

# Goals Remain Intact

*Buckeyes Devastated By Cancellation Of The Game,  
Excited By Opportunity To Play For Big Ten Title*

By ANDREW LIND  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Almost everything the Ohio State football program does is in preparation for the annual rivalry game against Michigan. The Buckeyes have a clock inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center that counts down the days, hours, minutes and seconds until their next meeting with the Wolverines and a period during every practice that focuses exclusively on the Maize and Blue.

So, to say the coaches and players were disappointed to learn on Dec. 8, just four days before The Game was scheduled to take place, that it was canceled due to a coronavirus outbreak within the Michigan program would be an understatement.

"I'm tired of giving this team bad news," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said during his weekly radio show on Dec. 10. "You just don't get that kind of news and move on. There's just been so much invested in that game throughout the entire year. All the time and every day, we honor this game."

At the same time, Day recognizes the Buckeyes cannot afford to dwell on the situation because two major goals – winning a Big Ten title and a national championship – are still in front of them.

"One of the things we've just had to learn to do is move on quickly," Day said. "It's easy to spend the time worrying about what's coming next or getting frustrated on what happened in the past, but the only thing you can do, especially in 2020, is just try to do the best you can and maximize each day. Early on, that was not easy for our team, but they've gotten a lot better at it and they've really transitioned well. It wasn't a bunch of guys with their heads down."

"They were frustrated, they were angry, but these kids have really become hardened, and the response that we had from our team was really pretty amazing. They were very devastated that we weren't playing in that game. We've been really looking forward to playing these guys. All of us. I certainly have for a while. We really wanted to play them in the worst way."

The cancellation of the Michigan game nearly eliminated Ohio State from contention for the Big Ten Championship Game, too, but the conference

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COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**A LOT TO PLAY FOR** – Running back Master Teague, left, and quarterback Justin Fields look to lead Ohio State to its fourth straight Big Ten title when the Buckeyes take on Northwestern on Dec. 19.

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## From The Message Board

***The Big Ten announced on Dec. 9 that it was doing away with the six-game requirement for eligibility in the conference championship game, which allows Ohio State to represent the East Division in Indianapolis. We asked the readers on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff members, how they felt about the Big Ten changing the rule this late in the season.***

***Here are some of the responses:***

"It was totally fair. Win or lose to Michigan (if it was played), it wouldn't have mattered. We had the head-to-head tiebreaker against Indiana."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I say it's fine. Let's play ball and get this year behind us."

– PeyoteBuck

"The Big Ten Conference has held throughout this whole process that the number of wins does not matter, only the number of losses. I originally wondered, theoretically, what would happen if some team was 4-0 and another was 7-1? That would have been more problematical, I think.

"Because Ohio State beat Indiana, they were going to be East Division champion no matter what the outcome of the Michigan game, so it makes perfect sense. One negative

is Ohio State having to play a team as flawed as Northwestern."

– Terrier Buck

"I think too much was made out of this. If the six-game rule was upheld, the Buckeyes still would have played in Big Ten Championship Week and might have played a more prestigious opponent than Northwestern. A big win and Ohio State would still have had about an equal shot of making the playoffs."

– Poster That Harley Built

"Would like to see a team that actually cares about the Big Ten title (Ohio State hasn't cared about the Big Ten since 2012) play for it, but I get it. Still have to feel for Indiana, which followed the rules that were set and had the rug pulled out from under it."

– Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 35 Years Ago – 1985

Two Buckeyes, junior defensive back Steve Hill and junior offensive guard Tom Glancey, were excited to return to their home state of Florida with the Buckeyes set to square off against BYU in the Florida Citrus Bowl on Dec. 28 in Orlando.

Hill, the son of a career Air Force officer, moved around a lot as a kid but called the Sunshine State home.

"I look at it as home," said Hill, who came to Ohio State from Fort Walton Beach, located in the Florida Panhandle. "My dad's going to retire there. I spent all of my high school and junior high days there. It's home."

For Glancey, Orlando wasn't quite his hometown of West Palm Beach, but it was still his first opportunity to return home since his arrival at Ohio State and a chance to play in front of loved ones.

"It will be nice," Glancey said. "It's the first game, since I've been here, that we've played that far south. So that should be nice, to have the folks come up and everything."

### 30 Years Ago – 1990

The Ohio State assistant coaching ranks were thinned by three when offensive coordinator Jim Colletto and running backs coach Bobby Turner left for Purdue and inside linebackers coach Gary Blackney was named head coach at Bowling Green.

Colletto, named the new coach at Purdue after Fred Akers resigned with one year left on his contract, started full time in West Lafayette Dec. 11.

Blackney, who had been at Ohio State since 1984 when he was hired as a defensive backs coach, took the head coaching job at Bowling Green Dec. 7, replacing the fired Moe Ankney.

A week after Colletto was hired, he offered the post of offensive coordinator and assistant head coach to Turner, who accepted it Dec. 12.

"It always hurts to lose coaches the caliber of Jim and Gary," said head coach John Cooper. "But there aren't many people that know offense like Jim. I've worked with him for six years, and I know he's going to make Purdue into a power. Gary's defenses have always been among the toughest in the nation, and Bowling Green has a fine tradition. It's good for both of them, and I think you'll see both schools being very successful real soon.

"However, I think Bobby is making a mistake leaving here. Frankly, I'm not sure the opportunities from Purdue would be as great as they would be if he stayed at Ohio State."

### 25 Years Ago – 1995

The attorney for Ohio State football players Mike Vrabel and Tom Hoying said the two maintained their complete innocence despite their early-morning arrests in connection with an ugly altercation outside a bar in Kent, Ohio, in early December.

Vrabel, a junior starting defensive end, and Hoying, a sophomore quarterback who backed up his brother Bobby, were arrested by Kent police behind Screwy Louie's bar at about 1:10

a.m. Reports say the two were pointed out by witnesses after returning to the scene where Timothy L. Fulton had been beaten in a parking lot melee.

Fulton, out celebrating his 21st birthday with friends, was treated and released from a nearby hospital but suffered cracked ribs, bruises, head and facial injuries and severe swelling around both eyes. His friends blamed the entire incident on Vrabel and Hoying, and both were charged with first-degree misdemeanor assault.

"They grabbed me and started beating me," Fulton explained, saying that the altercation sparked after he refused to kick out a car window as the Buckeye pair had asked him to do. "I can remember being hit from all angles. I can remember trying to protect myself and not being able to."

### 20 Years Ago – 2000

Cooper assured reporters his 20th-ranked Buckeyes were excited to play anyone in a Jan. 1 bowl game, even upstart South Carolina and head coach Lou Holtz in the Outback Bowl.

"It doesn't matter if you are playing South Carolina and Lou Holtz or Tennessee or LSU," Cooper said. "You're not going to play a bad team from the SEC in a Jan. 1 bowl game. I'm delighted. Speaking on behalf of myself, our coaching staff and our players, anytime you can play in a Jan. 1 bowl game in Tampa, Fla., that's pretty good.

"We've been there before, and it's a great bowl game. We're tickled to death to have an opportunity to compete in one of the best bowl games in the country."

### 15 Years Ago – 2005

Former Ohio State men's basketball coach Jim O'Brien's wrongful termination lawsuit got under way Dec. 12 in a Columbus courtroom, featuring testimony from O'Brien and former OSU athletic director Andy Geiger on the first day.

O'Brien testified that he lent money to former recruit Aleksandar Radojevic knowing that Radojevic had competed professionally and would never join the Buckeyes.

The university contended O'Brien knew he was violating NCAA rules by keeping the loan a secret for more than five years.

After coaching the Buckeyes for seven years, O'Brien was fired June 8, 2004, by Geiger, who claimed the coach was dismissed after acknowledging he had given \$6,700 to Radojevic in 1999.

### 10 Years Ago – 2010

Sugar Bowl executive director Paul Hoolahan credited Ohio State's national profile and BCS bowl experience for putting the Buckeyes over the top when his organization was looking for a team to face off with SEC representative Arkansas in the annual event Jan. 4 in New Orleans.

With three Big Ten teams finishing tied atop the conference standings and BCS rules prohibiting a conference from sending

more than two teams to a BCS bowl, everyone knew someone would be left out.

Wisconsin ended up earning the Big Ten's bid to the Rose Bowl by virtue of its No. 5 ranking in the final BCS rankings, one spot better than OSU and four ahead of Michigan State. Ultimately, the Sugar Bowl committee picked the Buckeyes over the Spartans.

### Five Years Ago – 2015

Urban Meyer wasted little time in replacing co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash as the university announced Dec. 11 that Greg Schiano was set to join the coaching staff.

Schiano was the head coach at Rutgers for 11 seasons, winning five bowl games, before coaching two years in the NFL with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. With Ash moving on to be the head coach at Rutgers following the Fiesta Bowl against Notre Dame, Schiano was set to coordinate the defense alongside Luke Fickell in 2016.

Schiano, who would also work with the Ohio State safeties and have the title of associate head coach, had last coached in 2013 when he led the Buccaneers to a 4-12 record.

"Greg Schiano is an excellent coach," head coach Urban Meyer said. "He is someone I have known for quite some time now and someone who is going to align with our staff extremely well. I think he will be outstanding as a coach and mentor in our program, and I am pleased to have him on our staff."

### One Year Ago – 2019

After just one year in Columbus as co-defensive coordinator, Jeff Hafley was set to depart from Ohio State for Boston College's open head-coaching job. Hafley was officially introduced as the head coach on Dec. 14.

"Well, it was more than just football," Hafley said when explaining why he accepted the job. "I grew up in north Jersey, and I've known about Boston College for my entire life. It's one of the teams you root for growing up as a family – the university, the values that I talked about. And then when I started to watch the tape, I saw a good team. This is not a rebuild. This is not something that is going to start from scratch. They've done a good job with good players, and it's our job to get it better, but that's one of the things that attracted me to this place."

Hafley, along with Greg Mattison, had been credited with a major turnaround for Ohio State on the defensive side of the ball in 2019. After struggles in 2018 saw the Buckeyes finish 50th in points allowed per game (25.5) and 71st in total yards allowed per game (403.4), Hafley shifted the Buckeyes primarily to a zone look in 2019.

That change paid off, with Ohio State checking in at third in points per game allowed (12.5) and second in yards per game allowed (247.6) heading into the College Football Playoff.



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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. 26 cover date) will be mailed on Dec. 22.

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# OSU-Michigan Just One More Victim Of 2020

To say I was surprised would not be an accurate description of my emotions immediately upon hearing this year's Ohio State-Michigan game had been canceled. After all, the calendar continues to read 2020 with anything and everything upside down from the way it should be.

Then Saturday came and I really didn't know how I should be feeling as I watched all the other Big Ten teams play while Ohio State and Michigan interrupted a rivalry that had renewed itself every year since 1918.

But then longtime OSU football historian Jack Park weighed in on social media and articulated what I think most of the rest of Buckeye Nation was feeling.

"This morning, I made a very nostalgic walk around Ohio Stadium where we all hoped this year's Ohio State-Michigan game would have been played," Park wrote. "It is really a vacant campus right now. I did not see another person around the stadium. ... If the game was on, I would have seen many of you on campus, at your tailgates and at the Sports Radio 97.1 The Fan remote broadcasting set-up."

If you have never had the pleasure of attending an Ohio State-Michigan game at Ohio Stadium, walking around the circumference of the old Horseshoe in late autumn with a chill in the air and electricity in the atmosphere, I'm truly sorry for you.

When it comes to Ohio State football, I'm about as jaded as they come. When you do anything on a regular basis for more than 40 years, it often devolves into a kind of drudgery. But I can assure you that all melts away on the final Saturday of the regular season when the Buckeyes and Wolverines face once another in a series that dates back to 1897.

Anyone who has ever had the slightest interest in the OSU-Michigan rivalry seems to have a tradition of his or her own that accompanies the annual game, everything from wearing a lucky pair of socks or mowing a Script Ohio into their back yard to my former co-worker who used to return to the BSB office each Friday before the game beating a snare drum and playing a kazoo to the tune of "Across the Field."

During various times through the years, I have been asked my favorite memory of the classic rivalry, and while there have been many, it's difficult to top the 14-9 victory the Buckeyes enjoyed in 2002, a game that continued an improbable journey toward the program's first national championship in 34 years.

As long as I live, I will never forget Will Smith recovering a Michigan fumble inside the final three minutes, and then Will Allen making the game-clinching interception on the final play followed by the surreal sight of quarterback Craig Krenzel being swept to the OSU locker room atop a sea of scarlet.

There were plenty of great moments in the rivalry before that, plenty more since, and lots more to come. But for sheer goose bump-inducing thrills, it's awfully tough to beat that one in 2002.

It's a shame none of us got to make new memories in 2020.

## Grace Vs. Not So Much

When the Big Ten decided to waive its rule regarding the six-game requirement to play in the conference championship game, players, coaches and administrators at Indiana had every right to feel they had been shafted. But to their credit, they took the high ground and accepted the decision with grace.

IU athletic director Scott Dolson issued a statement that read, "Although we understand the conference's decision, we are disappointed. From the start of the year, we have said we can only control what we can control. We had a chance to earn our spot in the Big Ten

Championship Game but ultimately fell a touch-down short on the road to a great Ohio State team."

On the other side of the spectrum are the self-serving complainers whose first inclination is to blame everyone but the person staring back at them from the mirror.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney, a fun-loving, good ol' boy when things are going his way and a gold-plated, championship whiner most of the rest of the time, twisted himself into a pretzel during a Dec. 10 appearance on satellite radio as he tried to make a pre-emptive argument for keeping Ohio State out of the four-team College Football Playoff.

"If I was on a committee, it would be hard for me to leave out a 10-1 Texas A&M or an 11-game Florida team over a team that's played six games," Swinney told SiriusXM radio host Rich Eisen. "That would be hard for me if I was on a committee, but I'm not on the committee, so it doesn't really matter."

"It doesn't mean (Ohio State isn't) a great team and couldn't win the whole thing. ... I just think, from a big-picture standpoint, I would lean toward rewarding the teams that have been all-in because it's been an incredible challenge."

My suggestion to ol' Dabo would be to stick to his own team's challenge – namely a Dec. 19 rematch with Notre Dame in the ACC Championship Game – and let the playoff take care of itself.

Two days after Swinney threw his predictable amount of shade toward Ohio State and the Big Ten, it was another coach's turn.

Florida head coach Dan Mullen was understandably not in the best of moods after his sixth-ranked team lost a 37-34 decision to LSU – a team No. 1 Alabama had throttled the week before by 38 points. The Gators lost mostly because cornerback Marco Wilson temporarily lost his mind by ripping off an opposing player's shoe and throwing it down the field, setting up LSU's game-winning field goal with 23 seconds remaining.

After the game, a flustered Mullen said, "I guess that's a penalty," and claimed he had "no idea what happened" before offering an opinion on his two-loss team's chances to make the College Football Playoff.

"I don't have a vote on that," he said. "I'm not in the room. I know we've played 10 games. So, I guess the best thing to do would have been to play less games because you seem to get rewarded for not playing college football this year."

Now in his third season in Gainesville, Mullen has restored the Florida program to prominence. He has won at least 10 games in each of his two previous seasons, and the Gators posted back-to-back finishes in the top 10 for the first time since 2008 and '09 when Urban Meyer was head coach.

But the aggrieved utterances of such successful coaches as Swinney and Mullen comes off as equal parts obstinate and petty. If either coach was really distasteful of the way Ohio State operates, perhaps teaching the Buckeyes a lesson with a home-and-home series during the regular season could help soothe their righteous indignation.

In case you wondered, neither Florida nor Clemson has ever appeared on Ohio State's regular-season schedule. Meanwhile, such Football Championship Subdivision opponents as The

Citadel, South Carolina State and Furman have combined over the years to make 99 appearances on Clemson's nonconference schedule. Florida's nonleague slate during just Mullen's first two seasons featured the likes of FCS stalwarts Charleston Southern, UT-Martin and Towson.

## Playoff Prediction

If you watched Northwestern run over – and I mean literally run over – a COVID-depleted Illinois defense on the way to a 28-10 victory, please do not worry about the Wildcats repeating in the Big Ten title game a performance that included 411 yards rushing, the first time they have cracked the 400-yard mark since 2003.

Northwestern entered the game against the Illini averaging just 130.5 yards on the ground, and it will find the sledding much rougher in the Big Ten title game against Ohio State. The Buckeyes are giving up an average of only 95.0 yards on the ground.

Obviously, the Wildcats will show up in Indianapolis and give it their level best. Head coach Pat Fitzgerald joked that his team will probably be 70-point underdogs, but the opening line was only 20½.

Therefore, armed with the knowledge that Northwestern has lost 32 of its last 33 meetings with Ohio State, and barring the kind of cataclysmic upset that apparently no longer befalls the Buckeyes with Ryan Day as head coach, OSU will go to the College Football Playoff and likely be the No. 3 seed in the four-team tournament.

That is predicated on Clemson defeating Notre Dame in its rematch with the Fighting Irish in the ACC title game and Alabama taking care of business against Florida in the SEC championship. If those outcomes each take place, Alabama will deservedly stay at No. 1 with Clemson moving up from No. 3 to No. 2. The Fighting Irish will drop behind the Buckeyes ostensibly because Notre Dame at No. 3 would set up a third match this season between Clemson and the Fighting Irish, and it is doubtful the selection committee has even the slightest appetite for that.

The top-ranked Crimson Tide can head to the friendly confines of the Sugar Bowl to take on fourth-seeded Notre Dame in one semifinal that will attract everyone's interest while OSU gets its shot at redemption for last year's narrow (and some would say referee-tainted) loss against Clemson.

Despite his protestations about nearly everything else, I find it difficult to believe Swinney could find it anything less than exhilarating to coach his team from the sideline at the Rose Bowl.

## And Finally

ESPN.com college football analysts Kyle Bonagura and Mark Schlabach have an unusual prediction for the Guaranteed Rate Bowl, the former Copper Bowl turned Insight.com Bowl turned Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl turned Cactus Bowl turned Cheez-It Bowl, to be played Dec. 26 at Chase Field in Phoenix.

Bonagura and Schlabach each have West Virginia in the game, but they differ on the Mountaineers' projected opponent – Penn State for Bonagura and Rutgers for Schlabach.

Raise your hand if you thought the Nittany Lions would get to the postseason after the first 0-5 start in program history. Likewise if you thought ever in your lifetime the Scarlet Knights would finish ahead of Michigan in the Big Ten East standings.

In the event the so-called "championship week" games don't count in the regular-season standings – and why should they when the Big Ten Championship Game does not? – Rutgers finished at 3-5 overall and 2-4 in the East, a full game ahead of the Wolverines, who were 2-4 overall and just 1-3 against division foes.





### Dabo Doesn't Think Buckeyes Belong In CFP

Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney drew significant attention on Dec. 11 thanks to comments that he made on "The Rich Eisen Show" when he was asked for his thoughts on the College Football Playoff, and specifically on if he believes his team – which has one loss on the season – should get a nod over an unbeaten Ohio State team if the playoff is forced to decide between the two.

"Obviously, that's a tough question to answer in my position because we feel like we're definitely one of the best four teams in the country and there's nothing that's going to happen in that game next week for Clemson or Notre Dame that's going to change that in my opinion," Swinney said. "And that's based on data. It's almost like you've got to have 120 hours to get a business degree and yet these people over here only need 60 hours to get a business degree."

The number of games played by the ACC, Big 12 and SEC served as a major

tenet of Swinney's argument against the Buckeyes, which will finish the season with just six games played.

"I think anytime you step in between the lines, the game of football, there's a lot that can happen – a lot," Swinney said. "I mean, heck, in 2017, we lost to a three-win or four-win Syracuse team and still went to the playoffs. So anything can happen. Guys can get hurt. There's a lot. So I think the fact that we're going to have 11 games as well as the SEC teams – I mean, you look at Florida and Texas A&M and Alabama. I mean, these teams are going to have 11 games this year. It's incredible."

"And I think the Big Ten had the same opportunity and they chose not to play, and I think the only reason they ended up playing is because of the leadership of the SEC and the ACC and the Big 12, and having demonstrated that we can do it and do it in a safe way. So it's been an unbelievably challenging season, that's for sure, but I think that the committee's going to have some tough, tough, tough questions to answer and things like that, regardless of what they do."

He also went on to mention that regardless of the result in the ACC championship game between Clemson and Notre Dame, scheduled for Dec. 19, he believes both teams should have a spot in the final four.

"Obviously, as coaches, we don't control any of that stuff," Swinney said. "So I do think that our team has played incredibly well. We had a double-overtime loss at the No. 2 team in the country now in Notre Dame, who's a great team and an unbelievable game. Again, no matter what happens for Notre Dame or Clemson, nothing changes in my mind, as far as both of these teams being in the top four."

Swinney's shots toward Columbus expanded in scope after he was asked if he feels that two other one-loss teams with more games played than the Buckeyes –

### Are You Having Mail Delivery Issues With Your BSB?

Many Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers have experienced delays in the delivery of their BSB in recent weeks. BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz wants to assure all readers that the paper is printed and mailed at the same time each week and that he is present to oversee the process.

"We have been told that there is a large backlog of mail at the Columbus processing center," Moskowitz said, noting things could get worse in the days leading up until Christmas. "We understand how frustrating it is for our readers. We thank you for your patience and understanding in these unique times."

Moskowitz reminds readers that each issue of BSB is posted in its entirety at the BuckeyeSports.com website on Tuesdays, before the paper is even in the mail.

"While this is not the same as holding BSB in your hands, it allows you to read the latest news while waiting for your paper to arrive," he said.

With football's early recruiting signing period starting on Dec. 16, readers are going to want to check in on BuckeyeSports.com regularly.

The BSB staff provides electronic recruiting coverage, along with 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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Florida and Texas A&M (Florida has since lost to LSU) – would also be more deserving of a spot in his mind.

"I wouldn't have an issue with it because, again, it's not my position to have an issue with it," Swinney explained. "My position is to coach my team, regardless of whoever. I just think there has to be some type of standard. If I was on the committee, it would be hard for me to leave out a 10-1 Texas A&M or an 11-game Florida team over a team that's played six games. That

would be hard for me if I was on a committee, but I'm not on the committee. So it doesn't really matter.

"It doesn't mean they're not a great team and couldn't win the whole thing. I just think that there has to be – I just think, from a big-picture standpoint, I would lean toward rewarding the teams that have been all in because it's been an incredible challenge."

Swinney's barbs caught the attention of Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, who was asked for a response during FOX's "Big Noon Kickoff" pregame show on Dec. 12, though he didn't directly address the man making the original comments.

"Everybody has their opinion," Day said. "But we just focus on playing one game at a time."

He went on to compliment the resolve and effort of his team under the strange circumstances of this season.

"We have a very, very talented team," Day said. "This team's done everything we've asked them to do right from the get-go. They've been through a lot of stuff. They've been through a point where they canceled the season on them, and they fought to get it back. They've had games canceled, rivalry games canceled, but they just keep coming back and they keep getting stronger. I think you saw the team last week, what we're capable of. We're still not really clean yet, but we're very, very talented. We have a lot of opportunity moving forward to show America how good we are."

"All we really wanted was an opportunity to go play for the championship and show everybody what we're made of. I know this team's hungry."

While the Clemson head coach doesn't think that the Buckeyes should be invited to the playoff, another familiar foe for Ohio State spoke out in support of OSU's play-off bid. Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel told media that he feels Ohio State has as strong a case as any team for a playoff spot.

"I don't believe that anybody – Ohio State, or any other team – should just be punished because of decisions we made by looking at eight games and saying we

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## 2020 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2020 Record
Oct. 24	NEBRASKA	W, 52-17	FOX	2-5
Oct. 31	at Penn State*	W, 38-25	ABC	3-5
Nov. 7	RUTGERS	W, 49-27	BTN	3-5
Nov. 14	at Maryland	Canceled	N/A	2-3
Nov. 21	INDIANA*	W, 42-35	FOX	6-1
Nov. 28	at Illinois*	Canceled	N/A	2-5
Dec. 5	at Michigan State*	W, 52-12	ABC	2-5
Dec. 12	MICHIGAN*	Canceled	FOX	2-4
Dec. 19	NORTHWESTERN**	12 p.m.	FOX	6-1

\* 2019 bowl team

\*\* Big Ten Championship at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)

should play six ... because of what happens to our team affects them,” Manuel said on Dec. 8. He also spoke in favor of removing the six-game minimum requirement to qualify for the Big Ten championship, a move that the conference officially took the next day.

“I just want to make it clear: I think Ohio State is one of the top four teams in the country,” Manuel said.

### OSU A Heavy Favorite Against Northwestern

When Ohio State takes the field against Northwestern on Dec. 19, it will do so as a heavy favorite in the betting markets. When the game was officially set on Dec. 9, sports books opened with Ohio State favored by 20½ points. That number saw slight movement in the days since and sat at 21 as BSB went to print.

While the Buckeyes are expected to win and win comfortably when they take on the Wildcats, Day was quick to compliment Ohio State’s upcoming opponent when asked about them during his appearance on Dec. 12.

“They’re very well-coached,” Day said.

“(Head coach Pat Fitzgerald) has always done a great job of that. On defense, they really know their defense. The defensive coordinator and Fitz have been there for so long, they know how you’re trying to attack them and they don’t give up a lot of big plays. It’s very hard to run the ball on them, and they keep it all in front of them. They force you to work down the field. On offense, I think Peyton Ramsey’s given them a shot in the arm. They’ve controlled the football, they’re smart and they really don’t turn the ball over. So when you do that, you’ve got to really be on your game. They’re not going to give you anything. You have to earn anything you have. So it’s going to be a challenge that way.”

Ohio State is 3-2 against the spread this season, while Northwestern is 5-1-1. The two teams last squared off in 2019, a 52-3 victory for the Buckeyes in Evanston.

### Ohio State Still No. 3/4 In Polls

Ohio State saw no movement in either of the two major polls for yet another week after its Dec. 12 game against Michigan was canceled.

## BSB Podcast Enhances Online Coverage

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

The Buckeye Sports Bulletin podcast covers Ohio State from all angles, with input from beat writers who cover everything from football and recruiting to men’s volleyball and women’s hockey, and everything in-between.

With BSB’s deep Rolodex of former Buckeye players, coaches and college sports analysts around the country, as well as in-house experts Joe Dempsey and Andrew Lind, the BSB podcast has you covered on all things Buckeye, all the time. Staffers Patrick Mayhorn and Wyatt Crosher host with a constantly rotating guest list to get insight and analysis on the latest in Ohio State news.

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

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

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

In the coaches poll, the Buckeyes remained behind Alabama, Notre Dame and Clemson but ahead of Texas A&M, Cincinnati, Indiana, Iowa State, Georgia and Oklahoma to round out the top 10.

Florida dropped from No. 5 to 11 and Miami fell from No. 8 to 19. The Buckeyes and Hoosiers were joined as Big Ten representatives by No. 14 Northwestern and No. 17 Iowa. Wisconsin fell out of the top 25 and received eight votes.

In the AP poll, Ohio State stayed at No. 3 behind Alabama and Notre Dame but

ahead of Clemson, Texas A&M, Cincinnati, Indiana, Iowa State, Coastal Carolina and Georgia. No. 15 Northwestern and No. 18 Iowa round out the Big Ten teams.

### OSU Stays No. 4 In CFP Rankings

Following a 52-12 victory on the road against Michigan State on Dec. 5, Ohio State continued to prove itself worthy of a spot in the top four, at least according

Continued On Page 6

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Continued From Page 5

to the College Football Playoff committee, which kept the Buckeyes at No. 4 for the third straight week on Dec. 8.

Ohio State trailed Alabama, Notre Dame and Clemson, which stayed at Nos. 1, 2 and 3, respectively, keeping the top four the same as it has been for three consecutive weeks. Also staying put were the pair of one-loss SEC teams, Texas A&M and Florida at No. 5 and No. 6.

Elsewhere in the Big Ten, there were still four teams from the conference within the top 25, with Indiana (No. 12), Northwestern (No. 14) and Iowa (No. 16) all checking in. Wisconsin dropped out after its 14-6 loss to the Hoosiers.

With just five games under its belt and only one more on the schedule, Ohio State has found itself at the forefront of much of the controversy surrounding the playoff, which playoff committee chair Gary Barta mentioned for the second time in as many weeks on the rankings unveiling show.

"We've talked about it from day one that that number of games was going to be critical," Barta said. "It was important for the committee to see Ohio State play again, and the more we can see Ohio State play, the better, because they've played five games."

"We resist looking ahead. We've seen Ohio State play five games. Based on that performance, we put them in the fourth spot, and we'll just wait and see."

The performance that he mentioned – a shorthanded 52-12 victory over Michigan State – caught the eyes of the playoff committee.

"The fact that three of them were offensive linemen, that certainly got our attention," Barta said. "So did watching Justin Fields do what he did, just really took command of the offense. It was important to see another game from Ohio State because they were at four games, now they're at five, but the 52-12 win against Michigan State was impressive."

### Hartline Nominated For Broyles Award

Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was named a nominee for the Broyles Award, which is given each year to the top assistant coach in college football.

Hartline was one of 56 nominees and one of seven from the Big Ten, after coaching two of the top receivers in the country in junior Chris Olave and sophomore Garrett Wilson.

It was a big week for Hartline off the field as well. He landed his fifth five-star wide receiver commitment since taking over the position in 2018, earning a pledge from Steilacoom, Wash., five-star Emeka Egbuka on Dec. 11 (for more information on this commitment, see Recruiting Outlook on pages 17-21).

Ohio State has had two assistants win the award – defensive coordinator Jim Heacock in 2007 and offensive coordinator Tom Herman in 2014.

### Davis, Fields, Wade Draw Award Nods

Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields, offensive guard Wyatt Davis and cornerback Shaun Wade were all included as award semifinalists among their respective position groups.

Fields received two nominations, one for the Davey O'Brien award, which is given to the nation's top quarterback, and one for the Maxwell, given to the nation's best player. This is his second straight season on both lists, and he was a finalist for the former in 2019. His 78.1 completion percentage, 1,407 passing yards and 15 touchdowns with just three interceptions have him in strong competition for both titles, along with 16 other

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Now is the time for loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers to show their support through our VIP subscription program as we all work through the coronavirus crisis.

As most of you know, the newspaper business these days is challenging in the best of times. BSB is now facing more challenges with recent events that have slowed the economy.

"We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now and what we have done the previous 39 years."

