



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

BACK-TO-BACK-TO-BACK-TO-BACK – Head coach Ryan Day and running back Trey Sermon helped capture Ohio State's fourth consecutive Big Ten title with a 22-10 win over Northwestern on Dec. 19, setting up a College Football Playoff semifinal rematch with Clemson. The Tigers beat the Buckeyes, 29-23, in the 2019 Fiesta Bowl.

Bucks Looking For Revenge Against Tigers In Sugar Bowl

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

From the moment that quarterback Justin Fields' potential game-winning pass was intercepted in the end zone in last year's College Football Playoff semifinal game against Clemson, Ohio State has had revenge on its mind.

The Buckeyes immediately put up a sign in the weight room at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center with the score from that game – a 29-23 win by the Tigers – as motivation to avenge the heartbreaking loss. Now, they'll have their chance, after it was revealed on Dec. 20 that Ohio State and Clemson will once again meet in the Sugar Bowl with a berth in the national championship on the line.

"Coming off of that game, we just didn't get over it in one day," head coach Ryan Day said during a coaches teleconference that afternoon. "It took time. The goal was to get back here."

"How we got back here is just amazing,

though. The journey we have gone on as a program to get back here, to have a chance to play Clemson in this game, is amazing. You couldn't make it up. Some of the best storytellers couldn't have come up with this story, but here we are."

The Buckeyes have dealt with plenty of adversity this year, from the Big Ten initially postponing and subsequently reinstating the season amid the coronavirus pandemic to having their game against Illinois canceled due to an increase in positive tests within the program. They also had games against Maryland and Michigan wiped out when those programs had outbreaks of their own.

"To me, our story is just simply amazing," Day said. "We weren't even playing the season for a month, and then here we are right now. I think we have an opportunity to write one of the greatest stories in the history of college football."

"I don't know what it all means. We certainly

Continued On Page 10

Early Signing Period Goes Off Without A Hitch For Ohio State

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Unlike years past, college football's early signing period was drama-free for Ohio State. The Buckeyes received letters of intent from 21 recruits, all by 11 a.m. on Dec. 16, which allowed second-year head coach Ryan Day and longtime director of player personnel Mark Pantoni to speak publicly about the prospects for the first time.

The group is headlined by five five-star prospects, including Pickerington (Ohio) North defensive end Jack Sawyer, who became the first player in the class to commit to Ohio State back in February 2019. He and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep five-star quarterback Kyle McCord, who pledged his services to the Buckeyes just two months later, set the tone for the entire cycle.

"Early on, we identified some really special families that helped build this thing," Day said during a teleconference on Dec. 16. "We just kept talking about, 'Who are the guys who fit our culture?' If they don't fit, then they probably need to go somewhere else. We've been very honest in recruiting."

"I think that people recognize the fact that if you come here, we're going to do everything we can to take care of your son and maximize them to be great. This has been a strange year, and we've worked hard to take care of our guys and give them every chance to get on the field and fight for them, to keep them safe and maximize them the best we possibly can. I think people see that about us, and that allowed us to build a special class."

The NCAA has prevented prospects from taking official and unofficial visits since mid-March due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which forced Ohio State to get creative in its recruiting efforts. The Buckeyes used Zoom video calls to communicate with prospects and host virtual tours of campus, which allowed them to secure commitments from several players who had never been to Columbus, including Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson; Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed four-star defensive tackle Tyleik Williams; and Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro four-star athlete Denzel Burke.

"It was a lot of hard work," Day said. "There was a lot of ingenuity in terms

Continued On Page 23

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

After overcoming an ugly start to the 2020 Big Ten Championship Game, Ohio State battled back in the second half to beat Northwestern 22-10 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Dec. 19.

The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff and our readers awarded Buckeye Leaves to some of the standout players in the win against Northwestern.

Wyatt Crosher, BSB: “There are other players that my fellow staff members will be selecting that are more than deserving, so let me use my pick on a player who is likely to get overlooked.

“That player is Zach Hoover, a fifth-year senior and former walk-on who stepped in as the starting punter after Drue Chrisman was listed out due to testing positive for COVID-19.

“In a game where only 32 total points were scored, Hoover had to punt three times, each of which were solid and two of which were downed inside Northwestern’s 10-yard line. Ohio State struggled mightily in plenty of areas, but not in the punt game, even without its star punter available, and Hoover helped to keep the Wildcats from scoring with his impressive short-range kicks.”

Joe Dempsey, BSB: “Justin Hilliard was the best player on the field for the Buckeyes in their 22-10 victory over Northwestern. In fact, Ohio State probably would have lost to the Wildcats without Hilliard’s stellar performance. Not only did Hilliard lead the Scarlet and Gray with nine tackles (five solo) and two tackles for loss, but his two takeaways were two of the biggest plays in the game.

“After the Wildcats drove right down the field with a 10-6 lead to open the second half, they faced third-and-8 from the Ohio State 9-yard line. An incomplection would have led to a short field goal to extend the lead, but

Hilliard came up with a big interception in man-to-man coverage in the end zone.

“In the fourth quarter, with Northwestern trailing 13-10, Hilliard changed the game again, scooping up a fumble at the Wildcat 40 to set up an Ohio State field goal. The former five-star from Cincinnati St. Xavier has overcome a slew of injuries during his Buckeye career to become an impact player as a sixth-year senior.”

Andrew Lind, BSB: “Ohio State senior running back Trey Sermon rushed for 331 yards and two touchdowns in the win over Northwestern, breaking former running back Eddie George’s single-game school record of 314 yards set against Illinois in 1995.

“The Oklahoma transfer struggled to find his footing in the offense and came into the game with just 344 yards and one score in the first five games of the season, but the Buckeyes called his number time and time again in the second half and he stepped up when they needed him most.

“Sermon also broke the Big Ten Championship Game rushing record set by former running back Ezekiel Elliott in the 59-0 win over Wisconsin in 2014.”

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: “He may not have been the biggest name on the defensive side of the ball for the Buckeyes, overshadowed by Justin Hilliard’s two forced turnovers, but defensive tackle Haskell Garrett was absolutely instrumental to Ohio State’s victory over Northwestern.

“He recorded just five tackles (two solo) but he had a crucial fourth-quarter sack to halt a Northwestern drive and force a punt, and was in on seemingly every play for the Buckeye defense.

“For a guy that’s been consistently excellent all season long, this certainly wasn’t anything out of the ordinary for Garrett, but to see him do this on this stage when his team needed him to step up was very impressive. Northwestern’s rushing attack lost essentially all of its

momentum as soon as Garrett started to take the game over.”

BSB Subscribers

“Justin Hilliard for his interception in the end zone, his fumble recovery and otherwise superlative play. The Buckeyes may have lost without his contributions! Trey Sermon was unbelievable and made us say, Zeke who? Haskell Garrett and Tommy Togiai for their awesome defensive line play. Marcus Williamson for making tackles everywhere. The offensive linemen, and especially the three tight ends (Luke Farrell, Jeremy Ruckert and Jake Hausmann), for making Trey Sermon’s day. The defensive coaching adjustments in the second half that helped the Buckeyes make so many takeaways. The backup punter Zach Hoover looked as good as Drue Chrisman! Hope he gets to play in the NFL based on this performance.”

– **AnthonyBuckeye**

“I second everything Anthony said. Very good analysis.”
– **kybuck**

“The O-line was awesome. They pushed around the Northwestern defense in the running game all day, setting up Sermon’s big day. Team rushing of 399 yards, 9.1 yards per carry.”

– **Bucks89**

“How about Zach Hoover, who filled in admirably for Drue Chrisman. He only punted three times for an average of 39.3 yards per punt. However, two of those punts were downed inside the 10-yard line. Overall, a nice performance for a seldom-used punter.”

– **bstu9**

“Trey Sermon was the obvious star of the game; would we have won without him? I think not. I, too, give my leaf to Justin Hilliard. It was a pleasure to see him shine.”

– **PeyoteBuck**



From The Message Board

After Ohio State signed 21 of the nation’s top-rated recruits during the early signing period from Dec. 16-18, we asked the readers on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff members, which prospect they’re most excited to see suit up for the Buckeyes next fall. Here are some of the responses:

“Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer. He’s a plug-and-play from the get-go and we could use another dominant defensive end.”

– **Tiffin Buckeye**

“I’m going to go with Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson. I really believe that he could see significant playing time next year as a true freshman and can be the home-run hitter that we seem to be lacking this year.”

– **bstu9**

“I am excited about both of the running backs, Henderson and Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star Evan Pryor. We will be needing some pep in that department soon.”

– **PeyoteBuck**

“There’s so much talent in this star-studded cast that I don’t know who I’m most excited about but I’ll venture to say that three years from now we’ll say, ‘How did we overlook so-and-so on signing day?’ Some A.J. Hawk or Troy Smith will emerge and surprise us all.”

– **Terrier Buck**

“I also like the Sawyer kid. I really like the defensive line haul with the possibility of signing Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimolou, two defensive ends and the two tackles (Streetsboro, Ohio,

four-star Mike Hall and Manassas, Va., United Reed four-star Tyleik Williams). This could be one of the best defensive line signings in the country.”

– **kybuck**

“I think Philadelphia St. Joseph’s Prep five-star quarterback Kyle McCord is the one I am most excited to see. He is a clear five-star talent and Ryan Day already said he’s going to compete for a starting job right away.

“On pure talent, I think he has a good chance over Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud, but that quarterback battle next season (assuming Justin Fields is gone to the NFL) is going to be very fun to watch.”

– **Wyatt Crosher, BSB**

“I’ll roll with Henderson because I think that he can add a much-needed spark to the Ohio State running back room and contend for a starting role from the jump. On top of that, he’s just a ton of fun to watch.”

– **Patrick Mayhorn, BSB**

“I don’t think there’s a wrong answer to this question, honestly. For the sake of not picking someone already listed, I’ll go with Ironton, Ohio, four-star linebacker Reid Carrico.

“He’s coming into a position with a lot of depth ahead of him, but I think he leaves Columbus in a few years as one of the best linebackers in school history.”

– **Andrew Lind, BSB**

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| No. 14 | Jan. 30 | No. 20 | April 24 |
| No. 15 | Feb. 12 | No. 21 | May |
| No. 16 | Feb. 27 | No. 22 | June |
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Sermon Bails Out Mistake-Prone Buckeyes

Sometimes the clichés write themselves, but it almost goes without saying that Ohio State head coach Ryan Day finally got religion during the second half of the Big Ten championship by repeatedly handing the ball to Trey Sermon.

Sermon ran 29 times for 331 yards – both an all-time OSU single-game record as well as a new conference title game record – and two touchdowns to strap the Buckeyes on his back and lead them to a 22-10 victory Dec. 19 against No. 15 Northwestern.

After repeatedly trying to pound a square peg into a round hole for much of the game, Day finally shelved a sputtering passing attack in favor of a ground-and-pound attack the Wildcats never really stopped all afternoon. OSU rushed for only 94 yards in the first half, but that came on just 17 attempts, good for an average of 5.5 yards per carry.

That average went up just a bit to 11.3 yards per carry in the second half as a tiring Northwestern defense obviously had no answer for Sermon, whose 271 yards after halftime would have still ranked as the fourth-best single-game output in program history. The graduate transfer from Oklahoma broke off runs of 21, 65, 33, 28, 25 and 23 yards during the game. As a team, Ohio State previously had only 15 rushes of 20 or more yards all season.

That the Buckeyes didn't rely on their punishing ground game until crunch time was a bit mystifying in that quarterback Justin Fields was clearly having an off-day.

Missing from the lineup, most likely due to testing positive for COVID-19, were nearly two dozen players including sure-handed receiver Chris Olave as well as valuable backup Jaxon Smith-Njigba, and the OSU passing attack fizzled as a result. In addition, there were some poor throws and questionable decisions on the part of Fields, who apparently sprained the thumb on his throwing hand, while on more than one opportunity a young member of the receiving corps appeared to run the wrong route.

Fields wound up throwing for only 114 yards, his lowest total since arriving at Ohio State, and no touchdowns – another OSU career first. Entering the game as one of the nation's most accurate passers at 78.1 percent, Fields at one point experienced a 4-for-16 stretch and finished with only 12 completions in 27 attempts. That 44.4 completion percentage was another low mark since the 6-3, 228-pound junior transferred from Georgia and joined the Buckeyes in 2019.

Fields also threw two more interceptions, giving him five picks over his last 79 passes. Prior to that, he had thrown only three interceptions in 478 career attempts.

It appeared – at least in the first half – that the Buckeyes were conflicted on what kind of offensive attack they wanted to use against Northwestern. The Wildcats entered the game boasting the No. 2 pass defense in the Big Ten, and Day seemed intent upon testing that ranking as Fields threw the ball on each of OSU's first five plays from scrimmage.

Then after the first rushing attempt of the game, a modest 4-yard gain by starting running back Master Teague, Fields threw the ball again, an 11-yard completion to freshman Julian Fleming, who started in place of Olave. But that was followed by six straight running plays in perhaps one of the most disjointed drives of the disjointed 2020 season.

A holding call wiped out a 7-yard touchdown run by Fields, and the Buckeyes wound up settling for a 41-yard field goal from kicker Blake Haubeil, something of a letdown after holding the ball for nearly 8½ minutes to start the game.

What followed was a series of missteps by the Ohio State defense, which fell into its old habit of missing tackles, missing assignments and missing opportunities. The Wildcats took full

advantage and jumped out to a 10-3 lead midway through the second quarter.

Sprinkled in were some excellent individual plays such as an end-zone interception by linebacker Justin Hilliard, who leapt in front of Northwestern tight end John Raine early in the third quarter to prevent the Wildcats from going up by a 17-6 margin.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Hilliard later recovered a Northwestern fumble on the second play of the fourth quarter, part of a day that included a career-high nine tackles for the fifth-year senior. Junior safety Josh Proctor also had his first interception of the season after dropping what would have been a pick-six earlier in the game.

Meanwhile, defensive tackle Haskell Garrett was a disruptive force for much of the game, helping the Buckeyes hold the Wildcats to only 105 yards rushing one week after they had torched Illinois for 411 yards on the ground. And while we're on the subject of Garrett – he was only third-team All-Big Ten from the coaches and honorable mention from the media? Are you kidding?

Aside from Hilliard, Proctor and Garrett, it would be difficult to single out any other OSU defender in what is becoming an alarmingly norm of surrendering big plays to average offensive teams. Early in the third quarter, facing a third-and-6 situation, Northwestern put running back Cam Porter behind center in a Wildcat formation. Everyone from coast to coast, including my grandmother who doesn't know a football from a footstool, knew a running play was coming, yet Ohio State linebackers Pete Werner and Tuf Borland seemed confused on where to line up. The result: a 16-yard gain by Porter to the OSU 11.

Three plays later, Hilliard grabbed his interception in the end zone, but two linebackers – one a first-team All-Big Ten performer according to conference coaches as well as a Butkus Award semifinalist and the other a three-time team captain and four-year starter – out of position on an obvious run? That's equal parts baffling and unacceptable.

The Buckeyes also gave up several other chunk plays, including a 34-yard run by Northwestern quarterback Peyton Ramsey and a 31-yard pass from Ramsey to wideout Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Bowman on a third-and-9 play in the third quarter. Chiaokhiao-Bowman had eight receptions for 103 yards, the third time in six games this season Ohio State has allowed an opposing receiver to crack the century mark. Last year, that happened only once in 14 games.

OSU also reverted to sloppy tackling against the Wildcats. That was especially true among linebackers and defensive backs, allowing Northwestern receivers to gain 108 of their 224 yards after the catch.

When the Buckeyes make a giant leap in competition, that stuff is going to have to get cleaned up or someone's going to get their doors blown off.

Anyone watching the ACC championship game – and hopefully that included the entire Ohio State defense including the coaching staff – has to be a little bit queasy about entering the College Football Playoff with a rematch against Clemson. The Tigers pretty much had their way with second-ranked Notre Dame, rolling up 541 total yards on the way to a 34-10 rout.

Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence made a particular statement, accounting for 412 yards and three touchdowns through the air and on the ground. Running back Travis Etienne rushed for 124 yards and one score, and receiver Amari Rodgers caught eight balls for 121 yards and a touchdown.

Ohio State coaches, players and fans might remember those three dudes. After falling behind the Buckeyes by a 16-0 margin in the first half of last year's playoff semifinal, the Tigers came back to win a 29-23 decision with Lawrence, Etienne and Rodgers being the difference-makers.

Lawrence completed only 18 of 33 pass attempts and was sacked three times, but it was his 67-yard touchdown run just before halftime that set the tone for his team's second-half comeback. Likewise, Etienne was held to just 36 yards rushing by Ohio State, but he turned a short flip from Lawrence into a 34-yard touchdown with just 1:49 remaining. One snap earlier, it was Rodgers with a 38-yard reception to set up Etienne's game-winning romp.

Those are exactly the type of plays that exploited the aforementioned weaknesses in the Ohio State defense, weaknesses such as sloppy tackling and constantly being out of position. Those are fundamental errors the kinds of which championship-caliber teams do not make – especially against championship-caliber opponents.

Title Game History

If you think for a minute that Ohio State is not the elite team in the Big Ten, take a look at the brief 10-year history of the Big Ten Championship Game.

The Buckeyes have appeared in six of the 10 games, tying Wisconsin for the most appearances, and have won it a record five times, including the last four in a row. Michigan State (three) and Northwestern (two) are the only other teams with multiple appearances while Iowa, Nebraska and Penn State have each made the title game once.

Sermon and his 331 yards obliterated the championship game rushing record of 220 set by Ezekiel Elliott against Wisconsin in 2014. Meanwhile, Braxton Miller holds the record for most yards rushing by a quarterback (142 vs. Michigan State in 2013), and Dwayne Haskins set passing records with 499 yards and five touchdowns against Northwestern in 2018.

The pass efficiency record also belongs to a Buckeye. Cardale Jones finished at 255.8 with his performance against Wisconsin in 2014. Devin Smith was on the receiving end of three touchdown passes from Jones in that game, and that ties him for most TD catches in the title game.

Sean Nuernberger kicked a record eight PATs in that 59-0 rout of the Badgers and added a field goal to give him 11 kicking points in the game, another record. And as if Wisconsin hadn't had enough from OSU's offensive onslaught, Cameron Johnston got off a 73-yard punt in that game, another title-game record.

How ugly was that 2014 game for the Badgers? Doran Grant grabbed two interceptions (another record) and Michael Bennett forced two fumbles. That's also a record. Oh, and Jerome Baker tallied 12 solo tackles among his 16 total stops – both title-game records. That was also the game in which Joey Bosa returned a fumble for a touchdown, a record that has been equaled but never broken.

The Buckeyes even own the best punting average in the Big Ten Championship Game. That came courtesy of Drue Chrisman, who averaged 54.8 yards on four attempts against Northwestern in 2018.

Matching Ohio State's record five championships are a record five game MVP awards – Jones (2014), J.K. Dobbins (2017), Haskins (2018), Fields (2019) and Sermon (2020).



OSU Down Several Players Against NU

Ohio State was without quite a few notable faces during its 22-10 victory over Northwestern on Dec. 19, due in large part to another – albeit smaller – outbreak of COVID-19 within the Buckeye program.

Leading the list was wide receiver Chris Olave, a loss that was certainly felt by the Buckeyes.

Justin Fields struggled without his top receiver, completing just 12 of his 27 passes for 114 yards while tossing two interceptions.

Freshman Julian Fleming was the primary replacement for Olave, filling in at the outside receiver spot and hauling in four passes for 53 yards, both career highs for the former five-star.

On the other side of the ball, Ohio State was down starting linebacker Baron Browning, though his replacement, Justin Hilliard, notched nine tackles, snagged an interception and recovered a fumble in filling in.

Starting safety Marcus Hooker and his primary backup Ronnie Hickman also missed the game but did so because of injury rather than COVID, as both were in Indianapolis for the game.

Other notable names on the report who were out for the game included fifth-year senior punter Drue Chrisman, a pair of contributing defensive ends in Javontae Jean-Baptiste and Tyler Friday, and fresh-

Championship Contingencies

There are two possible publishing dates for the next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. If Ohio State defeats Clemson and advances to the College Football Playoff championship game on Jan. 11, BSB will be published Jan. 19. If the Buckeyes lose to the Tigers, BSB will be published on the regularly scheduled date of Jan. 12.

man wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who might have been in for a larger role with Olave out.

OSU Dominates Big Ten Awards

As has become tradition in Columbus, it was a busy week at Ohio State when the college football award season kicked off in full, with the Big Ten leading the way, announcing its all-conference teams and award winners.

The Buckeyes were well-represented on all three all-league teams, as well as in the lengthy list of award winners.

Leading the way was Fields, who repeated as both the Big Ten quarterback of the year and the offensive player of the year. He's the fourth player in conference history to win the offensive player of the year crown twice, following Purdue quarterback Drew Brees (1998, 2000), Ohio State quarterback Braxton Miller (2012-13) and Penn State running back Saquon Barkley (2015-16). He has completed 119 of his 164 passes on the season for 1,521 yards and 15 touchdowns.

Also on the offensive side of the ball, offensive guard Wyatt Davis claimed Big Ten offensive lineman of the year. He's the fourth Buckeye to win the award in the past six years, following Taylor Decker, Pat Elflein and Billy Price, who won the award consecutively from 2015-17.

"(I celebrated) by having practice early this morning," Davis said. "It's just really unbelievable. I'm very blessed and fortunate to have a coach like (offensive line coach Greg Studrawa) who pushes me to reach awards like this."

While it was Davis that won the award, he felt that the recognition for an Ohio State offensive lineman should actually be going to right tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere.

"I would definitely say Nick Petit," said Davis, a right guard who was named All-American last season. "He has really come a long way. In those first games, it showed. He's over here finishing guys down the film, and he's motivating me to go harder."

"He definitely has stepped up to become a great player. I'm excited for his future, and he has improved the most."

Fields and Davis were joined on the offensive all-conference teams by seven other Buckeyes, including four on the first team, at least according to the coaches.

Center Josh Myers, left tackle Thayer Munford, Olave and wide receiver Garrett Wilson were all listed alongside Fields and Davis.

The media was not as friendly to the Buckeyes, including only Fields, Davis and Munford on the first team. Myers, Olave and Wilson sit on the second-team list according to the media, as does running back Master Teague (second team in both lists).

Lastly, Petit-Frere earned second-team

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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.

VIP subscribers enjoy a 20 percent discount at the new Conrads College Gifts at Easton. VIP subscribers also enjoy a 5 percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel. And VIP subscribers receive a certificate good for \$10 off at Roosters restaurants, the "Fun, Casual Joint."

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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.

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Scarlet VIPs: Anthony Ananthanarayanan, Rochester, Mich.; Greg Brooks, Gahanna, Ohio; Marty Brumbaugh, Troy, Ohio; Dennis Dahm, Sandusky, Ohio; Tom Goila, Cincinnati; Doug Harris, Lima, Ohio; Joseph Huber, Walpole, Mass.; Bill Judy, Dublin, Ohio; Alan Lord, Reynoldsburg, Ohio; Jim Shaw, Lake Forest, Calif.; William Torok, Girard, Ohio; Anonymous, Dallas; Anonymous, Norwalk, Ohio.

BSB Podcast Enhances Online Coverage

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

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

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

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

For those of you who are new to the podcast world, the show will be posted at 10 a.m. on Dec. 31 on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as in the BSB Fan Forum. The recap show will be posted on Saturday morning, at the same time as the Thursday preview.

honors from the coaches but was not recognized by the media, while guard Harry Miller was selected to the third team by the media but not by the coaches.

Running back Trey Sermon and tight ends Jeremy Ruckert and Luke Farrell received honorable-mention All-Big Ten recognition.

On the other side of the ball, cornerback Shaun Wade was picked as the defensive

back of the year after making the move from the slot to the outside corner spot in 2020. He's the first Buckeye to win the award since its introduction 2011. He recorded 21 tackles and two interceptions on the season.

Wade was joined by linebacker Pete Werner on the first team on the coaches list but was alone on the media's top team, which placed Werner on the third team



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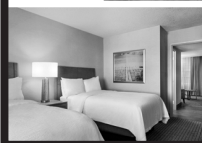
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2020 Ohio State Football Schedule

| Date | Opponent | Result/Time (ET) | TV | 2020 Record |
|---------|-------------------|------------------|------|-------------|
| Oct. 24 | NEBRASKA | W, 52-17 | FOX | 3-5 |
| Oct. 31 | at Penn State | W, 38-25 | ABC | 4-5 |
| Nov. 7 | RUTGERS | W, 49-27 | BTN | 3-6 |
| 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 | 2-6 |
| Dec. 5 | at Michigan State | W, 52-12 | ABC | 2-5 |
| Dec. 12 | MICHIGAN | Canceled | N/A | 2-4 |
| Dec. 19 | NORTHWESTERN** | W, 22-10 | FOX | 6-2 |
| Jan. 1 | Clemson*** | 8 p.m. | ESPN | 10-1 |

* 2020 bowl team

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

*** Sugar Bowl at New Orleans (Mercedes-Benz Superdome)

along with defensive end Jonathon Cooper, who was picked for the third team in both polls.

Tommy Togiai was picked as a second-teamer by both groups.

As with the offense, the coaches were more generous than the media to the Buckeyes, including defensive end Zach Harrison as a second-team pick and placing defensive tackle Haskell Garrett on the third team.

Defensive end Tyreke Smith, linebacker Tuf Borland and defensive backs Sevyn Banks, Marcus Hooker, Josh Proctor and Marcus Williamson are All-Big Ten honorable mentions.

Lastly, Chrisman was picked by the coaches as a second-teamer. He was not selected by the media.

"To see those guys get recognized is great for them," head coach Ryan Day said. "I just want to make sure some of these guys – whether the team or individual – get some of the recognition they deserve after everything they've been through."

Day also spoke about the Big Ten Coach

of the Year vote, which ultimately went to Indiana's Tom Allen, though Day said that he felt either Allen or Northwestern's Pat Fitzgerald would be deserving.

"I can't say enough about Pat Fitzgerald, just the class that he brings," Day said. "He's somebody, really, that I think the Big Ten can really be proud of."

"I would say Fitz should certainly get recognition for Coach of the Year. What he's done this year is pretty tremendous. I think Tom Allen also deserves some credit, recognition for what he's done this season. I think both of those guys have done an excellent job this year in a tough spot."

Fields, Wade, Hartline Draw National Plaudits

Several Buckeye players and a coach have drawn national attention to go with their Big Ten success, including in the list of semifinalists for the Walter Camp award, given to the nation's best player, which includes both Fields and Wade.

Ohio State is one of five schools with multiple semifinalists for the award, along

with Alabama (3), Clemson, Florida and Iowa State.

The list of 20 semifinalists will be cut down to five finalists on Dec. 28, and the winner will be announced on Jan. 7.

On the coaching side, wide receivers coach Brian Hartline was listed as one of 15 semifinalists for the Broyles Award,

given to the best assistant coach. He was the only non-coordinator on the list.

Buckeyes Finish No. 3 in CFP Poll

After staying at No. 4 in every iteration

Championship Print Schedule Contingencies

There are two possible publishing dates for the next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. If Ohio State defeats Clemson and advances to the College Football Playoff championship game Jan. 11, the next print issue of BSB will be published Jan. 19. If Ohio State loses to the Tigers, BSB will be published on the regularly scheduled date of Jan. 12.

Either way, there will be a large gap between this issue and the next BSB. Buckeye Sports Bulletin publisher Frank Moskowitz encourages all readers to check our BuckeyeSports.com website daily for any news between now and then, especially with the possible COVID impact.

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, including reprints covering games from our 40th Anniversary Football Season as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays.

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 come playoff time. If something interesting, troubling or exciting happens in a game, share your thoughts in real time.

If you are not already taking advantage of BuckeyeSports.com, BSB's 24/7 website, simply email your name, address and preferred email address to subscriptions@buckeye-sports.com, and we will send back simple instructions on how to access the site. Don't forget, subscriptions@buckeyesports.com is our email address, not the website. We will send you directions on how to access the site.

Readers who have been experiencing postal delivery problems, as so many of you have reported, can also read the entire issue of each Buckeye Sports Bulletin online at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon its completion. Your copy of the paper will still arrive in your mailbox at its usual time.

If you are a current subscriber and have been unable to access all features on the site, please give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will help you gain access.

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Continued On Page 6

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Continued From Page 5

of the College Football Playoff rankings to this point, Ohio State jumped up one spot to No. 3 in the final rankings, getting placed over Notre Dame after its 34-10 loss to Clemson in the ACC Championship Game.

The Fighting Irish dropped to No. 4 and will play top-ranked Alabama in the other semifinal game.

Texas A&M finished at No. 5, followed by Oklahoma, Florida, Cincinnati, Georgia and Iowa State to round out the top 10. No. 11 Indiana, No. 14 Northwestern and No. 15 Iowa finished out the rankings for the Big Ten. None of the three non-Ohio State Big Ten teams was selected for an NY6 bowl game.

Buckeyes Finish Third In AP, Coaches Polls

While they may not be the most impactful polls released on the weekend of Dec. 20, the Associated Press and Amway coaches polls still released as usual on Dec. 20, and they agreed that for its efforts, Ohio State belongs in the No. 3 spot, behind Alabama and Clemson.

In the AP poll, the Buckeyes sit ahead of Notre Dame, Texas A&M, Cincinnati, Indiana, Oklahoma, Coastal Carolina and Florida, the latter of which managed to move up a spot after sustaining its third loss of the season.

The Buckeyes and Hoosiers were joined

Ohio State Has Record 120 Academic All-Big Ten Honorees

Ohio State set a school record with 120 fall student-athletes being recognized as academic All-Big Ten honorees, the conference announced on Dec. 10. That surpassed the previous record of 112 recognized last fall.

The fall honorees include student-athletes from field hockey, football, men's and women's cross country, men's and women's soccer and women's volleyball. To be eligible for academic All-Big Ten selection, student-athletes must carry a cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 or higher.

The football team led the Buckeyes with a team-record 40 selections. Sophomore lineman Harry Miller and women's cross country sophomore runner Gia Napoleon were recognized for carrying 4.0 grade-point averages.

The following is a complete list of Ohio State's fall academic All-Big Ten honorees, including their class year and major. The list is in alphabetical order by sport.

Men's Cross Country – Steven Bauers, Gr., business finance; Giovanni Copploe, So., marketing; Jack Good, Jr., marketing; Eric Halford, Jr., finance; Peter Hayden, Sr., economics; Nick Miller, Jr., finance; Nick Regas, Jr., marketing; Zach Shultz, So., city and regional planning; Ivan Slyepkan, So., pre-health science; Jake Wickert, Jr., mechanical engineering; Aaron Wood, Sr., civil engineering.

Women's Cross Country – Alex Buck, Sr., exercise science; Gabby Dilick, Jr., nursing; Allison Guagenti, So., pre-art education; Emma Hoellrich, Sr., operations management; Alexa Jankowsky, Jr., architecture; Hannah Moulton, Sr., microbiology; Gia Napoleon, So., journalism; Kathleen Shay, So., food, agricultural and biological engineering; Kalee Soehnen, Sr., exercise science; Ellie Weber, Jr., marketing.

Field Hockey – Mackenzie Alessie, So., psychology; Leanne Bough, So., accounting; Sarah Charley, So., health professions exploration; Julia Dickinson, Jr., communications; Kennedy Fertitta, Jr., finance; Emma Goldean, Jr., biology; Aaliyah Hernandez, Jr., biology; Jessica Hourihane, Jr., marketing; Mara Hunter, Sr., public management, leadership and policy; Tess Maloney, Jr., finance; Katie Pyle, Jr., human development and family science; Sina Schwinn, Jr., psychology; Sammy Stone, Gr., sport management; Julianna Sweeney, Sr., animal science; Nikki Trzaska, Sr., marketing.

Football – J.P. Andrade, So., undecided; Kamryn Babb, Jr., communications; Ryan Batsch, Jr., marketing; Chris Booker, Sr., psychology; Tuf Borland, Gr., sports coaching; Steele Chambers, So., undecided; Drue Chrisman, Gr., human development and family science; Gavin Cupp, Gr., sport management; Kevin Dever, Sr., finance; Tommy Eichenberg, So., undecided; Luke Farrell, Sr., human development and family science; Dallas Gant, Jr., finance; Zaid Hamdan, Jr., criminol-

ogy and criminal justice; Blake Haubeil, Sr., communications; Jake Hausmann, Gr., health care innovation; Justin Hilliard, Gr., consumer sciences; Gunnar Hoak, Gr., sports coaching; Ryan Jacoby, So., hospitality management; Jack Jamieson, Jr., finance; Cade Kacherski, Jr., finance; Chris Kuhn, Jr., construction systems management; Jagger LaRoe, Jr., marketing; Roen McCullough, Jr., finance; Harry Miller, So., pre-mechanical engineering; Teradja Mitchell, Jr., fashion and retail studies; Michael O'Shaughnessy, So., undecided; Noah Potter, So., exploring; Bradley Robinson, Sr., human nutrition; Mitch Rossi, Sr., finance; Jeremy Ruckert, Jr., human development and family science; Ben Schmiesing, Jr., finance; Bryson Shaw, So., criminology and criminal justice; Ryan Smith, So., sport industry; Zach Stevenson, So., pre-medical laboratory science; Master Teague, Jr., communications; Danny Vanatsky, Jr., English; Taron Vincent, Jr., sport industry; Pete Werner, Sr., real estate; Marcus Williamson, Gr., public management; Max Wray, Jr., communications.

Men's Soccer – Matteo Bennati, Sr., international studies; Mitch Bergman, Sr., industrial and systems engineering; Samuel Buzzas, Sr., logistics management; Channing Chasten, So., communications; Brayden Durbin, So., sport industry; Devyn Etling, Sr., sport industry; Xavier Green, Jr., environment, economy, development and sustainability; Luis Hernandez, Sr., economics; Joshua Jackson-Ketchup, Sr., communications; Xavier Kennedy, Sr., communications; Luke Kiley, Jr., criminology and criminal justice; Matt Kiley, Sr., communications; Tommy Marusic, So., accounting; Joe Ortiz, Sr., human development and family science; Sean Ryan, So., business economics; Owen Sullivan, So., accounting.

Women's Soccer – Alyssa Baumbick, Sr., communications; Marissa Birzon, Sr., marketing; Blair Cowan, Jr., communications; Brittany Duncan, So., biology; Kayla Fischer, Jr., biology; Meghan Kammerdeiner, Gr., public policy and management; Bailey Kolinski, Sr., logistics management; Maciah Lipsey, So., criminology and criminal justice; Taylor Lisevick, Sr., biology; Maddy Lowe, Sr., sport industry; Olivia Petit, Sr., sport industry; Ariella Pitty, So., animal science; Izzy Rodriguez, Sr., finance; Maggie Samanich, Sr., human resources; Emma Sears, So., pre-human nutrition; Emaly Vatne, Jr., exercise science.

Women's Volleyball – Vanja Bukilic, Jr., civil engineering; Jordan Fry, Sr., biology; Gabby Gonzales, So., sport industry; Hannah Gruensfelder, Sr., biomedical engineering; Mia Grunze, Jr., sport industry; Becca Mauer, Sr., health science; Camryn Moeller, Jr., accounting; Jenaisya Moore, So., exploring; Kylie Murr, So., sport industry; Mac Podraza, So., communications; Adria Powell, Jr., biology; Lauren Witte, Sr., health science.

as representatives of the Big Ten by No. 15 Northwestern and No. 17 Iowa. No one else

in the conference received any votes.

In the coaches poll, Ohio State checked

in ahead of the Fighting Irish, Texas A&M, Cincinnati, Oklahoma, Indiana, Georgia and Florida. Northwestern sits at No. 13, with Iowa rounding out the conference at No. 16. Wisconsin received 10 votes.

Dabo Disagrees With Ohio State Ranking

While Ohio State made its way to the College Football Playoff, coming in as the No. 3 seed behind Alabama and Clemson, the head coach the Buckeyes are about to face off against did not agree with that ranking.

