback Jalen Hurts and Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields and defensive end Chase Young – as well his parents, Jim and Robin; LSU head coach Ed Orgeron; and a handful of assistants who also made the trip to see Burrow win the second Heisman in program history along with running back Billy Cannon in 1958.

Burrow then made his way across the room to where Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and director of sports performance Mickey Marotti were sitting and gave each of them a hug. Then, after lifting the trophy, he expressed his gratitude for his time with the Buckeyes.

"I'm just so thankful for LSU and Ohio State, two of the great programs in the country," Burrow said while fighting back tears. "Great coaches at both places. My journey ... I wouldn't have traded it for anything in the world."

# Johnson Focused On Winning Instead Of Himself

Continued From Page 1

got better this week. With Coach Day being out, he challenged the leadership on the team to improve, and I think the leaders on the team definitely stepped up and helped lead the team in practice this week.

"It was tough at first, but we all just had to step up, and we all had each other. The guys being out, I feel for them. I love those guys. I'd die for them. But I think the team responded well."

Johnson, who is in his seventh season with the program, credited Fields for making his job easier after the Heisman Trophy contender threw for 199 yards and two touchdowns and rushed for a career-high 104 yards and two more scores.

"If you're going to be a head coach for one day, you want Justin Fields with you," Johnson said. "That was pretty special. He's a special young man. Coaching the defensive side of the ball, you don't get to talk to those guys a lot. But this week, he and I talked a lot."

"What a great kid. He's just a great leader. He stood in front of the team and talked to them and encouraged the offensive line. I thought it was great. Every time I saw him, he had a smile on his face, so I knew we were in good hands."

Day could say the same thing about Johnson, though, who earned his first head-coaching win since he was at legendary T.C. Williams High School just outside of Washington, D.C., in 1993.

Moments like this are exactly why he promoted Johnson to associate head coach upon Day's assuming the top spot in 2019.

"I think Larry has great leadership and understands how to motivate the team," Day said. "When he stands in front of the team, guys listen. I think his leadership had a big part in how well our team played today and the energy they played with. I couldn't be happier for him."

While it was only for one game, Johnson became the 26th head coach – and first Black head coach – in Ohio State



PUTTING THE PLAYERS FIRST – Ohio State defensive line coach/interim head coach Larry Johnson and linebacker Justin Hilliard (47) celebrate defensive tackle Haskell Garrett's second-quarter pick-six.

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## COVER STORY

history. But Johnson said he didn't think about any of that during the win over Michigan State.

"I'm really just coaching one game. All I'm doing is standing the gap," Johnson said. "I was just thinking about coming here to East Lansing, getting the win and making sure when I turn it back over to Coach Day that we were 5-0. That was the biggest thing on my mind. I did not want to go back on Sunday and stand in front of the team after losing the game. That was my focus."

"It was never about me. It was about the team. That's just my mind-set. It's a great honor, but everything I do is for the players."

Sometime in the third quarter with the result well in hand, though, Johnson admitted the gravity of the situation hit him.

"There was kind of a tear in my eye because I felt so great for the players," Johnson said. "With how hard they worked, they deserved the opportunity to play on Saturday. I was just happy for them because you could see it in their eyes all week long, just wanting that opportunity to play. That was the most important thing."

Then, when time ran out, Johnson found himself on the receiving end of a Gatorade bath.

"It was pretty cold," Johnson said. "I'm just glad it wasn't below freezing here or I'd probably be sick. It kind of surprised me. The kids set up me up. (Sophomore

defensive end) Zach Harrison was talking to me and I knew something was going on. Next thing, there's a cold tub coming. But what a great moment for the guys. I am really happy for the players and the way they responded throughout all of the adversity this week."

Day said that moment also brought a tear to his eye clear back in Columbus.

"I can't say enough about the leaders this week," Day said. "So many people had to step up this week. It's all about them today. What a great statement about who we are as a culture, as a program."

The Buckeyes can't afford to spend too much time celebrating the win, though, especially with the regular-season finale against Michigan looming – provided the Wolverines are able to get their own coronavirus outbreak under control. But Day, who can return to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on Dec. 7, hopes his team can appreciate what they accomplished against the Spartans given all of the challenges they've had to overcome this season.

"We take a lot of pride in being Buckeyes, and there's so much emotion this season, so to see the team rally together in this moment (was pretty cool)," Day said. "There's certainly a lot more football to play, but we live to see another day. With these kinds of challenges and then adversity we've been through, it is a moment that everybody needs to enjoy tonight ... then we're on to The Team Up North."

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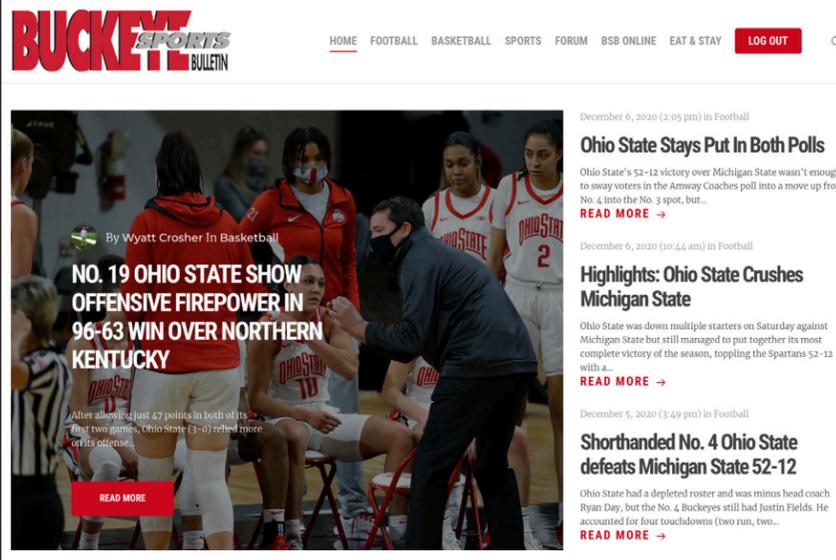
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# OSU's Defense Bounces Back Against Sparty

The Ohio State defense entered its match-up at Michigan State coming off a poor performance against Indiana with glaring issues. The Buckeyes had allowed 291.0 passing yards per game and 6.0 yards per play through four games, ranking last and third-to-the-last in the Big Ten.

The Silver Bullets stifled the Spartans, particularly shutting down their rushing attack and showing vast improvement. The Buckeyes held them to just 12 yards on 12 carries in the first half, and the Spartans finished with just 81 yards on 28 carries (2.9 yards per carry).

## GAME NOTEBOOK Joe Dempsey

"I thought the kids came out with a chip on their shoulders," said Larry Johnson, who served as acting head coach in Ryan Day's absence. "They had something to prove, and I thought they played very well. They shut the run down. The secondary played really well. The linebackers played well. They played as a unit, and I thought that was really key too."

"They were having fun out there. When you have fun, you can fly around, and I thought that's what we did today. It was a great moment for all of those guys on defense to come back and play as well as



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**TIP DRILL** – Senior defensive tackle Haskell Garrett tipped a pass to himself in the end zone for the first pick-six of his career, which put Ohio State ahead 28-0 in the second quarter.

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## Game Analysis

### What Worked Well

Ohio State's rushing attack has been solid all season, but it has lacked consistency. The Buckeyes answered some doubts, dominating the Spartans with their bruising running game in a 52-12 victory. Michigan State entered the game with the fifth-ranked rushing defense in the Big Ten, allowing just 132.0 yards per game. Ohio State exceeded that mark with 153 rushing yards on 26 carries in the first half, and the visiting Buckeyes finished with 322 yards on 48 attempts.

The running game thrived despite Ohio State missing three starting offensive linemen. Starters Thayer Munford, Josh Myers and Nicholas Petit-Frere were unavailable, but Dawand Jones, Matthew Jones and Max Wray stepped up in their absence, along with normal starters Wyatt Davis and Harry Miller. The makeshift Ohio State offensive line paved the way for a pair of 100-yard rushers in Justin Fields (104) and Trey Sermon (112), who both hit the century mark for the first time as Buckeyes. Overall, the Scarlet and Gray averaged 6.7 yards per carry and scored four touchdowns on the ground.

### What Didn't Work

Not much went wrong for the Buckeyes in their blowout victory against the Spartans. Frankly, Ohio State was excellent in all aspects of the game despite missing its head coach and several starters. The Buckeyes were not perfect, though, committing seven penalties for 63 yards. Also, Chris Olave fumbled twice for the Buckeyes and lost one of them.

Another area of weakness for Ohio State was shotgun snaps, with the team trying to replace Myers. Miller, a converted guard, had difficulties with the accuracy of his snaps, including one that he launched over backup quarterback Jack Miller's head, resulting in a safety with 1:02 left.

Overall, the Buckeyes played well defensively, but they had a few breakdowns in the second half. On a first-and-10 from their 25, the Spartans connected on a 55-yard completion from Payton Thorne to Jayden Reed after a breakdown in coverage. Then Thorne gashed Ohio State by scampering for a 20-yard score.

### Play Of The Game

There are many big plays that lead to 40-point victories, and it is not always easy to determine which plays were more significant than others when the game is so lopsided. With that being said, perhaps no play was more important than Justin Fields' first touchdown to set the tone. Nearly every snap on the Buckeyes' opening drive made Fields adjust to catch it, with one at his ankles and multiple above his head. On back-to-back plays on Ohio State's opening drive, Fields turned bad snaps into positive plays, running for 4 yards and then 8 yards for a first down. After Master Teague was tackled at the 1, he lost 1 yard on two carries to set up a third-and-goal from the 2. Instead of settling for a field goal or coming away empty-handed, Fields sidestepped a Spartan lineman in the backfield and scrambled for a touchdown to take a 7-0 lead with 8:46 left in the first quarter.

– Joe Dempsey

they did today."

Part of what allowed the Buckeyes to play free and fly around to make plays was their ability to shut down the run early. Ohio State senior defensive tackle Haskell Garrett, who finished with three tackles (two solo), said stopping opposing rushing offenses is how his group sets the tone.

"We really pride ourselves on stopping the run," Garrett said. "Our goal is to have under 100 yards a game. Sometimes that happens and sometimes it doesn't, but we really pride ourselves on that. And we just want to get really great on all-around defense. We set the bar high in previous years, so we just want to keep it going and move that bar and make it higher."

The Buckeye linebackers elevated their game against the Spartans, with the quartet of Pete Werner, Dallas Gant, Justin Hilliard, and Baron Browning combining for 22 tackles with Gant adding one-half tackle for loss.

Overall, the Buckeyes forced four turnovers and allowed just 180 passing yards and 4.1 yards per play.

Ohio State's defensive line created pressure all game long, combining for 4½ of the Buckeyes' six TFL. Junior defensive end Tyreke Smith stood out for Ohio State, making his first sack of the season along with three solo stops.

"He's doing really well," Garrett said of Smith. "We're all working as a unit. Tyreke is using his abilities more to his advantage now. He's really quick, he's really fast. And we're just getting better every week and giving guys new opportunities, rotating guys and just trying to stay fresh."

Converted tight end Cormontae Hamilton, a redshirt freshman, recorded his first sack in scarlet and gray. Sophomore defensive end Zach Harrison and fourth-year junior defensive tackle Jerron Cage also combined for a sack, giving Ohio State three on the day.

According to Johnson, Smith is just scratching the surface of his elite potential.

"He's only played four games, and he didn't play very much last season because he was hurt. Now he's getting a chance, starting to play more games and play more snaps. And the more snaps he plays, the better he's getting," Johnson said of Smith. "And you saw that today. If you leave him on the field for 25-35 snaps, he's going to make a play. He's really athletic. He's got great pass-rush skills, and the sky's the limit for Tyreke. He's got a chance to be a really special player for us."

### Big Man Scores Six

With Michigan State facing a third-and-9 from its own 2-yard line, Garrett gave the Buckeyes their most exciting play of the game.

Spartan signal caller Rocky Lombardi dropped back to pass in his own end zone with his team trailing 21-0 in the second quarter.

Garrett read Lombardi's eyes, and when the quarterback let the ball rip, Garrett stuck his left arm up and tipped the ball in the air. The 6-2, 299-pound interior lineman displayed exceptional athleticism to corral the ball in the end zone for a pick-six with 5:15 until halftime.

"That was big," Garrett said. "We had them backed up, and we needed to flip the field and just put the field position back in our hands. And I was just doing my job, and I made a play. 'Like Coach (Urban) Meyer says, 'Big-time players make big plays.' I was just in the right spot at the right time."

The play was reminiscent of one Garrett had made just two days earlier on the practice field.

"In walk-throughs on (Dec. 3), the ball got tipped up and I caught it and ran it back in practice," Garrett said. "So fortunately, it happened during the game. It was pretty wild."

In fact, it is wild that Garrett was even on the field for Ohio State. Garrett had been in danger of missing the start of the season, or more, after he suffered a gunshot wound to the face Aug. 30.

"It means a lot. It reassures me that I'm putting the right work in and that I'm doing the right things," Garrett said. "It was very emotional. And I was just happy to change the momentum of the game and to light the fire in the guys on the sideline, 'Let's keep this thing rolling.'"

The Buckeyes kept rolling on their way to a 52-12 victory in Spartan Stadium, inspired by the tremendous play of Garrett.

"He put his hand up, tipped the ball, and you must be pretty athletic to tip it and catch your own tip," Johnson said of Garrett. "That's pretty good. What a great story in Haskell Garrett himself. Here's a guy who's probably lucky he's still here, yet he continues to play great football and do great things for us. I'm very proud of where he's at right now and the things he's doing for our defense."

### Reserve Linemen Step Up

Ohio State starting offensive linemen Thayer Munford, Josh Myers and Nicholas Petit-Frere were not available for the game at Michigan State, but several reserves stepped up in their place.

Sophomore Harry Miller slid over to start at center for Myers, while sophomores Dawand Jones and Max Wray started for Munford and Petit-Frere at tackle. Third-year sophomore guard Matthew Jones started in Miller's typical left guard spot.

The Buckeyes ran for 322 yards and four scores on 48 carries for a 6.7 yards-per-carry average. Following the 40-point victory, head coach Ryan Day praised offensive line coach Greg Studrawa and the backups who rose to the occasion, including redshirt freshman Enokk Vimahi.

"Greg did a good job all week," Day said of his assistant. "Just from watching it the way I watched it (on television), I thought they battled. Was it perfect? I'm sure it wasn't perfect, but they battled. And having really one guy playing the same position he played in the last game, that was (right guard) Wyatt (Davis). Harry had to move, and some other guys were in their first start, Max, Matt and Dawand Jones, and I saw Enokk in there. It was just

great to see those guys battling in there."

Senior running back Trey Sermon followed the new-look Buckeye front to the tune of 112 yards and a touchdown on just 10 carries.

Sermon set the tone for his big day with a powerful run in the second quarter on first-and-10 from the Spartan 27. The Oklahoma transfer broke multiple tackles on his way to a 25-yard run, setting up a touchdown.

"It was very important, just knowing that I can go out there and make those plays," Sermon said, "just constantly building confidence."

Perhaps Sermon's most memorable run came in the second half on a third-and-1 carry. The 6-1, 215-pound back took the third-down tote, hit the hole with vigor and outran the Spartan secondary for a 64-yard touchdown to extend the lead to 35-0 with 6:14 left in the third quarter.

For Sermon, all the praise belonged to the big men up front, many of whom were making their first starts.

"I'm really happy for those guys," Sermon said. "They worked really hard, and they came here to play. They came here to make the most of their opportunities, and that's what they did today. They worked really hard to get where they are, and it showed today in the game."

Someone who has a unique perspective on the likes of Dawand Jones, Matthew Jones and Wray is Garrett, who faces those guys in practice quite regularly.

"Throughout the week, we go against the best," Garrett explained. "Those guys that go against us on the twos when we go twos vs. ones – we're going against the best every week. I wasn't worried about those guys. It's just, 'Next guy up.' One man goes down and the next guy steps up."

"Those guys have been training their whole lives for this opportunity, and today was their day. I wasn't really worried. We went out there and did our job. Everybody has been talking about how we struggle in the second half, and so we were just worried about us. I've got full faith in the offense that they're going to do their job. That's why you get recruited at our school. And when you come, you're ready."

### Fields Flashes As Runner

Justin Fields had surpassed 25 rushing

yards only once in his past six games entering the Buckeyes' matchup with Indiana, where he rushed for 78 yards. In his two games before that, Fields took 12 carries for just 3 yards.

The junior quarterback continued his momentum at Michigan State, running the ball nine times for 75 yards and two touchdowns in the first half alone. He finished with 13 carries for a career-high 104 yards and the two scores, averaging 8.0 yards per rush.

On Ohio State's first drive, Fields set the tone with his feet, but it was not all by design. His first two carries came because of bad snaps from Miller, who started his first game at center. Fields used his baseball background to field those poor snaps and turned them into gains of 4 and 8 yards, with the second run moving the chains. Then, with the Buckeyes facing third-and-goal from the Michigan State 2, they dialed up a passing play. The play call resulted in six points, but not exactly how it was drawn up.

"It was a pass play, nobody was open, so I just tried to make something happen with my feet," Fields said. "And I saw an opening to the right, so I just scrambled out there and got into the end zone."

Fields was effective as a runner throughout the game, picking up six first downs on the ground and lowering his pads to pick up tough yards when necessary.

"I don't know if I enjoy initiating contact, but I'm going to do it if I need to," Fields said. "I'm not looking for contact. If I'm going to get yards and I see guys converging on me, of course I'm going to get down. But if we need the first down, I'm going to help my team out and do whatever, give my full effort, and play with toughness. And I lift a lot, so I think my body's built for it."

In his postgame interview, Fields was asked if he felt the need to step up his performance as a runner with three starters missing along the offensive line, or if that was just how the game played out.

"That's how the game played out," Fields responded. "I think Harry was a little bit antsy on the first drive, so the snaps were a little bit wild. But as the game went along, he got more comfortable. So I had to make some plays with my feet today, but that's going to happen in big games. Whatever I have to do to help this team win, that's what I'm going to do."

# Shorthanded Buckeyes Dominate Spartans

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State met the challenges on and off the field to overcome a depleted roster and the absence of head coach Ryan Day when the No. 4 Buckeyes used a four-touchdown performance from Justin Fields to notch a 52-12 win at Michigan State on Dec. 5. Fields accounted for two running and two passing TDs and accumulated 303 total yards at Spartan Stadium in East Lansing, Mich., as the Buckeyes moved to 5-0.

For the game, Fields was 17 of 24 for 199 yards and ran for 104 yards on 13 carries.

The Buckeyes overwhelmed the Spartans (2-4) for a 28-0 halftime lead when Fields had a TD pass of 28 yards to Garrett Wilson and scoring runs of 2 and 1 yards. Defensive end Haskell Garrett added a pick-six late in the second quarter.

Ohio State was without five starters, three on the offensive line, because of COVID-19, other illness or injury

Center Josh Myers, left tackle Thayer Munford, right tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere (and freshman OL backup Paris Johnson), linebacker Tuf Borland and safety Josh Proctor were among 23 players, 17 on scholarship, who did not make the trip (the school did not specify why players were unavailable).

Ohio State had canceled its game at Illinois on Nov. 28 because of a COVID-19 outbreak that included Day, who was at home in quarantine for the MSU game.

Associate head coach/defensive line coach Larry Johnson was the acting head coach, becoming the first African American to hold that position for the program.

"If you're going to be head coach for one game, you want Justin Fields with you," Johnson said.

While there was the potential for an upset, Fields quickly removed any doubt.

Ohio State's first drive was an adventure that resulted in a 2-yard scramble for a touchdown by Fields for a 7-0 lead at 8:46. Half of the 12 plays began with poor snaps by sophomore Harry Miller, the starting left guard filling in for Myers.

Nonetheless, the Buckeyes went 83 yards in 4:37, aided by a roughing-the-passer penalty and a 21-yard run by Master Teague to the 1. After Teague lost a yard on two carries, Fields was able to get out of the pocket and run toward the right pylon for the score.

"Harry was a little antsy on the first drive, so the snaps were a little bit wild," Fields said.

In the new-look line, the starters were



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**DO IT ALL – Junior quarterback Justin Fields threw for 199 yards and two touchdowns and rushed for 104 yards and two more scores in Ohio State's 52-12 win over Michigan State on Dec. 5.**

Dawand Jones at left tackle, Matthew Jones at left guard, Wyatt Davis staying at right guard and Max Wray at right tackle, in addition to Miller.

Fields led the Buckeyes 72 yards in three plays covering just 41 seconds for a 14-0 lead at the 2:01 mark. He ran 44 yards to the Spartans 28 on the first play and, after an incompletion, rolled right and tossed a TD pass to Wilson.

The Buckeyes were methodical in marching 75 yards in 10 plays for a 4:57 scoring drive, capped by Fields' 1-yard run for a 21-0 lead at 10:25 of the second quarter. The big play was one that could have been bigger.

Wilson had a 63-yard catch-and-run for an apparent TD, but Teague was called for a downfield hold, limiting the gain to 24 yards and putting the ball at the Michigan State 49 after the infraction was marked off. Miller kept the series rolling when he recovered Olave's fumble after his 8-yard catch to the MSU 44.

Later, Trey Sermon's 25-yard run to the 2 set up the score.

Garrett then had a pick-six in the end zone to put the Buckeyes up 28-0 with 5:15

left in the half.

The Spartans had been pinned at the 1 after a 35-yard punt by Drue Chrisman. On third down from the 2, Rocky Lombardi tried to pass from the end zone, but Garrett tipped the ball with his extended left arm and grabbed the ball for his first career interception.

"It was emotional," said Garrett, who was shot in the face during the offseason. "I was happy to change the momentum, light the fire."

OSU's defense came through again in the final minute of the first half. On fourth-and-2 from the Ohio State 39, quarterback Payton Thorne ran for 3 yards, but Baron Browning forced a fumble and Javontae Jean-Baptiste fell on it at the OSU 47.

The Buckeyes' offense opened the second half with a three-and-out before Sermon's 64-yard TD run at 6:14 of the third quarter upped the score to 35-0. OSU went 87 yards in 2:06 with Sermon on the fifth play taking the handoff heading left before cutting back and finding a gaping hole through the line for the sprint to pay dirt.

Sermon had 112 yards on 10 rushes for the game.

Michigan State made it look easy in responding to make it 35-7, needing two plays and 44 seconds to go 75 yards. Thorne, the backup quarterback, hit Jayden Reed for 55 yards. Thorne kept the ball on the next play and ran 20 yards for the score.

The Spartans gifted the Buckeyes a scoring opportunity after starting at their own 13, but OSU had to settle for a 27-yard field goal by Blake Haubeil with 1:08 left in the third quarter.

During the drive, MSU was guilty of a late hit on Sermon, and Spartans coach Mel Tucker was flagged for another 15 yards to move the ball to the Ohio State 49.

Fields had a 6-yard pass to Julian Fleming followed by 11- and 25-yard runs of his own to the 9 before Sermon lost a yard on a rush and Fields had two incompletions to stall the drive.

The Spartans wasted an 11-play, 55-yard drive that reached the 15 after Thorne's 31-yard run by not going for it on fourth-and-10, instead converting a 32-yard field goal by Matt Coghlin with 11:58 to play to make it 38-10.

Two possessions later, Fields made quick work for a 45-10 score, needing one play to go 41 yards on a scoring strike to Olave at the 8:16 mark. Olave had 10 catches in the game for 139 yards.

On the Buckeyes' final scoring drive, Miyan Williams had four runs for 28 yards before freshman QB C.J. Stroud ran 48 yards for a TD at the end of the 2:49 sequence to give the Buckeyes a 52-10 advantage with 4:21 remaining.

A bad snap for a 21-yard loss with Jack Miller at quarterback led to a safety for MSU with 1:02 left.

On the ensuing kickoff, Cade Stover forced a fumble that Marcus Hooker recovered at the MSU 37. The Buckeyes took two snaps to end the game.

## Numbers

Ohio State had 521 total yards (322 rushing, 199 passing) and 26 first downs. MSU gained 261 yards (81 rushing, 180 passing) with 13 firsts. The Spartans averaged 2.9 yards per run. ... Teague rushed for 46 yards on 14 carries; Wilson caught three balls for 49 yards, his first game of the season with less than 100 yards receiving. ... Lombardi was 5 of 11 for 33 yards and an interception; Thorne was 16 of 25 for 147 yards and a pick. ... Each team had three sacks. ... Pete Werner led the Buckeyes with eight tackles (three solo).

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# The Numbers Game

## Ohio State 52, Michigan State 12

Dec. 5, 2020 – Spartan Stadium, East Lansing, MI

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
MICHIGAN STATE	0	0	7	5	12
OHIO STATE	14	14	10	14	52

### First Quarter

- OSU – Fields, 2-yard run (Haubeil kick), 8:46; 12 plays, 83 yards, 4:37 TOP.
- OSU – Wilson, 28-yard pass from Fields (Haubeil kick), 2:01; 3 plays, 72 yards, 0:41 TOP.

### Second Quarter

- OSU – Fields, 1-yard run (Haubeil kick), 10:25; 10 plays, 75 yards, 4:57 TOP.
- OSU – Garrett, 1-yard interception return (Haubeil kick), 5:15.

### Third Quarter

- OSU – Sermon, 64-yard run (Haubeil kick), 6:14; 5 plays, 87 yards, 2:06 TOP.
- MSU – Thorne, 20-yard run (Coghlin kick), 5:30; 2 plays, 75 yards, 0:44 TOP.
- OSU – Haubeil, 27-yard field goal, 1:08; 9 plays, 77 yards, 3:35 TOP.

### Fourth Quarter

- MSU – Coghlin, 32-yard field goal, 11:58; 11 plays, 55 yards, 4:03 TOP.
- OSU – Olave, 41-yard pass from Fields (Haubeil kick), 8:16; 1 plays, 41 yards, 0:06 TOP.
- OSU – Stroud, 48-yard run (Haubeil kick), 4:21; 5 plays, 76 yards, 2:49 TOP.
- MSU – Team safety, 1:02.

Att. – 0

Weather – 34 degrees, brisk, cloudy; wind NNW 4 mph

### Team Statistics

	MSU	OSU
First Downs	13	26
Rushing	2	12
Passing	10	9
Penalty	1	5
Rushes-Yards	28-81	48-322
Passing Yards	180	199
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	21-36-2	17-24-0
Offensive Plays	64	72
Total Net Yards	261	521
Third Down Efficiency	3-17	6-12
Punts-Avg.	10-43.5	5-53.4
Fumbles-Lost	2-2	2-1
Penalties	10-101	7-63
Time of Possession	27:13	32:47

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – MSU:** Thorne 9-42; Collins 8-37; Heyward 8-11; Lombardi 3-(-9). **OSU:** Sermon 10-112; Fields 13-104; Stroud 1-48; Teague 14-46; Williams 5-28; Chambers 1-8; Olave 1-0.

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – MSU:** Thorne 16-25-1-147-0; Lombardi 5-11-1-33-0. **OSU:** Fields 17-24-0-199-2.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – MSU:** Reed 5-79; Nailor 4-36; Hunt 4-26; Mosley 2-22; Heyward 5-10; Dotson 1-9. **OSU:** Olave 10-139; Wilson 3-59; Fleming 2-8; Davis 1-(-2); Sermon 1-(-5).

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – MSU:** Baringer 10-43.5. **OSU:** Chrisman 5-53.4.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – MSU:** None. **OSU:** Smith-Njigba 1-7.0; Wilson 1-2.0.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) MSU:** Reed 3-28.0; Barnett 1-17.0. **OSU:** McCall 1-18.0.

**MISSED FIELD GOALS – MSU:** None. **OSU:** None.

**FORCED FUMBLES – MSU:** Grose, Kline. **OSU:** Browning, Stover.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES – MSU:** Simmons 1-0. **OSU:** Hooker 1-5; Jean-Baptiste 1-0.

**INTERCEPTIONS – MSU:** None. **OSU:** Garrett 1-0; Wade 1-0.

**SACKS – MSU:** Fletcher 2.0-12; Camper 0.5-2; Dowell 0.5-2. **OSU:** Hamilton 1.0-12; Smith 1-9; Cage 0.5-1; Harrison 0.5-1.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS – MSU:** Fletcher 2.0-12; Simmons 2.0-2; Camper 1.0-3; Jones 1.0-2; Beesley 0.5-3; Harvey 0.5-2; Slade 0.5-2; Dowell 0.5-2; Henderson 0.5-1; Kline 0.5-1. **OSU:** Harrison 1.5-8; Hamilton 1.0-12; Smith 1.0-9; Pope 1.0-4; Togiai 0.5-1; Cage 0.5-1; Gant 0.5-0.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst-Tot.) – MSU:** Simmons 4-8-12; Henderson 3-6-9; Harvey 3-5-8; Grose 2-4-6; Brown 4-1-5; Person 3-1-4; Fletcher 3-1-4; Gervin 3-1-4; Dowell 2-2-4; Beesley 1-3-4; Camper 0-4-4; Jones 0-4-4; Kline 1-2-3; Slade 0-3-3; Long 2-0-2; Pietrowski 1-1-2; O'Connor 1-0-1; Hansen 0-1-1; Mallory 0-1-1. **OSU:** Werner 3-5-8; Williamson 4-2-6; Hilliard 3-2-5; Gant 1-4-5; Browning 3-1-4; Smith 3-0-3; Garrett 2-1-3; Hickman 2-1-3; Wade 1-2-3; Cooper 0-3-3; DiMaccio 2-0-2; Banks 2-0-2; Stover 2-0-2; Hamilton 1-1-2; Simon 1-1-2; Harrison 1-1-2; Jackson 0-2-2; Eichenberg 0-2-2; Jean-Baptiste 1-1-2; Hooker 1-1-2; Pope 1-1-2; Johnson 0-1-1; Vincent 0-1-1; Togiai 0-1-1; Cage 0-1-1.