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

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With the \$50 Brutus VIP upgrade, Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers will have their names and cities listed in two different issues annually as supporters of BSB.

Those who add \$100 to their subscriptions will have their names and cities listed in all 24 issues each year as BSB Scarlet patrons. Those who donate \$125 or more will be designated as Elite patrons in each issue.

To upgrade your existing subscription to VIP status, with all the benefits that come with that designation, go to [buckeyesports.com/vip-memberships](http://buckeyesports.com/vip-memberships) to pay by credit card, or call us at (614) 486-2202 during regular business hours. If readers have questions on this program, they can call the same number.

The following are our Elite Wachsman, Elite and Scarlet VIP subscribers. Brutus level VIPs will have their names listed at a later date.

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semifinalists for the Davey O'Brien and 17 for the Maxwell.

He would be the second Buckeye quarterback to win the O'Brien, joining Troy Smith (2006). He would be the fifth to win the Maxwell, following Howard Cassady (1955), Bob Ferguson (1961), Archie Griffin (1975) and Eddie George (1995).

Davis was included as one of six semifinalists for the Outland trophy, given to the best lineman, along with Alabama center Landon Dickerson, Notre Dame offensive tackle Liam Eichenberg, Texas A&M guard Kenyon Green, Alabama offensive tackle Alex Leatherwood and Iowa defensive tackle Daviyon Nixon.

If selected, Davis would be the fifth Buckeye to win the award, joining Jim Parker (1956), Jim Stillwagon (1970), John Hicks (1973) and Orlando Pace (1996).

Wade was picked as a semifinalist for the Jim Thorpe award, given to the best defensive back in the nation, following in the footsteps of Jeff Okudah who finished as a finalist for the same award in 2019. He's one of 12 semifinalists and would be the third Buckeye to win the award, following Antoine Winfield (1998) and Malcolm Jenkins (2008).

Wade was also included as a semifinalist for the LOTT Impact Trophy, which gives "weight to personal character as well as athletic performance from a defensive college player" when selecting a winner. Safety Jordan Fuller was a contender for the LOTT Impact Trophy in 2019.

### Ohio State Names 20 MSU Champions

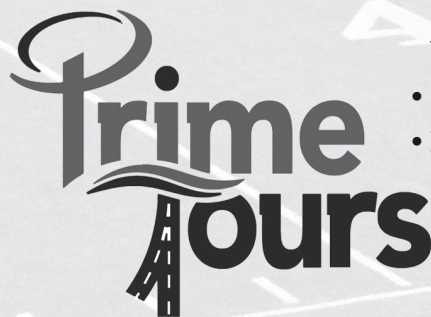
After its victory over Michigan State,

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Ohio State named 20 players to its weekly list of champions. Fields led the way for the offense as the offensive player of the game, joined as a champion by halfback Trey Sermon, tight ends Luke Farrell and Jeremy Ruckert, Davis, tackles Dawand Jones and Max Wray, and guard Matthew Jones.

On the other side of the ball, Wade and Haskell Garrett claimed player of the game honors along with the champion title, alongside linemen Tommy Togiai, Tyreke Smith, Javontae Jean-Baptiste, Zach Harrison and Jonathon Cooper; defensive backs Marcus Hooker and Seyvn Banks; and linebackers Justin Hilliard, Pete Werner and Baron Browning.

Drue Chrisman was named the special teams player of the week. Both he and Fields were recognized for their play on a conference level as well, as they were named the Big Ten special teams and offensive players of the week, respectively.

### Meyer Not Interested In Texas Job

Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer will not be returning to the sidelines donning the burnt orange in 2021. After weeks of rumors and speculation that the former Buckeye coach was interested in taking over for Herman at Texas, reports broke on Dec. 6 that Meyer's flirtation with the Longhorns was over and that he would not be accepting the job. Chip Brown of Horns247 had the news first.

"The possibility of three-time national championship coach Urban Meyer ending up at Texas appears to have come to an end after Meyer indicated to Texas he's leaning toward not coaching again due to

health reasons, a university source told Horns247," Brown wrote.

It's been two years since Meyer last patrolled the sidelines, following his retirement from Ohio State at the conclusion of the 2018 season. He cited those same health issues then that are rumored to have kept him away from Austin now. He's served as an analyst for FOX in each of the last two seasons and is expected to remain in that role for the 2021 season.

A week after the reports that Meyer would not be accepting the job, Texas announced officially that it would be bringing Herman back for his fifth season as the Longhorns head coach.

"There's been a lot of speculation about the future of our football coach," UT athletic director Chris Del Conte said in a statement. "My policy is to wait until the end of the season before evaluating and commenting on our program and coaches. With the end of the regular season, I want to reiterate that Tom Herman is our coach.

"When I look at our football program right now, I see tremendous young men and promising talent. Our student-athletes are developing, and they play their hearts out. This has been an unprecedented year for all of us, and we're all disappointed that we didn't meet our expectations. Like the many fans that follow and support our program, I can't help but think what could have been in 2020.

"There's still more work to be done, but I'm excited to watch our players and program move forward."

### Tony Curcillo Dead At 89

Former Ohio State football player Tony

Curcillo – Woody Hayes' first quarterback – passed away on Dec. 8 in Murrieta, Calif., where he lived. Ohio State announced the loss on Dec. 11. He was 89.

"Our father would be honored to be remembered for his love of Ohio State University," son David Curcillo said in an Ohio State release, "and for the privilege he had of being the first quarterback for Woody Hayes. He was also very proud of the fact that he was probably the oldest, for a while, of all the Ohio State quarterbacks."

Curcillo served as the starting quarterback for the Buckeyes in 1951, Hayes' first season at the helm. Playing from 1950-52, Curcillo's standout performance came against Iowa in 1951 when he set the program record with six total touchdowns. He threw for 292 yards and four touchdowns on 10-of-14 passing, adding two scores as a runner.

His record of six total touchdowns for Ohio State was equaled by Kenny Guiton against California in 2013. J.T. Barrett would break the record in 2016 against Bowling Green with seven scores.

While at Ohio State, Curcillo played in the Buckeye backfield with 1950 Heisman Trophy winner Vic Janowicz, who also had been his teammate at Elyria (Ohio) High School. After starting as the signal caller for the Scarlet and Gray from 1950-51, Curcillo moved to fullback for the 1952 season and earned first-team All-Big Ten honors.

Curcillo went on to be chosen in the sixth round of the 1953 NFL draft by the Chicago Cardinals. He eventually played for the CFL's Hamilton Tiger-Cats, whom he helped win the 1957 Grey Cup.

### News From Around The NFL

Former Ohio State cornerback Jeff Okudah will undergo surgery on his injured groin on Dec. 15, ending his rookie season with the Detroit Lions.

The No. 3 overall pick in April's NFL draft, Okudah started six games for the Lions and played in nine total. He recorded 43 tackles, two pass breakups and one interception, which came in a Week 3 win over the Arizona Cardinals.

Okudah missed three games this season prior to this due to hamstring and shoulder injuries. Although he's fully recovered from both, he elected to have surgery now on the nagging groin injury that has bothered him since he was playing for the Buckeyes in order to be ready for the 2021 season.

Former kicker Mike Nugent made an appearance in the NFL for the 15th straight season, this time with the Cardinals after their normal starting kicker, Zane Gonzalez, was ruled out with a back injury for the Dec. 13 game against the New York Giants. He connected on all four of his field-goal attempts and both of his PATs in a 26-7 win.

This is the second time in his NFL career that he's kicking for the Cardinals. The first time was in 2009, when he hit both field-goal attempts and all eight extra-point attempts in two appearances.

For his career, Nugent has hit 258 of his 319 attempts (80.9 percent) with a long of 55 yards and has played for eight different NFL teams, most recently with the New England Patriots in 2019. Nugent was drafted No. 47 overall in the 2005 NFL draft by the New York Jets.

His 356 points from 2001-04 are still a record for the most in Ohio State history.

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# Buckeyes Will Be Aided By Return Of Key Players

Continued From Page 1

officially removed the six-game minimum requirement on Dec. 9, clearing the way for the Buckeyes to represent the East Division despite playing just five regular-season games.

The decision, according to the conference, was based on the fact that Ohio State would have won the division due to a head-to-head win over Indiana on Nov. 21, no matter the result against Michigan on Dec. 12. Now, the Buckeyes will play Northwestern at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis with a chance to win their fourth straight Big Ten title.

"It was good to be able to give (the team) some good news," Day said. "They were very, very excited about that. It was a deep sigh of relief knowing that we have an opportunity to play in the Big Ten Championship Game. We get an opportunity to go for No. 4 here, which is really great. And we're fired up about it."

"It's just been a strange year. We've only played five games. We knew it was going to be strange. We didn't know how this would shake out, but the fact that we're in this game and in Indy, that's a goal accomplished."

The Wildcats are now the last hurdle on the road back to the College Football Playoff, and the Buckeyes quickly shifted their focus to their next opponent following the Big Ten's announcement on Dec. 9. They practiced that afternoon, conducted a mock game on Dec. 11 and then held another practice and a socially distanced victory dinner on



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**GUESS WHO'S BACK? – After missing Ohio State's win over Michigan State, linebacker Tuf Borland was among the handful of players who returned to practice on Dec. 9.**

the indoor practice field with Northwestern's game against Illinois on the big screen on

Dec. 12.

"(The players have) become used to this flexibility and things changing, and it's been good to see the maturity of this team," Day said. "I really feel in my heart that this is going to pay off somewhere down the line for us."

Ohio State is on track to get many of the players and coaches who tested positive for COVID-19 or were ruled out due to contact tracing and missed the Dec. 5 win at Michigan State back for the Big Ten Championship Game. That includes Day, who returned to practice on Dec. 7, as well as fifth-year senior linebacker Tuf Borland, junior safety Josh Proctor, quarterbacks

coach Corey Dennis, co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison and safeties/special teams coach Matt Barnes, who could be seen in photos shared by the football program's social media accounts on Dec. 9.

Other players who tested positive prior to the cancellation of Ohio State's Nov. 28 game against Illinois should be able to return to action in the coming week, provided they pass a heart test to remove any possibility of the heart ailment myocarditis.

Still, the Buckeyes – who played without 17 scholarship players against the Spartans – must remain diligent in an effort to avoid another outbreak heading into the championship game, especially since they've already

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## COVER STORY

had three games canceled this season, twice through no fault of their own.

"We're in a pretty good place right now with that, but it's day-to-day," Day said. "The good news is, the guys that were affected with it the last week or so are starting to get back into the rhythm, we're getting them back into practice and they should be ready to roll for the game. But at the same time, everyone else has to be really on top of their game and really being careful."

### Resetting The Clock

The aforementioned count-down clock that sits in a heavily trafficked area inside the WHAC had ticked all the way down to three days, 22 hours and some-odd minutes when it was announced The Game had been canceled.

Upon hearing the news, the first thing Ohio State strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti did was reset the clock to 353 days and counting – signaling the

number of days until the Buckeyes' Nov. 27, 2021, game at Michigan.

"I grabbed one of our operations guys and I said, 'Go change it, now,'" Marotti said during an appearance on Day's radio show on Dec. 10. "By the time the team got out of the locker room and walked down the hallway, they were going to see that number again."



Mickey Marotti

Marotti enjoyed seeing the players' reaction to the reset, especially as some remembered they have to do the same number of crunches, sit-ups or pushups that match the number of days until The Game.

"It might have brought some fear into some guys, like, 'Oh my goodness, we've got 300 and whatever days,'" Marotti said. "It's funny. Guys that are trying to decide whether they should come back to school, maybe I helped them a little bit like, 'I think I'm going to head on to the NFL. There are too many days there.'"

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The screenshot shows the Buckeye Sports Bulletin website. The top navigation bar includes links for HOME, FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL, SPORTS, FORUM, BSB ONLINE, EAT & STAY, and a LOGIN button. The main content area features several articles with images and headlines. The first article is about former Ohio State kicker Mike Nugent being activated from the practice squad to play for the Arizona Cardinals. The second article is about former Ohio State cornerback Jeff Okudah undergoing season-ending surgery. The third article is a scouting report on 2021 five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka. The fourth article is about 2021 Washington five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka committing to Ohio State. Each article has a 'READ MORE' button.

**Buckeye Sports Bulletin has expanded its online presence to a full-service website to complement the 24 annual print editions. Access to BuckeyeSports.com is free to all print subscribers and includes numerous great features like:**

- Daily features, analysis and breaking news stories
- A fan forum where readers can interact with the BSB staff and other subscribers while catching up on the latest Buckeye news
- Rosters, scholarship charts, schedules and commit lists for the football team to keep up to date with the Buckeyes
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The advertisement for Cucos Taqueria features a collage of images showing various Mexican dishes, including tacos, burritos, and a bowl of soup. The text "Cucos Taqueria" is prominently displayed at the top in a stylized font. Below the images, the text "The Great Taste of Mexico" is written in a cursive font, followed by "only at Cucos Taqueria". A circular badge on the right side of the ad says "Order Online Pick-up & Delivery Drinks-to-Go". At the bottom, the text "HAPPY HOUR MONDAY - FRIDAY 4-7PM" is displayed in large, bold letters. The address "2162 W. HENDERSON RD. COLUMBUS, OH 43220" and the phone number "(614) 538-8701" are listed at the very bottom, along with the website "CUCOSTAQUERIA.COM".



# Readers Share Favorite Memories From The Game

*With no Ohio State-Michigan game this year, Buckeye Sports Bulletin publisher Frank Moskowitz asked BSB readers to share their favorite editions of The Game. Here are some of the responses:*

In 2007 at Ann Arbor, I was there and you heard O-H-I-O around the stadium! It was audible, and Beanie Wells had a great game in the drizzle. Went with my friend Gordon, it was fab.

Second was 2005 with Troy Smith to Anthony Gonzalez, and Stan White Jr. crushes a linebacker as Antonio Pittman scores the winning TD.

Electric in both cases.

The 2016 game in the 'Shoe was epic too.

**Rick Benjamin**  
via email

I am that most unusual of Ohio State fans. Though my Buckeye allegiance was established for life as I grew up in Toledo during the Ten-Year War, I went on to get a medical degree from the University of Michigan and stayed on as a faculty member in the Medical School. It hasn't always been easy being a Buckeye fan working at U of M, especially since my early years here corresponded to the 2-10-1 era.

In 2001, a patient of mine who was a professor at U of M and a long-term season ticket holder generously decided he wanted to give his tickets to me and my son, Derek, so that we could experience The Game at Michigan Stadium for the very first time. We were thrilled, though the Buckeyes were big underdogs in Jim Tressel's first year and we certainly didn't expect a victory. His tickets were great – on the 40-yard-line – but naturally, they were right in the middle of a section of die-hard Wolverines. Derek was only 9 at the time and I was worried about the possibility that he might get heckled by some of the Michigan fans around us.

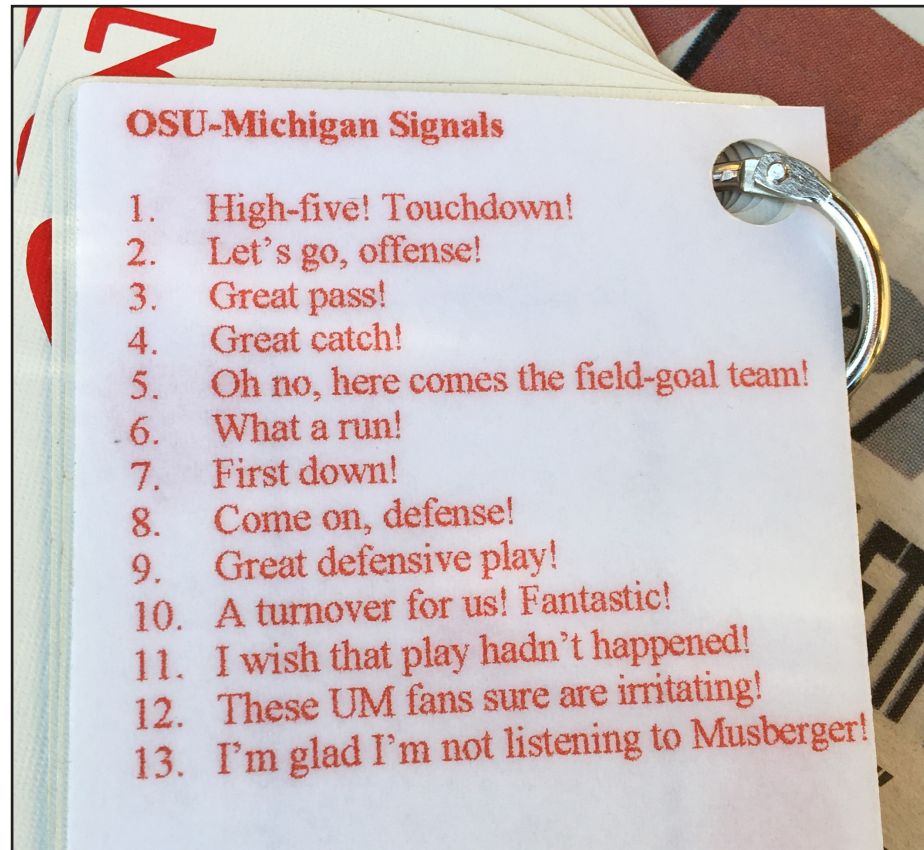
So I decided we should go undercover, two camouflaged Buckeyes on a secret mission behind enemy lines. Of course, we needed to have some way of communicating with each other about the game without blowing our cover. So I took the two red suits from a deck of playing cards, one for each of us, and assigned a particular meaning to each card, aces through kings (see photo). We took great pleasure in secretly flashing these cards at each other throughout the game, especially since there was so much to celebrate and the Buckeyes held on in the second half to win their first game in Ann Arbor since 1987.

As we were about to get up to leave, elated and congratulating ourselves on the success of our covert mission, a man decked head to toe in Michigan gear came over, tapped each of us on the shoulder and said with a slight smile: "Congratulations. Your team played very well today."

**Paul L. Fine, MD**  
Associate Professor of Internal Medicine  
University of Michigan Medical School

I grew up in the late '80s and '90s, so needless to say I've experienced the darker days of the rivalry. The last 20 years have done wonders to heal those wounds, but the scars of 2-10-1 still haunt my nerves every year during Michigan week. Every victory is as much relief as exultation. And no matter how many times in a row the good guys have come out on top, I'm still worried about when the streak will end.

The 2016 game is one of my favorites because it's a game where the Buckeyes were outplayed by the Wolverines for most of the game and yet still found a way to win. It was a tense game from the opening kickoff until the final whistle, as both teams were highly ranked



and had national title hopes on the line. J.T. Barrett and the offense could do nothing for 3½ quarters, and it was fantastic plays by Malik Hooker, Jerome Baker, Raekwon McMillan and the rest of the defense that kept the Buckeyes in the game.

To his credit Barrett led scoring drives when they were needed the most late in the game. I'll never forget Tyler Durbin missing an easy field goal midway through the fourth quarter then getting a chance and successfully redeeming himself on the next-to-last play of regulation to tie the game up. The Curtis Samuel 9-yard gain on third-and-10 in the second overtime may have been one of the best individual plays I've ever seen but is mostly forgotten because of the legendary/controversial fourth-and-1 play that followed. I never questioned that Barrett got the first down, despite Jim Harbaugh's objections. When Samuel crossed the goal line on the next play to win the game, it set off a huge celebration at our family watch party, with much shouting and jumping for joy. I remember seeing Urban Meyer collapse to the ground in relief and exhaustion and knowing exactly how he felt. The twists and turns were like taking a ride on an endless emotional roller coaster.

This game is right up there for me as one of the greatest victories in the rivalry because I had already accepted that we had been outplayed and were probably going to lose that game, but somehow the Buckeyes snatched victory from the jaws of defeat that day. The feelings of impending defeat made the win that much sweeter. Every year since then I have a moment during Michigan week where I think back to the 2016 game and shake my head, still soaking it in.

**Nathan Herr**  
Bowling Green

All the ones we won.

**Kurt Klass**  
via email

The 1972 game was a wonderful defensive battle that OSU won 14-11, with two Buckeye goal-line stands for the history books! I was a senior student in the stands and will always remember that U-M ran 12 plays from inside

the Buckeyes' 5-yard line, seven of which were from the 1-yard line. U-M came into the game undefeated and only needed a tie to win the Big Ten and go to the Rose Bowl. OSU's only blemish was a 19-12 loss at Michigan State.

On both of our successful goal-line stands, Bo had rejected a tying field-goal attempt from the 1-yard line that would have clinched a Big Ten title and trip to the Rose Bowl. I cannot remember a louder Ohio Stadium as the Buckeyes stopped each of those goal-line plays. With a few seconds left in the game, fans poured onto the field and began to prematurely tear down the goal posts!

**Dan LaVille**  
Grand Rapids, State Up North

I formerly owned a jewelry and gift store in Urbana, Ohio. I had a customer who was an Ohio State grad and a huge Buckeyes fan. She had a husband who was a U-M fan. She wanted me to come up with a gift for him. I had a line of music boxes and I had my supplier come up with a music box that had the M on the lid and inside the box we put the OSU fight song. We had the perfect gift.

The word got out and one day an OSU grad came into my store with a check from Woody's wife for two of the M boxes and one of the boxes would be a gift from Woody for Bo. It would have been priceless to see the look on Bo's face when he opened the present from Woody. Go Bucks.

**John McLaughlin**  
Murphy, N.C.

I think my favorite Michigan game was the 2005 game in the Big House. Bobby Carpenter got hurt very early in the game, spending the rest of the day on crutches, and a rash of mistakes and turnovers led to the Buckeyes trailing 21-12 midway through the fourth quarter.

But Troy Smith elevated his game, establishing himself as a 2006 Heisman candidate with clutch scrambles and passes, leading the Buckeyes to two late TDs to win the game 25-21. Trailing 21-19 with just over four minutes left, Ohio State went on an 88-yard drive, highlighted by Smith's throw to a leaping, spinning Anthony Gonzalez, and Antonio Pittman

bounced off Michigan defenders for the winning TD.

Troy Smith was virtually flawless in the fourth quarter, and I can still see him kissing Jim Tressel on the cheek as the coach did his postgame interview on ABC.

**Jim Restle**  
Toledo

So many great games to pick. So many wins. The 1998 game was special; after watching great Buckeye teams end the regular season in a loss and in heartbreak, finally Joe Germaine and David Boston powered an offense to a 31-16 victory. The 2001 edition of the game was amazing, Jim Tressel's first, and it came after he promised we would be proud of them. We were.

But 2002 has to be my favorite. It had everything on the line. An opportunity for Michigan to spoil our national championship hopes once again. But a late touchdown gave Ohio State a 14-9 victory that got us invited to the national championship game in Tempe, Ariz. It was an old-fashioned defensive battle, like so many Tressel had during his tenure. Tressel always had some special plays saved up for that team up north, and this one was no exception: a wheel route to Maurice Claret, and an option pitch to Maurice Hall that led to the fourth-quarter touchdown.

However the defense won that game. They were suffocating and kept Michigan out of the end zone all game long. That 2002 team was truly special.

**Eric Roddick**  
Downers Grove, Ill.

I am torn between three different Michigan games, so I will have to mention all three:

No. 3 – 2006. The greatest sporting event I have ever attended. No. 1 vs No. 2. Heisman Trophy winner. Bo died the day before. Two great teams. Great game.

No. 2 – 2002. Two great teams. National championship game on the line. Game in doubt until the last play. Heart-pounding excitement throughout. My brother's first Michigan game – at the age of 65. Euphoria!

No. 1 – 1968. I was a student at Ohio State. My wife and I were newlyweds, and although she had quickly become a huge Buckeye fan, she graciously, but reluctantly, surrendered her ticket to a high school friend of mine who was visiting and was as big a Buckeye fan as I was.

For those not old enough to remember, '68 was a perfect season. The weather was beautiful for every game. The team was a complete surprise. Those who paid close attention knew about the "Super Sophs," but few ordinary fans did. There were snazzy new uniforms that – my goodness! – had the players' names on the back!

The game was close for the first half, but then the Buckeyes pulled away and administered a thorough thrashing to the hated Wolverines. Delirium! I can still see Jim Otis throwing the ball into the stands after scoring (it was not a penalty then), and Ray Gillian breaking loose for a long run. And who can forget the devastating hit Jack Tatum put on their quarterback? Ah yes, I was young, life was good, and Ohio State was No. 1!

**Terry Walrath**  
Ashtabula, Ohio

*If you would like to share your favorite Ohio State-Michigan game email your memories to [subscriptions@buckeyesports.com](mailto:subscriptions@buckeyesports.com) or send them to BSB at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. If space allows we will run another batch of memories or post them at our [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com) website.*



# Offensive Line Depth Steps Up When Needed Most

By WYATT CROSER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Once the status report came out for Ohio State's game against Michigan State, there was one clear takeaway for which position group was most impacted.

That position was the offensive line, where the Buckeyes lost three starters – senior tackle Thayer Munford, junior center Josh Myers and sophomore tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere – as well as true freshman tackle Paris Johnson, leaving Ohio State just two typical starters in junior guard Wyatt Davis and sophomore guard Harry Miller.

Even the two typical starters turned to one at a typical position with Miller moving from guard to center, but Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said in a Zoom call Dec. 8 that adversity is simply something that this team has had to deal with and that it is something the Buckeyes have gotten better at dealing with as the season has progressed.

"What have we most improved on? I just think it's overcoming all the adversity and the emotional roller coasters and the leadership and the character and resilience that has gone on this season," Day said. "A lot of people have gone through it, but just to see the way that the team has responded to it has been tremendous, and I think the maturity is really where we've seen it."

That was evident on Dec. 5 against Michigan State, when Ohio State won 52-12 with a new starting offensive line of Davis, Miller, sophomore tackle Dawand Jones, sophomore guard Matthew Jones and sophomore tackle Max Wray, with the latter three each making his first career collegiate start.

Davis said that the strength of the offensive line, despite being without the majority of its starters, came from the "next man up" mentality, while also not making it about the individual player.

"I feel like a lot of it just had to do with our culture," Davis said. "Obviously going into it, it sucked for guys like Josh Myers and Thayer and Nick Petit, especially with Nick Petit, who's worked so hard to get to this point and been having a heck of a year, and to not be able to play in that game with the way it happened was very unfortunate. So going into this game, I feel like for everyone that had the opportunity to play, we took it inside ourselves to realize that it's not about us, it's about the people that can't be here, and I feel like that ultimately led to a lot of the success we had playing up front."

"Guys weren't playing for themselves, even those guys where it was their first opportunity starting. They were playing for something that's bigger than themselves, so I feel like that had a lot to do with our success."

In the pass game, the Ohio State offensive line allowed three sacks on the game, staying on pace with the 3.0 per game the Buckeyes have allowed all season. And while junior quarterback Justin Fields had less of an impact through the air than in games prior, throwing for just 199 yards and two touchdowns, he did so without an interception, unlike the three he threw in the previous game against Indiana which were, in part, due to pressure from the Hoosier defense.

Fields said he spoke to the offensive line during practice leading up to the game against the Spartans and added that he

thinks having that Michigan State game will be beneficial for at least the experience it gave all the newcomers on the line.

"I told those guys earlier in the week last week that they came to Ohio State to play," Fields said. "They didn't come to sit the bench their freshman year. They eventually came to play, and those guys got the opportunity to play last week and I think those guys thrived in that opportunity. I think those guys, after getting that game under their belt, they just have more confidence and hopefully that confidence helps them grow and become better."

Where the new offensive line shone was in the run game. Ohio State ran the ball 48 times for 322 yards and four touchdowns, with the total yardage up from the 251.0 yards per game, and the 6.7 yards per carry up from the 5.5 yards per rush the team has averaged through five games.

While senior running back Trey Sermon was a big factor, rushing the ball 10 times for 112 yards and a score, Fields also hit a new career best with 104 yards on 13 carries for a pair of scores. All of that success, according to Davis, was because of everyone on the line buying into working as a unit.

"Looking back at the tape, it goes all into that week what (offensive line coach Greg Studrawa) was preaching. You don't have to go out there and do something special, you have to do your job and do it to the highest of your ability," Davis said. "That those guys have stepped in, they weren't going extra and beyond, they were doing their assignments and they were playing at a high level. I would probably say the biggest thing that I took away from all those new guys that stepped in was the effort that was shown."

On an individual basis, Dawand Jones has been a much-talked-about figure, largely due to his size, as the second-year lineman checks in at 6-8, 360. But Day said he has played very well in limited time so far, and it is now all about having a steadier performance when he is called to action.

"I think Dawand, if he continues to play the way he's playing, he deserves to play," Day said. "I mean, that was a good start. He played well, and now we'll kind of see where he goes. He has to be able to play consistently. He flashes, but consistency is critical."

Wray had just one single snap on the offensive side of the ball heading into East Lansing, finding a snap against Rutgers but spending the rest of his time on special teams. Still, Davis had faith in the third-year sophomore because of what he has seen in practice.

"Me and him were very close, so once he got the opportunity to play, I was excited for him," Davis said. "And I just felt like what really led to all these guys to go out there and play fearless was just the fact that no one's asking you guys to go out there and be like Superman playing a crazy game. Just do your assignment, do what you're supposed to do, and play at a high level of effort, and the rest will come. I feel like with Max it was the same thing. I mean that was a guy who always went hard in practice, yet he might not get those reps during the game on Saturday. He was always a guy that was fully locked in."

"I feel like, with all those guys that played, honestly, it had a lot to do with themselves because, even though they weren't always playing, they were always



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**IN A PINCH** – With senior Thayer Munford out against Michigan State, sophomore Dawand Jones (79) earned his first start at left tackle on Dec. 5.

asking questions in meetings and being aware of what's going on and not messing up during plays when it was their opportunity to go in."

Miller had more of an up-and-down performance at center, specifically on the opening drive of the game, when his snaps forced Fields to make some unorthodox plays to not just gain yards, but to keep possession at all.

But the former five-star got the snaps down as the game continued, and Fields said he has no concerns about Miller's ability moving to that position in the future.

"I think Harry got adjusted to snapping the ball after the first drive, to be honest with you," Fields said. "I mean there might have been a few errant snaps after that first drive, but I think after he settled down after the first drive of the Michigan State game, he was fine. I expect Harry to be fine playing center."

On the whole, the Buckeyes had 521 yards of offense on 7.2 yards per play, scored 52 points and beat Michigan State by 40 points to move to 5-0, despite 23 total players and four key offensive linemen

missing.