USA Today released the individual ballots for the most recent Amway coaches poll, a poll that also placed Ohio State third. Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney placed the Buckeyes 11th, by far the lowest ranking for Ohio State of any of the 61 ballots in the poll.

The low placement goes with Swinney's recent comments that Ohio State, as well as any other teams with significantly fewer games played, should not make the playoff over teams from conferences that were able to play a 10- or 11-game schedule.

This was also evidenced by Swinney's ranking of Indiana and Northwestern – ranked No. 8 and No. 13 in the overall coaches poll – which he has at No. 14 and No. 19, respectively.

There were only 15 coaches who did not

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From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1985

An undefeated Cleveland State basketball squad had used the press defense effectively, as well as a running game, in racking up four straight victories and averaging 105.5 points per game.

That string came to an end on Dec. 7 when the Vikings came up against an Ohio State squad that could also run and beat their press more often than not – Dennis Hopson, in particular.

His career-high record of 34 points scored against Florida on Dec. 3 was still warm as he set a new mark for himself of 42 points against Cleveland State. His output helped the Buckeyes take a 99-95 decision over the Vikings, their fifth victory without a loss.

“This game, I had a pretty good first half and it carried over to the second half,” said Hopson afterward. “I was just taking what they were giving me. If I see a little hole, I try to get in there and either score or get fouled.”

30 Years Ago – 1990

Ohio State’s 23-11 loss to Air Force on Dec. 27 did not affect head coach John Cooper’s job security, according to university officials.

OSU president E. Gordon Gee told reporters that the appropriate time to discuss Cooper’s future with the Buckeyes would be following the 1991 season. The coach would then have finished the fourth year of a five-year contract.

“That was a loss none of us liked,” Gee said of the Liberty Bowl defeat. “But there are lessons to be learned from such a defeat.”

25 Years Ago – 1995

News broke shortly before Ohio State’s Citrus Bowl matchup against Tennessee that longtime defensive coordinator Bill Young, who had traveled with Cooper to Ohio State from Arizona State in 1988, would be leaving Columbus to take over the same job under new head coach John Blake at Oklahoma.

The news came after Young took a trip down to Norman to view the facilities and speak with Blake.

“It wasn’t an interview as much as it was a chance to come look around and see if everything was a good fit,” Young told BSB. “It was, even though Oklahoma has had some tough times lately, and now hopefully we’ll build it back up.”

Cooper and athletic director Andy Geiger had made a focus of increasing assistant coach salaries to avoid the loss of assistants to lateral moves, but Young and his wife, Lawana, were natives of the Norman area and felt the

opportunity was special.

20 Years Ago – 2000

Senior split end Reggie Germany had missed OSU’s regular-season finale against Michigan with a leg injury, but by all accounts he had recovered and was practicing full-go with the Buckeyes in preparation for his final game at the Outback Bowl against South Carolina.

However OSU announced Dec. 20 that it was suspending Germany for the Outback Bowl for academic reasons. Cooper decided to suspend Germany, who was second on the team in receptions with 22, after he reportedly failed all of his fall-quarter classes.

“I feel bad for Reggie,” Cooper said. “I think Reggie let our football team down, and more importantly, I think he let himself down. I hope he goes to the National Football League and has a great career.

“But he violated university and team rules. We have high standards at Ohio State for not only our football players but for all student-athletes. He didn’t meet the requirements we asked him to meet so he’s not playing for us.”

15 Years Ago – 2005

After winning at Iowa State to improve to 7-0 on the season, OSU’s men’s basketball team crept into the Dec. 19 Associated Press poll at No. 24, marking the team’s first such appearance since March 2002. The Buckeyes struggled with Tennessee State in the following week, but slip-ups ahead of OSU allowed it to move to No. 21 and No. 20 in the AP and coaches polls, respectively.

“Are we the 20th-best team in the country? I don’t know that,” head coach Thad Matta said. “But it’s exciting for our program to have some positive light on it.

“I think our players would attest that things haven’t changed from when we were 0-0 or 8-0. It’s the same intensity every day in practice and the same focus. It doesn’t change what we are trying to accomplish.”

10 Years Ago – 2010

Suspensions were handed down Dec. 22 to four starters on offense – quarterback Terrelle Pryor, wide receiver DeVier Posey, running back Dan Herron and offensive tackle Mike Adams – and defensive end Solomon Thomas on the other side of the ball. The five players would be required to sit out the first five games of the 2011 season for selling items that they had received from the team as well as accepting discounted tattoos from a Columbus shop.

Ohio State revealed the sanctions Dec. 23 with a press conference and a news release that included mention

of a little-known provision that would allow the players to still participate in Ohio State’s upcoming Sugar Bowl battle against Arkansas, because university officials had not properly educated the players before the violations occurred sometime after the 2008 season.

“Our rules education program is one of the best in this country,” said OSU athletic director Gene Smith. “I am so proud of our compliance team and our university and our department and the great education system we have in place, but with this particular bylaw only we were not as explicit as we should have been in ’07-’08 and ’08-’09. With everything else, we’re at the top of the charts, but in this one we did not do as good a job as we should have done.”

Five Years Ago – 2015

Ohio State great Tom Cousineau was selected as a member of the 2016 College Football Hall of Fame class, an honor bestowed on him by the National Football Foundation.

Cousineau, who starred for the Buckeyes from 1975-78, won three Big Ten Conference championships and was twice named a consensus All-American.

“I am stunned. I am humbled. And I am truly honored to be a part of this Hall of Fame class,” Cousineau said. “I know there are so many great, great players who will never see the College Football Hall of Fame. It is my understanding that it is really tough to get consensus with so many great players on the ballot, so the fact I have been elected to the Hall of Fame is a testament to the incredible teammates I was fortunate to play alongside and just wonderful news to receive. I am very appreciative and thankful for this honor.”

One Year Ago – 2019

Ohio State receivers coach Brian Hartline told reporters on Dec. 18 that he had no interest in leaving Ohio State anytime in the near future, despite an overwhelmingly successful start to his career, with the 2019 season serving as his first as a full-time assistant.

“I’m very passionate about Ohio State,” Hartline said. “At this point, it’s really early, I don’t want to sound ignorant to the fact – I don’t know what would get me out of the city, frankly, unless I’m just not good.

“Hopefully I can control that and keep getting better. But I think my passion lies in this receiver room. I love coaching the wide receivers. There are a lot of coaches who say they’ll never leave, and never is a long time. But being honest, realistically I don’t see a situation where I’m out of here anytime soon. Hopefully I’m here for a long time and that I’ve earned it year in and year out.”

put the Buckeyes in the top four, including Alabama head coach Nick Saban, whose Crimson Tide finished first in the playoff, and Texas A&M head coach Jimbo Fisher, whose Aggies ended in fifth in the rankings, also behind Notre Dame.

Fighting Irish head coach Brian Kelly placed the Buckeyes fourth in his ranking, with his team staying at third despite their 34-10 loss to Clemson in the ACC Championship Game.

The only other coach to put Ohio State below fifth was Georgia head coach Kirby Smart, who had the Buckeyes in sixth. His top four teams were Alabama, Clemson, Texas A&M and Florida, who finished the season with an 8-3 record.

Senior Buckeyes Inspired By Cancellations

Ohio State didn’t get to send its seniors off with the traditional senior day festivities this season, thanks to the cancellation of its Dec. 12 matchup against Michigan.

In fact, those seniors didn’t get a true sendoff of any sort in Ohio Stadium, as they had no way of knowing that the Nov. 21 matchup with Indiana would be the final home game of the campaign for the Buckeyes.

“It was really tough,” Davis said of miss-

ing senior day. “Especially when we found out super early in the week like that. For me, personally, that’s what I was thinking about, just, man, here we are on Saturday (Dec. 12) having a practice, when we’d be getting ready for a game right now. If anything, this year has taught us that nothing is for certain and we just had to bounce back from that and try to move on as best we could, with full focus on Northwestern, which is what we’ve been doing.

“Really just what was hard was obvious-

ly that game but also not being able to walk out into the ’Shoe for one last time. That was tough.”

For some, like Wade, losing the opportunity against Michigan specifically was a difficult pill to swallow, but he understood the move.

“I only got one chance to play against Michigan,” Wade said. “Last year I didn’t get to play because I was hurt, my fresh-

Continued On Page 8

2020 Big Ten Individual Award Winners

Dungy-Thompson Humanitarian Award: Vincent Smith, Michigan
Ford-Kinnick Leadership Award: Napoleon Harris, Northwestern
Graham-George Offensive Player of the Year: Justin Fields, Ohio State
Nagurski-Woodson Defensive Player of the Year: Daviyon Nixon, Iowa
Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year: Brandon Joseph, Northwestern
Hayes-Schembechler Coach of the Year (coaches vote): Tom Allen, Indiana
Dave McClain Coach of the Year (media vote): Tom Allen, Indiana
Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year: Justin Fields, Ohio State
Richter-Howard Receiver of the Year: Ty Fryfogle, Indiana
Ameche-Dayne Running Back of the Year: Mohamed Ibrahim, Minnesota
Kwalick-Clark Tight End of the Year: Pat Freiermuth, Penn State
Rimington-Pace Offensive Lineman of the Year: Wyatt Davis, Ohio State
Smith-Brown Defensive Lineman of the Year: Daviyon Nixon, Iowa
Butkus-Fitzgerald Linebacker of the Year: Paddy Fisher, Northwestern
Tatum-Woodson Defensive Back of the Year: Shaun Wade, Ohio State
Bakken-Andersen Kicker of the Year: Connor Culp, Nebraska
Eddleman-Fields Punter of the Year: Tony Taylor, Iowa
Rodgers-Dwight Return Specialist of the Year: Aron Cruickshank, Rutgers

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Continued From Page 7

man year I didn't get to play, so I only got (the one year). I wasn't mad that they kind of backed out. At the end of the day there's COVID. Our health is definitely more important than the game of football and for the world in general. They had to make their grown-man decision."

While disappointed, those seniors didn't let the stop-and-start nature of the season or the lack of a senior day derail their preparation for the Big Ten title game against Northwestern or for anything that will happen next as Ohio State preps for the CFP. In fact, with just one more assured (save for pandemic cancellations) game on the schedule, with the potential for a second, Ohio State's players told media on Dec. 15 that the lack of a senior day has just served as motivation to make these final games count.

"It's huge," Davis said. "And not only that it's the last couple games. We're just taking it day by day. Having the opportunity to even practice and then play, it's something that I've learned to appreciate more this year because of these circumstances. The motivation is at an all-time high, not just for me but for everyone else, because you don't even know. Tomorrow, something could happen and you might not be playing. We're just taking it day by day and being grateful for each individual moment."

The Buckeyes had moved their focus away from the cancellations and toward the Big Ten title by Dec. 15, but the loss of that final opportunity still stung several days after Ohio State heard the news.

"I feel like it wouldn't sit well with anybody, but that's life. I can only control what I can control," Browning said. "I can't sit here and act like I moved on immediately afterwards when we found out it was canceled. It took a day or two, but I had to shift my mind-set to get ready for Northwestern."

That ability to move forward and past the loss of games in such a strange season was one that every player mentioned as a focus for the Buckeyes entering the final stretch of the season.

With nothing guaranteed in 2020, Ohio State is just hoping to make the most of the opportunities it has left, whatever that might entail in the next few weeks.

"I'm trying to cherish every (game), and I feel like that's the mind-set of all the other seniors," Browning said. "We're just trying to lean on one another and make the most of our last few moments as a Buckeye."

Fields Was Nearly A Northwestern Commit

Before Fields rose to stardom as a high school senior, he drew attention from only

INSIDER

2020 All-Big Ten Football Teams

Here is a look at the All-Big Ten football teams as selected by the coaches and media. Ohio State players are in bold, while unanimous selections are in all caps.

Coaches Team

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE:
QB – **JUSTIN FIELDS, Ohio State**
RB – Tyler Goodson, Iowa
RB – Mohamed Ibrahim, Minnesota
WR – **Chris Olave, Ohio State**
WR – **Garrett Wilson, Ohio State**
OL – **Josh Myers, Ohio State**
OL – Kendrick Green, Illinois
OL – **Wyatt Davis, Ohio State**
OL – Alaric Jackson, Iowa
OL – **Thayer Munford, Ohio State**
OL – Cole Van Lanen, Wisconsin
TE – Pat Freiermuth, Penn State

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE:
DL – Line Chauncey Golston, Iowa
DL – Daviyon Nixon, Iowa
DL – Jayson Oweh, Penn State
DL – Shaka Toney, Penn State
DL –
DL –
LB – Micah McFadden, Indiana
LB – Paddy Fisher, Northwestern
LB – **Pete Werner, Ohio State**
LB –
DB – Shakur Brown, Michigan State
DB – Brandon Joseph, Northwestern
DB – Greg Newsome II, Northwestern
DB – **Shaun Wade, Ohio State**
DB –

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
K – Connor Culp, Nebraska
P – Tory Taylor, Iowa
Returner – Aron Cruickshank, Rutgers

HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS: Chase Brown, Mike Epstein, Doug Kramer, Vederian Lowe, Roderick Perry; INDIANA: Whop Philyor, Harry Crider, Cam Jones; IOWA: Mekhi Sargent, Ihmir Smith-Marsette, Cody Ince, Kyler Schott, Sam LaPorta, Dane Belton, Riley Moss; MARYLAND: Jaelyn Duncan, Mo Kite, Chance Campbell, Nick Cross, Tarheeb Still; MICHIGAN: Hassan Haskins, Andrew Stueber, Kwity Paye, Carlo Kemp, Daxton Hill; MICHIGAN STATE: Drew Beesley; MINNESOTA:

BIG TEN SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD HONOREES: Blake Hayes, ILL; Michael Ziemba, IND; Mekhi Sargent, IOWA; Brian

Media Team

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE:
QB – **Justin Fields, Ohio State**
RB – Tyler Goodson, Iowa
RB – MOHAMED IBRAHIM, MINNESOTA
WR – Ty Fryfogle, Indiana
WR – David Bell, Purdue
OL – Tyler Linderbaum, Iowa
OL – Kendrick Green, Illinois
OL – **Wyatt Davis, Ohio State**
OL – Alaric Jackson, Iowa
OL – **Thayer Munford, Ohio State**
TE – Jake Ferguson, Wisconsin

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE:
DL – Jerome Johnson, Indiana
DL – Chauncey Golston, Iowa
DL – Daviyon Nixon, Iowa
DL – Shaka Toney, Penn State
DL –
LB – Micah McFadden, Indiana
LB – Paddy Fisher, Northwestern
LB – Olakunle Fatukasi, Rutgers
DB – Jamar Johnson, Indiana
DB – Tiawan Mullen, Indiana
DB – Brandon Joseph, Northwestern
DB – Greg Newsome II, Northwestern
DB – **Shaun Wade, Ohio State**

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
K – Connor Culp, Nebraska
P – Tory Taylor, Iowa
Returner – Aron Cruickshank, Rutgers

HONORABLE MENTION: ILLINOIS: Mike Epstein, Doug Kramer, Vederian Lowe, Roderick Perry; INDIANA: Whop Philyor, Harry Crider, Cam Jones; IOWA: Spencer Petras, Mekhi Sargent, Cody Ince, Kyler Schott, Mark Kallenberger, Sam LaPorta, Shaun Beyer, Nick Niemann, Seth Benson, Riley Moss, Matt Hankins, Dane Belton; MARYLAND: Taulia Tagovailoa, Jake Funk, Dontay Demus, Rakim Jarrett, Johnny Jordan, Jaelyn Duncan, Mo Kite, Chance Campbell, Tarheeb Still, Nick Cross; MICHIGAN: Hassan Haskins, Michael Barrett,

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE:
Michael Penix Jr., Indiana
Stevie Scott III, Indiana
Master Teague, Ohio State
Ty Fryfogle, Indiana
David Bell, Purdue
Tyler Linderbaum, Iowa
Cole Banwart, Iowa
Mike Miranda, Penn State
Nicholas Petit-Frere, Ohio State
Will Fries, Penn State

Jake Ferguson, Wisconsin

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE:
Owen Carney, Illinois
Jerome Johnson, Indiana
Zach VanValkenburg, Iowa
Zach Harrison, Ohio State
Tommy Togiai, Ohio State
George Karlaftis, Purdue
Blake Gallagher, Northwestern
Derrick Barnes, Purdue
Olakunle Fatukasi, Rutgers

Jamar Johnson, Indiana
Tiawan Mullen, Indiana
Jaylin Williams, Indiana
Cam Taylor-Britt, Nebraska

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Charles Campbell, Indiana
Drue Chrisman, Ohio State
Charlie Jones, Iowa

Tanner Morgan, John Michael Schmitz, Conner Olson, Blaise Andries, Sam Schlueter, Boye Mafe, Coney Durr; NEBRASKA: Wan'Dale Robinson, Matt Farniok, Brenden Jaimes, Will Honas, Ben Stille, JoJo Domann, Deontai Williams, Marquel Dismuke; NORTHWESTERN: John Raine, Eku Leota, Earnest Brown IV, Chris Bergin; **OHIO STATE: Trey Sermon, Luke Farrell, Jeremy Ruckert, Tyreke Smith, Tuf Borland, Sevyon Banks, Marcus Hooker, Josh Proctor, Marcus Williamson;** PENN

Cobbs, MD; Carlo Kemp, MICH; Antjuan Simmons, MSU; Casey O'Brien, MINN; Collin Miller, NEB; Jesse Brown, NU;

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE:
Michael Penix Jr., Indiana
Stevie Scott III, Indiana
Master Teague, Ohio State
Chris Olave, Ohio State
Garrett Wilson, Ohio State
Josh Myers, Ohio State
Cole Banwart, Iowa
Mike Miranda, Penn State
Peter Skoronski, Northwestern
Cole Van Lanen, Wisconsin
Pat Freiermuth, Penn State

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE:
Owen Carney, Illinois
Zach VanValkenburg, Iowa
Kwity Paye, Michigan
Tommy Togiai, Ohio State
Jayson Oweh, Penn State
Jake Hansen, Illinois
Antjuan Simmons, Michigan State
Blake Gallagher, Northwestern
Jaylin Williams, Indiana
Jack Koerner, Iowa
Shakur Brown, Michigan State

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Charles Campbell, Indiana
Blake Hayes, Illinois
Giles Jackson, Michigan

Daxton Hill, Brad Hawkins; MICHIGAN STATE: Drew Beesley; MINNESOTA: Tanner Morgan, John Michael Schmitz, Sam Schlueter, Boye Mafe, Coney Durr; NEBRASKA: Matt Farniok, Brenden Jaimes, Ben Stille, JoJo Domann, Will Honas, Cam Taylor-Britt, Dicaprio Bootle, Deontai Williams, Marquel Dismuke; NORTHWESTERN: Ramaud Chiao Khiao-Bowman, John Raine, Earnest Brown IV, Chris Bergin, JR Pace; **OHIO STATE: Trey Sermon, Harry Miller, Nicholas Petit-Frere, Haskell Garrett, Zach Harrison, Tyreke Smith, Tuf**

THIRD-TEAM OFFENSE:
Peyton Ramsey, Northwestern
Jake Funk, Maryland
Zander Horvath, Purdue
Rashod Bateman, Minnesota
Jahan Dotson, Penn State
Michal Menet, Penn State
Harry Miller, Ohio State
Logan Bruss, Wisconsin
Peter Skoronski, Northwestern

Peyton Hendershot, Indiana

THIRD-TEAM DEFENSE:
Haskell Garrett, Ohio State
Jonathon Cooper, Ohio State

Jake Hansen, Illinois
Nick Niemann, Iowa
Antjuan Simmons, Michigan State
Baron Browning, Ohio State
Devon Matthews, Indiana
Jack Koerner, Iowa
Jaquan Brisker, Penn State
Tre Avery, Rutgers
Caesar Williams, Wisconsin

THIRD-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Keith Duncan, Iowa
Adam Korsak, Rutgers
Giles Jackson, Michigan

STATE: Rasheed Walker, P.J. Mustipher, Antonio Shelton, Brandon Smith, Tariq Castro-Fields, Joey Porter, Lamont Wade; PURDUE: Rondale Moore, Gus Hartwig, Spencer Holstege, Grant Hermanns, Payne Durham, Lorenzo Neal, Jaylan Alexander, Cam Allen; RUTGERS: Bo Melton, Reggie Sutton, Julius Turner, Michael Dwumfour, Mike Tverdob, Brendon White, Christian Izien; WISCONSIN: Mason Stokke, Tyler Beach; Isaiahh Loudermilk, Leo Chenal, Jack Sanborn, Eric Burrell, Faion Hicks.

Jonathon Cooper, OSU; Will Fries, PSU; Derrick Barnes, PUR; Billy Taylor, RU; Isaiahh Loudermilk, WIS.

THIRD-TEAM OFFENSE:
Peyton Ramsey Northwestern
Chase Brown, Illinois
Zander Horvath, Purdue
Rashod Bateman, Minnesota
Jahan Dotson, Penn State
Michal Menet, Penn State
Conner Olson, Minnesota
Logan Bruss, Wisconsin
Blaise Andries, Minnesota
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Pete Werner, Ohio State
Derrick Barnes, Purdue
Jack Sanborn, Wisconsin
Devon Matthews, Indiana
Joey Porter, Penn State
Lamont Wade, Penn State
Tre Avery, Rutgers

THIRD-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS:
Keith Duncan, Iowa

Charlie Jones, Iowa

Borland, Baron Browning, Sevyon Banks, Marcus Hooker; PENN STATE: Will Fries, P.J. Mustipher, Antonio Shelton, Brandon Smith, Jaquan Brisker, Tariq Castro-Fields; PURDUE: Rondale Moore, Gus Hartwig, Spencer Holstege, Grant Hermanns, Greg Long, George Karlaftis, Lorenzo Neal, Cam Allen, Brennan Thieneman; RUTGERS: Bo Melton, Raiqwon O'Neal, Julius Turner, Michael Dwumfour, Mike Tverdob, Tyshon Fogg, Avery Young, Christian Izien; WISCONSIN: Leo Chenal, Faion Hicks, Caesar Williams, Eric Burrell.

Final CFP Rankings

| Rk. | Team | Record |
|-----|------------------------|------------|
| 1. | Alabama..... | 11-0 |
| 2. | Clemson..... | 10-1 |
| 3. | Ohio State..... | 6-0 |
| 4. | Notre Dame..... | 10-1 |
| 5. | Texas A&M..... | 8-1 |
| 6. | Oklahoma..... | 8-2 |
| 7. | Florida..... | 8-3 |
| 8. | Cincinnati..... | 9-0 |
| 9. | Georgia..... | 7-2 |
| 10. | Iowa State..... | 8-3 |
| 11. | Indiana..... | 6-1 |
| 12. | Coastal Carolina..... | 11-0 |
| 13. | North Carolina..... | 8-3 |
| 14. | Northwestern..... | 6-2 |
| 15. | Iowa..... | 6-2 |
| 16. | BYU..... | 10-1 |
| 17. | USC..... | 5-1 |
| 18. | Miami (Fla.)..... | 8-2 |
| 19. | Louisiana..... | 9-1 |
| 20. | Texas..... | 6-3 |
| 21. | Oklahoma State..... | 7-3 |
| 22. | San Jose State..... | 7-0 |
| 23. | N.C. State..... | 8-3 |
| 24. | Tulsa..... | 6-2 |
| 25. | Oregon..... | 4-2 |

a select number of schools during his recruitment, which he reflected on during the lead-up to Ohio State’s Big Ten championship matchup against Northwestern.

Fields explained during a Dec. 15 media availability that he actually took a serious look at committing to Northwestern after a visit to Evanston in 2016.

“I was really actually close to actually going to that school,” Fields said this week. “I love Coach Fitzgerald. He’s a great person, great coach, and I just love the way he runs his program. I think they have a great culture over there, and I think they do things the right way over there.”

Fields – who had just six offers in July 2016 when Northwestern extended a scholarship – caught the eyes of Northwestern’s coaches immediately.

“I remember our recruiting office showing me his tape, and he was, I call him a three-play guy: You pop on three plays and you go ‘Yeah, he could play for us,’ ” Fitzgerald said. “And then you start to dive in a little bit more and you’re like, ‘This guy is unbelievable.’ Then you find out all the background about his family and you find out about who he was as a student, all those things, and you’re like, ‘This is potentially a program-changing type player at the quarterback position.’ ”

Ultimately, Fields drew more interest from larger programs as his profile grew. By the time he signed with Georgia, he was considered the No. 2 player in the nation, behind only Clemson’s Trevor Lawrence.

“We thought we’d take a hard swing, and we thought we built a great relationship, and then everybody else I think watched the same tape we did, and we kind of got back to the back of the line,” Fitzgerald said.

Ohio State Schedules Southern Miss For 2024

According to a report from FBSSchedules.com on Dec. 21, Ohio State has agreed to a contract with Southern Miss that will bring the Golden Eagles to Columbus on Aug. 31, 2024. The contract states that Southern Miss will receive \$1.9 million for playing the game.

If played as scheduled, this will be Ohio State’s first matchup against Southern Miss and the first matchup against any team from Mississippi for the Buckeyes.

This is the second nonconference game that Ohio State has on the schedule for 2024, with a road trip to Washington scheduled for Sept. 7, meaning that the Buckeyes

2020-21 Bowl Schedule

| Date | Bowl | Site | Matchup | Time (ET) | TV |
|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Dec. 21 | Myrtle Beach Bowl | Myrtle Beach, S.C. | Appalachian State vs. North Texas | 2:30 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 22 | Potato Bowl | Boise, Idaho | Nevada vs. Tulane | 3:30 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 22 | Boca Raton Bowl | Boca Raton, Fla. | BYU vs. UCF | 7 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 23 | New Orleans Bowl | New Orleans | Georgia Southern vs. Louisiana Tech | 3:30 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 23 | Montgomery Bowl | Montgomery, Ala. | Florida Atlantic vs. Memphis | 7 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 24 | New Mexico Bowl | Frisco, Texas | Hawaii vs. Houston | 3:30 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 25 | Camellia Bowl | Montgomery, Ala. | Buffalo vs. Marshall | 2:30 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 26 | Gasparilla Bowl | Tampa | South Carolina vs. UAB | 12 p.m. | ABC |
| Dec. 26 | Cure Bowl | Orlando | Coastal Carolina vs. Liberty | 12 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 26 | LendingTree Bowl | Mobile, Ala. | Georgia State vs. Western Kentucky | 3:30 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 26 | First Responders Bowl | Dallas | Louisiana vs. UTSA | 3:30 p.m. | ABC |
| Dec. 29 | Cheeze-It Bowl | Orlando | Miami (Fla.) vs. Oklahoma State | 5:30 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 29 | Alamo Bowl | San Antonio | Colorado vs. Texas | 9 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 30 | Duke’s Mayo Bowl | Charlotte | Wake Forest vs. Wisconsin | 12 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 30 | Music City Bowl | Nashville | Iowa vs. Missouri | 3:30 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 30 | Cotton Bowl | Arlington, Texas | Florida vs. Oklahoma | 7:15 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 31 | Armed Forces Bowl | Fort Worth, Texas | Mississippi State vs. Tulsa | 12 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 31 | Arizona Bowl | Tucson, Ariz. | Ball State vs. San Jose State | 2 p.m. | CBS |
| Dec. 31 | Liberty Bowl | Memphis | Army vs. West Virginia | 4 p.m. | ESPN |
| Dec. 31 | Texas Bowl | Houston | Arkansas vs. TCU | 8 p.m. | ESPN |
| Jan. 1 | Peach Bowl | Atlanta | Cincinnati vs. Georgia | 12 p.m. | ESPN |
| Jan. 1 | Citrus Bowl | Orlando | Auburn vs. Northwestern | 1 p.m. | ABC |
| Jan. 1 | Rose Bowl | Arlington, Texas | Alabama vs. Notre Dame | 5 p.m. | ESPN |
| Jan. 1 | Sugar Bowl | New Orleans | Clemson vs. Ohio State | 8 p.m. | ESPN |
| Jan. 2 | Gator Bowl | Jacksonville | Kentucky vs. N.C. State | 12:00 p.m. | ESPN |
| Jan. 2 | Outback Bowl | Tampa | Indiana vs. Ole Miss | 12:30 p.m. | ABC |
| Jan. 2 | Fiesta Bowl | Glendale, Ariz. | Iowa State vs. Oregon | 4 p.m. | ESPN |
| Jan. 2 | Orange Bowl | Miami Gardens, Fla. | North Carolina vs. Texas A&M | 8 p.m. | ESPN |
| Jan. 11 | CFP National Championship | Miami Gardens, Fla. | TBD vs. TBD | 8 p.m. | ESPN |

will look to schedule one more home non-conference game for the 2024 season.

Men’s Basketball Drops, Women’s Basketball Rises In Polls

The Ohio State men’s basketball team bounced back to beat UCLA after suffering its first loss against Purdue but still dropped three spots to No. 23 in the Associated Press top-25 poll, and the women’s hoops squad rose one spot to No. 16 without playing a game due to COVID-19.

The 6-1 men’s basketball team fell 67-60 to Purdue before beating UCLA 77-70, but its first loss of the season caused the squad to drop.

In the men’s poll, Gonzaga remained at No. 1 with Baylor at No. 2, while Kansas jumped three spots to No. 3, Iowa dropped one spot to No. 4 and Villanova moved up two spots to No. 5. Michigan State fell from No. 4 to No. 12 after losing 79-65 to Northwestern, which is 4-1.

Beyond the Buckeyes, Hawkeyes and Spartans, the Big Ten boasts four other teams in this week’s AP poll. Wisconsin ranks No. 9, Rutgers is No. 11, Illinois ranks No. 18 and Michigan is No. 19.

Outside of the top 25 in the men’s poll, Indiana also received votes at No. 30, Purdue was No. 36, Northwestern ranked No. 38 and Minnesota was No. 40.

In the women’s poll, the Big Ten featured five teams in No. 14 Maryland, No. 15. Northwestern, the No. 16 Buckeyes, No. 17 Michigan, No. 19 Indiana and No. 25 Michigan State. Iowa is outside the top 25 at No. 38 with Rutgers ranked No. 39.

The women’s basketball team, which is currently 4-0, had its Dec. 15 matchup with St. Mary’s canceled due to COVID-19 and its Dec. 19 game against Iowa postponed, and its Dec. 23 matchup with Maryland and Dec. 31 game against Michigan State have already been postponed. Kevin McGuff’s squad is next scheduled to play Jan. 4 against Penn State.

50 Student-Athletes Earn OSU Degrees

Ohio State announced on Dec. 18 that 50 current or former student-athletes received degrees at the end of the Autumn semester, though COVID has prevented any in-person graduation ceremony.

Included in the list are 15 current or former members of the football program, including Alex Boone, Jeff Okudah, Isaiah Prince, C.J. Saunders and Ryan Shazier, all of whom returned to Ohio State through the athletics department’s degree completion program. Connor Curlis and Sam Jardine also returned to OSU to graduate.

A complete list of the graduates can be found below, divided by sport.

Baseball – Dominic Canzone, sport industry; Connor Curlis, sport industry; Andrew Magno, sport industry.

Men’s Basketball – Musa Jallow, exercise science; Clarence Walker, sport industry.

Women’s Basketball – Jensen Caretti, communications.

Cheerleading – Grace Powell, communications.

Men’s Cross Country – Noah Corbett, actuarial science; Alexander Lomong, sociology.

Women’s Diving – Ginger Lingard, finance.

Field Hockey – Mara Hunter, public management, leadership and policy.

Football – Alex Boone, history; Tuf Borland, sport coaching; Kevin Dever, finance; Luke Farrell, human development and family science; Haskell Garrett, sociology; Blake Haubeil, communications; Justin Hilliard, consumer sciences; Gunnar Hoak, sport coaching; Josh Myers, social work; Jeff Okudah, sport industry; Isaiah Prince, sport industry; C.J. Saunders, kinesiology; Ryan Shazier, psychology; Darryl Sinclair, criminology; Phillip Thomas, psychology.

Women’s Golf – Sofia Seldemirova, marketing.

Men’s Hockey – Sam Jardine, communications.

Women’s Lacrosse – Lindsay Epstein, communications.

Rifle – Rhiann Travis, agricultural communications.

Rowing – Cailly O’Toole, sport industry; Maureen Robinson, forestry, fisheries and wildlife.

Women’s Swimming – Katherine Trace, communications.

Men’s Soccer – Samuel Buzzas, logistics management; Joshua Jackson-Ketchup, communications; C.C. Uche, economics.

Women’s Soccer – Kaylee Karsh, biomedical engineering; Taylor Lisevick, biology; Olivia Petit, sport industry.

Softball – Amy Balich, welding engineering; Carley Gaskill, communications; Claire Nicholson, human development and family science.

Men’s Swimming – Noah Lense, electrical and computer engineering; Samuel Stankivicz, data analytics.

Women’s Track and Field – Lailah Elliott, communications; Brianna Holloway, communications.

Men’s Volleyball – Jason Bruggemann, mechanical engineering; Austin Gerwig, biology.

Women’s Volleyball – Jordan Fry, biology.

Wrestling – Gary Traub, human development and family science.

The men’s basketball team returns to Value City Arena for a matchup with the No. 11-ranked Scarlet Knights on Wednesday, Dec. 23 at 4:30 p.m. ET before traveling to Northwestern for a 2 p.m. tip on Saturday, Dec. 26.

Ohio State Looks To Avenge 2019 Fiesta Bowl Loss

Continued From Page 1

don't have the game reps, especially for the younger guys, to find out what they can do. And we haven't had our best game yet this year, either. We've played some good games, but we haven't played our best game this year, and we're going to have to play our best game again to beat Clemson."

In order to do that, Day knows Ohio State's must contain Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, who threw for 259 yards and two touchdowns and rushed for 107 yards and another score in last year's meeting, as well as running back Travis Etienne, who racked up 134 yards from and scored three total touchdowns in that game.

"I think they are two of the most dynamic players in college football and probably in the history of college football," Day said. "I think the fact that a lot of those guys played in that game and having the experience of playing in that game is critical. I think that's why these Clemson teams have won so many games. They've played in this environment before which, hopefully, also plays in our favor, since we were there last year. We didn't come home with a win, but we gained some experience there and, hopefully, that pays dividends."

On the other hand, the Big Ten's late start coupled with the cancellations has allowed Ohio State to play just six games this season. That drew criticism from coaches in other conferences, including Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney, whose second-ranked Tigers played 11 games, including two against fellow play-off participant Notre Dame.

But while the Buckeyes may have less wear-and-tear as a result, Swinney believes the Tigers will be more prepared for the game on Jan. 1 because of their schedule.

"It's been a grind, not just football-wise, but the mental challenges, the personal sacrifice and commitment that



ANDREW LIND

SWEET REVENGE – Rather than enter the NFL draft after last season, Ohio State right guard Wyatt Davis opted to return to Ohio State with goals of beating Clemson and winning a national championship.

everybody has had to make to be able to play and continue to play," Swinney said. "It's been incredible. But at the end of the day, none of that matters in New Orleans. What matters is who plays the best in those four quarters."

Clemson is 4-0 all-time against Ohio State. That includes victories in the 1978 Gator Bowl, 2014 Orange Bowl, and the

2016 and 2019 Fiesta Bowls, the last three coming with Swinney at the helm.

That history, combined with their battles on the recruiting trail, is why Swinney considers Ohio State a rival. Not to mention, he sees a lot of his own program in the Buckeyes.

"I think Ryan does things the right way," Swinney said. "I think he believes in a lot of similar things as far as how they try to run their program. We recruit a lot of the same guys, so I have a lot of respect for their program."

Although the Buckeyes opened as 6.5-point underdogs against the Tigers, Day is confident in his team's chances this time around.