### Players In The Game

**MSU –** Lombardi, Heyward, Hunt, Reed, Mosley, Nailor, Arcuri, Duplain, Samac, Carrick, Jarvis, Panasiuk, Slade, Mallory, Beesley, Harvery, Simmons, Gervin, Grose, Person, Henderson, Brown, Morgan, Dowell, Jackson, Welch, Barnett, Lockett, Coghlin, Kruse, Fletcher, O'Connor, Hansen, Long, Thorne, Williams, Flowers, Kline, Snow, Collins, Haladay, Boateng, Hightower, Pedrozo, Mandryk, Berghorst, Pietrowski, Henrichs, Brown, LaFave, Bueter, Ohonba, Isaia, Foster, McDonald, Dotson, Camper, Morris, Jones, Baringer.

**OSU –** Jones, Jones, Miller, Davis, Wray, Olave, Wilson, Williams, Farrell, Fields, Teague, Cooper, Garrett, Togiai, Smith, Werner, Browning, Hilliard, Wade, Hooker, Williamson, Banks, Johnson, Watts, Hickman, Ransom, DiMaccio, Mitchell, McCall, Fleming, Robinson, Jackson, Vincent, Sermon, Jean-Baptiste, Booker, Miller, Harrison, Smith-Njigba, Stroud, Stover, Shaw, Gant, Chambers, Johnson, Williams, Rossi, Eichenberg, Pope, Simon, Kacherski, Cupp, Vimahi, Hausmann, Hamilton, Cage, Ruckert, Chrisman, Haubeil.

## Season Statistics

2020-21 Game-By-Game			
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Oct. 24	(5) NEBRASKA	W, 52-17	1,344
Oct. 31	(3) at Penn State (18)	W, 38-25	1,500
Nov. 7	(3) RUTGERS	W, 49-27	1,275
Nov. 14	(3) at Maryland	Canceled	N/A
Nov. 21	(3) INDIANA (10)	W, 42-35	635
Nov. 28	(3) at Illinois	Canceled	N/A
Dec. 5	(3) at Michigan State	W, 52-12	0
Dec. 12	(3) MICHIGAN	Noon	
Dec. 19	Big Ten Championship Week	TBA	

OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.

### Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	130	91
Rushing	56	24
Passing	59	60
Penalty	15	7
Average Per Game/Rush	251.0	95.0
Average Per Game/Pass	281.4	268.8
Total Offense	2662	1819
Total Plays	365	325
Average Per Game	532.4	363.8
Average Per Play	7.3	5.6
Penalties-Yards	31-266	34-335
Fumbles-Lost	7-3	11-9
Third Down Efficiency	37-69	21-66
Percentage	54%	32%
Fourth Down Efficiency	5-7	5-9
Percentage	71%	56%
Sacks-Yards	14-75	15-87
Time Of Possession Avg.	34:07	25:45

### Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	56	80	55	42	0	233	46.6
Opponents	13	17	37	49	0	116	23.2

### Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Master Teague	87	426	4.9	6	41
Trey Sermon	55	344	6.3	1	64
Justin Fields	55	239	4.3	5	44
Steele Chambers	8	86	9.6	0	38
Garrett Wilson	2	67	33.5	0	62
C.J. Stroud	1	48	48.0	1	48
Miyan Williams	6	33	5.5	0	11
Jack Miller	2	23	11.5	1	21
Xavier Johnson	4	17	4.2	0	7
Demario McCall	1	12	12.0	0	12
Chris Olave	1	0	0.0	0	0
TEAM	5	-40	-8.0	0	0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>1255</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>66</b>

### Passing Comp. Att. Pct. Yds. TD-INT Effic.

Justin Fields	107	137	78.1	1407	15-3	196.1
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>78.1</b>	<b>1407</b>	<b>15-3</b>	<b>196.1</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>62.4</b>	<b>1344</b>	<b>9-4</b>	<b>134.7</b>

### Receiving Rec. Net Avg. TD Long

Chris Olave	36	528	14.7	5	49
Garrett Wilson	34	572	16.8	5	65
Jeremy Ruckert	9	60	6.7	3	13
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	6	17	2.8	1	7
Jameson Williams	5	78	15.6	1	38
Trey Sermon	5	30	6.0	0	13
Master Teague	3	37	12.3	0	23
Luke Farrell	3	26	8.7	0	16
Julian Fleming	3	21	7.0	0	13
Demario McCall	1	27	27.0	0	27
Jake Hausmann	1	13	13.0	0	13
Wyatt Davis	1	-2	-2.0	0	-2
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>1407</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>1344</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>68</b>

### Scoring TD EPK EPR EPRC FG PTS

Master Teague	6	-	-	-	-	36
Chris Olave	5	-	-	-	-	30
Garrett Wilson	5	-	-	-	-	30
Justin Fields	5	-	-	-	-	30
Blake Haubeil	-	16-16	-	-	2-3	22
Jeremy Ruckert	3	-	-	-	-	18
Jake Seibert	-	13-13	-	-	0-1	13
Jameson Williams	1	-	-	-	-	6
Dominic DiMaccio	-	3-3	-	-	1-2	6
Jack Miller	1	-	-	-	-	6
Haskell Garrett	1	-	-	-	-	6
C.J. Stroud	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	1	-	-	-	-	6

Shaun Wade	1	-	-	-	-	6
Sevyn Banks	1	-	-	-	-	6
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32-32</b>	-	-	<b>3-6</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9-9</b>	<b>0-1</b>	<b>0-5</b>	<b>5-5</b>	<b>1116</b>

### FG Distance 0-29 30-39 40-49 50+ Total

Blake Haubeil	1-2	1-1	0-0	0-0	2-3
Dominic DiMaccio	1-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-2
Jake Seibert	0-0	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-1
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>2-4</b>	<b>1-1</b>	<b>0-1</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>3-6</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>1-1</b>	<b>3-3</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>1-1</b>	<b>5-5</b>

### Punting No. Yds. Avg. Bk Long

Drue Chrisman	18	813	45.2	0	74
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1346</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>56</b>

### Interceptions No. Yds. Avg. TD Long

Shaun Wade	2	36	18.0	1	36
Marcus Hooker	1	31	31.0	0	31
Haskell Garrett	1	0	0.0	1	0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>33</b>

### Punt Returns No. Yds. Avg. TD Long

Garrett Wilson	4	34	8.5	0	22
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	3	11	3.7	0	7
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>58</b>

### Kickoff Returns No. Yds. Avg. TD Long

Demario McCall	5	78	15.6	0	29
Xavier Johnson	1	11	11.0	0	11
Garrett Wilson	1	4	4.0	0	4
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>39</b>

### Def. Leaders Solo Ast. Tot. TFL-Yds. Sacks

Pete Werner	14	18	32	2.5-10	1.0-5
Baron Browning	15	8	23	1.0-3	-
Tuf Borland	9	10	19	2.5-11	1.0-8
Tommy Togiai	6	10	16	3.5-14	3.0-13
Shaun Wade	11	5	16	-	-
Marcus Hooker	13	2	15	-	-
Marcus Williamson	11	4	15	-	-
Jonathon Cooper	4	10	14	1.5-7	1.5-7
Dallas Gant	6	7	13	0.5-0	-
Haskell Garrett	8	4	12	2.0-6	1.0-5
Josh Proctor	8	2	10	1.0-5	-
Sevyn Banks	7	2	9	-	-
Zach Harrison	5	4	9	4.0-12	2.0-3
Justin Hilliard	5	3	8	-	-
Teradja Mitchell	4	3	7	0.5-2	-
Tyrece Smith	5	2	7	1.0-9	1.0-9
Jerron Cage	1	5	6	0.5-1	0.5-1
Javontae Jean-Baptiste	3	3	6	2.0-12	1.0-8
Antwuan Jackson	1	5	6		

## BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 52, Michigan State 12

**Ohio State interim head coach Larry Johnson on preparing for this game without head coach Ryan Day and other assistant coaches:** "It was tough. We knew the coaching staff was down. We had some guys step in. Coach (Kerry) Coombs did a great job. The entire coaching staff did a good job of filling in. We call it standing in the gap. When somebody is out, somebody has to intercede for that person. I thought the staff did a great job staying in the gap and moving us forward and giving our kids a chance to play on Saturday."

**Ohio State junior quarterback Justin Fields on playing without Day and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis on the sidelines:** "With Coach Dennis being out, Coach Day being out, I had to step up a little bit more this week. I have no problem doing that. I actually liked it, to be honest with you."

**Day on what this game means to him watching from afar:** "This is all about the leaders, it's all about the coaches who all stepped up in a big way ... watching the leadership and watching the way these guys played, I couldn't be any prouder and happier for them. Couldn't be prouder of a coaching staff."

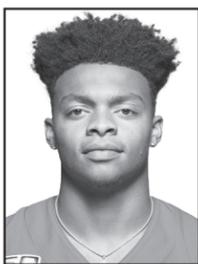
**Fields on if Day talked to him a lot after the three interceptions against Indiana:** "Coach Day wasn't really on me because he knows that I messed up. He knows that I know where I need to improve. And to be honest, those were just dumb mistakes by me last week. So I'm glad it happened. It was a great learning opportunity for me. Especially coming into this week with some of the O-line missing, I knew that we were going to have pressure and I knew that there weren't going to be good plays all the time. So I was just trying to be as smart as possible with throwing the ball away."

**Day on what impressed him with Fields' performance:** "You could just see today the way he attacked the game. On that one run, chasing down the guy, cutting him off on the long run - that was just amazing. Some of those creative plays he made with his feet. Throws he made down the field. I thought he played really gutsy in a situation where we had to be really careful with the offensive line in what we were doing."

**Michigan State head coach Mel Tucker on the performance of his team today:** "I thought we played hard in spurts, but we need to play smarter and

we need to be more consistent. I believe that once we figure out what it takes to be consistent on a day-to-day basis with our guys, then we'll have a better performance, and we'll have an opportunity to beat good teams."

**Tucker on the key things that did not work for the Spartans against Ohio State:** "I want to give Ohio State credit, obviously because they have some good players and they're well-coached. With that being said, turnovers will kill you, as we know. Not getting first downs, not being able to sustain drives, not being able to convert on third down, those things."



Justin Fields

**Tucker on the areas on Michigan State's defense that did not work:** "We knew we had an athletic quarterback that we needed to contain in the scramble game. We didn't do that. We knew we needed to contain him in the designed quarterback runs. We didn't do that. We knew we couldn't give up explosive plays in the run game and the pass game, and we gave those up."

**Michigan State senior linebacker Antjuan Simmons on dealing with the Ohio State offense:** "You just do your job. You don't do anything extra, you don't do anything less. You just do your job. If he comes to you, you wrap him up, you take him down. I mean you just have to do your job. There's no secret trick or secret play or coverage you can run to stop really good plays. You just do your job. You run to the ball and you hit, and I feel we didn't do that today."

**Simmons on what makes Fields such a difficult quarterback to deal with:** "He can run and he can pass. I mean, it's pretty hard to stop quarterbacks that can do both. Usually if you get a guy who stays in the pocket, you want to blitz him, force him outside of the pocket, make him a little uncomfortable. But a guy like Fields, you don't want that guy running all over the field. You want to have controlled rushes. You want to be sound in your rush. If you have the edge you want to protect that edge. And if you're responsible for him, whether it's a spy or whether you're in coverage and you can come off and come up and make a play on him, you just have to do those things."

**Ohio State senior defensive tackle Haskell Garrett on how the team came**

**together to win against Michigan State:** "It's times like adversity when people really step up, and the whole team stepped up. The players, coaches, faculty and staff and even support staff, everybody picked it up and did a little extra this week, and it showed out on the field."

**Michigan State redshirt freshman quarterback Payton Thorne on the difficulties of playing against the Buckeyes:** "Credit Ohio State, obviously. They're one of the best teams in the country every year, and they play in our division. And I know in the last 10 years that we've beaten them before, and we have to be better. And I know Coach Tucker is going to have us ready to play next week and in the coming years when we do get to play Ohio State again."

**Thorne on if this result was at all expected considering the opponent:** "No, absolutely not. We felt pretty good coming into the game, and obviously we did not play good enough, especially on the offensive side of the ball."

**Ohio State senior running back Trey Sermon on facing the uncertainty of whether the game would even be played:** "It was rough, but our coaches, they just tell us it's adversity and we're going to face it, so we have to be ready when our number's called, and we were. We always keep our motto, just fight. So when we get the chance, just fight and just take care of business."

**Tucker on his conservative decisions on fourth downs against the Buckeyes:**

"If I thought we could get it, I would have gone for it. I think we had one, it was a fourth-and-1 on our own side of the field, and we went for it and we made it. I'm looking to go for it. I've shown that I'll go for it on fourth down before. If we think we can get it, then we'll go. If we think it's better for us to try to pooch it and punt, we'll do that."

**Tucker on Ohio State, who has dealt with multiple positive COVID-19 cases over the past two weeks:** "I know Coach Day and all those that are affected by COVID, obviously our hearts and our prayers go out to them for their full recovery. Obviously, the game is important, but the health and safety of everybody involved - players, support staff - coaches, is actually more important."



Mel Tucker



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**"Your Head to Toe Buckeye Source"**

# Hapless Wolverines Hunting For An Upset

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

It would be difficult for Ohio State and Michigan to enter the 116th rendition of The Game with less in common. Contained within the 2020 season, Ohio State sits at 5-0 with playoff and national title hopes still very much intact. On the whole, the Buckeyes appear to be trending up in recruiting and on-field production under head coach Ryan Day, with the type of title hopes baked into the program every season.

Michigan enters the matchup at 2-4. It was blown out by Wisconsin, 49-11, lost to Indiana handily (38-21) and dropped games against rivals Penn State and Michigan State. A season-opening victory over Minnesota and a 48-42 win against Rutgers serve as the lone positives for the Wolverines, though the latter required three overtime periods to secure the victory.

As a program, the Wolverines seem to be on the ropes. Head coach Jim Harbaugh's contract runs through 2021 with no extension in sight. He's also has notched an 11-10 record since losing 62-39 to the Buckeyes in 2018, his fourth loss in as many years against Ohio State at the time.

The shaky circumstances of the head coach have not been lost on his players. For Michigan, the 2020 season appears to be a lost one with little in the way of positivity or encouragement. However, those players are adamant that there's no idea of quitting on the season within the program.

"It's tough to be in this position," said offensive guard Andrew Stueber. "It's not what we imagined. You just continue, got to keep getting better. Up and up, every day, come with a mindset to work. There's definitely no quit in this team, there's no question about that. We're going to keep showing up every day. We're going to watch film Sunday, Monday, learn."

One of Michigan's largest issues on the season has been at the most important position on the field. Junior quarterback Joe Milton drew praise entering the season for his big arm and athletic ability, which he flashed in moments through four games as a starter. However, he was pulled against Wisconsin for sophomore Cade McNamara, a former four-star recruit. McNamara hasn't been dominant, completing 43 of his 71 passes for 425 yards and five touchdowns, but he's impressed Harbaugh and his teammates with his play.

"His mind-set is very good, very solid," Harbaugh said. "He's very good, confident. He's got faith in his ability, works extremely hard and is tough, too. So really good mind-set in all those areas."

Tight end Nick Eubanks echoed Harbaugh's sentiments, saying that McNamara has worked hard to battle his way into the starting role.

"Cade is a competitive dude when it comes to outworking people," Eubanks said. "He works on his craft every day after practice. I told him in the summer to keep chipping away because his time would come."

McNamara has been throwing primarily to junior Ronnie Bell (26 receptions for 401 yards) and a pair of sophomores, Giles Jackson (15 receptions for 167 yards) and Cornelius Johnson (16 receptions for 254 yards) in the wide receiver room. Eubanks and tight end Erick All are involved (combined 22 receptions for 199 yards) but not nearly the focal point that the tight end position used to be in a Harbaugh offense.

"Michigan's had some success this year throwing downfield to Cornelius Johnson," MGoBlog writer Ace Anbender said. "He got a little bit of time last year (as a run blocker), but he's easily the biggest target Michigan has out there outside of the tight end group, and he's

somebody that's shown some ability to stretch the field. He's the guy most likely to catch a deep ball if Michigan has any sort of a vertical passing game going.

"Underneath, Giles Jackson missed the Penn State game with an undisclosed injury, but he's Michigan's best runner, really tough to bring down in the open field and also has some downfield catching ability.

"The passing game will be focused on Ronnie Bell, whichever of the slot receivers is healthy (and Johnson)."

The quarterback position has been a question mark for Michigan all season, as has the ground game. The Wolverines struggled early in the season to find a true workhorse starter, but similar to the quarterback room, a fairly new name appears to have emerged as the unquestioned starter. Junior Hassan Haskins split time in the backfield last season, but he has a team-high 61 carries for 375 yards on the season and really broke free against Rutgers and Penn State, rushing for a combined 212 yards and three touchdowns. Success on the ground is crucial for offensive coordinator Josh Gattis' system.

"To open up the passing game, you have to focus on and establish the run game," Eubanks explained. "That will be something we drill down tight this week. It's about playing Michigan football, though I'm not saying we ever left it.

"That's us – running the ball. It's a key thing for us, and it's how we make those big plays downfield. We have to have belief in one another and make sure we're all on the same page offensively and defensively.

"When we're not on the same page, it doesn't end well for either side of the ball."

Haskins has impressed Harbaugh too, thanks to his hard-nosed, bruising running style at 6-1, 220 pounds.

"You talk about heart, I thought all our players played with great talent and heart," Harbaugh said after the Rutgers game. "The amount of runs that Hassan had that were yards after contact in this game – tough, efficient, outstanding runs. Just tremendous."

Also crucial for the Gattis offense is a sound offensive line, which has presented issues for the Wolverines in 2020. It's a young group with tackle Jalen Mayfield serving as the only returning starter from 2019. Some of those new faces, like freshmen Zak Zinter, Zach Carpenter and Karsen Barnhart have found themselves in difficult situations playing some of their first snaps in college football as starters on one of the nation's most recognizable teams. However, some of that youthful inexperience has started to fade as the season wears on, and all three freshmen drew praise from Harbaugh after Michigan's overtime win over Rutgers.

"I thought there was some really good play in the line," Harbaugh said after Michigan's win over the Scarlet Knights on Nov. 21. "There was just a time in the game where the line was coming off the ball in a way that they hadn't up until this point. There was a switch that really flipped. Zach Carpenter, also a redshirt freshman, true freshman Zak Zinter – thought he flipped the switch in a way that was tremendous. And Karsen Barnhart, a redshirt freshman."

On the other side of the ball, Michigan has another green group in the trenches, especially without star defensive end Aidan Hutchinson, who was lost for the year to a leg fracture suffered on Nov. 7 against Indiana. Hutchinson was expected to lead the Michigan front entering the season and had a strong start to the season, racking up 15 tackles during his three games.

Without Hutchinson there to star, Michigan has leaned heavily on its two healthy returners up front – defensive tackle Carlo Kemp and defensive end Kwity Paye.

## Get To Know ... Michigan

### About Michigan

- **2020 Record:** 2-4.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-3; Starters Returning – Offense 4, Defense 5, Specialists 2.
- **Head Coach:** Jim Harbaugh, 6th year at Michigan, 49-22, 10th year overall, 78-43.
- **Series History:** 116th meeting; Michigan leads 58-51-6.
- **School Facts:** Location – Ann Arbor, MI.; Enrollment – 46,002; Nickname – Wolverines; Colors – Maize, Blue; Conference – Big Ten (East Division); Stadium – Michigan Stadium (Surface, FieldTurf; Capacity – 107,601).

### Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Hassan Haskins	61	375	6.1	6
Zach Charbonnet	19	124	6.5	1
Joe Milton	38	109	2.9	1

Passing	Comp.-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Joe Milton	80-141	56.7	1,077	4-4
Cade McNamara	43-71	60.6	425	5-0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Ronnie Bell	26	401	15.4	1
Cornelius Johnson	16	254	15.9	3

### Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 28.3  
Rushing Yards Per Game – 131.5  
Passing Yards Per Game – 250.3  
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 381.8

### 2020 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Oct. 24	at Minnesota	W, 49-24
Oct. 31	MICHIGAN STATE	L, 27-24
Nov. 7	at Indiana	L, 38-21
Nov. 14	WISCONSIN	L, 49-11
Nov. 21	at Rutgers	W, 48-42 (3OT)
Nov. 28	PENN STATE	L, 27-17
Dec. 5	MARYLAND	Canceled
Dec. 12	at Ohio State	12 p.m.
Dec. 19	Big Ten Championship Week	TBA

### Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo-Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Josh Ross	27-26	53	1.5-13	1.0-11
Daxton Hill	30-16	46	–	–
Mike Barrett	25-19	44	2.0-9	1.0-5
Brad Hawkins	25-14	39	1.0-2	–
Cam McGrone	14-12	26	2.0-8	0.5-5
Vincent Gray	16-9	25	–	–
Adam Shibley	6-17	23	3.0-11	–
Gemon Green	17-5	22	–	–
Carlo Kemp	11-10	21	3.0-20	2.0-15

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Josh Ross	1	18	18.0	0
Daxton Hill	1	0	0.0	0

### Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 34.5  
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 178.8  
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 255.5  
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 434.3

Both have stepped up. They're tied for the team league in sacks with two apiece. Unfortunately for defensive coordinator Don Brown, that pressure has not yet mattered much. Michigan is allowing 255.5 passing yards per game, with opposing offenses often throwing the ball before pressure is able to arrive.

"I think that, if I'm not mistaken, I think they're getting rid of the ball pretty quickly," defensive end Taylor Upshaw said after Michigan's loss to Penn State. "They were getting rid of the ball pretty quickly. We were pretty close to getting home on several occasions that would have been big plays – including myself. I was close to a strip-sack. I mean, it's football. We've just got to get home."

Those problems against the pass and in general for a defense allowing 34.5 points per contest have put Brown under fire among Michigan fans and media. His man coverage-heavy defense isn't putting up the gaudy stats that it once did under his tutelage, like in 2016, when the Wolverines allowed just 14.1 points per game, but his players have repeatedly stood in support of him when asked about his job security.

"We have full faith in Coach Brown," said defensive tackle Christopher Hinton. "He's a great defense coordinator. He's shown over the years that he knows what he's doing. I have no questions in the scheme. We, as a defense, as players, need to execute what he's telling us down after down and play after play, because like I said, we have full faith in Coach Brown."

Behind the defensive line, Michigan still deploys its traditional 4-3 look with a "viper" linebacker, similar to how Ohio State utilizes its "bullet" spot. Mike Barrett fills that role in 2020 and has shone next to traditional linebackers Josh Ross and Cam McGrone, racking up 44 tackles, the third-highest figure on the team. A former high school quarterback, Barrett does a little bit of everything for Michigan, serving as a coverage man, a run stuffer and a pass rusher throughout each game.

"For a guy who was a former quarterback in high school, to transition to defense and learn the linebacker position and 'viper' position – where we ask him to do a lot – it's good," linebackers coach Brian Jean-Mary said of Barrett. "The athletic ability kind of jumps off the screen at times,

but the physicality part and taking on blocks has been a surprise. I still think he's got room to improve and be even better."

The back end of Michigan's defense has frequently caused Brown the most anguish. Star cornerback Ambry Thomas opted out of the season, leaving Michigan with an extremely inexperienced group at cornerback, which has been exposed at times in the passing game.

Gemon Green and Vincent Gray are the big names to know in Thomas' stead. Both players are juniors but are seeing their first significant starting time this season.

Safeties Brad Hawkins and Daxton Hill are back from significant roles in 2019 and have added stability, but neither has been able to successfully cover some of the coverage miscues that Michigan is suffering. Hill, a former five-star, has been especially impressive to his coaches.

"He's a hell of a player," Michigan's secondary coach Mike Zordich told reporters. "He's very explosive. He's a lot like Jabrill (Peppers) as far as his explosiveness goes. But I would even give Dax the upper hand as far as his coverage ability."

For the Michigan defense, the name of the game all season has been growth. This is a group that entered the season with five returning starters – one of whom has now been lost for the season to injury – and has grappled with that inexperience all season, allowing quite a few more chunk plays than it has been accustomed to in recent seasons. Against the big-play Buckeyes, limiting breakdowns will likely serve as a significant key for Brown's unit.

"We just have to keep going forward and not get down," Hill said after Michigan's loss to Wisconsin. "You win some, you lose some, so you're not going to win every game. You have to forget what you've been doing and try to find some positive out of it.

"There's still plenty of games to be played. The last few games, that doesn't really determine how we're going to be for the rest of the season. There are many more games to be played, many more plays to be made.

"We're not going to just dwell on how our pass defense has been. So the most important thing is just really doing what we can do right now. That's all we can focus on."



# Ohio State vs. Michigan

Saturday, Dec. 12, 2020 • 12 p.m. • FOX  
Ohio Stadium; Columbus, OH



## Projected Depth Charts

### How We See It

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

The Buckeyes have had back-to-back strong rushing games, following up 307 yards vs. Indiana with 322 vs. Michigan State in the 52-12 win on Dec. 5. What is worrisome for Michigan is how Ohio State reached those numbers. Master Teague ripped through the Hoosiers for 169 yards, including a 41-yard touchdown. He had a quiet game vs. MSU (46 yards on 3.3 yards per carry) but Trey Sermon picked up the slack with a 64-yard gallop for a score among his 112 yards on 10 carries. By the way, quarterback Justin Fields chipped in with 104 yards on 13 rushes against the Spartans' defense.

What's most impressive about the totals is the fact that OSU was missing three starters from the offensive line and still looked dominant. It can be assumed if all three tested positive for COVID-19 they will be unavailable for the Michigan game – if it happens. It is impossible to know which players may be forced to miss the game. At 251.0 yards rushing per game, the Buckeyes lead the Big Ten. Michigan is tenth in rush defense, allowing 178.8 yards per game. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

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

The Wolverines run for 131.5 yards a game to rank in the bottom half of the conference. They gain 4.6 every time they run the ball. By comparison, the Buckeyes gain 5.5 yards per rush. Hassan Haskins leads U-M with 375 yards on 61 carries (6.1 avg.) and has six rushing TDs. In addition to Haskins, the other three backs have scored as well: Blake Corum has two TDs on the ground, and Zach Charbonnet and Chris Evans one each. Evans leads their ball carriers with 1,795 career yards and 15 rushing touchdowns. After giving up 81 yards on the ground (2.9 average) to Michigan State, Ohio State for the season is yielding 95.0 yards (3.4 average), second in the league to Wisconsin. Of note, Michigan has turned the ball over only six times (two fumbles, four interceptions) to lead the conference. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

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

Fields had to overcome bad snaps from replacement center Harry Miller, an inexperienced line, plus three sacks to rebound from a three-interception game against Indiana. He threw for 199 yards and TDs to Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave with no INTs. He flung the ball away under duress instead of throwing it up for grabs, except he did get nailed for an intentional grounding. It was a solid effort. The Buckeyes get 281.4 yards a game through the air. Michigan is second only to Ohio State for worst pass defense in the Big Ten with a 255.5 average and has two interceptions for the season. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

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

Neither Joe Milton nor Cade McNamara has been consistent for coach Jim Harbaugh. Milton is completing 56.7 percent of his passes (80 of 141) for 1,077 yards and has as many interceptions as TDs (four). McNamara is 43 of 71 (60.6 percent) for 425 yards and five touchdowns against zero interceptions. The top receivers are Ronnie Bell with 26 grabs for 401 yards (15.4 average) and a score and Cornelius Johnson. His 16 catches for 254 yards (15.9) have resulted in three TDs. Michigan averages 250.3 yards per game.