It remains to be seen if any of those players on the line will be out once again as Ohio State moves to the Big Ten championship, but regardless, Davis said that this experience has helped the offensive line as a whole and, as a captain, helped him become an even stronger leader moving forward into the postseason.

"Just truly being a leader for those guys," Davis said of what he needs to do. "I feel like, as far as leadership goes, for me it got tested this last week, and truly how, at least the way I took it, I felt like I would have failed those guys if I didn't prepare them enough to be able to go out there and play confident. Giving them the confidence that they need, going in practice, helping them out with footwork. Any questions that they had, they could come to me. If they wanted to watch extra film, they could come to me. And really just trying to instill the utmost confidence in these guys because I firmly believe that, prior to even going into that game, that no matter who we put in there, they were going to get the job done."

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# Buckeyes To Meet Familiar Foe In Indianapolis

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Northwestern didn't spend much time in the cellar of the Big Ten West. After a 10-win season in 2017 and a Big Ten title berth in 2018, the Wildcats fell to 3-9 in 2019, seemingly out of the blue. An often-shaky offense became completely untenable without a stable quarterback, as NU averaged just 16.3 points per game (126th nationally). The defense – usually a staple of Pat Fitzgerald's program – took a step back as well, suffering through an injury-laden season.

After vowing that Northwestern would return to its prior form near the top of the conference after the end of that miserable 2019 campaign, Fitzgerald went about the work needed to make that happen. He replaced longtime offensive coordinator Mick McCall with Mike Bajakian, a former NFL coordinator who spent the 2019 season with Boston College. Bajakian and Fitzgerald went out and landed former Indiana quarterback Peyton Ramsey as a graduate transfer. The offense hasn't turned a corner into excellence or anything of that sort (25.3 points per game), but the Wildcats have returned to where they once were thanks to offensive improvements and a reinvigorated and experienced defense.

"That's the big one," Ben Goren of Forget The Protocol, a Northwestern website, told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "The offense improving from incomprehensibly terrible to merely just below average is a huge step. Mike Bajakian has a big part to do with it. So too does Peyton Ramsey coming in from Indiana as a very competent Big Ten quarterback, which they certainly didn't have last year. That's the short answer, just those two upgrades.

"I think the other part of it too is that Northwestern plays every game to a coin flip. If the average Northwestern contest is a one-possession game, where the score is probably in the 20s, a couple bounces either way means that Northwestern either wins or Northwestern loses. And over the last five years, it seems that Northwestern is just bouncing back between seasons where every bounce is going their way, or no bounces go their way. When Northwestern made the Big Ten championship last time, that team was not the best team in the Big Ten West. That was not a nine-win team by any stretch of the imagination, but they won every 50/50 game.

"I don't think last year's team was a 3-9 team. It was a bad team. It was probably closer to a 6-6 team, but they just didn't get any bounces all year, so they go 3-9. And then this year, especially earlier in the year – and it's kind of balancing out now – there was just a litany of weird things that kept happening in Northwestern's favor. All of the turnovers that were happening early in the season were tipped by at least three people before they were ever intercepted. It was just a bunch of really good bounces.

"I do think this team is good, especially on defense – you don't even have to put any qualifiers on it, they're an elite defense – but they're probably not the best team in the Big Ten West. But they're getting a lot of bounces. And they're a team and program that really excels in executing, and if it's going to be a 50/50 game, you're probably going to take the team that seems to not hurt themselves, and that's generally Northwestern."

While Bajakian's offense has added stability in Evanston, Ramsey's ability as a game manager has been crucial for the NU offense.

He doesn't throw the ball down the field much, but he's completed 124 of his 210 passes for 1,218 yards and nine scores, while tossing just six interceptions. In Fitzgerald's eyes, his best traits are his leadership and experience, which can't be quantified in the statbook but have earned him the respect of the locker room.

"I don't want to speak for him," Fitzgerald said of Ramsey, "but, man, he seems like he's having a lot of fun. He's a fun guy to be around every day. He's got a great demeanor. He's a terrific leader, and he is who he is all the time. He doesn't just show up in the building and act a certain way. He's been so consistent since we've had him, and I'm really thankful that we do.

"You can't put a price tag on experience. Young quarterbacks might let one bad play fester in their minds. We all saw that last year with our young, inexperienced quarterbacks. I think the guys have complete and total confidence in Peyton."

Northwestern is without a No. 1 running back to lean on alongside Ramsey in the backfield but has had some success rotating sophomore Drake Anderson and junior Isaiah Bowser, though the latter is averaging just 3.0 yards per carry and has worked almost like a fullback this season.

"We have a really nice room," running backs coach Lou Ayeni said. "We just try to find spots to get those guys the ball. Coach Bajakian's offense is built around playmakers."

Anderson is the smaller and more explosive of the two, checking in at 5-11, 190 pounds (Bowser is 6-1, 220) but actually seems to seek out contact and interior lanes, which better suits Bajakian's north-south run game.

"I prefer to run inside," Anderson said. "I like running straight forward, downhill rather than having to run outside, stretch it. I'm a lot more comfortable running downhill. Obviously, you see my size, you wouldn't expect me to be in between the tackles, but that's where I'm most comfortable."

The biggest playmaker for the offense has been senior wideout Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Bowman, who has 30 catches for 344 yards and four scores on the season, all team highs for 2020 and career highs for the Minneapolis native. With a larger frame at 6-2, Chiaokhiao-Bowman has been the largest beneficiary of the introduction of a vertical passing aspect into Northwestern's playbook and does much of his best work when boxing out defenders for contested catches.

"If you're inside our facility, you know what he brings to the table," Ramsey said on Nov. 14. "(He) works on his game, works on his craft so much to be a great player. It was fun to see him out there have a really, really big game for us today (against Purdue)."

He's been essentially Northwestern's only consistent downfield threat this season, though Kyric McGowan (30/333) has provided some help underneath, along with Riley Lees (14/150) and tight end John Raine (14/122), a transfer from FAU.

Despite the loss of projected first-round offensive tackle Rashawn Slater to a preseason opt-out, Northwestern's offensive line has been improved in 2020, thanks in large part to the emergence of former four-star freshman tackle Peter Skoronski taking over Slater's spot. Rated the top freshman in the Big Ten by Pro Football Focus, Skoronski has helped an inexperienced line jell quickly.

"I think a lot of people don't realize how much communication might really go on in there, but it's bang-bang, it's split-second deci-

## Get To Know ... Northwestern

### About Northwestern

- **2020 Record:** 6-1
- **Team Information:** **Offensive Formation** – Multiple; **Defensive Formation** – 4-3; **Starters Returning** – Offense 7, Defense 7, Specialists 2.
- **Head Coach:** Pat Fitzgerald, 15th year at Northwestern, 104-80.
- **Series History:** 79th meeting; Ohio State leads 63-14-1.
- **School Facts:** **Location** – Evanston, IL; **Enrollment** – 21,946; **Nickname** – Wildcats; **Colors** – Purple, White; **Conference** – Big Ten (West Division); **Stadium** – Ryan Field (Surface, Grass; Capacity – 47,130).

### Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Drake Anderson	62	256	4.1	2
Isaiah Bowser	77	229	3.0	1
Evan Hull	23	202	8.8	2

Passing	Comp.-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Peyton Ramsey	124-210	59.1	1,218	9-6

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
R. Chiaokhiao-Bowman	30	344	11.5	4
Kyric McGowan	30	333	11.1	0
Riley Lees	14	150	10.7	1

### Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 25.3  
Rushing Yards Per Game – 170.6  
Passing Yards Per Game – 180.9  
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 351.4

### 2020 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Oct. 24	MARYLAND	W, 43-3
Oct. 31	at Iowa	W, 21-20
Nov. 7	NEBRASKA	W, 21-13
Nov. 14	at Purdue	W, 27-20
Nov. 21	WISCONSIN	W, 17-7
Nov. 28	at Michigan State	L, 29-20
Dec. 5	at Minnesota	Canceled
Dec. 12	ILLINOIS	W, 28-10
Dec. 19	Ohio State	12 p.m.

### Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo-Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Paddy Fisher	37-28	65	3.5-8	–
Blake Gallagher	33-32	65	9.5-36	2.0-17
Chris Bergin	29-29	58	3.5-12	–
Brandon Joseph	23-21	44	1.0-1	–
J.R. Pace	16-12	28	1.5-6	–
Earnest Brown IV	16-7	23	5.5-11	0-0
Cameron Ruiz	14-7	21	2.0-20	2.0-20
Adetomiwa Adebawore	10-5	15	4.5-32	2.0-26
A.J. Hampton	10-4	14	1.0-2	–

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Brandon Joseph	5	19	3.8	0
Chris Bergin	1	5	5.0	0

### Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 14.6  
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 121.9  
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 192.0  
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 313.9

sions, split-second words that have to come out of your mouth," offensive line coach Kurt Anderson said. "And a lot of times what happens with freshmen is, what comes out of their mouth is just grunts and noises of 'uhh' and they don't know how to say it because they haven't been in the system long enough to articulate it.

"He's been able to assimilate and do those things very, very quickly, which has been awesome for us."

On defense, much of Northwestern's disruption comes from its back seven, leaving little room for dominant defensive line play. The closest thing that Northwestern has had to a force up front this season is sophomore Eku Leota, who has 5.5 tackles for loss and four sacks but just 12 total tackles.

The linebackers stand out as usual for a Fitzgerald-run team, led by Paddy Fisher (65 tackles), Blake Gallagher (65 tackles) and Chris Bergin (58 tackles), who refer to themselves as "The Firm," because, in their words, they sound like an Irish law firm.

"It's a unique firm," Gallagher said. "We do strap on the boots and bring our lunch pails, but we're also handing out justice."

The law firm of Fisher, Gallagher and Bergin has served as the leaders for this defense throughout the year.

"One thing about our team right now that jumps out to me is no one cares about yards, stats, carries, tackles, interceptions," Fitzgerald said. "They want to do everything they can to be incredibly unselfish teammates to help our team win, and that's what those three guys are doing. They're the heartbeat of our football team. There's no question about that."

Those linebackers have drawn Ohio State head coach Ryan Day's eyes as well.

"They've played so much football, it's amazing," Day said. "And they play like that. It feels like they've been there forever."

Day is impressed with the Northwestern defense at large.

"You might get them once, but you're not going to get them twice – and you might be lucky the first time," Day said.

The secondary has been just as strong, thanks to standout senior safety J.R. Pace (28

tackles), junior cornerback Greg Newsome (12 tackles) and junior cornerback Cam Ruiz (21 tackles). Redshirt freshman Brandon Joseph (44 tackles) rounds out the back four at the other safety.

"J.R. is a senior leader back there, a captain for us," Fitzgerald said. "Greg is showing that he's an All-Big Ten and beyond-type shut-down corner. Cam Ruiz is getting better with each rep, and quite frankly, he's really hard on himself. I think he's learning how to deal with the momentary failures that happen back there on the back end."

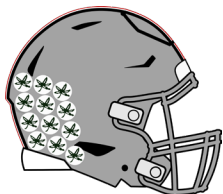
As it almost always is under Fitzgerald, the defense is the guiding force for this Northwestern team. It has allowed just 14.6 points per game this season, second-best in the nation. Save for a 29-point outburst in Michigan State's surprise upset of the Wildcats, Northwestern has held every opponent on its schedule to 20 or fewer points, including a 17-7 win over then-No. 10 Wisconsin and season-low outputs for Maryland (3), Iowa (20), Nebraska (13) and Purdue (20).

With such a strong back seven, Northwestern has leaned heavily on its pass defense this season, allowing just 142.0 passing yards per game, good for 21st nationally, respectively. Ohio State has been held under the 200-yard mark in passing just once in the 2020 season – a 199-yard showing against Michigan State – but has yet to face a secondary putting up the kind of numbers that the Wildcats have produced.

Takeaways have been a factor for the Northwestern defense as well – it has forced 16 on the season (third in the Big Ten) and will likely look to turn the Buckeyes over, even if it means hunting for interceptions against Ohio State's stingy Heisman contender Justin Fields.

"We just do what we do," Fitzgerald said. "You fall back on your training. We work it every day. There's not a defense in the country that doesn't talk about taking the ball away. There's not a defense in the country that doesn't work at it every single day and preach it every single day. It's a big correlation to victory."



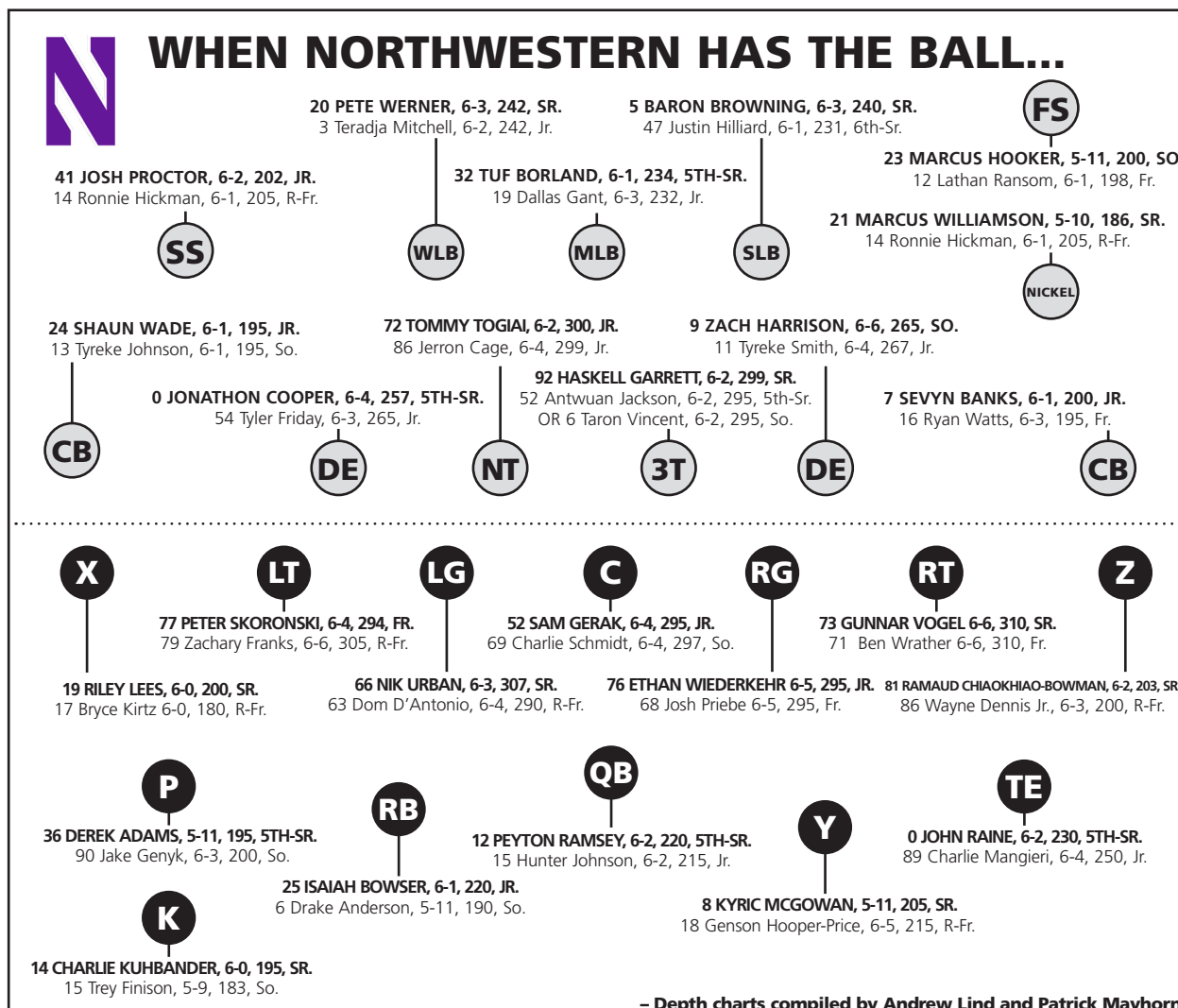
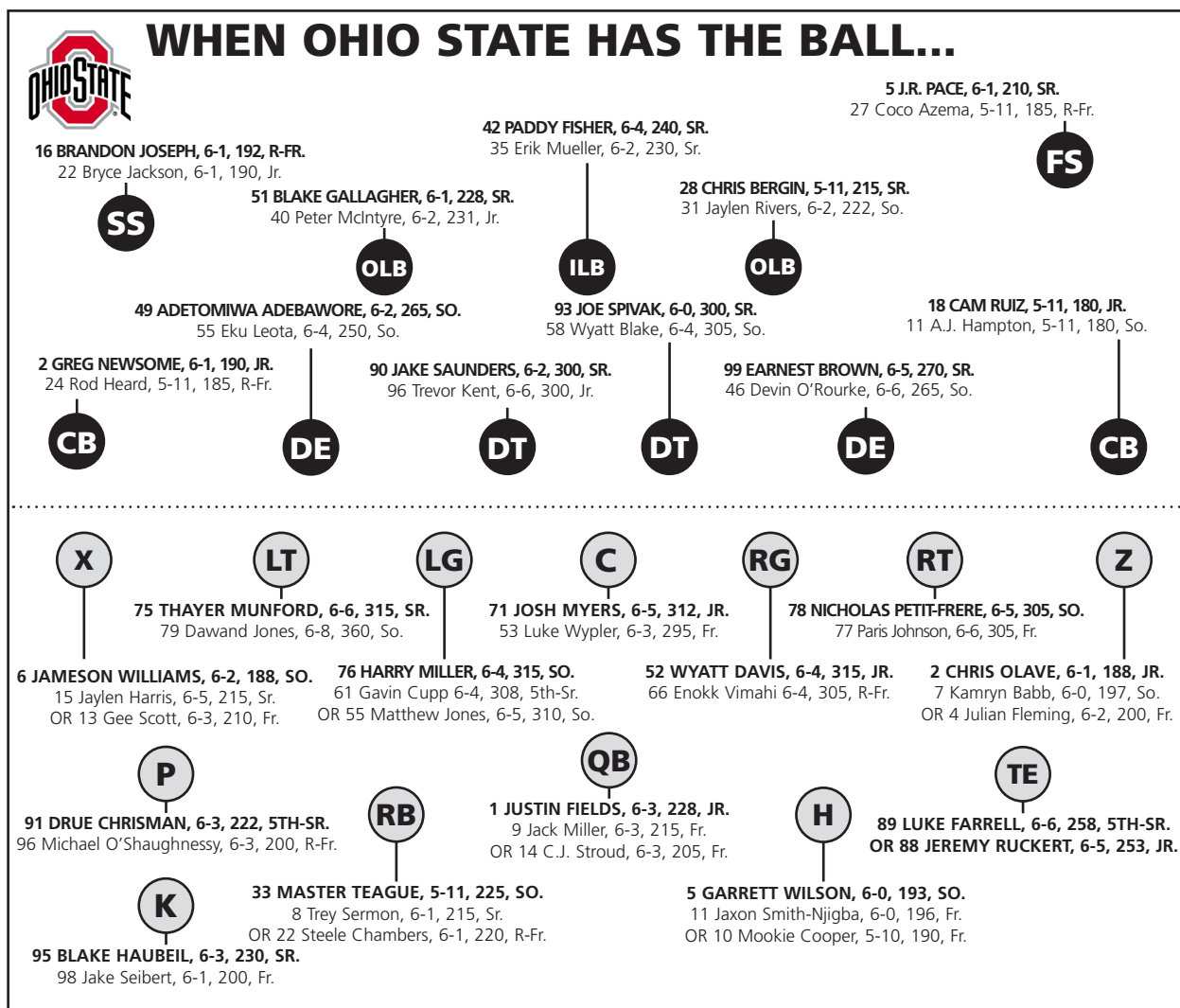


# Ohio State vs. Northwestern

Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020 • 12 p.m. • FOX  
Lucas Oil Stadium; Indianapolis, IN



## Projected Depth Charts



- Depth charts compiled by Andrew Lind and Patrick Mayhorn

## How We See It

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

For fun, let's pretend there will be a Big Ten Championship Game. With more cancellations than a bad sitcom actor, it's not a given, but it's worth a try to review where the Buckeyes are in the running game. Mind you, vs. Michigan State on Nov. 28 they ran for 322 yards despite having three offensive linemen unavailable. Imagine what the Buckeyes could do with a full squad. In the past two games, Master Teague ran for 169 yards vs. Indiana and Trey Sermon had 112 yards on 10 carries against the Spartans, the same game in which QB Justin Fields had 104 rushing yards. Northwestern entered the regular-season finale vs. Illinois on Dec. 12 allowing 116.3 yards a game, and the Illini were getting 210 on the ground. Illinois gained 155 yards on 4.4 yards per carry.

**EDGE: OHIO STATE**

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

Yes, it was Illinois and who knows what OSU would have done to that defense if the Nov. 28 game had been played, but the Wildcats literally ran over the Illini to get healthy. Northwestern ran for just 167 total yards in the previous three games before exploding for 411 (7.1 average) vs. Illinois. Freshman Cam Porter had 142 yards and two touchdowns on 24 carries after getting 32 yards on eight carries in the six prior games. Evan Hull, another freshman, entered with 53 yards on 10 carries but added 149 yards and a TD on 13 totes. Ohio State for the season is yielding 95.0 yards (3.4 average), second in the league to Wisconsin. **EDGE: EVEN**

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

Fields, working behind an inexperienced line, threw for 199 yards and two TDs against Michigan State. His go-to guys were Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, but he's willing to distribute the wealth, although the tight ends seem to be forgotten again. The Wildcats present a formidable opposition, led by defensive back Brandon Joseph with five interceptions. As a team, they have 12 picks, although none came against the Illini. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

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

Indiana transfer Peyton Ramsey is efficient. He will not overwhelm anyone with his stats, but he puts the team in position to win. For example, in a TD drive leading to halftime against Illinois, the Wildcats went 64 yards in 17 plays, going 3 for 3 on fourth down, in 7:02. In sloppy conditions vs. the Illini, he was 7 of 12 for 82 yards and a touchdown. For the season the Cincinnati native is 124 of 210 (59.1 percent) for 1,218 yards and nine touchdowns and six interceptions. His longest completion is for 27 yards. The Buckeyes have been unimpressive in defending the pass, but if they can hurry Ramsey, the lack of experience in the secondary will be marginalized. 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

Punter Drue Chrisman and kicker Blake Haubeil give the Buckeyes comfort. Ohio State has too much talent at the skill positions not to have dynamic return teams, right? Northwestern's Charlie Kuhbander has made 8 of 10 field goals. He's 5 of 7 from 40-49 yards with a long of 46. Derek Adams averages 41.4 yards per punt with his best this season traveling 58 yards for the Wildcats. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

### INTANGIBLES

In the "stop me if you've heard this one before" category, it is hard to predict how a team will respond to a COVID-19 related cancellation. Since Nov. 14, the scoreboard reads: cancellations 3, OSU games 2. The lack of game reps for units such as the defensive backs is significant, but fortunately for the Buckeyes the Wildcats are not known for their passing. Their trademark under coach Pat Fitzgerald is gritty and grind 'em football. Northwestern looks to be a worthy opponent but a 29-20 loss to Michigan State a week before the Buckeyes pounded the Spartans 52-12 is a head scratcher. **EDGE: EVEN**

### STAFF PREDICTION

Ohio State needs more than a win. The Buckeyes need a big win, not like the 59-0 wipeout of Wisconsin in the 2014 title game but a dominating and impressive performance if results around the other conferences don't go favorably and there's a question if OSU deserves a College Football Playoff spot. A bad first half against Wisconsin in the 2019 championship game cost the Buckeyes the No. 1 seed and a chance to play Oklahoma instead of Clemson. OSU can't afford a close game vs. the Wildcats. **OHIO STATE 42, NORTHWESTERN 17**



# Buckeyes Blast Badgers, Claim Big Ten Championship

By JEFF SVOBODA

*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 issue we move to the Big Ten Championship Game and recap the stunning 2014 domination of Wisconsin in a 59-0 victory in Indianapolis that propelled Ohio State into the inaugural CFP playoff. Additional features about the 2014 win over the Badgers will be reprinted at BuckeyeSports.com on Thursday, Dec. 17.*

As the Ohio State football team danced, high-fived and screamed its way joyously throughout its locker room Dec. 6 in Indianapolis, there were a lot of emotions in play after the team's 59-0 slaughter of Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game.

There was jubilation. There was relief. There was excitement for what was likely to come.

And in some ways, there was astonishment at the lopsided final score of the game, a drubbing that went down as one of the largest demolitions of a ranked team in college football history.

"If you would have told me earlier this week that we would shut them out 59-0, I wouldn't have believed you," senior Michael Bennett said after OSU won its first-ever league title game. "I think it would have been a hard-fought battle, but we would have come out on top.

"But seeing the guys before the game and what was going on in the locker room and how just hyped up everyone was and how everyone bought in to what we were saying, maybe I thought they would get seven points. A shutout is a big deal against this offense."

Anything that could go right did go right for the No. 5 Buckeyes (12-1) against the 13th-ranked Badgers. Sophomore Cardale Jones, making his first start in his career after the Michigan game injury to J.T. Barrett, threw three touchdown passes and was in

complete command of the Ohio State offense from the beginning. On the other side of the ball, the Heisman campaign of Wisconsin running back Melvin Gordon came to an emphatic end as the Big Ten's all-time leader in single-season rushing yards finished with just 76 on 26 carries, a meager average of 2.9 per carry.

And when it was over, two of the team's larger objectives were accomplished. First, Ohio State washed the bitter taste of last year's title-game loss to Michigan State in Lucas Oil Stadium away, and the Buckeyes were impressive enough to move from fifth in the College Football Playoff rankings to fourth, punching a ticket to the inaugural event.

"To be here and see this right now, I don't even know what to say," offensive guard Pat Elflein said. "It's just really satisfying that we came together as a team. Everybody did their jobs, everybody played hard and we're Big Ten champs. That's always the ultimate goal is everybody to play their best game, and that's what happened."

## Sweet Revenge

Sitting at home while nursing a season-ending injury a year ago, then-true freshman linebacker Darron Lee had tears in his eyes as he watched his crestfallen teammates walk off the field 52 weeks prior vs. Michigan State and swore that he would help make amends.

"What a difference a year can make, right?" he said in the locker room this time around. "I'll never forget when I watched on TV last year, I cried. I cried a lot, and I vowed one day to get a championship for my leaders and for my brothers, so it's crazy what a year can make.

"It feels good. Watching it from the TV and then coming out and winning it a year later, the feeling is indescribable."

Lee's smile was nearly a mile wide as the party around him was in full swing. The entire game – by far the largest shutout win vs. a ranked team ever for OSU and second-biggest beating ever put on a top-15 team in college football history – was essentially a celebration for the team and its fans, who swarmed the

home of the Indianapolis Colts looking to wash away the lingering feelings from the year before.

The team jubilantly cheered Devin Smith's touchdown catch that started the shellacking just 1:59 into the game and was equally thrilled when Wisconsin's last-gasp drive ended just short of the end zone against OSU's second unit to keep the shutout intact.

After celebrating on the field and receiving the Big Ten championship trophy from commissioner Jim Delany, the Buckeyes retreated to the team locker room for a team dance party captured by reporters. Later, as reporters milled about, music blared as hugs were exchanged throughout the night.

"It's just a great feeling," senior linebacker Curtis Grant said. "Reality still hasn't hit me yet. I think it's all a dream. But I wouldn't trade this team for the world."

The thought that this year would be different entered the team's mind from the second it returned to Lucas Oil Stadium. A year ago, Ohio State was the visiting team, meaning it stood on the east sideline of the stadium, used the opposing locker room and wore its road white uniforms.

When the Buckeyes arrived this year, they were the home team, which meant using the Colts locker room and donning the team's iconic scarlet tops.

"We had that bad taste from last year," Grant said. "Coming out of the opposite tunnel (in walk-through before the game), the first thing I thought about was (Michigan State) coming out with their roses last year, and they were excited, man. It just hurt to be on the other end and to see it. Now we see what we can do."

That Michigan State loss motivated the team throughout the year. Before the Indiana contest Nov. 22 that allowed OSU to clinch a share of the Big Ten East Division title and return to the conference championship game, the Buckeye players spoke unprompted about how important the goal to return had been to the team through winter workouts.

Once that mission was accomplished, the elders of the team spoke of how much they were looking forward to returning to Indianapolis to exorcise the demons of the past year. They did so in grand fashion against the Badgers.

"I think a lot had to do with how we finished the year last year," said senior tight end Jeff Heuerman. "We didn't forget that feeling, and they made sure of that in the offseason. We would watch before workouts, before mat drills, video of them celebrating out there and us losing and stuff like that.

"It was terrible at the time, honestly, but it truly motivated us the whole offseason. We learned from our mistakes and came out today and showed what we've been working for for the last year."

## Jones Shines

Odds makers made Wisconsin the favorite before the game thanks largely to the fact Ohio State entered the game with a first-time starter at quarterback in Jones.

It was a fair move considering that when Barrett went down late in the Michigan game with a broken bone in his right ankle, Jones – who had thrown 16 career passes in nearly three years in the program before the U-M contest – was suddenly the No. 1 guy.

If there was any weight on his shoulders considering the OSU season hung in the balance, he didn't show it. Jones was superb from his first throw and finished with three touchdown passes on deep balls to Smith while

completing 12 of 17 throws for 257 yards and no interceptions. More importantly, he was in command of the OSU offense throughout the game.

Teammates and coaches alike said they knew the 6-5, 250-pounder had the potential in him to shine, and most said they weren't surprised by his standout performance.

Then there was head coach Urban Meyer. "I don't use the word surprised," Meyer said. "I guess I'll use it for the first time – I was a little bit surprised."

Jones was asked if he played with an edge considering how his presence as the starter had led many to decree OSU the underdog in the game, but he said that was not the case.

"I wouldn't say a chip on my shoulder," he said. "I played with confidence because of the confidence my teammates had in me, the confidence my coaches had in me, my family, close friends, Buckeye Nation.

"It was very fun, going out there showing everybody what we can do when we all come together as one."

During the week before the game, Meyer and his offensive staff went to great lengths to explain that a quarterback is the product of those around him while noting that the Ohio State offense had improved around Barrett throughout the first 12 games. That included a running back in Ezekiel Elliott who went from solid to a standout, an ever-improving group of receivers and an offensive line that jelled into a unit that brought back memories of 2013's dominant squad.