"I think we have the potential to beat anybody in the country," the Buckeye coach said. "One game, we can beat anybody. But we have to play well. We have to be able to practice as a team together, as a unit. And I think if we do and we're all together and we're detailed in our execution and we're playing hard, then we can beat anybody in the country. That's just what it comes down to. People can talk and that's fine. They can talk about who deserves to be in, who's favored, all those things. What really matters at the end is how well we execute and how hard we play."

"If we do those things, if we execute at a high level and we play really, really hard, we'll be in it in the fourth quarter, and then we go from there. We do have really good players in a lot of areas, and we do have one of the best quarterbacks in the country. He didn't have his best game (in the Big Ten Championship Game against Northwestern), but he'll

come back and he'll play well. And then our defense has to do a great job of stopping the run and avoiding big plays. If we can do all those things, we'll be right where we need to be."

Both teams have just 12 days from the announcement of the game to prepare for the semifinal, which is less time than usual thanks to the late end to the regular season. Ohio State plans to practice three times before taking Christmas off, then begin a normal game week the following day.

The Buckeyes have been dreaming for this moment for nearly a year and, given all they've been through to get to this point, are determined to not let this opportunity slip away.

"Every day, our focus has to be on Clemson and executing at the highest possible level we can," Day said. "We know, because we were there last year, how much it hurts if you don't execute. The margin for error is tiny when you play a team like Clemson, so we have to learn from what happened last year and win all those 50/50 plays. We have to do a great job in all three phases. We have to do a great job in the red zone. We have to do a great job on third down. We have to do all those things that matter in big games, and if we do, that will give us our best chance."

"At the end of the day, it's who executes better and plays tougher. When you play in big games, you have to execute at a high level. That's really what it comes down to. Both teams are going to play hard. Everything is on the line. It is who executes better that is going to pull it out. We have to do that."

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Buckeyes Use Sermon To Mount Comeback

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Trey Sermon took a wounded passing game and a depleted roster on his back and broke the Ohio State and Big Ten Championship Game rushing records with 331 yards when the No. 4 Buckeyes defeated No. 14 Northwestern 22-10 in Indianapolis on Dec. 19 for their fourth straight conference title.

Quarterback Justin Fields struggled without star receiver Chris Olave, and the Buckeyes (6-0) trailed 10-6 at the half against the stout Northwestern (6-2) defense before Sermon came to the rescue.

Sermon, who had two second-half touchdowns among 29 carries for the game, bettered Eddie George's mark of 314 yards in 1995 and the championship game record of 220 by Ezekiel Elliott in OSU's 59-0 win vs. Wisconsin in 2014.

Sermon's first TD made it 13-10 late in the third quarter, and he extended the margin to the final score with just over four minutes to play. After gaining 60 yards on seven carries (8.6 average) through two quarters, he rushed 22 times for 271 yards (12.3) in the second half.

"I was able to get in a groove and keep it rolling," Sermon said. "My teammates were there to support me. They made it easy."

The Buckeyes were shorthanded for a second straight game with 22 players, including Olave, starting linebacker Baron Browning and first-team punter Drue Chrisman, unavailable because of possible COVID-19 issues, other illnesses or injuries. The school did not specify.

OSU was down 23 players, including three starting offensive linemen, when it defeated Michigan State 52-12 on Dec. 5.

It appeared the Buckeyes would not miss a beat when they opened the game with authority vs. the Wildcats.

Ohio State took the kickoff and held the ball for 16 plays, covering 51 yards and running 8:26 off the clock, but for the first time this season, the Buckeyes did not get a touchdown on their opening drive.

Fields did pop into the end zone on a 7-yard run, but left guard Harry Miller was called for holding, pushing the line of scrimmage back to the 17. On third down from the 9, Fields suffered a 15-yard sack by Cameron Mitchell and Chris Bergin to force Blake Haubeil's 41-yard field goal for a 3-0 lead at 6:34.

True freshman Julian Fleming had three catches for 30 yards on the aborted drive.

Northwestern shredded the defense to take a 7-3 lead at 4:02 of the first on a 9-yard-run by Cam Porter to complete the Wildcats' first possession of seven plays and 75 yards in 2:32. Quarterback Peyton Ramsey kept the drive alive on third-and-2 from the OSU 43 when he escaped pressure and ran 34 yards to the 9 on the play prior to Porter's score.

Northwestern continued in the second quarter to chunk yardage to take a 10-3 lead at 8:46 on a 47-yard field goal by Charlie Kuhbander. Starting from their 6, the Wildcats reached the OSU 24 but were pushed back to the 29 on a third-down after a 5-yard loss on a screen pass.

The big play of the 14 that used 6:00 in the series was a 22-yard catch to the NU 42 by Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Bowman when the Wildcats needed 7 yards on third down. Bryce Kirtz contributed two catches for 16 yards, and Ramsey added a 9-yard rush.

Ohio State squandered another opportuni-



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

WORKHORSE BACK – Senior running back Trey Sermon rushed for a school single-game-record 331 yards in Ohio State's 22-10 win over Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game.

ty later in the quarter. Consecutive passes of 21 yards to Garrett Wilson and 23 to Fleming put the Buckeyes at the NU 25. Fields was sacked for 9 yards, got 8 back on the next play with a run but threw incomplete to Wilson on third down to set up a 43-yard field goal by Haubeil to make it 10-6 with 5:23 to go at the end of an eight-play drive that consumed 3:23.

After a Wildcat punt, for the third time in the first half the Buckeyes drove to the 25 or better but this time came away with nothing because Brandon Joseph made his NCAA-leading sixth interception, a spectacular one-handed grab falling backwards while guarding Wilson in the end zone with 28 seconds left to preserve the lead.

The Buckeyes had driven deep thanks to a 21-yard run by Sermon, Fields' scramble for 24 and a pass interference that placed the ball at the Northwestern 25. Wilson had two receptions to set up second-and-5 from the 9 before the pick.

Fields, who completed five of his first seven passes for 21 yards, was 9 of 20 for 101 yards with that interception in the first half. Hampered by an injury to the thumb on his right (throwing) hand, he finished 12 of 27 for 114 yards and two interceptions.

Northwestern got a taste of its own medicine on the first possession of the second half. Chiaokhiao-Bowman had a third-down catch for 31 yards, and later Porter converted another third down with a 16-yard run to the 11. But on third-and-8 from the 9, Ramsey was intercepted in the end zone by Justin Hilliard.

The Wildcats almost immediately got the ball back when Fields was intercepted by Mitchell at the Northwestern 49.

The real fault was that receiver Jameson

Williams broke his route near the right sideline.

NU punted the ball back to Ohio State, but the Buckeyes wasted a 65-yard run by Sermon and got nothing when Haubeil missed from 42 yards with 7:27 left in the third.

Sermon's jaunt from his own 7 to the Northwestern 28 was followed by Fields' running for 8. On second down, he threw incomplete to Wilson. A delay of game then pushed the ball back to the 25 on third down, and another incompletion ensued.

The Wildcats failed to extend the lead on their next try after back-to-back penalties on Tyreke Smith (roughing the passer) and Jonathon Cooper (horse collar tackle) gave Northwestern the ball at the OSU 25. A 9-yard loss on a run by Riley Lees on first down eventually led to a missed 46-yard attempt from Kuhbander.

Ohio State eschewed the pass entirely to take a 13-10 lead on Sermon's 9-yard run with 2:41 left in the third.

He ran for 3, 5, 6 and 33 to the Wildcat 24. Fields then rushed for 5 before true freshman Miyan Williams came in for Sermon and on his only carry of the game went 10 yards to the 9. Sermon scored on the next play. The Buckeyes went 71 yards on seven plays in 2:23.

OSU could not take advantage of Josh Proctor's interception at the NU 41 on the ensuing series and went three-and-out.

The Buckeyes increased the advantage to 16-10 on Haubeil's 26-yarder with 12:07 remaining in the game after Ramsey's fumble was recovered at the NU 40 by Hilliard after it was forced by Pete Werner.

Sermon went 28 yards on the first play to

the 12. He then lost a yard, Fields gained 7 back but Sermon lost 3 on a catch to stall the drive at the 9.

After a touchback on an NU punt with 8:49 left, Sermon took over.

He carried the ball on seven of nine plays and gained 64 of the 80 yards, including a 3-yard TD with 4:03 to go. He had a 25-yard run on the second snap. Wilson had a 12-yard grab, and Fields ran for 4.

A two-point conversion was unsuccessful, and the score remained 22-10.

OSU stopped the Wildcats on the next possession. The Wildcats got to their 38 before a fourth-down incompletion sealed the Buckeyes' win.

Ramsey was 24 for 37 for 224 yards with two picks and a fumble lost.

OSU got the ball with 2:24 left, and Sermon ran for 7 yards. He then bulled his way for 23 to the 8 to break George's record. He added 6 more yards on two attempts before the Buckeyes let the clock run out at the 2-yard line.

"That's a heck of a football team to come in here shorthanded and play the way they did," Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald said of the Buckeyes.

Numbers

The Buckeyes had 513 total yards to 329 for the Wildcats. OSU rushed for 399 yards on a 9.1 average. Northwestern entered yielding 121.9 yards and a 3.8 average. NU ran for 105 yards (3.1), 10 more yards than the Buckeyes had been giving up. ... Fleming (53 yards) and Wilson (49) each had four catches. In addition to his pick and fumble recovery, Hilliard had a team-high nine tackles (five solo).

Sermon Has Historic Day To Win Big Ten Title

In the early part of the season, Ohio State's run game was considered the weak point of the offense as junior quarterback Justin Fields put up strong passing numbers in games against Nebraska, Penn State and Rutgers, throwing for 11 touchdowns and zero interceptions with just 11 incompletions as the lone blemishes on his stat line.

During that three-game opening stretch, neither of the Buckeyes' primary rushing options – sophomore running back Master Teague and senior running back Trey Sermon – made a large impact, with Teague's 211 rushing yards and four touchdowns holding an advantage over Sermon's 172 yards on the ground.

GAME NOTEBOOK

Wyatt Crosher

Both had strong performances against Indiana, though Sermon's (nine carries, 60 yards) came in much fewer opportunities than Teague (26 carries, 169 yards, two touchdowns).

Then, it was the senior grad transfer from Oklahoma's chance to show something against Michigan State, rushing 10 times for 112 yards and a score, outpacing Teague's output (14 rushes, 46 yards), even with fewer carries.

However, even a recent stretch of strong performances did not prepare even the most optimistic Ohio State fans for what Sermon was going to do in the Big Ten Championship Game.

In the game against Northwestern, Sermon ran the ball 29 times for 331 yards and two touchdowns in the 22-10 win, breaking both the Big Ten Championship Game record and the Ohio State single-game record in the process.

"Trey had a lot of explosive runs out there," Fields said. "I mean he played his



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

OUT OF NOWHERE – Running back Trey Sermon had just 344 rushing yards and one touchdown in Ohio State's first five games but nearly matched his season total with 331 yards and two scores in the 22-10 win over Northwestern.

ass off. He did a great job today. I think when you have a player that's in a rhythm like that, you just have to keep feeding him the ball, and that's what we did."

The yardage surpassed a 314-yard output from College Football Hall of Fame inductee Eddie George, who set the record in a 1995 matchup against Illinois, rushing the ball 36 times in the 41-3 win.

Sermon, who broke the record on his 27th carry – nine fewer than it took George – had just 344 yards on the ground

heading into the game and nearly doubled his season output by the end of his game at Lucas Oil Stadium.

"When I'm in the zone, I just feel like, personally, everything just really slows down," Sermon said. "The game really just slows down, and I'm able to just see everything develop and just continue to be decisive and just make the right reads and make the right cuts. I was able to really just get in a groove and just keep it rolling, and my teammates were there to support me, so they just kind of made it easy for me."

The Oklahoma transfer found himself with so many rushing opportunities partially because of an injury to Teague that took the third-year sophomore out of the game after just two carries for 23 yards.

The other reason Sermon became the focal point of the offense was a rare off game by Fields, who finished the day completing 12 of his 27 passes for 114 yards and two interceptions. He also ran the ball 12 times for 35 yards in a down performance for the Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year, a lackluster showing that was

partially due to what Fields believes is a sprained thumb.

But the injury was not enough for Fields to push the blame entirely off of his down performance on the day.

"It's pretty stiff right now," Fields said. "I really can't move it, but I think it's just a sprain, so I'll probably just get some ice on it and it should be good within a few days."

"In the first half it wasn't even the thumb. I think it was just overall execution, and again that falls on me. I'm not blaming it on my thumb because I don't want people to look at my thumb as an excuse. It's just flat-out me."

Fields said he was happy about Sermon's breakout performance, especially considering the two have known each other since they were on opposing high school football teams in the state of Georgia.

"I'm very proud of him," the quarterback said. "I mean we've been working out since like junior year of high school. We played against each other in high school. Just seeing his hard work pay off, I know the kind of guy he is, I know how hard he

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

On offense, it can be summed up in two words: Trey Sermon. The Oklahoma grad transfer running back had a historic performance against Northwestern, rushing 29 times for 331 yards and Ohio State's only two touchdowns in the 12-point win. The yardage was not only a Big Ten Championship Game record but also a program record, passing Eddie George's 314 yards on the ground against Illinois. George reached that total in 36 carries. Sermon took over for an injured Master Teague and built on a strong first half with an absolutely explosive final 30 minutes, amassing 271 of his yards on the ground in the third and fourth quarters to help put the game away.

Defensively, the Buckeyes forced three turnovers, including an interception and a fumble recovery by sixth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard. Hilliard, who was replacing senior linebacker Baron Browning, finished with a team-high nine tackles, five of which were solo, and two tackles for loss along with the pick and recovered fumble. Junior safety Josh Proctor had the other interception and finished with four tackles (three solo).

What Didn't Work

It was not a day to remember for junior quarterback Justin Fields, who finished the day completing just 12 of 27 passes for 114 yards and two interceptions, while also adding 35 yards on 12 carries. Fields was also sacked three times for 29 yards and was out of sync with his receivers through the air. Some of that can be attributed to a thumb injury Fields suffered, but prior to that, the third-year

quarterback was still having issues with the Wildcats' defense, completing just nine of his 20 attempts in the first half. Without junior wide receiver Chris Olave in the offense, Fields threw to sophomore wideout Garrett Wilson 10 times, but the pair connected on only four of those attempts for 49 yards.

It was not a perfect day for the defense, with Northwestern going 75 yards in seven plays for a TD on its first offensive drive of the game. Senior wide receiver Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Bowman had a big day, hauling in eight passes for 103 yards, both numbers that were game highs.

Play Of The Game

Northwestern threatened to take a 17-6 lead on the team's opening drive of the third quarter. The Wildcats drove down to the Ohio State 9-yard line in nine plays thanks to a 31-yard connection between Peyton Ramsey and Chiaokhiao-Bowman, as well as a 16-yard run by Cam Porter. Facing third-and-8, Ramsey threw into the end zone hoping to push the lead to 11. Instead, Hilliard made an impressive defensive play and intercepted the pass to stop the drive and to keep the Buckeyes within a touchdown. Ohio State would not directly score off the turnover, but it was the closest the Wildcats would get to putting up seven points after scoring on their opening offensive drive.

The interception was Hilliard's first of the season and the first since his pick against Penn State in 2019, a play that also helped to seal that Buckeye victory.

— Wyatt Crosher

works. Seeing him having success on the field is just great to see."

Sermon's 331-yard outburst was not against a bad Northwestern rush defense, either. The Wildcats ranked No. 21 in the country and fourth in the Big Ten with 121.2 yards allowed per game on the ground, while also allowing just two rushing touchdowns through seven games.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day knew it was not a defense that the Buckeyes expected to be able to run through, and that led to an effort to get the pass game going maybe longer than most thought it should, considering how well Sermon was playing.

"We were always going to be aggressive," Day explained. "That's just the way we are, and we didn't execute great. I think we'll probably look back and have a lot to coach off of and to fix, but the run game started to go, and to run for over 300-plus yards. We wanted to throw on them early, wear them down a little bit and then run it a little bit in the second half, and that's kind of what played out. It wasn't clean, and not making excuses, it's just what it was. That's what this whole season's been. I mean this game was a microcosm of what these kids have been through this season."

Even in a game that wasn't clean, Day had plenty of compliments for his veteran running back, as well as the Joe Moore Award-nominated offensive line for their efforts on the ground.

"He ran hard, and the offensive line played unbelievable," the coach said. "The tight ends played really hard, and they're the guys that get lost in the mix, too, these tight ends. I mean they block their tails off."

"There was a time probably after Week 2 or Week 3, we really weren't sure what's going on," Day said of Sermon. "Just maybe not hitting the hole right, didn't have a lot of confidence, and we didn't know Trey, so we weren't sure exactly what we had there. And then to see him persevere again, through all that, to play the way he did in this game and break records like that? That's tremendous, against a really good run-stopping defense."

After a difficult start to the season for this rushing attack, a performance like this by Sermon, as well as the offensive line, was a major accomplishment for the group, at least according to junior center Josh Myers.

"Early on there were a lot of questions about our running game, and I have to tell you guys, it was just the best feeling," Myers said. "(Northwestern) allowed 3.8 yards per rushing attempt, and we averaged over nine on 44 rushing attempts, so I can't even express how happy I am about that."

"With Trey, we see it from a different angle than you guys do, but we see it the

same way you guys do. After he broke a couple out, even in the first half, I was like 'Oh, he's about to go off.' I knew it was just a matter of time and, man, did it feel good."

This type of performance was not something that had been seen from Sermon in his short time with the Buckeyes, or even during his tenure at Oklahoma. He came into this game with a career high of 206 yards, which he achieved in 2018 against Texas Tech on 26 carries.

But Sermon said he knows what he brings to the team and that this is the type of performance he was envisioning when he made the transfer over to Ohio State this past offseason.

"I am aware of my ability and I know I'm more than capable of making plays and just playing my game, which is making guys miss and winning at the second level," Sermon said. "They brought me here for a reason. They know that I'm a great player and I can make an impact, and I just had to really believe that in myself as well, just trust my coaching and just trust my teammates around me."

Hilliard Excels In Starting Role

Ohio State was without 24 total players against Northwestern, with 22 listed as unavailable and safeties Marcus Hooker and Ronnie Hickman also missing the game entirely. One of those unavailable players was senior linebacker Baron Browning, which led to the start of sixth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard.

Hilliard not only earned his place in the lineup, but he became the star of the defense, leading Ohio State with nine tackles (five solo) and two tackles for loss while also intercepting a pass and recovering a fumble to help keep Northwestern at 10 points on the day.

The impressive showing is a bright spot in what has been a tumultuous collegiate career for Hilliard, a former five-star who has spent much of his time with the Buckeyes recovering from injuries.

"This whole journey has been something," Hilliard said. "It's been tough, but it's been such a blessing at the same time. Just the journey I've been on and the guys that have been here with me to stick with me and push me through some of those tougher times, and same thing as today. I knew I had to step up today in a bigger role and I'm glad I was able to."

There were many big plays made by Hilliard against the Wildcats, but likely

none bigger than his pick of quarterback Peyton Ramsey in the end zone to stop a drive that was threatening to put Ohio State down by two scores.

"It's something that we practice," Hilliard said. "Our coaches put us in the best positions to make plays. I was ready for him to run that fade, and I was glad I was able to make that play."

The career-best effort from Hilliard, who nearly doubled his previous single-game high of five tackles, earned plenty of praise from his head coach following the victory. Day sounded thrilled to be asked about the performance from his veteran linebacker and team captain.

"Oh my god, how about the interception he had in the one-on-one? I mean he played his tail off," Day said. "Because of the game and because of all the things that people are going to want to talk about, there's a lot of things that happened today that people need to really respect."

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Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on the Buckeyes' struggles on offense and playing without key players on short notice: "We certainly didn't execute the way we wanted to, but at the same time, at the end of the week we're losing guys. And we had 10 days of practice with certain guys in certain spots, and then we had to move people around."

Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald on his initial thoughts after the 12-point loss against the Buckeyes: "Incredibly disappointed in the outcome of the game. First and foremost, I want to credit Ryan, his staff and his players. With them being shorthanded and the injuries we had in-game, we kind of had a short-handed game on both sides. I want to credit them. I want to credit their players. This was a hard-fought battle. They earned it and they're Big Ten champs for a reason, so congratulations to them. I'm just hurting for our seniors. We didn't come down here to play hard, we came down here to win. And not to get the job done is bitterly disappointing, but I'm really proud of them. They've led us to this point, they've done a terrific job, and now through adversity they're going to have to lead us again as we get ready for a couple weeks from now the privilege to represent the Big Ten at whatever bowl game destination that we get the privilege to go to."

Ohio State junior quarterback Justin Fields when asked about having to play without standout junior wide receiver Chris Olave: "When you don't have one of your top receivers on the team, of course it's going to make my job harder, but I just think Northwestern did a great job on defense. They're a sound defense. They did a great job doing their jobs, but it's really on me, to be honest with you. I wish I could say that they just had it locked down, but again, I just have to be flat-out better and that's that. I'm not trying to make any excuse. I just have to be better."

Fitzgerald on how the Wildcats were able to limit Fields and the typically potent Ohio State passing attack: "Justin's not a good player; he's a great player. He's a top-10 pick for a reason. I just think we were able to get some pressure early, we tipped some balls, we had good coverage concepts, our guys competed. I mean, he was maybe off on a couple throws, it wasn't very much. But down the stretch is probably where I'll spend most of my time in our run fits and our gap fits and our block destruction and our tackling. It didn't look like us there the last quarter and a couple minutes. We've got to get those things fixed. It's something we pride ourselves in. And again, I'll credit the

Buckeyes there, they're really, really good."

Day on his team's overall performance and the defense's ability to create turnovers: "The defense really did a great job getting us the ball back, and they played really, really well in the second half. The run game and the defense were excellent. I thought special teams was solid. We just didn't do as good a job in the pass game. But hey listen, that's kind of how it goes. They have a really good team, too."

Ohio State sixth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard on the tough first half and how the defense responded to adversity: "There's panic around everywhere except for on the defensive sideline and in the defensive huddle, because we're trying to figure stuff out, we're trying to make adjustments and things like that. The whole attitude on the sideline was mostly just trying to figure out what adjustments we needed to make."



Pat Fitzgerald

Ohio State senior running back Trey Sermon on what changed in the second half for the Buckeyes: "Our coaches just came and talked to us and really told us that only we were stopping ourselves. We just had a couple penalties and just made a couple mistakes, and our mentality was just to make the most of every opportunity and execute, and I mean I feel like we came out and did that in the second half."

Fitzgerald on the performance of Sermon and the Buckeye rushing game, and what went wrong for his defense: "He's a heck of a player, number one. He's a very talented guy. We had guys there one-on-one, he ran through them, and credit to him. But then we had some misfit gaps, we had some guys out of position, and then that put a lot of pressure on our linebackers to fit the right gaps, and we were falling off tackles. We weren't running our feet. And we really pride ourselves fundamentally and technically on those things, and we did not accomplish that. But first and foremost, I've got to give credit to Ohio State, and their talent and their players. We have to get that fixed when we want to put that beautiful Big Ten championship trophy in our case. We have to get that fixed. But there were two Big Ten teams here, and there were a bunch of other Big Ten teams watching, so we're where we want to be. We just have to continue to put the work in to get over this next hurdle, and I know our guys will, because they have a lot of pride and they have an amazing brotherhood."

Sermon on the performance of the Ohio State offensive line: "It was amazing, man. Those guys played their tails off. They fought hard from start to finish, and I'm just

grateful. They made my job easy just moving the line of scrimmage, controlling it and just dominating up front."

Day on the performance of fifth-year senior punter Zach Hoover, a former walk-on: "How about Zach Hoover stepping up? I mean he'd never punted before in a game, I don't think. I think that was the first time he's ever punted. He did a great job."

Fields on the play where he injured his thumb: "I think it was a third down in the red zone when I hit that dude and tried to put my hand down to brace myself for the ground, but I kind of landed straight on my thumb and it just bent backwards. But after that, I told Coach (Day) that I really couldn't throw the ball. I mean it was getting stiffer by the second. I think the last ball I completed was that out route to Garrett (Wilson), and then after that, I mean it was killing me. Hopefully, we have a good amount of time, so I can get it recovered and healed up."

Day on the injuries to Fields and running back Master Teague: "I think it looked to me, I mean just talking to (Fields) quickly, like it was just a sprain, so I think hopefully he'll recover pretty quickly from that. But we'll have to see. I don't know much about it. Master (Teague) was out of the game. We'll have to see what the doctors are saying about him over the next couple of days, and then we'll try and get you an update."

Fitzgerald when asked if Ohio State deserves a spot in the College Football Playoff: "I believe the Buckeyes deserve to be in the College Football Playoff because number one, they're undefeated. Number two, they have an incredibly talented team. They've overcome a bunch of adversity through COVID and running the gamut of the Big Ten season with the ups and downs. And I don't think everyone understands the emotion that goes into the challenges that they've been through. And then, when you look at their skill, they had to put some new guys in today, and they played outstanding. It wasn't like they really skipped a beat with a lot of those guys out. One guy goes down and there goes another four- or five-star talented player. I think they have as much talent as anybody to go compete for a national championship. And they're Big Ten champs. There's a lot of really good football teams out there, but to play the Big Ten gantlet and the physicality that our brand of football plays in this league, if you're an undefeated champion here, in my humble opinion, you deserve the privilege to play for the national championship, and I believe they should be in the final four. And I look forward to the day when we get ourselves there."



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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 22, Northwestern 10

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| | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|----|
| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F |
| NORTHWESTERN | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| OHIO STATE | 3 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 22 |

First Quarter

OSU – Haubeil, 41-yard field goal, 6:34; 16 plays, 51 yards, 8:26 TOP.

NU – Porter, 9-yard rush (Kuhbander kick), 4:02; 7 plays, 75 yards, 2:32 TOP.

Second Quarter

NU – Kuhbander, 47-yard field goal, 8:46; 14 plays, 65 yards, 6:00 TOP.

OSU – Haubeil, 43-yard field goal, 5:23; 8 plays, 49 yards, 3:23 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Sermon, 9-yard run (Haubeil kick), 2:41; 7 plays, 71 yards, 2:23 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Haubeil, 26-yard field goal, 12:07; 5 plays, 31 yards, 2:19 TOP.

OSU – Sermon, 3-yard run (Wilson pass from Fields failed), 4:03; 9 plays, 80 yards, 4:46

Att. – 3,178

Weather – Indoor

| Team Statistics | | |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| | NU | OSU |
| First Downs | 19 | 24 |
| Rushing | 6 | 17 |
| Passing | 11 | 6 |
| Penalty | 2 | 1 |
| Rushes-Yards | 34-105 | 44-399 |
| Passing Yards | 224 | 114 |
| Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.) | 24-37-2 | 12-27-2 |
| Offensive Plays | 71 | 71 |
| Total Net Yards | 329 | 513 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 7-16 | 4-11 |
| Punts-Avg. | 4-42.2 | 3-39.3 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 1-1 | 1-0 |
| Penalties | 2-15 | 5-45 |
| Time of Possession | 28:40 | 31:20 |

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – NU: Porter 16-61; Ramsey 10-28; McGowan 5-26; Bowser 1-1; TEAM 1-(-2); Lees 1-(-9). **OSU:** Sermon 29-331; Fields 12-35; Teague 2-23; Williams 1-10.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – NU: Ramsey 24-37-2-224-0. **OSU:** Fields 12-27-2-114-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – NU: Chiaokhiao-Bowman 8-103; Raine 4-35; McGowan 4-33; Porter 3-15; Kirtz 2-16; Mangieri 1-16; Lees 1-7; Hull 1-(-1). **OSU:** Fleming 4-53; Wilson 4-49; Sermon 3-4; Teague 1-8.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – NU: Adams 4-42.2. **OSU:** Hoover 3-39.3.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – NU: None. **OSU:** None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) NU: McGowan 1-17. **OSU:** None.

MISSED FIELD GOALS – NU: Kuhbander (46). OSU: Haubeil (42).

FORCED FUMBLES – NU: None. OSU: Werner.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – NU: None. **OSU:** Hilliard 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS – NU: Joseph 1-0; Mitchell 1-0. **OSU:** Hilliard 1-0; Proctor 1-0.

SACKS – NU: Saunders 1.0-9; Brown 1.0-5; Bergin 0.5-8; Mitchell 0.5-7. **OSU:** Cooper 1.0-16; Garrett 1.0-4; Vincent 0.5-4; Borland 0.5-4.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – NU: Saunders 2.0-10; Brown 2.0-7; Adebawore 1.0-4; Hampton 1.0-3; Bergin 0.5-8; Mitchell 0.5-7. **OSU:** Hilliard 2.0-10; Garrett 2.0-7; Cooper 1.0-16; Hamilton 1.0-5; Borland 1.0-5; Vincent 1.0-4; Banks 0.5-1; Harrison 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – NU: Bergin 8-3-11; Gallagher 5-4-9; Fisher 4-5-9; Hampton 5-3-8; Brown 4-1-5; Joseph 4-1-5; Pace 3-2-5; Mitchell 2-2-4; Saunders 2-0-2; Adebawore 1-0-1; Leota 1-0-1; Ruiz 1-0-1; Spivak 0-1-1. **OSU:** Hilliard 5-4-9; Williamson 5-2-7; Borland 2-5-7; Cooper 5-1-6; Wade 5-1-6; Werner 5-0-5; Garrett 2-3-5; Proctor 3-1-4; Togiai 2-1-3; Banks 2-1-3; Vincent 0-3-3; Harrison 0-3-3; Ransom 2-0-2; Hamilton 1-0-1; Potter 0-1-1.

Players In The Game

NU – Raine, McGowan, Ramsey, Lees, Porter, Gerak, Urban, Vogel, Wiederkehr, Skoronski, Chiaokhiao-Bowman, Newsome, Pace, Hampton, Joseph, Bergin, Fisher, Adebawore, Gallagher, Saunders, Spivak, Brown, Brown, Kuhbander, Kirtz, Ruiz, Mitchell, Jackson, Niro, Heard, Bowser, Hull, Azema, Haskins, Gallagher, Mueller, Adams, McIntyre, Gillikin, O'Rourke, Hudetz, Butler, Leota, D'Antonio, Priebe, Schmidt, Wrather, Franks, Dennis, Gordon, Mangieri.

OSU – Fields, Fleming, Wilson, Williams, Teague, Davis, Myers, Munford, Miller, Petit-Frere, Farrell, Cooper, Banks, Smith, Werner, Williamson, Wade, Borland, Proctor, Hilliard, Togiai, Garrett, Mitchell, McCall, Cavazos, Vincent, Sermon, Harrison, Ransom, Johnson, Stover, Babb, Gant, Johnson, Watts, Williams, Hoover, Rossi, Pope, Simon, Robinson, Jackson, Jones, Cupp, Vimahi, Wray, Jones, Hausmann, Hamilton, Cage, Ruckert, Haubeil, Potter.