The Buckeyes have been porous this season, but after giving up 491 passing yards to Michael Penix of Indiana, they limited the Spartans to 180 yards, nearly a third of that coming on a 55-yard reception by Jayden Reed. The Buckeyes concede 268.8 yards a game but have pick-sixes in the past two games by Shaun Wade and Haskell Garrett. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

#### SPECIAL TEAMS

Michigan punter Brad Robbins leads the Big Ten with a 45.3 average and has put eight of 23 punts inside the 20. Quinn Nordin is 2 of 5 on field goals with a long of 46 yards, and Jake Moody is 1 of 4 with his make from 40 yards for the Wolverines. Drue Chrisman provided the Buckeyes with deep pins twice vs. the Spartans, and Blake Haubeil returned from a groin injury to make a 27-yard field goal. Giles Jackson is a dangerous kick returner for U-M with a 95-yard TD and a 27.2-yard average on 13 attempts. He also has a 32-yard punt return. **EDGE: EVEN**

#### INTANGIBLES

The not-so fun part is trying to predict how teams respond to adversity. The Buckeyes showed character against Michigan State after COVID-19-related cancellations in two of their previous three games. Now it's the Wolverines' turn to react. Michigan (2-4) has nothing to lose, other than possibly its coach, against the heavily favored Buckeyes and has been accused of wanting to dodge OSU. The Buckeyes must continue to not only win but do so in style. **EDGE: EVEN**

#### STAFF PREDICTION

The only advantage Michigan has is there will be few if any fans in Ohio Stadium, so the intimidation factor is gone. It won't be enough. **OHIO STATE 45, MICHIGAN 24**

### WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...

**QB**  
12 JOSH ROSS, 6-2, 230, SR.  
45 Adam Shibley, 6-1, 225, Sr.

**RB**  
33 MASTER TEAGUE, 5-11, 225, SO.  
8 Trey Sermon, 6-1, 215, Sr.  
OR 22 Steele Chambers, 6-1, 220, R-Fr.

**FB**  
91 TAYLOR UPSHAW, 6-4, 256, JR.  
99 Gabe Newburg, 6-5, 265, So.

**TE**  
22 GEMON GREEN, 6-2, 181, JR.  
5 D.J. Turner, 6-0, 182, So.

**WR**  
23 MICHAEL BARRETT, 6-0, 227, JR.  
10 Anthony Solomon, 6-1, 212, So.

**OL**  
44 CAM MCGRONE, 6-1, 236, JR.  
41 Nikhai Hill-Green, 6-1, 225, Fr.

**OL**  
40 BEN VANSUMEREN, 6-2, 253, JR.  
55 David Ojabo, 6-5, 250, So.

**OL**  
19 KWITY PAYE, 6-4, 272, SR.  
OR 2 CARLO KEMP, 6-3, 286, GR.

**OL**  
2 CARLO KEMP, 6-3, 286, GR.  
OR 95 DONOVAN JETER, 6-3, 318, SR.

**OL**  
15 CHRISTOPHER HINTON, 6-4, 305, SO.  
OR 95 DONOVAN JETER, 6-3, 318, SR.

**DL**  
20 BRAD HAWKINS, 6-1, 218, SR.  
27 Hunter Reynolds, 6-0, 192, Sr.

**DL**  
91 VINCENT GRAY, 6-2, 190, JR.  
16 Jalen Perry, 6-0, 185, So.

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# McCray Battles Rivalry Through Son's Career

By WYATT CROSHER  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Before he made his way to Ohio State, Mike McCray did not have any emotional stakes in the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry, and that was despite going to high school at Dunbar in Dayton.

This was not because McCray had a different favorite team or strictly watched the games to watch two good teams play. Instead, it was because McCray barely watched football at all as a kid and throughout high school, only really turning on games for teams playing across the country due to some family ties.

"I didn't have any experience with it. It's so funny, but I didn't watch that many sports when I was in high school, and even before that, I didn't watch too many sports," McCray told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "I did watch a little bit of Southern Cal. The reason why was because my grandparents lived in LA. I might watch a Rose Bowl or something, but never really followed that game until I got to Ohio State."

That all changed when McCray came to Ohio State in 1985, with the Buckeyes sporting a 4-2 record against the Wolverines since Earle Bruce took over as head coach. McCray said he learned quickly what this rivalry meant, not only to both teams, but to everyone at Ohio State.

"When you walk on campus, you know," McCray said. "That's one of the first conversations that you have in that

first team meeting that we had with Earle Bruce. That's one of the first things that we learned, how important that game is at the end of the year, and then we learned about the gold pants and how important it is. They put their pants on just like we do. It was a sense of learning about it, and we did learn about it right when we walked on that campus."

McCray's first season for the Buckeyes ended with a 9-3 record for the sixth straight season after Bruce started his tenure at Ohio State with an 11-1 campaign in 1979. After losses to Illinois and Wisconsin, the latter of which came a week before The Game, Ohio State came into Ann Arbor with an 8-2 record, while Michigan boasted an 8-1-1 record with its only loss being a 12-10 defeat to top-ranked Iowa.

During the week of practice before the matchup, McCray said it was clear just how much this rivalry meant to Bruce, a former Ohio State player who had had run-ins with Michigan since the 1950s, as well as during his time as an assistant on Woody Hayes coaching staff from 1966-71.

"They stepped it up," McCray said. "We even used to tape our helmets to make it look like Michigan. Earle Bruce was a huge Buckeye. He was with Woody, so he took that game extremely serious, and you knew his whole demeanor changed during that week. He was always a little fiery guy, but that week brought out a different type of coach."

In his first year, McCray, whose prima-

ry position was linebacker, found time on the special teams, finishing with just two tackles on the season, neither of which came against the Wolverines.

But even without making much of an impact on the field, McCray said that the atmosphere alone in his first experience of an Ohio State-Michigan game, both in the antics before the game and the energy during it, stands out to him.

"My first time, you could see the respect that they have for each other, but you also see the dislike," McCray said. "You really found out what a rival was. You could really tell that this was a huge game from day one, I mean when you walk in the locker room and they're playing the music, playing their fight song, they have things posted on lockers, quotes from Michigan players. The history was always there."

"You knew when you got to The Game, that atmosphere, the crowd and the pageantry of that game was huge."

McCray did not get the result he was hoping for in his first Ohio State-Michigan game, with the Wolverines taking a 27-17 victory. Led by quarterback Jim Harbaugh, who completed 16 of 19 passes for 230 yards and three touchdowns, Michigan overcame an early 10-3 deficit and took the final 10-point advantage on a 77-yard connection from Harbaugh to freshman wide receiver John Kolesar with 9:19 to go in the fourth quarter.

The 1986 season was much of the same story for McCray and Ohio State. The Buckeyes ended with three losses for the seventh straight year, though the Buckeyes did get a 10th win to break the monotony of the 9-3 stretch. McCray found some more time at linebacker and finished the season with 13 tackles (five solo).

Two of those tackles came against Michigan in Ohio Stadium, but despite a closer game, it did not change the outcome as the Wolverines won their second straight in the rivalry by a score of 26-24.

The Buckeyes again had an early lead, this time going up 14-3 in the first quarter, but Michigan countered in a big way, scoring 23 of the next 26 points to go up 26-17. A touchdown by Ohio State quarterback Jim Karsatos to Cris Carter with 9:42 to go, Carter's second touchdown catch of the day, shrank the deficit, but Ohio State kicker Matt Frantz missed a field goal from 45 yards out with 1:06 to go, securing the win for the Wolverines.

Harbaugh again played, throwing for 261 yards and two interceptions, but he was not the star, with Michigan running back Jamie Morris exploding for 210 rushing yards and a pair of scores to help secure the victory. For Ohio State, linebacker Chris Spielman tied a program record with 29 tackles in the losing effort.

After starting his Ohio State career 0-2 against the team's largest rival, 1987 did not appear to be the season that would change McCray's fates. The Buckeyes came into the matchup with a 5-4-1 record and losers of three straight games, including a heartbreaking 29-27 loss to Iowa the week prior. On the other side, Michigan came in with a 7-3 record and winners of three straight.

On top of that, Ohio State also had drama off the field to deal with. Following the loss to the Hawkeyes, Bruce was fired, and athletic director Rick Bay resigned due to the decision made by the university.

## McCray Vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
1985/Fr.	Ann Arbor	L, 27-17
1986/So.	Columbus	L, 26-24
1987/Jr.	Ann Arbor	W, 23-20
1988/Sr.	Columbus	L, 34-31

But McCray said that the week leading up to the Michigan game was mostly the same as it had been the two seasons prior, but with the players now having even more motivation to end the season with a victory.

"I thought he was a great coach," McCray said. "He knew how to motivate us, and I think most players did not want to see him go, and then we really wanted to send him out on a good note, a great note, so we were motivated that whole week. We were motivated. We did struggle that year. We did lose some close games, but I think Earle got us focused in on, you know, it's a rival game, so whatever happens, the 10 games before didn't mean anything. This was the most important game, and I think we had a good relationship with Earle."

McCray's first game as a key contributor against the Wolverines did not start out according to plan, with Michigan taking an early 13-0 lead and threatening to make it 20-0 on a drive that got to the Ohio State 43-yard line. But on a first-and-10, Michigan fullback Jarrod Bunch fumbled, and McCray recovered it. The Buckeyes scored on the ensuing drive to cut the deficit to six.

The fumble recovery was one of two on the day for McCray, who also ended the game with seven tackles (six solo), fourth most on the team.

"It was really being at the right place at the right time," McCray said. "I think one of them I had to fight for, but the other one just bounced into my hand, so it put us into good field position at that time. I think we might have scored off of one of them."

The Buckeyes scored their first touchdown of the game, to close to 13-7 before the half, when McCray recovered a Wolverine drop at the OSU 39.

"It seemed like I made plays when I needed to make plays sometimes, so I made another play," he said.

Even with the success that he saw against the Wolverines during his junior season, McCray said that it was certainly a more taxing game to play in than he was used to.

"First of all, it was extremely cold," McCray said. "But also, the hits are a little different. It's a little bit more physical contact."

The cold and the extra physicality were worth it in the end, as Ohio State rallied from the early deficit behind 219 yards and two touchdowns from quarterback Tom Tupa, defeating Michigan on the road 23-20 to send Bruce off with a victory in his final game as the team's head coach.

McCray ended that season with 71 tackles (39 solo), six tackles for loss and three interceptions, as well as what would end up being his lone victory against the Wolverines.

"We upset them. We came out with our little red Nike shoes on and I had a good game, recovered a couple fumbles, had a lot of tackles," McCray said. "That win in Ann Arbor was huge. We took Earle Bruce, put him (on our shoulders) and carried him off."



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## MICHIGAN MEMORIES

The 1988 season was the first for newly named head coach John Cooper and the last for McCray, who became a captain in his senior season. It was a down year for both McCray and the Buckeyes, who came into The Game with a 4-5-1 record and with McCray battling injuries for much of the year.

But McCray said that there was no way he was going to miss the Michigan game despite the ailments he was dealing with.

"I was hurt my senior year, but I made it back for that game," McCray recalled. "I didn't want to miss that game, and I came back and I played about 75-80 percent, but I played the whole game for the most part. I just needed to play in that game. I got hurt earlier in the Indiana game, and I made sure that I was going to make it back for the Michigan game, that's how important it was for me."

Ohio State started out on the wrong foot in 1988's game against the Wolverines, with Michigan taking a 20-0 lead into half-time. But the Buckeyes rallied with 31 of the next 38 points to take a lead with 2:02 to play. But Kolesar, who had made the big play in 1985, again came up huge, hauling in a 41-yard touchdown with 1:37 to go to give Michigan the 34-31 lead.

The Buckeyes drove down to the Michigan 39-yard line, but quarterback Greg Frey threw an interception to seal the loss in Cooper's first outing. McCray made four tackles (three solo) in the defeat.

The 1988 loss would be one of 10 that Cooper was dealt at the hands of Michigan in his 13 seasons at Ohio State, a stark difference from both Bruce and Hayes, who boasted winning records in The Game in their tenures. Even in just one season under Cooper, McCray said he could tell the differences between the two coaches when it came to Michigan week.

"I'm a very honest person, so I'm going to be honest. The atmosphere was different because I think Earle Bruce had a different history of Ohio State-Michigan than Coach Cooper did," McCray said. "That year, we had a losing season, I still don't think Coop understood the magnitude of that game at that time the way Earle did."

"And Coach (Bruce) had so much background with that game, being an assistant coach, he might have been a GA. I think he played at Ohio State. He just understood the rivalry better because he had more history of being a part of that rivalry. I don't think that John Cooper had that history yet of how important that game was."

That was the last game that Mike McCray Sr. played in, but it would not be the last time a Mike McCray found his way onto the field in this rivalry.

The 2013 recruiting class featured a four-star linebacker out of Trotwood (Ohio) Trotwood-Madison by the name of Mike McCray Jr., Mike Sr.'s son, and he committed to Michigan despite an offer from the in-state Buckeyes.

"I support him in anything he does, and we had conversations because he did receive an Ohio State offer," McCray Sr. said. "We went back and forth, and he just made a decision he felt was best for him, and I supported him in that decision."

McCray's son played well in his time with the Wolverines, specifically in his final two seasons with the program. In 2016 and 2017, McCray Jr. finished with 160 total tackles, 29½ TFL, 9½ sacks, eight pass breakups, two forced fumbles and a pair of interceptions. Despite his ties to Columbus, McCray Sr. rooted for his son every step of the way, while still rooting for Ohio State throughout the first 11

games of each regular season.

"It wasn't hard because I only had one child and that's easy to do" McCray said of rooting for his one-time rival. "Your love for your child would be more than the love for your school, so it wasn't very difficult at all. I always rooted for (Ohio State), I rooted for them when my son was at Michigan, just not when they played Michigan. I rooted for my son to be successful."

McCray Jr. had five years in Ann Arbor and played in four of them but was not part of a team that defeated Ohio State, losing those five games to the Buckeyes by a combined score of 187-129. The 2016 loss to the Buckeyes – a 30-27, double-overtime win for Ohio State – was the first where McCray really found meaningful time, breaking through for nine tackles, two pass breakups and a sack.

But thanks in part to a controversial fourth-down conversion by quarterback J.T. Barrett, Ohio State prevailed for the fifth straight time against Michigan, though McCray does not necessarily agree that the Buckeyes deserved to earn that call.

"If I'm being honest, I thought he was short," McCray said. "And when you go back to instant replay, I still think he was short."

McCray Jr.'s best game against Ohio State came in his fifth-year senior season, racking up 11 tackles and three TFL that lost the Buckeyes 20 yards on the day. Ohio State still won the game 31-20 in Ann Arbor, leaving McCray with an 0-5 record against his largest rival.

"It was very emotional for him because I think he understood that rivalry, too, and never had an opportunity to win," McCray said. "They didn't get that his senior year. The last two games were really good for him. They were in the games, and one coming down to the fourth-down play and it did go to overtime. I know he wanted both of those games from an emotional standpoint and from a competitive standpoint. He understands the rivalry now, just like I do, but he just understands it from the other side."

Now McCray Jr. is an analyst for the Wolverines, and while he is still a part of the Michigan program, his father, who is the principal at Trotwood-Madison, now has no problem giving his son a hard time when he loses to the Buckeyes.

"My love for my son is my love for my son, but now that he coaches it's different," McCray said. "He has to take his ass-whippings."

Ohio State has been dominant on the field over the Wolverines, winning eight straight and doing so in blowout fashion the past two matchups. But, despite all the winning the Buckeyes have done on the field in The Game, McCray Sr. still has a very important fandom battle within his family that he said he appears to be losing.

"Our son just had our first grandchild, so right now, it's competition to see, hopefully, which one he's going to pick (between Ohio State and Michigan)," McCray said. "Hopefully I'll win, but the only sad thing about it is all my family has converted, most of them, to being Michigan fans. I'm the oldest son and now my brothers and sisters and my mother and my wife, all of them are Michigan fans now. I just don't understand it. I don't know if my son has more weight than me or more clout than me. I mean my wife still wears her Michigan gear and my mother will wear her Michigan stuff, so I'm like 'Wait a minute, y'all came to see me play!'"



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# Wooldridge Prefers Competitive Rivalry Game

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A young Akron native mulled his college decision as an elite running back recruit while a legendary head coach made his pitch in the living room of the prospect's family.

The phone rang and the talented recruit's father was on the other line, telling him to hold off on a decision until he got home from work. After the father got home, he called the prospect into the kitchen for a private conversation while the coach stayed put on the couch.

"He said, 'I will support you, no matter what decision you make. We will be there. We will support you. This is a decision that you have to live with and experience. This is your decision. But I've always dreamt about seeing one of my sons run onto that Ohio Stadium field dressed in scarlet and gray. You're my last son that has the opportunity to help me fulfill my dream,'" recalled the highly touted recruit.

"And I just sort of looked at him and both of us got kind of teary-eyed. And I realized at that point that it meant something extremely special. It was very, very important to him for me to go to Ohio State."

The talented tailback from Akron was John Wooldridge, and the coach in his parents' living room was Michigan head coach Bo Schembechler.

Prior to that kitchen conversation, Wooldridge was leaning toward joining

Schembechler at Michigan, but his father's influence sparked a change.

"My dad sort of carried the weight of my decision to go to Ohio State, because I realized, once he pulled me into the kitchen with Bo Schembechler sitting on my living room couch, what it meant to him," Wooldridge told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "That had a tremendous impact on me because I wanted him to be proud of me."

Wooldridge did not want to disappoint his dad, but that meant he would let down a coach he had grown fond of in Schembechler.

"It's one of those moments where here's a man that's larger than life sitting in my living room," Wooldridge said. "And I'm on the verge of telling him I'm probably not going to go to Michigan, after he's traveled here, come to my home and he's sitting at my couch and having coffee at my parents' coffee table. I'm about to tell this man, 'I'm not going to your school.' Once I got over that fright as a teenager, I felt like the weight of the world was lifted off my shoulders, and then I felt better."

After he made his decision to become a Buckeye, Wooldridge became excited to take part in the greatest rivalry in sports.

"It's truly the epitome of what Ohio State is known for," Wooldridge said of the rivalry. "It's almost like the heavyweight championship belt. It embodies the spirit of Ohio State dominance, particularly back in some of the previous decades when Michigan was more competitive."

As someone who almost ended up on

the other side, Wooldridge has an unusual perspective. So what does the rivalry signify to him?

"The level of energy that reverberates not only through the stadium, but also through you as a player," Wooldridge responded. "You hear about this rivalry that is second to none in all of sports. I didn't particularly ever have a really good game against Michigan. In fact, I was hurt in the majority of those games against Michigan. By that time of year, I was pretty banged up most of the time. But the essence was being a part of the pageantry of what that game represents, and the understanding that it's coming down to Ohio State and Michigan, typically to decide who was going to represent the best in the Big Ten."

Although he redshirted his first season in 1982, Wooldridge was a member of the Buckeyes who upset Michigan 24-14. He was an Ohio native, but being in Columbus for the week of the Michigan game gave him a different vantage point.

"There was excitement and a form of pageantry in the Michigan game, because that was almost like a mini bowl game for us, because there's so much to it," Wooldridge said. "There's so much to Michigan week. There's Michigan-Ohio State canned food drives, Michigan-Ohio State blood drives, Michigan-Ohio State everything."

As someone who was close to choosing the Wolverines, Wooldridge had a lot of respect for the Maize and Blue program, particularly referencing the talent they had poached from his home state.

"Michigan was competitive," Wooldridge said. "They had great athletes. Hell, they had a bunch of athletes from Ohio. They were even getting good Ohio players, and Ohio players that were making plays and creating an impact in those games. That added to the flavor of that because there were guys from Ohio on that team who wanted to say look, 'We're from Ohio, we went to Michigan and we're going to show you why we went to Michigan.'"

As a redshirt freshman, Wooldridge served as a backup to starting tailback Keith Byars and returned kickoffs for the

## Wooldridge Vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
1982/Fr.	Columbus	W, 24-14
1983/R-Fr.	Ann Arbor	L, 24-21
1984/So.	Columbus	W, 21-6
1985/Jr.	Ann Arbor	L, 27-17
1986/5th-Sr.	Columbus	L, 26-24

Buckeyes. When it came time to take on Michigan, Ohio State planned to use Wooldridge's speed to its advantage against an ultra-aggressive Wolverine front.

"We put in a few special plays that we felt we would be able to take advantage of my quickness vs. their aggressive, blitzing-style defense," Wooldridge said. "We put in a few counters and a few special trap plays that we hadn't run all season, and we were working on them in practice trying to get them ready for the Michigan game. Situations arose where we were able to run those plays – disappointingly, not to much success though."

Ohio State fell 24-21 to its archrival in a heartbreaking game, and Wooldridge took his two carries for just seven yards.

On the season, Wooldridge finished with 264 rushing yards and two touchdowns on 51 carries for 5.2 yards per carry, adding five catches for 40 yards. The red-shirt freshman also returned five kickoffs with a long of 33 and an average of 21.2 yards per return.

The Buckeyes and Wooldridge entered the 1984 campaign with revenge on their minds. Coming into The Game, Ohio State boasted an 8-2 record, while the Wolverines had a 6-4 ledger.

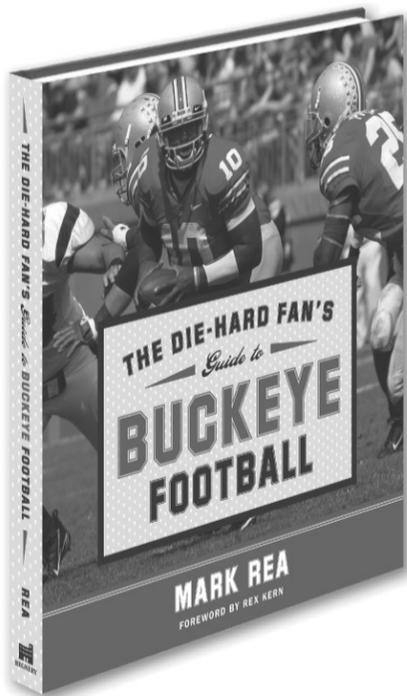
Ohio State safety William White recovered a fumble with 5:58 left in the game and his squad leading 14-6. The Buckeyes drove to the Michigan 14-yard line, but a delay of game penalty set them up for a second-and-12 from the 19.

Hoping to put the game away, Wooldridge took a handoff and burst through the hole.

"I saw a touchdown. It's almost like a kid opening a present during Christmas," Wooldridge said. "We ran a play, one of our

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## MICHIGAN MEMORIES

famous or infamous, however you want to look at it. It was a play known as '21 Dave,' and it was a bunch of down blocking by our line, and we had our fullback kick out the end, and there'd be a gap right there. That 21 Dave worked as it had been drawn on the chalkboard. And there was such a gaping hole right there, and I saw nothing but the end zone. And I worked desperately to try to get to that end-zone line."

He gashed the Wolverine defense for 17 yards, but his run went awry as Wooldridge approached the goal line.

"I got hit right at the 2-yard line, and I thought my momentum would carry me because I was untouched for almost 20 yards, so I had a lot of momentum. And I figured, 'If I get it now, I'm cashing this one in because my momentum is going to carry me.'" Wooldridge said. "I got hit at the 2-yard line and I immediately got planted right there. What ultimately happened was I got hit from both sides, and it ruptured a disc in my lower back down on the 2-yard line, and I literally couldn't move. I had an immediate sort of almost paralysis just where I couldn't move my back, and it was a very bittersweet moment for me."

Rupturing a disc may be all bitter with no sweetness for most people, but Wooldridge had a firm understanding of what was on the line. He was carted off the field, but while he was being attended to, he was provided with game updates and could even hear the roar of the Ohio State crowd when Byars punched the ball in for six. Beating the Wolverines 21-6 meant the Buckeyes were Big Ten champs.

"Even though I was hurt, that was one of the shining moments, because obviously we won and that represented a Big Ten championship for us," Wooldridge said. "I thought it was impactful, because it took us right to the cusp of scoring a touchdown that was vital for us in that game."

The feeling of helping his team beat Michigan is one that will never leave Wooldridge, as well as the back pain from never surgically repairing his ruptured disc.

"It kind of plagued me throughout the rest of my career," Wooldridge said. "And now that I'm almost 60, I'm still plagued by back issues, so I've got another reason to be pissed off at Michigan."

Wooldridge finished his sophomore season with 108 carries for 633 yards (5.9 avg.) and four touchdowns, and nine receptions for 120 yards. He also returned 10 kickoffs for 198 yards.

Entering his junior season, Wooldridge was eager to do more to help the team win, and that became a necessity when Byars suffered a foot injury that hampered him for nearly all of 1985.

By the time the matchup with Michigan came around, Wooldridge was banged up from carrying the load at tailback with a serious knee injury. Ohio State was ranked No. 12 in the country at 8-2 before traveling to Michigan, which was ranked No. 6 at

8-1-1. Finally, Wooldridge would have the opportunity he had been waiting for, but a bum knee kept him from being himself.

"I was really stiff, my knee was really swollen, and it was a lot of pain too," Wooldridge recalled. "And so I said, 'Let me give it a shot during the opening kickoff kind of see where we go.' Ironically, I got the opening kickoff, and I almost broke the kickoff and took it all the way back for a touchdown. Our kick return team created a huge gap, and I caught it at the 7-yard line, and I took it back to the 40 and I was kind of running with a limp. Had I been healthy, I really believe I would have had an opportunity to take that to the house."

Wooldridge's 33-yard return ignited the players and coaches on the Ohio State sideline, but for the returner, he knew his knee would not last.

"I remember Jim Karsatos bending down and trying to pick me up off the ground, but my leg was so swollen and so stiff. I was really struggling to be able to bend my legs to get up," Wooldridge said. "Right then I knew that it's probably not going to work out from a running back standpoint for me today. I'm going to be a liability when it comes to blocking and having to navigate from the inside to pick up a blitz on the outside."

The Buckeyes held a 10-3 lead in the first half, but the Wolverines tied the game with a 12-play, 80-yard drive that ended with 2:28 until the intermission.

Coming out of halftime, the Wolverines drove down the field before settling for a field goal to take a three-point lead with 10:28 left in the third quarter. Wooldridge could feel the momentum slipping from the Buckeyes, and the junior tailback tried to make an impact.

"Michigan kicked off again, and I said, 'Let me give it another shot.' My knee had really gotten stiff, and that kickoff came toward me also, and I tried to slide to the side a little bit to get underneath it. And I could barely move to get underneath the ball to catch it. And it hit me right in the face, and I said, 'Oh s—.'"

"I didn't want to be a liability. I thought I might be, and clearly that was on the verge of happening, so I was done. I was done for the rest of the game."

Fellow returner Vince Workman corralled the fumble, preventing complete disaster, but the Buckeyes still had to start at their own 7. After a three-and-out, Ohio State punted the ball away to Michigan, who took 12 plays to travel 63 yards for another score, giving the home team a 20-10 edge after 17 unanswered points.

The resilient 1985 Ohio State team cut the Michigan lead to 20-17 with 10:10 remaining in the game on a touchdown pass from Karsatos to standout wide receiver Cris Carter.

"I remember Cris Carter's excitement in the end zone," Wooldridge said. "He ran over a cheerleader in the back of the

end zone. He just flattened her, and it was almost like a stampede coming at this cheerleader."

Ohio State had seized momentum on the big play from Carter, and Wooldridge said it felt like the perfect opportunity to take the game. Instead, Michigan quarterback Jim Harbaugh hit John Kolesar in stride for a 77-yard touchdown on second-and-7 to extend the Wolverine lead to 27-17, signaling the end for the Buckeyes.

Despite dealing with injuries, Wooldridge concluded his junior campaign with 1,051 yards from scrimmage, with a team-high 820 rushing yards on 174 attempts (4.7). He scored seven rushing touchdowns and two receiving touchdowns.

Wooldridge's poor luck continued when he became a senior in 1986, with his season ending almost before it even got started. The talented tailback took just 10 carries for 30 yards against No. 5 Alabama in the season opener and did not finish the game after blowing out his knee.

"For that Michigan game, I walked out on senior day on crutches for my last time in Ohio Stadium. It was a monumental moment still, because I knew that was the culmination of my time in the 'Shoe and wearing the scarlet and gray," Wooldridge said. "It meant a lot to be there with my teammates to embrace and celebrate what we had accomplished over the course of those years."

The Buckeyes fell to the Wolverines 26-24 in Wooldridge's senior season, bringing his overall record against them to 2-3, but he found a silver lining in the Buckeyes being Big Ten co-champions.

"It was all bittersweet for me" Wooldridge said. "The essence of what the game represents, and what it represented back in that era of the '80s, it wasn't disappointing. It was truly everything that I had bargained for, everything that I had signed up for. The irony of this whole thing is I had once favored That Team up North."

It would be understandable for Wooldridge to be bitter about choosing Ohio State over Michigan, then losing to the Wolverines three times and ending so many seasons with serious injuries. Yet, his appreciation for the rivalry has not wavered, and he regrets nothing about his decision.

"It represented everything that I thought it was, that was said to be of that rivalry," Wooldridge said. "There's pageantry, there's excitement, there's blood, sweat and tears. It was two good football teams, two historic programs, coming together for an epic Saturday afternoon of football."

Ohio State and Michigan still play on a Saturday afternoon to end the regular season, so why did Wooldridge speak in past tense when referring to the rivalry between "two good football teams?" The answer is simple. After they have lost 17 of the past 19 matchups, Wooldridge does not think the Wolverines are close to the Buckeyes' level, and unlike many former Ohio State players and coaches, he hopes they get back to that.

"Obviously, I want Ohio State to beat them every year," Wooldridge said. "But I would like to see the games be more competitive. I look at the bigger picture. Ohio State vs. Michigan, it's epic. But I think it's something bigger than this. The essence of that game is bigger than just Ohio State-Michigan. I think it represents the Big Ten, it represents college football. And for those reasons, it represents more if its more competitive. It makes college football better."

A less competitive Michigan weakens Ohio State in Wooldridge's eyes, and he wants his alma mater to be as strong as it can be when it comes time to compete for national championships with such perennial powers as Alabama and Clemson.

"It gives maybe a false sense of understanding sometimes of what it really is. Is it a mirage? What are we seeing? Is Ohio State really that good, or is Michigan really that bad?" Wooldridge asked. "I just don't know that it sets us up for us being the best that we can be when it really comes time for us to be the best team that we can be."

Will the Wolverines get back to being a national force that pushes the Buckeyes to be their best year in and year out? For Wooldridge, nothing will change until they fire the former quarterback who is 0-5 as a head coach in The Game.

"Until they get rid of Harbaugh and try something new, they're going to continue to struggle," Wooldridge said. "They need some fresh blood. They need a new perspective. And right now, they don't have that."

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# Kacherski Haunted By Howard's Heisman Pose

By ANDREW LIND  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The first memory former Ohio State linebacker John Kacherski has of the Buckeyes is their 16-10 loss to fifth-ranked Alabama in the 1986 Kickoff Classic at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J.

But after he watched Chris Spielman record a game-high 16 tackles and an interception that set up Ohio State's lone touchdown, he knew he wanted to play for the Buckeyes.