Jones was also lauded before the game for how he handled being the No. 2 quarterback this season, and his mature approach to preparation was consistent during the week leading up to the title game.

"To see the way he focused this week, he wasn't at the house like he usually is," roommate Tyvis Powell said. "He spent a lot of time at the Woody. He did a lot of throwing and a lot of film study. He stayed overtime at the Woody, so the work he put in this week, I knew he was leaving no doubt that he'd be ready to play."

Whether his gaudy numbers were a surprise or not, Jones got the job done when the spotlight was the brightest.

"He delivered just like I thought he would," offensive coordinator Tom Herman said. "We worked all week to make sure that his confidence level was up and that he prepared like a pro, which he did. He did all those things. When he did all those things it fills you with confidence.

"He still made some first-time blunders. He certainly didn't play a perfect game. The thing I was most proud of was when he did make some bonehead mistakes, he came right back and never got in the tank and continued to play extremely well."

## Blow By Blow

The underdog Buckeyes thoroughly dominated the Badgers in every facet of the game. Ohio State outgained Wisconsin (10-3) by a 558-258 margin and limited Gordon to the 76 yards and no touchdowns.

The Buckeyes chose to play a safety near the line of scrimmage to limit the Badgers rushing attack, and that move along with the standout play of the defensive line almost totally shut down the Heisman finalist.

The Buckeyes forced four turnovers, two coming during a dominant first half. Sophomore safety Vonn Bell and Lee led the unit with seven tackles apiece. Bennett, who wore the No. 53 of late teammate Kosta Karageorge, recorded two sacks and four



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tackles for loss and forced a pair of fumbles. “It all starts up front with a game like this,” defensive coordinator Luke Fickell said. “To have the ability to be able to stop Melvin Gordon, you’ve got to be able to do a lot of things, and those guys did an incredible job. As a whole everybody did a great job, but to finish the way they did, there was more energy on that sideline in the last 45 seconds than there was the whole second half.”

Smith, long known as a deep-ball threat for the Buckeyes, had immediate chemistry with Jones. He caught just four passes, but three of them went for touchdowns of 39, 44 and 42 yards. Elliott outshone Gordon, rushing for career-high 220 yards and a pair of touchdowns, and the Buckeyes outrushed the run-heavy Badgers 301-71.

Even the special teams broke OSU’s way. Sophomore punter Cameron Johnston had two punts downed inside the UW 5-yard line and recorded a career-long boot of 73 yards.

“I’ve been asked a lot, ‘Did I see this happening?’ ” Meyer said. “I saw a team that prepared very well and is playing at a very high level right now.”

Wisconsin (10-3) got little from its passing game. Quarterback Joel Stave completed 17 of 43 passes for 187 yards with no touchdowns and three interceptions. The Badgers were shut out for the first time since Aug. 24, 1997, vs. Syracuse, and it was the team’s worst loss since a 59-0 setback against Earle Bruce’s OSU squad in 1979.

“We’re going to bounce back, take care of business,” said Wisconsin head coach Gary Andersen, who instead took the Oregon State job days later. “I’ll do a lot better job as a head football coach. I failed the kids tonight. So I’ll come back, fight, and away we go.”

It did not take Jones long to make an impact in the game.

Wisconsin won the opening toss and deferred, and Jones quickly led the Buckeyes 77 yards to a touchdown in just six plays. He completed all three of his pass attempts, including a 39-yard touchdown pass to Smith. Jones took a shotgun snap, faked a QB run by taking a step toward the line of scrimmage and dropped back to pass. He flung the ball deep into the end zone, and Smith muscled past Wisconsin cornerback Sojourn Shelton for the ball in the end zone for a TD.

Freshman Sean Nuernberger came on to add the extra point, giving the Buckeyes a 7-0 lead just 1:59 into the game.

“After the first touchdown, I knew the game was over,” Smith said. “I went to Coach Meyer and I told him it was over. Their demeanor wasn’t, ‘We can still win this.’ I feel like they were kind of scared of us, and we just came out and kept our foot on the throttle the whole game.”

The Ohio State defense passed its first test against Gordon, holding him to a single yard on a pair of carries on Wisconsin’s first drive, which ended with a punt after a three-and-out.

Ohio State extended its lead later in the first quarter.

This time it was Elliott taking a starring role. The Buckeyes started the drive at the OSU 7 and gained 12 yards on an Elliott run up the middle. The next play was much like the first, only Elliott went untouched up the middle 81 yards for a touchdown.

Elliott took the Jones handoff and immediately had plenty of room to run. OSU senior right tackle Darryl Baldwin had a key pulling block, and sophomore center Jacoby Boren had another crucial block to spring Elliott, who outraced the Wisconsin defense down the field.

Nuernberger’s PAT made it 14-0 Ohio State with 4:06 remaining in the opening quarter.

A Stave interception by Bell turned into

points early in the second quarter. Jones drove the Buckeyes from the OSU 41 to the UW 1 before a false start penalty and a dropped potential touchdown pass by Elliott forced Ohio State to settle for a 23-yard field goal by Nuernberger that upped the lead to 17-0 with 14:14 left before halftime.

Jones continued his stellar play with another deep touchdown pass that extended the lead to 24-0 with 11:09 remaining in the first half. It was another quick TD drive, lasting just three plays. At the UW 44, Jones dropped back and stood tall in the pocket, taking a hit as he threw deep for Smith again. And again, Smith came down with the ball in the end zone for another score. Nuernberger added the extra point to give the Buckeyes a commanding lead.

After throwing his second TD of the night, Jones had completed 7 of 9 passes for 165 yards – and one of those incompletions could have been caught for a third TD.

The onslaught continued with another Ohio State touchdown later in the second quarter. The Buckeyes marched 69 yards in six plays, facing little trouble against the Wisconsin defense. Elliott capped the drive with a 14-yard touchdown run that, following the Nuernberger PAT, made it 31-0 with 6:36 left before halftime.

Ohio State concluded a near perfect half with another key play in the final minute of the second quarter. Following another impressive punt by Johnston that was downed at the Wisconsin 5, the Badgers had the ball at the UW 12 when Bennett forced a Gordon fumble. The ball was scooped up at the UW 4 by sophomore defensive end Joey Bosa, who rumbled into the end zone with just 36 seconds left in the half.

“Honestly I was desperate to make a big play,” Gordon said. “I lost focus on the ball. That’s how it came out. I was just trying so hard to make a play, get the team going.”

Following the Nuernberger PAT, the Buckeyes boasted a 38-0 lead that they took into halftime.

The first-half stats told the story of Ohio State’s dominance. The Buckeyes outgained the Badgers 364-91, and Jones completed 10 of 13 passes for 211 yards and two touchdowns. Elliott scored a pair of touchdowns and had 150 yards on 12 carries. Smith caught three passes, including two for a TD, for 95 yards.

Conversely, Gordon was limited to 43 yards on 14 carries, an average of 3.1 yards per carry. Stave completed just 5 of 14 passes for 58 yards and an interception.

Jones and Smith connected again for a third touchdown in the third quarter. The Buckeyes extended their lead to 45-0 with 9:24 on the clock on the 42-yard touchdown pass. On a play-action play, Jones again threw a ball up for Smith to beat a Wisconsin defender in a one-on-one situation. And again, Smith won the battle, bringing down the ball in the end zone for a third time.

Freshman Curtis Samuel capped the scoring with a pair of fourth-quarter touchdowns. The first came on a 12-yard run with 11:39 remaining, one play after a 60-yard run by Elliott in which he lost his shoe during the run to bring back memories of Keith Byars’ famous run vs. Illinois in 1984. Nuernberger added the PAT after Samuel’s scamper over the left side to up the OSU lead to 52-0.

With 2:25 remaining, Samuel added a 1-yard run that set the final score at 59-0.

“I’m almost really at a loss for words,” Lee said. “I don’t really know what to do because I’m still trying to figure out what just happened.”

*This story originally appeared in the Dec. 20, 2014, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.*

# The Numbers Game

## Ohio State 59, Wisconsin 0

Dec. 6, 2014 – Lucas Oil Stadium; Indianapolis

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4		F
WISCONSIN	0	0	0	0	–	0
OHIO STATE	14	24	7	14	–	59

### First Quarter

**OSU** – D.Smith, 39 yard pass from C.Jones (Nuernberger kick), 13:01; 6 plays, 77 yards, 1:59 TOP.

**OSU** – Elliott, 81 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 4:06; 2 plays, 93 yards, 0:42 TOP.

### Second Quarter

**OSU** – Nuernberger, 23 yard field goal, 14:14; 7 plays, 53 yards, 2:41 TOP.

**OSU** – D.Smith, 44 yard pass from C.Jones (Nuernberger kick), 11:09; 3 plays, 63 yards, 1:17 TOP.

**OSU** – Elliott, 14 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 6:36; 6 plays, 69 yards, 2:52 TOP.

**OSU** – Bosa, 4 yard fumble recovery (Nuernberger kick), 0:36.

### Third Quarter

**OSU** – D.Smith, 42 yard pass from C.Jones (Nuernberger kick), 9:24; 5 plays, 77 yards, 2:47 TOP.

### Fourth Quarter

**OSU** – Samuel, 12 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 11:39; 2 plays, 72 yards, 0:34 TOP.

**OSU** – Samuel, 1 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 2:25; 7 plays, 61 yards, 4:02 TOP.

**Att.** – 60,229.

**Weather** – Indoors.

### Team Statistics

	UW	OSU
First Downs	18	24
Rushing	6	12
Passing	11	10
Penalty	1	2
Rushes-Yards	37-71	38-301
Passing Yards	187	257
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	17-43-3	12-18-0
Offensive Plays	80	56
Total Net Yards	258	558
Third Down Efficiency	5-18	2-8
Fourth Down Efficiency	3-5	0-0
Punts-Avg.	8-41.1	4-53.0
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	1-0
Penalties	3-23	5-44
Time of Possession	33:55	26:05

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** – **UW:** Gordon 26-76; Clement 5-14; Doe 1-6; Erickson 1-4; McEvoy 1-2; Stave 3-(-31). **OSU:** Elliott 20-220; Dunn 5-47; Samuel 4-23; C.Jones 8-9; Marshall 1-2.

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** – **UW:** Stave 17-43-3-187-0. **OSU:** C.Jones 12-17-0-257-3; Marshall 0-1-0-0-0.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** – **UW:** Erickson 7-83; Doe 3-41; Fumagalli 2-24; Arneson 2-23; Clement 2-12; Traylor 1-4. **OSU:** D.Smith 4-137; Thomas 3-41; Marshall 2-36; C.Smith 2-30; Spencer 1-13.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** – **UW:** Meyer 8-41.1-57. **OSU:** Johnston 4-53.0-73.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – **UW:** None. **OSU:** Marshall 2-1.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – **UW:** Doe 6-114; Fumagalli 1-8. **OSU:** Samuel 1-23.

**MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.)** – **UW:** None. **OSU:** Nuernberger (29).

**FORCED FUMBLES** – **UW:** None. **OSU:** Bennett 2, Lee.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.)** – **UW:** None. **OSU:** Bosa 1-4.

**INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.)** – **UW:** None. **OSU:** D.Grant 2-60; Bell 1-7.

**SACKS (No.-Yds.)** – **UW:** Landisch 1.0-9. **OSU:** Bennett 2.0-16; Frazier 1.0-8.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.)** – **UW:** Landisch 1.5-10; Schobert 1.0-5; Ma.Trotter 1.0-4; Herring 1.0-1; Obasih 0.5-0. **OSU:** Bennett 4.0-18; Apple 2.0-4; Frazier 1.0-8; Washington 1.0-4; C.Grant 1.0-1.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.)** – **UW:** Ma.Trotter 7-3-10; Landisch 4-3-7; Caputo 1-5-6; Hillary 3-2-5; Jean 2-3-5; Shelton 2-1-3; Doe 1-2-3; Herring 2-0-2; Schobert 2-0-2; Figaro 2-0-2; Keefer 1-1-2; Jacobs 0-2-2; Zagzebski 1-0-1; Gaulden 1-0-1; Tindal 1-0-1; Gordon 1-0-1; Fredrick 1-0-1; V.Biegel 0-1-1; Jordan 0-1-1; Obasih 0-1-1; Musso 0-1-1. **OSU:** Lee 5-2-7; Bell 4-3-7; McMillan 4-2-6; Apple 4-1-5; Bennett 4-1-5; Perry 3-2-5; Bosa 4-0-4; C.Grant 2-2-4; Washington 2-2-4; E.Smith 3-0-3; D.Grant 1-2-3; Burrows 2-0-2; C.Williams 1-1-2; Powell 1-1-2; Fada 1-1-2; Dunn 1-1-2; S.Miller 1-0-1; Frazier 1-0-1; Tanner 1-0-1; Conley 1-0-1; Carter 1-0-1; Marshall 1-0-1; Samuel 0-1-1; Lewis 0-1-1; Booker 0-1-1.

### Players In The Game

**UW:** Offense, Stave, Gordon, Fredrick, Arneson, Marz, Lewallen, Voltz, Costigan, Havenstein, D.Watt. Defense, Gaulden, Zagzebski, Herring, Schobert, Ma.Trotter, Landisch, V.Biegel, Shelton, Caputo, Jean, Hillary, Meyer. Reserves, Jordan, Doe, McEvoy, James, Clement, Wheelwright, Love, Rushing, Baretz, Musso, Ogunbowale, Tindal, Straus, Hudson, Figaro, Jacobs, Obasih, Ferguson, Endicott, Hayes, Mi.Trotter, Traylor, Fumagalli, McGuire, Ruechel, R.Ball, Maly, Keefer, Sheehy, Goldberg.

**OSU:** Offense, C.Jones, Elliott, Thomas, D.Smith, Spencer, Heuerman, Decker, Price, Boren, Elflein, Baldwin, Nuernberger. Defense, Bosa, Washington, Bennett, Frazier, Lee, C.Grant, Perry, Apple, Powell, Bell, D.Grant, Johnston. Reserves, E.Smith, McMillan, Samuel, Webb, Holmes, Bell, Burrows, Marshall, Conley, Tanner, Dunn, Reeves, Booker, Worley, Fada, Clinton, Haynes, Munger, C.Williams, Lewis, Carter, Hill, Brown, Vannett, C.Smith, S.Miller, Schutt, Sprinkle.



# OSU Whacks Wisconsin En Route To National Title

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

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

After dropping their second game of the season to Virginia Tech, Ohio State rattled off 10 straight victories entering the 2014 Big Ten Championship Game.

Despite the hot streak, Ohio State was a 4.5-point underdog to the Badgers after starting quarterback J.T. Barrett had been carted off the field against Michigan for a season-ending injury.

The Buckeyes needed to make a statement because they sat outside the top four of the rankings for the inaugural College Football Playoff.

On a phone call with Buckeye Sports Bulletin, former Ohio State safety Tyvis Powell said the team's focus was not on the CFP rankings or winning with style points. Instead, the Buckeyes were peeved to be considered underdogs in a Big Ten matchup.

"Our minds weren't on trying to embarrass them," Powell said. "We just wanted to win the game first of all. I remember we had a chip on our shoulder because I think that was the first time that we were ever considered underdogs in a game, and it was Wisconsin, so we were playing with that edge. Like man, listen, this was the ultimate disrespect right here. Y'all are going to make us underdogs in a game like this? It was like, 'All right, then we're just going to show y'all something.'"

Eager to prove they were being overlooked against a conference opponent on the national stage, the Buckeyes needed to prepare a former three-star gunslinger from Cleveland Glenville, Cardale Jones.

"We were just at the point where it was more so about competitive excellence," former Ohio State offensive tackle Chase Farris told BSB. "When J.T. went down, guys were hurt, we were sad about it, but we didn't really have worries that Cardale wouldn't be able to handle the load. Everyone had complete confidence in him being able to manage that game plan. And then, he came out on top as the MVP of that game. So from our standpoint it was just more so about, 'How can we best support Cardale any way possible?'"

Jones certainly showed something against a vaunted Badger defense, completing 12 of 17 passes for 257 yards and three touchdowns in his first collegiate start.

Wisconsin and the rest of the nation were blindsided by Jones' brilliant performance in a 59-0 victory, but those in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center had seen it before on the practice field.

"Unlike everybody else, we got the chance to see Cardale in practice, so we knew what he was capable of," Powell said. "Nobody really batted an eye over it. J.T. is a tremendous leader, a great player, but Ohio State recruits really well and we knew Cardale could throw the ball. One thing I always said about Cardale - he can throw that ball. He can for sure throw that ball. I thought it would open up more deep passes because Cardale had a strong arm."

By stepping up when he was called upon, Jones eternally cemented himself in Buckeye lore. Jones became affectionately referred to as "12-Gauge" for his strong arm and his donning of the No. 12.

He used his rocket of an arm to connect with senior wide receiver Devin Smith for three touchdowns in a stellar four-catch, 137-yard performance. Although Smith had never reeled in three scores in the same game before, Powell was not surprised by the big-time outing from the Massillon (Ohio) Washington product.

"I got the chance to go against him all the time when I was a freshman on scout team. I always knew what he was capable of," Powell said of Smith. "Checking him was not fun. You had to make sure you were on your horse at all times, because once he gets loose, it's hard to catch up with him. I got to go against him as a freshman in practice all the time, and it was a lot. But you know what? He ultimately made me better, and I appreciate him for that."

Smith's first score came on the Buckeyes' opening drive, capping a six-play, 77-yard drive with a 39-yard touchdown with 13:01 left in the first frame.

Standout sophomore running back Ezekiel Elliott also helped Jones and the offense establish an identity in the absence of Barrett, who was a Heisman Trophy candidate for much of the year. Elliott carried the ball 20 times for 220 yards and two touchdowns, including an 81-yard score to extend the lead to 14-0 with 4:06 left in the first quarter.

Whether it was Barrett or Jones behind center, Farris said the Buckeyes' emphasis was always going to be on Zeke

and the ground game.

"Overall, Ohio State is a downhill first, run-the-ball type of offense as long as I was there," Farris said. "We were always run-first, establish the run and then after that, let the chips fall where they may."

Elliott dominated a stout Wisconsin defensive front, averaging 11.0 yards per carry for an offense that totaled 301 rushing yards. Freshman Curtis Samuel added four carries for 23 yards and two touchdowns.

Defensively, Ohio State entered the Big Ten title game with the mentality that it would have to go above and beyond to make it easier on Jones and the offense.

"Our defensive mind-set was, 'This is Cardale's first start, so let's give him as many chances with the ball as possible.' He might have some jitters, but eventually the jitters would go away, and the more times he touched the ball, he would get more confident throughout the game and he would make the plays," Powell said. "Honestly, he came out swinging hard, and as a defense, it was like, 'Man, every time we get him the ball, he's scoring, so let's keep doing it.' We were motivated by how well he was doing."

In Jones' first eight possessions as a collegiate starter, Ohio State scored five touchdowns and kicked a field goal with just two punts, with a defensive score along the way to lead 45-0 with 9:24 left in the third quarter.

The overwhelming effectiveness of the Jones-led offense inspired the solid Scarlet and Gray defense, which was already fired up to shut down Heisman Trophy candidate Melvin Gordon, who was the Badgers' star tailback.

"The game plan wasn't a complex one," Powell said. "I just knew we had to stop the run. That was our huge thing was trying to stop the run. Once we did that, we knew we had an excellent chance of winning the game."

While stopping Gordon and the high-powered Wisconsin rushing attack may have been an obvious strategy, the Buckeyes' methods were a bit unconventional.

Defensive coordinator/linebackers coach Luke Fickell and co-defensive coordinator/safeties coach Chris Ash decided to move Powell from his safety spot to the box by sophomore end Joey Bosa.

"That was the week that they made me get in the box, and I had to basically stand next to Joey," Powell said. "And Coach Ash was like, 'Yep, this is what you have to do the whole game. You have to sit in here and you have to hold this gap. Everybody is going to be responsible for a gap, and you have to hold this gap the whole game. You're not going to get any glory for it or anything.' And I remember they were like, 'If they motion, how do you all want to do it? Do you and Vonn (Bell) want to switch?' And Vonn says, 'No, I'm not going down there.'"

Bell did just fine from his safety spot, tying Darron Lee for the team lead with seven tackles (four solo) and picking off a pass.

Lee forced a fumble on the Badgers' second play scrimmage, which they recovered.

Senior defensive tackle Michael Bennett forced two fumbles, including

one against Gordon that Bosa scooped and scored from 4 yards out. A former Centerville, Ohio, standout, Bennett boasted five tackles (four solo), four tackles for loss and two sacks to go with his two forced fumbles in the game.

"Mike was vital to that team," Powell said of Bennett. "We wouldn't have won the national championship without Mike. Mike is just truly a monster. He had that attitude, and he was good with his hands. Mike was a special player."

After the Buckeyes went up 52-0 on the first rushing score from Samuel with 11:39 left in the fourth quarter, Powell helped put an exclamation point on the big victory.

With the game in control and the Badgers in desperation mode, Fickell and Ash called up a rare safety blitz for the former Bedford, Ohio, standout.

"They finally dialed me up," Powell recalled. "That's what they did. I was excited to get through there. I didn't blitz a lot, so it was one of those things where, 'We'll put it in the game plan, but if it happens, it happens.' If not, I was like whatever. We were up so much, and they were like, 'You know what, Tyvis, we're going to call it. Go ahead.' I'm like, 'Bet.'"

Powell got through to Wisconsin quarterback Joel Stave and forced him into his third interception of the day with a hurry. Senior cornerback Doran Grant, who had mentored Powell as a young defensive back, came up with his second interception of the game.

"For Doran to get the pick at the end was such a good feeling because Doran is such a huge, big brother to me," Powell said. "So, it was good to see him make a big play in that game."

Grant's second pick set up Samuel's second touchdown to give Ohio State a 59-0 advantage, which it held onto for the statement win, which proved to be enough to convince the CFP committee that the Buckeyes deserved a spot.

Powell, who continues to train in hopes of returning to the NFL where he has played for eight teams, finished with two tackles (one solo) and a quarterback hurry in the blowout victory. The win convinced the college football world that Ohio State was good enough, but inside the program, there were no need for convincing.

"We were always a pretty confident bunch, so it wasn't like that we needed any extra motivation," Powell said. "We always knew we were a good team. It was just good that we won the Big Ten. I felt like all we needed that season was a chance, like please just give us a chance to show you how good we can be."

Farris, who recently became executive director of the Save Our Children program in his hometown of Elyria, Ohio, acknowledged the win over Wisconsin catapulted Ohio State into the playoffs and the momentum the Buckeyes had built carried into the semifinals against Alabama and the national title against Oregon.

"That game was what actually propelled us to be able to go on to the playoffs and do what we did," Farris said. "I believe we were No. 5, and we were out of the CFP rankings, and for us to go in and win like we did, we needed it to happen to push us into that race."

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# Washington 5-Star Receiver Commits To OSU

Ohio State's nearly two-year-long recruitment of Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka finally paid off when he announced his commitment to the Buckeyes on Dec. 11.

The 6-1, 190-pound Egbuka is considered the top-rated wide receiver and No. 9 prospect overall in the class of 2021 after catching 199 passes for 3,907 yards and 61 touchdowns in three seasons at the varsity level. He's also rushed for four touchdowns and returned five punts, three interceptions and one kickoff for a score and hopes to add to that total when the state of Washington begins its postponed fall season in the spring.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

Egbuka landed an offer from Ohio State in January 2019, and he made his first trip to campus for a spring practice in March, which coincided with the program's annual Student Appreciation Day. He then returned for an unofficial visit for the Buckeyes' 38-7 win over Wisconsin that October.

Ohio State was widely considered the favorite in Egbuka's recruitment from that point on, and he subsequently included the Buckeyes in his top schools along with Clemson, Oklahoma and Washington with an eye on a summertime decision. The coronavirus pandemic and ongoing recruiting dead period nixed those plans, however.

Egbuka eventually dropped the Tigers from his list of options, which left the Buckeyes battling the Sooners and home-state Huskies for his pledge. Though he'd been to Washington numerous times, he didn't want to make a decision until he made his first trip to Oklahoma.

That finally happened earlier this month when Egbuka and his father attended the Sooners' win over Baylor on Dec. 5. He wasn't able to meet with coaches or see the facilities due to the dead period, but he did spend a considerable amount of time with five-star quarterback commit Caleb Williams.

In the end, though, Egbuka's relationship with Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, wide receivers coach Brian Hartline and offensive quality control coach Keenan Bailey, as well as freshman wide receiver and fellow Washington native Gee Scott, helped the Buckeyes fend off the Sooners.

Egbuka becomes the 21st member of Ohio State's 2021 recruiting class, join-



COURTESY OF EMEKA EGBUKA

**WORTH THE WAIT** – Ohio State landed a commitment on Dec. 11 from Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka, ending the Buckeyes' nearly two-year-long pursuit of the top-rated receiver in the class of 2021.

ing Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star Jayden Ballard and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep four-star Marvin Harrison at the wide receiver position. He plans to sign with the Buckeyes on Dec. 16, the first day of the early signing period, but not enroll in classes until the summer.

the general public but not take an official or unofficial visit to Ohio State this fall speaks to that.

"I think it's a big-time disadvantage," Day said during his weekly teleconference on Dec. 8. "We have recruits, even

last weekend, who went and visited other schools and were in the stands watching games. But we can't do that."


It didn't matter in this specific instance,

**Continued On Page 18**

### Day Discusses Disadvantages

While the Big Ten's decision to limit attendance to family members of players and staff created an even playing field within the conference, it has also put the member institutions at a disadvantage on the recruiting trail when compared to teams within the ACC, Big 12 and SEC, which have all allowed fans at a reduced capacity this season.

The fact that Egbuka was able to attend Oklahoma's game on Dec. 5 as a member of




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# Offensive Tackle Target Trending Away From OSU

Continued From Page 17

of course, but Day believes it's something that should be addressed by the powers that be moving forward.

## Prospects Set To Enroll Early

As mentioned, prospects from the 2021 recruiting cycle can finally fax in their National Letters of Intent during the early signing period that runs from Dec. 16-18.

All 21 of Ohio State's commitments are expected to do so during this time. However, only 14 of them will enroll in classes in January and compete in spring practice.

That list includes Ballard; Harrison; Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer; Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson; Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep five-star quarterback Kyle McCord; Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star running back Evan Pryor; Ironton, Ohio, four-star linebacker Reid Carrico; Richfield (Ohio) Revere four-star offensive guard Ben Christman; Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed four-star defensive tackle Tyleik Williams; Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro four-star athlete Denzel Burke; Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren four-star safety Jantzen Dunn; Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central four-star offensive tackle Zen Michalski; Aurora (Colo.) Cherokee Trail three-star tight end Sam Hart; and Fremantle, Western Australia, three-star punter Jesse Mirco.

The 14 early enrollees will tie the pro-

gram record set by the 2020 recruiting class.

Those holding off until June include Egbuka; Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal five-star offensive guard Donovan Jackson; Streetsboro, Ohio, four-star defensive tackle Mike Hall; St. Louis De Smet Jesuit four-star cornerback Jakailin Johnson; Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star cornerback Jordan Hancock; Nashville Ensworth four-star safety Andre Turrentine; and Cincinnati La Salle three-star safety Jaylen Johnson.

## Tackle Target Visits Florida

Ohio State hopes to sign as many as three more players on the traditional National Signing Day of Feb. 3, with Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive tackle J.T. Tuimoloau; Fairfax (Va.) Robinson Secondary five-star offensive tackle Tristan Leigh; and Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star linebacker Raesjon Davis as their lone remaining targets.

However, don't expect Leigh to choose the Buckeyes when he makes his college decision during the All-American Bowl's Declaration Day programming on Jan. 2.

The 6-5, 270-pound Leigh – who is considered the fourth-best offensive tackle and No. 11 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – listed Alabama, Clemson, LSU, Ohio State and Oklahoma as his final five schools in July, but he hasn't been to Columbus in more than a year and does not have a return visit scheduled.

Continued On Page 20

## 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
Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-1	190	★★★★★	Steilacoom, Wash.
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

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# Quarterback Commit Among Best Recruits Ever

Continued From Page 18

Meanwhile, Leigh traveled to Norman, Okla., on Dec. 5 and attended the same game as Egbuka before heading to Gainesville, Fla., to take in Florida's game against LSU on Dec. 12. That's especially notable since the Gators weren't even on the above-mentioned list of top schools.

With only two weeks before Leigh's announcement, there's still a slight chance he makes his way to Columbus, but sources inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center have indicated that's highly unlikely.

The Sooners remain the favorite for Leigh with 54.2 percent of the 247Sports crystal ball predictions.

It remains to be seen if Ohio State will look to add another offensive tackle if the staff misses out on Leigh. One option is Massillon (Ohio) Washington three-star Terrence Rankl, who has been committed to Pitt since April.

However, it's far more likely the Buckeyes stand pat with Christman, Jackson and Michalski already in the fold for 2021 and focus their efforts on the class of 2022, where the staff already holds one commitment at the position in West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Tegra Tshabola and have shown early interest in top prospects such as Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy five-star offensive tackle Zach Rice; Daleville (Va.) Lord Botetourt five-star Gunner Givens; Fond Du Lac (Wis.) St. Mary's Springs four-star Billy Schrauth;

Charlestown, Ind., four-star Kiyaunta Goodwin; Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star offensive tackle Aliou Bah; and Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Aamil Wagner.

## Coombs Has High Standards

Defensive coordinator and secondary coach Kerry Coombs, who returned to Columbus following a two-year stint with the NFL's Tennessee Titans, acknowledged it's been difficult to recruit this year for a number of reasons.

Among them, the inability to visit a prospect's school, sit down with them at the facility or work with them in a camp setting due to the ongoing dead period has made evaluations a challenge.

"It's been incredibly difficult," Coombs said during a conference call on Dec. 8. "You don't get to see anybody. You don't get to have them on your campus. There are a lot of kids out there that want to be Buckeyes and they want to come to campus. They want to be a part of this experience, but they can't come. So we have to do everything through FaceTime and Zoom. The art of recruiting has changed dramatically. It is so much different to talk to mom through your phone than it is to sit in the same room with her.

"To me, one of the things that brings people to Ohio State is the feeling of family. If they're going to trust you with their son, they want to see that, they want to feel that in the

same room. That's really challenging."

The same goes for when he visits a potential prospect's school, as Coombs tries to talk to as many people as possible to get a good sense of who the recruit is on and off the field.