Season Statistics

| 2020-21 Game-By-Game | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|-------------|-------|
| Date | Opponent | Result/Time | Crowd |
| Oct. 24 | (5) NEBRASKA | W, 52-17 | 1,344 |
| Oct. 31 | (3) at Penn State (18) | W, 38-25 | 1,500 |
| Nov. 7 | (3) RUTGERS | W, 49-27 | 1,275 |
| Nov. 14 | (3) at Maryland | Canceled | N/A |
| Nov. 21 | (3) INDIANA (10) | W, 42-35 | 635 |
| Nov. 28 | (3) at Illinois | Canceled | N/A |
| Dec. 5 | (3) at Michigan State | W, 52-12 | 0 |
| Dec. 12 | (3) MICHIGAN | Canceled | N/A |
| Dec. 19 | (3) Northwestern (15) | W, 22-10 | 3,178 |

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

| Team Statistics | | |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|
| | OSU | Opp |
| First Downs | 154 | 110 |
| Rushing | 73 | 30 |
| Passing | 65 | 71 |
| Penalty | 16 | 9 |
| Average Per Game/Rush | 275.7 | 96.7 |
| Average Per Game/Pass | 253.5 | 261.3 |
| Total Offense | 3175 | 2148 |
| Total Plays | 436 | 396 |
| Average Per Game | 529.2 | 358.0 |
| Average Per Play | 7.3 | 5.4 |
| Penalties-Yards | 36-311 | 36-350 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 8-3 | 12-10 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 41-80 | 28-82 |
| Percentage | 51% | 34% |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 5-7 | 6-11 |
| Percentage | 71% | 55% |
| Sacks-Yards | 17-103 | 18-116 |
| Time Of Possession Avg. | 33:39 | 26:15 |

| Score | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|------|------|--|
| By Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | OT | Tot. | Avg. | |
| Ohio State | 59 | 83 | 62 | 51 | 0 | 255 | 42.5 | |
| Opponents | 20 | 20 | 37 | 49 | 0 | 126 | 21.0 | |

| Individual Statistics | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|----|------|
| Rushing | Att. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
| Trey Sermon | 84 | 675 | 8.0 | 3 | 65 |
| Master Teague | 89 | 449 | 5.0 | 6 | 41 |
| Justin Fields | 67 | 274 | 4.1 | 5 | 44 |
| Steele Chambers | 8 | 86 | 9.6 | 0 | 38 |
| Garrett Wilson | 2 | 67 | 33.5 | 0 | 62 |
| C.J. Stroud | 1 | 48 | 48.0 | 1 | 48 |
| Miyan Williams | 7 | 43 | 6.1 | 0 | 11 |
| Jack Miller | 2 | 23 | 11.5 | 1 | 21 |
| Xavier Johnson | 4 | 17 | 4.2 | 0 | 7 |
| Demario McCall | 1 | 12 | 12.0 | 0 | 12 |
| Chris Olave | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| TEAM | 5 | -40 | -8.0 | 0 | 0 |
| OSU Totals | 272 | 1654 | 6.1 | 16 | 65 |
| OPP Totals | 173 | 580 | 3.4 | 6 | 66 |

| Passing | Comp. | Att. | Pct. | Yds. | TD-INT | Effic. |
|---------------|-------|------|------|------|--------|--------|
| Justin Fields | 119 | 164 | 72.6 | 1521 | 15-5 | 174.6 |
| OSU Totals | 119 | 164 | 72.6 | 1521 | 15-5 | 174.6 |
| OPP Totals | 140 | 223 | 62.8 | 1568 | 9-6 | 129.8 |

| Receiving | Rec. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
|--------------------|------|------|------|----|------|
| Garrett Wilson | 38 | 621 | 16.3 | 5 | 65 |
| Chris Olave | 36 | 528 | 14.7 | 5 | 49 |
| Jeremy Ruckert | 9 | 60 | 6.7 | 3 | 13 |
| Trey Sermon | 8 | 34 | 4.2 | 0 | 13 |
| Julian Fleming | 7 | 74 | 10.6 | 0 | 23 |
| Jaxon Smith-Njigba | 6 | 17 | 2.8 | 1 | 7 |
| Jameson Williams | 5 | 78 | 15.6 | 1 | 38 |
| Master Teague | 4 | 45 | 11.2 | 0 | 23 |
| Luke Farrell | 3 | 26 | 8.7 | 0 | 16 |
| Demario McCall | 1 | 27 | 27.0 | 0 | 27 |
| Jake Hausmann | 1 | 13 | 13.0 | 0 | 13 |
| Wyatt Davis | 1 | -2 | -2.0 | 0 | -2 |
| OSU Totals | 119 | 1521 | 12.8 | 15 | 65 |
| OPP Totals | 140 | 1568 | 11.2 | 9 | 68 |

| Scoring | TD | EPK | EPR | EPRC | FG | PTS |
|------------------|----|-------|-----|------|-----|-----|
| Master Teague | 6 | – | – | – | – | 36 |
| Blake Haubeil | – | 17-17 | – | – | 5-7 | 32 |
| Chris Olave | 5 | – | – | – | – | 30 |
| Garrett Wilson | 5 | – | – | – | – | 30 |
| Justin Fields | 5 | – | – | 0-1 | – | 30 |
| Jeremy Ruckert | 3 | – | – | – | – | 18 |
| Trey Sermon | 3 | – | – | – | – | 18 |
| Jake Seibert | – | 13-13 | – | – | 0-1 | 13 |
| Jameson Williams | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| Dominic DiMaccio | – | 3-3 | – | – | 1-2 | 6 |
| Jack Miller | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| Haskell Garrett | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------|----|-------|-----|-----|------|-----|
| C.J. Stroud | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| Jaxon Smith-Njigba | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| Shaun Wade | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| Sevyn Banks | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| OSU Totals | 34 | 33-33 | – | 0-1 | 6-10 | 255 |
| OPP Totals | 16 | 10-10 | 0-1 | 0-5 | 6-7 | 126 |

| FG Distance | 0-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50+ | Total |
|------------------|------|-------|-------|-----|-------|
| Blake Haubeil | 2-3 | 1-1 | 2-3 | 0-0 | 5-7 |
| Dominic DiMaccio | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1-2 |
| Jake Seibert | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-1 |
| OSU Totals | 3-5 | 1-1 | 2-4 | 0-0 | 6-10 |
| OPP Totals | 1-1 | 3-3 | 1-2 | 1-1 | 6-7 |

| Punting | No. | Yds. | Avg. | Bk | Long |
|---------------|-----|------|------|----|------|
| Drue Chrisman | 18 | 813 | 45.2 | 0 | 74 |
| Zach Hoover | 3 | 118 | 39.3 | 0 | 43 |
| OSU Totals | 21 | 931 | 44.3 | 0 | 74 |
| OPP Totals | 34 | 1515 | 44.6 | 0 | 56 |

| Interceptions | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-----------------|-----|------|------|----|------|
| Shaun Wade | 2 | 36 | 18.0 | 1 | 36 |
| Marcus Hooker | 1 | 31 | 31.0 | 0 | 31 |
| Josh Proctor | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Justin Hilliard | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Haskell Garrett | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0 |
| OSU Totals | 6 | 67 | 11.2 | 2 | 36 |
| OPP Totals | 5 | 57 | 11.4 | 0 | 33 |

| Punt Returns | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|--------------------|-----|------|------|----|------|
| Garrett Wilson | 4 | 34 | 8.5 | 0 | 22 |
| Jaxon Smith-Njigba | 3 | 11 | 3.7 | 0 | 7 |
| OSU Totals | 7 | 45 | 6.4 | 0 | 22 |
| OPP Totals | 3 | 80 | 26.7 | 1 | 58 |

| Kickoff Returns | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-----------------|-----|------|------|----|------|
| Demario McCall | 5 | 78 | 15.6 | 0 | 29 |
| Xavier Johnson | 1 | 11 | 11.0 | 0 | 11 |
| Garrett Wilson | 1 | 4 | 4.0 | 0 | 4 |
| OSU Totals | 7 | 93 | 13.3 | 0 | 29 |
| OPP Totals | 15 | 283 | 18.9 | 0 | 39 |

| Def. Leaders | Solo | Ast. | Tot. | TFL-Yds. | Sacks |
|------------------------|------|------|------|----------|--------|
| Pete Werner | 19 | 18 | 37 | 2.5-10 | 1.0-5 |
| Tuf Borland | 11 | 15 | 26 | 3.5-16 | 1.5-12 |
| Baron Browning | 15 | 8 | 23 | 1.0-3 | – |
| Marcus Williamson | 16 | 6 | 22 | – | – |
| Shaun Wade | 16 | 6 | 22 | – | – |
| Jonathon Cooper | 9 | 11 | 20 | 2.5-23 | 2.5-23 |
| Tommy Togiai | 8 | 11 | 19 | 3.5-14 | 3.0-13 |
| Justin Hilliard | 10 | 7 | 17 | 2.0-10 | – |
| Haskell Garrett | 10 | 7 | 17 | 4.0-13 | 2.0-9 |
| Marcus Hooker | 13 | 2 | 15 | – | – |
| Josh Proctor | 11 | 3 | 14 | 1.0-5 | – |
| Dallas Gant | 6 | 7 | 13 | 0.5-0 | – |
| Sevyn Banks | 9 | 3 | 12 | 0.5-1 | – |
| Zach Harrison | 5 | 7 | 12 | 4.5-12 | 2.0-3 |
| Taron Vincent | 1 | 6 | 7 | 2.0-5 | 0.5-4 |
| Teradja Mitchell | 4 | 3 | 7 | 0.5-2 | – |
| Tyreke Smith | 5 | 2 | 7 | 1.0-9 | 1.0-9 |
| Jerron Cage | 1 | 5 | 6 | 0.5-1 | 0.5-1 |
| Javontae Jean-Baptiste | 3 | 3 | 6 | 2.0-12 | 1.0-8 |
| Antwuan Jackson | 1 | 5 | 6 | – | – |
| Ronnie Hickman | 2 | 3 | 5 | – | – |
| Craig Young | 5 | 0 | 5 | – | – |
| Tyler Friday | 1 | 4 | 5 | – | – |
| Tyreke Johnson | 2 | 3 | 5 | – | – |
| Ryan Watts | 4 | 0 | 4 | – | – |
| Lathan Ransom | 4 | 0 | 4 | – | – |
| Cade Stover | 3 | 1 | 4 | – | – |
| Cody Simon | 2 | 1 | 3 | – | – |
| Cormontae Hamilton | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2.0-17 | 1.0-12 |
| TEAM | 1 | 1 | 2 | – | – |
| Chris Olave | 2 | 0 | 2 | – | – |
| K'Vaughan Pope | 1 | 1 | 2 | – | – |
| Tommy Eichenberg | 0 | 2 | 2 | – | – |
| Dominic DiMaccio | 2 | 0 | 2 | – | – |
| Darrion Henry-Young | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1.0-4 | 1.0-4 |
| Cameron Brown | 1 | 0 | 1 | – | – |
| Trayvon Wilburn | 1 | 0 | 1 | – | – |
| Chris Booker | 1 | 0 | 1 | – | – |
| Steele Chambers | 1 | 0 | 1 | – | – |
| Julian Fleming | 1 | 0 | 1 | – | – |
| Bryson Shaw | 0 | 1 | 1 | – | – |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|---|--------|--------|
| OSU Totals | 210 | 156 | 366 | 36-164 | 17-103 |
| OPP Totals | 253 | 184 | 437 | 41-172 | 18-116 |
| Fumbles Forced: | 7 | – | Werner (2), Browning, Stover, Gant, Hilliard, Fleming. | | |
| Fumbles Recovered: | 10 | – | Jean-Baptiste, Hilliard, Hooker, Banks, Proctor, Browning, Gant, Harrison, Hilliard, Munford. | | |

Buckeyes Granted Another Shot At Clemson

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

For the third time in five seasons, Ohio State's path to a potential national championship will be through Clemson in the first round of the College Football Playoff. The two-seeded Tigers and three-seeded Buckeyes will square off on Jan. 1 in the Sugar Bowl – friendly confines for the Buckeyes when they last played there in the 2014 CFP against Alabama.

For the Tigers, the matchup couldn't be coming at a much better time. After dropping a game to Notre Dame on Nov. 7 while missing a number of top players – including star quarterback Trevor Lawrence – the Tigers have rattled off three straight wins, including a 34-10 blow-out of the Fighting Irish in the ACC title game.

"We're playing and trending in the right direction," Lawrence said after that win over Notre Dame that avenged Clemson's lone loss on the year. "We're playing our best football, and our best football is still ahead. I think that's the biggest thing at this point in the year. We see a lot of teams start off really well, then just sort of fall off at the end of the season. That's what we pride ourselves on by from starting, playing and finishing well. That's just something that takes work."

"You know what we see on tape is who we are. So going out there with the right mind-set and definitely whoever we play

with we try to make a statement."

The junior signal caller has been front and center during Clemson's resurgence in the back half of the season. After spending more than a month away from the field – partially because of a bout with COVID that sidelined him for two weeks against Boston College on Oct. 31 and against Notre Dame, along with Clemson's canceled matchup against Florida State on Nov. 21 – Lawrence has played as well as anyone in college football in the weeks since his return.

He's completed 66.3 percent of his passes in his last three games, racking up 920 yards and five scores in the air, while rushing for another three touchdowns. In those games, against Pitt, Virginia Tech and Notre Dame, the Tigers have put up an average score of 43.7-12.3.

"Trevor was awesome, but that's who he is," Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney said of his quarterback after the Notre Dame game. "He made a lot of checks and checked into some great plays. We empower him, because he can handle it. And he made some great, great decisions. You know, they didn't fool him, he just didn't hold it quite long enough on that one interception, but he made some big-time plays. But that's just who he is. All the Heisman stuff and all that, I mean, he just wants to win."

For his play in those recent games, Swinney also declared that he feels Lawrence is deserving of not just a finalist spot, but of the Heisman Trophy.

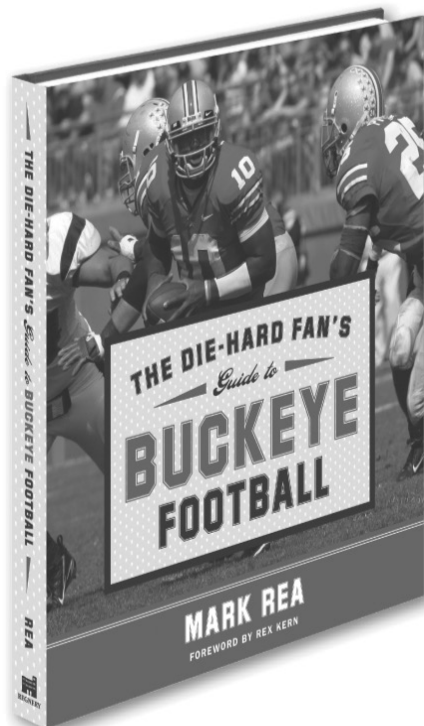


COURTESY OF THE CLEMSON DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

KEY TO THE GAME – Ohio State will look to contain Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, who threw for 259 yards and two touchdowns and rushed for 107 yards and another score in last year's Fiesta Bowl.

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"If the Heisman Trophy doesn't attach its name to Trevor Lawrence," Swinney said, "then that is a crying shame."

"I hate even having to even campaign for him, if you will. But again it's become a stat award, and it is so media driven. To me it's not about stats, it's about who's the best player. And he's, you know, he's the best player. And there's a lot of great players in college football, but there's only one Trevor Lawrence, and he's a generational player."

Running back Travis Etienne remains Lawrence's partner in the backfield, but Clemson's rushing attack has taken a bit of a step back in 2020, at least relative to its performance in 2019. Etienne has carried the ball 158 times for 882 yards, still good enough for 5.6 yards per carry, but a significant drop from his 7.8 yards per carry in 2019 or 8.1 in 2018. However, he told media prior to the ACC title game that he feels the Clemson rushing attack is very close to piecing everything together. He rushed 10 times for 124 yards against the Fighting Irish.

"Just here and there, little things," Etienne said of issues in the rushing attack for Clemson this year. "We have to keep preparing like we have. We are so close to getting it going. We have to keep doing what we are doing. Stick-to-it-ness. Just watching film, just the little things nobody sees. Maybe we were off an inch. Just keeping trusting it will take care of itself."

At wide receiver, the loss of star Justyn Ross to a neck injury prior to the season has been difficult for the Clemson passing attack to overcome at times, as have injuries to Frank Ladson and Joseph Ngata, both of whom projected to be starters this season. In their place, senior Cornell Powell has burst onto the scene, notching 45 receptions for 743 yards and five scores. In his words, he's simply doing his job, filling in for those who entered the season ahead of him on the depth chart.

"You just make the most of your opportunities – whenever the ball comes to you, you just go out there and you make a play," Powell said. "And then you try to come in, stack one play on top of another and then one game on top of another, and that's what I've been doing. But it's not because of me, man. First of all, it's all because of God giving me this ability and blessing me with the chance to come to Clemson, and then the offensive line and then having two great quarterbacks just throwing the ball. There are not many college programs you go from the No. 1 pick in the draft, and then he goes down and your next man up is just as good."

"So it's just a blessing to have both of those guys back there. And to receive the ball from them, I'm honored to. Whenever the ball is thrown my way, I'm going to try to make them look good."

He's joined in the receiving corps by slot specialist Amari Rodgers, who leads the team with 69 receptions for 966 yards and seven scores, along with Etienne, who has 44 receptions for 524 yards and two scores.

Up front, Clemson is led by a familiar face – former five-star recruit Jackson Carman, a Fairfield, Ohio, native who spurned the Buckeyes in 2018. He's joined by junior Matt Bockhorst on the left side of the line, along with senior center Cade Stewart, but inexperience on the right side of the line with two starting sophomores – guard Will Putnam and tackle Jordan McFadden – has caused issues for Clemson up front at times. The Tigers have allowed just 18 sacks on the season,

About Clemson

- **2020 record:** 10-1 (8-1).
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-3; Starters Returning – Offense 6, Defense 5, Specialists 2.
- **Head Coach:** Dabo Swinney, 140-32 in 13 years at Clemson.
- **Series History:** Fifth meeting, Clemson leads 4-0-0.
- **School Facts:** Location – Clemson, SC.; Enrollment – 23,406; Nickname – Tigers; Color – Orange; Conference – ACC (Atlantic division); Stadium – Memorial Stadium (Surface, Natural Grass; Capacity – 81,500).

but the rushing attack struggled against larger defensive fronts, like when Etienne carried 18 times for just 28 yards in Clemson's first matchup with Notre Dame.

On the other side of the ball, much of the Clemson defensive corps has remained intact from its dominant 2019 group. Hybrid safety Isaiah Simmons is off to the NFL, but linebackers James Skalski and Baylon Spector have a combined 11 years of college experience, while junior cornerback Derion Kendrick and fifth-year safety Nolan Turner (who will miss the first half of the Sugar Bowl because of a targeting penalty) anchor the back of the defense.

While the back seven is fairly experienced, Clemson is relying almost entirely on youth up front. Defensive tackle Jordan Williams and end Xavier Thomas are the only upperclassmen in the two-deep up front, and neither player is a full-time starter. True freshman end Myles Murphy leads the defensive line in sacks (four) and TFL (10). He, along with freshman defensive tackle Bryan Bresee, picked up praise from Swinney entering the season.

"(Murphy is) pretty special," Swinney said. "He and Bresee, they're freshmen on paper only. They're smart, they're instinctive, they're big and physical, incredibly coachable guys. You know, that's just not the norm. At all."

At linebacker, Spector leads the team in tackles with 62 out of the weakside linebacker slot, while Skalski has racked up 32 in just eight games played. Defensive coordinator Brent Venables considers Skalski, a longtime contributor at middle linebacker for Clemson, the leader of the Tiger defense.

"He's been around the block a number of times, but he brings the leadership component that's like having a quarterback on your defense," Venables said of Skalski.

Turner leads the defensive backfield in tackles with 52 but will be sitting out the first half of Ohio State's matchup with Clemson, as noted, after he was flagged for targeting in the second half of Clemson's win against Notre Dame. It was a call that Swinney said he agreed with, but still one that the Clemson head coach anticipates will hurt his team against the Buckeyes.

"We'll miss Nolan. There's no question," Swinney said. "He's been a quarterback for us. He's a great player. What a great example he is. No Division I offers, and here we are talking about him on playoff Sunday, Nolan Turner. He had no Division I offers. Here, this kid has had an unbelievable career. He'll be drafted one day. He's played as well at safety for us as any safety we've had. He'll be a big miss for us, but the silver lining in 2020, if you will, is we've had to play more players than ever. We've started 23 different players on defense this year."

Clemson Season Statistics

| 2020-21 Game-By-Game | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|--------|
| Date | Opponent | Result/Time | Crowd |
| Sept. 12 | (1) at Wake Forest | W, 37-13 | 68 |
| Sept. 19 | (1) CITADEL | W, 49-0 | 18,609 |
| Oct. 3 | (1) VIRGINIA | W, 41-23 | 18,735 |
| Oct. 10 | (1) MIAMI (7) | W, 42-17 | 18,885 |
| Oct. 17 | (1) at Georgia Tech | W, 73-7 | 11,000 |
| Oct. 24 | (1) SYRACUSE | W, 47-21 | 18,629 |
| Oct. 31 | (1) BOSTON COLLEGE | W, 34-28 | 18,690 |
| Nov. 7 | (1) at Notre Dame (4) | L, 40-47 (OT) | 11,011 |
| Nov. 28 | (4) PITTSBURGH | W, 52-17 | 18,819 |
| Dec. 5 | (4) at Virginia Tech | W, 45-10 | 250 |
| Dec. 19 | (4) vs. Notre Dame | W, 34-10 | 5,240 |
| Jan. 1 | (2) vs. Ohio State (3) | 8 p.m. | |

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

| Team Statistics | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | CLEM | Opp |
| First Downs | 272 | 166 |
| Rushing | 96 | 55 |
| Passing | 158 | 90 |
| Penalty | 18 | 21 |
| Average Per Game/Rush | 163.8 | 99.8 |
| Average Per Game/Pass | 343.8 | 198.6 |
| Total Offense | 5584 | 3283 |
| Total Plays | 831 | 709 |
| Average Per Game | 507.6 | 298.5 |
| Average Per Play | 6.7 | 4.6 |
| Penalties-Yards | 62-558 | 65-531 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 15-8 | 22-9 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 78-167 | 49-161 |
| Percentage | 47% | 30% |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 10-13 | 7-19 |
| Percentage | 77% | 37% |
| Sacks-Yards | 44-296 | 18-134 |
| Time Of Possession Avg. | 30:52 | 29:08 |

| Score | | | | | | | |
|-------------|-----|-----|----|----|----|------|------|
| By Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | OT | Tot. | Avg. |
| Clemson | 155 | 150 | 99 | 83 | 7 | 494 | 44.9 |
| Opponents | 41 | 74 | 24 | 40 | 14 | 193 | 17.5 |

| Individual Statistics | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Rushing | Att. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
| Travis Etienne | 158 | 882 | 5.6 | 13 | 72 |
| Trevor Lawrence | 58 | 211 | 3.6 | 7 | 34 |
| Lyn-J Dixon | 40 | 170 | 4.3 | 2 | 21 |
| Chester Mellusi | 27 | 151 | 5.6 | 3 | 38 |
| Darien Rencher | 24 | 137 | 5.7 | 1 | 50 |
| Kobe Pace | 18 | 75 | 4.2 | 0 | 16 |
| D.J. Uiagalelei | 28 | 60 | 2.1 | 4 | 30 |
| Michel Dukes | 8 | 55 | 6.9 | 0 | 29 |
| Demarcus Bowman | 9 | 32 | 3.6 | 0 | 10 |
| Taisun Phommachanh | 7 | 25 | 3.6 | 0 | 7 |
| Brannon Spector | 2 | 21 | 10.5 | 0 | 19 |
| Hunter Helms | 2 | -7 | -3.5 | 0 | 2 |
| TEAM | 5 | -19 | -3.8 | 0 | 0 |
| CLEM Totals | 389 | 1802 | 4.6 | 31 | 72 |
| OPP Totals | 394 | 1098 | 2.8 | 8 | 65 |

| Passing | Comp. | Att. | Pct. | Yds. | TD-INT | Effic. |
|--------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Trevor Lawrence | 198 | 286 | 69.2 | 2753 | 22-4 | 172.7 |
| D.J. Uiagalelei | 78 | 117 | 66.7 | 914 | 5-0 | 146.4 |
| Hunter Helms | 9 | 12 | 75.0 | 77 | 2-0 | 183.9 |
| CLEM Totals | 293 | 442 | 66.3 | 3782 | 29-5 | 157.6 |
| OPP Totals | 168 | 315 | 53.3 | 2185 | 11-13 | 114.9 |

| Receiving | Rec. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
|--------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Amari Rodgers | 69 | 966 | 14.0 | 7 | 83 |
| Cornell Powell | 45 | 743 | 16.5 | 5 | 70 |
| Travis Etienne | 44 | 524 | 11.9 | 2 | 46 |
| Braden Galloway | 25 | 331 | 13.2 | 2 | 49 |
| Frank Ladson | 17 | 272 | 16.0 | 3 | 54 |
| E.J. Williams | 19 | 261 | 13.7 | 2 | 38 |
| Davis Allen | 14 | 212 | 15.1 | 4 | 42 |
| Brannon Spector | 14 | 120 | 8.6 | 0 | 26 |
| Joseph Ngata | 7 | 83 | 11.9 | 0 | 19 |
| J.C. Chalk | 6 | 43 | 7.2 | 1 | 12 |
| Ajou Ajou | 2 | 41 | 20.5 | 1 | 35 |
| Chester Mellusi | 5 | 38 | 7.6 | 1 | 23 |
| Will Swinney | 7 | 29 | 4.1 | 0 | 9 |
| Will Brown | 3 | 27 | 9.0 | 0 | 10 |
| Kobe Pace | 5 | 26 | 5.2 | 1 | 14 |
| Lyn-J Dixon | 2 | 21 | 10.5 | 0 | 12 |
| Drew Swinney | 3 | 18 | 6.0 | 0 | 12 |
| Darien Rencher | 2 | 15 | 7.5 | 0 | 8 |
| CLEM Totals | 293 | 3782 | 12.9 | 29 | 83 |
| OPP Totals | 168 | 2185 | 13.0 | 11 | 83 |

| Scoring | TD | EPK | EPR | EPRC | FG | PTS |
|-----------------|----|-------|-----|------|-------|-----|
| B.T. Potter | - | 57-58 | - | - | 18-23 | 111 |
| Travis Etienne | 15 | - | - | - | - | 90 |
| Trevor Lawrence | 7 | - | - | 0-1 | - | 42 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------|---|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Amari Rodgers | 7 | - | - | - | - | 42 |
| Cornell Powell | 5 | - | - | - | - | 30 |
| Chester Mellusi | 4 | - | - | - | - | 24 |
| D.J. Uiagalelei | 4 | - | - | 0-1 | - | 24 |
| Davis Allen | 4 | - | - | - | - | 24 |
| Frank Ladson | 3 | - | - | - | - | 18 |
| Lyn-J Dixon | 2 | - | - | - | - | 12 |
| Braden Galloway | 2 | - | - | - | - | 12 |
| E.J. Williams | 2 | - | - | - | - | 12 |
| Derion Kendrick | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Kobe Pace | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| James Skalski | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| J.C. Chalk | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Ajou Ajou | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Andrew Booth | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Darien Rencher | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Nyles Pinckney | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Aidan Swanson | - | 2-2 | - | - | - | 2 |
| Bryan Bresee | - | - | - | 1-1 | - | 2 |
| Jonathan Weitz | - | 1-1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| CLEM Totals | 63 | 60-61 | - | 0-2 | 18-23 | 494 |
| OPP Totals | 23 | 21-21 | - | 0-11 | 11-16 | 193 |

| FG Distance | 0-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50+ | Total |
|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| B.T. Potter | 5-5 | 5-8 | 6-7 | 2-3 | 18-23 |
| CLEM Totals | 5-5 | 5-8 | 6-7 | 2-3 | 18-23 |
| OPP Totals | 4-5 | 1-2 | 4-6 | 2-3 | 11-16 |

| Punting | No. | Yds. | Avg. | Bk | Long |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Will Spiers | 40 | 1742 | 43.6 | 1 | 64 |
| Aidan Swanson | 3 | 131 | 43.7 | 1 | 50 |
| TEAM | 2 | 8 | 4.0 | 0 | 8 |
| CLEM Totals | 45 | 1881 | 41.8 | 2 | 64 |
| OPP Totals | 71 | 3102 | 43.7 | 0 | 59 |

| Interceptions | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Nolan Turner | 3 | 52 | 17.3 | 0 | 31 |
| Mario Goodrich | 2 | 5 | 2.5 | 0 | 5 |
| Andrew Booth | 2 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mike Jones | 1 | 40 | 40.0 | 0 | 40 |
| Kane Patterson | 1 | 8 | 8.0 | 0 | 8 |
| Malcolm Greene | 1 | 8 | 8.0 | 0 | 8 |
| Jalyn Phillips | 1 | 5 | 5.0 | 0 | 5 |
| Derion Kendrick | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sheridan Jones | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| CLEM Totals | 13 | 118 | 9.1 | 0 | 40 |
| OPP Totals | 5 | 67 | 13.4 | 1 | 39 |

| Punt Returns | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|------------|----------|-----------|
| Amari Rodgers | 9 | 64 | 7.1 | 0 | 21 |
| Travis Etienne | 1 | 44 | 44.0 | 0 | 44 |
| Will Swinney | 1 | 9 | 9.0 | 0 | 9 |
| Elijah Turner | 1 | 7 | 7.0 | 0 | 7 |
| Derion Kendrick | 1 | -1 | -1.0 | 0 | -1 |
| CLEM Totals | 13 | 123 | 9.5 | 0 | 44 |
| OPP Totals | 15 | 130 | 8.7 | 0 | 18 |

| Kickoff Returns | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Lyn-J Dixon | 9 | 210 | 23.3 | 0 | 52 |
| Travis Etienne | 6 | 148 | 24.7 | 0 | 40 |
| Michel Dukes | 1 | 20 | 20.0 | 0 | 20 |
| Cornell Powell | 1 | 15 | 15.0 | 0 | 15 |
| CLEM Totals | 17 | 393 | 23.1 | 0 | 52 |
| OPP Totals | 12 | 269 | 22.4 | 0 | 39 |

| Def. Leaders | Solo | Ast. | Tot. | TFL-Yds. | Sacks |
|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|----------------|---------------|
| Baylon Spector | 32 | 30 | 62 | 9.5-40 | 3.5-24 |
| Nolan Turner | 37 | 15 | 52 | 6.5-8 | - |
| Joseph Charleston | 24 | 14 | 38 | 2.0-3 | - |
| Myles Murphy | 16 | 20 | 36 | 10.0-55 | 4.0-25 |
| James Skalski | 20 | 12 | 32 | 3.5-14 | 1.5-10 |
| Jake Venables | 16 | 15 | 31 | 5.5-26 | 2.5-21 |
| Trenton Simpson | 17 | 11 | 28 | 6.5-56 | 4.0-47 |
| Mike Jones | 12 | 13 | 25 | 4.0-10 | 0.5-4 |
| Andrew Booth | 18 | 6 | 24 | 2.5-8 | 1.0-4 |
| K.J. Henry | 12 | 8 | 20 | 6.0-30 | 3.5-26 |
| Lannden Zanders | 17 | 2 | 19 | 2.5-14 | 1.0-12 |
| Nyles Pinckney | 10 | 9 | 19 | 3.0-10 | 1.0-6 |
| Bryan Bresee | 9 | 9 | 18 | 4.0-20 | 3.0-19 |
| Derion Kendrick | 11 | 5 | 16 | 1.0-2 | 1.0-2 |
| Regan Upshaw | 6 | 10 | 16 | 3.5-11 | 2.5-10 |
| Sheridan Jones | 12 | 3 | 15 | 1.5-1 | - |
| CLEM Totals | 410 | 257 | 667 | 103-437 | 44-296 |
| OPP Totals | 507 | 220 | 727 | 60-245 | 18-134 |

Fumbles Forced: 12 – Murphy (3), Bentley, Bresee, Jones, Maguire, Simpson, Spector, Thomas, Venables, Zanders.

Fumbles Recovered: 9 – Spector, Skalski, Booth, Henry, Pinckney, Kendrick, Mascoll, Patterson, Goodrich.

Ohio State Looks To Beat Clemson For First Time

By WYATT CROSER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the second straight season, the Buckeyes are preparing for a game to get them into the national championship, and for the second straight season, it is against an opponent they have never beaten in program history.

There are only two teams in the history of college football that can say that they have played at least three games against Ohio State and won all of them. One of those teams is Florida State, which won a pair of games against a Buckeyes in 1981 and 1982, both of which were in Columbus, and then followed it up with a 31-14 victory over Ohio State in the 1998 Sugar Bowl.

Bobby Bowden ended his 34-season run with a 3-0 record against Ohio State, something that was accomplished again by a new head coach when the Buckeyes faced off against Clemson on Dec. 28 last season.

The Tigers have now moved ahead of the Seminoles with a 4-0 record, with three of the games coming recently under the leadership of Dabo Swinney and the first taking place more than 40 years ago.

Gator Bowl, 1978

Ohio State's first matchup against the Tigers came on Dec. 29, 1978, after a 7-3-1 season led by head coach Woody Hayes in his 28th season at the helm.

On the other side, 30-year-old Danny Ford was leading a Clemson group that had gone 10-1, but not under his primary tutelage.

The Gator Bowl was Ford's first game moving up from assistant coach to head coach after Charley Pell left Clemson for a head-coaching gig at Florida following the regular season and Ford's first game as a head coach at any level.

On the surface, the game was quite an impressive feat. Ford managed to go toe to toe with one of the best coaches in the sport and come out of it with a two-point



ANDREW LIND

SO CLOSE – Quarterback Justin Fields (No. 1) threw an interception in the final minute of Ohio State's 29-23 loss to Clemson in the 2019 Fiesta Bowl, which improved the Tigers to 4-0 all-time against the Buckeyes.

victory that was capped off by Clemson linebacker Charlie Bauman's interception of quarterback Art Schlichter with 1:59 remaining.

But that interception not only ended Ohio State's season with a loss, it also was a moment that led to the end of an era. Bauman was tackled out of bounds on the Ohio State sideline, and when he got up, he looked toward the OSU bench for just a moment, enough time for Hayes to lose his cool and punch Bauman.

The moment ended with a 15-yard

unsportsmanlike penalty that did not amount to much as the Tigers ran out the clock and won the game 17-15, but it was the final straw that ended Hayes' nearly three-decade-long tenure as Ohio State's head coach.

The next morning, Ohio State athletic director Hugh Hindman fired Hayes, who ended his Ohio State career with a 205-61-10 record.

Orange Bowl, 2014

After a 36-year gap, Ohio State once again had a shot to get its first ever win against Clemson, and again it was on a major stage in the form of the Orange Bowl on Jan. 3, 2014. This time around, it was the No. 12 Tigers against the No. 7 Buckeyes in a shootout that had multiple lead changes and went down to the final minutes to ultimately decide.

Clemson's Tajh Boyd and Ohio State's Braxton Miller each exchanged long quarterback runs for touchdowns – Boyd's from 48 yards and Miller's from 33 – to open up the scoring before Clemson's offense scored on two of the next five drives, both of which were Boyd touchdown passes. There was also a safety in favor of Ohio State after an intentional grounding penalty occurred in the end zone.

A 57-yard touchdown from Miller to tight end Jeff Heuerman, as well as a block on the ensuing extra point, made the score 20-15 before Miller ran another one in to give Ohio State a 22-20 lead at the end of a wild half of football.

Ohio State scored again to make it 29-20 before the Tigers came storming back with a pair of Boyd touchdown passes to make it 34-29 after three. The first of those scores came on a 30-yard connection from Boyd to wide receiver Sammy Watkins, who would end the day with 16 catches for

227 yards and two touchdowns. Both the receptions and yards were Orange Bowl records, and it was the most yards Ohio State has ever allowed to a single receiver.

In the fourth, Miller found running back Carlos Hyde for a 14-yard touchdown with 11:35 left to again give the Buckeyes a lead, but it would all be for naught. Boyd threw his fifth touchdown pass on the evening with 6:16 to play, and a Miller interception late officially sealed Clemson's second victory in program history over the Buckeyes.

The game was a heartbreaker for Ohio State, but it was something that occurred on the first OSU possession that would make the largest impact. On the opening possession, Miller injured his shoulder but played through it the rest of the game, finishing with 269 total yards and four total touchdowns in the loss.

In August 2014, just weeks before the season was ready to get under way with Miller at the helm, he reinjured that shoulder, tearing his labrum in an injury that would have him miss the season, giving J.T. Barrett an opportunity to step into the starting role.

Barrett, and eventually Cardale Jones, led Ohio State to a national title in the first season of the College Football Playoff.

Fiesta Bowl, 2016

With the Hayes punch and Miller injury, the first two matchups had pivotal moments that ended up shaping the program, but the 2016 matchup between Clemson and Ohio State was on the minds of these two teams heading into the 2019 game.

That included defensive tackle Robert Landers, while other players, such as defensive tackle Jashon Cornell, tried to forget it entirely.

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OHIO STATE VS. CLEMSON

"To be honest, I can't even remember," Cornell said. "I can't remember. I blocked it out."

"I do. It was rough," Landers said. "It was one of those moments where, for me, I'll never forget."

This matchup against the No. 2 Tigers and No. 3 Buckeyes was the first of what would end up being three playoff semifinal matchups between Ohio State and Clemson in the 2-3 spots during a five-year stretch.

The game started off well enough for the Buckeyes, with an interception by Gareon Conley on Clemson's first drive that gave Ohio State the ball on the Clemson 33. But after the offense stalled, gaining only 3 yards, the Buckeyes decided to attempt a 47-yard field goal, one that Tyler Durbin missed, keeping the game scoreless early.

The Tigers would go down and hit a field goal to make it 3-0 before Ohio State again got into prime position to score but went backward, leading to a fourth-and-18 that led to another 47-yard field-goal attempt by Durbin and another miss.

Clemson would score a touchdown on the next drive to make it 10-0, and from there, Ohio State's possessions went like this: punt, punt, punt, punt, halftime, fumble, punt, punt, interception, interception, turnover on downs, end of the game. Clemson won the game in dominating fashion, 31-0, and eventually took down Alabama to win the title.

"I just remember we put in so much hard work, and especially with the group of guys that we had, and it was just like we just fell short, and it was one of those things where we kind of asked the question, 'All right, what did we not do? What did we miss? What did we take for granted?'" Landers said. "We put so much blood, sweat and tears into it to get to that moment and just get on the big stage and just didn't play the way that we wanted to."

"At the end of the day, it's history. You try to rewrite a new chapter in this book and see what happens."

Ryan Day, who was in his first season as head coach and was facing off against the Tigers for the first time in 2019, was not reading too much into the matchup from three years previous.

"I think we'll use it as a reference point, but that's two very different teams," Day said. "I mean, I wasn't here, and a lot of guys weren't here. But we'll definitely use it as a reference point, but I don't think it's very relevant here."

Fiesta Bowl, 2019

Ohio State and Clemson once again battled in the Fiesta Bowl, this time flipping the seedings with the Buckeyes coming in at No. 2 and the Tigers No. 3, but the matchup was far from locked in heading into the final rankings of the season.

Prior to the Big Ten Championship Game, Ohio State was the No. 1 team in the rankings, holding that spot for two weeks straight before a second matchup with Wisconsin. While the Buckeyes held on to win 34-21 against the Badgers, it was not the most dominant of wins, with Wisconsin holding a 21-7 halftime lead before Ohio State scored 27 unanswered in the final two quarters.

The playoff committee was not impressed enough, though. After LSU demolished Georgia 37-10 in the SEC Championship thanks to a 349-yard, four-touchdown outing from former Ohio State quarterback Joe Burrow, the committee jumped the Tigers to the top spot,

giving the Buckeyes a shot at redemption against Clemson.

"Do I feel like we should have been the one seed? Yes," Day said. "But LSU has had an unbelievable season. I think what Joe has done and what that team has done, they've done a great job."

"At the end of the day, you've got to beat the best to go win the national championship, and certainly Clemson is that. If we want to go win the whole thing, we have to be able to play everybody, so now we've got a chance to go play Clemson."

Ohio State started the game hot, scoring the game's first 16 points, including a 68-yard touchdown by running back J.K. Dobbins and a trio of field goals by kicker Blake Haubeil, all of which came from within the red zone.

But the momentum began to turn against the Buckeyes in the second quarter, starting with a controversial targeting call against Shaun Wade that forced the then-sophomore cornerback to miss the remainder of the game.

Following the ejection, Clemson running back Travis Etienne and quarterback Trevor Lawrence had runs of 8 and 67 yards for touchdowns to cut the deficit to two points before halftime.