"Growing up in Long Island, it's very different," Kacherski told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "You don't really grow up dreaming of playing college football. It's just not that big out there. The closest school in Division I is probably Boston College. Syracuse and Penn State are about four hours away, too, so kids don't grow up the way they do around here, just like my boys grew up dreaming of playing at Ohio State. But I was just infatuated with that team after that."

Because of the distance from home, Kacherski admitted he did not fully understand Ohio State's rivalry with Michigan until he got on campus in the fall of 1987, either.

"When I got here, I was in a dorm and on a floor with a lot of other players like (linebacker) Derek Isaman, (running back) Vince Workman and (offensive lineman) Joe Staysniak. Going in and

out of their rooms, I would see posters from the rivalry game of the year prior and what that team was saying about our players, so you just kind of see a lot of the symbolism around campus.

"We were also just moving into the (Woody Hayes Athletic Center), so it certainly wasn't the way it is now, but we would practice one period each week just for that game. No one sat you down and told you why it was important, but you can feel it throughout the year. By the time you get to that game, you've probably done your homework or you've done some reading or you look up some of the history of the game and you began to understand kind of the significance of it.

"I don't know about what they do up north, but here, it's kind of everywhere. Everything we do is for that game, and it's been like that for as long as I've been here."

Naturally, Kacherski expected an easy win over Michigan during his first year on campus, but then the Buckeyes – who entered that season at No. 5 in the country – tied LSU and lost to Indiana, Michigan State, Wisconsin and Iowa, which resulted in the firing of head coach Earle Bruce. To say he was thrilled when Ohio State knocked off the heavily favored Wolverines, 23-20, and sent Bruce out on a high note would be an understatement.

"There was some extra juice my freshman year because Coach Bruce got fired," Kacherski said. "Think about that.

Firing the coach on a Monday before that game, and we went up there and beat them. It's probably the best and one of the biggest wins of my whole career."

The following season, Ohio State struggled under first-year head coach John Cooper. Yet the Buckeyes were still in position to beat Michigan until wide receiver John Kolesar rescued the Wolverines in the final two minutes with a 59-yard kickoff return and a 41-yard touchdown reception that sealed a 34-31 win at Ohio Stadium.

"We weren't a very good football team, but we had a lot of pride and we fought the hell out of them," Kacherski said. "They were more talented than we were. We were down 20-0 at the half, came back and took the lead but ended up losing it late."

Kacherski suffered separate knee injuries the next two seasons, which prevented him from playing in the 28-18 loss to Michigan in 1989 and the 16-13 loss in 1990. But he returned to full strength and was named a team captain as a fifth-year senior in 1991.

Unfortunately, that only made the 31-3 loss to the Wolverines that season sting that much more.

"It was such an honor and such a privilege," Kacherski said. "It's one of the proudest accomplishments of my whole career. I'm very proud of it. But being a captain of that team, I take a lot of the blame for that game. As a captain, you can't let that happen.

"It was very, very, very, very, very, very disappointing. Probably the worst loss of my whole career. Just totally disheartening. It was a terrible way to end my career and to lose it that way to that team. They were talented, but our defense was pretty damn good. We just didn't know how to win. The culture wasn't like it was today.

"You can make excuses, but to lose the game like we lost my senior year, I'll just never get over it. I think about it all the time. That's when (wide receiver and kick returner) Desmond Howard did that

## Kacherski Vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
1987/Fr.	Ann Arbor	W, 23-20
1988/So.	Columbus	L, 34-21
1989/Jr.	Ann Arbor	L, 28-18
1990/Sr.	Columbus	L, 16-13
1991/5th-Sr.	Ann Arbor	L, 31-3

Heisman pose on us. I wanted to punch him. You end your career and you just never get a chance to get back at it and play them. I still dream about it. I dream about playing them again and beating them like they beat us. They were more talented, of course, but they beat us like we shouldn't be beat.

"I had a tremendous amount of respect for them until Desmond did that. Now I don't care for them at all. It's almost what it feels like when someone snatches the back of your head and runs away and you'll never get a chance to get them back. That's what it's like. There's nothing you could say when you get beat 31-3. You have to keep your mouth shut and move on. When you go into a game like that, you have to make sure you're prepared. A loss has consequences, and if it's your last game, you'll never be able to fix it."

Because of those defeats, Kacherski is overjoyed with today's one-sided nature of the rivalry. In fact, he'd be perfectly happy if the Wolverines finished 0-12 every season and got beat by the Buckeyes by 50-plus points in the process.

"There's just a natural, honest hatred there that we have here at Ohio State that puts a little fuel on the fire," Kacherski said. "I mean, to lose any game around here is terrible, but to lose to them is even worse. And you think about it all year. Lately, it hasn't been this way, but typically, you lose that game, you lose the Big Ten and you lose that pride of beating that team.

"It doesn't make it more meaningful to the players whether they're good or not. I'm a fan of college football. I love

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## MICHIGAN MEMORIES

college football, so as a fan I would like to see them play better. But as a player, I want to see them down. I want to beat them like we did in 2018 and 2019, and I want to see other teams beat them, too.

"I understand when people say it's better for the Big Ten for Michigan to be better. Sure, it's better for college football, too. But for the rivalry? That's a tough one. I don't care how good they are. I just want to beat them."

The best thing Ohio State has going for it, Kacherski said, is its desire to beat Michigan. It drives the players and coaches in everything they do. But he also noted that wasn't always the case when he played.

"Coach Cooper was a fine football coach, and his record speaks for itself. But it was a tough spot," Kacherski said. "If you peel back the onion and you think about it, there's no question that he didn't understand the rivalry just like I didn't when I came here. When you're from out of state and you are the head football coach here, it takes a little bit of time.

"To his credit, I think one thing he did right away was he upped the talent level here by going outside the state of Ohio and be able to recruit nationwide, which was a great thing. But now you're bringing in more kids outside the state of Ohio that maybe wouldn't understand it as much.

"The Michigan game really shows importance of the culture within the program and it can expose it, too. So then Coach (Jim) Tressel comes in and just hits the nail right on the head with his speech and you're off and running.

"Really, there are three aspects to a great football team. There's your talent, and the talent level under Coach Cooper was there. He was recruiting at a much different level than Coach Bruce was. Then you have the player development and the coaching. The player development under Coach Cooper was very good. He had very good coaches and had a strength program that was night and day from what it was under Coach Bruce, so we began to get into the mold of developing players. But the third leg to the stool is your culture. I think Coach

Tressel focused on that and you could tell, then Coach (Urban) Meyer took it to another level and now you have Coach (Ryan) Day, which is kind of out of sight.

"It's such a great culture over there now. You want to run through a wall for Coach Day. And then you mix a little bit of the tradition of Ohio State and what it means to play football here and you have all the pieces that you need to be as successful as the fans expect you to be. Now everyone's bought in. You lose one game at Ohio State and it's crazy. It's great."

Though his playing days are long behind him, Kacherski is still very involved in the Ohio State football program. His son, Cade, walked on in 2018 and is in the midst of his junior year with Buckeyes, while his wife, Julie, is on the board of the Football Parents at Ohio State.

A linebacker like his father, the younger Kacherski has appeared on special teams in all five of Ohio State's games this season, though he went down with an unspecified injury in the Buckeyes' 52-12 win over Michigan State on Dec. 5.

"When he made the travel team last year, I can't even begin to explain how proud I was. He's a walk-on and you're talking about one of the top three most talented teams in the country right now. When he told me he wanted to forgo other scholarship offers to come here, I understood it, but I was just like, 'Man, it's going to be tough.' But I'm just so proud of him. He's earned everything."

Kacherski admitted he's a bit envious of his son, though, since Cade has two pairs of Gold Pants for beating Michigan in 2018 and 2019, whereas John has just one pair from his freshman season.

"In our Buckeye room downstairs, we have one side for me and one side for him. He's got two pairs of gold pants and he has two Big Ten championship rings, and Dad doesn't have any of those," Kacherski said. "He wants four or five, and that would just be amazing to see five pairs of gold pants hanging up on his side. I'm proud of my one. It was a different time. I would have wanted to win a Big Ten championship, but like I said, those are the consequences of losing to Michigan.



ANDREW LIND

**FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS** – Ohio State junior linebacker Cade Kacherski, the son of former linebacker John Kacherski, joined the football program as a walk-on in 2018.

"That's why you have to take advantage of your opportunities and winning the games that you get a chance to play, beating That Team Up North and playing for Big Ten championships. That's the expectation here."

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# Safety Bell Brought His Best To The Game

By JOE DEMPSEY  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Growing up in Virginia, Kelvin Bell enjoyed watching major college football rivalries on TV like Oklahoma-Nebraska, USC-UCLA and Ohio State-Michigan.

When it came time for the talented safety to decide where he was going to school, he had been worn down by the overwhelming recruiting grind.

Both Ohio State and Michigan recruited the Highland Springs, Va., standout, but he did not have a strong preference despite having a 'Go Blue' poster in his room. Though Bell did not know what they were yet, the appeal of Buckeye leaves helped guide him to Columbus.

"When it came down to it, I was somewhat confused and just was tired of the recruiting process," Bell told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "And my older brother told me, 'I always liked the stars on their helmets and liked their uniforms.' We didn't know anything about any Buckeye leaves; it looked like some nice fancy stars on the back of their helmets on the TVs we had back then. We didn't have any digital TVs and all that stuff."

Bell became a starter at safety as a true freshman in 1981 and excelled in that role. He thought he had a grasp on what it meant to be a Buckeye, but he had not yet been a part of "The Game."

The Buckeyes beat Northwestern 70-6 a week prior to his first matchup with

Michigan, but when the team returned to the team facilities, everything changed.

First, the Ohio State freshmen who regularly played in Bell, offensive lineman Jim Lachey, defensive tackle Spencer Nelms and quarterback Mike Tomczak, who played on special teams, had to switch locker rooms.

"We had to move over to the varsity locker room, and they converted the freshman locker room into Michigan locker room, and they played Michigan music in the locker room all week," Bell said. "And we were kind of envious of the scout team, believe it or not, because they got Michigan jerseys. They weren't the pull-ons, they were actually nice Michigan jerseys, and they got to keep them for being on the scout team. They had helmets painted like Michigan."

"I was 17 when I got here. I turned 18 on my first game against Duke. I was still a kid. And I'm looking at this, like, 'What the hell is going on? These people are going crazy over this doggone Michigan game.' I'm just trying to not give up 400 yards passing. I'm not even thinking about Michigan."

The Wolverines entered the 1981 season as the No. 1 team in the country, and they welcomed the Buckeyes to Ann Arbor as the seventh-ranked team at 8-2 and with a Rose Bowl appearance on the line. Ohio State was unranked at 7-3, with a shot at a share of the Big Ten title at stake.

With his first opportunity to play in

The Game approaching, Bell became acclimated to just how seriously some fans took the rivalry, especially when defensive tackle Jerome Foster, a Detroit native, was forced to find private parking.

"They would have to park their cars at a coach's house," Bell said of Buckeyes from that state up north. "Because they said, 'You've got Michigan plates. Your car might get turned over or spray painted, or even set on fire.'"

After reports predicted a cold, snowy day for The Game, the Buckeyes geared up to handle the weather sans gloves. Head coach Earle Bruce had previously banned gloves because of a haunting memory, and it took the words of his mentor to make a change.

"I don't care how cold it was, we couldn't wear any gloves, because somebody dropped an interception and they had gloves on," Bell recalled. "And Earle said, 'That's it, no more gloves.' Anyway, we got the weather report on how much snow there was going to be and how cold it was going to be."

"And Woody Hayes was the guest speaker for 'The Game.' And Woody said, 'I don't care what you guys got to do, make sure you got your gloves on, your pantyhose on, and you all go up there and kick their ass and don't let the weather affect you.'"

"And sure enough, the next day we get to the locker room and there are gloves every-damn-where. We were glad, we were happy. But that showed the influence of Woody Hayes. They didn't have compressions or anything then, but I said, 'I'm not putting no damn pantyhose on.'"

Hayes was a larger-than-life figure at Ohio State, and Bell said it seemed like he was like god. The freshman safety never initiated contact with the legendary coach, but he caught Hayes' attention, nonetheless.

"He said, 'Where's that No. 4? I can't remember his name. I just know he's talented.' Then everybody started pointing at me, and I raised my hand like, 'What the hell is he gearing to say?' " Bell said. "And he said, 'I saw you out there during the walk-through, you dropped an interception during the walk-through. You catch every pass. I don't care if it's a walk-through.'"

Those words inspired Bell to take every rep more seriously, leading to a successful Buckeye career. Immediately after Hayes spoke up, defensive coordinator Dennis Fryzel, defensive backs coach Nick Saban and Bruce all jumped on Bell's back.

"And once Woody said something, Fryzel said something, Saban said some-

## Bell Vs. Michigan

Year/Class	Location	Result
1981/Fr.	Ann Arbor	W, 14-9
1982/So.	Columbus	W, 24-14
1983/Jr.	Ann Arbor	L, 24-21

thing, Earle said something," Bell said. "Man, I got called out by Woody."

Gloves, pantyhose and all, the Buckeyes beat the Wolverines 14-9 to spoil their rival's season in Ann Arbor. Ohio State held Michigan quarterback Steve Smith to 9-for-26 passing for 136 yards and three interceptions, and Bell finished with two tackles (one solo) in the victory.

For their performance in The Game, the Buckeye defensive backs were to be rewarded by making an appearance on the "Earle Bruce Show." Bell and his teammates were excited to make their debut, but their position coach left them out in the cold.

"It was already cold and snowing that Michigan week, and we were supposed to meet Coach Saban at St. John to pick us up and take us to the show," Bell recalled. "Man, we walked with dress shoes from Steeb Hall and it was cold as hell, and Saban forgot us."

"And then, we made it back to the dorm in time to see the show. Saban was sitting there and Coach Bruce made the comment, 'The secondary was supposed to be here, but maybe they got caught up in the celebration on campus.'"

"And we were sitting there like, 'Damn, we weren't caught up in the celebration, we were out caught up in the cold.' And Saban was only like 30. I don't know if he was celebrating or not - I'm not going to say anything, but he left us out there in the doggone cold."

As a freshman, Bell recorded 33 tackles (19 solo), one tackle for loss, one sack, one forced fumble, 11 pass break-ups and three picks.

In 1982, Michigan entered The Game as the No. 13 team nationally at 8-2 and 8-0 in Big Ten play, while Ohio State was unranked at 7-3 and 7-1 in the conference.

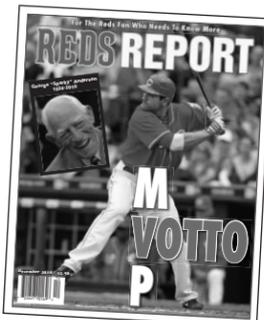
For Bell and his teammates in the secondary - Shaun Gayle, Doug Hill and Garcia Lane - stopping the Wolverines was all about shutting down standout receiver/returner Anthony Carter. Ohio State held Carter to 78 receiving yards without a score and caused him to cough up a costly turnover on his lone carry at the Michigan 15-yard line with 7:40 left in a 14-14 game.

"You talk about a brand name back in those days, it was A.C., Anthony Carter. You couldn't get a bigger name in college

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## MICHIGAN MEMORIES

football during that time," Bell said. "And we put it on him. And the final was when Doug Hill and Rowland Tatum slammed him and he fumbled, and Doug Hill picked up the fumble."

Three plays later, tailback Tim Spencer flipped into the end zone for an Ohio State touchdown to put the Buckeyes ahead 21-14. On the Wolverines' first play following the score, Smith threw an interception to linebacker Marcus Marek, which Bell said should have been his second of the day.

"When I tipped the pass – I was actually real heavily recruited in basketball too – so I was tipping the ball to myself. And Marek just came and got it in front of me," said Bell, who had a pick to end Michigan's final drive of the first half.

The Buckeyes forced Smith to throw three interceptions again on a 12-for-28 passing day for a meager 127 yards, while Bell posted four tackles (three solo), one pick and one pass break-up. More than anything, Bell was just happy to put a damper on the end of the Wolverines' season.

"My freshman year I knew that we were trying to make sure that they didn't go to the Rose Bowl," Bell said. "My sophomore year, I remember saying, 'They were going to the Rose Bowl, but we were going to make sure they went to the Rose Bowl with a loss against us.'"

Even though Michigan still technically won the Big Ten title in '82, Bell believed Ohio State had bragging rights for Big Ten supremacy because it won The Game.

"I don't care if we were playing for the championship or not. To win that game, I think you're the best team in the Big Ten for that year," Bell said.

Finishing his sophomore season with 34 tackles (25 solo) and four interceptions, Bell was primed for a big year in 1983.

Given the nature of the safety position, Bell found himself receiving an earful from Bruce for any miscues in the secondary.

Despite the criticism, the standout safety eventually learned how to get on his coach's good side by playing well in the final regular-season game.

"That gave a true meaning to 'salvage your season.' No matter what, you don't lose to them," Bell said. "I had the fortunate but unfortunate pleasure of Earle having to chew me out in some one-on-ones during my time.

"Even those times of me being in his doghouse, my play in the Michigan game always kind of made the offseason quite a bit better in his eyes. No matter what I might have done on the field or off the field during that season, I always had a pretty good Michigan game."

Though Bruce was known for being a hard-nosed football coach with a serious approach to the game, Bell said every once in a while, the guys could catch him trying to have a flashback to his playing days.

"Every now and then, man, you could catch Earle when he would get in a playful mood. It was such a limited amount of times, it's not easy to remember many," Bell recalled. "He was returning kicks, and he grabbed the kick, he was running up the field, and his hamstring popped. And he got mad at us because we were laughing at him, but it looked like somebody had shot him with a gun."

Bruce may not have been fond of Bell laughing at his misfortune, which



COURTESY OF KELVIN BELL

**MAKING AN IMPACT** – Ohio State safety Kelvin Bell broke up a pass intended for Michigan tight end Greg Dunaway in the 1981 edition of The Game, which the Buckeyes won 14-9.

the safety felt was unavoidable, but he appreciated how a kid from Virginia had embraced the rivalry.

"Knowing that we could pretty much ruin them and salvage us was always going to be the motivating factor when it comes down to the end," Bell said. "You hear them say, 'We can be 1-10 as long as we win the Michigan game.' OK, that's a little far-fetched to think that's going to satisfy you. But no matter what was going on at the end, we knew that if we beat them, that meant everything to our season. And to make them have to suffer through the whole offseason of knowing they lost to us, no matter where they finished at, that was everything."

In 1983, the Buckeyes and Wolverines ranked No. 10 and No. 8 in the country, respectively, both boasting 8-2 records entering The Game.

Smith turned in his best effort against the Buckeyes with 207 yards and two scores on 11-of-20 passing in a 24-21 backbreaking win for the Wolverines. Bell notched four solo stops and one pass breakup and also saved a touchdown with an excellent open-field tackle.

Bell concluded his junior year with 37 tackles (20 solo), two forced fumbles, seven pass breakups and five interceptions.

The '83 game ended up being Bell's last in the rivalry because a broken foot forced him to miss his senior season, but he still had a good run against Michigan.

The Buckeyes went 2-1 in the games Bell played against the Wolverines, and the defense held them to 43.2-percent passing for 156.7 yards per game and two touchdowns to six picks.

After his Ohio State career concluded, Bell, who had totaled 12 interceptions, continued to support the program and often participated in events with Bruce.

A few years after his departure, a

young Michigan quarterback rubbed him the wrong way.

Although the rivalry is not as competitive as it used to be with the Buckeyes winning eight in a row and 17 of the last 19 renditions of The Game, that moment made Bell fine with the one-sided domination.

"I was gone when it happened," Bell said, "but ever since Jim Harbaugh gave that guarantee, just keep beating his ass."

"Hell, we can go another 10-20 more. Every time I see somebody here in Columbus with a Michigan thing on, a hat, shirt, anything, I make sure I make a beeline over to them and just tap them and show them my championship ring."

To Bell's dismay, he felt the rivalry lost some of its fervor in the '90s during John Cooper's 2-10-1 tenure against Michigan as the head coach at Ohio State. He credits Cooper's successor Jim Tressel for re-emphasizing the importance of beating the Wolverines.

"Tressel brought that back," Bell said. "Cooper, to me, was satisfied with playing close or being like, 'Oh well, we're still 11-1.' No, you lost to Michigan. He had some of the best teams in Ohio State history, and if you don't beat them, I put an asterisk beside it."

To this day, Bell gets excited for The Game. That excitement and enthusiasm stays with him throughout the whole year if the Buckeyes win, but on the other hand, the sting of a loss lingers longer than the former safety would like.

"As long as we beat them, I can take where everything else lands, I can live with it," Bell said. "Because I don't want to hear from coworkers, I don't want to hear from fans, I don't want to hear from friends. I don't want to hear from anybody. Literally, that's sickening. We haven't had it in a while, and I don't want it. To lose to them, it takes me 2-3 weeks

to recover. I'm just that bitter about it. If you win that game, you've got a long year to live, because it makes things a lot easier."

With the 2020 version of The Game drawing near, Bell is not just calling for a win over the Wolverines. He wants complete domination.

"They still bring up the guarantee every time this rivalry comes up, especially related to him," Bell said of Harbaugh. "The best thing we can do is put up 100 and send him packing. That's one coach that I wouldn't want to ever get a win in this rivalry, Jim Harbaugh."

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# Keels Has Called 'The Game' From Both Sides

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Paul Keels still remembers his first Ohio State-Michigan game.

The tenured Buckeye play-by-play man has been calling "The Game" since 1981 – albeit with a 10-year break from 1987-1997 – but his first exposure to the best rivalry in football came well before he became one of the voices of it.

"I might be able to say, not that I could recall a whole lot about it, but it would have been the 1968 team that won the national championship," Keels told BSB. "I would've been all of 11 years old then.

"Growing up in Cincinnati, and my mother was from Columbus and was an Ohio State graduate, so we were always very much in tune to what was going on with Ohio State football, especially when it came to the Ohio State-Michigan games.

"We had a very good family friend of my parents – Bob Dorsey, who played at Ohio State in the 1940s – who was also an influence on our family when it came to following Ohio State football. I just remember watching it and, as a kid, trying to figure out the Michigan helmets, what they meant. Recognizing players, not only with the Ohio State players, but Michigan players. Ed Shuttlesworth was from Cincinnati – being able to identify with that. Mike Sensibaugh, who was from the same high school district that my father had gone to in Lockland. So the '68 game, even though I may have not understood everything about it, was probably the first one that I really ever watched."

Just 13 years later, Keels was watching Ohio State-Michigan from a completely different vantage point. He was hired at WWJ Radio in 1981, one of the five outlets that provided radio play-by-play broadcasts for Michigan games at the time. That made for a different dynamic than the one Keels would walk into when he accepted a job with WBNS radio in 1998

to serve as the play-by-play man for the Buckeyes on the only radio broadcast of the games in Columbus.

"There are some differences," Keels told BSB. "First off, when I was at Michigan, I was with one of five stations that did the games. There was not one outlet. So there was that part of it. And being an Ohio native, and having grown up an Ohio State fan, it always felt a little odd when it came time for Michigan to play Ohio State.

"But the really neat thing about it was Bo Schembechler was still the head coach at Michigan. And hearing him tell stories about the respect he had for Ohio State, the respect for Woody, him talking about his days at Miami and being from Barberton, that was the thing that was always really neat just to be around that part of that great rivalry."

While the time in Michigan was always a bit strange for Keels, he does have fond memories of his time there, including a rare opportunity to speak with one of the architects of the most competitive decade in the history of the rivalry.

"I tell you, maybe the thing I remember most (about this rivalry) is from the six years that I was working in Detroit," Keels said. "Our guy who did our halftime stuff knew Woody Hayes from the Navy. He had Woody in our booth to interview him at halftime. It would have been probably 1983. That was one that I remember from Michigan."

When Keels arrived in Columbus, he did so in what ended up being quite the year for the Buckeyes, especially as it related to the Wolverines, who had vexed head coach John Cooper for years.

"Coming back here and starting this job in 1998, and being in my home state, being in a job that I never really knew would ever open, and then having the chance to get to do the rivalry for my home state team was really exciting," Keels said.

"And then, my first year doing it in '98 was one of the rare wins that Coach Cooper had against Michigan. I remem-

ber early in the game, Michael Wiley took off on a long touchdown run, and that seemed to be something that gave a feeling to a lot of people that Coach Coop was going to get one against Michigan this time."

As Keels became further entrenched in his new role, Ohio State-Michigan delivered increasingly memorable matchups and calls from the booth, though the game that still stands out above all the rest to Keels – even 18 years later – is the one that sent Ohio State through to its first national title in more than three decades.

"Probably the one that jumps out is the 2002 game," Keels said. "The last-second interception by Will Allen. Mostly because of what was at stake, that was getting them into the Fiesta Bowl and the national championship. But that being their last game before playing for the national title, that's the one that really jumps out."

Has Keels ever seen a more jubilant Ohio Stadium than he did on that day?

"I don't think so," Keels said. "Here's why I say that, because you remember that whole season was like that. It seemed like so many of those games, not all of them, but most of them went down to the final play or the final few minutes. That was really three straight weeks with Purdue, Illinois and then that Michigan game where (quarterback John) Navarre goes back to throw that last pass and Will Allen's able to pick it off. People just exploded onto the field. That's the thing that I remember."

While the chaos immediately following the win has become synonymous with that title-winning season for the Buckeyes, it made things a little tougher on Keels and his cohorts in the booth.

"(In fact), first, it was hard to figure out who made the interception right away, because Will Allen's teammates were all on top of him before we could clearly see the number. And then, number two, how quickly the fans just exploded out onto the field, knowing what was at stake and knowing how much of a heartbreaker Michigan had been with some of the great teams in the past, previous to that."

That win, along with head coach Jim Tressel's first against the Wolverines a year prior, served as the official start to an unprecedented era of domination for the Buckeyes against Michigan.

Losses in 2003 and 2011 served as brief interruptions, but since Tressel's arrival, Ohio State has looked completely unbeatable in the eyes of the Wolverines at times.

While recent seasons have seen the Buckeyes enter matchups as heavy favorites – the upcoming 2020 version included – many of the best games between the two that Keels has called came in what could traditionally be considered heavy-weight fights.

In a rivalry that became known for its surprising upsets, that shift is notable, as David no longer seems to be able to topple Goliath when the Buckeyes and Wolverines suit up. The favorite has won 16 of the last 19 battles.

The game best known for living up to lofty expectations is the 2006 "Game of the Century" matchup that saw the No. 1 Buckeyes host the No. 2 Wolverines, but Keels' first memory of that game has

nothing to do with the play on the field.

"It was dark by halftime," Keels said, laughing. "That's the problem with making those games 3:30 starts."

As for the actual game-play, Michigan's ability to roll with Ohio State's uppercuts and stick in the game still stands out to Keels as the thing that determined the game, along with a Heisman-caliber performance from Buckeye quarterback Troy Smith.

"That was one that looked like for a while Ohio State was going to run away with it, and then (Michigan running back) Mike Hart went crazy. And to see Troy Smith and that whole offense, just the way they put together such a back-and-forth battle, a lot of people thought maybe they'd get a repeat of Ohio State and Michigan in the BCS championship game that year.

"Well, the way that one went, it certainly would have been a more interesting game than the Ohio State-Florida game ended up being. But that was just one of those that really lived up to its billing."

Ohio State and Michigan didn't quite draw that same billing 10 years later when they squared off as the No. 2 and No. 3 teams respectively.

But with a playoff berth on the line, the stakes were just as high and the final result just as exciting for Keels, who remembers the 2016 game as another back-and-forth battle reminiscent of the Hayes-Schembechler years, both in the competitiveness and in a defense-heavy approach for both sides.

It was ultimately decided after a legendary scrum on fourth-and-short in the second overtime period.

"The spot, and then the Curtis Samuel play," Keels said of the game's end. "Just the fact that that game went back and forth the way that it did. That it went to overtime for the first time.

"We were just doing some stuff for our network not too long ago and we replayed the 2002 Illinois game, which is the first Ohio State game that had ever gone to overtime. And then I started thinking about the first time that Ohio State and Michigan go to overtime and how easily it could have gone the other way. There's all of that craziness over the spot for J.T. Barrett. Did he get it? Did he not get it?"

"And then immediately, as soon as they resolved that answer, then Samuel pops it all the way into the end zone. Everybody remembers seeing – apparently, it was on TV when they showed Urban Meyer just fell chest-first down onto the ground. The back and forth in that game was crazy."

As Keels prepares to call yet another rendition of The Game – the 29th of his career and 23rd as the voice of the Buckeyes – he does so having seen one of the most dominant runs in the history of the rivalry. Ohio State is 21-7 in the 28 games with Keels on the radio call (18-4 during his time in Columbus).

Through those 28 games, Keels has accumulated a lifetime full of memories from both sides. He's called tight games, last-second victories, blowouts, head coach firing-inducing losses, two national title runs and some of the rivalry's most bitter and heated matchups.

For a kid from Cincinnati who grew up in a Buckeye household, it's hard to ask for much more than that.



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# Heacock's Defense Crucial In OSU Dominance

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Jim Heacock spent 16 years in the Michigan-Ohio State cauldron, and what stands out most for the former Buckeye assistant coach are the Sundays, not the days of the game.

"Probably the biggest thing for me, even the first game I was there in '96, was the intensity, the magnitude of the game, the magnitude of the week before game," he said. "The intensity level started on Sunday. It was such a big difference from a normal game."

"The Sundays, I remember them a lot because all of a sudden the intensity level is almost like a game day, 'Wow, we've got to get ready.'"