"I just love to see the kids and evaluate them in person," Coombs said. "I love to see them in the school environment. When I go to a school, I talk to the janitor and the lady who serves them lunch in the cafeteria, not necessarily the football coach. I want to know what this kid is like when he's not playing football and nobody is around. That's hard to do. You can't Zoom the janitor. That part of the experience, and a full evaluation of what kind of people they are beyond what you see on film has been made incredibly difficult."

Coombs also admitted he struggled upon his return to the college game with evaluating high schoolers on tape after two years of working with professional athletes.

"I went to (director of player personnel Mark) Pantoni and said, 'Hey, these guys you're giving me are not good enough.' And he said, 'Kerry, they're 15 years old and you've been looking at 28-year-old professionals at the top of their game.' " Coombs said. "I had to regroup a little bit and go back and try to watch them in context, which really helped me get a better feel for the evaluation part of it."

## Quarterback Commit Earns Perfect Rating

Following a recent update to Rivals' recruiting rankings, Ohio State five-star quarterback commit Quinn Ewers is now the No.

1 overall player in the 247Sports composite rankings for the class of 2022 with a perfect 1.0000 rating.

That makes the 6-3 and 195-pound Ewers the highest-rated player to commit to Ohio State during the Internet recruiting era (since 1999), ahead of the likes of former quarterback Terrelle Pryor (0.9997) in 2008 and cornerback-turned-wide receiver Ted Ginn (0.9992) in 2004.

Ewers also has a higher rating than current starter Justin Fields, who finished the 2018 recruiting cycle with a 0.9998 rating. Fields, of course, signed with Georgia before transferring to Ohio State after his freshman season.

If he maintains his current ranking, Ewers – who has thrown for more than 5,200 yards and 60 touchdowns in 18 career starts at Southlake (Texas) Carroll – will join former Texas quarterback Vince Young in 2002 as the only signal caller in the history of the composite rankings to finish with a perfect rating.

Ewers would also be just the sixth prospect ever to finish with a 1.000, joining Young, former Florida State linebacker Ernie Sims in 2003, former South Carolina defensive end Jadeveon Clowney in 2011, former Ole Miss defensive end Robert Nkemdiche in 2013 and former Michigan defensive tackle Rashan Gary in 2016.

## Five-Star Corner Visits Campus

With no end in sight for the ongoing recruiting dead period, Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South five-star cornerback Will Johnson took

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# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler

**USC linebacker Palaie Gaoteote, the cousin of Ohio State defensive tackle Haskell Garrett, had the Buckeyes among his top schools before he committed to the Trojans during the 2018 recruiting cycle. Now that he's entered the transfer portal, do you think linebackers coach Al Washington shows any interest?**

"I think it would make sense to at least kick the tires on Gaoteote, but I think a lot will depend on what attrition, if any, Ohio State suffers at the position after the season. The Buckeyes are currently three deep at all linebacker positions with a bit of a logjam among the veterans. Now they are expected to lose several seniors, but it will still be interesting to see if any of the second- or third-teamers decide to move on. If that happens, I could see Gaoteote being pursued."

**Sticking with linebacker, Ohio State continues to recruit 2021 Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater**

**Dei four-star linebacker Raesjon Davis despite his pledge to LSU. How likely is it that the Buckeyes are able to flip him from his pledge, especially now that he might not sign with the Tigers during the early signing period?**

"I do not expect Davis to end up at LSU at this point, and if he does wait until February to sign as he has told me he will, that would be a clear indication that he's looking to end up somewhere else. USC has also become a very serious option for Davis, and there will be a lot of schools after him in January if he is still unsigned. I do think Ohio State, along with USC, are the co-favorites to land him at this point."

**There were some rumors that 2021 Cincinnati La Salle four-star cornerback Devonta Smith, who was once committed to Ohio State before flipping to Alabama in June, wants back in the Buckeyes' recruiting class. Is there any truth to that, and how would such a decision impact**

**Ohio State's other defensive back commitments?**

"I don't believe there is much validity to that. Ohio State is pretty much set in the secondary at this stage assuming they sign all of their committed guys."

**Looking ahead, Ohio State seems to be in a great spot with several of the nation's top-rated prospects for the class of 2022. Who do you anticipate will be the next player to commit to the Buckeyes?**

"I think Lewisville, Texas, four-star wide receiver Armani Winfield or Chandler, Ariz., four-star wide receiver Kyion Grayes could be the next one in for the Buckeyes. Both are top priorities at receiver for assistant coach Brian Hartline. Another name I think is worth watching is Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star defensive tackle Caden Curry, but he may wait it out until he can visit."

it upon himself to visit Ohio State's campus on Dec. 12.

The 6-3, 190-pound Johnson – who is considered the fourth-best cornerback and No. 8 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – made the trip with his mother and father, the latter being former Michigan defensive back Deon Johnson (1991-94). They walked around campus and made stops at Ohio Stadium and the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, though they could not meet with the coaching staff.

The younger Johnson had never been to Columbus, and his original plan was to be on campus during The Game on Dec. 12, though that was canceled due to a coronavirus outbreak within the Wolverines' pro-

gram. The elder Johnson, on the other hand, went 0-1-1 in two trips to Columbus. Ohio State and Michigan played to a 13-13 tie in 1992 and the Buckeyes beat the Wolverines, 22-6, in 1994.

Johnson landed an offer from Day and Coombs during a virtual tour of campus in April. He then included Ohio State in his top five with Arizona State, Michigan, Oklahoma and USC on Nov. 23.

The Wolverines are considered the favorite in his recruitment thanks to his father's ties to the program and the fact that he grew up with Michigan paraphernalia around his home. But the Buckeyes are widely believed to be the biggest threat in his recruitment,

and this visit – on his own dime – certainly shows his interest in the program is sincere.

Johnson has not announced a decision date and hopes to take official visits once the dead period – which was recently extended through April 15, 2021 – comes to a close.

### Other Notes From Around The Country

• In response to an article written by Rivals recruiting analyst Mike Farrell that suggested he might flip his pledge to Cincinnati, 2022 Ohio State four-star linebacker commit C.J. Hicks posted a tweet on Dec. 4 that said, "I'm a Buckeye. Stop the rumors."

• Savannah (Tenn.) Hardin County four-

star tight end Hudson Wolfe decommitted from Tennessee on Dec. 10 and committed to Ole Miss the following day. Wolfe, the seventh-best tight end in the class of 2021, included Ohio State among his top schools before choosing the Volunteers in June.

• West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star running back Donovan Edwards will make his college decision on Dec. 16, the first day of the early signing period. The one-time Ohio State target is widely expected to commit to Michigan.

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

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

### 30 Years Ago – 1990

Cleveland St. Ignatius defensive lineman Trent Zenkewicz told BSB he would probably make his final college choice in the first week of January.

"I didn't think there was any sense in fooling around, going to a lot of other schools I knew in my heart I didn't really want to go to," he said. "I decided to visit Michigan and Ohio State and then make my decision."

He had former teammates at both schools – tight end John Jaekin at Michigan and quarterback Joe Pickens at Ohio State.

### 25 Years Ago – 1995

Andy Katzenmoyer, the 1995 Mr. Football in Ohio as a linebacker at Westerville South, was cited for underage possession of alcohol at a campus area bar during his official visit to Ohio State over the Dec. 8 weekend.

Katzenmoyer, who had already committed to Ohio State, was reportedly in a campus bar with his former South teammate and OSU host Chris Kirk.

According to Dianne Katzenmoyer, her son was simply moving an open bottle of beer left at the table he and Kirk sat down at.

"My son does not drink," she said. "Should they have been there? No. Should there have been other choices of things to do? Probably. Is this a huge black eye for Ohio State? Probably. But that is exactly what happened."

Katzenmoyer was not charged with consumption and planned to plead not guilty to the possession charge at a court hearing later in the month.

### 20 Years Ago – 2000

Ohio State held 13 verbal commitments and was looking to add another 12 to finish out its 2001 class. With signing day rapidly approaching, the Buckeyes started to really zero in on a few main targets.

Leading the way was Columbus Brookhaven running back Maurice Hall, fresh off a visit to Columbus on the weekend

of Dec. 1-4. He was considering the Buckeyes along with Northwestern (which he visited on Dec. 8), Georgia Tech, Florida State and Penn State.

Another big target for the Buckeyes was Gardena (Calif.) Serra linebacker Austin Jackson, who also visited Columbus Dec. 1 before taking a trip to Tennessee on Dec. 8. He was also looking at Colorado and USC and planned to announce a commitment in short order

### 15 Years Ago – 2005

Ohio State hosted a pair of prospects on Dec. 9-10, both verbal commitments – Coldwater, Ohio, linebacker Ross Homan and Dana Point (Calif.) Dana Hills safety Grant Schwartz.

"It went pretty well," Homan told BSB. "They showed us the academic side of campus. They showed us the Woody Hayes facility. And they introduced us to all the coaches."

"We watched practice on Friday and Saturday. They were pretty intense. Both days were good practices."

Schwartz, meanwhile, got a taste of what it's like to be a Buckeye.

"One of the highlights of my weekend actually came at the airport on my way home," Schwartz said. "We were checking in, and the guy at the counter must have recognized me because he asked my dad, 'Well, is Grant all signed up?'"

"We can't wait to have him here," he said. I just looked at my dad and said, 'How did he know who I am?' My dad just smiled and said, 'Welcome to Columbus, Grant, and welcome to Ohio State.'"

### 10 Years Ago – 2010

The fight for the nation's No. 2 cornerback appeared to be down to a two-horse race. After initially planning to take official visits to five schools, five-star prospect Doran Grant of Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary cut that list down by three.

Only Ohio State and Michigan State remained, and the Spartans were giving the Buckeyes a run for their money in an effort to land the No. 2 overall prospect from inside

Ohio's borders. He told Scout that he enjoyed his visit to East Lansing.

"Right now it's dead even between Michigan State and Ohio State," he said. "I have settled down on those two schools, but I am also going to look at a few others as well. I'm not sure if I will take official visits or not."

### Five Years Ago – 2015

After committing in the spring to play quarterback for Ohio State, Tristen Wallace didn't have a great senior season.

His position of evaluation was switched by Scout.com from a quarterback to an athlete, and a senior season of struggles at DeSoto, Texas, appeared to have made that change in status a reality.

Wallace saw that his future wasn't at quarterback, but it appeared Ohio State wasn't interested in bringing him in to play wide receiver or another skill position.

The four-star prospect, who was the No. 99 overall recruit in the country, took trips to UCLA and Oregon on the final weekend before the dead period and announced his commitment to Oregon on Dec. 13.

### One Year Ago – 2019

Ohio State landed a commitment from one of the nation's top-rated signal callers when Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., quarterback C.J. Stroud pledged his services to the Buckeyes on Dec. 18.

The 6-3, 194-pound Stroud – who was considered the second-best pro-style quarterback and No. 83 prospect overall in the class of 2020 – landed an offer from the Buckeyes following his unofficial visit for the 34-10 win over Michigan State on Oct. 5 then returned for an official visit with his mother the weekend of Dec. 14.

He picked the Buckeyes over finalists Georgia and Michigan despite what likely would have been a quicker path to playing time with the Bulldogs or Wolverines.



# Sawyer Ready To Live Up To Lofty Expectations

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It didn't take long for defensive end Jack Sawyer to make an impact at Pickerington (Ohio) North, at least in the eyes of head coach Nathan Hillerich.

In fact, Hillerich told Buckeye Sports Bulletin that he was told about Sawyer, who was in middle school at the time, when he first took over as head coach for the Panthers in 2017.

"When I was hired here at Pickerington North, he was an eighth-grader," Hillerich said. "The previous coach before me, Tom Phillips – who took the director of player personnel job at Cincinnati – when I replaced him, he said, 'Hey, we got a kid that he's in junior high and he's going to be the best player to ever come through Pickerington.'"

"That's a pretty big word when you just had (Michigan tight end) Jake Butt and (Ohio State guard/center) Pat Elflein and Godwin (Igwebuike), who went to Northwestern and was a captain. So there was a lot of hype."

Before Pickerington North even took the field for a true practice for the 2017 season, which would have been Sawyer's freshman year, he had already shown what the hype was all about simply by his performance in workouts.

"I still remember the first time I came to the weight room," Hillerich said. "He was an eighth grader, and we have morning workouts at Pickerington. He came to every morning workout, and we do competitions. We were doing a tire competition, so one-on-one just to see where you're at. And you set the tire down and you both put your hands on top of it and it's just who can pull the other person and pull the tire back about 3 yards."

"He's an eighth-grader, and I put him up against a kid (Ohio redshirt freshman Tyler Foster) who's a tight end at OU, he's a Division I tight end that's two years older than him. And (Sawyer) beat him the first day, and you know, he didn't back down. He was pumped to get to go. Just his competitiveness and the thought that he has no fear of coming in and competing and has a confidence that is just different than a lot of kids. A lot of kids I think have similar talent, but just his competitiveness and confidence in himself are special."

That may have been Hillerich's introduction to Sawyer's competitiveness, but that was not a new trait to the current five-star defensive end and Ohio State commit.

Whether it be Sawyer's first football memory – an 80-yard touchdown on what he believes was his first ever carry in his first ever football game on a halfback dive when he was in second grade – or playing games with his parents as a kid, that drive to win was always something that Sawyer had within him.

"It was kind of something I learned growing up, you know," Sawyer told BSB. "My parents, we played knockout in the front yard, and they were never letting me win. I've always just been competitive since I was a little kid and I guess it's kind of natural, but I've always had a huge drive to compete and want to win and succeed in everything I do."

Sawyer said that football has always been a big part of his life, starting with his dad, Lyle, who played football and was

a starter at Division II Findlay. That, along with constantly watching, being around, playing and throwing around a football throughout his childhood made the sport a huge part of Sawyer's family growing up.

That all led to the buzz that Hillerich heard about and, eventually, to Sawyer playing at Pickerington North and making an impact as early as his freshman season for the Panthers, an impact that Sawyer said was garnering some attention from the collegiate level.

"It was early on my freshman year," Sawyer recalled. "Coach Hillerich was definitely telling me that a lot of coaches were interested after seeing my film, since I started as a freshman in one of the hardest leagues probably in the country. Division I in Ohio is super tough, so definitely making noise early as a freshman on the field raised a lot of coaches' eyebrows."

Sawyer entered his sophomore season as the No. 3 overall prospect in the 247Sports composite rankings and proved worthy of that acclaim, finishing the 2018 season with 62 tackles, 15 tackles for loss and six sacks while also forcing and recovering a fumble.

His efforts moved him up to second on the composite rankings for the better part a year, including when Sawyer committed to the Buckeyes on Feb. 3, 2019, becoming Ohio State's first commit of the 2021 class.

"It feels great," Sawyer said of being first. "It definitely feels good just being a part since day one really just believing in the coaches that early and really helping build my class. It definitely feels good being the first guy, and I'm kind of like the founding father of the class, so it definitely means a lot to me."

Sawyer's commitment came just over a month after Ryan Day officially became Ohio State's head coach following the Buckeyes' 28-23 win over Washington in the Rose Bowl. But Sawyer said he never really wavered on his decision after the coaching change, due largely to the stability on the defensive line, where associate head coach Larry Johnson has remained through both Day and former head coach Urban Meyer.

"I think a lot of that had to do with Coach Johnson. I knew Coach Johnson was going to stay there and didn't really have any worry that he was going to leave," Sawyer said. "So trusting that and then Coach (Mickey Marotti), the best strength coach in America, too, really kind of made the decision easy. And then, after I took a visit and talked to Coach Day, I knew that was the guy I wanted to play for right away."

That confidence in Day and Ohio State from Sawyer came despite offers from Michigan, Notre Dame, Oklahoma and Penn State, among others. He also was offered visits from other major programs such as Alabama, Clemson and LSU, according to Hillerich.

But the Pickerington North head coach said that he was not surprised at how early Sawyer made the decision, and a moment very early in Day's tenure was what helped solidify that thought.

"(Sawyer's commitment) was right when Day had just been hired for probably, I don't know, maybe a month and

I think a big part of it was the day after I believe Day got hired or a couple days after, the first place he visited on a Monday, start of school, he was waiting on Jack to come to school in my room," Hillerich said. "I think that meant a lot to Jack to know that he was priority No. 1, because he had a visit scheduled to go to Clemson in the spring, go watch spring practice and stay, and he ended up going to an Ohio State basketball game, spent time there, and committed."

Despite the consistent top-five ranking in the class, a commitment to the Buckeyes and all the other acclaim and accolades that Sawyer received before even becoming a junior, Hillerich said he never saw the success impact him in any way, either on or off the field.

"I think he has a great family, and I think being at Pickerington, being around a lot of really good players – his freshman year we had a kid go to Ohio State, Alex Williams," Hillerich said. "He's obviously I think a superstar and really everybody knows who he is, but it's not like he's in a small town where no one's ever been to Ohio State or went on to play Division I football. I think his family has him grounded, and you know he's just a great kid."

"He really just wanted to enjoy the high school experience early. He didn't go visit Clemson or Alabama, LSU, all these places that would invite him. He knew what he wanted. He knew where he wanted to be. What you see is a lot of these kids just like to get the glamour and, you know, the retweets or whatever it is and all the love that some of these recruiting people will do for you."

In 2019, Sawyer improved on much of the success he'd had as a sophomore, lowering his tackles total with just 37 but making them count more with 19 TFL and 13½ sacks to go with one forced fumble and two fumble recoveries.

But a big change happened in Sawyer's junior season on the offensive side of the ball. With Pickerington North facing injury troubles at the quarterback position, the Panthers turned to their five-star defensive phenom to become the signal caller on very short notice.

"I didn't really have that much time to prepare for my first game," Sawyer said. "I kind of was just thrown in on a walk-through the day before a game. I was excited, and it was definitely a good challenge. It was fun touching the ball every play and trying to make a play, and I think I did all right. We made it to the playoffs so that's what I wanted to do was just help the team win."

Sawyer completed 6 of 11 passes for 60 yards and a touchdown and added 134 yards and three scores on the ground in his debut, a 38-17 win over Olentangy Orange. But the real challenge came in a battle against Dublin Coffman.

The Shamrocks started out the game hot, jumping out to a 7-0 first-quarter lead, an advantage that jumped to 21-6 in the third quarter off a pair of touchdown connections between quarterback Connor Mathews and Jameel Williamson, a current wide receiver at Akron, that went for 60 and 67 yards.

Sawyer helped cut that deficit later in

the quarter with a 78-yard touchdown connection to wide receiver Chris Scott, now at Cincinnati, and after a Pickerington North field goal, the Panthers trailed 21-16 heading into the fourth.

There, Sawyer found Scott again from 25 yards out on a fourth-down conversion off a tipped pass to take a one-point lead after a failed conversion, and then Sawyer took one in himself from 7 yards to make it 29-21, capping off a run of 23 unanswered points from Pickerington North.

Coffman would score with 32 seconds left with a chance to tie the game, but the Panthers stuffed the two-point rush attempt, sealing a huge win in the process.

Both Sawyer, who finished the game with 201 total yards and three touchdowns on offense alone, and Hillerich noted that game as the highlight of his tenure at Pickerington North. Sawyer called it "probably the best game I've been a part of," while his head coach said it symbolized even more than just the impressive result on the field.

"Dublin Coffman at the time was I think ranked third in the state, undefeated, and he kind of put the team on his back," Hillerich said. "He had multiple touchdowns in the game and also was playing on defense and had two sacks that were just huge sacks clinching the game, playing both ways, which is something not many guys do at the Division I level that we play at. It was a huge win, and I think it kind of solidified him as a junior. He was a captain and it was his team, and he wasn't going to let us have a down year, no matter how many injuries or what happened."

Zack Carpenter, an Ohio State recruiting writer at Eleven Warriors, was at Pickerington North's comeback victory over Dublin Coffman and told BSB that a performance like that showed how special a player Sawyer is, and not just because of his talent.

"It wasn't so much the ability to play quarterback that impressed me. It was the leadership he showed when he led them to a comeback win that night," Carpenter said. "Already facing a 1-3 start to the season and on the verge of missing the playoffs, Pick North trailed 21-6 in the third quarter to Dublin Coffman. The kid put the team on his back. They won 29-27, which was part of five wins in the next six games to squeak them into the playoffs. It was easily their biggest win of the season. It can't be overstated how impressive that poise was."

After all the effort it took to get his team into the playoffs, Pickerington North faced off against Olentangy Orange. But during the game, a 36-17 Orange win, Sawyer suffered a torn MCL, the first major injury of his football career.

"It was definitely hard at first," Sawyer admitted. "Luckily for me I've been injury-free my whole life up until that when I got hit. I just had to push through, and really after the first month, I just got my mobility back on my knee and my leg. It was kind of a breeze honestly just doing all the stuff I love squatting and getting strong and running again and stuff like that."

"So after the first month, I'd say it was pretty easy, but it was definitely a grind."

Despite that injury, the five-star defensive end said he feels better than he ever has after his recovery.

"I think I got better from that because



Jack Sawyer



## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

it really pushed me that much harder and I worked out much harder and now I take everything less for granted,” Sawyer said. “I appreciate it every time I get on the field, every time I get to work out. I feel way better than I have ever in my life so I’m just super excited to finally get to put it to use in a spring game here soon.”

Sawyer was healthy to play in his senior season for the Panthers but ultimately elected to opt out and prepare to enroll early for Ohio State in January, choosing to do so during a time when it appeared the Big Ten was looking at playing a spring season.

Hillerich said that spring-season idea definitely played a part in Sawyer’s decision but that, even with the conference ultimately playing in the fall, he thinks the star defensive end made the right decision in order to prepare for the collegiate level.

“Obviously a crazy, crazy year,” Hillerich said. “We had talked this summer, and we didn’t know at the time if we’d even have football honestly. In July, we were thinking there’s a decent chance we weren’t going to play, especially when the Big Ten announced they were not playing football. When I think he really started thinking about it was when Ohio State talked about moving the season to the spring and all of college football, and the possibility of him being able to play in the spring because he’s already set to graduate early. And talking to Coach Johnson and Coach Day at Ohio State there was a legit chance I think that he’d be in the rotation as a defensive end.

“I think that’s when maybe the wheels started spinning, the thoughts of, ‘I have to make sure I’m ready to go Jan. 6,’ or whenever he could enroll. And then with all the uncertainty and just making sure an injury or something wouldn’t delay things for him, I just thought it was the best thing for him.”

Sawyer agreed with his head coach, saying that he still believes it was the right move for his football career, even if he obviously would have loved to play for the Panthers one more time.

“Everybody who knows me knows that I’m a competitor and I love football, and I love Pick North, too, so it was definitely hard to not play this year,” Sawyer said. “Looking back, I still think I made the right decision. Obviously, I progressed so much more than I would have if I was in a season the last four months.”

Now Sawyer is set to make it official and sign with the Buckeyes during the early signing period, but when he ultimately enrolls early, it will be far from the first time he has visited campus.

Although some recruits in the 2021 class have never been to Columbus for an official Ohio State visit, Sawyer was at multiple home games over the past few seasons, and though he said all of his visits stand out for different reasons, it was a game in 2018 against a certain major rival that comes to mind first.

“I think the one that stands out the most might be Urban Meyer’s last game against the team up north,” Sawyer said. “The college football playoff was loving them that year, and we just put it on them bad, smacked them around like we should, and that was definitely one of the best games I’ve been a part of watching.”

With the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry in mind, Sawyer said that “it sucks” and was a “bummer” to see the latest installment of The Game canceled due to COVID-19 cases in the Wolverines program. He

also said that he wasn’t sure if Ohio State would hang 100 on Michigan as Day had reportedly said following a Zoom call, but that the Buckeyes “for sure would have put up 60 without even trying.”

Sawyer will have an opportunity to make his mark in the rivalry as soon as next season, though finding significant time as a freshman at Ohio State is never a given.

But if you ask Sawyer’s high school coach, he is confident that the five-star talent is going to make his presence felt in the defensive line room early and often when he makes the move to Columbus.

“I think he’s one of them kids that’s going to go there and he’s going to make an impact right away,” Hillerich said. “I think he could be a guy like Andy Katzenmoyer or Maurice Clarett where coming in as a freshman, they’re going to compete and they’re going to be a guy that everybody talks about.

“It’s not just the ability, it’s his relentlessness to compete and be the best and not back down. He’s not going to be scared of, if Thayer Munford is still there and he goes in spring practice, he’s not going to be backing down one bit.”

With that type of confidence from his head coach, a top-five composite ranking in his recruiting class and being the “founding father” of one of the top classes in the country, it is safe to say there are a lot of outside expectations put on Sawyer’s shoulders as his time at Ohio State draws nearer.

But Sawyer wants to have those expectations, using them as fuel to work harder in an attempt to live up to even the loftiest of hopes for the 6-5, 248-pound defensive end.

“My expectations are super high for myself,” he said. “I think the expectations that everyone has for me are extremely high, too, so I would just say my expectations are everything that everyone says I should do. I want to win a couple of national championships, first and foremost, obviously win the Big Ten every year and then win the team up north game every year. And personal expectations, I want to play as a freshman, obviously. Obviously long term, the goal is always to be a first-round pick, be a top-five pick, so definitely those are my goals.”

Also adding to the pressure is Ohio State’s constant success at defensive end, with names such as Joey Bosa, Nick Bosa and Chase Young all becoming top-four picks in the NFL draft, and each of whom had huge success at the collegiate level.

But Sawyer looks forward to the pressure that comes with the expectations, and as he did in second-grade football, games of knockout with his parents, in the Pickerington North weight room as an eighth-grader or in a pivotal matchup against Dublin Coffman, he is using his natural competitiveness to try to come out the other side as one of the best defensive ends the program has ever seen.

“There’s a sense of pressure, but for a guy like me I always look at that as a positive because there are a lot of guys out there that would love to be in my position, and I thrive off that so-called pressure that people think I have on me,” Sawyer said. “I love that. I want those expectations. I want to be considered in the mentions of the Bosa brothers and the Chase Youngs of the world.

“So, it just makes me want to work that much harder and try to achieve those, and if I do, then obviously I’ll go down as one of the greats at Ohio State.”



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# Christman Hopes To Make Early Impact At OSU

By ANDREW LIND  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Although Richfield (Ohio) Revere four-star offensive lineman Ben Christman's mother attended Ohio State and he grew up rooting for the Buckeyes, securing his pledge was no easy task for head coach Ryan Day and offensive line coach Greg Studrawa.

After all, the 6-6 and 299-pound Christman – who is considered the sixth-best offensive guard and No. 124 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – held early scholarship offers from some of the nation's top programs, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State, West Virginia and Wisconsin. He wasn't in a rush to make a decision, either.

But following an unofficial visit in June 2019, he knew Columbus was the place to be. He announced his commitment just five days later and became the fourth member of the Buckeyes' 2021 recruiting class, joining Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer, Philadelphia St. Joseph's five-star quarterback Kyle McCord and Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star wide receiver Jayden Ballard.

"The culture of Ohio State was the difference," Christman told Buckeye Sports Bulletin Dec. 11. "Knowing that I wanted to be a leader of a class and just the opportunities that you can have at Ohio State, I couldn't pass on it."

Christman spoke highly of Studrawa, who has been with Ohio State since 2016 and has established himself as one of the nation's best recruiters, landing five-star offensive linemen

such as Wyatt Davis in 2017, Nicholas Petit-Frere in 2018, Harry Miller in 2019 and Paris Johnson in 2020.

"He's the real deal," Christman said, "one of the best in the business. He's just everything you look for in a coach. I really trust him, and I'm looking forward to working with him."

Christman noted his early commitment allowed him to build a stronger relationship with Day and Studrawa, whereas a recruit who holds off on a decision would be spreading his time across multiple coaching staffs trying to land his signature.

"We just talk about life," Christman said. "We obviously talk about football, but it's good to talk about things outside of that. Our relationship has really grown as a result. I feel so comfortable and my family trusts those guys, and I'm just so ready to move onto the next chapter."

Recruiting analysts are undecided on whether Christman – who was recently named first-team all-state by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association – would be best-served playing guard or tackle at the next level. But he believes that speaks to his overall versatility and knows that will be the quickest way to playing time in Columbus.

"I was recruited to play offensive line and understand that the best five are going to get on that field," Christman said. "I think a reason I was able to get recruited as highly as I was is because I'm able to play all five positions, and I like to take that to the next level."

"You're just one snap away, especially with the situation that we are in now. I just want to go in with that mentality that I can go play right

away at any position. Whatever happens, I'm just going to give it my all."

Christman noted he had four different offensive coordinators and four different offensive line coaches throughout his high school career. The Minutemen also ran four different offensive schemes, so continuity on the coaching staff and in the playbook is something that Christman is looking forward to when he gets to Ohio State.

"Lately, it's been very run heavy," Christman said. "When I was first being recruited, we ran the spread, so I'm ready to get back to that. It's really exciting."

Once he made his decision, Christman – who wants to be a coach when his playing days are over – took it upon himself to be the leader of Ohio State's 2021 recruiting class. He reached out to recruits whom he wanted to play alongside and whom the coaching staff identified as their top targets in hopes of leading the Buckeyes to the No. 1 class in the 247Sports team recruiting rankings.

"The bar at Ohio State is to just keep getting better, and I wanted to make sure we had the best class in America," Christman said. "I just try to compete in everything I do, and that was another example. I just take great pride in it and I can't wait for all of us to get to Columbus."

Christman mentioned the difficulties in recruiting due to the pandemic shutting down all official and unofficial visits through at least April 15, 2021. He was thankful that technology allowed him to become close to out-of-state commits such as Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson and Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star running back Evan Pryor, among others.

"Meeting guys on visits is really the key to recruiting," Christman said. "But the guys who weren't able to visit before everything got shut down, we just told them about our experiences that we had."

"With me being from Ohio, I had nothing but positive things to say. We were really lucky to have Zoom to show them what campus was like, though that's obviously not the same as being in person, walking and talking. Recruiting, to me, is all about relationships, and we did a good job of establishing those."

Naturally, Christman has grown especially

close to the fellow offensive line commitments in Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal five-star offensive guard Donovan Jackson and Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central four-star offensive tackle Zen Michalski.

"Those guys are great," Christman said. "It all starts up front, and knowing those guys before they committed is going to help now that we're going to be playing together."

Heading into the early signing period, which runs from Dec. 16-18, Ohio State holds commitments from 21 players, including Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka, who pledged his services to the Buckeyes on Dec. 11 (see page 17). And while Christman is just the 13th-highest ranked player in the class, he doesn't feel overshadowed by any of his fellow commits.