"The one thing on offense, we didn't score touchdowns when we got in the red zone in the first half," Day said. "We're looking there. It's 16-14. We had all of the momentum. Then when we got the sack and then the penalty was called on Shaun (Wade), the momentum swung right there. We thought we really were doing a great job on defense. We had almost 300 yards of offense."

Clemson maintained that momentum to start the third quarter, taking its first lead of the game on a 53-yard connection between Lawrence and Etienne. But the Buckeyes battled back, regaining a 23-21 advantage with 11:46 to go in the fourth quarter when quarterback Justin Fields found wide receiver Chris Olave in the end zone from 23 yards out, converting a fourth-and-1 in the process.

The teams exchanged punts before the Tigers went on a four-play, 94-yard drive, finishing it off with a 34-yard touchdown pass, once again by Lawrence to Etienne, to take a 29-23 lead with 1:49 to play.

Ohio State had a chance to drive down the field and got all the way to the Clemson 23-yard line before Fields looked Olave's way in the end zone once again. This time around, the two had a miscommunication, and Clemson safety Nolan Turner intercepted the ball to seal the game for the Tigers.

"He thought Justin was scrambling," Day explained of Olave. "He was running a post route right there. Actually, we had exactly the call on that we wanted. He felt like Justin was in a scramble mode. Justin does a lot of creating, so they weren't on the same page. They're playing football, and they're competing. Things like that happen. Unfortunately, that happened to us on the last play of the game when we needed it the most."

Of course, that was not the Buckeyes' lone route to victory. Earlier in the game, it appeared that Ohio State cornerback Jeff Okudah stripped the ball from Clemson wide receiver Justyn Ross, a fumble that

safety Jordan Fuller recovered and took into the end zone for an apparent touchdown.

But, after a review, the refs overturned the call, labeling the play an incomplete pass and taking six points off the board for Ohio State.

"We had a lot of good looks on it," referee Ken Williamson said of the call after the game. "We put on fast motion and slow motion. The player did not complete the process of the catch, so, therefore, the pass was incomplete."

Because of that call, or the interception at the end of the game, or the three early field goals, or a combination of all three, Ohio State was eliminated from the playoff at the hands of Clemson for a second time, dropping the program's all-time record against the Tigers to the 0-4 tally it stands at today.

On Jan. 1, the Buckeyes will again have their chance to break that 42-year-long winless spell.

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Buckeyes Have College Football Playoff History

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After defeating Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game, No. 3 Ohio State will make its fourth appearance in the College Football Playoff in the seventh year of its existence.

The Buckeyes are 2-2 overall in CFP games, with both victories coming in the inaugural event when they ran the table by beating Alabama and Oregon to win the national title in 2014.

Both of Ohio State's losses in the CFP came at the hands of Clemson, losing in the semifinals in 2016 and 2019. The Scarlet and Gray seek revenge on the Tigers in 2020, matching up with them for their third straight time in the playoffs. What follows is a history of each Ohio State appearance in the CFP:

2014 Bucks Beat 'Bama, Oregon To Claim National Title

The 2014 Buckeyes caught much of the country by surprise when they won the inaugural College Football Playoff. Head coach Urban Meyer's team was an underdog against Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game with backup quarterback Cardale Jones taking over for the injured J.T. Barrett.

Ohio State, which was ranked No. 5 in the CFP rankings going into the final weekend, emphatically answered naysayers with a dominant 59-0 win over the Badgers, propelling the Buckeyes into the fourth seed for the CFP.

Early in the season, the Buckeyes had dropped a game against Virginia Tech, and they spent the rest of the year trying to make up for that blemish on their record. In a phone interview with Buckeye Sports Bulletin, former Ohio State safety Tyvis Powell said the 2014 team was destined for greatness but just needed a chance.

"We always knew we were a good team," Powell told BSB. "It was good that

we won the Big Ten, and I felt like that season all we needed was a chance, like please just give us the chance to show you all how good we can be. And by the grace of God, it just happened to work out that way, and we ended up getting the fourth seed."

The blowout of the Badgers was enough to move the Buckeyes into the first CFP, but since they were the fourth seed, they faced a brutal matchup with No. 1 Alabama in the Sugar Bowl for the CFP semifinals.

Ohio State fell behind 21-6 in the second quarter to the Crimson Tide, which was expected, but it battled back with a pair of touchdowns to cut the deficit to 21-20 entering halftime.

On the opening drive of the second half, Jones connected with wide receiver Devin Smith for a 47-yard touchdown to take a 27-21 lead. Ohio State extended its lead to 34-21 with a 41-yard pick-six by defensive lineman Steve Miller.

The Crimson Tide cut the Buckeye lead to six points, but Ohio State showed resilience with Alabama threatening. While the OSU offense struggled, safety Vonn Bell made an interception for the defense, which kept the Tide offense at bay.

With Ohio State holding a 34-28 lead at its own 15-yard line, standout tailback Ezekiel Elliott broke the game open with an 85-yard touchdown run and 3:24 left on the clock.

After the Buckeyes converted a two-point conversion, Alabama answered with a touchdown to cut the lead to 42-35. Once the Crimson Tide got the ball back, they advanced to the OSU 42 with a chance at a pass to the end zone. Powell picked off the final pass, and Ohio State clinched a spot in the national title game.

"What better way to display how good you could be than to go against Alabama and go out there and do what we did to them?" Powell said. "We were losing at halftime, but it didn't feel like we should be losing. Statistically, the offense was rolling, and they had a couple good plays



SONNY BROCKWAY

UNDISPUTED – Under the guidance of former head coach Urban Meyer, Ohio State won the inaugural College Football Playoff national championship with a 42-20 victory against Oregon.

on defense, but it wasn't anything outrageous. I remember saying to myself, 'Man, this is the Alabama that everybody feared? They're not really that that good.'"

After beating 'Bama, Ohio State matched up with Oregon for a national title bout.

The Ducks struck first to take a 7-0 lead, but the Buckeyes rebounded with 21 straight points on an Elliott touchdown, a Jones touchdown pass to tight end Nick Vannett, and a Jones scoring run.

Oregon made a field goal to cut its deficit to 21-10 right before the half, and the Ducks scored the first 10 points of the second half to cut Ohio State's advantage to 21-20 with 6:39 left in the third quarter.

From that point, the Buckeyes dominated by leaning on Elliott and the running game. The star sophomore tailback scored three more touchdowns to lead Ohio State to a 42-20 victory, finishing with 246 rushing yards and four scores.

"We shocked the world," Bell said. "We kept improving every day, and we overcame adversity. Nothing can stand in the way of this team and how hungry we are."

The Buckeyes took great pride in shocking the college football landscape by beating Alabama and Oregon en route to a national title with a third-string quarterback at the helm.

"I love these players," Meyer said. "This team wasn't supposed to do this,

but they fought through adversity, they got stronger and stronger and stronger, and this is a great team. We finished the year a great team."

In the preseason, Jones was the third quarterback on the depth chart behind reigning Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year Braxton Miller and Barrett. For Jones, who had not expected to play much prior to the season, staying ready with an optimistic mentality was essential to the team's success.

"Event plus response equals outcome," Jones said. "It's all about how you respond to each event, getting the outcome you want. It helps when you have a tough time or something tough happens. You've got to understand that you've got to have a positive response and have a positive outcome."

After falling to the Hokies early in the season, any other blemish on the Buckeyes' record would have prevented them from achieving their goals, but they never gave up hope.

"This was our dream to get here," cornerback Doran Grant said. "Everyone counted us out after the Virginia Tech loss, and we didn't waver. We never wavered, and that's why we're here."

2016 Clemson Shuts Out Ohio State

Two years after beating Oregon to become national champions, Ohio State returned to the CFP at 11-1.

The third-ranked Buckeyes traveled



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to Scottsdale, Ariz., for the Fiesta Bowl, which represented the CFP semifinal in 2016, to take on second-ranked Clemson.

With the shot at another national title on the line, the Tigers thoroughly dominated the Buckeyes in a 31-0 shutout that stunned Ohio State.

"I expected a much better performance," Meyer said. "Some guys played their tails off. Some other guys didn't execute very well. But, no, I didn't anticipate that."

Barrett, who started at quarterback after splitting time with Jones for much of the season, agreed with his coach.

"I didn't see that coming by any means," Barrett said. "We expected to win the game, and that was what happened. We were not nine units strong. It's real simple."

Perhaps no part of the team was weaker than the Buckeye offense, which mustered just 215 yards of total offense, including 127 through the air.

"I mean, we just didn't execute really on offense," Barrett admitted. "It wasn't really like we were surprised by the looks that we had. I think we prepared really hard and coaches did everything they could as far as like throwing us the different looks that we thought we were going to get, and we just didn't execute it anywhere on offense, really."

After the game, many fans were quick to point fingers at the coaching staff, while others blamed Barrett, the offensive line and the receivers for the poor play. The quarterback himself chose to keep the blame on the players.

"I thought we had good plays," Barrett said. "We just didn't execute those plays and that's what happens."

In the first half, Ohio State threw the ball 19 times while attempting just 11 rushes. Of those 11 runs, six were by Barrett – totaling 5 yards – and just one was by starting running back Mike Weber. Instead of a balanced attack – which was the plan, Meyer said after the game – the Buckeyes leaned on short passes to the flats or screens and struggled to move the ball.

That resulted in 12 completions on the 19 attempts but just 79 yards I GET 80 before halftime. All in all, the offense did not operate as planned. When asked about running the ball so few times for so few yards in the first half, Meyer admitted the Buckeyes got away from their game plan.

"Our game plan was to be balanced and certainly not, whatever the stat you just said, that wasn't our game plan," Meyer said in response to a query. "We just didn't execute very well on offense."

"That was not the game plan. I think we kind of got taken out of the game plan a little bit. But no, that was our plan, to be balanced. We didn't follow the plan."

Barrett completed 19 of 33 passes for only 127 yards with two interceptions, while his Clemson counterpart, Deshaun Watson, threw for 259 yards and one score on 23-of-36 passing with two picks. Barrett carried the ball 11 times for minus-2 yards, while Watson rushed for 57 yards and two touchdowns.

"I'm going to take a hard look at some things when we get back," Meyer said during his postgame press conference. "And obviously there were some great things this year, some great things. I go back to Norman, Oklahoma, (a 45-24 win over the Sooners) and some other great things. But anytime you struggle a little bit, you always take a hard look."



ANDREW LIND

FAMILIAR FOE – Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, left, and Clemson's Dabo Swinney met in the 2019 Fiesta Bowl, with the Tigers knocking off the Buckeyes in a 29-23 thriller.

"We will become a good passing team, we will. Next year."

Just a few days later, co-offensive coordinator Ed Warinner and co-offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Tim Beck were out, and Meyer brought in a new quarterbacks coach and co-offensive coordinator by the name of Ryan Day.

2019 Controversial Calls Cost Bucks Big-Time

Just three seasons into his Ohio State tenure, Day ascended to replace Meyer as the head coach. Day led the Buckeyes back to the CFP in his first season at the helm, and they faced the same school that had embarrassed them in their last appearance.

In 2019, Ohio State had a more consistently dominant team than in its last showdown with Clemson and seemed destined to meet LSU in the national championship.

The 13-0 Buckeyes jumped on the Tigers early, but with some help from a few controversial calls and a few Ohio State gaffes, they fought back.

The Buckeyes dominated early in the game, driving deep into Clemson territory on four of their first five possessions – including a 68-yard touchdown run by running back J.K. Dobbins – while holding the Tigers scoreless. But the Buckeyes settled for field goals on three of those possessions, turning what could have been a commanding 28-0 lead into a two-score game that proved to be easy for the defending national champions to overcome.

Despite settling for field goals, Ohio State still controlled the game with a 16-0 lead with just 4:47 until halftime.

Facing third-and-5 from the Ohio State 45-yard line, sophomore Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence dropped back to pass, and sophomore cornerback Shaun Wade came through on a blitz and drilled Lawrence for an 8-yard sack. However, when the Clemson quarterback crouched to avoid contact, Wade hit him helmet to helmet and drew a targeting

call, disqualifying him from the game.

Wade's early exit allowed the Tigers to seize momentum, and they scored 21 consecutive points to take their first lead midway through the third quarter.

"You talk about a change of events when they threw Shaun out of the game," Day said. "He's out of the game, it's fourth-and-13. They get the first down and score. That was a huge change."

It appeared Ohio State had overcome the adversity with a game-changing play of its own with under six minutes left in the third quarter trailing 21-16. Cornerback Jeff Okudah forced a fumble on a catch by Clemson wide receiver Justyn Ross that was recovered by safety Jordan Fuller and returned 29 yards for what appeared to be a go-ahead touchdown. That was overturned to an incomplete pass, though, when replay determined that Ross never fully possessed the ball before Okudah knocked it free.

"I know there were some plays that were called on the field and then overturned, and when they overturn it, there has to be indisputable evidence," Day said. "I think when we look back on it, it is going to be overwhelming. Those game-altering plays that happen in a game, you need those things to go beat a team like Clemson where you're playing

in a semifinal game. You need those one or two plays. Then to miss a couple of them, that hurts you. I just know when two great teams get together, it comes down to a few plays, and it did again tonight."

The Scarlet and Gray did not quit, driving 84 yards on 13 plays to score a go-ahead touchdown on a 23-yard pass from Justin Fields to Chris Olave.

The teams traded possessions before the Tigers responded with a four-play, 94-yard touchdown drive of their own with just under two minutes remaining.

Ohio State then drove all the way to Clemson's 23-yard line before Fields was intercepted by safety Nolan Turner in the middle of the end zone with just 37 seconds left due to a miscommunication with Olave.

"I thought our guys left it all on the field," Day said after the game. "We played hard and played bold. But certainly, there were a lot of plays in that game that didn't go our way. It's very hard to swallow right now. We're going to have to really take a look at the film and figure out what really happened on some of those plays, because in a game like this where the margin for error is so tiny, one play can alter the game. It didn't seem like we got any of those plays."



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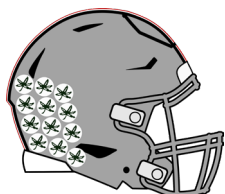
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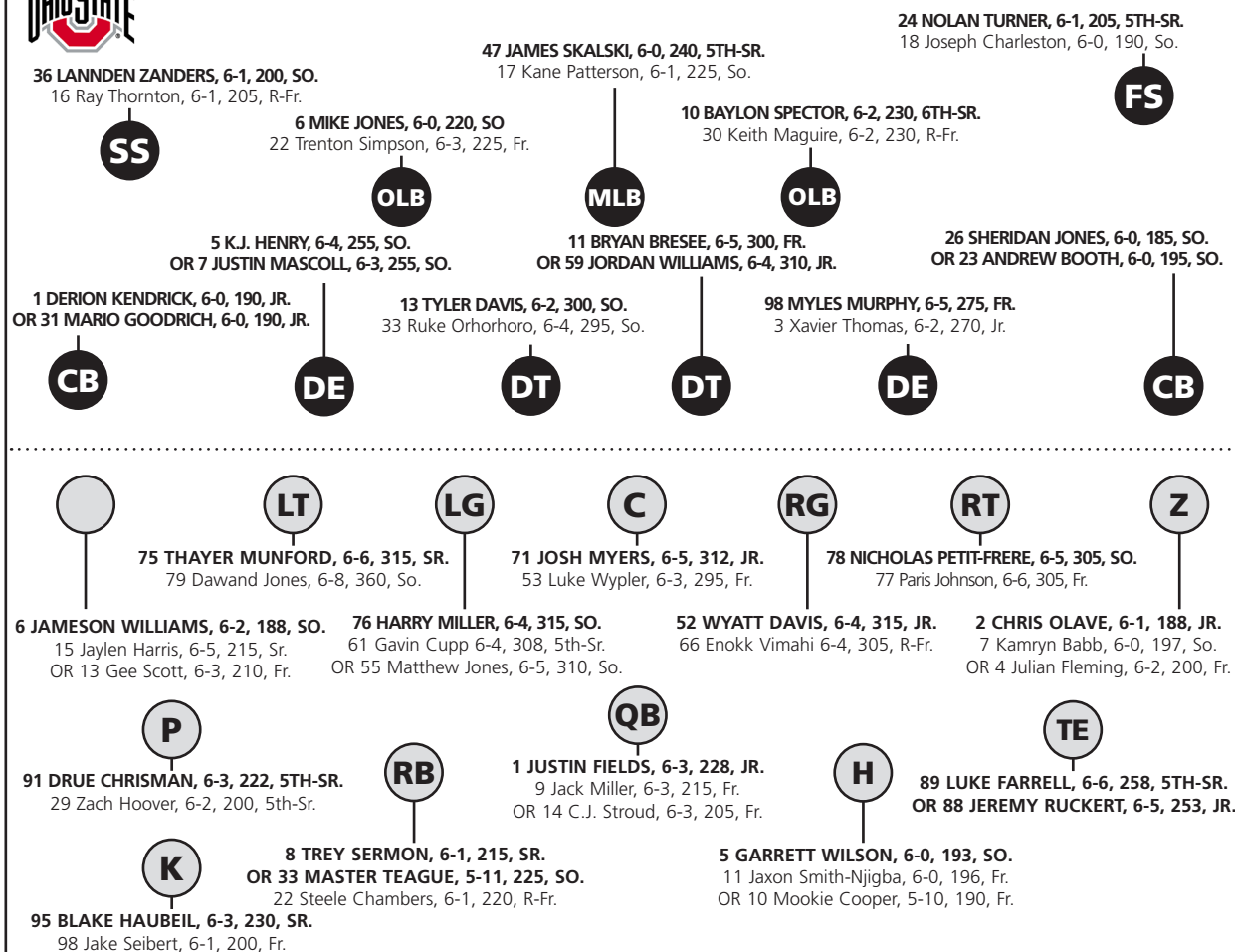
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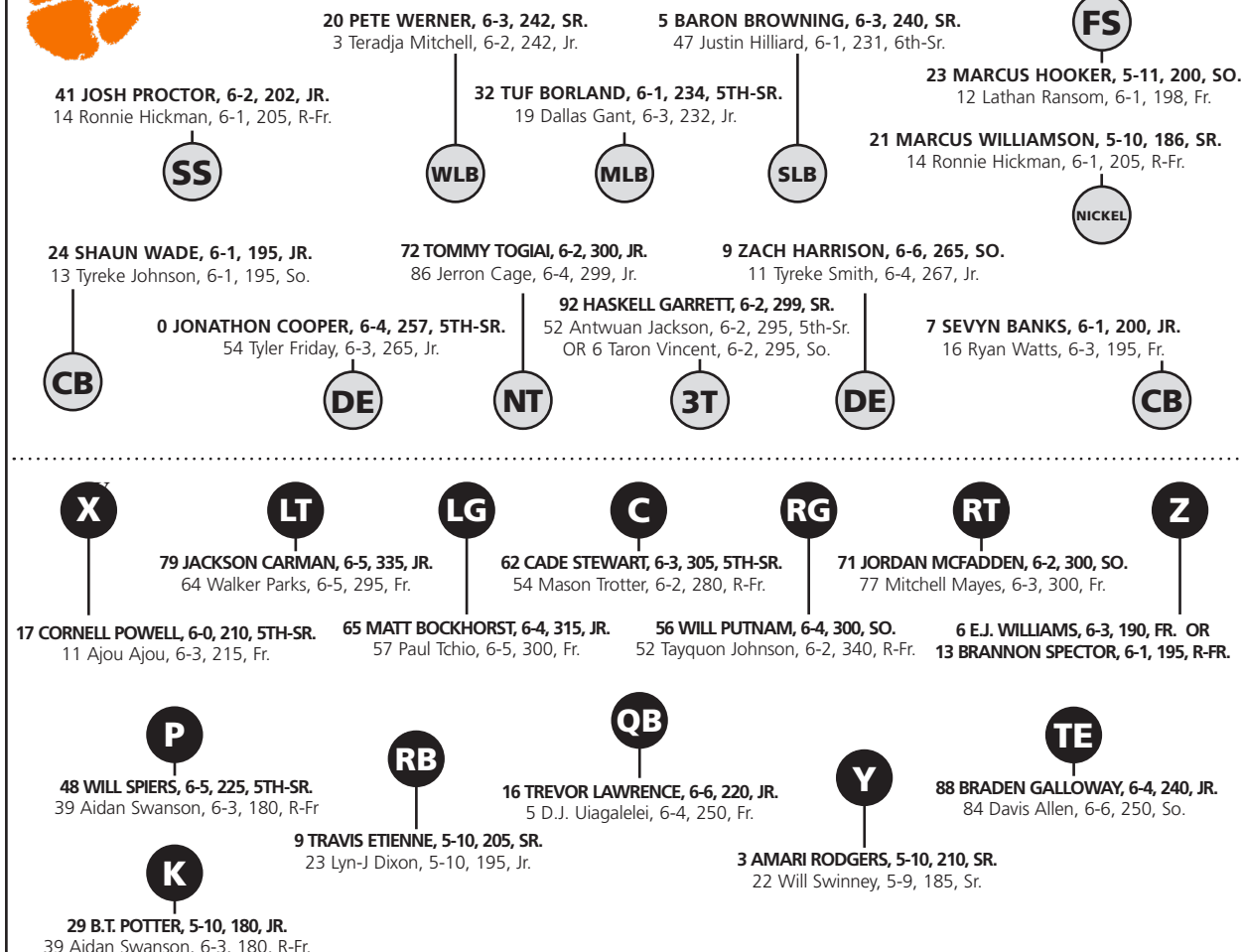
Projected Depth Charts



WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN CLEMSON HAS THE BALL...



- Depth charts compiled by Andrew Lind and Patrick Mayhorn

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE VS. CLEMSON RUSH DEFENSE

Prior to the Big Ten title game when it appeared the Buckeyes, with a win over Northwestern, might get a College Football Playoff semifinal rematch vs. Clemson, a big concern was not having a J.K. Dobbins-like running back to face the Tigers. He ran for 174 yards on 18 carries with a 68-yard TD while being hampered by an injury in the game last year. Those fears may be allayed after the performance by Trey Sermon vs. Northwestern when he rushed for not only an Ohio State-record 331 yards on 29 carries (11.4 average), but the most yardage ever in an FBS conference championship game. Amazingly, he nearly doubled his season total in one game, having entered with 344 yards from 55 carries (6.3) through five games. OSU also has Master Teague, who has 449 yards (5.0) on the season, although he was injured vs. the Wildcats and his status is unknown. Clemson is ninth nationally in rushing defense at 99.8 yards per game. The Tigers held Notre Dame to 44 yards on 30 carries (1.5) in the Dec. 19 ACC title game. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

CLEMSON RUSH OFFENSE VS. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes rank seventh against the run (96.7) but will be tested by Clemson's multifaceted offense that seems to be coming around at the right time. The Tigers average 163.8 yards per game rushing but broke the Irish defense for 219 yards at 8.1 yards per tote. Travis Etienne had six straight games rushing for less than 100 yards but exploded for 124 on 10 carries (12.4) with a 44-yard touchdown against Notre Dame. The real threat is letting quarterback Trevor Lawrence loose as the Buckeyes saw last season when he had a 67-yard touchdown. Against Notre Dame, he had 14 carries for 90 yards that included a 34-yard score. **EDGE: EVEN**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE VS. CLEMSON PASS DEFENSE

Chris Olave missed the Northwestern game, for possibly COVID-19 related reasons, but could return against Clemson, much to the relief of quarterback Justin Fields. Without his star receiver and nursing a suspected sprained thumb on his throwing hand, Fields was not good against the Wildcats (12 of 27 for 114 yards, no TDs and two interceptions). He continues to make poor decisions under duress, and Clemson will try to harass him like last season when the Tigers picked him off twice. Notre Dame QB Ian Book was sacked six times for 39 yards, but the Tigers will be missing safety Nolan Turner for the first half because he was ejected for targeting in the second half vs. the Irish. He leads the team with three interceptions. **EDGE: CLEMSON**

CLEMSON PASS OFFENSE VS. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Give credit to the Buckeye defense. Despite a lack of games due to cancellations galore, there has been improvement in the secondary in the two games since allowing 491 passing yards vs. Indiana. Granted, neither Michigan State nor Northwestern was a real threat through the air, but OSU has survived despite absences throughout the lineup. However, facing the likely No. 1 pick in the 2021 NFL draft could be too much for the Buckeyes to handle. Last season they held Lawrence in check until a controversial targeting penalty on cornerback Shaun Wade changed the game, but the Buckeyes still had three future NFLers in the secondary whom he exploited. Wade is back, but his supporting cast isn't as strong. **EDGE: CLEMSON**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter Drue Chrisman did not play vs. Northwestern, but Zach Hoover did a creditable job as his replacement (39.3-yard average, two of three inside the 20). Blake Haubeil made field goals of 41, 43 and 26 yards but missed from 42 vs. Northwestern. The Buckeyes can't afford to waste scoring opportunities. Clemson punter Will Spiers averaged 37.3 yards and dropped all three inside the 20 against Notre Dame while kicker B.T. Potter had makes from 27 and 37 yards. He's made 18 of 23 with a long of 52 this season. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

The breakout game by Sermon reminded people of the 2014 conference championship game when running back Ezekiel Elliott took over and eventually carried the Buckeyes to a national championship. A lot of folks didn't think OSU deserved a spot in the first CFP because of its loss to Virginia Tech, and six years later people are miffed that the Buckeyes were selected despite playing only six games. In other words, Ohio State has more to prove than Clemson does and revenge is a strong motivator. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

STAFF PREDICTION

In real estate it's location, location, location. In this game it's experience, experience, experience. The Tigers have more big-game experience accumulated over the past few seasons, and playing five more games this season may be too much for the Buckeyes, who are still trying to field a full team to overcome. Also, Clemson has owned Ohio State, and that is being drilled into the Tigers. The wild card is COVID-19 and what effect it may once again have on the Buckeyes. **CLEMSON 35, OHIO STATE 27**

Recruiting Success Defined By On-Field Results

Continued From Page 1

of trying to connect with these families without seeing them in person. That's a challenge. But being honest, being an open book and talking to them about what it means to come into our program and what the expectations are was key. These recruits have really come together, too. The leadership of this class has already started. They all want to be great. That's the thing I think they all share. They all want to be elite and be a part of this culture."

The staff also used Zoom calls to build camaraderie among the commits and top targets, helping them feel like they were together on campus when they were physically apart.

"This summer, we had two different Zoom calls where we had the whole class on together. One of them included their parents and we did a game show. It was a lot of fun and very interactive," Pantoni said that same afternoon. "The second one was more serious and just about sharing their experiences with their (high school) teams and what they were going through during the pandemic. It was just good to get all of the guys together, see them face-to-face and let the guys interact among each other."

The commits also took things into their own hands, setting up a group text and an unofficial gathering at Sawyer's house that coincided with the season opener against Nebraska on Oct. 24. That allowed Henderson and Williams to see campus for the first time, even though the recruiting dead period prevented them from meeting with the coaching staff or touring the football facilities.

"On our end, we didn't have to do a ton of work. They were on it," Pantoni said. "If there was ever any sort of smoke or issue, they let us know right away like, 'Hey, you might want to watch this guy.' They were awesome. They handled it. They have great leadership in that group, so we were there just to support them and do what we could."

"This group is already really, really tight. They're going to come in here knowing so much about each other. I wouldn't be surprised if we see some really, really special things from this class moving forward."

Ohio State suffered just two decommitments in the class of 2021 in Cincinnati La Salle four-star cornerback Devonta Smith and Katy (Texas) Tompkins four-star defensive end Tunmise Adeleye, who ended up at Alabama and Texas A&M, respectively. Pantoni credited the staff for identifying the right prospects, not only physically, but in their character and personality traits, too.

"Culture fit is the biggest thing for any kid we recruit, so before we even take a kid's commitment, we want to make sure they're a great culture fit," Pantoni said. "We don't want to deal with a lot of games being played where a kid commits and then a couple weeks later wants to go visit other schools. We try to eliminate that early on and make them understand what a commitment here means. It also just shows the quality of kids we're recruiting. Not a lot of drama. It was an easy day and pretty much the whole cycle was drama-less. Our coaches did a great job of having these kids understand what it meant to be committed."

Along those same lines, Day believes it's important to establish genuine relationships with prospects and their families in order to find out which players will fit the program's culture. They can't simply recruit someone based on their talent level, nor should they expect to land a prospect based on the program's winning percentage, traditions or the number of players they send to the NFL, though that certainly makes things easier.

"The days of talking a kid into coming to your school are over," Day said. "When I was young, a head coach walked in with a book on how to close a sale and dropped it on my desk. Those days are over. You have to be an open book. This is who we are, and this is our culture. We want to be elite in everything we do. Our goal is

to win the national championship every year. If that's something that gets you fired up, then come on, let's go. But it's more about building relationships than it is about talking people into coming to your school and chasing stars. That's a short-term gratification."

Ohio State landed commitments from 13 different states – including six from Ohio, two from Pennsylvania, two from Virginia and one each from Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Washington – as well as Australia, proving how strong the Buckeyes' brand truly is.

"I think having the exposure on TV and having a lot of talented players who have gone on to the NFL helps," Pantoni said. "When the players see that, they want to be a part of that. They know if they come to Ohio State, they're going to be developed."

"So rather than making the easy decision (to stay home), they make a great business decision for their future. They also have parents that support that. These kids could literally pick any school in the country. For them and their parents to believe in Ohio State, the culture, Coach Day and our coaching staff, that's a big testimony to what we're trying to do here."

Now, with a little over one month until the traditional National Signing Day on Feb. 3, Ohio State sits second in the 247Sports team recruiting rankings, trail-

ing No. 1 Alabama by almost nine points with three fewer commitments. That's likely where the Buckeyes will finish the cycle, too, even if they add Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau.

Day and Pantoni don't seem to care one bit about where Ohio State ends up, though. Their only concern is developing the 21 players they've signed into the best versions of themselves in hopes of competing for Big Ten and national titles.

"I'm not really interested in (recruiting rankings) because it's just someone's opinion," Day said. "I get that it's respected, but in the end, you have to find the right guys for Ohio State. The guys we bring in are the right fit for us. This is the No. 1 recruiting class for us. I just want to make sure we have the right guys for us and that we're winning once they get here. Where is it at in four years? To me, that's the true test of the recruiting class. I know it's fun and great to talk about, but what matters is what they do when they get here."

Pantoni agreed.

"It's not that big of a deal," he said. "We've had classes in the past that were probably fourth or fifth and had more NFL draft picks in the top two rounds than some of the higher-rated classes. The way I grade recruiting classes is how they end up, with the NFL being a big part of it, but also being key contributors and starters, as well. So we'll look back on it in three or four years and see."

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McCord Ready To Compete For Starting QB Job

Assuming Ohio State junior quarterback Justin Fields declares for the NFL draft after this season, the Buckeyes will have a three-way battle for the starting gig next fall.

True freshmen Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud were both highly touted recruits in their own right, but the two have combined for just 17 total snaps in two games this year. That leaves the door open for Philadelphia St. Joseph's five-star quarterback Kyle McCord, who signed with Ohio State during the early signing period on Dec. 16.

"He will compete for the job," OSU head coach Ryan Day said during a teleconference that afternoon. "If Justin goes to the NFL, we're going to have to figure out who the next quarterback is at Ohio State. That's a big, big deal. I know he's looking forward to getting here and getting to work right away."

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

McCord, who became the first five-star signal-caller to sign with the Buckeyes since Braxton Miller in 2011, is hoping to become the first true freshman since Miller to start a game for Ohio State. He threw for 6,887 yards and 88 passing touchdowns to lead the Hawks to three straight state titles in high school, which is one reason Day identified him as his top target early in the process.

"Right from the jump, Kyle was somebody that we recognized as a very, very talented player," Day said. "We had the opportunity to watch him play and thought he had the chance to be a really, really good player. I know he's excited about getting here and competing the minute he walks into the door. The thing that stood



PHOTO COURTESY OF KYLE MCCORD

PHILLY'S FINEST – Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep five-star quarterback Kyle McCord will enroll early at Ohio State in hopes of competing for the starting job with current freshmen Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud.

out to me was that he and his family did a great job of recruiting the other players. He jumped in early on, and that made a major impact on our recruiting class. We're very, very excited that he's now a Buckeye."

Alford Rebounds With Star Backs

Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford caught a lot of flak during the 2020 recruiting cycle when he missed on Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic five-star

Bijan Robinson and Deerfield Beach, Fla., four-star Jaylan Knighton, who were once silent commits but ended up signing with Texas and Miami (Fla.), respectively.

So to say he rebounded this year would be an understatement after he secured signatures from Hopewell, Va., five-star TreVeyon Henderson and Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star Evan Pryor.

"Tony is one of our best recruiters," director of player personnel Mark Pantoni said on Dec. 16. "He probably works

as hard as or harder than anybody on our staff. His greatest quality is building relationships. He's relentless. He gets everyone involved, from mom, dad, sister and brother. He's just in constant communication. He's on it every day.

"With Tre and Evan, he did a good job explaining very early that we were going to take two running backs and explaining what their roles would be in the offense. Those guys just hit it off well. They were best friends throughout the recruiting process. They were playing Madden every

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A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1985

Ohio State landed commitments from a pair of highly-touted recruits just over a month away from the February signing day. Salem, Ohio, tight end Rich Huffman and Dayton Meadowdale defensive lineman Kenny Coleman both announced their intentions to sign with the Buckeyes on Feb. 12.

Huffman, a first-team All-Mahoning Valley Conference selection, reeled in 35 receptions for 542 yards and five touchdowns, and he expected to serve as an immediate contributor for Ohio State with two Buckeye tight ends – Ed Taggart and John Hutchinson – set to graduate after the 1986 season.

“Coach (Earle) Bruce told me that they had nobody to back up the two seniors coming back and that I’d be able to play early,” said Huffman, who was courted by Michigan, Michigan State, Illinois, Rutgers, Louisville, Stanford, Boston College, Penn State, West Virginia and Pitt.

Coleman, on the other side of the state, was named to the all-Dayton City League first team and was excited to get to Columbus.

“Scarlet and gray ... that’s what it’s all about now,” he said.

30 Years Ago – 1990

Ohio State recruiting target Ki-Jana Carter, a halfback out of Westerville (Ohio) South, was the subject of a story published Dec. 18 in the St. Paul (Minn.) Pioneer Press, alleging that Notre Dame had committed five violations of NCAA recruiting rules in courting the talented running back.

The story, which said Ohio State and Penn State had reported the violations to the NCAA, was denied by all parties concerned.

“I have no idea where any of that came from,” Carter said. “None of it made any sense.”

The story quoted an unnamed source who reported the Fighting Irish had given Carter athletic equipment and allowed him to stand on the sidelines during a game, and that his high school coach, Tony Pusateri, had shielded his player from other recruiters because Pusateri was a Norte Dame graduate.

Both Carter and his coach – who was set to join former Ohio State assistant Gary Blackney’s staff at Bowling Green – denied the story.

“I find it ridiculous,” Pusateri said. “For one thing, I would never do that, and for another, I didn’t go to Notre Dame. I’m a Capital University graduate and proud of it.”

25 Years Ago – 1995

Ohio State secured a commitment from Palatine, Ill., strong safety Mike Burden just days after his Dec. 8 official visit to Columbus. He canceled a Dec. 15 visit to Tennessee after announcing his verbal pledge to Ohio State.

“I just really liked the people there, and I felt like it was the place for me,” Burden told BSB.

Burden had the on-field aspect of recruiting down pat. He was

considered the No. 2 weakside linebacker in the nation by The National Recruiting Advisor – though the Buckeyes viewed him as a safety. He had more questions, however, off the field. His qualification for admittance was up in the air, and his coach, Joe Petricca, told the Chicago Tribune that he wasn’t sure that Ohio State would allow him as a Prop 48 student.

However, Burden said that Ohio State coach Tim Spencer had told him differently.

“Ohio State has said they would take me even as a Prop 48,” Burden explained. “Coach Spencer said he was pumped when I told him I was coming.”