Heacock, 72, was hired as a defensive line coach for John Cooper in 1996. He was promoted to defensive coordinator by Jim Tressel in 2005 and remained on the staff until retiring after the 2011 season, the only one under interim coach Luke Fickell.

He and his wife, Sherry, a retired teacher, live in the Columbus suburb of Dublin and like to spend their time at a log cabin at Seneca Lake near Cambridge, Ohio. He also enjoys following his brother, Jon Heacock, the defensive coordinator for Iowa State.

BSB talked with him the afternoon of Dec. 6 while the Cleveland-Tennessee game was on in the background.

While rooting interests have always been with the Browns for the native of Alliance in northeast Ohio, he was torn because of his friendship with Titans head coach Mike Vrabel, who was a player in Heacock's first season at Ohio State and an assistant coach alongside him for Heacock's last with the Buckeyes.

Balancing that allegiance to Vrabel was Joe Woods, the defensive coordinator for the Browns who played for Heacock when he was head coach at Illinois State.

"I wish them both well," Heacock said. "It makes it interesting to watch."

By the way, the Browns won 41-35.

During his tenure with the Buckeyes, Heacock had a 10-6 record vs. the Wolverines. It's a deceptive mark because he was on the losing side in four of his first five encounters with Cooper in charge.

All that changed on Jan. 18, 2001, when Tressel, who had just been named to replace the fired Cooper, addressed the crowd at the Ohio State-Michigan basketball game in Value City Arena with this guarantee: "I can assure you that you will be proud of your young people in the classroom, in the community, and most especially in 310 days in Ann Arbor, Michigan."

How did Heacock feel about that brash statement?

"We hadn't had a lot of success the previous four or five years," he said. "There was going to be pressure anyway. I liked the confidence. I felt good about what he said. It was a different approach, but it obviously worked."

Final score: Ohio State 26, U-M 20. That started a run of nine wins in 10 games for Tressel. Despite the disparity of records vs. Michigan between Cooper and Tressel – and to a lesser extent Fickell's loss in his only try – Heacock didn't see the coaches as having widely varied approaches.

"I can't really say that they did," he said. "A lot of things go into the differences, but it was so important to everybody."

"Why we lost a few more early, I can't say it was one thing that caused it ... All three coaches knew the importance of the game. We



FILE PHOTO

**VETERAN OF THE GAME** – Jim Heacock, center (with Luke Fickell), spent 16 seasons on the Ohio State staff as defensive line coach or defensive coordinator.

prepared equally hard for it."

Maybe not to the extent of Woody Hayes, who was famously obsessed with beating the Wolverines, but the thought was omnipresent.

"I remember specifically with Coach Tressel," Heacock said. "During a spring practice if we had a Saturday scrimmage, a lot of times we would watch a quarter of a Michigan game and spend some time going over that."

"We took some time in practices going over stuff, we'd put a little bit of emphasis on it. It was pretty much throughout the year. Obviously, once you got into the season you didn't have the luxury to spend a lot of time on Michigan, but it was never off our minds."

That mind-set was true, even on those Sunday mornings that started Michigan week.

"The band would come over and do Script Ohio," he said. "The players would hang around the band. Seeing that, you realize it's only Sunday and we don't play until the following Saturday and it's already like the intensity level is out the roof."

"You see the players pick it up a notch, watching more film, getting in earlier in the morning to watch film. I can remember Cameron Heyward coming in at 6 o'clock in the morning watching film. As coaches we stayed later, got in earlier."

Other memories from Heacock's time coaching against Ohio State's largest rival included playing at Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor.

"Anytime riding into the game up there was an experience for me," Heacock said. "You realized how much you were hated by those people up there. We had an escort in and you'd pass all the cars along the highway, and a lot of them were Michigan fans. I don't think they liked us a whole lot."

"The other thing I remember so well is just the Saturday morning of the game. It was always a noon game for us. We'd have our meetings, and the pregame meal was four hours before the game. We'd have our defensive meetings, and no one was sleepwalking. It

was high intensity. Everybody was there early and ready to go."

A highlight was the 2002 game, which was won by the Buckeyes 14-9 in Ohio Stadium and led to a berth in the BCS national championship game, where they defeated Miami 31-24 in double overtime in the Fiesta Bowl.

"At that time, I don't think anybody was really thinking about the national championship. It was a normal 'Beat Michigan' game," he said. "We were ranked highly, but we had a long way to go to get to the national championship."

It was a low-scoring game that a defensive coach loves, something that was not the case with another great memory, the 42-39 victory in 2006 in the "Game of the Century" between the No. 1 Buckeyes and No. 2 Michigan.

The win advanced Ohio State to the national title game again, but the Buckeyes lost 41-14 to the Florida Gators and coach Urban Meyer, the man Heacock had hired as an assistant coach at Illinois State (1988-89).

When Meyer was hired at Ohio State after the 2011 season, Heacock was not retained, but he is still a fan of the Buckeyes.

"I watch every game and read every article," he said. "It's just great to have football back and the Buckeyes playing as well as they are."

While Heacock was part of a bitter rivalry with Michigan, it was always civil among the staffs.

"We had great respect for them and hopefully they had respect for us," Heacock said. "As coaches, we're all in it for the same reason. We're trying to win and do the best you can for the players."

"I never felt hatred or anything close to that. There wasn't anybody I wanted to beat more, but it had nothing to do with hate. It's just wanting to beat them."

Even though The Game no longer decides the Big Ten title, as was the case so often in the old days, potentially playing in the conference championship the following week doesn't diminish the importance in Heacock's view.

"It adds another element to it, but Michigan is Michigan, Ohio State is Ohio State. That won't change," Heacock said. "It will be the rivalry it always is. I still look forward to it."

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# Tressel Delivers On Promise In First Michigan Game

By STEVE HELWAGEN

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. In this the second of two games from the week of Nov. 21-27, we remember Ohio State's 26-20 win over Michigan 310 days after the hiring of Jim Tressel. It was the first win for the Buckeyes in Ann Arbor since Earle Bruce closed out his Buckeye coaching career in 1987. Additional features about the 2001 win will be reprinted at [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com) on Thursday, Dec. 10.

As Ohio State-Michigan games go, the one played Nov. 24 in Ann Arbor followed the usual script: One team dominated most facets of the game, capitalized on its opponent's major mistakes and held off a late charge to secure a momentous victory.

The only difference in the 98th installment of The Game was the roles were reversed from recent history.

Ohio State capitalized on a handful of Michigan mistakes and rode the hard running of tailback Jonathan Wells to a 23-0 halftime lead on its way to a 26-20 win over the 11th-ranked Wolverines before 111,571 in Michigan Stadium.

The OSU win:

- Snapped the school's six-game losing streak in Ann Arbor, a string that dated to a 1987 win;
- Ended a two-game losing streak in the overall series, dating to a 1998 OSU win in Columbus;
- Was the first for rookie OSU head coach Jim Tressel; and
- Cost Michigan (8-3, 6-2) a piece of the Big Ten championship and a spot in the Bowl Championship Series. Illinois (10-1, 7-1), the outright Big Ten champions, will take the BCS bid.

Ohio State (7-4, 5-3) will wait to see which Big Ten bowl tie-in it will play in.

"I haven't beat Michigan and now I've beaten Michigan," said OSU safety Mike Doss, who notched a pair of interceptions.

"To be here three years and finally get a big win like this, it feels good."

OSU capitalized on four interceptions and a fumble by Michigan quarterback John Navarre. Doss returned each of his picks inside the Michigan 10-yard line. Defensive end Will Smith sacked Navarre twice and end Kenny Peterson caused the fumble.

While the Buckeyes were building their halftime advantage, the OSU defense held Michigan to just 52 yards total offense and four first downs in the first half.

"The defense made some plays," said OSU quarterback Craig Krenzel, who made his first career start. "They got some turnovers and gave us good field position. They made it easier on us."

Wells left the game in the third quarter with leg cramps but had already done most of the damage with 129 yards and three touchdowns on 25 carries. He had 122 yards in the first half against a UM defense that had been allowing a Big Ten-best 83.5 rushing per game.

"We thought we could run the football," Tressel said. "We weren't going to pile up hundreds and hundreds of yards, but we thought we would be able to effectively run it."

Wells added, "I just wanted to come out and play the best football I could play. I was feeling like I was getting better every game this year. My offensive line just came together. They were giving me creases, and when I get creases I can punish people or run around them."

Likewise, Krenzel, starting in place of Steve Bellisari – who did not see action after his suspension for a drunken driving arrest was lifted – also had a big day. Krenzel, a native of the Detroit suburb of Sterling Heights, Mich., was 11 of 18 passing for 118 yards with an interception.

Navarre ended up 21 of 47 passing for 206 yards. His two touchdown passes weren't enough to offset his four picks.

"Anytime you have the chance of winning the Big Ten championship and don't get it, it's a disappointment," Michigan coach Lloyd Carr said. "Anytime you turn the ball over five times against a good team,

## Other Big 40th Anniversary Games

In addition to Ohio State's win in Ann Arbor in Jim Tressel's first year at the helm in 2001, there were several other big games the week of Nov. 21-Nov. 27, including Earle Bruce's final game as Buckeye coach, featured in the Dec. 5 issue of BSB. Recent big games during that week in BSB's publishing history include the following:

**2002:** Ohio State clinched a trip to the BCS national championship game with a 14-9 win over No. 12 Michigan in Ohio Stadium. Maurice Hall scored the game-winning touchdown with 4:55 left in the contest, and Will Allen snuffed out any hopes of a last-second Wolverine comeback with an interception at the Buckeye 3 as time expired.

**2016:** In one of the more hard-fought recent editions of The Game, No. 2 Ohio State outlasted No. 3 Michigan in two overtimes, 30-27. Buckeye quarterback J.T. Barrett barely converted a fourth-and-1 in the second overtime, and Curtis Samuel scored from 15 yards out on the next play to secure the victory.

**2018:** Michigan again invaded Ohio Stadium as a highly-ranked team, but No. 10 Ohio State stunned the No. 4 Wolverines with a 62-39 pasting. Ohio State racked up 567 yards of total offense with Dwayne Haskins passing for 396 yards and six touchdowns, including a 78-yarder to Parris Campbell and two more to freshman Chris Olave. Haskins did not throw an interception.

you're going to have difficulty winning the game."

Michigan rallied in the second half behind wide receiver Marquise Walker, who ended up with 15 catches for 160 yards and two touchdowns.

The Wolverines outgained OSU 271-76 in the second half and blocked a punt, setting up a touchdown. UM scored on a late Navarre-to-Walker pass to cut the lead to 26-20 with 2:26 left.

But OSU recovered the ensuing onside kick and ran the time down to nine seconds before Michigan regained control.

Two Navarre Hail Mary passes later – the second one intercepted by freshman safety Dustin Fox – and the Buckeyes had pulled off the win.

"Michigan never quits, but our defense never quits, either," Doss said. "We just came out and tried to be patient and take it one play at a time. We made the breaks when we had to."

Tressel told the OSU faithful on the day he was hired, Jan. 18, that Buckeye fans would be proud "most especially in 310 days in Ann Arbor, Mich., on the football field." He delivered on that promise – tenfold.

"We're so proud of these kids," Tressel said. "The defense came up with great field

position for us. Our kicking game, with the exception of the one mistake, gave us good field position."

## As It Happened

Ohio State had the ball to open the game but could not muster a first down. The Wolverines took over, but disaster struck on UM's third play.

Facing third-and-9 on the UM 29, Navarre threw down the middle to tight end Shawn Thompson. The ball glanced off Thompson's hand and right to Doss, who intercepted the pass and returned it 35 yards down to the UM 4 with 11:54 left in the first quarter.

"I just played my keys out there, played my coverage and the ball came to me," Doss said.

UM's Charles Drake was flagged for a face mask on Wells on first-and-goal, moving the ball to the 2. Wells got 1 yard on first down. Then on second down, he went right and shrugged off UM end Dan Rumishek, who got good penetration, and danced right into the end zone for the 1-yard touchdown and a 7-0 lead with 10:46 left in the first quarter.

UM's next possession ended after OSU's Smith sacked Navarre. The teams traded

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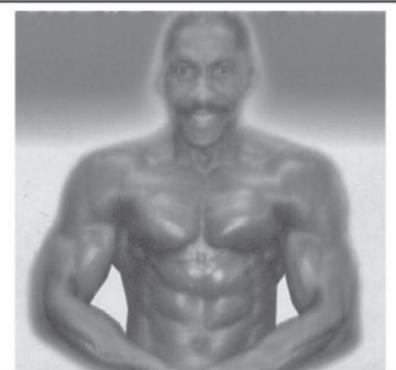
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## 40TH ANNIVERSARY OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

punts and UM punted again, giving the Buckeyes possession on their own 15-yard line.

It was there where the Buckeyes embarked on an eight play, 85-yard scoring march. Wells ripped off a 20-yard run on the first play. Then he converted a third-and-5 predicament with a 5-yard run up the middle.

Krenzel found Chris Gamble for a 12-yard gain on third-and-13, leaving OSU fourth-and-inches at the UM 46. OSU went to its jumbo look and Wells went right behind blocks by linemen Shane Olivea and Tyson Walter and fullback Jamar Martin. Wells squirted through a seam at the line of scrimmage then outraced UM's Cato June for the 46-yard touchdown and a 14-0 lead with 14:07 left in the first half.

"The line did a great job," Wells said. "When I get to the line untouched, I have to make things happen. I've been playing hard all year. But as your confidence gets bigger and bigger, you can make some big plays."

Krenzel added, "Jonathan just saw some creases and some holes. Then he was able to make some people miss. A lot of the credit goes to our offensive line for handling Michigan's defense."

The OSU defense forced another three-and-out – its third in four UM possessions. The Buckeyes moved 36 yards in 11 plays. But the drive stalled at the UM 22, where Mike Nugent's 39-yard field goal sailed wide left with 6:59 left in the first half.

But Michigan was its own worst enemy moments later as a Navarre pass attempt was tipped by OSU end Darrion Scott right to teammate Tim Anderson, who intercepted the ball and returned it 4 yards to the UM 28.

The Buckeyes needed four plays to find the end zone. The key play was Krenzel's backside screen to Martin for 10 yards and a first down on third-and-eight at the 26. The Wolverines were flagged for offsides before the next play, giving OSU a first-and-5 at the UM 11. Wells went right behind Martin and pulling guard Alex Stepanovich for the 11-yard touchdown and a 21-0 lead with 4:34 left in the half.

The teams then traded punts and turnovers in the closing minutes of the half. OSU's Peterson beat UM left tackle Tony Pape and stripped Navarre for a fumble, which OSU's Smith recovered at the UM 21 with 1:21 left in the half.

But two plays later, Krenzel got greedy. Rolling to his right, he underthrew Michael Jenkins on a pass against the grain and UM's Todd Howard made the easy interception in the end zone for the touchback with 1:08 left in the half.

Carr opted to replace Navarre with backup quarterback Jermaine Gonzales. But that move, too, proved disastrous.

On second-and-14 from the UM 16, Gonzales was not watching as center Kurt Anderson's shotgun snap sailed over his head. Gonzales raced back to his end zone and batted the ball beyond the end line for a safety that extended the OSU lead to 23-0 with 35 seconds left in the half. That scored stood at the intermission.

"Jermaine took his eyes off the ball," Carr said of the safety. "He wasn't ready."

Michigan, getting the ball to start the second half, wasted no time serving notice that it intended to rally. The Wolverines moved 65 yards in a quick six plays.

Backup UM tailback Chris Perry sparked the drive with a 30-yard run down to the OSU 22. Three plays later, UM faced third-and-9 at the OSU 21. Navarre, given plenty of time, dialed up Walker on the post. Walker got in front of OSU's Will Allen to

make the 21-yard touchdown grab that cut the OSU lead to 23-7 with 12:43 left in the third quarter.

Neither team could threaten over its next two possessions. In fact, OSU mustered no first downs and just 12 yards of offense on its 11 third-period offensive plays.

But late in the period, Navarre hit Walker, who got behind OSU's Derek Ross, with a 47-yard post pass down to the OSU 13. Perry got 3 yards on first down, but Navarre threw incomplete on the next two plays – the second one going off Walker's hands in the end zone.

"Even though (the defender's) hand came across my face, I still should have caught it," Walker said. "That was on me. It was just a slight concentration (lapse). When the ball is in the air, I'm supposed to catch it."

UM kicker Hayden Epstein came on to attempt a 27-yard field goal, but the kick sailed wide left with 48 seconds left in the third quarter.

The Buckeyes continued cruising until UM's Anthony Jordan came up the middle and blocked a punt by OSU's Andy Groom. UM's Roy Manning recovered it at the OSU 9 with 10:52 left in the game.

"We just made an error," Tressel said. "We didn't handle a gap."

The Buckeyes appeared to have Michigan stopped after Navarre's third-down pass to Walker was incomplete. But OSU's Smith was flagged for roughing Navarre.

Given new life, Askew rammed up the middle for the 2-yard touchdown, trimming OSU's lead to 23-13 with 10:02 left. Michigan attempted a two-point conversion, but Navarre's pass to Walker was wide and incomplete.

OSU was forced to punt the ball away with 7:27 left. On Michigan's first play, Navarre threw down the right side to Walker, but Doss cut in front of him and intercepted it. He returned it 36 yards down to the Michigan 9.

"I was trying to protect Derek Ross a little bit," Doss said. "They had been running that stop route the entire game, and Derek kind of bit on it. I ran over to Marquise, saw the ball and just made the play."

The Buckeyes were penalized for 15 yards twice, once for a late hit and for having 12 men on the field. But a third-down screen from Krenzel to Darnell Sanders netted 16 yards down to the UM 16. Nugent came on and hit a 33-yard field goal to push the lead to 26-13 with 5:58 left.

Michigan then drove all the way down to the OSU 14. But Navarre's fourth-down pass to Ronald Bellamy was incomplete with 4:23 left. The UM defense stopped OSU cold and, after using all three of its timeouts, regained possession for the Wolverines at the OSU 45 after a punt with 3:53 left.

The Wolverines needed 10 plays to score on this possession as Navarre converted a must-have fourth-and-10 with a 16-yard pass to Walker down to the OSU 4. OSU's Smith sacked Navarre, but that only delayed the inevitable.

On the next play, Navarre found Walker for an 11-yard TD pass in the back of the end zone to trim the gap to 26-20 with 2:26 left.

Michigan's Adam Finley then attempted an onside kick, but OSU's Chris Vance recovered it with 2:23 left. The Buckeyes succeeded in winding the clock down to just nine seconds before Michigan regained possession after a punt. Fox's interception ended the game.

*This story originally appeared in the Nov. 30, 2001, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.*

# The Numbers Game

## Ohio State 26, Michigan 20

Nov. 24, 2001 – Michigan Stadium; Ann Arbor, MI.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
<b>OHIO STATE</b>	7	16	0	3	26
<b>MICHIGAN</b>	0	0	7	13	20

### First Quarter

**OSU** – Wells, 1-yard run (Nugent kick), 10:46; 2 plays, 4 yards, 1:08 TOP.

### Second Quarter

**OSU** – Wells, 46-yard run (Nugent kick), 14:07; 8 plays, 85 yards, 3:24 TOP.

**OSU** – Wells, 11-yard run (Nugent kick), 4:34; 4 plays, 28 yards, 1:27 TOP.

**OSU** – Safety, Michigan's Gonzalez batted ball out of end zone, 0:35

### Third Quarter

**U-M** – Walker, 21-yard pass from Navarre (Epstein kick), 12:43; 7 plays, 65 yards, 2:17 TOP.

### Fourth Quarter

**U-M** – Askew, 2-yard run (pass failed), 10:02; 4 plays, 9 yards, 0:50 TOP.

**OSU** – Nugent, 33-yard field goal, 5:58; 4 plays, 7 yards, 1:18 TOP.

**U-M** – Walker, 11-yard pass from Navarre (Epstein kick), 2:26; 10 plays, 45 yards, 1:27 TOP.

**Att.** – 111,571

**Weather** – 58 degrees, cloudy; wind 15 MPH from E-SE.

### Team Statistics

	OSU	U-M
<b>First Downs</b>	11	18
<b>Rushing</b>	6	6
<b>Passing</b>	4	9
<b>Penalty</b>	1	3
<b>Rushes-Yards</b>	50-137	35-117
<b>Passing Yards</b>	118	206
<b>Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)</b>	11-18-1	21-47-4
<b>Offensive Plays</b>	68	82
<b>Total Net Yards</b>	255	323
<b>Third Down Efficiency</b>	5-19	6-17
<b>Fourth Down Efficiency</b>	1-1	1-2
<b>Punts-Avg.</b>	11-37.5	7-41.1
<b>Fumbles-Lost</b>	1-0	2-1
<b>Penalties</b>	9-66	6-30
<b>Time of Possession</b>	33:51	26:09

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** – **OSU:** Wells 25-129; L. Ross 16-9; Martin 6-5; TEAM 1-(-2); Krenzel 2-(-4). **U-M:** Perry 6-53; Askew 17-46; Bell 2-21; Navarre 8-12; Gonzalez 1-1; TEAM 1-(-16).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** – **OSU:** Krenzel 11-18-1-118-0. **U-M:** Navarre 21-47-4-206-2.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** – **OSU:** Sanders 3-38; Martin 3-23; Hartsock 1-18; Jenkins 1-14; Gamble 1-12; Vance 1-10; L. Ross 1-3. **U-M:** Walker 15-160; Bell 2-17; Bellamy 1-19; Seymour 1-5; Butler 1-5; Askew 1-0.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** – **OSU:** Groom 10-41.3-66; TEAM 1-0-0. **U-M:** Epstein 7-41.1-51.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – **OSU:** Vance 3-8. **U-M:** Walker 4-5; Jordan 1-12.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – **OSU:** Hall 1-27; Childress 1-3. **U-M:** Howard 2-34.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.)** – **OSU:** Smith 1-0. **U-M:** None.

**INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.)** – **OSU:** Doss 2-71; Anderson 1-4; Fox 1-0. **U-M:** Howard 1-0.

**SACKS** – **OSU:** Smith 2-11; Peterson 1-8. **U-M:** Hobson 1-4.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.)** – **OSU:** Smith 2-11; Peterson 1-8; Anderson 1-5. **U-M:** Hobson 2-9; Foote 2-5; June 2-4; Heuer 1-3; Lazarus 1-1.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.)** – **OSU:** J. Cooper 8-0-8; Anderson 7-1-8; D. Ross 7-0-7; Wilhelm 6-1-7; Smith 5-0-5; Grant 4-0-4; Doss 2-2-4; Bullard 2-0-2; Cheatwood 2-0-2; Fox 2-0-2; Collins 2-0-2; Nickey 2-0-2; McNutt 1-0-1; Jacobs 1-0-1; Reynolds 1-0-1; Peterson 1-0-1; Allen 1-0-1. **U-M:** Hobson 9-1-10; Brackins 6-4-10; Foote 7-1-8; Drake 7-0-7; June 6-1-7; Heuer 4-0-4; Howard 3-0-3; Bowman 3-0-3; Lazarus 2-1-3; LeSueur 1-2-3; Williams 2-0-2; Shaw 2-0-2; Spyttek 2-0-2; Orr 2-0-2; Diggs 1-1-2; Rumishek 1-0-1; Frysinger 1-0-1; Goodwin 1-0-1; Navarre 1-0-1; Askew 1-0-1; Dubuc 1-0-1; Combs 1-0-1.

**PLAYERS IN THE GAME** – **OSU:** Ross, Childress, Vance, Maldonado, Grant, D. Ross, Bryant, J. Cooper, McNutt, Jenkins, H. Jacobs, Chattams, Krenzel, Groom, Hall, Huston, Lee, Nickel, Allen, Wells, Kline, L. Ross, M. Cooper, Stead, Wilhelm, O'Neal, Fox, Joe, Martin, Matthews, Reynolds, Pagac, Muhammad, Cheatwood, Anderson, Scott, Bullard, Clarke, M. Jacobs, Bentley, Olivea, Fraser, Stepanovich, Walter, Bishop, Gamble, Nugent, Hartsock, Sanders, Bond, Smith, Peterson, Collins. **U-M:** June, Nasif, Howard, Van Pelt, Walker, Hobson, Cross, Butler, Williams, Stevens, Navarre, Foote, Gonzalez, Bellamy, LeSueur, Shaw, Perry, Drake, Epstein, Bell, Jordan, Combs, Askew, Kaufman, Dudley, Spyttek, Diggs, Brackins, Orr, Pearson, Manning, Bowman, Killian, Miller, Anderson, Denay, Soloman, Petruziello, Pape, Goodwin, Seymour, Smith, Joppru, Thompson, Finley, Dubuc, Heuer, Casseus, Rumishek, Kashama, Lazarus, Frysinger.

# Five-Star Receiver Target Finally Visits Oklahoma

Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka made his first trip to Norman for the Sooners' game against Baylor on Dec. 5. Oklahoma is considered the biggest threat to Ohio State's chances with Egbuka.

Interestingly, the 6-1 and 190-pound Egbuka – who is considered the top-rated wide receiver and No. 9 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – was actually able to attend the game, since the Big 12 has allowed its member institutions to host fans at a reduced capacity this season. And though the ongoing recruiting dead period prevented him from meeting with Oklahoma's staff, the Sooners used that attendance loophole to their advantage and provided Egbuka and his father with tickets to the game.



ANDREW LIND

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

The same goes for Fairfax (Va.) Robinson Secondary five-star offensive tackle Tristan Leigh and 2021 Oklahoma five-star quarterback commit Caleb Williams, who has already moved to Norman, Okla., and served as Egbuka's host for the weekend.

Egbuka, who was still on the Sooners' campus when Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, is not expected to make his college decision until the early signing period on Dec. 16-18. Sources inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center continue to express confi-

**BOOM INCOMING? – Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka wanted to hold off making his college decision until he made a trip to Oklahoma, which he finally did for the Sooners' 27-14 win over Baylor on Dec. 5.**

dence in Ohio State's standing, even with his last-minute trip to Oklahoma, thanks to his long-standing relationship with head coach Ryan Day, wide receivers coach Brian

Hartline and offensive quality control coach Keenan Bailey, as well as freshman wide receiver Gee Scott.

The Buckeyes would like to take three wide receivers this cycle, and the plan all along has been to add Egbuka to a haul that includes Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star Jayden Ballard and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep four-star Marvin Harrison. But if Egbuka starts trending to Oklahoma, Ohio State could extend an offer to Clayton (Ohio) Northmont three-star Markus Allen.

Allen, who is currently committed to Wisconsin, would likely flip his pledge if the Buckeyes offer. But with the early signing period fast approaching and Allen set to sign with the Badgers on Dec. 16, Ohio State needs an answer from Egbuka sooner rather than later in case it needs to move on to Plan B.

### Virginia Five-Star Tackle Sets Commitment Date

Leigh has announced he will make his college decision on Jan. 2 during NBC's two-hour special called "All-American Bowl: Declaration Day." He'll choose among Alabama, Clemson, LSU, Ohio State and Oklahoma.

The show, which is scheduled for 1 p.m. ET, will celebrate the 100 players invited to play in the 2021 All-American Bowl and feature a number of live player commitments. The game, typically played at the Alamodome in San Antonio, was canceled due to the worldwide coronavirus outbreak.

It's unlikely the 6-5 and 270-pound Leigh – who is considered the fourth-best offensive tackle and No. 11 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – chooses the Buckeyes.

Continued On Page 32

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

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

#### 35 Years Ago – 1985

Among the seniors Ohio State was recruiting who received statewide honors from The Associated Press were Middletown offensive lineman John Peterson, who was named Class AAA Lineman of the Year, and Cincinnati St. Xavier quarterback Greg Frey, who was named Ohio's top back in the AAA division.

Meanwhile, junior tailback Carlos Snow led Cincinnati Academy of Physical Education to the Class AA state championship and was named back of the year in that division.

At the big-school level, the Crusaders of Cincinnati Moeller claimed their seventh state title since the start of the state playoffs in 1972, routing Canton McKinley 35-11 in Division I finals. Senior Tony Jackson, not a major Buckeye target, rushed 19 times for 176 yards and two scores in the victory.

#### 30 Years Ago – 1990

Ohio State recruiting coordinator Steve Pederson didn't know what the big deal was all about.

In the span of a week, the Buckeyes had lost the services of coaching staff members Jim Colletto and Bobby Turner to Purdue and Gary Blackney to Bowling Green, and they awaited word on Bill Young's future while he interviewed for the head coaching job at North Texas State.

While many of the so-called recruiting experts were saying it marked the beginning of a troublesome time for the Buckeyes in the recruiting wars, Pederson disagreed.

"Obviously, your preference is to keep the staff intact," Pederson said. "But you know you can't always do that. When your assistant coaches get good jobs, I think that's a compliment to your program."

#### 25 Years Ago – 1995

The Ohio State recruiting effort, already off to a great start, really kicked into high gear leading up to and over the weekend of Dec. 8.

Prep All-America offensive tackle Jefferson Kelly of Cincinnati Colerain got the ball rolling with his verbal commitment to the Buckeyes over Michigan in a press conference at his school on Dec. 7. That came just after Westlake, Ohio, tight end Kevin Houser and Boca Raton (Fla.) Pope John Paul II running back Jerry Westbrook both committed to the Buckeyes.

Then the Buckeyes welcomed in a number of the nation's top players for official visits.

Over that weekend, OSU received verbal commitments from two more players, Chagrin Falls (Ohio) Kenston offensive lineman Tyson Walter and San Jose (Calif.) Bellarmine Prep defensive back Garrett Shea.