"I'm not really thinking about rankings, especially since I'm about to move into college in less than a month," Christman said. "But heading into my senior year, I wanted to have an elite season, and that provided a bit of motivation for me."

Christman was supposed to wrap his high school career with an appearance in the Under Armour All-America Game, which was scheduled for Jan. 2 but was canceled due to the pandemic. Still, it was an honor for him to be among the 100 players nationwide to be selected.

"It was a childhood dream come true," Christman said. "It was something that I worked for, so it was tremendous honor and great recognition. I'm truly grateful to Under Armour for inviting me. I'm obviously extremely disappointed that I couldn't play in the game, but with everything that was going on, I totally understand why it got canceled. I'm still truly grateful for the honor."

Christman is now focused on enrolling early, learning the playbook in time for spring practice and competing for playing time as a true freshman. But he also has lofty goals for himself and his teammates, which includes winning multiple Big Ten titles and multiple national championships.

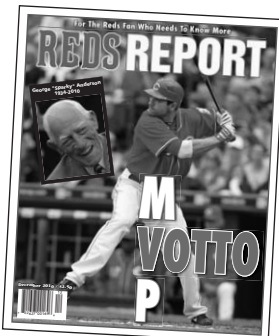
"We're ready to accept the challenge," Christman said. "We want to play as well as advertised, be a part of this winning culture and keep on building it. I just hope Buckeye Nation is ready."

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# Henderson A Rare Talent For Running Back Corps

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Since the class of 2007, Ohio State has signed at least one five-star prospect in all but one position room. In fact, in that time, the Buckeyes have secured commitments from several players sitting near or at the top of their position group that gained that coveted fifth star, including two quarterbacks (with another two set to sign in the 2021 and 2022 classes, respectively), four wide receivers, six offensive linemen, six defensive linemen, six linebackers and five defensive backs.

But the one room without that truly elite recruiting production has been one of the most successful in the program, producing one All-Big Ten player after another along with some of the best single-season and career statistics that the school has ever seen. Of course, the position that went more than 14 years without signing a five-star is running back, with Chris Wells serving as the most recent five-star back to sign on with the Buckeyes after he joined the fold in the class of 2006.

That streak should come to an end on Dec. 16, the first day of the 2020 early signing period, when Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson signs his letter of intent to suit up for the Buckeyes.

Ranked the No. 24 player and No. 1 running back in the 247Sports composite (he checks in all the way up at No. 11 in the in-house 247Sports rankings), Henderson's drought-ending commitment for the Buckeyes may be a big deal, but it wasn't necessarily the result of a significantly focused effort from Ohio State to end the streak. Instead, he just found himself comfortable with Ohio State's staff, specifically running backs coach Tony Alford.

"I don't know that it was anything hyper-specific," Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Marc Givler told BSB on what drew Henderson to Ohio State. "I think he connected very early with Tony Alford and (head coach) Ryan Day. I think he started to connect very early with other members of the recruiting class. And I think there was just a comfort level established there, even though he hadn't visited campus at that point – and up until the (October) Buckeye Bash he had never been to Ohio State.

"So I think it was kind of a thing where those kinds of the people, he felt he meshed well with from the top-down, coaches to other recruits. And I don't know how much he would admit this, but certainly I think if you're a class of 2021 running back, you probably have to like the depth chart."

While the commitment is certainly historically significant for the Buckeyes, it's likely even more significant for Henderson's future position coach in Alford. Long praised as a top member of the staff and rewarded with the associate head coach title, Alford has been considered an elite recruiter but suffered several major setbacks, specifically in the 2020 class, when five-star Bijan Robinson and four-star Jaylan Knighton snubbed the Buckeyes for Texas and Florida State respectively – after being considered near-locks to land in Columbus.

Similar issues in 2019, when Ohio State lost a commitment from four-star Sampson James and had to scramble to land Marcus Crowley to replace him – or even going back to 2018, when the Buckeyes secured two top-100 halfbacks in Jaelen Gill and Brian Snead, both of whom have since left the program.

"I've chalked it up to bad luck," Givler said of Alford's struggles on the recruiting trail and in talent retention. "When you have success over several years recruiting this position and

then you kind of have a one-off, and then you immediately kind of get back to what he's done in '21, what he's potentially going to be able to do in 2022 with what they have as far as some guys there in the top two or three, four right now – I just think, look, he swung really hard at two out-of-state kids and looked really good to get maybe both of them at one time, and things kind of just fell apart there over a couple-week period.

"And I think you have to give him the benefit of the doubt because this really hasn't been a pattern. He has proven over the years that he can go and get those kids. I mean, he got J.K. Dobbins out of Texas. I know right now that this doesn't seem like a big deal, but pulling Brian Snead out of Florida was a big deal. I know it didn't pan out well for everybody involved on that, but that was a big win. So he's proven he can do that.

"I just think two kind of weird situations happened, and they just so happened to happen in the same month basically. And it is what it is. It's kind of a fluky thing."

For Alford and the Buckeyes, landing Henderson and his classmate – Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star running Evan Pryor – is a return to that class of 2017 form when Alford outworked the in-state Longhorns to bring La Grange, Texas, four-star Dobbins to Columbus. In actual recruiting rankings, these signings even outweigh that of Dobbins.

Rankings don't necessarily equate with production, for obvious reasons. Dobbins came to Ohio State as a high four-star prospect (No. 46 nationally) and left the program as the single-season rushing yards record holder. Living up to that standard, even with a higher pedigree entering the program, isn't likely going to be a walk in the park for Henderson. However, he certainly seems to have the traits needed to produce on a similar level, even if crushing the 2,000-yard mark as Dobbins did may be setting the bar high.

"I think he gives them more of a home-run hitter than they've had, really since Zeke (Elliott)," Givler explained. "Dobbins was capable of breaking big runs, but I don't know that he was quite the explosive top-end speed guy that Henderson is. He is very elusive. Again, very explosive and seems to have great vision, have a great field, like an open-field runner. He has almost a – this is going to be probably pretty high praise here – but almost has a Reggie Bush quality to him in terms of once he gets out in the open, how dangerous he can be, and he seems like a guy who could also be a pretty good pass catcher out of the backfield as well."

As an actual prospect, Henderson compares more to the last blue-chip halfback to cycle through Columbus prior to Dobbins' arrival in 2017: Elliott, who signed with the Buckeyes in the class of 2013 as the No. 69 player in the country, though OSU had little doubt what the St. Louis product could do.

"It's such a tough thing with Zeke," Givler said. "He played at such a small school, I mean, the competition there was so bad, and I don't think people knew how to make heads or tails of that. And then Zeke goes to the Army All-American Bowl, but they don't even really let him play running back. They had him playing safety. So I think that one's a complicated comparison. I think if you got the people at Ohio State who were on the staff at the time in a moment of honesty, that they would tell you that they knew what they had in Zeke and that that's probably the gold standard for them.

"But I do think Henderson is a bit more of a prototype than say, J.K. was. J.K. was a little bit undersized. He was not a 4.4, 4.3 (40-yard

dash time) guy. I think Henderson fits a prototype much more closely to what Zeke fit. And obviously it looks like he's going to be ranked higher than Zeke coming out of high school.

"So I think he's in that category. Zeke has been an unbelievable player, though. Obviously, the hindsight is 20/20, so that's pretty big company to put him there. But as a pure run-and-jump athlete, prototype type of guy, yes, I think, to me, he's closer to Zeke or a Beanie Wells than he is a J.K., who kind of maxed out his physical ability (in high school)."

While that praise may seem lofty for an 18-year-old – still almost a year away from playing his first actual college snaps – Henderson's ability to enchant analysts and coaches and draw those major comparisons is another trait that he has in common with the last five-star back to roll through Columbus. As a top-10 player in the class of 2006, Wells' position coach, Dick Tressel, placed him in the same breath as one of the best running backs that the sport has ever seen when discussing him in 2006.

"Jim Brown," Tressel said on signing day in 2006 when asked for a comparison for Wells. "He absolutely reminds me of Jim Brown. You probably shouldn't quote me on that because that's putting something on him, but that's who he reminds me of really. He has a little gait in his step almost like Jim Brown."

He may not be earning Jim Brown comparisons as the last five-star running back at Ohio State did, but with Henderson's talent and fit into Ohio State's offense, there's a growing thought around Columbus – especially as the Buckeyes struggle in 2020 to find a true No. 1

halfback – that Henderson could be a first-year starter.

He wouldn't be Alford's first true freshman starter. After Mike Weber spent the offseason dealing with nagging injuries, Dobbins claimed the starting spot in his first season on campus and never really relinquished it. Save for the injury-impacted part of that battle, could Ohio State see a similar situation with Henderson in 2021?

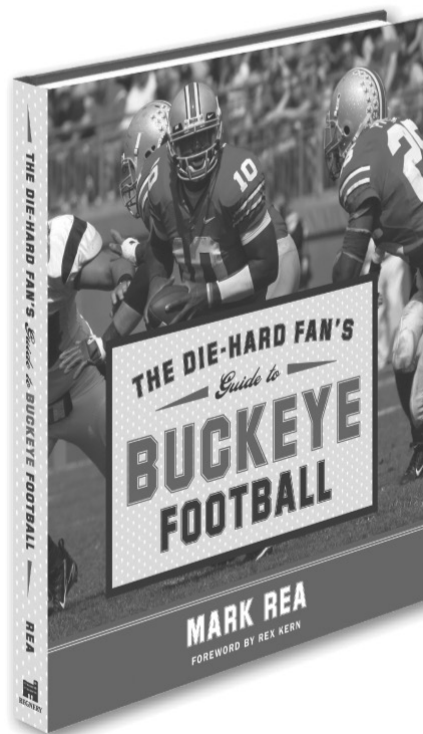
"I could see it playing out very closely to that," Givler said. "Would I expect maybe Master Teague to get demoted? I don't know about that. But I could definitely see a situation where Henderson is part of a two-back, kind of two-headed monster thing. I could absolutely see him do that.

"I do think it's a little bit unfortunate that he basically hasn't played football in a year now (Henderson's senior season was canceled). So I think there will be maybe a bit of a learning curve there. But I think once he gets into the program and back into a routine, that he certainly – from an ability standpoint – will have the highest ceiling of any back on the roster.

"And then, it's going to be a matter of work ethic, picking up the playbook. Does he block? Does he pick up blitzes well? Does he do all the little things that they're going to want guys to do? I mean, that's a big part of what got Dobbins on the field early too was not just his ability, but just his maturity and understanding of the offense and everything else. I think that's probably a really good comparison there in terms of how Henderson could absolutely be part of a two-back system type of thing (like Dobbins was)."

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# Freshman Treloar Finds His Way With The Buckeyes

Well-traveled freshman Travis Treloar has found a home playing for the Ohio State men's hockey team.

A one-time Western Michigan commit, he reopened his recruiting while playing junior hockey in Lincoln, Neb., and was instantly drawn to the Buckeyes thanks to the efforts of head coach Steve Rohlik and his staff.

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"I know Rohls (Rohlik) came out for a weekend, and then I got to talk to him," Treloar said. "A couple weeks after that weekend I came over for a visit and then literally right away after the visit I knew this was the spot and I gave him a call. I'm super happy and

thankful about it.

"The whole staff, literally, that was the biggest selling point. I came here because of the staff, but it's the whole Ohio State. It's just great people around you and you want to be part of the family and the community."

Rohlik is glad that Treloar (5-11, 170 pounds) chose the Buckeyes. After not scoring in the first two games, he had six points (three goals, three assists) in the following four games.

In the next two games at No. 15 Notre Dame on Dec. 12-13, Treloar earned two assists for the No. 14 Buckeyes (3-5-0, 3-5-0-1-0).

The first came late in the middle period of the second game to spark a run of three straight power-play goals as the Buckeyes overcame a 2-0 deficit to win 3-2 for a split after a 3-0 loss to the Fighting Irish (4-4-0, 3-3-0-0-0) in the opener.

Treloar's play is not a surprise to Rohlik based on what he did at Lincoln in 2019-20 with 49 points (14 goals, 35 assists) in 48

games.

"We've certainly seen that at the junior level," the coach said. "He was an integral part in a lot of offense where he was, and we're just now getting to see what he can do here."

"He loves the game. He's a student of the game, and he works extremely hard at it. Those are some really good qualities to have success."

Treloar's studious approach comes naturally from being the son of a former pro hockey player.

Toronto native Darren Treloar played junior hockey in Canada before a nine-game minor-league stint in the American Hockey League in 1987-88.

He played professionally in Sweden from 1989-98 and has since been a head coach in Sweden and Norway. He is the sporting manager for Norway's Stjernen Hockey.

"I was born in Sweden and raised in Norway," Travis Treloar said. "I have Swedish and Canadian citizenship, nothing Norwegian. My dad is Canadian. That's where I got the Canadian citizenship."

He lived in Toronto for a time as part of his multi-continent journey.

"When I turned one, I moved to Norway where dad was a general manager," he said. "I was in Norway until I was 14 and I moved back to Sweden to play for hockey reasons, just to play for a little better team and overall hockey in general."

"When I was in Sweden, I was thinking about the college route, and I thought the best way for me to also adopt the North American style of hockey was to come over as soon as possible."

He played in New Jersey and eventually moved to Chicago of the United States Hockey League, the highest level of junior hockey in America. He played four games for the Steel in 2017-18 and 69 the next season before landing in Lincoln of the USHL.

He was there in March when the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to the sports world.

"Everybody got sent home but me," Treloar said. "They didn't want me to go back home because if the season started again, they didn't want me to be stuck in Norway if I had difficulties coming back from overseas again."

The season did not restart and Treloar spent his time until entering Ohio State in his hometown of Fredrikstad, Norway.

After an initial quarantine, he had to get creative to stay in shape because initially fitness centers were closed.

"My dad is very into hockey, so he rented a whole basement and I had a small gym and shooting ramps," he said. "I could go there whenever I wanted. It could be early or late at night. I could just go there and shoot pucks. I could go there and lift weights. I really had everything set up for me. Everything was in place."

It wasn't a typical basement setting, though.

"It was like a parking garage and it went into this small kind of tunnel and there were massive rooms down there," Treloar said. "My dad knew a guy and he asked if he could borrow a squat rack and weights and I brought my net from home."

Treloar spent the summer months there with his dad and a personal trainer.

"I worked out with the trainer in the morning and then in the afternoon I would work out with my dad," he said. "I would do more hockey-related things like shooting and working on my legs a little bit more."

After a few months, the ice rinks in Norway reopened.

"We had to skate in Oslo but it was a bit of a drive," he said. "I live about an hour away from Oslo. I'd skate two or three times a week with my dad and my old teammates when I played in Norway and some older guys as well."

His efforts paid off with a fast start to his college career. His first goal came in the third game of the season on Nov. 28 vs. Michigan State, and the next game against the Spartans he had two assists playing alongside junior Quinn Preston and sophomore Mark Cheremeta.

"He's a really smart player," Preston said. "He's got a lot of skill, and he's really impressed me a lot. He does a lot of little things that are really good that some guys don't do, and it's really a respectable thing to have as a freshman coming in."

Preston likes that Treloar plays a responsible game.

"He's a very skilled player, but he doesn't turn the puck over very often," Preston said. "A lot of times when you got those high-end skill guys, they try to make some moves at the wrong times, and he's one of those guys that doesn't really do that."

"He's also pretty sound defensively. He knows the system already, and that's a tribute to him and his focus every day in practice."

Treloar said the biggest adjustment from junior hockey is the physicality and tempo.

"Everything is stepped up a notch," he said.

Instead of describing whom he patterns his game after, Treloar prefers to look at the big picture.

"I want to be known as a winner," he said. "I love to compete. You see these guys that say, 'I'm more of skill guy,' or whatever. I just love to compete. That's the main reason I play this sport."

I just love it, just competing and that team bonding. There's nothing like it. I played other sports growing up, and nothing compares to hockey."

*For a recap of Ohio State's series against Notre Dame, go to BSB's BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.*

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# Standout Sophomore Liddell Steps Up For Ohio State

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State was down eight points to Notre Dame at halftime of its first road game of the season Dec. 8.

E.J. Liddell had two points on a pair of foul shots after an 0 for 5 start. The Buckeyes needed their sophomore forward to step up his game if they were going to win, and head coach Chris Holtmann let him know.

"Excuse my language, Mom, but Coach chewed my ass at halftime," Liddell said. "And I just came out in the second half going hard, trying to play my hardest."

Holtmann got on the talented sophomore from Belleville, Ill., only because he knew he could handle it.

"He is one of the best kids I've coached," Holtmann said. "He is a tremendous kid. Having said that, he took it, and it was pretty one-sided. He is a tremendous kid. He responds in those moments. And man, I was proud of him."

Liddell answered the bell, playing his best basketball in a 17-point second half on 7-of-10 shooting and finishing with 19 points, 12 rebounds and three blocks.

The former four-star prospect from Belleville (Ill.) West said his coach emphasized contesting shots with more vigor – so he would not be "dotted" (a player scoring over the outstretched arm of a defender) – and stepping up as a leader when he gave him an earful.

"He just needed me to contribute on both ends. Me being one of the leaders on the team, he needed me to be better on both ends," Liddell said. "Coach said they dotted me a few times on defense. But he just felt like I needed to play harder and lead the team better."

Liddell responded well to his coach's criticism, but he said that he already knew he needed to play drastically better after a frustrating start.

"Not even the scoring factor, I just felt like I needed to play defense better," Liddell said. "I wasn't challenging enough shots well, and I just felt like I needed to do more for my team to help us win. And I felt like I did a lot in the second half to help us."

Liddell, who has since been ruled out indefinitely due to a non-COVID-19 related illness, credited his teammates for giving him the confidence to bounce back after a rough first half.

"I felt like we were more connected," Liddell said. "Everybody was picking me up, and I felt like I needed that. My teammates had my back no matter what. They just kept telling me how I know how to play. And I was just telling everybody to keep shooting the ball, just being positive, and we came back out in the second half with a different mind-set."

That confidence boost proved to be big for Liddell and the Buckeyes, particularly after Notre Dame junior center Nate Laszewski hit a clutch three-pointer to cut the lead to 81-80 with 1:57 left.

Following a basket by junior wing Justice Sueing, Ohio State got a huge stop on defense, ending in a Liddell rebound. The Buckeyes showed improved connection with solid ball movement on the ensuing possession, but they were running out of time on the shot clock when the ball found Liddell's hands.

Looking like he was back in the practice gym where he put in countless hours of work during the offseason, Liddell calmly dribbled to his left and stepped back before releasing a midrange jumper after a heads-up call from junior guard Duane Washington. Nothing but net.

"I actually didn't know the time on the clock," Liddell said. "Duane was just yelling, 'Shoot it,' and I looked up at the last second and saw there were two seconds on the clock. I just feel like that

was a huge momentum swing for us."

Liddell swished home the midrange jump shot as the shot clock expired for his sixth make in his final seven shots, and the visiting Buckeyes held on to win 90-85 to improve to 4-0.

"I just felt like in the second half, Coach needed me in those final minutes," Liddell said. "Last year, I wasn't in the game at the end of the season for the final minutes sometimes, and I had a feel of what that was like, and Coach wanted me to be a leader this year. Being a leader on the court at that time and just picking everybody up – the guys on the bench picked me up, so I just felt like they needed me in those final moments."

The two-time Illinois Mr. Basketball winner flashed his elite potential as a freshman last season, but his role was limited with Andre and Kaleb Wesson playing such heavy minutes at forward. Liddell averaged 6.7 points and 3.8 rebounds per game on 46.1 percent shooting in 16.6 minutes per game as a true freshman.

Through four games in 2020-21, Liddell led the team with averages of 15.5 points and 7.5 boards per game, improving his field-goal percentage to 53.7 percent. After averaging 0.9 blocks and 0.4 steals per contest as a freshman, Liddell's marks are up to 1.5 blocks and 1.5 steals per game.

Playing with physicality has been an area of emphasis for Liddell early in his collegiate career, which Holtmann applauded after a 16-point, seven-rebound outing in a 77-44 win over Morehead State on Dec. 2.

"I've been really proud of the steps he's taken in that area, playing with force," Holtmann said after that game. "I think he's doing a lot of good things, a lot of growth and improvement, but again, the challenge will be as we move forward with competition increasing, can he continue to do that on both ends?"

It is no secret that the departure of standout center Kaleb Wesson left Ohio State vulnerable in the middle due to a lack of size. Liddell has been a big reason the Buckeyes have not been exposed in that area early in the season.

Though he is listed at 6-7 and 240 pounds, Liddell gave up a few inches against Laszewski (6-10) and Juwan Durham (6-11) for Notre Dame.

"There's no question we've got some undersized guys in some spots," Holtmann said after the Notre Dame game. "But I do think that E.J.'s quickness, his offensive versatility, his ability to block shots and impact the game as he continues to get in game shape – he was tremendous in the second half. We had a really honest, heart-to-heart conversation there at halftime, because we need him to be good for us if we're going to be good."

For Liddell, who was the No. 8 power forward and No. 44 overall recruit nationally in 2019, playing against bigger players is nothing new.

"Just growing up I really haven't always been the tallest," Liddell said. "I've played against bigger guys my whole life, and I felt like tonight was just another game."

Through the first 29 games of his Ohio State career, Liddell had scored at least 10 points on four occasions. In his last six games stretching from March to December, Liddell has accomplished the feat in each outing.

Liddell raised some eyebrows after scoring in double figures for the sixth straight game, with four games of 16 or more points in that span. To fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker, Liddell's success came as no surprise.

"E.J.'s always been a great post player," Walker said of Liddell. "It was just that last year we had really good players who played in front of him. It's just his role to step up more this year and be more confident in himself. I've always thought he was a great post player. He can score over both shoulders; he can make the midrange jump

shot; he can pick and pop.

"He just does a lot. He creates a lot of attention. He can pass out of the post as well. I've always seen E.J. as a great post scorer, passer and just overall great player."

Another area of improvement for Liddell has been his passing. After committing 29 turnovers and dishing just 14 assists as a freshman, Liddell has five assists to five turnovers this year and his average has increased from 0.5 helpers per game to 1.3.

Liddell has also improved at the foul line after shooting 71.8 percent (61 of 85) last season. He is up to 81.8 percent on free throws, increasing his attempts per game from 2.7 to 5.5.

"I tried to work on my body, just work on my whole frame," Liddell said Dec. 2. "And I've just been trying to get in better shape and get in better condition, and I just feel like this summer I put in tons and tons of work to get stronger, which led me up to here."

Being in better shape helps Liddell in all areas, especially when banging against bigger bodies in the post. Part of what makes him such an effective defender around the rim is his excellent timing as a shot blocker.

Liddell blocked 29 shots as a freshman, sending away 6.6 percent of all two-point field goals attempted while he was on the court, which led the Buckeyes and ranked No. 81 nationally according to KenPom.com.

His three blocks against Notre Dame marked the 10th time Liddell recorded multiple blocks in a game and the second this season.

What makes Liddell so vital to the Buckeyes' success is his ability to get a bucket regardless of the circumstances. His abilities to defend in the

post, block shots, rebound and dish the rock are all important, but Ohio State often relies on him to get a basket when it is most needed. However, Holtmann realizes the standout forward is still an underclassman.

"There's no question he's got to take a real important step for us," Holtmann said in the preseason. "I think to expect a sophomore to be someone you're going to run 100 percent of your offense through in the best league in the country is probably too much to put on him right now."

What makes Liddell such a dynamic scorer is his ability to use both hands and hit shots by using superb footwork to get open.

Growing up, Liddell's favorite player was Kobe Bryant, who tragically died in a helicopter crash in January. Though Bryant was a guard and Liddell is a forward, there are similarities in their post skills, and the young Buckeye carries his hero with him on the floor.

"Every time I yell 'Kobe' in my head, I think it's going in," Liddell said. "I feel like when I miss, I kind of fail him."

Without trying to put too much pressure on the sophomore forward, Holtmann understands how critical Liddell's overall consistency will be to his team.

"He's a sophomore, and he's one of our best players, so I think those conversations are going to happen throughout his sophomore year," Holtmann said. "He needed to play better for us. He is a terrific player. And as a sophomore, he's got to be consistently a pretty good player for us, night in and night out, if we're going to be good."

"He responded with some real grit and determination. I'm sure those conversations will happen again."

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# Buckeyes Must Move Forward Without Liddell

This space was poised to write about what could have been a defining moment for forward E.J. Liddell and in turn Ohio State's chances to make some noise come NCAA Tournament time.

He was poked and prodded by coach Chris Holtmann to pick up his game after a lackluster first half at Notre Dame on Dec. 8. The Buckeyes trailed by eight points and Liddell had a mere two points.

## COURT REPORT

Craig Merz

That he finished with career highs in points (19) and rebounds (12) in the 90-85 win in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge was the stuff legends are made of. Sort of like Thad Matta kicking Evan Turner out of practice early in the Ohio State career of the future national Player of the Year.

As the words started flowing (OK, trickling) for Court Report on the afternoon of Dec. 11, news came via an Ohio State release that Liddell would be out indefinitely with a non-COVID 19 illness.

Thoughts of a previously undetected ailment like the hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (hardening of the heart muscle) that forced Penn State running back Journey Brown to retire in November came to the forefront.

But reports from The Columbus Dispatch and other outlets suggested Liddell was suffering from mononucleosis. His timetable for return, if true, will be weeks, not months.

That's good news for the Buckeyes, although the timing certainly stinks from the team's perspective in one regard. Under normal circumstances, meaning pre-COVID, the Big Ten plays two conference games in December.

This season because of a later start and fewer nonleague games, the Buckeyes will have four Big Ten games this month, beginning Dec. 16 at Purdue, not to men-

tion the Dec. 19 matchup in Cleveland vs. North Carolina in the CBS Sports Classic.

On the other hand, it's better that Liddell is sidelined now than in March during the conference and national tournaments.

The Buckeyes will be tested without their leading scorer (15.5 points per game) and rebounder (7.5).

Having mono, at least the onset of it, might explain in part Liddell's lackluster first half against the Fighting Irish. He missed all five shots from the floor, including two three-pointers, in 14 minutes.

At halftime, Holtmann "chewed my ass," as Liddell colorfully described the tongue-lashing.

Now, it would have been easy for a young star player to react negatively and either try to do too much or sulk and retreat from the game. Either can be a detriment to the team. Liddell did neither.

He played with poise and control and, most importantly, within the team structure.

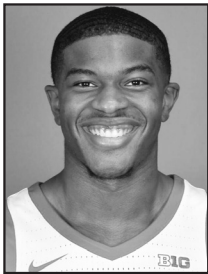
"I just came out in the second half and tried to play my hardest," he said. "(Holtmann) just needed me to contribute at both ends. Me being one of the leaders on the team, he needed me to be better at both ends of the court."

Liddell had 17 points after the break. He made six of his final seven field goals and 7 of 10 overall in the final 20 minutes. His biggest was hitting a jumper in the final minute to extend the lead to five.

"I challenged the kid at halftime, and he responded," Holtmann said. "We had a really honest, heart-to-heart conversation there at halftime because we need him to be good for us if we're going to be good."

"He's a terrific player, and as a sophomore he's got to be consistently a pretty good player for us night in and night out if we're going to be good. I thought he responded with some real grit and determination. I'm sure those conversations will happen again."

As evidenced by his statements,



E.J. Liddell

## 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

Holtmann realizes he has a special player in Liddell and knows he can be trusted, even when he's having an off game.

Liddell for his part believes Holtmann can bring out the best in him, even if it means an occasional "motivational" speech.

"I just felt like, not even the scoring factor, I needed to play defense better," Liddell said. "I wasn't challenging enough shots well. I needed to do more for my team to help us win, and I felt like I did a lot in the second half."

He said the Buckeyes benefited from overcoming an 11-point second-half deficit.

"We needed to face adversity," Liddell said. "We needed that for the Big Ten. That was a great game. Notre Dame is a good school, and they challenged us really well. We fought through the adversity."

Whether it be Liddell's illness, injuries or COVID related concerns, there will be more adversity and the Buckeyes will need to find a way to carry on.

### Musa To The Rescue

The disappointment of temporarily losing Liddell came three days after Holtmann's excitement at seeing junior guard Musa Jallow back on the court.

Jallow played the season opener against Illinois State after missing the 2019-20 season because of ankle surgeries.

He then missed the next two games because of an unrelated Achilles strain, and Holtmann wasn't certain what to expect from him in the Notre Dame game.

What he got from Jallow in 22:09 of playing time was seven points, two rebounds, a key steal that led to OSU assuming the lead for good, and a team-best plus-10.

"He's hardly practiced this last week," Holtmann said. "I wasn't even sure he

was going to play tonight.

"This was the kind of game where we needed his defensive versatility because of how well they shoot it. I couldn't take him off the floor tonight. We needed his ability to switch and guard different people. We don't win the game without Musa Jallow tonight."

Jallow was happy he was able to contribute.

"It's just been up and down," he said. "I've just been telling myself to take it one day at a time and just be ready for whatever it takes. Sitting out a year and going through the recovery process for my injury, you never take anything for granted."

### Alabama Shakes

Alabama A&M was already on campus, having bused from the Deep South to Columbus in anticipation of the Dec. 5 game vs. the Buckeyes when word came the afternoon before the game that somebody in the Bulldogs' traveling party had a confirmed case of COVID-19.

The game was called off.

"I felt bad for them and hope that everything is good with the person that tested positive," Holtmann said at a Dec. 7 Zoom conference.

He is looking for a replacement game to have the maximum 27. The schedule is tight, but he's hopeful.

"I do anticipate us adding another game at some point," Holtmann said. "I just don't know when and where right now."

### See You Later

With Ohio State football kicking off at noon for the Dec. 19 Big Ten Championship Game vs. Northwestern, the basketballers' tip-off vs. North Carolina at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse in Cleveland has been moved.

Instead of the 2 p.m. game, the Buckeyes and Tar Heels swapped with UCLA and Kentucky and will start at approximately 4:30 p.m.

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# Bucks Overcome Adversity To Start Season 5-0

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The No. 22 Ohio State men's basketball team faced its toughest adversity of the young 2020-21 season, but it responded well to improve to 5-0.

A talented Notre Dame team took the Buckeyes to the brink, leading at halftime and forcing head coach Chris Holtmann's squad to make some big plays down the stretch Dec. 8.