20 Years Ago – 2000

Ohio State had recently become familiar with pulling talented running backs out of the San Diego area, when it pulled Michael Wiley from California all the way over to Columbus five years prior.

So when it came to recruiting Mission Bay High School half-back JaJa Riley for the class of 2001, Ohio State’s staff just leaned on that Wiley playbook and ultimately secured a pledge from the 6-2, 190-pound running back during his Dec. 4 visit to Ohio State, even amid questions about head coach John Cooper’s job status.

“Nothing’s changed as of yet,” Riley told BSB in late December, prior to Ohio State’s bowl matchup with South Carolina. “Really I want to be a Buckeye. My situation is not a whole lot on who the coach is going to be, it’s more like how the offense is going to be run. Right now, I’m with Ohio State 100 percent.”

15 Years Ago – 2005

Following a Dec. 14 visit to Ohio State, Clermont (Fla.) East Ridge cornerback Chimdi Chekwa received a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes and promptly accepted, officially joining a rapidly growing class of 2006 for the Buckeyes.

Chekwa was a relatively new face for Ohio State on the trail, as wide receivers coach Darrell Hazell only discovered him during a recruiting trip to his high school, where Hazell was set to see Notre Dame wide receiver commitment Richard Jackson. Instead, Chekwa caught his eye and the two struck up a connection.

He scheduled and took his official visit, headed straight to Maryland afterward and then canceled scheduled trips to Wake Forest and Georgia Tech because he had seen enough in Columbus to convince him.

“I saw the school and saw both sides – the athletic part and the academic side – and it was amazing,” Chekwa said. “The school was amazing and so were the facilities. And the amount of effort they put into helping you academically also – that’s what stood out to me.”

10 Years Ago – 2010

Florida’s loss proved to be Ohio State’s gain.

When Gators head coach Urban Meyer decided to resign fol-

lowing his team’s appearance against Penn State in the Outback Bowl, it led some verbal members of Florida’s recruiting class to re-evaluate their decisions.

After doing so, outside linebacker Ryan Shazier from Plantation, Fla., opted to switch his commitment and become a Buckeye. Before he pulled the trigger Dec. 17, however, Shazier had to both meet with newly hired Florida head coach Will Muschamp and take an official visit to Columbus.

In the end, the Buckeyes won out over their foe in the 2007 national title game.

Five Years Ago – 2015

The Buckeyes finished runner-up in the race to land four-star defensive tackle Antwuan Jackson.

Because of the miss on Jackson, Ohio State’s quest to land a premium defensive tackle under Meyer remained in progress with Monroe (La.) Neville’s Rashard Lawrence and Paramus (N.J.) Catholic’s Rashaan Gary.

The Buckeyes had found it difficult to lure big run stoppers from the South, and that was the case once again when Jackson, a four-star from Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove, chose Auburn over Ohio State on Dec. 17.

“I love the coaches, I love the community and I can’t wait to get there and be an Auburn Tiger,” Jackson said at his commitment ceremony.

The Buckeyes were in it with Jackson until the end but were unable to win out for the services of Scout’s No. 12 defensive tackle and No. 97 overall prospect.

One Year Ago – 2019

Ohio State officially signed 24 players from the 2020 recruiting class when the early signing period began on Dec. 18. But one notable absence was La Habra, Calif., four-star cornerback Clark Phillips, who flipped his commitment and signed with Utah the following day.

The 5-11, 178-pound Phillips had been committed to the Buckeyes since late June. But on Dec. 15, the same weekend that former co-defensive coordinator and secondary coach Jeff Hafley was named the head coach at Boston College, Phillips took an unexpected official visit with the Utes.

Utah was among the first programs to offer Phillips a scholarship early in the recruiting process, and the coaching continuity in Salt Lake City – where head coach Kyle Whittingham was entering his 16th season and cornerbacks coach Sharrieff Shah was entering his ninth year – was a major selling point to him and his family.

“The coaches, they’re super stable,” Phillips told reporters gathered at his announcement on Dec. 19. “The stability is definitely appealing, of course. For me, I love the players. I love the guys, and then they’re super genuine dudes. They’re really, really good guys, I think, and even away from the football piece, I feel like those are guys I want to spend three to four years with.”

day, so credit to them for embracing their roles and embracing what they could do for this team. We’re glad to have them. They’re both awesome kids, they’re both fast and they’re going to have great careers here.”

Henderson, who is considered the top-rated running back in the class of 2021, committed to Ohio State in March without ever stepping foot on campus. He hopes to follow in the footsteps of former running back J.K. Dobbins, who also picked the Buckeyes sight unseen during the 2017 recruiting cycle.

“TreVeyon is one of the more special people that I’ve had an opportunity to get to know,” Day said. “The crazy thing about it is that he’s not been on our campus and that he’s coming in with another running back in Evan Pryor. They’re both really, really, really talented young men. TreVeyon is a 4.0 student and the No. 1 running back in the country. He and Evan have built a special relationship, and I can’t wait to get around these guys. It’s been forever since we’ve seen them. Some of the guys we haven’t even met in person, which is unbelievable to me. But how cool is it to see this guy make connections with so many of these other recruits with the

dream to come here and be a part of a culture that is about winning championships and bettering themselves and being the best versions of themselves?”

Pryor, on the other hand, is labeled as an all-purpose back.

“They would both tell you they have different styles,” Day said. “Evan is a little bit more of a hybrid. He’s really good as a running back, he can get out on some jet sweeps, he can catch bubble screens and get the ball on the perimeter. Tre is a little bit more of an every-down back. It will be interesting to see how they develop.”

In-State Prospects Are OSU’s Top Priority

Ohio State signed six in-state prospects on Dec. 16, including Pickerington North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer, Streetsboro four-star defensive tackle Mike Hall, Massillon Washington four-star wide receiver Jayden Ballard, Ironton four-star linebacker Reid Carrico, Richfield Revere four-star offensive tackle Ben Christman and Cincinnati La Salle three-star safety Jaylen Johnson.

“The Ohio guys this year are special,” Day said. “One of the first things I did as head coach was to meet with Jack Sawyer

and his family. He is a special talent and the top defensive end in the country. I’m just so fired up that he’s a Buckeye. I cannot say enough about what he and his family have done during this time. He’s a special young man that is going to make us better, not only on the field but off it as well. He’s one of the most talented young men that I’ve ever been around.

“If you look at the other guys from Ohio like Mike Hall, he’s an unbelievably talented young man. A special, special person. He and his mom have been great. Reid Carrico, when you look him in the eye, you know he’s going to have a great career because of the way he takes care of himself in the classroom and on the field. He’s one of the toughest guys I’ve seen on film, running from sideline to sideline. Ben Christman and his family have been tremendous. All of these guys in Ohio are going to be really good players. You just know it.”

Pantoni actually believes it’s the strongest in-state group the Buckeyes have landed in several years.

“They’re all great kids from great families,” he said. “Obviously, Jack was our top guy early on, but Michael Hall was someone who didn’t have many offers

when we started recruiting him. The more you watched his film, the more you loved him. We got to know him on campus. Then we saw him just blow up in the rankings. It was well-deserved. Ben Christman was another guy we were on early. We had him in camp, and we knew what we were getting there. It’s just a great group. We’re really excited to have those guys.”

The key, of course, was to lock down the in-state commitments early in the process. That allowed Ohio State to build from there.

“It’s critical,” Pantoni said. “Obviously, Ohio is our main priority overall. But if we can get some of those guys in the boat early, that helps build the backbone and the structure of the recruiting class. We want the backbone of the class to be Ohio and the Midwest, so the more guys we can get in there early, like Jack and Jaylen, they can help build the class. That’s what they did. They took it head on.

“Then Kyle (McCord) committed, and you saw this chain of events where these guys kept adding kids in their group. That group kept getting bigger and bigger and made our lives easier because the commits

Continued On Page 26

Cornerback Signees Hardest To Identify On Tape

Continued From Page 25

are our best recruiters. And with kids not being able to come to campus, it put a little bit more on our commits, and they did an awesome job.”

Carrico Earns Rave Reviews From Staff

Speaking of Carrico, Pantoni mentioned the all-state linebacker as someone he truly enjoyed watching on film.

In fact, he says it was always a race between him and other staff members to get to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on Saturday mornings after high school games to be the one responsible for cutting up his tape.

“There are certain guys that you really look forward to seeing on film, and Reid was always one of them,” Pantoni said. “He’s really fun to watch, just how hard he plays. He’s just this old-school, throwback linebacker who has no regard for his body. He’s making 20-25 tackles per game, and he’s playing running back, making 80-yard runs. He was just a dominant high school player who wasn’t into recruiting. He just loves ball. If you have stock, you’re going to put it in that kid because he’s just a grinder. He’s a blue-collar kid who is going to have a great career here.”

Difficult To Identify Top Defensive Backs

One of Ohio State’s top priorities in the 2021 recruiting cycle was defensive back. The Buckeyes signed six players who could potentially see time in the secondary, including 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; Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren four-star safety Jantzen Dunn; Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro four-star athlete Denzel Burke; and the previously mentioned Jaylen Johnson.

“A huge emphasis for us was the secondary,” Day said. “(Defensive coordina-

tor) Kerry Coombs did an unbelievable job. We needed some corners and some cover guys. Jakailin and Jordan give us that. They’re two special young men, and both have remarkable stories. They’re both really good guys that we think fit the culture on and off the field. When you look at Jantzen and Andre, we think they’re going to have an impact right away. Denzel has tremendous ability and upside, and Jaylen has a great way of connecting with recruits. He’s really been a glue keeping guys together during this process.”

One interesting aspect of the recruiting process is that many cornerbacks don’t actually play there in high school. They’re often the best athlete on the field and lined up at safety to prevent big plays, which makes it especially difficult to evaluate them on film.

“This year is different, but we never try to take a corner unless a coach has seen him do movement drills in person,” Pantoni said, pointing out Burke specifically. “He didn’t have a lot of corner film. We just saw a receiver who had great speed, great feet, great hands and he wanted to play corner, which made it even better. That’s just a great example of a great athlete where we saw different qualities on film that we thought we could project as a corner.”

Wide Receiver Group Among Nation’s Best

Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline continues to excel on the recruiting trail.

After bringing in five-star Garrett Wilson and four-star Jameson Williams in 2019 and five-stars Julian Fleming and Jaxon Smith-Njigba and four-stars Gee Scott and Mookie Cooper in 2020, you’d think he’d have a hard time convincing other top-rated receivers to come to Columbus.

That was hardly the case, though, as the Buckeyes signed Ballard; Steilacoom, Wash., five-star Emeka Egbuka; and Philadelphia St. Joseph’s Prep four-star

OSU Football Signees & Verbal Commits

Players in the class of 2021 who have signed a letter of intent 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 |

Marvin Harrison, the son of the Pro Football Hall of Famer of the same name.

“A lot of these guys want to go play in the NFL,” Day said. “If they can’t get on the field here at Ohio State, how are they going to get on the field in the NFL? They just want the chance to compete and be a part of this culture.”

Egbuka was the cherry on top, announcing his commitment to Ohio State on Dec. 11 over finalists Oklahoma and Washington.

“Emeka is a special young man,” Day

said. “Brian Hartline did an excellent job building a relationship with he and his family. He was able to visit, and I think he fell in love with the place when he got here. He’s another 4.0 student and the No. 1 wide receiver in the country. A great culture. He’s just another piece of the puzzle here. When you look at the combination of ability and who he is, he’s really special.”

Offensive Line Sees Wins, Losses

Offensive line coach Greg Studrawa, meanwhile, has had his fair share of ups and downs this cycle.

Ohio State missed out on Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star J.C. Latham, who signed with Alabama, but added Christman, Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal five-star offensive guard Donovan Jackson and Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central four-star offensive tackle Zen Michalski.

“I think Stud worked his tail off,” Day said. “In Ben, we got a big, strong, athletic guy. He’s going to have a really good career. Donovan just jumps off the film. That was a huge deal for us to get his commitment. He and his family are unbelievable with schools trying to recruit him out of Texas, and he’s just stayed strong. His loyalty and faith have been tremendous. And then Zen is a unique situation. He put on 60-70 pounds in about a year. We saw right away when we watched his film and thought this guy has a chance to be special. Three really talented young men.

“What’s great about all three of them is that they have versatility, too. They could play multiple positions if you need them to do so. I think that’s what makes them special.”

Recruiting assistant Zane Stevens actually deserves credit for finding Michalski,

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler

Ohio State's 2021 recruiting class is on pace to finish second in the 247Sports team recruiting rankings to Alabama, so this is probably a matter of nitpicking. But who or what position was the biggest miss for the Buckeyes this cycle?

"IMG Academy five-star offensive tackle and Alabama signee J.C. Latham, for sure. They didn't hit their number of four offensive linemen, and offensive tackle was a huge priority in this class – though they still signed some very good linemen. Ironically, if you flipped Latham from Alabama to Ohio State, that would probably be the difference right now between the Crimson Tide having the top class over the Buckeyes."

Ohio State and Michigan appear to be the top two for 2022 Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South five-star cornerback Will Johnson, who toured campus with his parents on Dec. 12. What do the Buckeyes need to do in order to overcome his father's ties to the Wolverines' program, and when do you anticipate him making his college decision?

"I think Ohio State trails right now, and it could take some coaching shake-up to change that. It's going to be hard to sever those ties to Michigan in this situation. Could see a decision this winter."

Jacksonville (Fla.) Robert E. Lee five-star cornerback Jaheim Singletary is set to make his college decision among Clemson, Florida,

Georgia and Ohio State on Jan. 2. Do the Buckeyes have a chance to land a pledge from the fifth-best cornerback in the class of 2022 despite being his most-recent offer and without a visit?

"The recent buzz was very heavy towards Florida, but I'm hearing a little bit of optimism on the Ohio State side. I think it will be one of those two, and whoever lands him on Jan. 2 will have to hold on for dear life the rest of the way, since I don't think he'll totally shut it down for the next year. Eventually, they will need to get him on campus to sign him, whether that is when they are trying to flip him from Florida or trying to keep him from flipping somewhere."

which allowed the Buckeyes to flip him from his pledge to Louisville on Oct. 3.

"This summer, since we had so much free time with no camps and no visits, I gave my staff a project and I said, 'Hey, let's just go through every conference's commit list and see if there are some guys who may be good to track.' Zane had the ACC," Pantoni said. "We did our homework and found out he put on all this weight, so we started watching his senior film and saw what we wanted to see. We're really glad we got him here."

Back To Square One

Now that they've put pen to paper, the 21 recruits are now full-fledged members

of the Ohio State football program. And whether they were highly sought-after five-star players or underrated three-star prospects, they'll have to prove their worth all over again the moment they step on campus.

"When they come in, (strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti) de-recruits them real quick. He gives them a wake-up call," Pantoni said. "These guys have no idea what hard work is until they get here and see the veterans leading the way and showing what a pro really is."

"Honestly, with the type of kids we're recruiting, it doesn't take a lot. They know what they're coming here for. A great example is Julian Fleming. He was the No. 1 player in the country last year (according to

ESPN). He just came in and went to work. He never complained. Same with (freshman and former five-star offensive tackle) Paris Johnson. Those guys didn't say a word. They know their role and they want to be great, so they just follow the leaders of their units. That's the type of kids we want."

Day stressed how unlikely it is for someone come in and make an immediate impact as a true freshman, no matter how many stars they had attached to their name during the recruiting process. He also noted there are exceptions, too.

"If you have enough talent and you develop enough, then you're going to get on the field. It's just going to happen," Day said. "When? Who knows? There are a lot of things that come into play there. There

are injuries and other things that get in your way. It's not like we come in here and just tell them they're going to play the first day they walk on campus. That's just not going to happen. There are a lot of good players that have been recruited and developed in the program before you."

"That said, they do have a chance to come in and compete for the job. For those that can do it, the blueprint is certainly there. But there's not a lot of freshmen who come in and play right away."

Defensive End Reveals Final Five

On Dec. 16, the same day Ohio State

Continued On Page 28

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

WR Target Decommits

Continued From Page 27

signed one of the nation's top-rated recruiting classes, Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau included the Buckeyes in his top five along with Alabama, Oregon, Washington and USC.

The 6-5, 277-pound Tuimoloau is considered the second-best strongside defensive end and No. 3 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He recorded 64 tackles, 15 tackles for loss and 11 sacks to lead the Crusaders to their second consecutive state title in 2019. He also hauled in 18 passes for 235 yards and four touchdowns while playing tight end, including the game-winning score in the championship game.

Tuimoloau has never been to Columbus, but the Buckeyes are widely considered the favorite in his recruitment thanks to his relationship with defensive line coach Larry Johnson and Gee Scott, his former high school teammate. He's also close with Egbuka, who signed with Ohio State during the early signing period.

Tuimoloau is expected to make his college decision on the traditional National Signing Day on Feb. 3, though he doesn't actually have to sign until April 1. Either way, he'll have to decide without the luxury of official visits, as the ongoing recruiting dead period will run through at least April 15.

If he does ultimately choose Ohio State, Tuimoloau will join Sawyer, Hall and Williams in the Buckeyes' 2021 recruiting class. He would also give the program signatures from six composite five-star prospects, which would tie the Crimson Tide for the national lead.

Arizona Wide Receiver Reopens Recruitment

One of Ohio State's top wide receiver targets is back on the market after Chandler, Ariz., four-star Kyion Grayes decommitted from Arizona on Dec. 14.

The 6-1, 170-pound Grayes is considered the 47th-best wide receiver and No. 313 prospect overall in the class of 2022 but has garnered numerous comparisons to current Buckeyes wide receiver Chris Olave after he caught 28 passes for 556 yards and 10 touchdowns to lead the Wolves to the state championship this season.

Grayes had been committed to the Wildcats since August, but an offer from the Buckeyes in October was a game-changer. He's gotten to know Day, Hartline, Pantoni and offensive quality control coach Keenan Bailey in the meantime, which is why Ohio State picked up a handful of 247Sports crystal ball predictions over the last month.

Arizona fired head coach Kevin Sumlin following a historic 70-7 loss to rival Arizona State on Dec. 11, prompting Grayes to reopen his recruitment. And while he could wait to take his first visit to Columbus once the ongoing dead period comes to a close, some think it's only a matter of time before he pledges his services to the Buckeyes.

Ohio State already holds one commitment at the wide receiver position for the class of 2022 in Del Valle, Texas, five-star wide receiver Caleb Burton. The Buckeyes hope to take two more, though, with Grayes; Lewisville, Texas, four-star

Armani Winfield; Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert four-star Kojo Antwi; Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star C.J. Williams; and Chicago St. Rita four-star Kaleb Brown among their top options to fill those remaining spots.

Top Defensive End Reveals Top Schools

Opa Locka (Fla.) Monsignor Pace five-star defensive end Shemar Stewart included Ohio State in his top 10 on Dec. 18. Also listed were Alabama, Arizona State, Clemson, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Penn State and Texas A&M.

The 6-5, 236-pound Stewart – who is considered the top-rated strongside defensive end and No. 5 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – landed an offer from the Buckeyes in April. He's never been to campus but chats regularly with Larry Johnson.

Ohio State is still looking for its first commitment along the defensive line but is in a good spot with a number of the nation's top-rated prospects. That includes Philadelphia Imhotep Institute Charter five-star defensive end Enai White, Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson five-star defensive end Jeremiah Alexander, Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star end Derrick Moore, Greensboro (N.C.) Grimsley four-star tackle Travis Shaw, Columbus (Ga.) Hardaway four-star tackle Mykel Williams, Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star tackle Caden Curry and Sicklerville (N.J.) Timber Creek three-star end Jihaad Campbell.

Michigan Loses Pair Of Four-Star Commits

Jacksonville (Fla.) Sandalwood four-star linebacker Branden Jennings and Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro four-star defensive end Quintin Somerville both flipped their commitments from Michigan on Dec. 16, choosing Maryland and UCLA, respectively.

The 6-4, 225-pound Jennings – who is considered the seventh-best outside linebacker and No. 109 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – initially committed to the Wolverines on Oct. 16, but the Terrapins made a push late in his recruitment and he announced his change of heart on the first day of the early signing period.

Michigan was able to sign three other linebackers in Brentwood (Tenn.) Ravenwood four-star Junior Colson; Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star Jaydon Hood; and Bolingbrook, Ill., three-star Tyler McLaurin.

The 6-1, 257-pound Somerville, meanwhile, is considered the 16th-best strongside defensive end and No. 219 prospect overall in the class of 2021. He is the former teammate of the aforementioned Burke.

Somerville had been committed to the Wolverines since June, but uncertainty surrounding the coaching staff – particularly defensive line coach Shaun Nua – forced him to reconsider his pledge. His decision leaves the Wolverines with three other defensive linemen in the class, including Suffield (Conn.) Academy four-star defensive end Kechaun Bennett; Mansfield, Mass., three-star defensive end T.J. Guy; and Middletown (N.J.) Mater Dei three-star defensive end Dominick Giudice.

The early signing period was not entire-

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

ly negative for Michigan. The Wolverines secured signatures from Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star quarterback J.J. McCarthy; West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star running back Donovan Edwards; and Fresno (Calif.) Central East four-star wide receiver Xavier Worthy and now sit at No. 12 in the national recruiting rankings.

Recruiting Outlook For Other B1G Programs

Big Ten programs signed a total of seven five-star prospects on Dec. 16, with Ohio State landing five such players. That left McCarthy and Lititz (Pa.) Warwick offensive tackle Nolan Rucci, who signed with Wisconsin, as the only other five-star prospects coming to the conference.

The Badgers currently sit at No. 16 in the 247Sports team recruiting rankings, having landed a trio of Ohioans in Clayton Northmont three-star wide receiver Markus Allen, Akron Archbishop Hoban three-star linebacker Darryl Peterson and Hilliard Bradley three-star tight end Jack Pugh.

Maryland head coach Mike Locksley, meanwhile, has the Terrapins on an upward swing. The nation's 19th-best class features the likes of Jennings, Gaithersburg (Md.) Quince Orchard four-star defensive end Demeioun Robinson and Washington (D.C.) St. John's four-star defensive tackle Taizse Johnson.

Despite a rough season on the field, Penn State continues to recruit well. The Nittany Lions signed five four-star players, including Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star offensive tackle Landon Tengwall, Malvern (Pa.) Prep four-star wide receiver Lonnie White, Detroit Cass Tech four-star cornerback Kalen King, Detroit Martin Luther King four-star safety Jaylen Reed and Severn (Md.) Archbishop Spalding four-star safety Zakee Wheatley.

While allegations of racial bias could have hampered Iowa's recruiting efforts, head coach Kirk Ferentz once again signed a top-25 class. The Hawkeyes' haul is headlined by a trio of four-star offensive linemen, including Winnetka (Ill.) New Trier offensive tackle David Davidkov; Cedar Rapids (Iowa) John F. Kennedy offensive guard Connor Colby; and Blue Springs, Mo., offensive tackle Beau Stephens.

Nebraska continues to make its presence felt within its local footprint, signing Council Bluffs (Iowa) Lewis Central four-star tight end Thomas Fidone, the nation's second-best player at his position, and Omaha (Neb.) Elkhorn South four-star offensive tackle Teddy Prochazka.

Minnesota didn't quite live up to expectations on the field this season, but that didn't diminish the Golden Gophers' recruiting efforts. They signed Antioch (Ill.) Community four-star dual-threat quarterback Athan Kaliakmanis and Goodyear (Ariz.) Desert Edge four-star

cornerback Steven Ortiz.

Michigan State pulled off one of the biggest surprises of the early signing period, flipping Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star linebacker Ma'a Gaoteote from USC. The Spartans also signed a handful of talented three-star prospects, including Akron Hoban safety A.J. Kirk, the younger brother of former Ohio State safety and three-time All-American Mike Doss.

Former Ohio State defensive coordinator Greg Schiano has, not surprisingly, found success in the first full recruiting cycle of his second stint at Rutgers. His local ties allowed him to sign nine prospects from the state of New Jersey, including Camden four-star cornerback Alijah Clark and Newark West Side four-star linebacker Khayri Banton.

Northwestern was also able to keep a prized recruit home, as Lake Forest, Ill., four-star linebacker Mac Uihlein signed with the Wildcats over offers from a number of other Big Ten schools. Head coach Pat Fitzgerald also secured a signature from Franklin (Mich.) Detroit Country Day four-star offensive tackle Caleb Tiernan and Solon, Ohio, three-star defensive end Najee Story.

Indiana, on the other hand, got better at the skill positions with the signing of Atlanta Westlake four-star wide receiver Jaquez Smith and Indianapolis Lawrence North four-star quarterback Donovan McCulley, who is rated the nation's ninth-best dual-threat signal-caller.

Purdue is fortunate to have standout defensive end George Karlaftis on the roster. The only four-star prospect to sign with the Boilermakers was his younger brother, West Lafayette, Ind., four-star linebacker Yanni Karlaftis. Every other signee is considered a three-star prospect rated no higher than No. 706 in the nation.

Rounding out the Big Ten, Illinois' decision to fire head coach Lovie Smith in the days leading up to the early signing period hampered its recruiting efforts. The Illini were able to hold on to a commitment from St. Louis De Smet Jesuit three-star offensive guard Brody Wisecarver, however.

National Powers Add More Firepower

Alabama, which sits atop the 247Sports recruiting rankings with 23 signees, brought in a nation-leading six five-star prospects, including Latham; Fort Worth (Texas) All Saints Episcopal offensive tackle Tommy Brockermeyer; Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas defensive end Dallas Turner; Belleville, Mich., defensive tackle Damon Payne; Pinson (Ala.) Valley cornerback Ga'Quincy McKinsty; and Bradenton IMG Academy wide receiver Jacorey Brooks.

The Crimson Tide found success all over the country, as well, pulling recruits from 10 different states, including six from

Florida, four from Texas and one from Ohio in Devonta Smith, the former Ohio State commit who hails from Cincinnati La Salle.

Clemson, on the other hand, signed just a pair of five-star prospects in Matthews (N.C.) Weddington running back Will Shipley and Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett linebacker Barrett Carter, a former teammate of Ohio State commit Jordan Hancock. The Tigers also secured a signature from Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep four-star linebacker Jeremiah Trotter, who teamed up with Harrison and McCord in leading the Hawks to three straight state titles.

Other notable signees include one-time Ohio State wide receiver targets in Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star Beaux Collins and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Cardinal Gibbons four-star Troy Stellato.

Notre Dame, meanwhile, signed a nation-leading 27 players during the early signing period. The Fighting Irish's class is headlined by a pair of elite linemen in Avon, Ind., four-star offensive tackle Blake Fisher and Clarkston, Mich., four-star offensive guard Rocco Spindler and includes two Ohioans in Pickerington Central four-star wide receiver Lorenzo Styles, the son of the former Ohio State linebacker by the same name, and Wadsworth three-star tight end Mitchell Evans.

Other Notes From Around The Country

- Former Ohio State commit and current Florida State linebacker/safety Jaiden Lars-Woodbey announced on Dec. 14 that he will transfer to Boston College.
- Katy (Texas) Tompkins four-star

247Sports Team Rankings

| Rk. | Team (Commits) | Points |
|-----|------------------------|---------------|
| 1. | Alabama (24) | 319.23 |
| 2. | Ohio State (21) | 310.39 |
| 3. | LSU (22) | 296.15 |
| 4. | Georgia (20) | 294.84 |
| 5. | Clemson (18) | 282.31 |
| 6. | Oregon (21) | 280.77 |
| 7. | Texas A&M (20) | 271.02 |
| 8. | Notre Dame (27) | 268.93 |
| 9. | Oklahoma (16) | 268.07 |
| 10. | Florida (25) | 265.69 |

247Sports Big Ten Rankings

| Rk. | Team (Commits) | Points |
|-----|------------------------|---------------|
| 1. | Ohio State (21) | 310.39 |
| 2. | Michigan (20) | 260.00 |
| 3. | Wisconsin (21) | 239.86 |
| 4. | Maryland (22) | 216.67 |
| 5. | Penn State (15) | 209.09 |
| 6. | Iowa (17) | 208.13 |
| 7. | Nebraska (19) | 207.95 |
| 8. | Minnesota (18) | 205.47 |
| 9. | Michigan State (19) | 192.53 |
| 10. | Rutgers (21) | 190.93 |
| 11. | Northwestern (14) | 171.30 |
| 12. | Indiana (13) | 169.39 |
| 13. | Purdue (14) | 160.05 |
| 14. | Illinois (14) | 150.06 |

defensive end Tunmise Adeleye, a one-time Ohio State pledge, committed to Texas A&M on Dec. 16.

- Virginia Tech offensive tackle Doug Nester, another former Ohio State commit, announced on Dec. 17 that he has entered the transfer portal.

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

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Recruiting Experts Think Highly Of OSU's 2021 Class

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

On Dec. 16, Ohio State had a successful early signing period window, officially locking in all 21 of its current commitments and giving the Buckeyes the No. 2 class in the country according to the 247Sports composite rankings.

Ohio State's 310.39 points trails only Alabama, whose 319.23 points through 24 commitments already ranks as the fifth-best class in the modern recruiting era (since 1999). While the Buckeyes have a little more ground to make up in the overall rankings, their 94.56 per-player average is nearly identical to what the Crimson Tide (94.6) has accomplished in this cycle.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin talked to four recruiting analysts about what they each thought of this 2021 class, and while the numbers are not always everything, they all agreed that this recruiting class was a special one for Ohio State.

"I do think it's one of the best recruiting classes in Ohio State history, and there is a chance that it could wind up being the best," Zack Carpenter, recruiting writer at Eleven Warriors, told BSB. "Obviously, that's going to take some years down the line when we look back years later to compare them, but there's been so much hype around it. There are some holes in the class, don't get me wrong, but it's hyped up because it deserves the hype right now. I mean years from now, hopefully for Ohio State, they'll be able to look back at it and see the class fulfill that potential."

When looking at the class in its entirety to this point, Ari Wasserman, former BSB writer and current national recruiting writer for The Athletic, said this type of class solidified that head coach Ryan Day has been able to take over the recruiting reins from his predecessor, former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer.

"Whenever you have a team that's signing double-digit top-100 players, that's a pretty remarkable class, and the prevailing thought I guess is, from a lot of people, that this class

is really good," Wasserman said. "But my prevailing thought is holy crap, Ryan Day already matched and might outdo what Urban Meyer's best class was in 2017, and that's a remarkable statement."

"I think the biggest worry from Ohio State's standpoint, from the transition from Urban Meyer to Ryan Day, was that Ohio State was not going to be able to recruit at the same level and thus that would have brought back the dominance of the team a little bit, but with the way that Ohio State's accumulating talent right now, it looks like they are every bit as set up to compete for national championships at a high level as they were when Urban was the head coach."

That 2017 class Wasserman mentioned consisted of five-star talents Baron Browning, Wyatt Davis, Jeff Okudah, Shaun Wade and Chase Young, as well as players like J.K. Dobbins, Thayer Munford, Josh Myers and Pete Werner, and it finished with a 94.59 per-player average score, the highest until Alabama's class in 2021.

That class is comparable to what the Buckeyes have done in 2021, with five of the 21 Ohio State signees being five-stars – defensive end Jack Sawyer (No. 4 overall prospect), wide receiver Emeka Egbuka (No. 9), offensive guard Donovan Jackson (No. 17), running back TreVeyon Henderson (No. 24) and quarterback Kyle McCord (No. 25) – while 12 of them ranked in the top 100.

Although there are many big names to choose from in this year's group, every recruiting analyst who spoke to BSB about the most important get in Ohio State's 2021 class came up with the same answer.

"It's TreVeyon," Carpenter said.

"Importance, I think you probably have to say running back TreVeyon Henderson," Wasserman said. "He is a really, really talented player, maybe one of the most complete running backs Ohio State has ever signed, and it's a position of great need moving forward."

The position was a great need for Ohio State after a difficult 2020 class for running backs coach Tony Alford. In that class, the Buckeyes had silent commitments from a pair of star backs: five-star Bijan Robinson and four-star Jaylan Knighton, who ultimately ended up at Texas and Miami (Fla.), respectively, after taking visits with the Longhorns and Hurricanes.

Alford did end up sealing the commitment of in-state three-star running back Miyan Williams, but Ohio State was looking for some serious firepower in the backfield for 2021 and found it in Henderson and four-star running back Evan Pryor, who committed within 11 days of each other this past March.

"I think it has to be TreVeyon Henderson just because of the nature of his commitment and the fact that he was the No. 1 running back in the country and a player that could have gone anywhere and decided to commit to Ohio State when he'd never been on campus," said Jeremy Birmingham, recruiting writer at Lettermen Row. "For the No. 1 player at his position in the country, at a position of need, especially after how the 2020 cycle played out with Bijan Robinson and Jaylan Knighton both slipping away from Ohio State before even publicly issuing commitments (is big)."

"The Buckeyes were in sort of a pickle in this class and not just to get him, but to pick up TreVeyon Henderson two weeks after getting another top-five running back in the class is pretty remarkable, and I think that's probably the one area where it's not just the

biggest surprise of the cycle, but also the most important player in the 2021 class."

Marc Givler, Ohio State recruiting writer at Buckeye Scoop, certainly agreed with the Henderson selection but told BSB that it was more of a big three who stand out above the rest of the signees as the most crucial pieces of this class.

"They definitely needed to address running back, and TreVeyon Henderson could be a guy who may play early," Givler said. "That was a definite need for them, so to me, that was a huge one. Obviously when you have a guy like Jack Sawyer right down the street, you have to hold on to someone like that, and I think both him and Kyle McCord were able to really do a lot of recruiting along with Henderson. So I think that trio really, just in terms of their ability, the positions they play and the impact they then had on helping build the class after they committed – it would be hard to replace any of those guys in this class, honestly."

But Henderson, McCord and Sawyer are all five-stars in the class and have the expectations to be eventual stars for this Ohio State program. What about someone whom both the national rankings and, in turn, the general crowd are overlooking?

Again, the writers had a consensus, all agreeing on a certain Kentucky defensive back as a player to watch for moving forward, with the four-star safety even getting a comparison to one of the best safeties the program has had in recent memory.

"I think Jantzen Dunn has a chance to be a really special free safety," Givler said. "I know they have a lot of defensive backs in this class, and I think they're still trying to sort out where certain guys are going to play, and I don't want to go crazy on a Malik Hooker comparison, but there are some similar things there in terms of their athletic backgrounds, basketball backgrounds, just the size and athleticism they have."

"He's probably, outside of maybe (four-star cornerback) Jakailin Johnson, he's probably the best athlete they recruited in the secondary. So if the instincts and some of the other stuff catches up, I think you have a really special safety prospect."

Both Carpenter and Birmingham agreed with the Dunn selection but also brought another name to the table: four-star defensive tackle Mike Hall. The Streetsboro, Ohio, native may rank as a top-50 prospect in the country at No. 49 but started ranked all the way down at No. 409 and is still an underrated gem in this class compared to some other key names.

"I think defensive tackle, if you're not a top-five, top-10 overall guy, maybe he gets left off the board a little bit," Carpenter said. "He's going to be a (three-technique) and I talked to him last week, and he was telling me (defensive line coach) Larry Johnson doesn't want him to redshirt as a freshman. He wants him to compete for a spot in the two-deep. At defensive tackle, if Haskell Garrett and Tommy Togiai both go to the draft or if one of them goes, they're going to be left a little thin as far as depth goes. So Mike Hall, I think first year and beyond, he's a guy who's going to make a big impact here."

Even in a top-two class that is one of the best Ohio State has had in recent memory, there are bound to be a few misses on the way, especially when involved in a recruiting battle with Alabama, the lone team above the Buckeyes in the class rankings.

There is one name that stands out, again, with the agreeance of every analyst, and that

is Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star offensive tackle J.C. Latham. The 6-5, 305-pound tackle was a heavy favorite to commit to Ohio State for months but ultimately chose to take his talents to the Crimson Tide and has since risen from a top-20 player to the No. 2 overall player in the 2021 class.