Their commitments brought OSU's class total to 17, with just eight spots left in that 2001 group.

#### 20 Years Ago – 2000

Two Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy prospects, Alphonso Townsend and Eric Coleman, still needed to meet Prop 48 requirements. But when and if that happened, they both sounded as though they would be OSU-bound.

They visited OSU over the weekend of Dec. 2-4 and came away very impressed.

Townsend, who had signed with OSU out of Lima (Ohio) Senior in 1999, told BSB that he remained steadfast to OSU. He ended up at Fork Union after failing to qualify academically.

At the same time, Coleman seemed all but sold on Ohio State. But he said he still wanted to take more official visits over the final two months of his recruitment.

#### 15 Years Ago – 2005

The Cleveland Glenville trio of offensive tackle Bryant Browning, defensive end Robert Rose and wide receiver Ray Small made an early December trip to Ohio State and came away with good things to say.

"It was a great experience," Small said. "I liked the academic programs."

"I just felt comfortable there," Rose chimed in. "I'm from Cleveland, so I knew everything about Ohio State football anyway."

Small and Rose said USC remained on their radar, but Browning sounded like someone close to committing. He told BSB of discussions between Jim Tressel and his grandmother about the ins and outs of scholarships as well as a chat with offensive line coach Jim Bollman about how he might be used when some Buckeye upperclassmen move on in future years.

#### 10 Years Ago – 2010

Although official visit season was in full swing as Ohio State worked to complete its 2011 recruiting class, the Buckeyes continued to move forward with their 2012 class as well.

Three days into December, Tressel found himself accepting his fifth verbal commitment from a prep junior, and it came from a familiar family. Three-star offensive guard prospect Jacoby Boren of Pickerington (Ohio) Central confirmed what was viewed as a foregone conclusion and issued his commitment to the Buckeyes.

Boren was the youngest of three sons in the family. Oldest brother Justin was OSU's senior starting left guard while Zach was a sophomore and the team's starter at fullback.

#### Five Years Ago – 2015

When Ohio State extended a scholarship offer to Columbus Walnut Ridge three-star recruit Malik Harrison on Dec. 4, it was the latest example of the Buckeyes using their full allotment of time to evaluate a local prospect. That had been a common practice under Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer,

who issued late offers to four-star defensive tackle Robert Landers and three-star defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton for the class of 2015 and three-star offensive tackle Brady Taylor in the class of 2014.

All three were in-state prospects, with Landers hailing from Huber Heights Wayne, Hamilton from Pickerington Central and Taylor from Columbus Bishop Ready. Meyer had long said that he wished recruiting could slow down so that coaches could have more time to assess borderline players.

He added that with bigger-name prospects committing earlier and earlier each recruiting cycle, it could take away space from three-stars who might not get an offer until later because coaches won't say no to four- and five-stars if they want in.

"I can't stand it, to be honest with you," Meyer said at Big Ten Media Days when asked about the current state of recruiting. "But how can you walk away from a kid that you think is a good one?"

"I think it's good to have a mix. Not all those five-stars turn out to be Raekwon (McMillan) and Vonn (Bell). But there's nothing better than seeing a Darron Lee – are you kidding me? And Tyvis (Powell)? And Ohio State has had a nice tradition of that. Coach (Jim) Tressel I thought did a phenomenal job at that."

#### One Year Ago – 2019

When Boston College announced the hiring of Ohio State co-defensive coordinator and secondary coach Jeff Hafley as its next head coach on Dec. 15, several defensive back commits – including Lathan Ransom, Ryan Watts and Lejond Cavazos – took to social media to reaffirm their respective pledges to the Buckeyes.

"The response has been good," head coach Ryan Day said during his media availability on Dec. 16. "It's been great. They're certainly disappointed that they're not going to get coached by Jeff, but they're excited to sign."

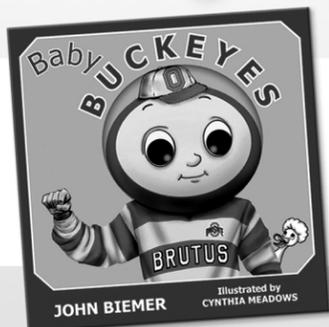
"They understand this is an unbelievable program that's on the rise. We have a great defensive system. There's great opportunity in the back end next year. Guys are going to be coming in with an opportunity to play."

However, one notable omission from the list was La Habra, Calif., four-star cornerback Clark Phillips, who was on an official visit to Utah at the time.

The Utes were among the first to offer a scholarship to Phillips – who was considered the fourth-best cornerback and No. 47 prospect overall in the class of 2020 – and his relationship with head coach Kyle Whittingham and cornerbacks coach Sharrieff Shah was a big reason that he was giving the program one last look.

Phillips, who had committed to Ohio State during his official visit in June, was set to make a final decision on his birthday, Dec. 19, the second day of the early signing period.

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# Ohio State Looks To Finish 2021 Cycle Strong

Continued From Page 30

He has not been to Columbus in more than a year, and the extended dead period prevents him from taking an official visit before he makes a decision.

Leigh was also unable to attend Buckeye Bash, an unofficial gathering of commits and top targets, on Oct. 24 after his mother fell ill. Leigh could visit campus on his own dime in the coming weeks, but sources close to the Ohio State football program have indicated to Buckeye Sports Bulletin such a trip is unlikely and that communication between the two sides has been sparse in recent months.

The Sooners, on the other hand, have made a significant push in Leigh's recruitment since he attended the Sooner Summit – their version of the Buckeye Bash – in August. Oklahoma currently holds 45.8 percent of the 247Sports crystal ball predictions, with the Bayou Bengals in a close second with 41.7 percent.

The Buckeyes do not hold a single predictions in favor of Leigh, meanwhile.

## Finishing The Class Of 2021

Besides Egbuka and Leigh, the only other players in the 2021 recruiting class whom Ohio State seems to be pursuing at this time are Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimolou and Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star linebacker Raesjon Davis.

The 6-5, 277-pound Tuimolou – who is considered the second-best strongside defensive end and No. 3 prospect overall – listed Ohio State in his top seven back in October along with Alabama, Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, USC and Washington. Though the Buckeyes have long been his perceived leader, he doesn't plan to make his college decision until the traditional National Signing Day on Feb. 3.

The 6-1, 215-pound Davis, meanwhile, is considered the fourth-best outside linebacker and No. 45 prospect overall. He has been committed to LSU since January but recently announced he won't be signing with the

Tigers during the early signing period.

Arizona State, Ohio State and USC are among the programs pushing hardest for Davis to flip his commitment, but they'll have to do so without an official or unofficial visit. The Trojans have the benefit of being the hometown team, but Davis has built a strong relationship with Buckeye linebackers coach Al Washington from afar.

Ohio State holds just one commitment at linebacker in Ironton, Ohio, four-star Reid Carrico, and the depth on the current roster has allowed Washington to be selective in his pursuit of other linebackers. Aside from Davis, the Buckeyes showed significant interest in only Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett five-star Barrett Carter, the teammate of four-star cornerback commit Jordan Hancock, but he's secure in his commitment to Clemson.

Ohio State would be happy wrapping up the class with just Carrico, but Davis would be an added luxury. Now Washington will have an extra two months to work on a flip.

## Former Commit Seeks Grad Transfer

Florida State linebacker/safety Jaiden Lars-Woodbey announced on Dec. 2 that he intends to leave the program as a graduate transfer.

"My overall experience at Florida State University has been extremely unique," Lars-Woodbey said on Twitter. "I've made so many connections and built life-long friendships that Tallahassee will always be special to me. I believe in this program and its potential. I truly believe that this program will get back to where it needs to be eventually."

"I have never cheated the game of life or football and never will. However, in order to attain my ultimate goal, I feel that it is in my best interest to graduate transfer and take my talents to another university. God has a different plan for me, stay tuned."

A former four-star prospect from Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco, the same program that produced Ohio State right guard Wyatt Davis, Lars-Woodbey was once committed to the Buckeyes before flipping

## 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

his pledge to the Seminoles on the first day of the early signing period during the 2018 recruiting cycle.

In three seasons at Florida State, including a redshirt 2019 season that was cut short by injury, Lars-Woodbey has recorded 105 tackles, seven tackles for loss and 1½ sacks.

As a graduate transfer, he will have two seasons of immediate eligibility remaining.

Lars-Woodbey was extremely close with several players who did sign with Ohio State in 2018, including linebacker Teradja Mitchell, cornerback Sevyn Banks and safety Josh Proctor, and the Buckeyes defensive struggles this season beg the question of whether he would make an impact. There's plenty of depth on the roster at both linebacker and safety, though, so it's much more likely he ends up at a school like Oklahoma or USC, his hometown team.

## OSU Commits Win State Championship

Harrison and Ohio State five-star quarterback commit Kyle McCord capped their high school careers with a state title after leading Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep to a

62-13 win over Central York on Nov. 28.

The 6-3, 215-pound McCord – who is considered the third-best pro-style quarterback and No. 25 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – completed 21 of 28 passes for 336 yards and four touchdowns. He finished his high school career with three consecutive state titles, as well as a Philadelphia-record 6,887 passing yards and 88 touchdowns.

The 6-3, 190-pound Harrison, meanwhile, is considered the 15th-best wide receiver and No. 91 prospect overall in his class. He caught eight passes for 156 yards and two scores in the win, including a 45-yarder that put the Hawks up 24-0 midway through the second quarter.

"That's practice," Harrison told reporters after the game. "Me and Kyle take a bunch of reps in practice and try to be perfect. I'm glad to see it come to this game. This is a goal at the beginning of the season. I wouldn't say it gets easier, but experience definitely helps here."

Harrison, the son of the Pro Football Hall of Fame wide receiver of the same name, ended his career with a city-record 2,624 receiving yards and 37 touchdowns.

"I think it's a combination of a lot of hard



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# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Lettermen Row's Jeremy Birmingham

**With about two weeks until the early signing period, do you expect all of Ohio State's current commitments to fax in their letters of intent at that time? Also, do you anticipate any new commitments joining them?**

"Right now, there is optimism that every Ohio State commitment will sign in the December signing period. The Buckeyes are still hopeful to add Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka this month but also understand he may hold off on a decision and not enroll early if the state of Washington makes a decision to play high school football this spring."

**Former Ohio State commit and current Florida State linebacker/safety Jaiden Lars-Woodbey announced on Dec. 2 that he plans to pursue a graduate transfer. Do you think the Buckeyes would be interested this time around or did he burn too many bridges when he flipped to the Seminoles late in the 2018 recruiting cycle?**

"I don't think it's a matter necessarily of burned bridges, but more a matter of it being an unnecessary addition. Ohio State signed five defensive backs in the class of 2020 and has six defensive backs it plans to sign on Dec. 16. Lars-Woodbey has also played a lot of linebacker for the Seminoles and the Buckeyes are

pretty stacked at linebacker, as well. It just seems like a move that doesn't add up for either side."

**Ohio State effectively has three linebackers committed for the class of 2022 in Marysville, Ohio, five-star outside linebacker Gabe Powers; Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star outside linebacker C.J. Hicks; and Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley North four-star athlete Dasan McCullough. How many more players at the position will the Buckeyes look to add, and who are some of the names to keep in mind?**

"At Washington and Ohio State have decided to go pretty thin at linebacker in the class of 2021 and turn the focus to 2022, which is why you see such early returns at the position. The question though, is whether or not all three of those committed players will remain at linebacker. That allows for some flexibility over the next handful of months as they look to supplement that group.

"Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed five-star Shawn Murphy continues to be one of the top targets, as is Salisbury, N.C., four-star Jalon Walker. The Buckeyes have a number of potential options to sift through, but with the dead period extended until at least April, it would seem that they are hoping for some patience and a chance to evaluate those players in person to make an informed

decision. Powers, Hicks and McCullough all have Ohio ties, and that made the decision to take them as early as they did a little bit easier for the Buckeyes."

**Ohio State continues to make significant noise in the state of Texas, having landed commitments in the class of 2022 from Southlake Carroll five-star quarterback Quinn Ewers and Del Valle five-star wide receiver Caleb Burton. Where do the Buckeyes stand with some of their other top targets in the Lone Star State, particularly Houston North Shore four-star cornerback Denver Harris and Lewisville four-star wide receiver Armani Winfield?**

"Ohio State has recruited the state of Texas better than anybody in the last handful of years, and the Buckeyes have a number of top targets still remaining in the state for the class of 2022. The two mentioned above, Harris and Winfield, are at the top of that list.

"Neither player has been to Ohio State for a visit, and the Buckeyes are not in any hurry to add any players at this point who haven't been able to see campus. It takes a very special type of relationship and talent for these early commitments to come to fruition, so patience is probably what the Buckeyes are preaching for anyone who hasn't been able to get to town to this point."

work that we put in," McCord said. "These past four years have been an up-and-down journey, not even knowing if we were going to play this year. To have one more opportunity to come out here and compete with my brothers, I think it's pretty special. There's not another way I want to go out."

Both Harrison and McCord are set to enroll at Ohio State in January, with the latter eyeing the starting spot as a true freshman with Justin Fields expected to be among the first few picks in next year's NFL draft.

### Five-Star Corner Names Top Schools

Jacksonville (Fla.) Robert E. Lee five-star cornerback Jaheim Singletary included Ohio State in his top four on Nov. 30 alongside Clemson, Florida and Georgia and also announced he'll make his college decision on Jan. 2.

The 6-1, 170-pound Singletary is considered the fifth-best cornerback and No. 10 prospect overall in the class of 2022 after recording 18 tackles, six pass breakups, three interceptions and one blocked field goal to lead the Generals to an appearance in the state semifinals this fall. He landed an offer from the Buckeyes in early November, whereas the Bulldogs (May 2019), Gators (June) and Tigers (July) have been in contact much longer, but it's clear Day and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs have made quite the impression in just a few short weeks.

Ohio State has recruited Jacksonville well in recent years, landing five-star cornerbacks Shaun Wade and Tyreke Johnson in 2017 and 2018, respectively, as well as four-star running back Marcus Crowley in 2019. All three players hailed from Trinity Christian Academy, though, so it remains to be seen if the Buckeyes can break through elsewhere in the city.

Ohio State already holds one commitment at cornerback for the class of 2022 in West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Jyair Brown, but the Buckeyes hope to add two more at the position. In addition to Singletary, they have been keeping tabs on Houston North Shore five-star Denver Harris, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star Domani Jackson, Grosse Pointe (Mich.)

South five-star Will Johnson and St. Louis Lutheran North four-star Toriano Pride.

### Carolina Defender Names Top Schools

Shelby, N.C., four-star outside linebacker Malaki Hamrick included Ohio State in his top five on Nov. 29, in addition to Appalachian State, North Carolina, Notre Dame and Penn State.

The 6-4, 200-pound Hamrick is considered the 13th-best outside linebacker and No. 140 prospect overall in the class of 2022, but the Buckeyes are recruiting him to play defensive end at the next level following a strong sophomore season in 2019 in which he recorded a whopping 129 tackles, 39 tackles for loss and 19 sacks. He'll look to improve upon that output when the Golden Lions return to the field in the spring, since the state of North Carolina postponed fall sports due to the pandemic.

Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson extended an offer to Hamrick back in August, and the two sides chat almost daily. He's never been to campus but plans to make his first trip when the ongoing recruiting dead period comes to a close.

The Buckeyes are still looking for their first commit along the defensive line but are in good standing with a number of the nation's top prospects. That includes Philadelphia Imhotep Institute Charter five-star defensive end Enai White, Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson five-star defensive end Jeremiah Alexander, Opa Locka (Fla.) Monsignor Pace five-star end Shemar Stewart, Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star end Derrick Moore, Greensboro (N.C.) Grimsley four-star tackle Travis Shaw, Columbus (Ga.) Hardaway four-star tackle Mykel Williams, Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star tackle Caden Curry and Sicklerville (N.J.) Timber Creek three-star end Jihaad Campbell.

### Other Notes From Around The Country

• Gaithersburg (Md.) Quince Orchard four-star defensive tackle Marcus Bradley, the 14th-best defensive tackle and No. 184 prospect overall in the class of 2021, committed to Vanderbilt on Nov. 27. The one-time Ohio State target was previously committed

to Maryland but reopened his recruitment on Nov. 2.

• Former Ohio State four-star defensive end commit Tunmise Adeleye will choose among Alabama, Florida and Texas A&M on Dec. 17, the second day of the early signing period. Adeleye, the sixth-best strongside defensive end and No. 37 prospect overall in the class of 2021, decommitted from the Buckeyes on Aug. 11.

• Clemson has picked up two 247Sports crystal ball predictions for Daleville (Va.) Lord Botetourt five-star offensive tackle Gunner Givens, who listed Ohio State among his top six on Nov. 4. He is considered the second-best offensive tackle and No. 23 prospect overall in the class of 2022.

• Opa Locka (Fla.) Miami Central five-star linebacker Terrence Lewis, the top-ranked linebacker in the class of 2021, decommitted from Tennessee on Nov. 30. He was once

interested in visiting Ohio State until the Buckeyes reportedly backed off their pursuit due to off-the-field concerns.

• Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook three-star linebacker Bryce Steele committed to Boston College on Dec. 1. The one-time Ohio State target was one of Eagles head coach Jeff Hafley's top targets when Hafley was the Buckeyes' co-defensive coordinator.

• Frisco (Texas) Lebanon Trail three-star wide receiver Drew Donley, the son of former Ohio State wide receiver Doug Donley, decommitted from Ole Miss on Dec. 3. He attended a one-day camp in Columbus in June 2019 but never landed an offer from the Buckeyes.

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# Indiana QB Penix Tears ACL, Ending Season

Indiana quarterback Michael Penix will miss the rest of the season after suffering a torn ACL in a 27-11 victory against Maryland Nov. 27.

Penix suffered the season-ending injury when he scrambled out of bounds at the Maryland 3-yard line with 4:36 left in the third quarter.

The sophomore tore the same ACL as a true freshman in 2018, and he redshirted that season.

Indiana's 36-35 upset win over Penn State in overtime of the season opener, and the left-handed gunslinger threw for a career-high 491 yards and five touchdowns Nov. 21 in Indiana's 42-35 loss to No. 4 Ohio State.

Each of Penix's first three seasons in Bloomington ended in injuries, with his 2019 campaign concluding with a clavicle injury that required surgery.

"It's a tough situation for all of us," Allen said. "My heart breaks for Michael. It's just tough, it's hard. I really feel for him and all he's worked to get back and the way he was playing."

Prior to learning the severity of the injury, Allen spent time with Penix, whose 491 passing yards at Ohio State were the fourth most ever surrendered by the Buckeyes, to prepare the third-year sophomore for the road ahead.

"It attacks the core of who you are," Allen said, "and how you're going to respond surely to things that happen that don't seem fair, and when there's no really good answer for why. That's the case here. You basically fall back on what you believe in, you fall back on your faith, you fall back on all the people that care the most about you. And you battle. You fight. You don't back down."

"Michael's got some big-time long-term goals, and it's going to take tremen-

dous grit to fight through this."

Tuttle, who was a teammate of Ohio State wide receiver Chris Olave at San Marcos (Calif.) Mission Hills, went to Utah as the No. 8 pro-style quarterback in the country in 2018.

"I know he hasn't played a lot here on game day, but he has a big-time arm and he's got tremendous football instincts and football IQ, and is extremely bright," Allen said of Tuttle. "But I think his greatest quality is his work ethic."

## Wildcats' Shot At Title Game Secured With Cancellation

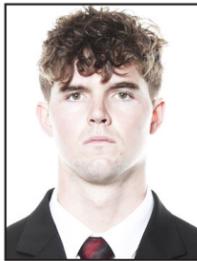
The Big Ten battle between Northwestern and Minnesota on Dec. 5 was canceled because of a COVID-19 outbreak within the Gophers program.

Minnesota reported seven new confirmed cases, bringing the Gophers' total to 47 members of the program – 21 players and 26 staff members – who had tested positive from Nov. 19-30.

The Gophers also canceled their Nov. 28 game at Wisconsin after they had paused all team activities Nov. 24.

The latest cancellation guarantees the Big Ten West title for the Wildcats, clinching them a trip to Indianapolis for the conference championship game Dec. 19.

At 5-1, Northwestern had played all its games prior to the cancellation against Minnesota, so the worst Pat



Jack Tuttle

## BIG 2020 Standings

East Division			
	W	L	Pct.
<b>Ohio State</b>	5	0	1.000
Indiana	6	1	.857
Maryland	2	2	.500
Michigan State	2	4	.333
Michigan	2	4	.333
Penn State	2	5	.286
Rutgers	2	5	.286
West Division			
	W	L	Pct.
Northwestern	5	1	.833
Iowa	5	2	.714
Wisconsin	2	2	.500
Minnesota	2	3	.400
Illinois	2	4	.333
Nebraska	2	4	.333
Purdue	2	4	.333

### Dec. 5 Games

**Ohio State 52, Michigan State 12**

Penn State 23, Rutgers 7

Nebraska 37, Purdue 27

Iowa 35, Illinois 21

Indiana 14, Wisconsin 6

Maryland at Michigan, Canceled

Northwestern at Minnesota, Canceled

### Dec. 12 Games

**Michigan at Ohio State State, 12 p.m.**

Illinois at Northwestern, 12 p.m.

Minnesota at Nebraska, 12 p.m.

Rutgers at Maryland, 12 p.m.

Wisconsin at Iowa, 3:30 p.m.

Michigan State at Penn State, 3:30 p.m.

Purdue at Indiana, 3:30 p.m.

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## BIG TEN NOTES

Fitzgerald's team could finish 5-2 with a loss to Illinois on Dec. 12.

The only other Big Ten West teams with two losses or fewer are Iowa (5-2) and Wisconsin (2-2), who were both beaten by Northwestern.

While the Hawkeyes could win their final game against Wisconsin on Dec. 12 to finish 6-2, the Wildcats would still win the division even if they lose to Illinois because head-to-head is the first tiebreaker between teams with the same number of losses, regardless of which team has more wins.

Amid the COVID pandemic, more than 100 college football games have been postponed or canceled this season.

The Big Ten, which did not allow for rescheduling games in its condensed schedule, has not gone one week without at least one canceled game since its opening weekend.

### Michigan-Maryland Canceled, Wolverines Have COVID Issues

Due to an outbreak of COVID-19 cases, Michigan canceled its Dec. 5 matchup with Maryland and put a pause on practices until at least Dec. 7.

"The decision by our medical professionals to stop practices and cancel this Saturday's game against Maryland was made with the health, safety and welfare of the student-athletes, coaches and staff as our utmost priority," said Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel said in a release. "We have seen an increase in the number of student-athletes unavailable to

compete due to positive tests and associated contact tracing due to our most recent antigen and PCR testing results."

Michigan initially paused all in-person activities Nov. 30 because of "an increased number of presumptive positives that are awaiting confirmation," according to head coach Jim Harbaugh.



Warde Manuel

"That's an increased number from zero," Harbaugh said Nov. 30. "It was more than one. It was a few. So, it was increased."

At least one Michigan player tested positive before the Wolverines' Nov. 28 game against Penn State, and Harbaugh said they have held out other players because of presumptive positive tests.

Michigan's athletic department has not revealed the number of positive tests specific to the football program.

The Wolverines (2-4) have two games remaining on the 2020 schedule, the rivalry matchup at Ohio State on Dec. 12 and the divisional crossover game on Dec. 19.

"Daily testing will continue and medical professionals will make a determination when to resume practice," Michigan's release said. "The earliest practice can resume will be Monday, Dec. 7."

### Rutgers Adds Kansas State Transfer Youngblood

Joshua Youngblood, a wide receiver/kick returner, announced he is transferring to Rutgers from Kansas State.

After appearing in just two of the Wildcats' four games, Youngblood

entered the transfer portal. The dynamic athlete displayed his abilities as a freshman in 2019, winning Big 12 Special Teams Player of the Year honors as an All-America kick returner.

Youngblood averaged 35.9 yards per return as a freshman and led the nation with three touchdowns on kick returns that came against Texas, Texas Tech and Iowa State in a four-game span.

As a sophomore in 2020, he had returned only three kickoffs for a total of 54 yards (18.0 avg.).

As a freshman, Youngblood recorded nine catches for 73 yards and carried 11 times for 55 yards and one touchdown.

Youngblood has ties to Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano since he played high school football at Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep, where Schiano's son played.

Rutgers also has a Berkeley Prep alum in third-year sophomore defensive lineman Mayan Ahanotu in addition to a 2021 commit in three-star linebacker Austin Dean.

Schiano has taken advantage of the transfer portal in putting together his Scarlet Knight squad. Several starters came to Rutgers through the portal, including quarterback Noah Vedral (Nebraska), tight end Jovani Haskins (West Virginia), defensive tackle Michael Dwumfour (Michigan), safety Brendon White (Ohio State) and wide receiver Aron Cruickshank (Nebraska).

Beyond the starters, key contributors Ahanotu (Minnesota), defensive end Aaron Lewis (Michigan) and defensive

lineman Malik Barrow (UCF), a former Buckeye, also went to Piscataway, N.J., via transfer.

### Top Performers Across The Big Ten Conference

Nebraska quarterback Adrian Martinez was the top performer in the conference outside of Ohio State, leading the Huskers to a 37-27 win over Purdue. The junior signal caller completed 23 of 30 passes for 242 yards and one touchdown, while adding 45 rushing yards and two scores.

Purdue third-year sophomore quarterback Jack Plummer put forth a valiant effort against the Huskers, throwing for 334 yards and three touchdowns on 33 of 47 passing.

Iowa third-year sophomore quarterback Spencer Petras helped the Hawkeyes improve to 5-2 in a 35-21 win over Illinois.

Petras completed 18 of 28 passes for 220 yards and three touchdowns.

Rutgers senior linebacker Olakunle Fatukasi stood out for the Scarlet Knights even though they lost to Penn State 23-7, recording 18 tackles (eight solo) and one tackle for loss. Penn State junior linebacker Jesse Luketa played well on the other side, posting 10 tackles (six solo), one TFL and one fumble recovery for the winning Nittany Lions.

Though he did not put up the most impressive stats, Tuttle deserves mention for leading the Hoosiers to a 14-6 victory at Wisconsin in his first collegiate start.



Joshua Youngblood

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# Towns Getting Closer To Making Buckeye Debut

COVID-19 made its first impact on the men's basketball program and possibly cost Seth Towns an opportunity to make his Ohio State debut on Dec. 5.

The Buckeyes had made it through the first three games of the season unscathed on and off the court, defeating Illinois State, UMass Lowell and Morehead State without any coronavirus incidents, but that changed the evening of Dec. 4 when Ohio State announced the cancellation of its home game the next day vs. Alabama A&M.

It has been a long wait for the 6-8, 230-pound graduate transfer from Harvard.

He injured his knee as sophomore during the Ivy League tournament in March 2018, and he missed the next two seasons because of related injuries. He underwent surgery in January of this year in hopes of resuming his career, but not at Harvard.

The hometown Buckeyes were a natural fit. He attended Columbus Northland, the same school that produced former Buckeye center Jared Sullinger.

Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann said in the preseason that Towns would not be ready for the Nov. 25 start of the season, and that proved accurate. In a Zoom call with reporters on Dec. 1, Holtmann said Towns was getting close to being cleared to play.

"The biggest thing for Seth is making sure that physically he's ready to go through live game action, which he's been somewhat limited at that," Holtmann said. "He'll have to work his way into shape and sharpening his skills and his ability to move and defend. Offensively, even though he'll have to shake some rust off there, he's a really gifted offensive player. Defensively is where he's going to have to really continue to grow and get more confident in his ability to move and his knee and his conditioning."

"He's making progress. What that looks like in terms of when he could play, it's something we're evaluating on a day-to-day basis."

Towns took to the Covelli Center court in uniform for warmups prior to the Morehead State game the next day, giving an indication his return was imminent.

Instead of possibly logging valuable minutes against Alabama A&M, he might make his debut Dec. 8 at Notre Dame in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge, certainly not an ideal situation because of the step-up in talent.

Holtmann is trying to suppress expectations of Towns, who in 2017-18 averaged 16.0 points, 5.7 rebounds and 1.8 assists to become the fourth Harvard player, and third sophomore, to be named Ivy

## 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

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

League Player of the Year.

"I do think everybody has to understand he's not the same player or athlete right now he was his sophomore year at Harvard," Holtmann said. "That's too much to expect given he's a young man that's been off two years."

"He's really worked hard to get back to this point. I think he feels a great amount of satisfaction in getting back at least in the conversation of playing again, but to expect that kind of production right now I think is unrealistic. And he understands that, but I think our fans are going to have to understand that as well."

Holtmann is unsure when Buckeye fans will see the "real" Towns, who initially is expected to back up forwards E.J. Liddell and Kyle Young.

"We haven't honestly seen him enough in live action to where I could even begin to speculate on when that will happen," Holtmann said of Towns. "It's hard to give a timeline on when he could get back to that because we haven't been able to see enough. Is it the end of this year? Next year? I don't know, but no question in my mind he can get back to that."

Towns has two years of eligibility with the possibility of a third because the NCAA is allowing an extra season because of the pandemic.

Holtmann said in addition to Towns needing to get in game shape, he must adjust to the rigors of the Big Ten compared to the Ivy League.

"It's a jump in athleticism and size in what you see in college basketball," the coach said. "There are good players, really good players at all levels, right? We've seen that over and over again in college basketball, early season, end of the season, tournament time, but I do think the consistency of the length and athleticism that you see in the Big Ten is just different. It's just different."

"So you combine that with a new system that he's learning, and I think all

of that is part of his adjustment period. He played in a really good program, was well-coached, and that will help him."