Ohio State seemed destined to cruise against a lesser Cleveland State group but met perhaps its tallest task yet in replacing sophomore forward E.J. Liddell, who on Dec. 11 was ruled out indefinitely, reportedly with mononucleosis.

Despite missing Liddell, who leads the team in scoring and rebounding, the Buckeyes beat Cleveland State in a sloppy game to keep their flawless season intact.

## Ohio State Overcomes 8-Point Halftime Deficit To Beat ND

After trailing by eight points at halftime, the Ohio State men's basketball team rallied behind a brilliant second half from Liddell to a 90-85 victory at Notre Dame on Dec. 8.

The sophomore forward followed up a two-point first half in which he shot 0 for 5 from the field with a 17-point second half on 7-of-10 shooting to finish with 19 points, 12 rebounds, three blocks and three steals.

After Notre Dame freshman forward Matt Zona and Liddell exchanged buckets, the Irish's leading scorer, junior guard Prentiss Hubb, drilled a three-pointer to tie the game at 75 with 3:12 left.

Ohio State junior guard Duane Washington knocked down a shot from deep and Liddell converted an old-fashioned three-point play with two Hubb foul shots in between to make it 81-77 with 2:17 to play.

After Irish junior center Nate Laszewski hit a clutch three-pointer, Ohio State junior wing Justice Sueing and Liddell converted consecutive baskets to push the lead to 85-80 with 50 seconds left. Liddell's bucket was a step-back midrange jumper that swished through the net as the shot clock expired.

Ohio State appeared to have the game in hand, but Sueing split a pair of foul shots after Hubb hit both of his free throws, and the Buckeyes led 86-82 with 34 seconds to play. Hubb gave the Irish life with an and-one play to cut the deficit to 86-85 with 22 ticks on the clock.

Notre Dame fouled C.J. Walker twice in an attempt to stop the clock and stay alive, but the fifth-year senior guard knocked down all four of his final foul shots to secure the win. Walker totaled 16 points and made all eight of his free throws.

"It was a tough, hard-fought road win, and our guys responded," Holtmann said. "We really played some really solid moments in the second half and a lot of a lot of contributions from a lot of guys, so it was a great team win."

The game was a back-and-forth affair in the first half with the largest lead by either team being the 42-34 margin the Irish took to the locker room at the half. The teams were tied at 34 with 3:18 before the break, but Notre Dame closed on an 8-0 run.

Sueing led the Buckeyes in the first half with seven points. Cormac Ryan had 15

points for the Irish.

The Buckeyes cut the Irish lead to 45-41 just 2:43 into the second half on a triple from Walker and a layup from Washington following a steal.

Notre Dame took its biggest lead of the game at 55-44 after a 10-3 run with 14:38 left. The Buckeyes bounced back with a 7-0 streak, ending with a three-pointer by senior guard Jimmy Sotos with 12:52 remaining.

Ohio State junior wing Musa Jallow caught an alley-oop pass from Washington and slammed it home, sparking a 6-0 streak that gave the Buckeyes a 62-61 lead with 8:44 left.

Jallow equaled Ohio State's largest lead of the game at 69-64 with an and-one finish with 6:24 left after Walker took a charge to gain possession. The Irish answered with back-to-back three-pointers by junior guard Dane Goodwin and Hubb to go up 70-69 with 5:41 to play.

Ohio State scored four straight to take a 73-70 lead with 4:56 left on a layup by Sueing and two free throws from Washington, setting up the run to the buzzer.

"The second half was considerably better," Holtmann said. "We moved the ball, we played together more on both ends in the second half. A lot of respect for this Notre Dame team, they spread you out. (Notre Dame head coach) Mike (Brey) does a tremendous job with them. They're really a difficult guard. And we struggled guarding them, quite honestly; we just did. We struggled guarding them for the whole game, and we're going to have to get better at that but give Notre Dame a lot of credit."

Hubb led all scorers with 26 points; Laszewski finished with 17 points and nine boards; and Goodwin, a former Thad Matta commit from nearby Upper Arlington, added 16 points for the Irish. Ryan was shut out in the second half and finished with 15.

Sueing scored 16 points and dished four assists for Ohio State, while Washington scored 13 points with four assists, and junior forward Justin Ahrens added 12.

The Buckeyes were excellent in the second half, shooting 54.5 percent overall (18 of 33), 50.0 percent from deep (4 of 8), and 88.9 percent from the line (16 of 18). The Irish were equally solid at 51.9 percent from the floor (14 of 27), 60.0 percent (6 of 10) on threes, and 75.0 percent on foul shots (9 of 12), but they committed seven turnovers to two for Ohio State.

"It's a big win," Jallow said. "And it is a good level of competition to set us up going into Big Ten play, especially on the road. Especially since they had some fans there chirping at us, so that was a good thing to get out of the way for the first time. It was a good, tough win to gut it out, and it gives guys a lot of confidence and shows the younger guys what it takes to win."

"I wasn't even sure I was going to play him, but this game required his defensive IQ and his ability to switch and guard different people," Holtmann said of Jallow. "We don't win the game without Musa Jallow tonight, obviously."

## Bucks Beat Vikings By 6 Despite Poor Shooting

Ohio State overcame a lackluster first half to defeat Cleveland State 67-61 at Value City Arena on Dec. 13.

The Buckeyes missed their leading scorer and rebounder in Liddell.

### Ohio State 90, Notre Dame 85

Dec. 8, 2020 Joyce Center • South Bend, Ind.												
				1	2							F
Ohio State (4-0)				34	56							90
Notre Dame (1-2)				42	43							85
Ohio State	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Washington	31	4-9	2-2	0-3	4	3	13					
Walker	30	3-10	8-8	1-2	2	3	16					
Sueing	31	6-10	3-4	1-1	4	1	16					
Young	24	1-5	1-2	2-2	1	3	3					
Liddell	31	7-15	5-5	6-6	1	4	19					
Sotos	4	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	3					
Jallow	22	3-5	1-1	0-2	0	3	7					
Brown	5	0-0	1-2	1-0	0	0	1					
Ahrens	20	4-6	0-0	0-1	0	0	12					
Key	2	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>29-62</b>	<b>21-24</b>	<b>14-18</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>90</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 46.8%. FT: 87.5%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 11-23 (Ahrens 4-6, Washington 3-5, Walker 2-4, Sueing 1-2, Sotos, 1-1, Young 0-2, Liddell 0-2, Jallow 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 3. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Liddell 3, Ahrens). <b>Turnovers:</b> 8 (Walker 3, Washington 2, Sueing 2, Sotos). <b>Steals:</b> 8 (Liddell 3, Washington, Sueing, Young, Jallow, Ahrens).												
Notre Dame	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Hubb	37	8-17	5-5	2-4	6	2	26					
Ryan	39	5-8	3-4	0-3	4	3	15					
Durham	22	3-8	1-1	6-3	1	5	7					
Laszewski	39	5-7	5-7	2-7	1	1	17					
Goodwin	40	7-14	0-1	1-2	2	2	16					
Sanders	15	1-3	0-0	0-0	0	4	2					
Zona	8	1-2	0-0	3-0	1	2	2					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>30-59</b>	<b>14-18</b>	<b>14-21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>85</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 50.8%. FT: 77.8%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 11-24 (Hubb 5-9, Laszewski 2-3, Ryan 2-5, Goodwin 2-5, Sanders 0-2). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 2. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 2 (Hubb, Zona). <b>Turnovers:</b> 13 (Hubb 3, Sanders 3, Durham 2, Goodwin 2, Ryan, Laszewski, TEAM). <b>Steals:</b> 6 (Hubb 2, Laszewski 2, Goodwin 2). <b>Officials:</b> Smith, Cassell, Dorsey. <b>Attendance:</b> 156.												

The backcourt stepped up in Liddell's absence, with Washington scoring 17 points and Walker adding 16 points and dishing three assists.

"They gave me certain looks, and I just took advantage of them, getting to the basket and finishing at the rim," Walker said. "I just took what they gave me, I took advantage and I just happened to make some shots and got to the basket."

Taking on a larger role, true freshman Zed Key helped fill the void left by Liddell in the middle with his first double-double. The 6-8, 245-pound forward scored 12 points, grabbed 10 boards, dished two assists and added three blocks and one steal in 21 minutes.

"Zed was great," Holtmann said of Key. "He protected the rim and impacted shots. That was maybe his biggest impact. And then, he also just brought a physicality tonight. He was tremendous, and he certainly earned this moment."

The Buckeyes began the game with a 6-0 start on two three-pointers from Washington. The Vikings did not make a field goal across the first 5:34 of the game when D'mMoi Hodge made a layup to cut the Ohio State lead to 8-4. Hodge hit a triple to cut the Buckeye lead to one point for the first of three times in the half to make it 8-7 with 13:45 in the opening 20 minutes.

After Key pushed the lead to 20-14 on an alley-oop finish from Walker, Torrey Patton put in a tough jump shot in the lane to cut the deficit to four points for Cleveland State with 5:31 until the midway point.

"He creates space for people to drive and get to the basket," Walker said of Key. "He can also finish around the basket and defensive rebounding. He had a few blocks that we really needed at the end of the stretch. He's just really good for us. He's learning each and every day. He plays hard and he gives us energy."

The Buckeyes were unable to push their first-half lead past six points until

### Ohio State 67, Cleveland State 61

Dec. 13, 2020 Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio												
				1	2							F
Cleveland State (0-3)				24	37							61
Ohio State (5-0)				31	36							67
Cleveland State	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Beaudion	33	1-6	0-0	0-1	4	1	2					
Gomillion	11	2-5	0-0	0-0	2	3	4					
Patton	30	4-11	0-2	2-12	2	3	8					
Johnson	20	0-1	4-6	0-5	1	4	4					
Hodge	33	6-14	0-0	0-4	0	4	14					
Oglesby	26	1-4	2-2	0-1	1	3	4					
Terry	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Hill	9	0-0	1-2	0-0	1	1	1					
Woodrich	8	2-2	0-1	0-0	0	1	6					
Greene	9	5-7	0-0	1-1	0	4	12					
Sanchez	3	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	2					
Majak	15	2-4	0-0	2-1	0	3	4					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24-56</b>	<b>7-13</b>	<b>10-26</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>61</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 42.9%. FT: 53.8%. <b>Three-point goals:</b> 6-15 (Woodrich 2-2, Greene 2-4, Hodge 2-6, Gomillion 0-1, Patton 0-1, Oglesby 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 6. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 1 (Hodge). <b>Turnovers:</b> 14 (Johnson 4, Patton 3, Majak 3, Greene 2, Hill, TEAM). <b>Steals:</b> 2 (Beaudion, Hodge).												
Ohio State	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Washington	30	5-14	5-6	0-1	0	0	17					
Ahrens	23	2-3	0-0	1-2	0	0	6					
Walker	36	5-12	5-5	0-4	3	1	16					
Sueing	26	2-8	5-8	0-3	0	4	9					
Young	17	0-2	0-0	1-1	2	2	0					
Sotos	14	1-2	0-1	0-1	1	1	3					
Jallow	24	2-5	0-0	2-4	2	2	4					
Brown	7	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Diallo	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Key	21	4-5	4-6	4-6	2	2	12					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>21-52</b>	<b>19-26</b>	<b>10-24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>67</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 40.4%. FT: 73.1%. <b>Three-point goals:</b> 6-21 (Ahrens 2-3, Washington 2-7, Sotos 1-2, Walker 1-4, Brown 0-1, Sueing 0-2, Jallow 0-2). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 4. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 5 (Key 3, Young, Diallo). <b>Turnovers:</b> 10 (Washington 2, Walker 2, Sueing 2, Key 2, Ahrens, Sotos). <b>Steals:</b> 3 (Young, Sotos, Key). <b>Officials:</b> Beaver, Cruz, Daily. <b>Attendance:</b> N/A.												

Walker split the defense on a strong dribble drive where he used a hop step to finish an and-one to put them up 31-24 with 1:43 until the halftime buzzer. That would be the margin at the break.

Following a nifty move and finish by Walker to push the Ohio State lead to 37-28 with 16:12 to play, the Vikings ripped off a 9-1 run sparked by seven points by junior forward Chris Greene, cutting the home team's lead to 38-37.

The Buckeyes bounced back from that 9-1 Viking streak with a 9-2 stretch of their own on three triples from Ahrens, Walker and Sotos to push their lead to 47-39 with 8:53 on the clock.

Cleveland State ended the 9-2 run with a three-pointer by Hodge to make it 47-42 with 8:28 until the final buzzer. The Vikings then came within five points again at 53-48 following a Greene triple with 5:49 left and at 60-55 with 2:41 left, but that was the closest the visitors came down the stretch.

Ohio State struggled offensively against the Vikings, shooting just 40.4 percent from the floor (21 of 52) and 28.6 percent from three (6 of 21) with 10 turnovers. The Buckeyes' defense helped them hold on for the win, limiting Cleveland State to a 42.9 field-goal percentage (24 of 56) and forcing 14 turnovers.

Key came up big for the Buckeyes in Liddell's place. The former three-star prospect from Glen Head, N.Y., kept his approach simple when taking on a bigger role.

"Just come in and just play hard," Key said. "That's what the coaches expect from all of us, so just embrace it coming into the game and play your butt off. Make effort plays and grab rebounds, and the offensive side will come."

The Vikings were led by 14 points by Hodge and 12 points from Greene, while Patton added eight points and a game-high 14 rebounds.



# Rebounding A Focus Heading Into Big Ten Play

Ohio State women's basketball has opened its season in dominant fashion, winning its first four games by an average margin of 40.8 points per contest, with each game being won by 33 points or more.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

There are a lot of strong takeaways from the team's performance, as evidenced by the No. 18 ranking in the current Associated Press top-25 poll, but when you ask Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff, or really any player on the roster, which area the Buckeyes must improve in heading into the Big Ten portion of the schedule, they will all give you the same answer.

"We're emphasizing rebounding," senior guard Braxtin Miller said. "We have to do a lot better on rebounding."

Rebounding appears to be the key focus of this Ohio State team as it prepares for conference play, and that is despite relatively strong numbers in that category thus far. This season, Ohio State is averaging 43.8 rebounds per game, tied for No. 55 in the NCAA in games through Dec. 10, while allowing just 36.8 boards per game from its opponents.

The Buckeyes have not yet lost a rebounding battle in a game this year but did have their best performance in their debut, outrebounding Duquesne 52-37 in the 35-point win. Since then, the rebounding margin has been less stark, with Ohio State holding a 123-110 edge in its past three games, outrebounding Kent State, Northern Kentucky and Miami (Ohio) by only three, five and five, respectively.

"We have some great possessions in that area, but we also have some lapses at times," McGuff said. "You could see in

the future where that would really hurt us."

The rebounding numbers through four games are a current improvement over last season, when Ohio State averaged 38.0 boards per contest while allowing 37.3, but that included Big Ten play against more difficult competition than the Buckeyes have faced in the early parts of this season.

The specific area of concern early on this season is in offensive rebounds, where Ohio State averaging just 10.3 per game compared to 14.8 from its opponents. Those numbers are both worse than what the Buckeyes finished with in 2019-20, with that group hauling in 11.0 offensive boards while allowing 11.7.

Junior forward Dorka Juhasz said the biggest issues in the rebounding have been when the Buckeyes need to go off the script or when there is an attempt to bring in those offensive rebounds, as they are often just tipped instead of grabbed, giving the team they are facing another shot at points.

"I think overall, when it's a set play, we're doing great on the boards, but those little tips, we're not grabbing the rebound and we're just tipping the ball out of bounds," Juhasz said. "Those are all going to them. We just have to make sure that we take pride in it. Everybody's boxing out their own person and then crashing the boards. I mean obviously in the Big Ten, these are going to hurt us a lot, so I think all of us have to do a better job individually, and every time the shot goes out, we have to yell, we have to tell each other to 'Hey, go find your man and box out.'"

When a team is outscoring its opponents by more than 40 points per game, it may be only minor flaws that need to get fixed. But as the Buckeyes start Big Ten play, a conference with five teams ranked in the top 25 (Maryland at No. 14, Indiana at No. 16, Northwestern at No. 17 and Michigan at No. 19, in addition to the Buckeyes), McGuff knows that even a small issue with hauling in rebounds will

## 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 2022 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

only grow larger if not fixed early.

"I thought we had it in a pretty good place for a while, then at the end we gave up some bad offensive rebounds," McGuff said following the win over the RedHawks, where Ohio State held a 39-34 rebounding advantage. "It's still an area where we have to continue to make progress."

## All Gas, No Brakes For Buckeye Offense

McGuff has utilized an up-tempo offense throughout his coaching career, and this year was going to be no different, partially because he thought there was enough talent on the team to go fast, but also because that is the tempo he prefers on his teams.

"I think we've got a lot of depth, and so I want to put us in position where we're utilizing our speed, quickness and depth, and really imposing our will on the other team," McGuff said. "And then from a style standpoint I like it, and I think it can be to our advantage because we have a lot of speed and quickness."

Four games into the season, the fast-break offense, as well as the transition defense, has been about as impressive as the Ohio State coach could have hoped for. The Buckeyes have scored 99 fast-break points while allowing just 14 for an outstanding early-season average margin of 24.8-3.5 fastbreak points per game.

Those impressive numbers include

Ohio State's most recent game, the Dec. 10 matchup against Miami where the Buckeyes put up a season-low 22 fast-break points but also held the RedHawks without a single point in transition.

"I just think that we have a lot of factors and we're great in transition, so we need to be able to run and get it up and there's so many people that can run up the court and finish," Miller said. "I think that's just really big for us and being able to put a lot of pressure on the defense."

McGuff said that the only potential downside from trying to play fast could be if the team's shot selection falters because of the pace.

"It's one thing to talk about and another thing to put it into practice," McGuff said. "The downside can be if you're settling for quick shots that aren't great shots. We talk a lot about 'Hey, we want to play fast, and we want to be relentless.' That doesn't mean it has to lead to a quick shot. We want to make sure if they're quick shots, they're great shots. If not, then we want to execute offense."

So far, Ohio State has not fallen into that trap, shooting 55.6 percent from the field, fourth-best in Division I and the best of any team in the country that has played multiple games. That shooting percentage is also up dramatically from the 43.4 percent rate from a season ago.

While there are still plenty of games to be played, getting up the court fast and taking smart shots is the clear key to the Buckeyes' success offensively, and that is by design.

"I feel like that's something the coaches really emphasized," sophomore guard Madison Greene said. "We really want to make that a part of our identity this year, so it's important."

## Crooms Gets Immediate Eligibility For Spartans

Former Ohio State and current junior Michigan State guard Janai Crooms was granted immediate eligibility on Dec. 4 to play in the 2020-21 season for the Spartans after departing from the Buckeyes in the offseason.

Michigan State is 3-0 on the season, including 1-0 in Big Ten play. That conference game, a Dec. 9 matchup against Minnesota, was also Crooms' debut for the Spartans. She played 14 minutes and finished with three points, three rebounds and two assists on 1-of-4 shooting during Michigan State's 81-68 win.

Crooms played in two full seasons with the Buckeyes, finishing the 2019-20 campaign with 6.8 points, 3.9 rebounds and 3.3 assists per game. She was second on the team to Miller with 107 assists and shot 46.7 percent from the field in 32 games played.

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# Juhasz The Star In OSU's Win Over Miami (Ohio)

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State women's team basketball did not have any troubles securing its fourth win in as many games, with the Buckeyes (4-0) taking down Miami (Ohio) 104-65 on Dec. 10 to continue their undefeated start to the season.

It was another big day for junior forward Dorka Juhasz, who led all scorers with 27 points while shooting 11 of 16 from the field. Juhasz also notched her third double-double by adding 15 rebounds on the day.

"I was more aggressive on the boards," Juhasz explained. "I think those gave me opportunities to score. We did a great job sharing the ball and my teammates were finding me in the post, and on the perimeter, too, so I think it's just like a collective success."

Head coach Kevin McGuff was also impressed with Juhasz's performance and said that he liked how much she diversified her scoring attack against the RedHawks.

"She showed her versatility today," McGuff said. "She scored around the basket, she scored from the three-point line, she drove it. She's a really unique player, and you could really see that out there today."

Sophomore guard Jacy Sheldon was also a factor once again for the Buckeyes, finishing with 13 points, four rebounds, four assists and four steals.

The Buckeyes led 24-9 after one and 49-26 at halftime, shooting 60.6 percent from the field while forcing 14 Miami turnovers. Juhasz (15) and Sheldon (13) combined for 28 of the team's points in the first 20 minutes.

The Buckeyes led by as many as 28, 47-19 with 2:09 to play before the half, on a layup by Gabby Hutcherson.

The strong start was met with a back-and-forth third quarter, which Ohio State led 80-53 at the end of despite 9-1 and 7-2 runs by the RedHawks in the frame.

The first run brought Miami to within 62-39 with 5:49 to play in the period, the closest the RedHawks would get the rest of the way.

The Buckeyes held on from there, outscoring Miami 24-12 in the fourth quarter for the lopsided win. Kateri Poole paced the Buckeyes in the final frame with seven points.

Ohio State ended the game shooting

55.7 percent from the field (39 of 70) and 36.4 percent (8 of 22) from three. Miami (1-2) hit on 40.3 percent overall (25 of 62) and 31.0 percent from deep (9 of 29).

A lot of the difference in the game came on the turnover battle. Ohio State forced 23 turnovers while committing just nine and outscored Miami 33-11 off those turnovers, much of which was due to the full-court press that the Buckeyes were utilizing on defense.

"I thought the press was effective today, and so that forced Miami to a lot of turnovers," McGuff said. "And the other thing, we were able to convert those turnovers into points, which was great to see."

Many of those turnovers by the RedHawks were self-inflicted, with a handful of traveling calls in the first quarter allowing Ohio State to gather an early lead.

Miami had nine miscues in the first period.

Senior guard Braxtin Miller said the Buckeyes spotted that potential weakness in Miami's offense and attacked it, leading to that stark advantage in the turnover battle.

"I think that we just focused in and really took advantage of a place we saw that they were struggling," Miller said. "In the press they had some troubles and things like that, and I think that we just worked hard there and forced some turnovers in that aspect."

After missing the game against Kent State due to an illness, Miller returned to the lineup against the RedHawks, though she started quiet with no points in the first half, missing both attempts.

Miller ended the game strong though, finishing with 13 points in 28 total minutes.

"I really wasn't feeling bad in the first," Miller said. "We were doing really well, and I didn't really have as many opportunities. I only shot twice, I think. I never felt bad. I just had more opportunities in the second, and I think they just went well."

While Ohio State returned Miller to the lineup, it was without graduate transfer forward Tanaya Beacham, who was not seen on the bench and did not play.

McGuff did not disclose the reason for Beacham's absence, simply saying after the game that she is "out right now" and that the team will "get a little

more of a status update in the next day or two."

On the opposition, sophomore guard Peyton Scott shook off an 0-of-6 shooting start to finish with 22 points, though she did turn the ball over seven times.

Freshman guard Katie Davidson also added 18 for the RedHawks in the losing effort.

Despite Juhasz's point total more than doubling anyone else on the team, the Buckeyes still managed to finish with six players scoring in double figures: Juhasz (27), Miller (13), Sheldon (13), sophomore guard Madison Greene (12), freshman guard Poole (12) and sophomore forward Rebeka Mikulasikova (10).

Junior forward Aaliyah Patty also nearly made it seven players with her nine points.

Greene also made an impact elsewhere on the court, registering a team-high seven assists without a single turnover on the day. She shot 3 of 5 and hit all six of her free-throw attempts.

It is no secret that the Buckeyes are a team that is big in transition, and that was clear yet again with their 22 fast-break points against the RedHawks. But Ohio State also stifled any sort of transition offense its opponent had planned, with Miami scoring zero fastbreak points on the game.

McGuff said that 22-0 margin on the fast break was partially due to working on it in practice but also because Ohio State's tempo on offense was impacting the play on both sides of the floor.

"We've been emphasizing transition defense," McGuff said. "And I liked our pace going the other way. Make or miss, we got up the floor and were able to get some great looks at the basket."

Next up, Ohio State was scheduled to play at 4 p.m. on Dec. 15 against Saint Mary's, but that has been canceled, with no direct reason stated by either program when BSB went to press.



Dorka Juhasz

## Ohio State 104, Miami (Ohio) 65

Dec. 10, 2020												
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	1	2	3	4	F							
Miami (Ohio) (1-2)	9	17	27	12	65							
Ohio State (4-0)	24	25	31	24	104							
Miami (Ohio)	Total		FG	FT	Reb.							
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
McLaughlin	20	3-3	0-1	0-4	0	4	6					
Esbrand	30	1-3	0-0	1-1	3	5	2					
Davidson	34	7-16	2-2	0-5	2	1	18					
Scott	40	8-24	2-2	2-4	3	4	22					
Hoff	40	4-8	0-0	2-1	1	4	10					
Duckett	13	1-3	1-2	3-1	0	3	3					
Schmitz	16	1-4	0-0	1-1	0	1	3					
Freeman	7	0-1	1-2	1-1	0	0	1					
Totals	200	25-62	6-9	15-19	9	22	65					
Percentages: FG: 40.3%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 9-29 (Scott 4-11, Hoff 2-5, Davidson 2-8, Schmitz 1-4, Esbrand 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 1 (McLaughlin). Turnovers: 23 (Scott 7, Davidson 5, McLaughlin 3, Hoff 2, Duckett 2, Esbrand, Schmitz, Freeman, TEAM). Steals: 3 (McLaughlin, Davidson, Scott).												
Ohio State	Total		FG	FT	Reb.							
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Juhasz	28	11-16	4-8	6-9	2	2	27					
Patty	23	3-9	3-6	3-2	1	0	9					
Greene	29	3-5	6-6	1-0	7	1	12					
Sheldon	26	6-11	0-0	1-3	4	1	13					
Miller	28	5-8	2-2	0-1	1	2	13					
Mikulasikova	17	4-5	1-1	0-1	2	3	10					
Poole	21	4-8	2-2	1-2	2	3	12					
Harris	12	1-1	0-0	1-1	1	1	3					
Hutcherson	13	2-7	0-0	1-3	0	1	5					
Jones	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0					
Totals	200	39-70	18-25	15-24	20	15	104					
Percentages: FG: 55.7%. FT: 72.0%. Three-point field goals: 8-22 (Poole 2-3, Mikulasikova 1-1, Harris 1-1, Hutcherson 1-2, Juhasz 1-3, Miller 1-3, Sheldon 1-5, Greene 0-1, Patty 0-3). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Patty 2). Turnovers: 9 (Mikulasikova 4, Juhasz, Patty, Sheldon, Poole, Harris). Steals: 8 (Sheldon 4, Patty, Greene, Miller, Hutcherson).												
Officials: Cross, Grinter, Enlund. Attendance: N/A.												

With that cancellation, the Buckeyes will next open up Big Ten play at home against Iowa on Dec. 19.

Juhasz said performances like these are what Ohio State will need once the team faces off against conference opponents.

"I think we played better than the last game and the game before, so that just shows how much we're growing after each game and just practicing hard and trying to build on our defense," Juhasz said. "It's a great feeling. It's almost Big Ten time, so we're really excited to play, and this game just gave us more confidence going into that."

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# Lovie Smith Out As Head Coach At Illinois

After five losing seasons, Lovie Smith is out as Illinois' head football coach.

The Fighting Illini lost 28-10 to No. 14 Northwestern on Dec. 12, finishing their regular season at 2-5. Smith went 17-39 overall and 10-33 in the Big Ten across his five seasons in Champaign, Ill.

He came to Illinois following a lengthy NFL career that included head-coaching gigs with the Chicago Bears and Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Smith guided the Bears to the Super Bowl in 2006, boasting an 81-63 overall ledger with the team.

Illinois athletic director Josh Whitman hired Smith just weeks after his own hiring in 2016. After Smith led Illinois to a bowl appearance in 2019, the Illini had heightened expectations entering the fall of 2020 with many key players returning.

## BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

"Lovie Smith led the Illinois football program with unquestioned integrity during his nearly five years of service," Whitman said in a statement. "I have tremendous respect for Coach Smith and will always be grateful to him for providing a steady, experienced hand at a time when our program required stability. His unshakeable leadership, never more needed than during this pandemic, will be forever remembered.

"Nonetheless, based on extensive evaluation of the program's current state and future outlook, I have concluded the program is not progressing at the rate we should expect at this advanced stage in Coach Smith's tenure. To achieve our competitive objectives, I believe new leadership of the football program is required."

According to ESPN, potential candidates to replace Smith include Buffalo's Lance Leipold, Army's Jeff Monken, Kent State's Sean Lewis, New York Giants assistant Bret Bielema (a former head coach at Wisconsin and Arkansas), Nevada's Jay Norvell, Toledo's Jason Candle, Tulane's Willie Fritz and several coordinators, including Notre Dame defensive coordinator Clark Lea and Wisconsin defensive coordinator Jim Leonhard.

### Hoosiers Lose Coordinator Wommack To South Alabama

Indiana defensive coordinator Kane Wommack will become the next head

coach at South Alabama, making him the youngest program leader at the FBS level at 33 years old.

"To be the head coach at the University of South Alabama is the opportunity of a lifetime," Wommack said. "Melissa and I could not be more excited to return to a city that we love. Believing in all that this community has to offer, we proudly join a team of exceptional leaders in steering the Jaguar football program to reach its greatest potential."

Wommack will return to South Alabama, where he was the youngest defensive coordinator in the FBS from 2016-17. He had success for the Jaguars, with his defense ranking as the fifth-most improved in scoring defense (minus-10.3 points per game) in the nation from 2015-16.

Wommack was a grad assistant at Ole Miss when Tom Allen was there as linebackers coach and special teams coordinator, and he eventually followed Allen to Indiana. He is the son of a long-time college defensive coordinator, Dave Wommack, whom Kane coached under at Ole Miss. After Ole Miss, Wommack moved on to the defensive coordinator position at Eastern Illinois from 2014-15.

After serving one year as the Hoosiers' linebackers coach, Wommack became defensive coordinator in 2019. In just his second season, Wommack's "Swarm D" became one of the best defenses in the Big Ten. The Hoosier defense ranks first in the nation in interceptions with 17, and the unit is tied for 11th in total takeaways with 20.

Showing such impressive results made Wommack an attractive head-coach option at the age of 33. A return to South Alabama made sense after head coach Steve Campbell was fired Dec. 6 following a three-year stint that saw just nine wins.