"The only miss that comes to mind is J.C. Latham at the offensive tackle position," Wasserman said. "They had a really good rapport with him for a while at the beginning of the year. And then of course all the COVID stuff happened, this is shut down and he ended up signing with Alabama. In a class that's about to sign potentially the best average player rating in the history of modern-day recruiting, I think it's hard to really nail down a miss, but Latham probably is the only answer."

Birmingham said that the Latham miss was partially because of a loss in momentum that Ohio State faced as the COVID-19 pandemic took away in-person visits. And while visits were lost by every program in college football, there were certain players and a lost snowball effect that specifically impacted what the Buckeyes were building.

"Alabama is sort of an anomaly in recruiting in that nothing really seems to impact them. But, you know, when you're talking about a bunch of kids who were planning on making visits to Ohio State in April and May and June, it's an opportunity for the Buckeyes to really give them a different experience when they're on an official visit," Birmingham said. "And of course, you know J.C. Latham and that kind of stuff, you just lose this ability to get everyone together and really capitalize on the incredible run of commitments that the Buckeyes had in March and early April, and I think that they just sort of lost a little gas there."

Even with some steam lost as the early signing period drew near, the Buckeyes hauled in a major commitment on Dec. 11 in Egbuka out of Steilacoom, Wash., the No. 1 receiver in the class. That commitment is significant on its own, but Egbuka's home state of Washington will also be important as Ohio State attempts to fill out its class with one major name: Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimolou.

Tuimolou, who is ranked the No. 3 overall prospect and second-best strongside defensive end in the 2021 class, recently released a top five that included the Buckeyes and is currently heavily favored to ultimately commit to the Buckeyes by 247Sports crystal ball predictions.

According to the recruiting analysts, Tuimolou is the major name left on Ohio State's board, though Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star linebacker and former LSU commit Raesjon Davis is another name to look out for in the coming months. Givler said, however, he expects the Buckeyes to potentially take another look around at who is left after the early signing period.

"I mean it's basically just two targets right now," Givler said. "I mean, it's basically J.T. and they are trying to land Raesjon Davis, the top-100 linebacker out of California. There could always be a late surprise, and you know I'm sure once this early signing period officially closes on (Dec. 18), that they will probably reassess the entire country and just see who didn't sign and just maybe kick some tires and see what's out there. But right now, it's really just those two guys as far as real targets."

"I like where they sit with J.T. They've



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got a shot at Raesjon Davis. I don't think he's actually going to sign with LSU. I think he's going to end up somewhere else. But USC has crept in there and Arizona State, and so I think right now he's probably going to make a decision about geography, in terms of does he want to stay closer to home or does he want to play at a place like Ohio State."

While Ohio State appears locked in for its second straight top-five recruiting class, it seems that the team's largest rival may also be preparing for its second straight class that ranks outside the top 10.

Michigan holds the No. 12 recruiting class in the nation following the early signing period, a ranking good for second in the Big Ten. And after a less-than-eventful signing period for the Buckeyes, with all of their commits signing, the Wolverines had plenty of ups and downs, starting with a pair of decommitments in four-star linebacker Branden Jennings and four-star defensive end Quintin Sommerville, who flipped to Maryland and UCLA, respectively.

But the Wolverines also received some good news, earning the commitment and signing four-star running back Donovan Edwards on Dec. 16. Edwards, who is the fourth-best running back and No. 44 overall prospect in the class, was a major Ohio State target before the Buckeyes received commitments from Henderson and Pryor.

That big signing, as well as the signing of five-star quarterback J.J. McCarthy, gave Michigan a relatively strong class despite the team's 2-4 record and despite some flaws within the 20 commits.

"Overall, I think Michigan fans should be thrilled because not only did you land the highest-ranked running back that they've landed in the modern Internet recruiting era with Donovan Edwards, but you have guys that you know are a really good offensive class," Birmingham said. "Defensively, it's not a good class, period. I mean I think it's telling and maybe indicating that there's going to be some widespread changes on the defensive side of the ball in Ann Arbor on the coaching staff, and maybe that Jim Harbaugh's offense will get a chance to get a redo on the 2020 season, but defensively, it's not a good class at all."

Givler said that Michigan ended up with a pretty strong recruiting class on its own, but not when looking at it compared to the team that the Wolverines have lost to eight times in a row.

"I think it's all relative" Givler explained. "In a vacuum, they have a good class. Donovan Edwards was a huge pickup for them. I had kind of expected him to go there but you never know until you know. Keeping a guy like that home is big. They kept (wide receiver Xavier) Worthy. That's big. It gets some speed at receiver there."

"I don't know that you can just judge their class in a vacuum. I think you have to pair that up with Ohio State's class and ask yourself, 'OK, did Michigan close the talent gap?' And I don't think they did. I think the talent gap probably got a little bit wider again this month, and that could be a problem."

"If the goal there is to win nine or 10 games, I think that class they just signed is going to be able to do that. But if the goal is to close the talent gap with Ohio State and start beating Ohio State consistently, I think Ohio State still pulled away from the rest of the conference."

Ohio State is set to finish with the top class in the Big Ten for the second straight cycle and is off to a strong start in extending that streak to three years. Thus far in the 2022 class, the Buckeyes have commitments from a pair of five-stars and five players ranked in the top 60, including quarterback Quinn

Ewers, the sixth player in modern recruiting history to hold a perfect 1.0000 grade in the composite rankings.

This hot start has led to a substantial lead for the top spot in the upcoming class, with the Buckeyes' 206.17 points leading second-place Penn State (147.34) by nearly 60 points. Will Ohio State hold onto this lead? The recruiting experts say it is too early to tell, but Carpenter said that topping the 2021 class numbers is certainly a possibility.

"I think it has a chance," Carpenter said. "I just don't think I can predict any recruiting crowns right now because Ohio State always winds up in second. Even back in March and April when they were the hottest thing in recruiting and it was a national storyline, not just a national recruiting storyline, it was a national storyline period with what Ohio State was doing. Even after that, Alabama still roared back and took the crown from them. That's kind of the goal for the 2022 class is to be better than '21. That's what, talking to (four-star linebacker) C.J. (Hicks), initially his goal was, 'We're going to be better than the '21 class.'"

"There's some trash talk back and forth between C.J. and (four-star athlete) Dasan McCullough and the 2022 class, and then TreVeyon, Jack, Kyle and all them in the '21 class. And then last time I talked to C.J., after they got Quinn and (five-star wide receiver) Caleb (Burton), he was like, 'Yeah, they're not really talking much trash anymore. If we say anything, they're kind of keeping silent because they know,' and I think even guys in the '21 class think that the 2022 guys are going to surpass them."

Givler agreed that the recruiting numbers may prove that Ohio State's 2022 class can surpass the impressive numbers put up in 2021, but he also thinks it will be interesting to see if the talent is the same after everything COVID has caused these recruits to miss in their high school careers.

"It's not just that it's early, but so much of (which class will be better) goes into how strong the classes are nationally. So the No. 5 player in the country in one class might be much better than the No. 5 player in the country in another class if that class is weaker," Givler said. "I think the unknown here is I really don't think anyone can honestly say they know how good the 2022 class is from a national perspective."

"Half those kids didn't get a junior season. Some of them got partial junior seasons. There were really no camps. There has just not been a lot of evaluation opportunity for that class. So I think that's going to be the interesting component into trying to weigh '21 vs. '22 is how good is this class nationally in '22, because I don't think we know that yet."

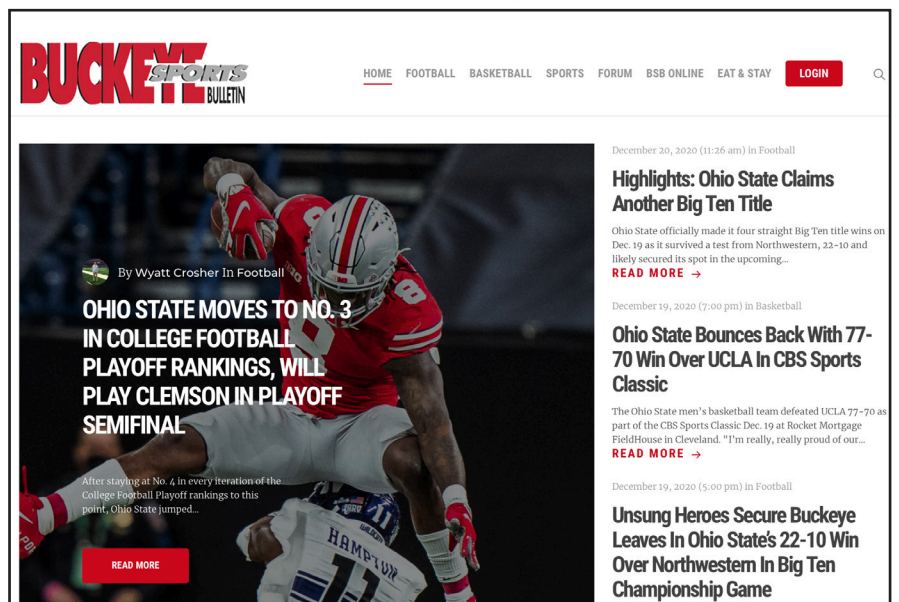
Having an even more impressive 2022 class than the top-two 2021 class seems to be a possibility, but Wasserman said that Ohio State fans should not always try to look forward when there is an extremely impressive group that has already signed for the Buckeyes right in front of them.

"It looks like they're off to a very similar start as they were when they started the 2021 class but like, when can it not be better anymore," Wasserman said. "They can continue rolling the way that they are in 2021, but to sit here and predict it's going to be better than maybe the best class ever made? It's like let that happen first and then we'll discuss it. At a certain point there's going to be a ceiling here."

"Where do you stop thinking can it be better, you know? So, I think you have to be careful about the slippery slope of expectations on how these recruiting classes should turn out because, frankly speaking, it couldn't be much better than it is right now."

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Germaine Rallies OSU To Win Over ASU In Rose Bowl

By STEVE HELWAGEN

Throughout the fall, Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be "playing" its 40th Anniversary football season with recaps of the biggest Ohio State games of each corresponding week or type of game in our publishing history. In this issue we move to the biggest non-BCS or CFP bowl games. The Rose Bowl following the 1996 season was an easy choice. It was one of the biggest wins in the John Cooper era and the victory came at the expense of an outstanding Arizona State team and its colorful and talented quarterback, Jake "The Snake" Plummer. Additional features about the dramatic win over the Sun Devils will be reprinted at BuckeyeSports.com on Thursday, Dec. 24.

A timing snafu in the final minute of the 1997 Rose Bowl caused referee Terry Monk to ask for additional time to be put on the clock.

When the timekeeper accidentally put 46

minutes on the clock instead of 46 seconds, the crowd of 100,635 roared its approval.

You see, nobody wanted to see the 83rd edition of the Rose Bowl come to an end. But it did, and Ohio State – behind last-minute heroics by quarterback Joe Germaine and receivers David Boston and Dimitrios Stanley – made sure it had the last laugh in a thrilling 20-17 win over No. 2-ranked Arizona State in the Pasadena, Calif., classic.

"It doesn't get any better than this," OSU coach John Cooper said simply after his team drove 65 yards to the winning touchdown in the game's waning moments. The capper was Germaine's 5-yard TD pass to Boston, coming with 19 seconds left.

That touchdown effectively answered one by Arizona State's slippery Jake "The Snake" Plummer, who gave the Sun Devils a 17-14 lead – and many thought the game – with his 11-yard TD run with 1:40 left.

But Germaine, back in a relief role behind Stanley Jackson after starting the Michigan game, and the fourth-ranked Buckeyes had one more trick up their sleeve.

Other 40th Anniversary Rose Bowls

In addition to Ohio State's win over Arizona State to cap off the 1996 season, the Buckeyes made the trip to Pasadena three other times in the BSB era. The year listed is the season after which the Rose Bowl was played.

1984: Freshman receiver Cris Carter had nine receptions for 172 yards – breaking a 50-year-old yardage record – and a score, and Keith Byars rushed for 109 yards on 23 carries, but it wasn't enough as the Buckeyes fell to USC, 20-17. Ohio State outgained the Trojans, 403-261, but Mike Tomczak was guilty of three interceptions, and the Buckeyes also lost a fumble. Rich Spangler hit on three field goals, including a Rose Bowl-record 52-yarder.

2009: Terrelle Pryor helped Ohio State to a 26-17 victory over Oregon. Pryor was 23 of 37 passing for 266 yards and a pair of scores and added another 72 yards on 20 carries. Pryor connected with DeVier Posey from 17 yards out to bring the score to its final margin with 7:02 to play. Posey had eight catches for 101 yards, and Dane Sanzenbacher added nine receptions for 64 yards.

2018: Ohio State took a 28-3 lead midway through the third quarter and then held off a furious comeback attempt by Washington for a 28-23 victory in Urban Meyer's last game as Buckeye coach. Tailback Myles Gaskin passed for one score and ran for two others during the Huskies comeback. Gaskin, who had 24 rushing yards in the first half, finished the game with 121 yards on 24 carries. Dwayne Haskins led Ohio State with 251 yards passing and three scoring tosses, while on defense, Brendon White had eight solo tackles, two for loss, a pass breakup and an interception on a two-point conversion attempt.

"We knew what we had to do," said Germaine, named the game's most outstanding player after completing 9 of 17 passes for 131 yards and two touchdowns.

"We worked a lot on it in practice, and we were fortunate enough to move it down the field and score," he said.

The win – just the school's sixth Rose Bowl triumph in 13 tries, lifted OSU to an 11-1 finish.

"That is a quality football team," said ASU coach Bruce Snyder, whose team's national championship dreams were shattered with its own 11-1 finish. "That was a hell of a drive that late in the game."

As astounding as OSU's late-game offensive heroics were, the Buckeye defense also played a major part in the win.

The high-powered, Plummer-led ASU offense came into the game averaging 42.8 points per game. But with OSU cornerback Shawn Springs shutting down top receiving target Keith Poole and linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer striking for three sacks of Plummer, OSU held ASU to a season-low 17 points.

"It was a long day offensively," Snyder said. "We got very little done considering what we accomplished all year. I give a great deal of credit to Ohio State."

"Those kids played hard and it was a little bit different schemes than what we've seen this year in our schedule."

Even with Poole all but removed from the offense, Plummer nearly delivered the win.

"Their defense was relentless and it kept me out of rhythm to a certain extent," said Plummer, who finished 19 of 35 passing for 201 yards with an interception.

"The blitzes were working for us," said OSU defensive end Matt Finkes, who notched one of OSU's six sacks. "We got to him a lot. It's not like we were going to sit

back and wait for him to pick us apart."

After being held to a three-and-out on its first possession, the OSU offense found a rhythm on its second drive. The Buckeyes drove 83 yards in 11 plays to the game's first touchdown.

Jackson opened the drive by hitting Dee Miller for a 10-yard gain. He hooked up with Miller for an 8-yard gain to convert a third down.

Jackson then got outside the pocket and scrambled for 20 yards, hurdling ASU's Scott Von der Ahe for a first down at the ASU 25. A play later, he hit fullback Matt Keller for a 22-yard gain down to the ASU 4.

The Buckeyes were backed up five yards by an illegal procedure penalty.

Jackson threw two incomplete passes before scrambling right and drilling a ball into Boston just inside the end zone for the touchdown.

Boston leaned out of bounds to make the catch in front of ASU's Mitchell Freedman, barely keeping one foot inside the sideline.

The officials conferred for what seemed an eternity before ruling Boston's catch a touchdown. The catch gave OSU a 7-0 lead with 5:04 left in the first quarter.

"Stan started scrambling," Boston said. "I guess he got hurried and he scrambled. I thought he was going to run, but I just set up there in the end zone, caught the ball and kept my foot inbounds."

"My foot was definitely in. That wasn't that close."

Arizona State answered to start the second quarter, moving 80 yards in 12 plays to tie the game at 7-7. Plummer completed 5 of 6 passes on the drive, including a miraculous 25-yard completion to Ricky Boyer for the touchdown.

It was a miracle in the sense the officials called the play by Boyer, who leaped around

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OSU's Antoine Winfield, a catch. Television replays showed the ball hitting the ground as Boyer hauled it in. Nonetheless, ASU had knotted the game at 7-7 with 10:04 left in the first half.

Arizona State took over after an OSU punt at its own 45. Plummer completed a 23-yard pass to Lenzie Jackson to the OSU 13, but an Arizona State late hit penalty backed the Sun Devils up and they had to settle for Robert Nycz's 37-yard field goal to take a 10-7 lead with 9:12 left in the third quarter.

It did not take Germaine and the Buckeyes long to regain the lead. He hit a diving Stanley for a 16-yard gain. He then went play action and threw deep to Stanley on a post pattern. The senior flanker got behind ASU's Jason Simmons, avoided his diving tackle attempt and was gone for the 72-yard touchdown, giving the Buckeyes a 14-10 lead with 8:23 left in the third quarter.

"That was a simple post route," Stanley said of OSU's longest pass play of the season. "Joe put the ball there and I just took it to the house."

OSU seemed to take control of the game midway through the fourth quarter when tailback Pepe Pearson, who finished with 111 yards on a season-low 13 carries, darted through a gaping hole provided by tackle Orlando Pace and got the Buckeyes out of the shadow of their goal line by rolling for a 62-yard gain to the ASU 35. The offense faltered, though, and the game changed dramatically when Josh Jackson's 37-yard field goal attempt was blocked by Brent Burnstein with 5:36 left.

The Sun Devils returned the blocked kick for a touchdown but were penalized for a forward lateral on the play. Nonetheless, Plummer took over at his own 42.

He conducted a methodical 10-play, 58-yard scoring drive. The key play was his gutsy 29-yard completion to a streaking Lenzie Jackson down the left sideline on fourth-and-4 at the OSU 37. That gave ASU a first-and-goal at the OSU 8.

Fullback Jeff Paulk gained a yard on first down, but OSU's Greg Bellisari sacked Plummer back at the 11 on second down. Trailing by four, ASU used a timeout with 1:47 left to plan its third-down play.

Plummer dropped back but couldn't find anybody open. Katzenmoyer got one hand on him, but the slippery Snake sidestepped him, tucked the ball and headed toward the goal line.

There, he dove between two OSU defenders to complete an 11-yard touchdown run. The extra point gave ASU a 17-14 lead with 1:40 left.

"I came up the middle and got my hands on him, but he just slipped out and the next thing I know he was running into the end zone to score a touchdown," Katzenmoyer said. "I thought the game was over."

Finkes added, "It was really disappointing. That play, the way things have been going for us at the end of the season the last four years, could have killed us. But luckily that wasn't the case."

Ohio State had one last gasp left, taking over at its own 35 after Matt Keller returned ASU's short kickoff. Germaine converted a pair of third downs by hooking up with the reliable Stanley for gains of 11 and 13 yards. Another 12-yard hookup between the two moved OSU toward field goal range at the ASU 29 with 46 seconds left.

"You could just look into Joe's eyes and see the determination," Pace said.

Two of OSU's next four plays were negated when first Stanley and then Boston drew pass interference calls on ASU defenders. As a result, Ohio State was given a first down at

the ASU 5 with 24 seconds left.

Snyder, meanwhile, was not pleased.

"I would think, and I know this is sensitive to officials, you would really want to make sure they were infractions before you threw the flag – and maybe they were.

"But from my point of view, I thought it was just guys battling for the ball."

On first down at the 5, Germaine dropped and threw to a wide open Boston at the 2. The freshman turned outside and trotted into the end zone untouched for the game-winning score.

"I'm supposed to just come down the line and clear out for (Stanley)," Boston said. "If that's not open, I'm supposed to go back out. The corner jumped inside. He thought I was going to slant. I went back outside and there was nobody there."

ASU's Burnstein added some suspense to the outcome when he blocked Josh Jackson's PAT attempt, leaving OSU a narrow 20-17 lead with 19 seconds left.

Redmond returned the ensuing kickoff to the ASU 34. Plummer connected with tight end Steve Bush for a 13-yard gain to the ASU 47 with seven seconds left.

Plummer then hit Jackson down the middle of the field to the OSU 35. He could not get down, though, to stop the clock. OSU defenders Damon Moore and Winfield sandwiched him there just as time expired, touching off a massive Ohio State celebration.

"A couple of tick ticks left and maybe we would have gotten a field goal and gone into overtime," Plummer surmised. "But I guess that's why they've got a clock."

Rose Bowl Notes

• Although Snyder was upset at the game-shaping pass interference calls, Ohio State was actually penalized 10 times for 75 yards in the game, compared to nine flags for 85 yards on ASU.

The OSU bench was assessed a 15-yard penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct after a confusing 5-yard penalty for illegal substitution was called on the defense after a timeout.

Linebacker Ryan Miller explained the substitution penalty.

"What we would do is we'd stand at about the hash and when they'd run in their personnel, we'd run in our change. We did it against Minnesota and Michigan. It was a little shady. They hadn't called it all game, and they didn't call it after that."

The unsportsmanlike conduct penalty came at a key point as ASU was driving late in the third quarter at the OSU 28, but Springs and Katzenmoyer teamed to bail out the unnamed OSU assistant who was flagged. Springs tipped a pass to Poole and Katzenmoyer intercepted it to end a threat.

• OSU's bowl record improved to 13-16. The Buckeyes ended a 23-year drought in the Rose Bowl, where they had not won since the 1974 game.

The Buckeyes improved to 2-0 against Arizona State. The only other meeting was a regular season win in 1980.

OSU's win trimmed the Pac-10's lead in the series to 26-25 in the 51 years of the Pac-10/Big Ten Rose Bowl agreement. The Big Ten has now won four of the last five Rose Bowls.

The Buckeyes became the 30th team in 83 Rose Bowls to spoil an opponent's unbeaten season. The last time it happened was 1980 when USC nipped OSU 17-16. OSU turned the trick twice before, beating USC in 1969 and Cal in 1950.

This story originally appeared in the Jan. 11, 1997, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 20, Arizona State 17

Jan. 1, 1997 – Rose Bowl; Pasadena, Calif.

| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|----|
| OHIO STATE | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 20 |
| ARIZONA STATE | 0 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 17 |

First Quarter

OSU – Boston, 9-yard pass from S. Jackson (Jo. Jackson kick), 5:04.

Second Quarter

ASU – R. Boyer, 25-yard pass from Plummer (Nycz kick), 10:04.

Third Quarter

ASU – Nycz, 37-yard kick, 9:12.

OSU – Stanley, 72-yard pass from Germaine (Jo. Jackson kick), 8:23.

Fourth Quarter

ASU – Plummer, 11-yard run (Nycz kick), 1:40.

OSU – Boston, 5-yard pass from Germaine (kick failed), 0:19.

Att. – 100,635

Weather – 68 degrees, overcast; wind 3 MPH from south.

| Team Statistics | | |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| | OSU | ASU |
| First Downs | 18 | 18 |
| Rushing | 8 | 5 |
| Passing | 8 | 11 |
| Penalty | 2 | 2 |
| Rushes-Yards | 30-133 | 41-75 |
| Passing Yards | 190 | 201 |
| Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.) | 15-31-0 | 19-35-1 |
| Offensive Plays | 61 | 76 |
| Total Net Yards | 323 | 276 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 4-13 | 7-18 |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 0-0 | 1-1 |
| Punts-Avg. | 8-44.9 | 8-43.0 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 1-0 | 1-0 |
| Penalties | 10-75 | 9-85 |
| Time of Possession | 26:43 | 33:17 |

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Pearson 13-111; Wiley 7-32; S. Jackson 5-6; Keller 2-4; Germaine 3-(-20). ASU: T. Battle 18-34; Redmond 8-26; Poole 1-13; Paulk 3-7; Plummer 11-(-5).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: S. Jackson 6-14-0-59-1; Germaine 9-17-0-131-2. ASU: Plummer 19-35-1-201-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Stanley 5-124; Boston 4-20; Keller 3-24; D. Miller 2-18; Pearson 1-4. ASU: L. Jackson 5-71; T. Battle 5-30; Bush 3-41; R. Boyer 3-39; Poole 1-10; Kendall 1-7; Paulk 1-3.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – OSU: Bartholomew 8-44.9-56. ASU: Anderson 8-43.0-59.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Boston 3-15. ASU: Redmond 3-23.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Springs 2-48; Keller 1-14. ASU: T. Battle 3-54; Redmond 1-20.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – OSU: None. ASU: None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Katzenmoyer 1-18. ASU: None.

SACKS – OSU: Katzenmoyer (3), Bellisari, Finkes, Kelly. ASU: D. Smith (2), Tillman, Freedman, Burnstein.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Katzenmoyer 5-18; Vrabel 2-6; Finkes 2-6; Kelly 1-8; Bellisari 1-4; Winfield 1-1. ASU: D. Smith 2-18; Tillman 2-6; Freedman 1-11; Burnstein 1-5; Rodgers 1-3; Amey 1-2.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU: Moore 8-4-12; Bellisari 5-4-9; Katzenmoyer 7-1-8; Vrabel 6-2-8; Howard 6-2-8; Finkes 5-2-7; Winfield 5-1-6; Kelly 4-1-5; Springs 4-1-5; R. Miller 2-1-3; Garnett 2-0-2; Fickell 1-1-2; Swinn 1-0-1; Griffin 1-0-1. ASU: Tillman 6-5-11; D. Smith 5-3-8; Von der Ahe 6-1-7; Soward 5-1-6; Freedman 3-3-6; Rodgers 2-3-5; Richardson 2-2-4; J. Simmons 2-2-4; Burnstein 2-1-3; T. Simmons 2-0-2; Tommasini 1-0-1; Reynolds 1-0-1; C. Jackson 1-0-1; Amey 1-0-1; Plummer 1-0-1; Mustafa 0-1-1; McCook 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – OSU: Boston, Pace, R. Murphy, Porter, Daniels, Gohlstin, Jones, S. Jackson, Keller, Pearson, Stanley, Finkes, Garnett, Fickell, Vrabel, Bellisari, Katzenmoyer, R. Miller, Springs, Moore, Kelly, Howard, D. Miller, Lumpkin, B. Houser, Germaine, Calhoun, Wiley, Je. Jackson, Tillman, Clark, Bell, Wilson, McClellion, Bryant, Winfield, Jo. Jackson, Stamp, Bartjolomew, K. Houser, Malfatt, Berry, Colson, Hoying, Knisley, Gwinn, Burden, Rudzinski, Griffin, LaVrar, Gilbert, Furrey, Wisniewski, Day. ASU: L. Jackson, Mitchell, Roque, Murphy, Robertson, Thompson, Ruegamer, Plummer, T. Battle, Paulk, Poole, Burnstein, Swayda, Ford, Rodgers, Amey, D. Smith, Tillman, Von der Ahe, Richardson, J. Simmons, Soward, Freedman, Bush, Kendall, Romero, Kelly, Campbell, Redmond, R. Boyer, Baumgartner, Staat, Simpson, C. Jackson, T. Simmons, Nycz, Anderson, Finn, T. Johnson, Farlow, Mustafa, Morgan, Clark, Williams, M. Brown, Turpin, L. Johnson, Reynolds, Tommasini, McCook, Beem, Hoffman, Bates.

Bucks Overcome Fourth-Quarter Deficit In Rose Bowl

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 and media members who covered them.

The 1996 Ohio State football team had outscored its opponents 42.6-10.1 on its way to a 10-0 start to the season. Ohio State seemed destined for its first national championship since 1968 but fell 13-9 to rival Michigan to conclude the regular season.

"We would get tight in the Michigan games," former Ohio State quarterback Stanley Jackson told BSB. "There's no reason why they should have beaten us, but they did. That '96 team was built for a championship because the offensive line was phenomenal and the defense was spectacular. If you've got those two components, you should win most of your games, and we only lost one."

Despite the loss, the Buckeyes were set to travel to Pasadena, Calif., for a Rose Bowl matchup with unbeaten Pac-12 champion Arizona State.

According to former Buckeye Sports Bulletin editor Steve Helwage, who still covers Ohio State for 247Sports, the opportunity to go to the Rose Bowl was bittersweet for the Buckeyes after losing to their rivals for the seventh time in nine years.

"It was just the same scenario all over again," Helwage recalled. "Every year, it just seemed to be the same thing, that they would get close to doing something big and Michigan would beat them. This time the difference was they already had clinched the Big Ten the week before when they beat Indiana, and everybody else had kind of fallen by the wayside, so they had the Rose Bowl locked up when

they played Michigan. And that was pretty miserable. I mean, they would've won the national championship if they had won both games, Michigan and the Rose Bowl.

"At the same time, they were going to play in the Rose Bowl for the first time in 12 years, and it had been a long time since they were considered that good. In some ways it was a breakthrough, but in some ways, it was just the same old thing over again."

For former Ohio State assistant coach Bill Conley, the heartbreaking four-point loss to Michigan hurt even more because the '96 team thought it could end the program's 28-year national title drought.

"The loss was obviously devastating going into that bowl game," Conley said. "And I really believe that if we would have had a loss earlier in the year against another team, and then we came on at the end of the year and beat Michigan, and with that great victory in the Rose Bowl, we would have had a chance to be No. 1 in the country."

Although Ohio State and Arizona State possessed two of the nation's most potent offenses, the two teams fought to a 7-7 stalemate at halftime. The Sun Devils took a 10-7 lead on a third-quarter field goal, but the Buckeyes quickly responded and flashed their offensive firepower.

After a penalty on the ensuing kickoff forced Ohio State to start from its own 12-yard line, third-year sophomore quarterback Joe Germaine connected with senior wide receiver Dimitrios Stanley for a 16-yard gain. On the next play, Stanley – a Worthington, Ohio, native – beat the Sun Devil secondary for a 72-yard touchdown to give his team a 14-10 lead.

"It was just a simple post pattern, he got behind the defense, and Joe Germaine led him perfectly," Helwage said. "He caught it near midfield and just kept on trucking. They couldn't catch him. It was kind of a dream play. You grow up as a young kid thinking, 'If I get to play in the Rose Bowl, I'd love to catch a bomb.'"

Later in the third quarter, Arizona State quarterback Jake Plummer had an opportunity to put more points up, but the Buckeye defense stepped up. On third-and-9 from the Ohio State 27, Plummer was picked off by freshman linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer to regain possession with 1:56 until the final frame.

The '96 Buckeye defense that featured seniors Luke Fickell, Mike Vrabel and Matt Finkes on the defensive line, with seniors Greg Bellisari and Ryan Miller next to Katzenmoyer at linebacker and Shawn Springs, Damon Moore and Antoine Winfield in the secondary, rose to the occasion against the Sun Devils.

"He was showing the form," Helwage said of Katzenmoyer. "The next two years he'd be an All-American for Ohio State. He was a dominant player his three years at Ohio State. He was on a veteran defense with a lot of seniors on the defensive line with Fickell, Vrabel and Finkes, and he had two seniors playing alongside him with Bellisari and Miller. So he was surrounded by veteran players who could help him in many ways, and that allowed him to just turn it loose and use his athletic ability."

"They turned him loose, and he was the perfect middle linebacker for that scheme. He could just do some amazing things athletically. He was unblockable at

times and got off blocks and made plays."

Katzenmoyer starred in the Rose Bowl, recording eight tackles (seven solo), with five tackles for loss, three sacks and the game's lone interception. Moore led the game with 12 tackles (eight solo), while Vrabel and Finkes both recorded two of the defense's 12 TFL.

"The whole defense played great," said Conley, who coached defensive ends that year. "And Andy is such a good athlete, and he could run like a deer for a big guy, and also, he was physical. Everybody knows he was physical when he hit somebody. He really stepped it up a notch and took (the stage) there, but the whole defense really played great the whole game."

What made the stellar performance from the Silver Bullet defense so impressive was that Arizona State had entered the Rose Bowl averaging 42.8 points per game, and Plummer was among the best signal callers in the country.

"He was a very good athlete," Conley said of Plummer. "He was a playmaker. We knew that stopping him was obviously the key to the game. We had an excellent defensive game plan because they were somewhat predictable by formation, and we really did a good job of holding them down compared to what they had been doing."

Although Ohio State had done a good job defending Plummer and the Sun Devils through three quarters, eventually the quarterback known as "The Snake" broke through.

The Scarlet and Gray were set to go up seven points with a field goal, but the 37-yard attempt was blocked, and Arizona State took over at its 42 with 5:36 left in the game.

Living up to his hype, Plummer converted a third-and-5 and a fourth-and-4 as part of a 10-play, 58-yard drive that ended in glory for the quarterback. On third-and-goal from the Ohio State 11, Plummer tucked the ball and ran for what looked like the game-winning touchdown, giving his team a 17-14 lead with just 1:40 remaining.

"It was a crazy game," Helwage said. "That was Jake Plummer. They called him 'The Snake.' That was his big thing. He had all these good cutbacks and was known as a clutch player. They went down the field, it was third down and he had a scramble, and he cut back and went down the middle of the field and scored. They go ahead with 1:40 left, and you're just left with this deflated feeling, that's unbelievable."

The crushed feeling on the Ohio State sideline quickly turned to animosity when Arizona State began celebrating a bit too early.

"When Jake scored that last touchdown, they started putting on national champion hats on the sideline," Conley recalled. "And we could see that from the press box. Therefore the players could see it from the sideline. So that was just a little extra incentive like, 'Not so fast, there's still over a minute left.'"

The Rose Bowl showdown between two high-powered offenses had been a defensive struggle for nearly the entire game, but it came down to who could score last. Germaine and the Buckeyes needed to drive through uncharacteristic weather conditions in Pasadena.

"It was crazy. Being there, it was almost surreal, this light mist was falling, it was kind of half raining," Helwage recalled. "Ordinarily, it's like a sunny day out there, but the weather wasn't like that. It wasn't cold, it was just kind of a light mist and it was getting dark, and it was just a weird vibe, like the Twilight Zone."

The Buckeyes began their possession at their 35 but quickly found themselves facing third-and-10 after two incomplete passes. Germaine hit Stanley for an 11-yard gain to move the chains, but the clock was ticking. Two more incompletions led to another third-and-10, and again, Germaine looked Stanley's way, connecting for a 13-yard gain to the Arizona State 41. Another completion to Stanley moved the ball to the 29.

"The thing about Joe was his calming nature," Conley said. "He's just a guy that was very confident, but he was not a loud, verbal guy at all. His calmness helped us out. The players responded to him and the way he handled the situation. We needed a couple crucial plays to keep the drive alive, and Joe was positioned perfectly."

After a false start, Ohio State moved up to the ASU 19 on a defensive pass interference call. However, Germaine threw two more incompletions to set up yet another third-and-10 with just 28 seconds left. Another pass interference call against the Sun Devils set the Buckeyes up at the 5, where freshman wide receiver David Boston etched his name in history.

"They hit the pass to David Boston with 19 seconds left for a dramatic victory," Helwage said. "It's one of the better games, obviously. In terms of bowl victories, it's probably one of the most dramatic Ohio State's ever had."

"Boston was just so explosive; he was such a strong player. He never lost a jump ball. He was always able to out-muscle the opponent. He was just a great all-around receiver for Ohio State. They'll run that play back on the big board for 100 years of him catching the touchdown pass and doing that strut in the end zone when they won the game."

For Conley and the rest of the team, beating Arizona State in the Rose Bowl meant more than just toppling a top-tier opponent on a national stage. The Buckeyes had redemption on their minds and something to prove.

"I know we felt like we were the best team in the country. All the coaches thought that, and the players thought that," Conley said. "It really was our chance of bouncing back after the Michigan loss and proving that to everybody. And we did exactly that."

Even though the Buckeyes were not named national champions following their victory over Arizona State, the fact that they returned to the Rose Bowl and left victorious had a lasting impact.

"The Rose Bowl is a special game," Helwage said. "It doesn't mean as much today because we have the playoff and everything, but back then, the Big Ten champion went to the Rose Bowl every year. And Ohio State hadn't been there in 12 years and hadn't won one in 23 years. So for them to break through and win one, that was the story. That was just unheard of. A whole generation of Ohio State fans had never seen them win a Rose Bowl. That kind of started what became the golden age, this modern era."