### Another Setback

Fourth-year junior guard Musa Jallow played in the opener vs. Illinois State but sat the next two games because of a lower-leg injury, and Holtmann said his return is unknown.

Jallow missed last season after undergoing reconstructive surgery on his right ankle.

### Center Of Attention

Those games Jallow missed against UMass Lowell and Morehead State were at the Covelli Center because of overlaps with the men's hockey team at Value City Arena due to the late scheduling of games for both sports.

The two-year-old Covelli Center houses the gymnastics, volleyball and wrestling teams and seats 3,700. With the floor of St. John Arena being temporarily reconfigured to a workout facility for some programs to meet social distancing guidelines, the basketball teams had to look elsewhere.

Men's basketball played at Covelli on Nov. 29, hours before the nearby hockey game at Value City Arena. With hockey scheduled there Dec. 3 and 4, it was decided as a cost-saving measure not to convert it for basketball for the Morehead State game of Dec. 2.

"I'd prefer to play at our home arena," Holtmann said. "I'd prefer to play at the Schott. But listen, it's hard for me when I get asked by our administration to save money and to limit the workload in terms of changing over the Schott from ice hockey to basketball twice in a week. It's hard for me to sit over there and say, 'No, we're not going to do that.'"

"I think it's a great facility. It is beautiful. I'd like to be in our own facility, shooting in our own facility, but clearly it's the right thing to do."

## COURT REPORT

### Craig Merz

The reason given was "in alignment with COVID-19 testing and protocols for nonconference opponents ... 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 Alabama A&M shared results of its most recent testing."

There was always the fear that scheduling nonleague teams that didn't meet the stringent COVID-19 protocols of the Big Ten would be dicey.

That's why football is playing a conference-only schedule and men's hockey is doing something similar with 24 Big Ten games and four games for each team against nonconference opponent Arizona State, which agreed to implement the conference's testing and protocol policies.

Of course, nothing is coronavirus-proof, as shown by the numerous canceled games in football, including two for OSU.

Towns would have benefited as much as anyone by playing against Alabama A&M. He appeared poised for his first game in 32 months after hinting on his Twitter page earlier in the week that he was wearing a return by using one word - "soon."

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# Ohio State Off To 3-0 Start Before Cancellation

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After crushing Illinois State and struggling to beat UMass Lowell as 26.5-point favorites to improve to 2-0, the Ohio State men's basketball team hoped to get back on track against Morehead State and Alabama A&M.

Fourth-year head coach Chris Holtmann left the Buckeyes' 74-64 victory over UMass Lowell on Nov. 29 with "a significant list" of areas where his team needed to improve.

With Morehead State coming to town just three days later, Ohio State did not have much time to turn the page. The Buckeyes made vast improvements in the short time, looking like a different team Dec. 2 against Morehead State in a 77-44 win.

"This was a definite improvement from the other night (against UMass Lowell), and it was good to see," Holtmann said. "We just played more connected on both ends.

"Most importantly, there was some improvement in some areas that we worked in these last couple days. It was good to see us makes some strides in some areas."

## OSU Stifles Morehead State En Route To 77-44 Victory

The stifling defense of No. 23 Ohio State held visiting Morehead State to just 25.0 percent from the floor (13 of 52), and the Buckeyes' pressure led to 17 turnovers in the 77-44 victory at the Covelli Center.

"We needed to come out and just compete," said Ohio State sophomore forward E.J. Liddell. "We didn't compete at our highest level (against UMass Lowell), but I felt like this was a good bounce-back game to come out and compete and show what we can really do."

Liddell led the way for the Buckeyes with 16 points and seven rebounds in the 33-point victory at home.

"E.J. was good tonight," Holtmann said. "He's playing with force. I've been really proud of the steps he's taken in that area."

Five Ohio State players scored in double figures, and fourth-year junior point guard C.J. Walker stood out with 11 points, four rebounds, four assists and three steals.

"C.J. was huge," senior forward Kyle Young said of Walker. "He brings it for us every game, and we look to him for leadership all the time. The way he competed and in the way he was making it tough on them defensively, and then running our offense, he did a really good job."

In the first half, Morehead State fourth-year junior guard DeVon Cooper scored or assisted on the Eagles' first nine points, helping the visitors take their only lead of the game at 7-6 with 15:19 until halftime.

Ohio State responded with a quick 6-0 spurt before a bucket by Morehead State fourth-year junior guard K.J. Hunt on a Cooper assist made it 12-9. The Buckeyes and the Eagles exchanged 5-0 runs before Young knocked down a jumper followed by four straight points from Liddell to push the Ohio State lead to 23-14.

The Buckeyes took a 12-point lead when Liddell grabbed a Washington miss off the glass and put it back in to make it 30-18 with 4:49 to go in the half. The Eagles answered with back-to-back three-pointers to cut the lead to six, but Ohio State countered with a 7-0 stretch before a triple by sophomore forward Julius Dixon triple cut the lead to



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**DISHING IT OUT** – Ohio State fifth-year senior point guard C.J. Walker, who leads the Buckeyes with 5.0 assists per game, has scored in double digits in nine straight games dating back to February.

10 at the midway point, 37-27.

Cooper opened the second half with a pair of foul shots, but the Buckeyes ripped off a 7-0 streak to extend their lead to 44-29 with 17:01 remaining. The Eagles cut the lead to 12 twice at 44-32 and 49-37 at the 13:14 mark, but that was the closest they came the rest of the way.

Ohio State tallied seven straight points with a rare Kyle Young three-pointer sandwiched between two buckets by fourth-year junior wing Justice Sueing to extend the lead back to 56-37 at the 8:27 mark.

Young, a senior forward, finished with 10 points and nine rebounds, while Sueing added 11 points and three boards.

"I want to be able to consistently shoot them," Young said of the three-pointer. "In the offseason, I was able to shoot it really well, so it's just translating it to the games now for me. And just seeing one go in now adds a little confidence, and I hope I can keep that going."

The Eagles cut the lead to 58-42 with 6:34 left, but the Buckeyes asserted their dominance over the visitors with a 19-0 spurt sparked by a Young slam and highlighted by three treys from junior wing Justin Ahrens and two three-pointers from junior guard Duane Washington.

A strong defensive effort by Ohio State forced Morehead State to miss all 11 of its field-goal attempts in the final 7:39, and the Eagles were just 4 of 30 in the second half (13.3 percent) in the second half.

Morehead State head coach Preston Spradlin came away from the loss to the Buckeyes thoroughly impressed with Walker and Liddell, in particular.

"E.J. Liddell had a fantastic game against us," Spradlin said. "He's got a great motor. He's got great hands. He hit some mid-

range shots today. I think that's really going to help his game."

Overall, Ohio State shot 44.3 percent from the floor (27 of 61) and 38.5 percent from three-point range (10 of 26), and the Buckeyes outrebounded Morehead State 43-32.

"In general, we were a little more connected on both ends," Holtmann said. "We shared the ball and moved it a little bit better than we had. We played through the post better. We still wasted a lot of possessions offensively."

Washington scored 11 points and dished four assists, and Ahrens added nine points for Ohio State.

Junior guard Skyelar Potter led the Eagles with 13 points and grabbed six rebounds, and Cooper finished with 11 and a team-high seven boards.

## Game Canceled Due To COVID Concerns At Alabama A&M

Following three straight victories to start the season, the Scarlet and Gray had their eyes set on 4-0 before their Dec. 5 matchup with Alabama A&M was canceled.

The game was canceled the evening of Dec. 4 after Ohio State became aware of Alabama A&M's most recent COVID-19 test results.

"The Ohio State Department of Athletics, in alignment with COVID-19 testing and protocols for nonconference opponents, has canceled the men's basketball game against Alabama A&M University scheduled for (Dec. 5) evening at 7 p.m. at the Jerome Schottenstein Center," an Ohio State statement read.

"The decision was made out of an abundance of caution and with the welfare of the student-athletes, coaches and event staff in

## Ohio State 77, Morehead State 44

Dec. 2, 2020 Covelli Center • Columbus, Ohio												
		1		2		F						
Morehead State (1-3)		27		17		44						
Ohio State (3-0)		37		40		77						
Morehead State		Total	FG	FT	Reb.	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Baker	25	1-8	0-0	1-3	0	1	3					
Broome	27	1-6	1-2	4-2	0	3	3					
Dixon	20	1-5	0-0	0-0	0	3	3					
D. Cooper	31	2-8	6-6	1-6	3	2	11					
T. Cooper	32	1-7	0-0	0-1	3	2	3					
Stanley-Williams	13	1-3	0-0	1-1	0	3	2					
Hunt	18	2-4	1-2	0-0	2	0	6					
Potter	28	4-9	3-3	1-5	0	2	13					
Rice	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Sebree	3	0-2	0-0	1-0	0	0	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>13-52</b>	<b>11-13</b>	<b>12-20</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>44</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 25.0%. FT: 84.6%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 7-21 (Potter 2-6, Baker 1-1, Hunt 1-1, D. Cooper 1-3, Dixon 1-4, T. Cooper 1-5, Sebree 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 5. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 1 (Stanley-Williams). <b>Turnovers:</b> 17 (Broome 3, D. Cooper 3, Stanley-Williams 3, Baker 2, T. Cooper 2, Hunt 2, Potter 2). <b>Steals:</b> 2 (Baker, T. Cooper).												
Ohio State		Total	FG	FT	Reb.	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A <td>PF <td>Pts.</td> <td colspan="5"></td> </td>	PF <td>Pts.</td> <td colspan="5"></td>	Pts.					
Sueing	24	4-7	2-2	1-2	2	2	11					
Young	28	3-6	3-4	3-6	1	2	10					
Liddell	28	6-9	4-4	2-5	1	3	16					
Washington	28	4-11	0-0	0-3	4	1	11					
Walker	33	3-8	4-4	1-3	4	3	11					
Ahrens	16	3-6	0-0	1-1	1	0	9					
Key	16	1-5	0-0	4-2	0	2	2					
Brown	14	2-6	0-0	0-3	0	1	4					
Sotos	11	1-1	0-0	0-1	2	1	3					
Hookfin	1	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	0	0					
Diallo	1	0-1	0-2	1-0	0	0	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>27-61</b>	<b>13-16</b>	<b>15-28</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>77</b>						
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 44.3%. FT: 81.3%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 10-26 (Washington 3-6, Ahrens 3-6, Sotos 1-1, Sueing 1-3, Young 1-3, Walker 1-3, Liddell 0-1, Brown 0-3). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 3. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 3 (Sueing, Young, Key). <b>Turnovers:</b> 7 (Sueing 2, Liddell 2, Young, Washington, Walker). <b>Steals:</b> 7 (Walker 3, Young 2, Washington 2). <b>Officials:</b> Boroski, Ek, Wells. <b>Attendance:</b> N/A.												

mind after Alabama A&M shared results of its most recent testing."

Ohio State's next scheduled games are against Notre Dame on Dec. 8 in South Bend, Ind, and Cleveland State on Dec. 13 at 4 p.m.

# Pandemic Helped Ohio State Come Together

The COVID-19 pandemic has made playing sports almost nothing but difficult since it caused the cancellation of both the men's and women's NCAA basketball tournaments back in March, and it was already the reason for both Ohio State basketball teams losing a game early on in their respective 2020-21 seasons.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Grosher

But all of those difficulties and new restrictions forced the women's team, along with many teams around the country, to isolate and avoid as much contact with others as possible. That, almost by default, brought the team together even further, according to head coach Kevin McGuff.

"Because of COVID, we have been preaching so much, 'Don't go out and be around other people,' and they've had a real easy time just being around each other," McGuff said. "Oddly, the whole situation has really kind of aided the chemistry. We've really preached, and our kids have bought into trying not to be around other groups of people, so they've really relied on each other and spent time with each other, and I think that's really enhanced the chemistry."

Senior guard Braxtin Miller agreed with her coach, saying that the restrictions ended up being a benefit in terms of growing together as a team and building chemistry within the roster.

"We're not really allowed to hang out with people for real that aren't getting tested, so we hang out with each other a lot more," Miller told BSB. "Once we got here, it's just kind of become something natural that we really rely on each other a lot and depend on each other, so we're always together honestly."

McGuff said that he could tell in early practices that this team had a specifically strong bond by the way they were communicating and passing the ball around, even after an offseason without organized practices. The Ohio State head coach even went so far as to call this roster "the best team we've had so far from a chemistry standpoint," prior to the start of the season.

Sophomore guard Madison Greene agreed with McGuff that this team had a different level of chemistry from even the season prior and that it comes from more than just the squad's dynamic while on the floor.

"I definitely feel it - we all feel it," Greene said. "It's not even on the court. It's off the court as well, and I feel like that leads to what we do on the court. I just love this group of girls, and I feel like we're just all really excited to go out here and play, and we really work well together, so it's exciting. We're literally with each other every day, and we don't get tired of each

## OSU Women's Basketball Signees

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

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School
Kaitlyn Costner	PG	5-8	N/A	Mishawaka (Ind.) Penn
Caylor Thierry	SG	5-10	N/A	Willoughby (Ohio) Laurel

Players in the class of 2021 who have verbally committed to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the ESPN rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School
Cotie McMahon	SG	5-11	★★★★	Centerville, Ohio

other. We all get along really well, and it's just a good time all the time with them."

This impressive bond was shown throughout a pair of blowouts to open its season, specifically in the 103-47 victory over Kent State on Dec. 2. Against the Golden Flashes, the Buckeyes finished with 23 assists and just three turnovers, with that astonishing 7.7 assist-to-turnover ratio showing strong improvement over last season when it was an even 1.0 ratio (503 assists, 503 turnovers).

"No question," McGuff said on the importance of that stat. "I think our kids are really sharing the ball, and it's great to see. I think it's a reflection of our chemistry on and off the court, and that's a big stat for us."

Ohio State is 3-0 with three lopsided victories to start its season and has done so through one of the most difficult off-seasons in recent memory. But it might end up being a benefit to the Buckeyes on the court due to the connections that it created throughout the team.

"It's a different dynamic and energy and atmosphere this year," Miller said. "I think that we have a lot of really great individuals, that we come together as a team even better, so definitely really great chemistry."

## Buckeyes Start 2022 Class With A Bang

The Ohio State women's basketball team earned the first commit of its 2022 class with Centerville, Ohio, four-star wing Cotie McMahon, who announced her commitment to the Buckeyes on Dec. 3.

"First I'd like to thank God for the many blessings he has blessed me with," McMahon wrote in a tweet. "Secondly, I want to thank my family for supporting me through this journey. This has been a wonderful process. I'd like to thank everyone who has ever helped me to get to this position in my life. To you all, I am forever grateful. I am very blessed to be able to say that I am taking my talents to THE Ohio State University to further my basketball dreams."

McMahon is ranked the ninth-best wing and No. 42 overall prospect in the 2022 class, according to ESPN. She is also ranked the No. 6 prospect in the class out of the state of Ohio.

"Strong, athletic perimeter performer drives and attacks the defense," ESPN's Dan Olson wrote of McMahon. "Finishes plays in traffic, delivers at the charity stripe. Plays with high motor effort, rebounds and handles coast-to-coast. Catch and shoot game at the arc; among the elite prospects in the class of 2022."

At Centerville, McMahon finished her last season third in the Greater Western Ohio Conference in scoring with 18.9

points per game. She shot 53.1 percent from the field and 38.2 percent from three and also added 8.0 rebounds and 2.2 steals per game. In one game this season against Ursuline Academy on Nov. 25, McMahon scored 23 points on 11-of-19 shooting while bringing in eight rebounds and adding three steals and two blocks. Centerville won the game 52-45.

The 5-11 wing received an offer from the Buckeyes in June.

The 2022 class is likely to be a very important one for the program with forwards Dorka Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty set to depart after the 2021-22 season.

The Buckeyes also have two commits for 2021, both of whom have officially signed in guards Kaitlyn Costner and Taylor Thierry.

## McGuff, Players Are Fans Of Covelli

Ohio State's two opening games against Duquesne and Kent State were played at the Covelli Center, as were the men's games against UMass Lowell and Morehead State. Both Greene and Miller had nothing but positives to say about their experience at Covelli.

"I like it a lot," Greene said. "It's a nice facility. It's comfortable and nice."

"I loved it," Miller added. "I don't know about everybody else. I think most of us liked it, I mean I loved it. It's a nicer atmosphere for not being able to have fans. I would play there more often. With no fans? That'd be fun, it's fun there."

McGuff agreed, calling the Covelli Center a beautiful facility, and added that his roster enjoyed it and that the facility has "been good to us so far."

In a normal year, the women's team plays in the Schottenstein Center for almost all of its home games. The Schott has a capacity of 18,809, while the Covelli Center can seat 3,700.

In the 2019-20 season, Ohio State averaged an attendance of 4,948 people during its 13 home games, including a peak attendance of 8,909 when UConn came to Columbus.

If those numbers were to be similar in the future, the women's basketball team would have sold out the Covelli Center in each home game a season ago, potentially swapping out an increase in ticket sales for a stronger atmosphere if the team were to ever change locations permanently.

While neither Greene nor Miller said they would prefer to play at Covelli once full attendance is allowed back, Greene did ponder the thought of what the Covelli Center would sound like with a full house.

"If everybody could fit in the Covelli," Greene said, "I feel like that would be this really cool environment having a lot of people there."

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# Buckeyes Improve To 3-0 With Impressive Showings

By WYATT CROSER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Three nonconference games into the season, and Ohio State women's basketball has had no problems dealing with its early competition, most recently taking down Kent State and Northern Kentucky by an average margin of 44.5 to move to 3-0 on the season.

The Buckeyes put up 199 total points in the two performances and have just two more out-of-conference games left on the schedule before Big Ten play is set to begin.

## OSU-Kent State Game Decided In A Flash

With two games under its belt, No. 19 Ohio State (2-0) had yet to sweat out a matchup, once again handling business in a 103-47 rout over Kent State (0-1) on Dec. 2 in the Covelli Center that was pretty much over before the first-quarter horn sounded.

That could not be said a season ago, when the Buckeyes held off the Golden Flashes in a 72-62 victory during a 2019-20 season in which Kent State won a share of the MAC East.

This time around, though, even with four Kent State starters returning from last year, Ohio State stormed out of the gates with a 26-0 lead, holding the Golden Flashes scoreless for the first 8:42 before freshman guard Casey Santoro, the younger sister of former Ohio State guard Carly Santoro, netted a free throw to end the shutout bid.

From there, Ohio State led 31-4 after the first quarter and 52-14 at halftime, holding Kent State to 4-of-37 shooting (10.8 percent) overall in the first, including eight misses from three on eight attempts.

"I thought we obviously started with really good defensive energy, and so we were playing really well on that end of the floor," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said following the win. "And I think Kent State, they missed some shots they might have been able to make early, so kind of a perfect storm there to start the game. I did like the mentality we had defensively, and that led to a lot of easy transition baskets for us to start."

The Buckeyes were also firing on all cylinders offensively, hitting 20 of their 33 attempts (60.6 percent) in the first half, doing most of their damage inside while still being efficient from deep, connecting on 4 of 6 (66.7 percent) from long range.

On the game, Ohio State shot 59.1 percent (39 of 66) while holding Kent State to 23.5 percent (16 of 68) and the 47 points, the second game in a row the Buckeyes had held their opponent to that total.

"Communication and hitting the gaps have helped us a lot," freshman guard Kateri Poole said about the defense. "Just making sure that we lock in on that and communicate throughout the game helps us."

Junior forward Dorka Juhasz led Ohio State at the break, almost outscoring Kent State herself with 12 points and eight rebounds, while sophomore guard Jacy Sheldon added 11 on 5-of-6 shooting.

Juhasz ended the game with her second double-double, finishing with 16 points and a team-high 10 rebounds. Despite her numbers, the third-year forward said that she has had to get warmed up to gain some momentum early on this season.

"I would say a little rusty," Juhasz said on her performance through two games. "Last game, I missed a couple of shots that I'm capable of making. I think it was just that first

game I had to get out of the way. This game I was a little bit more confident, and obviously we moved the ball really well and my teammates found me a lot of times under the rim, so the credit is for them, too."

The scoring was evenly dispersed for Ohio State, with five players – Juhasz (16), Sheldon (16), Poole (15), junior forward Aaliyah Patty (15) and sophomore guard Madison Greene (12) – scoring in double figures. The team chemistry was also shown in a 23-to-3 assist-to-turnover ratio, up from the 1-to-1 ratio (15 assists and 15 turnovers) from the opener against Duquesne.

On the other end, no Golden Flashes scored 10 or more points, with sophomore forward Nila Blackford's nine points leading the way.

For the second straight game, all 11 active members of the Ohio State roster saw action, this time all scoring points, with freshman guard Anyssa Jones scoring her first collegiate basket in the process. McGuff said it has been pivotal to get his young players minutes in the early games.

"It's such an adjustment from high school to college, and we've got some really good young kids that they just need experience, and it's one thing to talk about what this is going to be like for them, but they need to be in the game," McGuff said. "You can see their talent, and if they can just continue to get better and get this experience, they're going to be really great players for us."

Despite a pair of victories by 35 points or more, McGuff still sees areas for this team to improve.

"One, rebounding. I don't think we rebounded the ball nearly well enough for us to be the team we're capable of being," McGuff said. "Also, even though we scored 100 points, at times we were still kind of jogging up the court, and I'm not necessarily wanting them to feel like they need to shoot a quick shot all the time, but we need to be relentless with our pace in terms of putting pressure on the defense to get back, and we were for most of the game, but certainly not all of the game. So those are two areas for sure where I think we need to improve."

## Miller-less Buckeyes Win Big Over Northern Kentucky

After allowing just 47 points in both of its first two games, Ohio State (3-0) relied more on its offense against Northern Kentucky (0-4) on Dec. 6, nearly racking up 100 points for a second straight time in a 96-63 win over the Norse behind strong performances from Greene and Sheldon at Value City Arena.

"In the last two games, we've been able to knock down shots and just play together well," said redshirt freshman guard Rikki Harris. "We're making the extra passes and we're just hitting shots. That's a big part, is just hit shots. If you hit shots, the score goes up."

Sheldon led the team in scoring for the third straight game with 20 points on 7-of-10 shooting, including 3 of 6 from deep, while Greene added 17 points and a team-high seven assists.

McGuff said that he was impressed with Sheldon's performance, specifically early in the game.

"She was really locked in from the get-go," McGuff said. "She's such a great player, it was awesome to see her really kind of get us going on the offensive end."

Both the second-year guards had to step up with the absence of senior guard Braxtin Miller, who did not play against Northern

## Ohio State 103, Kent State 47

Dec. 2, 2020 Covelli Center • Columbus, Ohio												
		1	2	3	4	F						
Kent State (0-1)		4	10	16	17	47						
Ohio State (2-0)		31	21	22	29	103						
Kent State		Total FG FT		Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Blackford	21	4-11	1-5	2-3	2	3	9					
Thall	26	1-10	2-2	1-4	0	4	5					
Marchese	23	2-9	2-3	0-5	0	3	6					
Modkins	24	3-8	0-0	0-1	0	1	8					
Shumate	16	1-7	2-2	1-1	0	1	4					
Santoro	16	0-7	1-4	1-1	0	1	1					
Pavlansky	21	1-4	1-2	2-3	1	1	3					
Jackson	17	1-4	0-0	2-1	0	0	2					
Young	12	2-2	2-2	0-0	0	1	6					
Kelly	20	1-6	1-2	4-3	2	2	3					
Ejbel	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>16-68</b>	<b>12-22</b>	<b>18-23</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>47</b>					
<b>Percentages: FG: 23.5%. FT: 54.5%. Three-point field goals: 3-17 (Modkins 2-4, Thall 1-4, Santoro 0-4, Shumate 0-2, Kelly 0-2, Jackson 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 14 (Thall 3, Jackson 2, Kelly 2, Blackford, Marchese, Modkins, Shumate, Pavlansky, Young, TEAM). Steals: 1 (Modkins). Technical Fouls: Coach.</b>												
Ohio State		Total FG FT		Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Juhasz	24	7-15	1-2	3-7	1	0	16					
Patty	17	6-8	2-2	0-6	0	3	15					
Greene	26	3-6	6-6	1-1	6	2	12					
Sheldon	19	6-7	2-2	0-4	2	3	16					
Miller	28	3-7	0-0	0-3	6	0	6					
Poole	23	5-7	4-5	1-5	1	1	15					
Beacham	18	2-3	0-0	1-3	3	4	4					
Mikulaskova	15	2-3	3-4	0-3	2	5	8					
Harris	15	2-4	0-0	0-3	2	2	4					
Hutcherson	10	2-4	0-0	0-1	0	0	5					
Jones	6	1-2	0-1	0-0	0	2	2					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>39-66</b>	<b>18-22</b>	<b>6-38</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>103</b>					
<b>Percentages: FG: 59.1%. FT: 81.8%. Three-point field goals: 7-14 (Sheldon 2-3, Patty 1-1, Poole 1-1, Hutcherson 1-1, Mikulasikova 1-2, Juhasz 1-4, Miller 0-1, Harris 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 5 (Juhasz 2, Patty, Miller, Hutcherson). Turnovers: 3 (Greene, Miller, Mikulasikova).</b>												
<b>Officials: Dickerson, Daley, Broderick. Attendance: N/A.</b>												

## Ohio State 96, NKU 63

Dec. 6, 2020 Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio												
		1	2	3	4	F						
NKU (0-4)		23	11	12	17	63						
Ohio State (3-0)		32	21	19	24	96						
NKU		Total FG FT		Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Coffey	22	2-2	4-5	3-0	0	2	8					
Souder	26	1-7	0-0	1-2	0	2	2					
Turner	26	4-10	2-2	2-3	0	0	11					
Garcia	24	1-13	3-4	2-1	5	2	6					
Niece	21	3-8	2-2	0-3	1	2	9					
Duvall	27	4-13	2-4	3-7	2	0	12					
Rose	15	1-4	0-0	1-0	0	1	3					
Irvin	10	1-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	2					
Igo	12	1-5	0-0	0-1	0	3	3					
Taylor	8	1-2	2-2	0-1	1	0	4					
Palmer	10	1-2	1-2	1-1	0	3	3					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>20-67</b>	<b>16-21</b>	<b>14-21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>63</b>					
<b>Percentages: FG: 29.9%. FT: 76.2%. Three-point field goals: 7-26 (Duvall 2-5, Turner 1-2, Garcia 1-3, Rose 1-3, Niece 1-5, Igo 1-5, Souder 0-3). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 2 (Rose, Irvin). Turnovers: 14 (Turner 3, Niece 3, Duvall 3, Igo 2, Garcia, Irvin, Palmer). Steals: 3 (Turner 2, Duvall).</b>												
Ohio State		Total FG FT		Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Juhasz	25	8-13	1-3	1-4	2	1	18					
Patty	24	5-6	2-2	0-8	2	2	13					
Greene	28	5-7	6-6	0-2	7	3	17					
Harris	23	4-8	0-0	0-4	1	2	11					
Sheldon	31	7-10	3-3	1-2	4	3	20					
Poole	19	1-3	3-4	0-1	1	4	5					
Beacham	16	3-5	0-0	1-5	0	2	7					
Hutcherson	13	0-3	0-0	0-3	0	2	0					
Mikulaskova	15	1-4	1-2	1-1	1	1	3					
Jones	5	0-0	2-2	1-0	0	1	2					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>34-59</b>	<b>18-22</b>	<b>6-34</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>96</b>					
<b>Percentages: FG: 57.6%. FT: 81.8%. Three-point field goals: 10-25 (Harris 3-6, Sheldon 3-6, Patty 1-1, Beacham 1-1, Greene 1-2, Juhasz 1-4, Poole 0-2, Mikulasikova 0-2, Hutcherson 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 3 (Hutcherson, 2 Patty). Turnovers: 14 (Poole 5, Juhasz 2, Sheldon 2, Beacham 2, Mikulasikova 2, Jones). Steals: 8 (Sheldon 2, Poole 2, Harris, Beacham, Hutcherson, Jones). Steals: 8 (Poole 2, Beacham 2, Patty, Sheldon, Miller, Harris).</b>												
<b>Officials: Morris, Beverley, Niemiera. Attendance: N/A.</b>												

Kentucky due to an illness, according to McGuff. He also said she should be able to play by next game, a Dec. 10 matchup with Miami (Ohio).

Harris stepped into her spot for her first collegiate start and finished with 11 points, all of which came in the second half, along with four rebounds in 23 minutes, though she did not feel that her role changed much with being in the starting lineup.

"It's basketball, so I just knew I had to step up and do what I could," Harris said. "It doesn't make a difference starting or not. You just have to do what you can do to contribute to the team."

The game stayed close throughout the first quarter, with Ohio State never trailing, but Northern Kentucky staying mostly within single digits, with the Buckeyes holding a 32-23 lead after 10 minutes of play. Sheldon was the primary reason for the lead, scoring 11 of the team's first 13 points thanks to a trio of three-point makes, as well as a jump shot from inside the arc.

Ohio State opened the game up with a 16-3 run to start the second quarter, taking a 48-26 lead with 4:01 before the half, and never led by less than double digits the rest of the way.

The Buckeyes took their largest lead of the game on a Rebeka Mikulasikova free throw at the 1:44 mark of the fourth quarter, making the score 96-57. NKU scored the last six points to bring the game to its final margin.

On the day, the Buckeyes shot 57.6 percent from the field (34 of 59) and 40.0 percent from three (10 of 25). Their defense held strong, with the Norse shooting just 29.9 percent overall (20 of 67) and 26.9 percent from deep (7 of 26), but junior forward Aaliyah Patty said that is still one of the areas the team needs to improve.