"We are extremely excited to have Kane as the new leader for our football program," South Alabama athletic director Joel Erdmann said in a release. "We conducted a national search that included many tremendous participants, and at the end of that process it became obvious to me who is the best fit for us at this point in time and as we look to the future."

At Indiana, Wommack's defense helped the Hoosiers begin the 2020 campaign with a 6-1 start, ranking No. 8 in the Associated Press poll. While Indiana is currently on pause because of increased COVID-19 cases within the program, it is still likely the Hoosiers will be playing in a high-profile bowl game to conclude the season.

"I cannot say enough great things

about Kane Wommack," Allen said Dec. 12. "I appreciate him so much and all that he has brought to the program. He took over our defense and made it better, which is what you want when you hire someone."

### Indiana-Purdue Postponed To Champions Week

The rivalry matchup between Indiana and Purdue was canceled due to an increase in COVID-19 cases at each school, though it was later rescheduled as part of the Big Ten's new champions week.

Both teams canceled practice Dec. 8 and paused all team activities. On Dec. 9, Indiana athletic director Scott Dolson and Purdue athletic director Mike Bobinski mutually agreed to cancel the game.

"We're certainly disappointed that we had to cancel the Old Oaken Bucket game," they said in a joint statement, referring to the trophy that goes to the winner. "We both understand the history and tradition of one of the best rivalries in college football, but the safety and well-being of our student-athletes, coaches and staff is our primary priority. We will continue to monitor the situation on both campuses and listen to the advice of our medical professionals."

At 6-1, Indiana already had clinched the No. 2 seed in the Big Ten East, while Purdue had lost four in a row to fall to 2-4.

### Maryland QB Out With COVID-19

Maryland quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa had been excelling as a sophomore for the Terrapins, but the Alabama transfer was forced to miss their game against Rutgers due to a positive COVID-19 test.

Along with starting linebacker Chance Campbell, starting cornerback Jakorian Bennett, reserve linebacker Ruben Hyppolite, Tagovailoa missed Maryland's matchup with the Scarlet Knights on Dec. 12.

Defensive coordinator Jon Hoke and special teams coordinator/inside linebackers coach George Helow were also absent. Rutgers won the game, 27-24, in overtime. Officially, the group of players and coaches missed the game for "medical reasons," but it was reported that their absences were a direct result of coronavirus test results.

### U-M Center In Transfer Portal

Michigan offensive lineman Zach Carpenter entered the transfer portal Dec. 10 and announced his intent to transfer on social media.

As a redshirt freshman, Carpenter had started the Wolverines' past two games against Rutgers and Penn State and had played in five of six games.

Fifth-year senior Andrew Vastardis had been the starting center but suffered an injury, which led to the starting opportunity for Carpenter.

Carpenter was a three-star prospect out of Cincinnati Moeller, rated the No. 554 overall recruit and No. 33 offensive guard in the 2019 class. As a recruit, Carpenter took unofficial visits to Ohio State, Clemson, Notre Dame, Cincinnati, Michigan State and Louisville.

## BIG 2020 Standings

### East Division

	W	L	Pct.
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>
Indiana	6	1	.857
Maryland	2	3	.400
Penn State	3	5	.375
Rutgers	3	5	.375
Michigan	2	4	.333
Michigan State	2	5	.286

### West Division

	W	L	Pct.
Northwestern	6	1	.875
Iowa	6	2	.750
Minnesota	3	3	.500
Wisconsin	2	3	.400
Purdue	2	4	.333
Illinois	2	5	.286
Nebraska	2	5	.286

### Dec. 12 Games

Northwestern 28, Illinois 10  
Iowa 28, Wisconsin 7  
Minnesota 24, Nebraska 17  
Penn State 39, Michigan State 24  
Rutgers 27, Maryland 24 (OT)  
Purdue at Indiana, Canceled  
**Michigan at Ohio State, Canceled**

### Dec. 18 Games

Nebraska at Rutgers, 4 p.m.  
Purdue at Indiana, 7:30 p.m.

### Dec. 19 Games

**Ohio State vs. Northwestern, 12 p.m.**  
Minnesota at Wisconsin, 4 p.m.  
Illinois at Penn State, 5:30 p.m.  
Michigan at Iowa, 7 p.m.  
Michigan State at Maryland, 7:30 p.m.

### Top Performers Across The Big Ten Conference

Penn State fourth-year junior quarterback Sean Clifford was the top performer in the Big Ten, leading the Nittany Lions to a 39-24 win against Michigan State. The Cincinnati St. Xavier product completed 17 of 27 passes for 232 yards and two touchdowns, adding 48 rushing yards and a score on nine attempts.

Minnesota fourth-year junior tailback Mohamed Ibrahim helped lead the Gophers to a 24-17 victory over Nebraska, carrying the ball 20 times for 108 yards and two touchdowns.

Gopher junior linebacker Mariano Sori-Marin also stood out with 18 tackles and one forced fumble in the win.

Rutgers wide receiver Bo Melton hauled in a modest five catches for 44 yards, but he did most of his damage on the ground.

The senior from Mays Landing, N.J., took two carries for 62 yards and two touchdowns in the Scarlet Knights' 27-24 win over Maryland in overtime.

Iowa senior wide receiver Ihmir Smith-Marsette reeled in seven receptions for 140 yards and two touchdowns in the Hawkeyes' 28-7 win over Wisconsin.

Smith-Marsette injured himself flipping into the end zone for his second score, ending his day in a walking boot.

Northwestern's freshman tailback duo of Evan Hull and Cam Porter starred in the Wildcats' 28-10 victory over Illinois. Hull, a redshirt freshman, ran for 149 yards and a touchdown on 13 carries.

Porter, a freshman from Cincinnati La Salle, carried 24 times for 142 yards and two scores.



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# Big Ten Makes The Right Call On Title Game

The Big Ten conference made the right call by changing the six-game requirement to get into the league championship game.

After all, it was the Big Ten that created the mess in the first place by delaying the start of the season till the end of October. The ACC allowed their first contest on Sept. 10 and the SEC on Sept. 26.

## COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

This put the Big Ten teams behind the 8-ball right off the bat. With no bye weeks and no ability to play any nonconference opponent, the likelihood of getting six games in was at risk from the beginning.

At the end of the "irregular season," only Iowa, Rutgers and Penn State had played the full eight-game schedule.

### Playoff Implications

A victory over the Northwestern Wildcats Dec. 19 should give the Buckeyes the cherished entry into the College Football Playoff. It would be a tough pill to swallow if Ohio State were not picked as one of the four best teams in the country after winning the Big Ten conference along with being undefeated.

The Buckeyes were ranked highly in the preseason polls and dropped out of the top 10 only when the season was in doubt for the Big Ten. After early-season dominating wins by Ohio State, it rocketed back into the top 10 and has maintained its spot in the top-four rankings the remainder of the regular season.

The playoff committee knows the talent level of the Buckeyes and the number of television sets the Scarlet and Gray turn on every time it plays. To deny Ohio State and the Big Ten a spot in the playoffs would be both wrong and not a smart thing to do.

A decisive win over Northwestern would, undoubtedly, land the Buckeyes in the playoffs. Just a victory should be enough. Only politics would keep an undefeated Buckeye team out of the playoffs.

Throughout the past few years, the process the college football playoff committee has used to choose the top four teams has been criticized, to say the least.

The favoritism the committee has shown toward the SEC and ACC is glaring. It seems they look for ways to take teams from those conferences and reasons not to choose teams from the Big Ten, Pac-12 and Big 12 conferences.

The rules and criteria for making the playoffs are so vague, it opens the door for scrutiny. One of the reasons coming from several of the southern schools to not select the Buckeyes is the fact Ohio State, counting the game against Northwestern this week, will have played only six games.

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney argues that teams with a one- or two-loss record should be considered over teams that have played much fewer games, thus implicating Ohio State should be out. It is true, because of the earlier start, the two teams that were ranked fifth and sixth behind Ohio State before games of Dec. 12, Texas A&M and Florida, will have played eight and 10 games respectively going into championship weekend.

The difference, however, is neither of those teams are undefeated, and Clemson already has a loss to Notre Dame.

With Florida's upset loss to LSU, they now have two losses but have a chance to beat Alabama in the SEC championship game.

On the 13-member selection committee is R.C. Slocum, former Texas A&M head football coach, and Scott Stricklin, Florida athletic director.

### State Of The Heisman

One of the casualties of the limited number of games played is Justin Fields' hopes of winning the Heisman Trophy.

Fields, along with Trevor Lawrence of Clemson, were preseason favorites for the coveted award. Now, due to only five games played for Fields and eight for Lawrence, who got the coronavirus, they have dropped behind Florida quarterback Kyle Trask and Alabama quarterback Mac Jones.

Notre Dame's Ian Book has also emerged as a contender but, like Fields and Lawrence, trails Trask and Jones.

Fields still has the highest completion percentage of all FBS quarterbacks but trails in comparison to the other Heisman hopefuls in terms of other key statistics.

A great performance against Northwestern will definitely help his résumé, but there simply may not be enough time to make his case before Heisman ballots go out.

Fields may be the best all-around football player in the country, but he has been caught in a situation he could not control – COVID-19.

### Northwestern Scouting Report

Northwestern's Pat Fitzgerald does more with less talent than any other head coach in the Big Ten. His players are not the elite five-stars, but they seem to play at a high level nearly every year for the Wildcats.

In the 15 years Fitzgerald has been the head coach, he has compiled 105 victories and has had eight winning seasons. Since 2015, Northwestern has finished first or second in the Big Ten West four times under his leadership.

Fitzgerald's formula for success with average college players compared to most of his opponents seems to rest on simplicity of scheme on offense and playing physically on defense. Fitzgerald was an All-America linebacker for the Wildcats, and he expects his players to play with

the same ferocity he did when he was a player. His football teams rarely beat themselves by turning the football over or having an abundance of penalties.

Time of possession is also a key to winning football games for Fitzgerald. By possessing the football longer than your opponent, Fitzgerald believes it gives more talented teams less of a chance to put up big numbers. Take for example the Dec. 12 game against Illinois. The Wildcats held the ball 22 of 30 minutes in the second and third quarters of the game.

Northwestern rushed the football for 411 yards on their way to a 28-10 victory. Overall time of possession was 35 minutes compared to 25 for Illinois.

### Key To Beating The Wildcats

For the Buckeyes to leave Indianapolis as Big Ten champions, they must not beat them-

selves by committing turnovers, thus giving Northwestern a short field. Secondly for Ohio State, it must stop the Wildcat rushing attack and force them to throw the football, where they are much less proficient.

Northwestern is first in the conference in scoring defense and third in total defense while the Buckeyes are first in both of those offensive categories. Ohio State needs to take advantage of its skilled talent to make big plays against the physical but slower Wildcat defense.

The Buckeyes need to even out possession time by forcing Northwestern into a high percentage of three-and-outs. Ohio State has more talent and outstanding coaches. If things go as they should, the Buckeyes will leave Indianapolis victorious and get ready to prepare for the College Football Playoff.

It would be a fitting ending to such a strange season.

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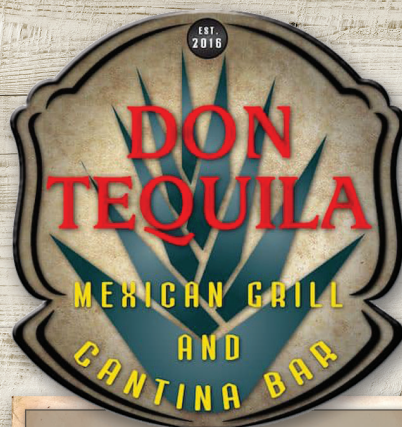
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# One Final Hurdle, Then The Waiting Begins

Sports are about tradition. When those traditions are interrupted, it's noticeable.

One tradition I have followed for years is watching old OSU-Michigan games, as a lead-up to The Game. In years the game is in Ann Arbor, road triumphs take center stage, and in years The Game is played in Columbus, home victories are savored. There is occasionally an extra of a historical documentary about the rivalry, if I'm feeling especially exuberant.

## THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

But that didn't happen this week as The Game was canceled. No go. Nothing. Silence.

The pandemic has done a lot of things, including altering the sports landscape. The fact that college football has completed this many games (upward of 80 percent) is a minor miracle, and something to be savored. But the downside is that many traditional rivalries – Notre Dame-USC, Washington-Washington State, Clemson-South Carolina among them – were nixed. Those were known pretty early, but even as cases were rising it never really entered the mind-set that The Game would be sent to the sidelines.

But it was. For the first time since 1917, Ohio State and Michigan did not face each other on the gridiron.

While it would be presumptuous to say that Michigan had no chance – I've witnessed personally many occasions where the Wolverines won despite being left for dead – the oddsmakers had installed the Buckeyes as a 30-point favorite. That's unheard of in the rivalry, and pretty amazing. To put that much dominance on one team, in a rivalry game, shows where the perception of the programs stand at this moment.



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OSU has put up 63 and 56 in the last two meetings, and the chorus in Ann Arbor has gotten so loud that the administration made a statement that negotiations would begin with coach Jim Harbaugh soon. Harbaugh was the only Power Five coach not signed beyond 2021, which is problematic. But also problematic is the belief that U-M higher-ups would re-sign him, but at a lower base salary. What kind of blow must that be to the ego? Would it be enough for Harbaugh to stomp out and keep walking all the way to the NFL? Would it make him take inventory and reshape the coaching staff? The offseason at Michigan should be fascinating, and you know Buckeyes fans will be watching intently.

With the Wolverines out of the way, OSU turns its attention to Northwestern. Full disclosure – I don't mind the Wildcats. Pat Fitzgerald is a great coach who always has his team playing hard and is a perfect fit in Evanston. The Wildcats are a smash-mouth, blue-collar outfit, resembling the way Fitzgerald played when he patrolled the middle of the defense at Northwestern as a Butkus Award-winning linebacker.

From an athletic standpoint this should be no contest – the Buckeyes win going away. OSU is faster, bigger and stronger, and has a lot more depth than the Wildcats. That's likely a big reason they opened as a 20-point favorite for the Big Ten Championship Game. A word of caution – football isn't just a contest of athleticism.

It's hard to blow out Northwestern because it often lulls you into playing its game. It will force a turnover here, a lost-yardage play there, and suddenly you're behind the chains. The Wildcats don't often mess up in coverage and make you work for everything you get. Interesting stat – heading into the 2020 season, Northwestern ranked 18th overall in defensive efficiency and 17th in total touchdowns allowed since 2015.

Not unexpectedly, Northwestern's defensive heart and soul is at linebacker.

Paddy Fisher and Blake Gallagher are one of the top combos in the Big Ten. Both are active and have a nose for the football, and they can really hit. They are seldom out of position, so if you're going to beat them it will have to be with execution. You aren't going to fool this group.

The chess match between Ryan Day and Wildcats DC Mike Hankwitz should be interesting. Northwestern's secondary is experienced and sticky in coverage, but the defensive line doesn't create a ton of pressure. So Justin Fields should have time to throw. Whether or not he'll have anyone to throw to is a question, which means the running skill he showed against Michigan State – a career-best 104 yards – may need to be utilized again.

It would be a pretty big upset if Northwestern won the game – especially when you consider the East is a perfect seven-for-seven in league title contests and that Ohio State has won three in a row.

Should the Buckeyes pull it off, then the discussion changes to whether or not they belong in the College Football Playoff. Only the CFP committee can answer that, and it will – more than 24 hours after the conclusion of the Big Ten title game. So it will be a waiting game for Buckeye Nation.

One school of thought is that a 6-0 Ohio State team is certainly among the best in the nation. Anyone who watches football and knows what to look for can see that the Buckeyes are an excellent team. The computer/efficiency metrics have them no lower than third, and they won't get worse with a league championship in their back pocket. If the committee is truly looking for "best," Ohio State checks all of the boxes.

The committee has never left out an unbeaten conference champion, which is a big factor in Ohio State's favor. But it's not wrong to wonder if this is a completely different season and all of the prior selections are irrelevant.

The other line of thinking is that six games simply isn't enough for a team to get in. Why should the Buckeyes be "rewarded," the thinking goes, for not having to go through the same meat-grinder of nine or 10 games that Alabama and Notre Dame and Clemson and others went through? It seems unfair, and it may be. OSU's strength of schedule is an abysmal 79th (according to ESPN), and it won't go up a ton with a win over the Wildcats.

So should the Buckeyes make the field, they will easily have the record for worst schedule for a CFP team. The committee has given the appearance that the "worst" teams, rather than the "best," have been chosen for the playoff. Nearly all of the selections have been top four in the Strength of Record (SOR) metric, which is a backward-looking, accomplishment-based number.

The field doesn't always align with other, forward-looking metrics that measure team play and strength – and those are actually a show of whether a team is best. SOR shows which team is most worthy. If the latter is used, Ohio State could be in trouble because it is lacking mightily in the accomplishment column.

Whether or not the Buckeyes have done enough, one thing is certain – it feels like ages since they last played. Which means the Big Ten Championship Game can't get here fast enough.

*"The waiting is the hardest part.*

*Every day, you get one more yard.*

*You take it on faith, you take it to the heart.*

*The waiting is the hardest part."*  
**Tom Petty, "The Waiting"**

## Dandy Dozen

1. Alabama (10-0)
2. Notre Dame (10-0)
3. Clemson (9-1)
4. Ohio State (5-0)
5. Cincinnati (8-0)
6. Texas A&M (7-1)
7. Iowa State (8-2)
8. Coastal Carolina (11-0)
9. Oklahoma (7-2)
10. Indiana (6-1)
11. Florida (8-2)
12. USC (5-0)

The final week of the season looked like it was going to provide a ton of drama, but Florida losing to LSU took much of that away. With a win over Alabama, the Gators looked poised to leapfrog over Ohio State and nab the fourth and final spot in the CFP rankings.

The shocking loss to the up-to-then moribund Tigers kills any notion of that happening. For Ohio State, it's basically win and you're in.

There has been talk that even if it wins the Big Ten, OSU won't get in because the committee isn't going to reward a team that has played only six games.

There apparently are a few things people don't understand about how the committee operates. Truthfully, there a few that I don't understand, either, but that's for another day.

If the committee sees fit to put OSU at No. 4 now, over Texas A&M, then there is no way the Aggies will vault past the Buckeyes. A&M won't even play for a conference title, and it lost – badly – to the best team on its schedule.

If people think that the committee is just waiting for "all of the returns to come in" before knocking Ohio State down, they have another thing coming. That's not going to happen. The only way OSU drops is if it loses.

Here are the scenarios:

- The easiest would be all of the favorites winning their league championship games. If Alabama, Clemson and Ohio State win, all three are in. The fact that Notre Dame is at No. 2 in the CFP rankings says the committee believes it is also already in. Barring a 59-0 blasting at the hands of Clemson, there seems to be no way Notre Dame is excluded.

- If Alabama, Notre Dame and Ohio State win, those three would be in, and then it would get interesting. Would the committee move A&M up to four to rematch with Alabama, to whom it lost 52-24? Would an unbeaten Pac-12 champion USC sneak in? Would it actually have the stones to move an unbeaten American Athletic Conference champ Cincinnati up to the final spot? If ever there is a year for a Group of Five team to make it, this would be it. One thing is certain – Clemson isn't getting in with two losses.

- If Notre Dame and Ohio State win and Alabama loses, the Crimson Tide will still be in along with A&M, Cincinnati or USC. It will just be a matter of seeding. In that scenario, The Irish would be No. 1 and OSU would likely be 2. The question is would Alabama as a nonleague champion drop all the way to 4? Or would the committee reward the season-long excellence and keep it at 3? That would be an interesting discussion.

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# Usual Fervor For Season Nowhere To Be Found

Bah, humbug. Just call me the Grinch who belittled Ohio State's 2020 football season.

I know this is not what most of our readers want to hear and what most readers expect from the publisher of an Ohio State sports newspaper. I'm sorry. I haven't particularly enjoyed this football season. The cancellation of the Ohio State-Michigan game is just the latest blow to that usual enjoyment.

Let me qualify all of this by saying I am not especially a college football fan. I am an Ohio State football fan. I know I am not supposed to say that because I am supposed to be an impartial journalist, but let's face it. I work for Buckeye Sports Bulletin. I have covered the Buckeyes for over 40 years. It's hard not to be a fan.

While others may watch the many other games that are played each week, I want to watch Ohio State football. That's my passion. Coastal Carolina vs. BYU just doesn't do it for me, though I love any team named the Chanticleers. (For the record, a chanticleer is a rooster.)

And this year, I have for the most part been denied what has been a huge part of my fall since I first started covering the Buckeyes for the now defunct Madison Press in London, Ohio, in 1978.

The past few weeks have been especially difficult. There have been two games in the last five weeks. Sure, there are open weeks in a normal season. But three in five weeks including the final week of the regular season? That doesn't cut it for me, especially when one of those "open weeks" should have actually been The Game.

A good football season should be like a good novel or movie. The various chapters should build up to a climax. This year we haven't had the joy – or pain – of seeing a team improve – or not improve – over the course of a full season. Jim Tressel-coached teams were famous for getting better as the season progressed. How would the 2020 Buckeyes have progressed if they had played a full season? How would they have progressed if they had even played an eight-game season with all the games in a row?

I think I could have lived with this season if it had brought some normalcy to a not-so-normal world. But instead we had fits and starts and instead of worrying about the next opponent, we were worried about if there would be a next opponent and if so, who would be playing for the Buckeyes come game time.

I think all of us have suffered from "COVID time" since the start of the pandemic – that loss of sense of time. Buckeye football season has exacerbated that for me. With the announcements – all in the same week – that the Michigan game was being canceled and that Ohio State would be allowed to play in the Big Ten Championship Game despite not meeting the minimum six-game rule, I became completely confused. On the Friday before what should have been The Game, I honestly asked assistant publisher Becky Roberts, "Now remind me, there's not a game this weekend, right?" I needed to make sure.

And what about looking ahead? Buckeye fans are convinced that their team, our team, is among the four best in the country. How do we know that? Have we seen a large enough sample to be sure?

Sometime in the distant past, Michael Penix and the Indiana Hoosiers were passing for 491 yards against a porous Buckeye defense. In the more recent past, Ohio State was holding Michigan State to just 180 yards through the air.

Was the improved defensive play against

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

the Spartans because Ohio State, and its secondary in particular, got better or because Michigan State – especially quarterback Rocky Lombardi – was inept?

In a normal season we would have had three games to watch the progress of the Buckeye defense and secondary to try to make that assessment, instead of just the one against MSU. Was the performance against IU, there for every upcoming offensive coordinator to see and emulate, the norm, or was the play against the Spartans more typical of the defense's capabilities?

Unfortunately, we are not going to find out until the postseason. Luckily, Northwestern doesn't seem like a team to test Ohio State's pass defense. Not so lucky is the fact that other, more talented teams may await the Buckeyes if they should get past the Wildcats.

Dabo Swinney, coach of Ohio State nemesis Clemson, doesn't believe that the Buckeyes belong in the four-team CFP field.

"It doesn't mean they're not a great team and couldn't win the whole thing," Swinney said. "I just think, from a big-picture standpoint, I would lean toward rewarding the teams that have been all in because it's been an incredible challenge."

He's right. Ohio State could win the whole thing. But how do we really know that? Even if the Buckeyes began the season as one of the legitimate contenders, have they been able to have the normal development, building of chemistry and improving that championship teams do over the course of a normal season?

I would have enjoyed seeing the Buckeyes possibly answer those questions in a 12-game season.

And if the Buckeyes do make the playoffs, how much fun is it going to be for the players? Any team that makes it that far is going to be on complete lockdown. Is that the way an 18- to 22-year-old wants to live his life? Sure, a guy like Justin Fields can deal with it because there is a pot of gold at the end of the COVID-colored rainbow. But if you are a guy who is beaten up on scout team every day, is taking your licking in practice and then being cooped up in your room for the holiday season what you really signed up for?

The Buckeyes are not highly paid pro athletes. They are college students. Are they having more fun than I am this season? At least I can pick up a pizza from a drive-thru.

These are things I think about.

Will I feel better if the Buckeyes win the national championship? Of course.

Will I feel they same type of joy I felt in 2002 or 2014? Ask me after the Buckeyes win, but somehow I don't think so.

Bah, humbug.

### Anniversary Season Continues

In this issue, Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 40th Anniversary Season heads into the post-season with the most important Big Ten Championship Game in our publishing history. While our choice may not have proved to be the most "exciting" it certainly proved to be the most significant and, I think most of you would agree, the most satisfying. I am sure you have already guessed that our choice is the 2014, 59-0 stunner over Wisconsin that put the Buckeyes, down to their third-string quarterback, on the path to the national championship.

With the loss of redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett – the surprise player of the season – the week before in the Michigan game and lingering questions about the OSU defense which had allowed an average of 29.0 points in the team's last four regular-season games, Buckeye fans were concerned about their team's faint dreams of earning a spot in the inaugural College Football Playoff, needing a win, hopefully a strong win, over a solid Wisconsin team (10-2, 7-1).

Of particular concern for the Buckeyes was Badger running back Melvin Gordon. Here's what BSB's Matt Hager had to say about Gordon heading into the game.

"Gordon's credentials are superb, and he seems like a near lock to be invited to New York City for the Heisman Trophy ceremonies," Hager wrote in the Dec. 6, 2014, issue of BSB. "His 2,260 rushing yards, fourth most in FBS history, are the most ever for a Big Ten back, and his 408 yards Nov. 15 vs. Nebraska set an FBS record that lasted just one week. In November alone, he rushed for 1,092 yards and 10 touchdowns in five games."

"Gordon has added 26 rushing touchdowns on the year and is averaging 8.0 yards per carry. Since the start of the 2012 season, Gordon has 551 rushes for 4,490 yards, an average of 8.1 yards per rush."

The Badgers entered the game averaging 37.5 points per game, 334.2 rushing yards and 482.1 total yards a contest. They were just as solid on defense, yielding just 16.8 points and 260.3 yards an outing.

So, what did the Buckeyes do? They drew the blueprint for their improbable march to the CFP championship, playing stifling defense and, on offense, using the superb running of Ezekiel Elliott to set up a productive passing game for the rifle-armed but inexperienced Cardale Jones.

The Buckeyes held Gordon to only 76 yards on 26 carries, a 2.9-yard average and a long of just 13. Elliott, meanwhile, was starting what would prove to be a remarkable post-season run with 20 carries for 220 yards and two scores, including one from 81 yards out, averaging 11.0 yards a tote.

Jones was called on to pass only 17 times, but he completed 12 of them for 257 yards and three scores. Jones was aided by big-play receiver Devin Smith, who was the recipient of all those scoring tosses, coming from 39, 44 and 42 yards. For the game, Smith had four total catches for 137 yards, good for a championship-caliber average of 34.3 yards for catch. For the game, Ohio State outgained the Badgers, 558-258, almost as decisive a margin as the final score.

Suddenly the Buckeyes, haunted all season by an early-season loss to Virginia Tech, had caught the attention of the CFP selection committee.

"There was still that nagging loss early in the season, the fact that they entered the week as one of the odd teams out in what appeared to be a five- or six-team field of contenders, and the fact that the other teams vying for the coveted spots all had valid résumés as well," I wrote in this space in the Dec. 20, 2014, issue of BSB. "If the Buckeyes were left out, it would not have been a huge surprise, especially given the seeming national bias against the Big Ten."

"As I understand it, it was the purpose of

the committee to select the four best teams at the end of the season. In that regard, it is hard to quibble with Ohio State's inclusion."

A note of caution here.

For those who think the current edition of the Buckeyes, with their 5-0 regular-season record, are a lock for the playoffs if they beat Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game, remember that the 2014 Buckeyes bullied their way into the playoffs with their big win over the Badgers after entering the championship game, as mentioned, just outside the final four. For the Buckeyes to be selected, someone else had to drop out, and that would seem to have been TCU, an omission that caught the attention of both me and a former Buckeye standout.

"I do have to agree with Buckeye great Joey Galloway, who couldn't make sense of how TCU could go into the final week of the season ranked third in the eyes of the committee, beat its final opponent (however hapless) 55-3, and drop to sixth place," I wrote after the Buckeyes were selected. "Did the Horned Frogs have to win 100-0 to maintain their status?"

"On the other hand, I can see how Ohio State played its way into the mix with its impressive final week performance."

TCU defeated Iowa State, which finished its 2014 season with a 2-10 record, in the referenced game. I had a simple solution to that problem then and I think it is still valid now.

"If the task is to determine the best four teams at the end of the season, then why are there weekly updates?" I asked. "They are absolutely meaningless. The answer is television, of course. The progress report creates more programming for ESPN but does little else."

"In my perfect world, there would be the selection show and nothing else. Exactly the same thing would be accomplished, albeit with less ad sales opportunities."

By the time you read this column next, and assuming the Buckeyes defeat Northwestern, you will know if Ohio State, like its brethren from 2014, will have a shot at playing for the national championship, or whether the Buckeyes are this year's version of the Horned Frogs.

### Preps Not Pros

Kerry Coombs has always been known as a good recruiter. I am sure that is one of the reasons Ryan Day lured the former Buckeye assistant back to the Ohio State fold after a two-year stint with Mike Vrabel and the NFL's Tennessee Titans.

Apparently, the return to the recruiting trail offered a bit of culture shock for the veteran coach according to an amusing note in Recruiting Outlook in this issue.

"Coombs admitted he struggled upon his return to the college game with evaluating high schoolers on tape after two years of working with professional athletes," the note by Andrew Lind reads.

"I went to (director of player personnel Mark) Pantoni and said, 'Hey, these guys you're giving me are not good enough.' And he said, 'Kerry, they're 15 years old and you've been looking at 28-year-old professionals at the top of their game.'" Coombs said. "I had to regroup a little bit and go back and try to watch them in context, which really helped me get a better feel for the evaluation part of it."

With any luck, some of those 15-year-olds that Coombs was looking at will develop into the future NFL players that he has earned a reputation for bringing to Columbus.



# FOR ATHLETES

## HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

### WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen when your brain gets bounced around in your skull after a fall or hit to the head.

#### • CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

Headache, nausea vomiting, balance problems, dizziness double or blurred vision, sensitivity to light or noise, feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy, memory problems, confusion, just not "feeling right" or "feeling down".

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?



**REPORT IT.** Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

**GET CHECKED OUT.** If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a health care provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

**GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL.** A concussion can make everyday activities, such as going to school, harder. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

### WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH & PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain.

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>



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