"Defensively, I think we could have done a lot better," Patty said. "We could have rebounded better, we could have guarded the ball better. Offensively, I think we share the ball very well, which is a good thing for us, but if we want to win games, then our defense has to get a lot better."

Ohio State ended up with five players in double figures, with Juhasz (18) and Patty (13) also crossing the 10-point threshold. The duo combined for 13 total rebounds on the day. On the other end, the Norse were led by junior guard Lindsay Duvall, who had a double-double with 12 points and 10 rebounds.



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# Defenseman Gabriele Making His Points As Senior

Grant Gabriele's career as a defenseman for the Ohio State men's hockey team has been defined by patience, perseverance and pragmatism.

In this his senior season he's added another P – production.

The Brighton, Mich., native has seen more ice time, particularly on the power play, due to graduation among the defensemen and is flourishing for the No. 13 Buckeyes (2-4-1 Big Ten).

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

After scoring five goals, one on the power play, in his first 60 career games, he has three goals in six games this season. Included are two with the man advantage as he replaces Matt Miller on the point.

As senior defensemen last season, Miller had nine power-play points (three goals and six assists), Wyatt Ege tallied six (3-3), and Gordi Myer added six assists.

Now it's Gabriele's turn. He scored in a third straight game during a 4-2 win vs. No. 14 Wisconsin on Dec. 3. The Buckeyes fell 3-1 to the Badgers the next night.

"We put him in a position here to run that

first power play," head coach Steve Rohlik said. "He's got a great feel for the game, and he's playing with a lot of confidence. I think that's a major difference.

"You know, we had three guys (last season) that probably averaged about 28 minutes a game, and all of a sudden he's thrown into that position, so he's handled it very well."

To further cement Gabriele's increased responsibilities, he was named an alternate captain this season. It's been quite a rise in stature for a player whose start at Ohio State was a big, fat zero.

That's the number of games he played as a freshman because the coaches felt he wasn't ready to make the jump from junior hockey. He played 24 games as sophomore and all 36 last season.

"It's crazy," Gabriele told BSB. "I think about that all the time from where I started at to where I am right now. I took what the coaches said my freshman year and it was something I focused on. I took it to heart.

"The offensive stuff they weren't worried about. They just wanted me to do certain things at the defensive end. I did that."

Despite not playing a game as a rookie, he never wavered in his decision to come to Ohio State after playing in the United States Hockey League for Waterloo (Iowa) in 2016-17.

"Not at all," he said. "We had a really deep group. Coming in as a freshman, we had a lot of older guys. In college the experience part

of it is a huge thing.

"I knew there were some things I needed to fix. The games would have been a bonus my freshman year. Obviously, I wanted to play, but I viewed my freshman year as a development year for me."

That first season the Buckeyes had defensemen Ege, Matt Joyaux, Sasha Larocque, Miller, Janik Moser, Myer and Tommy Parron among those ahead of him. That team made the second of what would have been a program-record four straight NCAA tournament appearances if last season hadn't been cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gabriele finally made his OSU debut as a sophomore on Oct. 20, 2018, vs. UMass and got an assist. His lone goal came at Penn State on Jan. 19, 2019, and he finished the season with three assists and was a plus-3 to be named co-Most Improved Player on the team.

Last season he tied for 13th in points among Big Ten defensemen with 13 (4-9). He was also second on the team with 46 blocks.

"Last year, Gordi Myer and I played pretty much the entire year together, and I think sometimes you find a clique and it helps your game and your partner's game. It helped both of us," Gabriele said. "We complemented each other really well."

Gabriele's newfound success on the power play is an extension of how he likes to play.

"For defensemen in college hockey, scoring five-on-five goals is really difficult, especially from the point," he said. "The power-play opportunity increases your chances a little, but at the same time for me the offense side is something I've always done. It's just playing hockey for me. That part of the game comes more natural."

Unfortunately for him and all athletes, the games stopped in March because of the coronavirus. When Ohio State went to remote classes Gabriele returned to Brighton to prepare for an uncertain future. Back in the spring and early summer he hoped there would be a 2020-21 hockey season, but nothing was a given in a topsy-turvy world.

That fact was literally staring him in the

face.

"Back home I lived two minutes from a rink, but it was closed because of the pandemic," he said. "Having a rink so close and not being able to skate was crazy. That's where I spend my entire summer usually at the rink every day.

"Not being able to do that was not enjoyable. You make do with what was going on. Everybody was having a similar situation in some way. It was not the most fun summer."

He couldn't have known when he began roller hockey at age 2 that it would one day come in handy, but that's how he passed the time this summer in lieu of getting on the ice.

"I was roller-blading nonstop," Gabriele said. "We'd put a couple of nets up in the driveway and play games. I'd roller-blade into town, roller-blade 10 o'clock at night around town.

"A couple of days out of the summer I was on my roller-blades more hours of the day than I was standing and walking around. It was insane. I was on them seven straight hours one day.

"It keeps you in shape but there's a little bit of difference between roller-blading and skating on ice. When I started back on ice it took me about 20 minutes to get my feet back from roller-blading to ice."

He now gets on the ice when he wants, but being back on campus is different than even 10 months ago. He tries to limit his contact to the outside world other than going to Value City Arena, to the store or to pick up carryout from a restaurant to avoid getting the virus.

"I think about what it would be like to come into college as a freshman at a time like this," he said. "It's different being around campus and not seeing people you know, different people in classes. It's strange. It's taken away that experience you look forward to, being around people and getting out."

There were also no fans for the four home games and two games at Minnesota to start the season.

"To be honest, the only time I notice that there's no fans is during warmups," he said. "The rest of the time during the game, that stuff you can block out. You don't even pay attention to that, but during warmups you got some time to look around. It's, 'Holy cow, this place is really empty.'"

Something else has also changed. Because the pandemic wiped out the end of last season, winter sports athletes can have an extra year of eligibility.

For Gabriele, it could be a chance to play four seasons since he was a spectator as a freshman.

"I have to see how the season turns out for me," he said. "If things didn't work out and I wasn't happy with what the next step was for hockey moving into next year, I would 100 percent think about coming back for another year. I want to play the year and see how it goes and what we're doing here."

### Next

The Buckeyes play at Notre Dame on Dec. 12 (7 p.m.) and Dec. 13 (5 p.m.). Both games are on NBCSN. Ohio State completes the 2020 portion of the schedule hosting Arizona State in nonconference games Dec. 17 and 18 at 5:30 p.m. each. The remainder of the schedule has not been released.

For a recap of Ohio State's series against Wisconsin go to BSB's [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com) website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



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# Stakes Are Always High During Michigan Week

Anticipation for the annual Ohio State-Michigan game is high but clouded with uncertainty due to the COVID curse of 2020.

The normal hype and fanfare surrounding the biggest football game of the year for each team is replaced with a nervous energy in hopes the kickoff indeed takes place at high noon in Ohio Stadium on Saturday.

## COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

The upcoming game, however, does have major repercussions regarding the Big Ten championship and playoff hopes for the Buckeyes, along with the immediate future of the Michigan football program under its current head coach.

Ohio State's victory over Michigan State despite being down four coaches, including head coach Ryan Day, and three of five starting offensive linemen was impressive to say the least.

Meanwhile, rumors swirl around the Michigan head coach. Reports that Jim Harbaugh may be headed back to the NFL, particularly the Chicago Bears or New York Jets, are circulating through the college football world.

One thing for certain, there is a lot of anxiety for both teams. If the game does take place, the Buckeyes must beware of the wounded Wolverines. They are a proud bunch, and we will get their best shot. We must be prepared to give ours right back.

### Heat's Up On Harbaugh

Jim Harbaugh was hired to bring back a Michigan football program that had slipped to mediocrity the previous seven years under Rich Rodriguez and Brady Hoke.

The two head coaches prior to Harbaugh had a combined record of 46 wins and 44 losses, only four bowl appearances, and just one bowl victory. Michigan had not won a Big Ten title since 2004, which it shared with Iowa. The Michigan faithful believed the former Wolverine quarterback, Harbaugh, was the answer to bringing the "Maize and Blue" back to its glory days of the past.

After all, Harbaugh had proven himself as a winning head coach at both the collegiate and professional level. He proved to have the right formula for success at the University of San Diego, Stanford University and with the San Francisco 49ers.

Most Michigan fans believed Harbaugh was the man who would get it done in Ann Arbor. For Jim Harbaugh to turn things around in Ann Arbor, he had to prove he could recruit to a high caliber, win football games and develop players to a high level of performance.

Under Harbaugh, Michigan has not become a consistent recruiting power. In six recruiting cycles, the Wolverines have finished in the top 10 just three times. They also have not been able to keep a lot of the high school talent from

the state of Michigan at home. Most of the top players in the state have opted for other programs rather than play for the Wolverines.

There seems to be little consistency in Michigan's recruiting strategy in terms of targeted areas of emphasis as in the past. Retention of recruits has been another problem for Harbaugh in that eleven scholarship players have transferred in the last twelve months alone.

In terms of winning football games, Harbaugh has an overall record of 49-22 at Michigan, which is a 69.0 winning percentage. That's not bad, but at the same time, he has beaten top-25 teams only 10 of 24 times and has gone 2-11 against top-10 opponents. But the most devastating of all his failures is the record against the Wolverines' two archrivals, Michigan State and Ohio State.

Harbaugh has a split against Michigan State, going 3-3, and has never beaten Ohio State during his tenure as head coach. In the last two outings alone, the Buckeyes have put up 62 and 56 points against the Wolverines.

Prior to coming to Michigan, Harbaugh was known for his development of players, especially at the quarterback position. Unfortunately for him, Michigan quarterbacks like Wilson Speight, John O'Korn and Shea Patterson never really panned out. As a matter of fact, no skilled players have ever been drafted higher than the third round since Harbaugh has been the head coach.

The bottom line is that as good a coach as Jim Harbaugh is, he simply has not gotten it done at Michigan. What seemed like a match made in heaven has been anything but paradise for Jim Harbaugh. The honeymoon for Jim Harbaugh is over, and an ugly divorce may be on its way. Michigan fans and alumni expect more from a man who is the fourth highest-paid coach in college football.

### Michigan In 2020

The Wolverines had high hopes going into the 2020 season, but what was a promising start with a 49-24 victory over Minnesota turned into a nightmare as they lost four of their next five games.

Unless the Wolverines schedule an extra game after the away finale at Ohio State, it will be the first time in the history of Michigan football, going back to 1881, they have gone winless at home.

The Michigan-Ohio State game is always considered a season in itself, but this especially is the case for Michigan this year. It is the Wolverines' last chance to save face, beat their main rival and, perhaps, save their head coach his job.

Statistically, the Dec. 12 game shouldn't be close. The Buckeyes near the top in every major offensive category. Michigan's best ranking in the Big Ten offensively is fifth in both scoring and passing yards.

Under Harbaugh, Michigan is now on its third offensive coordinator and has never ranked higher than 50th nationally in terms of yards gained per game. In terms of defense, the Ohio State-Michigan matchup should be closer, but not by a lot.

The Buckeyes rank higher in scoring defense, rushing defense and total defense, while Michigan is slightly better

this season in pass defense. Under defensive coordinator Don Brown, Michigan has ranked in the top 10 nationally four of the past five seasons, but that's not the case this year.

As with the offense, Michigan has struggled on the defensive side of the football, giving up over 34 points and 430 yards per game.

### What "The Game" Means

There doesn't need to be any special reason for wanting to beat Michigan. The rivalry goes back to the Dark Ages, figuratively speaking.

The two teams have squared off 116 times. Fourteen times since 1969, with the beginning of the "Ten Year War" between Woody and Bo, the lesser-ranked team has pulled the upset; Ohio State eight times and Michigan six.

These two elite programs absolutely despise each other, and the rivalry is considered, by many, as the greatest in all of athletics. For Ohio State players it is more than just the "gold pants." It's the fact you have bragging rights in beating TTUN for one more year.

This is 2020, however, and nothing is normal. There are extra incentives for the Buckeyes in terms of making it to the Big Ten Championship Game and the chance to seal a spot in the top four of the college football playoffs. Ohio State needs the sixth victory of the season to guarantee the Big Ten East title and a chance to play Northwestern for the

league championship. If Michigan cannot play due to too many positive COVID cases, the conference would have to change the current sixth-game rule for Ohio State to play in that championship game.

Ohio State must stay under the positivity numbers as well. What makes the situation even more nerve-racking is the fact those numbers might not be known until the end of the week.

A victory over Michigan, coupled with the 52-12 destruction of Michigan State, should give the Buckeyes a strong enough resumé to impress the college football playoff committee. Add a Big Ten championship, it becomes a lock.

If Michigan cannot play and the Big Ten stays with the six-game criteria to play for the championship, Ohio State will need other criteria to make a final impression on the committee to be assured of one of the four spots.

Indiana's defeat of Wisconsin proves the Ohio State victory over the Hoosiers was a quality win. Justin Fields, a legitimate Heisman candidate, is the best player in the conference, and the overwhelming offensive numbers the Buckeyes put up make this team an attractive draw for college football.

As long as the Scarlet and Gray take care of business the next few weeks, it would be a crime for them not to be in the playoffs.

But it all starts first with beating Michigan.

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# Buckeyes Deserve Shot At College Football Playoffs

Let's be honest. This Ohio State football team does not look as good as the 2019 Buckeyes.

To be fair, we haven't exactly gotten an extended look. And this team hasn't exactly gotten a chance to develop and grow like a normal team in a normal season. But based on what we have been able to see so far, I'll take the 2019 Buckeyes over the 2020 Buckeyes.

## EXNER POINT Rich Exner

Quarterback and receiver play is better this year. It has been some of the best – if not the best – ever seen at these positions at Ohio State.

But the running game has not been elite.

By elite, we mean J.K. Dobbins, Ezekiel Elliott type of elite.

And the defense hasn't been elite either. Indiana scored 35 points; Rutgers scored 27. There's no one on that side of the ball we would expect, at this stage, to be a top-five pick in the NFL draft next spring, let alone two of the top three picks like last season (Chase Young and Jeff Okudah).

But what I've said so far speaks more about the level to which Ohio State football has risen than it is criticism of this year's team. This is a playoff football team. Only stumbling unexpectedly over the next two weeks will ruin that.

And Ohio State deserves to be there. I would argue that Ohio State is one of the top three teams in college football. Very few people would argue that Ohio State isn't one of at least the top four.

That was demonstrated again on Saturday at Michigan State. Shorthanded, and clearly handicapped on the center to quarterback exchange because of the havoc COVID-19 had played on the offensive line, Ohio State still

dominated Michigan State start to finish.

Michigan State is not a top-20 team, nor does it even have a winning record. But the Spartans do count among their games a 29-20 win over otherwise undefeated Northwestern, and the Spartans did beat Michigan, 27-24, before the Wolverines' season completely fell apart.

Perhaps more importantly, OSU's last win came with a fill-in coach, three new offensive linemen pushed into starts because of COVID-19, and a lot of uncertainty leading up to the game.

Remember when Clemson lost to Notre Dame? There was a lot forgiven because COVID-19 had kept quarterback Trevor Lawrence out of the game. But Clemson lost when rocked by the virus; Ohio State won. (Side note, if Clemson isn't penalized for losing that game, why has Notre Dame been rewarded so much for winning it?)

Back to what all this means for Ohio State.

Two points: (1) Until I see otherwise, I don't think this is the best team in the country; (2) you don't have to be the best to win a national championship; you just need a ticket to the playoffs for an opportunity.

The best teams don't always win it all.

Ohio State was better than Clemson last year but didn't advance to the title game because of a series of unfortunate events: Justin Fields playing hurt, J.K. Dobbins getting injured during the game, and some lousy calls by the officials. If any one of those doesn't occur, Ohio State – the better team – wins. But Ohio State lost. That's football.

The 2002 Ohio State team won the national championship, undefeated in doing so. But I think we could have a healthy discussion about how many better Ohio State teams came up short.

The 2014 Ohio State team was not the best team in the country most of the season, but the Buckeyes got on a roll at the right time, blasting Wisconsin in the Big Ten title game and then rolling through the playoffs by playing far, far better than it had through the regular season.

Could this team catch fire like the 2014 Buckeyes? I'm not so sure. But with Justin Fields and the receivers playing like they are, they could have a chance if some of the other elements improve.

Ryan Day has lost just once as a head coach (to Clemson in last year's playoffs). This team seems to have all the focus in the world under very trying circumstances. Fields is as good as they come at quarterback.

Ohio State likely will be an underdog in the playoffs should it win out to earn a spot. But sometimes all you need is a chance. Plus, having a chip on the shoulder doesn't hurt, in this case from last year's loss to Clemson.

Michigan game will be on. By the time you read this, we will know better.

Here are some pretty amazing things to consider about what has occurred in recent years:

- In the entire history of the OSU-UM game, only four coaches are undefeated: Urban Meyer (7-0), Day (1-0), Michigan's George Little (1-0 from the 1924 game) and Michigan's Gustave Ferbert (1-0 from the 1897 game). In other words, an OSU win will make Meyer and Day the only undefeated coaches with multiple wins.

- Eleven coaches are winless, just three of whom lasted more than two games – Ohio State's A.E. Herstein (0-4 from way back in 1906-09) and more recently U-M's Rich Rodriguez (0-3 from 2008-10) and Jim Harbaugh (who enters this game 0-5).

- OSU's John Cooper took a lot of heat for going 2-10-1 against Michigan, though Cooper had some pretty good teams overall. But Michigan enters this year's game 1-15 against OSU from 2004 on.

- Michigan last won in Columbus in 2000, Cooper's last year as coach. Two months later, upon his introduction at an OSU basketball game, new coach Jim Tressel said, "I can assure you that you will be proud of your young people in the classroom, in the community, and most especially in 310 days in Ann Arbor, Michigan." From the time Tressel spoke those words, OSU is 17-2 against Michigan. The two losses were in 2003 and in 2011 (the year Luke Fickell was OSU's interim coach).

- Ohio State has scored at least 42 points in five of the last seven Michigan games, including 56 points in 2019 and 62 points in 2018.

### Thrilled For Larry Johnson

I hadn't given this much thought ahead of time, but as OSU was wrapping up its win at Michigan State, I found myself being really happy for Larry Johnson, who was filling in for Day as the head coach for the game.

What a special day it was for a guy who has logged so many years on the sidelines.

A three-time state champion in 11 years as a high school head coach, Johnson was hired onto the Penn State staff in 1996. He was an assistant for the Nittany Lions for 18 seasons before making the move to OSU in 2014. His résumé includes being the defensive line coach of the Bosa brothers, Nick and Joey, and Chase Young, all top-three picks in the NFL draft.

Now in his 25th season as a college assistant, he got to be the head coach for a day – and won.

During his initial comments after the game, Johnson talked about the focus of the team in the absence of so many regulars, saying it was the "next man up" kind of attitude. The same could be said for Coach Johnson – the now undefeated Coach Johnson.

### Michigan Week

At this writing, we presume the Ohio State-

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# Justin's Day Sets Him Apart From The Field

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

At some point during the telecast of the Ohio State-Michigan State game, one of the announcers said something that I had been thinking for much of the game. The battle between the Buckeyes and Spartans looked like a high school game – sloppy but being dominated by one player who was simply far superior to anyone else on the field.

Ohio State's 52-12 win over the Spartans was certainly sloppy at times – a chunk of that attributable to the Buckeyes' COVID-ravaged offensive line and even more attributable to MSU not being that good – and the player head and shoulders above the rest was one Justin Fields.

While Fields wasn't overpowering through the air on this particular Saturday, he was more than competent while completing 17 of 24 passes for 199 yards and a pair of scores without an interception. In this game, Fields dazzled with his legs, rushing for 104 net yards on 13 carries, scoring twice. He also set up Ohio State's second TD with a 44-yard scamper.

Despite that 303 yards of total offense, the thing that impressed me most about Fields' day was how he handled the poor snaps offered by Harry Miller, who was forced into service at center when starter Josh Myers was scratched, presumably for COVID-19 reasons. The junior signal caller never panicked and got the most out of what was presented on each of the plays as Miller got accustomed to his new role. Not only is Fields a gifted athlete, but he is a calm and effective leader.

It made Larry Johnson's job as acting head coach while Ryan Day served out his own quarantine a lot easier.

"If you're going to be a head coach for one day, you want Justin Fields with you," Johnson said. "That was pretty special. He's a special young man. Coaching the defensive side of the ball, you don't get to talk to those guys a lot. But this week, he and I talked a lot.

"What a great kid. He's just a great leader. He stood in front of the team and talked to them and encouraged the offensive line. I thought it was great. Every time I saw him, he had a smile on his face, so I knew we were in good hands."

I also liked something Fields said about running the football from the quarterback position, after he had shown a willingness to mix it up with defenders when the Buckeyes needed an extra yard and a willingness to slide when the extra yardage was not necessary.

"I don't know if I enjoy initiating contact, but I'm going to do it if I need to," Fields said. "I'm not looking for contact. If I'm going to get yards and I see guys converging on me, of course I'm going to get down. But if we need the first down, I'm going to help my team out and do whatever, give my full effort, and play with toughness."

I think this shows a maturity on his part and an understanding of how to make sure you win the battle but don't lose the war.

That thought makes me continue to wonder why the Buckeye coaching staff insists on leaving Fields in after a game is seemingly no longer in doubt. Not only do they risk unnecessarily exposing him to injury, but they deny game reps to the reserves, who would benefit from the experience if Fields was injured.

As was demonstrated by the performance of the patchwork offensive line against the Spartans, the Buckeyes have enough talent to overcome losses at most positions. I think most Buckeyes fans and observers, however, would agree that the one player Ohio State can't afford to lose, if they are serious about making a run to the national championship, is Fields.

Which brings me to a thought I've had about this pandemic-riddled season and the

quest for the College Football Playoff.

How do you choose the "best" four teams, when you have no idea which players, or how many players, might test positive? Would Notre Dame have defeated Clemson if Trevor Lawrence had played in that game? Would Ohio State have been able to compete with the offensive line they fielded against the hapless Spartans if they were playing the Tigers, Irish or Alabama?

And come the playoffs, are all teams going to be playing with the same coronavirus protocols? Are some teams willing to win at a higher cost than others?

These are things that make me wonder, as the numbers rise nationally and even bastions of protocol like Ohio State are hit by the virus, if it was worth playing this fall.

I'm just asking.

And in my weekly tight end watch, the group had no receptions for the second game in a row. Of course, you must think with the Buckeyes fielding a makeshift line that the coaches were more concerned about the tight ends blocking than making catches.

### And On The 310th Day

I was picking up some carry-out the other day – I'm still not quite ready to eat out – and while I was waiting for my order there was a guy at the bar very loudly holding court. I wasn't paying much attention to what he was saying, but at one point I heard him bellowing, "I can't remember his name – you know, two-10-and-one."

This guy, I'm sure fueled by a few adult beverages, couldn't remember John Cooper's name, but 20 years later, he remembered his record against Michigan.

I bring this up because I found the story amusing, but also as a way to introduce the fact that we are featuring Jim Tressel's first game against Michigan in this issue of BSB as part of our 40th Anniversary Football season. As I mentioned in the last issue, it is one of two featured games from the week of Nov. 21-27, the other being Earle Bruce's last Michigan game in 1987, which was recapped in the previous issue of BSB.

As I looked into that 2001 Buckeye victory in Ann Arbor, it was obviously significant because Tressel won his first installment of The Game, after Cooper failed to beat the Wolverines until his seventh attempt.

But I couldn't help but wonder if the 2001 game would be such a significant edition of the storied rivalry if Tressel hadn't made the pledge, upon his hiring, that "you will be proud of our young people in the classroom, in the community and, most especially, in 310 days in Ann Arbor, Mich., on the football field."

That pledge is what really makes the game stand out to me, long after I had forgotten many of the details. I'm sure many of you are the same.

One of the details that I had forgotten is that the 26-20 Buckeye victory was Craig Krenzel's first start as Buckeye quarterback, taking over for Steve Bellisari, who had been suspended for a DUI offense. I had also forgotten that Mike Doss had two interceptions in the game, each of which he returned inside the Michigan 10.

I have long maintained that beating Michigan in Ann Arbor in 2001 was the first step toward winning the national championship in 2002. It taught the Buckeyes that they could

win on the big stage. And Krenzel and Doss would prove to be two of the major contributors in that championship run.

In fact, I have also long maintained that Doss electing to come back for his senior season was the second step toward that unforeseen national championship.

While we were just getting acquainted with Tressel and his coaching style in that first season, there were hints of what was to come during his tenure, within that Michigan game and in his comments afterward.

The Buckeyes had jumped out to an improbable 23-0 lead at the half and led 23-7 after three quarters before the Wolverines mounted a comeback. That rally was fueled by a block of an Andy Groom punt that put Michigan in business at the OSU 9 with 10:52 to play. The Wolverines quickly cashed in to make it 23-13. Michigan would get as close as the final score of 26-20 at the 2:26 mark before Ohio State ran all but the final nine seconds off the clock.

After the game, Tressel stated what we would learn was his philosophy.

"The defense came up with great field position for us," Tressel said. "Our kicking game, with the exception of the one mistake, gave us good field position."

The "one mistake," of course, was the blocked punt and, as we all know now, "The punt is the most important play in football."

Noted Krenzel – who threw just 18 passes, completing 11 for 118 yards – of the Buckeye defense, "They got some turnovers and gave us good field position. They made it easier on us."

"We thought we could run the football," Tressel said. "We weren't going to pile up hundreds and hundreds of yards, but we thought we would be able to effectively run it."

Jonathan Wells ran for 129 yards and three touchdowns on 25 carries before leaving the game with leg cramps in the third quarter against a U-M defense that had been allowing a Big Ten-best 83.5 yards rushing per game.

Run the football, win the turnover battle, win the field-position battle, play defense, win the punting battle!

We were watching "Tressel Ball" evolve before our very eyes.

That win would start the magnificent run against Michigan that the Buckeyes will try to extend on Dec. 12.

### Michigan Memories

I admit it. I love BSB's Michigan Memories. I have for the nearly 30 years that they have been a Buckeye Sports Bulletin staple, and this year is no different.

Going back to the blowhard at the restaurant who couldn't remember John Cooper's name but knew his record against Michigan, it has been a mantra for Buckeye fans that Coop, who came to Columbus from Arizona State, "didn't get it" when it came to The Game.

Keep in mind that Cooper already had a win over the Wolverines of his own, having earned it in the Rose Bowl after the 1986 season. And let's face it. He ultimately "got it."

But it is interesting to hear former Buckeyes who were there talk about that transition from the Woody/Earle era to Cooper in this issue.

"I'm a very honest person, so I'm going to be honest," said Mike McCray, who played under both Bruce and Cooper. "The atmosphere was different because I think Earle Bruce had a different history of Ohio State-Michigan than

Coach Cooper did. That year (1988, Cooper's first), we had a losing season. I still don't think Coop understood the magnitude of that game at that time the way Earle did.

"And Coach (Bruce) had so much background with that game, being an assistant coach, he might have been a GA. I think he played at Ohio State. He just understood the rivalry better because he had more history of being a part of that rivalry. I don't think that John Cooper had that history yet of how important that game was."

John Kacherski, who came to the Buckeyes from back east, offered up a more tangible theory about the culture under Cooper and why the Buckeyes struggled against their rival during the Hall of Fame coach's tenure.

"Coach Cooper was a fine football coach, and his record speaks for itself," Kacherski explained. "But it was a tough spot. If you peel back the onion and you think about it, there's no question that he didn't understand the rivalry just like I didn't when I came here. When you're from out of state and you are the head football coach here, it takes a little bit of time."

"To his credit, I think one thing he did right away was he upped the talent level here by going outside the state of Ohio and be able to recruit nationwide, which was a great thing. But now you're bringing in more kids from outside the state of Ohio that maybe wouldn't understand it as much."

"The Michigan game really shows the importance of the culture within the program, and it can expose it, too. So then Coach Tressel comes in and just hits the nail right on the head with his (310 days) speech, and you're off and running."

Kelvin Bell played his entire career for Bruce. But he was exposed to the legendary coach Woody Hayes, who helped amp up the rivalry with Michigan. His tale shows the influence Hayes had over Bruce and the program, even after he was fired.

It seems that Bruce banned gloves for the 1981 Michigan game because he had seen a defender wearing gloves drop a surefire interception.

"Woody Hayes was the guest speaker for 'The Game,'" Bell recounted. "And Woody said, 'I don't care what you guys got to do, make sure you got your gloves on, your pantyhose on, and you all go up there and kick their ass and don't let the weather affect you.'"

"And sure enough, the next day we get to the locker room and there are gloves everywhere. We were glad, we were happy. But that showed the influence of Woody Hayes."

Bell had his own close encounter with Woody his freshman year. He had apparently caught the old coach's attention before the Michigan game.

"He said, 'Where's that No. 4? I can't remember his name. I just know he's talented.' Then everybody started pointing at me," Bell recalled, "and I raised my hand like, 'What the hell is he gearing to say?' And he said, 'I saw you out there during the walk-through. You dropped an interception during the walk-through. You catch every pass. I don't care if it's a walk-through.'"

"And once Woody said something, (defensive coordinator Dennis) Fryzel said something, (defensive backs coach Nick) Saban said something, Earle said something. Man, I got called out by Woody."

Be sure to check out Bell's tale of Saban, now a legendary coach in his own right, after the Buckeyes' 14-9 victory.

Special thanks to all the Buckeyes who participated in this year's Michigan Memories.

# FOR ATHLETES

## HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

### 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 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.

## 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

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