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"Your Head to Toe Buckeye Source"

Towns' Ohio State Debut Was Short But Sweet

His contribution to the game was negligible, but graduate transfer forward Seth Towns left an impact on Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann after the Buckeyes' 77-70 victory over UCLA in the CBS Sports Classic in Cleveland on Dec. 19.

"I can't tell you how happy I was to see that young man on the floor again," Holtmann said. "He's come such a long way. He's got a long way to go, but I'm thrilled for him."

The reason for Holtmann's excitement was seeing Towns play his first game in about 33 months.

day before the game Holtmann was asked when Towns might debut.

"I can't tell you an exact timeline," the coach said. "I think it could be certainly in a month or it could be in a couple days. We're taking it game by game with how he feels after certain practices."

Following the game, Holtmann explained the decision to insert Towns.

"With Seth, we had talked about it yesterday," Holtmann said. "He said he wasn't sure if he was ready to go yesterday. After the shootaround today, he said, 'Coach, I think I'm ready to go.' And I said, 'Listen, I don't want you to feel pressure to play. This is your decision.'"

Changes Bruin

First, the tip-off for the Ohio State-North Carolina game at the CBS Sports Classic was switched to avoid going head-to-head with the Buckeyes' Big Ten title game in football that kicked off at noon.

Instead of a 2 p.m. start, Ohio State and the Tar Heels were moved to the 4:30-ish slot following Kentucky and UCLA. Then, three days before the game, the teams were swapped so that UCLA of the Pac-12 would face the Buckeyes because of similar COVID-19 protocols among the conferences.

Holtmann said Dec. 18 that Ohio State did not initiate the change. He said he had a phone call with North Carolina coach Roy Williams the morning of Dec. 16 as the OSU players and staff were being given COVID-19 tests prior to playing at Purdue that night.

"We had gotten contacted the night before the Purdue game that there was some conflict between, I guess between Kentucky and UCLA on maybe some testing protocols," Holtmann said. "We talked for about 15 minutes and both agreed to be OK with it if it was going to keep the event intact."

Holtmann said the players weren't concerned with who they would be playing in Cleveland as much as the game was to be played at all given the numerous cancellations throughout college basketball.

"I just explained how it went down but they were excited to play," he said.

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 | 6-4 | 175 | ★★★★ | Akron (Ohio) St. Vincent-St. Mary |
| Kalen Etzler | PF | 6-8 | 195 | ★★★★ | 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 |

"North Carolina, UCLA, Kentucky, any of the three, you're talking about certainly blue-blood basketball programs they were excited to play. So it wasn't a situation where they necessarily voiced any preference on one team over the other."

Make A Guess

With one of (hopefully) 20 Big Ten games in the books for Ohio State, it's an opportunity to review the preseason prognosticators.

Although the Big Ten no longer does a preseason poll, The Athletic and The Columbus Dispatch have collaborated the past four seasons on the unofficial poll by gathering ballots from two beat writers per team.

Illinois was tabbed the favorite by garnering 376 out of a possible 392 points (14 for first; 13 for second, etc.) and 16 of the 28 first-place votes. Ohio State was picked seventh.

Here's the full poll with first-place votes.

1. Illinois 376 (16)
2. Iowa 350 (6)
3. Wisconsin 347 (6)
4. Michigan State 323
5. Rutgers 249
6. Michigan 241
7. **Ohio State 229**
8. Indiana 212
9. Purdue 179
10. Maryland 141
11. Minnesota 121
12. Penn State 72
13. Nebraska 54
14. Northwestern 47

Iowa's Luke Garza (24 votes) was viewed as the player of the year over Ayo Dosunmu of Illinois (4).

The Illini's Adam Miller (12) was the choice for freshman of the year, edging Khristian Lander of Indiana (10). Other frosh receiving votes were Hunter Dickinson (4) and Zeb Jackson (1) of Michigan and Purdue's Ethan Morton (1).

The picks for first-team all-conference were: Garza (28); Dosunmu (28); Trayce Jackson-Davis, Indiana (24); Kofi Cockburn, Illinois (11); Nate Reuvers, Wisconsin (11); and Franz Wagner, Michigan (11).

No Buckeyes received all-conference votes.

Remember Them?

With the Big Ten schedule under way and fresh off a victory over UCLA, it's understandable if the earlier nondescript, nonconference opponents are an afterthought, or maybe no thought at all.

But what Illinois State accomplished after playing the Buckeyes in the season

opener and what Cleveland State did prior to its Dec. 13 loss in Columbus are notable.

For Cleveland State, it was a record that the Vikings would rather forget from the 101-46 pounding administered by Ohio one week before facing the Buckeyes.

The Bobcats went on a 40-0 run to set the NCAA mark in a game involving two Division I teams. The previous record was 39 straight points by Oklahoma against Weber State on Dec. 22, 2014, for a 49-4 lead.

The Ohio streak began with 43 seconds in the first half and the Bobcats opened the second with a 35-0 run for an 86-25 score that ended with 8:03 left in the game on a free throw. During that span, Cleveland State missed 17 shots and did not make its first field goal of the second half until the 5:10 mark. The Vikings missed all 12 three-point attempts in the second half.

To their credit, the Vikings responded to give the Buckeyes a challenge before falling 67-61.

The combined 128 points did not come close to what Illinois State exploded for on Dec. 2 in a home game against Division III school Greenville (Ill.) University.

The Redbirds set an NCAA record for field-goal percentage (.846) and assists (57) in a 177-108 victory. The Redbirds' point total was the fourth most ever by a Division I team.

Greenville plays the "The System" – a style popularized by another D-III program, Grinnell (Iowa) College, in which frequent substituting is used for a continual trapping defense that leads to an offense that emphasizes shooting as quickly as possible, preferably three-pointers after crossing midcourt. Greenville was 14 of 55 from beyond the arc vs. Illinois State.

Last season, Greenville set the D-III record for points in a 200-146 win against Fontbonne.

However, the game against Illinois State was the first time this season that Greenville surpassed the century mark. It might have had to do with playing all D-I schools prior to Illinois State, losing to Murray State (173-95), Samford (174-99) and Kansas City in a defensive struggle (138-97).

So, how did Illinois State, which lost 94-67 to the Buckeyes on Nov. 25, hit 70 of 83 shots vs. Greenville? They made 34 layups and 27 dunks.

Illinois State made 32 of 35 field goals in the first half for an 83-50 lead then popped in 94 points in the second half.

Anybody for the Buckeyes scheduling Greenville for next season? Now, that might be a nonconference game people remember.

COURT REPORT

Craig Merz

It was March 11, 2018, when Towns sustained a knee injury while playing for Harvard in the Ivy League championship. Since the injury, the Columbus native has undergone multiple surgeries to aid his recovery and transferred to Ohio State this year.

At 6-8, 230 pounds, he will offer depth and experience behind sophomore E.J. Liddell with an eye on a bigger role as he works into game shape.

Holtmann recently made it a point to say Towns will not immediately be the same caliber of player he was for Harvard.

Towns in 2017-18 averaged 16.0 points, 5.7 rebounds and 1.8 assists to become the fourth Harvard player, third sophomore, to be named the Ivy League Player of the Year. The hope is that Towns will play a vital role when the games really matter in March. For the Buckeyes, it would be akin to a pro team acquiring a key player at the trading deadline.

He entered the game with 2:47 left in the first half and OSU up 35-34 on UCLA. Towns missed a three-pointer at the 2:07 mark and exited with 28 seconds to go before the half for a total of 2:19 of action.

Not that that number mattered. The

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Buckeyes Bounce Back Vs. Bruins After First Loss

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Coming off a shaky performance in a six-point victory over Cleveland State on Dec. 13, the Ohio State men's basketball team again struggled without standout sophomore forward E.J. Liddell, who was out with an illness.

Although he is a fifth-year senior, CJ Walker understands the Buckeyes are an inexperienced team with key players who are underclassmen.

"At the end of the day, we're a learning and growing team, so we're just building our chemistry," Walker said Dec. 13. "It's kind of different in these types of environments. It's hard to win with no fans, so you've just got to adjust. And every team comes in here playing hard and wants to make a statement like Cleveland State did. They came in and played harder than us today. We had to adjust, and we did in the second half. We're just learning from here and getting better each and every day."

After the Buckeyes fell, 67-60, to Purdue on the road Dec. 16, head coach Chris Holtmann emphasized how his new-look team needed to improve in some areas of weakness ahead of a tough matchup with UCLA.

"They were certainly disappointed. It was a game that certainly we had chances, we were able to climb back and put it within striking distance," Holtmann said Dec. 18 after the loss to the Boilers. "These are great learning experiences for us as a group, and that's what we really tried to stress. We can continue to learn and grow from an experience like that. You don't fully know about your team until you go through rough stretches, and that happens in college basketball."

Just three days after the loss at Purdue, Ohio State traveled to Cleveland to take on UCLA as part of the CBS Sports Classic. Freshman wing Eugene Brown said he and his teammates took Holtmann's message of playing with poise to heart in the 77-70 Buckeye victory.

"He made it clear that we did not play with enough poise late in that game," Brown said of the previous game with Purdue. "In this game, it was obviously a different situation because we had the lead late-game, but I feel like it definitely translated in the way we handled situations, slowed down our offense, figured certain things out and talked in transition."

OSU Falls At Purdue For 1st Loss

The Buckeyes missed Liddell, struggling to match Purdue's physicality in the 67-60 loss for its first defeat of the season on Dec. 16 at Mackey Arena in West Lafayette, Ind.

"We need to play with more force and physicality, both offensively and defensively," Holtmann said. "I didn't think we were as physical as we needed to be for this league."

Purdue (5-2, 1-0) pushed its second-half lead to 65-54 on a turnaround jumper by standout junior forward Trevion Williams with 3:40 to play, but the No. 20 Buckeyes (5-1, 0-1) battled back with a 5-0 run on two foul shots by Walker and a triple from junior guard Duane Washington in a 28-second spurt leaving 2:54 on the clock and a six-point margin.

Washington's three-pointer capped the play of the game for the Buckeyes. After Walker missed a jumper, freshman center Zed Key grabbed an offensive rebound, but his putback attempt was shut down and he hit the deck on the miss. The ball bounced out

to Key, still on the ground, and he punched it into the ground on a bounce to Walker, who swung it to Washington for the trey.

"He's making real progress for us," Holtmann said of Key, who had five points, three rebounds and a block. "He's figuring it out. He played 22 minutes tonight. That's a lot for freshmen in a Big Ten game, particularly when you're going against an all-league post guy. We got some good minutes from both of our freshmen. It was a big play; it cut it to two possessions. That was a good play. Obviously, we needed more of those throughout the course of the game."

The Ohio State run proved to not be enough, stalling out in the final three minutes to lead to the seven-point loss. Key's free throw with 23 seconds left was the only Buckeye point the rest of the way.

The Buckeyes led by as many as five points twice in the first half, the last time coming at 8:30 on a layup by Walker. The Boilermakers outscored Ohio State 21-11 the rest of the way to lead 38-33 at the break. Sasha Stefanovic paced Purdue with 10 points in the first 20 minutes.

After the Buckeyes cut their deficit to 42-38 with 17:57 left on a triple by Justice Sueing on an assist from Walker, the Boilermakers responded with a 6-0 streak to push their edge to double digits with 15:55 to play.

Ohio State showed resolve by answering the 6-0 Purdue stretch with one of its own on a stepback jumper by Walker, a dunk from fourth-year junior wing Musa Jallow, and a smooth left-handed layup by Washington to cut the lead to 48-44 with 14:22 left. The Buckeyes were never closer again.

The Buckeyes were led by 14 points from Sueing, while Williams led the Boilermakers with 16 points, nine rebounds and eight assists.

Overall, Ohio State struggled to get into a rhythm offensively, shooting just 37.9 percent from the field (22 of 58) and 25.0 percent from deep (6 of 24) and committed a season-high 13 turnovers.

"It's just the flow of basketball, and it happens," Walker said. "Some days you're hot, some days you're not. Every game is not going to be the same. It's just a matter of stepping up with confidence, shooting it and believing every shot is going in. And unfortunately, today they just didn't fall."

Washington scored 13 points for the Buckeyes, while Walker added six points and a team-high seven assists and senior forward Kyle Young added six points and led the team with eight boards. Purdue junior guard Eric Hunter scored 15 points, and redshirt freshman guard Brandon Newman added 10 points with seven rebounds. Stefanovic was held scoreless in 19 minutes in the second half.

Typical starters Walker and Young came off the bench because Holtmann wanted to send a message that his leaders needed to play harder on both ends. Jimmy Sotos and Jallow started in their place, adding three points and seven points, respectively.

"We were just attacking this game with the mind-set knowing it was going to be physical, but we just weren't able to be tough enough offensively and defensively," Young said. "Some things we need to look at and ratchet up for the next game."

Frosh Lead Bucks To Bounce-Back Win

Ohio State defeated UCLA 77-70 with clutch plays from its true freshmen as part of the CBS Sports Classic Dec. 19 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse in Cleveland.

Purdue 67, Ohio State 60

| Dec. 16, 2020 | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------|-------|-------|-------|----|----|------|--|--|
| Mackey Arena • West Lafayette, Ind. | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | F | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (5-1, 0-1) | 33 | 27 | 60 | | | | | | |
| Purdue (5-2, 1-0) | 38 | 29 | 67 | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total FG | FT | Reb. | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | |
| Sotos | 7 | 1-1 | 1-1 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | | |
| Jallow | 25 | 3-6 | 1-1 | 1-2 | 1 | 1 | 7 | | |
| Washington | 31 | 4-14 | 3-3 | 0-4 | 2 | 2 | 13 | | |
| Sueing | 32 | 5-11 | 2-4 | 2-3 | 2 | 3 | 14 | | |
| Key | 22 | 2-6 | 1-2 | 3-0 | 0 | 2 | 5 | | |
| Brown | 6 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | | |
| Ahrens | 16 | 1-4 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 1 | 3 | | |
| Walker | 35 | 2-7 | 2-2 | 1-2 | 7 | 4 | 6 | | |
| Young | 24 | 3-7 | 0-0 | 3-5 | 2 | 3 | 6 | | |
| Totals | 200 | 22-58 | 10-13 | 10-24 | 18 | 60 | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 37.9%. FT: 76.9%. Three-point field goals: 6-24 (Washington 2-9, Sueing 2-5, Ahrens 1-4, Brown 1-2, Jallow 0-2, Walker 0-1, Young 0-1) Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 3 (Jallow, Key, Young). Turnovers: 13 (Sueing 5, Washington 3, Walker 3, Jallow 2) Steals: 6 (Walker 2, Sueing 2, Jallow, Washington). | | | | | | | | | |
| Purdue | Total FG | FT | Reb. | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | |
| Gillis | 16 | 3-3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1 | 2 | 6 | | |
| Hunter | 32 | 6-11 | 2-3 | 0-1 | 2 | 2 | 15 | | |
| Newman | 26 | 4-6 | 0-1 | 0-7 | 0 | 3 | 10 | | |
| Edey | 12 | 0-3 | 1-1 | 2-3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | | |
| Stefanovic | 37 | 2-7 | 4-4 | 0-2 | 3 | 3 | 10 | | |
| Wheeler | 24 | 2-3 | 0-0 | 1-5 | 1 | 4 | 5 | | |
| Thompson | 13 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 2-0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Ivey | 8 | 2-7 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | | |
| Morton | 4 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Williams | 27 | 6-12 | 4-4 | 2-7 | 8 | 3 | 16 | | |
| Totals | 200 | 25-53 | 11-13 | 9-27 | 16 | 19 | 67 | | |
| Percentages: FG: 47.2%. FT: 84.6%. Three-point field goals: 6-20 (Stefanovic 2-7, Newman 2-3, Hunter 1-3, Wheeler 1-2, Ivey 0-4, Morton 0-1) Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Edey 2, Gillis). Turnovers: 16 (Hunter 4, Williams 4, Edey 3, Newman, Stefanovic, Wheeler, Thompson, TEAM). Officials: Sciroto, Carstensen, Pfeifer. Attendance: 250. | | | | | | | | | |

"I'm really, really proud of our guys," Holtmann said. "It was our best performance of the year against a really quality UCLA team that I've got tremendous respect for, that is going to be up near the top of the Pac-12, if not win it, and they're clearly an NCAA Tournament team. They're good. We played together more. We played with more poise and purpose on both ends."

Stellar defense and timely three-point shooting led to the seven-point victory for the Buckeyes (6-1) over the Bruins (5-2), and they were paced by 14 points from Washington. Key played well on both ends and finished with 11 points and six rebounds, while Brown connected on all three of his triples for nine points.

UCLA fourth-year junior forward Cody Riley broke up a 61-61 tie with a jumper at 6:22, but the Buckeyes bounced back with an 8-2 stretch, highlighted by two triples by Brown to take a 69-65 lead with 4:37 on the clock. The first three-pointer came off a blocked shot by Key on the other end.

"It all starts on defense," Key said. "Defense translates to offense, so we need to get stops. The block – we were trying to rotate in transition, and we got two open threes from Eugene, and he knocked them down. That was definitely the turning point in the game because we were down at that time, and those threes really helped us get ahead and shift momentum in our favor."

Brown was just glad to be trusted by his veteran teammates down the stretch.

"Honestly, it was a great feeling," Brown said. "For my teammates to trust me and allow me to get back-to-back threes in a tight-situation type of game like that, it just proves that we've been working hard together and we've just been doing the little things throughout practice. It was a trust thing."

Holtmann appreciated the confidence of Brown, a defensive specialist, to nail multiple clutch three-pointers.

"How critical were those two threes?" Holtmann said. "The young man comes in and defends well and then makes two threes

Ohio State 77, UCLA 70

| Dec. 19, 2020 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------|-------|-------|-------|----|----|------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse • Cleveland, Ohio | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 1 | | 2 | | F | | | | | | |
| UCLA (5-2) | | 38 | | 32 | | 70 | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (6-1) | | 39 | | 38 | | 77 | | | | | | |
| UCLA | Total FG | FT | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Riley | 21 | 7-9 | 1-2 | 1-4 | 1 | 4 | 15 | | | | | |
| Juzang | 31 | 5-13 | 2-2 | 2-1 | 2 | 1 | 13 | | | | | |
| Jaquez | 32 | 2-9 | 2-2 | 3-3 | 2 | 3 | 7 | | | | | |
| Smith | 20 | 2-8 | 2-2 | 1-4 | 0 | 0 | 6 | | | | | |
| Campbell | 34 | 1-10 | 1-2 | 0-1 | 5 | 1 | 3 | | | | | |
| Bernard | 28 | 1-3 | 6-7 | 3-3 | 3 | 4 | 8 | | | | | |
| Kyman | 8 | 1-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | | | | | |
| Hill | 19 | 4-6 | 2-5 | 3-1 | 0 | 2 | 10 | | | | | |
| Singleton | 6 | 1-1 | 2-2 | 0-1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 24-60 | 18-24 | 18-19 | 13 | 18 | 70 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 40.0%. FT: 75.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-13 (Kyman 1-1, Singleton 1-1, Jaquez 1-2, Juzang 1-6, Smith 0-1, Campbell 0-1, Bernard 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 1 (Hill). Turnovers: 6 (Riley 2, Juzang, Jaquez, Smith, Singleton). Steals: 3 (Juzang, Jaquez, Campbell). | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total FG | FT | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Washington | 31 | 4-12 | 4-4 | 0-5 | 3 | 1 | 14 | | | | | |
| Walker | 35 | 3-6 | 4-4 | 0-2 | 4 | 2 | 10 | | | | | |
| Sueing | 20 | 2-5 | 2-2 | 1-4 | 1 | 3 | 6 | | | | | |
| Young | 23 | 2-4 | 3-5 | 2-2 | 0 | 3 | 7 | | | | | |
| Liddell | 19 | 4-8 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0 | 5 | 9 | | | | | |
| Sotos | 2 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Jallow | 28 | 3-5 | 1-4 | 1-2 | 3 | 2 | 8 | | | | | |
| Brown | 8 | 3-3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 10 | 1-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | | | | | |
| Key | 22 | 3-4 | 5-7 | 3-3 | 0 | 2 | 11 | | | | | |
| Towns | 2 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 25-50 | 19-26 | 11-20 | 11 | 19 | 77 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 73.1%. Three-point field goals: 8-22 (Brown 3-3, Washington 2-6, Ahrens 1-1, Liddell 1-3, Jallow 1-3, Walker 0-1, Young 0-1, Sotos 0-1, Towns 0-1, Sueing 0-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 4 (Walker, Jallow, Ahrens, Key). Turnovers: 7 (Washington 2, Walker 2, Sueing 2, Young). Steals: 2 (Liddell, Jallow). | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Officials: Ayers, Rastatter, Nelson. Attendance: 0. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

that really changed the game, honestly."

After UCLA fourth-year junior center Jalen Hill ended the 8-2 stretch with a powerful dunk to cut the OSU lead to 69-67 with 4:17 left, Ohio State scored four straight on a layup by Key and a pair of free throws by Walker for its first lead of more than five points at 73-67 with 2:52 remaining in the game.

Neither team made a field goal in the final 3:53 following Key's layup until a layup by Riley with 16 seconds to play, but the Buckeyes made all six of their foul shots to close the game, while the Bruins went 1 for 2 from the charity stripe in that closing span.

Ohio State had taken a 39-38 lead at halftime using balanced scoring. Liddell and Jallow each scored seven, and Walker and Washington added six apiece. The Buckeyes shot 55.6 from the floor in the first half but never led by more than six points, that coming early in the stanza and at the 9:09 mark on a three-pointer by Washington to make it 25-19.

Liddell returned to action after missing the previous two games with an illness, posting nine points in 19 minutes before fouling out with 7:21 left and Ohio State trailing 60-59.

At one point, Key cut a Buckeye deficit in half when he converted an and-one to trim the UCLA lead to 51-48 with 13:42 left, which incited his "finger guns" celebration that amused his teammates earlier in the season.

"I told everyone, every time it's an and-one, I'm doing the finger guns," Key said, "So, just be ready, don't laugh, it's going to happen."

Riley led the Blue and Gold with 15 points on 7-of-9 shooting, while Johnny Juzang scored 13 and Hill added 10. After the Bruins shot 48.1 percent from the floor in the first half, the Scarlet and Gray held them to just 33.3 percent in the second half.

"We made a couple of strategy changes in some of their flow game," Holtmann said, "but the biggest thing is we just stood our ground a little bit more on their ability to deck the ball."

OSU Has First Three Big Ten Games Postponed

The Ohio State women's basketball team's Big Ten opening game against Iowa, which was scheduled for Dec. 19, was suspended due to positive COVID-19 tests within Ohio State's team, according to a press release sent out on Dec. 15.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

"The women's basketball game Saturday between Ohio State University and the University of Iowa at Value City Arena has been postponed after Ohio State paused all team-related activities due to an increase in positive COVID-19 tests within the program," the release stated.

While no number or names have been specified, an Ohio State spokesman told BSB that the team "had some positives which hit the protocol limit" to make the Buckeyes pause team activities.

Ohio State was next scheduled to travel to College Park to face No. 14 Maryland in a rematch of the Big Ten tournament final on Dec. 23, but that game, along with the following game on Dec. 31 against No. 25

Michigan State, was also postponed by the Ohio State program.

Continued COVID-19 issues forced the team to extend the pause on all team activities for seven more days starting on Dec. 18.

The Buckeyes started the season 4-0 with an average margin of victory of 40.8 points per contest and ranked No. 16 in the Dec. 21 edition of the Associate Press top-25 poll.

These are the third, fourth and fifth games on Ohio State's schedule to be impacted, first in the scheduled season opener against Akron and then a scheduled matchup with Saint Mary's, which was supposed to come to Columbus on Dec. 15.

Though the matchup against the Zips was canceled due to the results of COVID-19 tests within the Akron program, the game against the Gaels did not happen initially because of the strict coronavirus protocols within Saint Mary's home state of California, according to Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff.

"We were playing Saint Mary's California, but they started invoking a lot of really strict regulations where they are," McGuff told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "It just made it unable for them to be able to put it together to come out here and play."

McGuff said he found out about the

OSU Women's Basketball Signees

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

| Player | Pos. | Ht. | Stars | High School |
|-----------------|------|------|-------|--------------------------|
| Kaitlyn Costner | PG | 5-8 | N/A | Mishawaka (Ind.) Penn |
| Taylor Thierry | SG | 5-10 | N/A | Willoughby (Ohio) Laurel |

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 |

postponement on the morning of the release and could not go into any further specifics about the extent of the positive tests past that there were positives within the program.

This latest change to the schedule was yet another hurdle for McGuff's team to clear in the first month of the season, and the Ohio State head coach said that, while the team was clearly hoping to play on the 18th, it's all about moving forward in a season amid the pandemic.

"You know, everybody's disappointed because everybody wants to play," McGuff said. "Certainly, we were excited to get the Big Ten season started off, so it's disappointing. But we'll hang in there and keep marching on as safely as we possibly can."

But continuing to march on can be difficult with all the stops and starts. McGuff said that it is difficult to keep the ball rolling and the momentum growing when instances like this keep happening, but that his team, like every other in college basketball, must continue to adapt to an environment that is far from easy.

"It is difficult. It's really difficult but I think it just is what it is for this year, so we will have to stay the course best we can and hopefully continue to move forward," McGuff said. "I liked what we had done so far, and our kids have worked extremely hard. I like where the team is from a chemistry standpoint, from a conditioning standpoint, and you start to get these interruptions and I get concerned about how that's going to affect us because I really liked the way we were going."

The the Big Ten games are postponed, not canceled, meaning that the teams will work with the conference to reschedule the matchup for later in the season. McGuff said that there had been no talks of when that game would potentially be held, simply saying the team has "a week in there where we're off."

Looking at Ohio State's schedule, there are three breaks within the schedule that appear long enough to hold a replacement game: a gap between games on Dec. 23 and Dec. 31, games on Jan. 25 and Feb. 1, and games on Feb. 27 and March 5. The last of the three gaps involve the Buckeyes' final two regular-season games, while the Dec. 23-31 gap is no longer possible due to Ohio State's continued issues with the coronavirus.

At the time BSB went to press, there had been no new word on if or when these three postponed games would be played, and the Buckeyes will get their chance against the Hawkeyes regardless on Jan. 13. But whether or not Ohio State does get to play the postponed games later on, McGuff said that the news never gets easi-

er to hear, especially when thinking about the players on his team.

"It's tough. I just really think about it through the lens of the players because I really want them to have the opportunity to play so I get really disappointed for them," McGuff said. "I try to stay focused on just being involved with the best strategy for us to move forward and try to maintain where we are, which is just difficult because we can't do a whole lot. It's disappointing, but mostly disappointing for the players."

Juhasz Honored For Double-Double

She played only one game in the week, but junior forward Dorka Juhasz's performance against Miami (Ohio) was impressive enough to land on the Big Ten's weekly honor roll on Dec. 14.

Juhasz finished with 27 points and 15 rebounds during the Buckeyes' 104-65 victory over the RedHawks on Dec. 10. The third-year forward from Pecs, Hungary, was also extremely efficient, hitting 11 of her 16 attempts in less than 28 minutes of action.

Despite the impressive showing, Juhasz did not earn Big Ten Player of the Week, with that honor going instead to a player Ohio State was set to face off against prior to the postponement.

Iowa first-year guard Caitlin Clark was named Big Ten Freshman and Player of the Week for the second straight week after averaging 34.5 points, 7.0 rebounds and 5.0 assists per game for the Hawkeyes in games against Iowa State and Michigan State.

Clark, a former five-star product out of West Des Moines (Iowa) Dowling Catholic, tallied a career-high 35 points in a losing effort against the Spartans, but her most impressive performance came against the Cyclones on Dec. 9. There, Clark scored 34 points and added seven rebounds and six assists, with three of her points coming on a deep contested shot from behind the arc to give the Hawkeyes a lead with 22 seconds to go.

The game-winning shot was part of a 26-7 fourth-quarter advantage by Iowa to overcome a 17-point deficit at the beginning of the final frame.

Along with the conference honors, Clark was also named the ESPNW National Player of the Week on Dec. 14 for her efforts. Through five games, Clark was averaging 29.8 points, 6.0 rebounds, 6.4 assists and 2.2 steals per contest while shooting 48.6 percent from the field.

"Incredible. I mean we started watching film and she's absolutely incredible," McGuff said of Clark. "She's a great player, just a huge addition for their program, for sure."

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Preston Likes Responsibilities As Alternate Captain

Quinn Preston said his job as an alternate captain is to set an example on and off the ice for his Ohio State men's hockey teammates. The junior forward, in his first season wearing the "A" on the jersey, is upholding his ideals with his comportment in the locker room and contributions to the scoresheet.

"It's a huge honor. The guys respect me," he said. "It's something I've always tried to be. I want to be a leader. I want people to look up to me. I really appreciated that my teammates voted for me. It really goes a long way as to how you feel as a person and a player."

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

Senior Austin Pooley wears the captain's "C" while senior Grant Gabriele and junior Gustaf Westlund are also alternate captains.

Preston said nothing has changed now that he has a letter.

"I'm still the same person," he said. "I already had a voice and a presence in the locker room."

He credits his parents and his experiences with preparing him.

"I've been through a lot in my life and have been able to grow as a person," Preston said. "I've learned a lot from all the captains I've had along the way and great leaders I've had."

"A great leader is about selflessness, doing the right thing. Leading by example is a huge thing. Also knowing how to judge a situation. I believe I can stay calm in certain situations when others don't. It's handling situations and handling yourself, holding yourself to a standard."

He's doing his part for the No. 18 Buckeyes (3-6-1, 3-5-0-0-1-0 Big Ten), who dropped out of the USCHO (U.S. College Hockey) top 20 for the first time since Oct. 30, 2017, after a 4-4 tie and 3-2 loss to Arizona State on Dec. 17 and 18, respectively.

Preston leads Ohio State with four goals and is third in points with seven. Last season he was second on the team with 15 goals and added 11 assists for 26 points in 35 games.

"I want to score and get goals and all that, but I want to play a good solid game both ways and lead the team by example and be a guy who does everything on the ice," he said.

Prior to the Arizona State series, he scored two power-play goals 45 seconds apart in the third period as the Buckeyes rallied for a 3-2 victory over Notre Dame on Dec. 13.

Preston is a player who provides energy

and feeds off the crowd, whether for or against him. Yet he is not bothered having no fans in the stands because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Warming up or skating around in between play, you notice it but when you're playing you don't really notice it," he said. "I definitely appreciate those times in a big game when I can see my parents up in the stands. That's the biggest thing I miss."

Buckeye Sports Bulletin last spoke to Preston on April 9, four weeks after the coronavirus abruptly halted the 2019-20 season before Ohio State could set a program record with its fourth straight NCAA appearance.

Preston was home in Trenton, Mich., staring at an uncertain future and a rink down the street that had been closed due to state COVID-19 restrictions. It remained shuttered most of the summer.

"I only skated about five or six times," he said. "I usually don't go that long without skating."

He had weights in his home and a 10-speed bike that he rode around town, pedaling up to 15 miles in a day.

As he biked, he thought back to the summer of 2019 when he traveled to Costa Rica as part of the athletic department's service-learning trip.

"It makes you appreciate everything we had before," Preston said. "Obviously, things are done different now. It's been an adjustment. You appreciate time with your family more. We can't see our families as much this year, which no one likes, but we've got to go through."

Fortunately, the Buckeyes get brief respite from their bubble-like existence on campus so he can enjoy Christmas with his family.

"I'm going to go home and stay at home, just like we do here (at school)," he said. "It's definitely weird not seeing anyone when you're not going anywhere for classes. We've only been around people we see at the rink every day. That's an adjustment."

Devil Of A Time

Arizona State ended a mind-boggling 36-day, 12-game road trip in style by beating the Buckeyes.

The Sun Devils, an independent, agreed to the Big Ten's rigid COVID-19 protocols to be guaranteed 28 games – four each against the seven conference schools. The other stipulation was that they play all the games on the road.

The games vs. ASU do not count in the standings.

Arizona State left home on Nov. 13 and returned Dec. 19 after its successful series in Columbus in which it overcame a three-goal deficit in the opener and twice trailed in the second game.

"We've had some really big moments as

we've built this thing and beat really, really good teams, but that win was probably the most gratifying since we've gone Division I," ASU head coach Greg Powers said. "To come back from three down last night and grab a third-period lead then earn a tie, and then come back tonight and beat them."

Staying on the road for five weeks cost a reported \$200,000.

The Sun Devils (4-6-2) started the trip 0-3-1 before going 4-3-1 in the final eight.

They will resume their season Jan. 3-4 at Minnesota to begin an eight-game trip covering 23 days. The Sun Devils will return to Arizona for 2½ weeks then head out for 22 days to finish the final eight games of the season, including back in Columbus on March 4-5.

"It's got to be tough on everybody, so I tip my cap to Arizona," Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik said after the series finale. "I mean they've played a lot of overtime games. They beat a lot of teams. They're as good as anybody in our league right now."

Preston is impressed by how the Sun Devils handled the marathon road swing.

"I would not like that at all," he said. "That would be very tough to do. I give them a lot of respect for what they're doing. They're playing good hockey."

"Being on the road like that is definitely tough on the body. You don't get to sleep in your own bed or go somewhere and get away from it all."

His worst trips in junior hockey were with Topeka, Kansas, in the North American Hockey League when he was on a bus for

the 900-mile rides to Corpus Christie, Texas.

"I was a rookie that year so I had to sit next to a guy for 16½ hours both ways," Preston said. "We did it a lot of times with them being in our division. I learned how to sleep on a bus playing in that division. I slept almost the whole trip as soon as I got on the bus."

He's enjoying the shorter trips in the Big Ten to places such as South Bend, Ind., and Ann Arbor, Mich.

"They're so easy and I still sleep all the way even though it's three hours," he said.

Up Next

The Big Ten announced the second portion of the schedule, encompassing the final 18 games for the Buckeyes, on Dec. 18.

OSU hosts Penn State (Jan. 8-9) followed by series at Michigan (Jan. 15-16) and Michigan State (Jan. 23-24). The Buckeyes return to Value City Arena to play Minnesota (Jan. 29-30) and Notre Dame (Feb. 5-6).

They go to Penn State (Feb. 12-13) and host Michigan (Feb. 19-20) before ending conference play with two at Wisconsin (Feb. 26-27). Then comes the previously mentioned home games vs. Arizona State (March 4-5).

The conference is leaving the weekend of March 11-12 open for makeup games due to COVID-19 before the Big Ten tournament (March 18-20) at a site to be determined.

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

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Illinois Names Bielema Next Head Coach

Former Wisconsin coach Bret Bielema was hired to replace Lovie Smith as the head football coach at Illinois.

"Illinois and the Big Ten is home for me, and I can't be any more excited about the opportunity in front of me with the Fighting Illini," Bielema said. "We want to build a program that makes Illini Nation proud and regain the passion that I've seen when Illinois wins. We want the young men playing football in the state of Illinois from Freeport to Cairo and from Quincy to Danville dreaming of wearing the Orange and Blue and playing at Memorial Stadium. I look forward to reconnecting with the high school coaches around the state making it clear we intend to keep our players home."

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

"We will build an outstanding staff for both player development and recruiting. The University of Illinois has incredible facilities and is known as one of the world's outstanding academic institutions. We will hold the young men on our team responsible both on and off the field while coaching them to be champions in life. Jen and I, along with our girls, are excited to get to Champaign-Urbana and get started on the journey."

Bielema, who is currently a defensive assistant coach with the New York Giants, becomes the 26th head coach in the 132-year history of Illini football.

He played football at Iowa and began his coaching career as a graduate assistant and linebackers coach for the Hawkeyes from 1994-2001. His familiarity with the Big Ten did not end there, serving as defensive coordinator at Wisconsin from 2004-05 before taking over as head coach from 2006-12 and then serving as head coach at Arkansas from 2013-17.

"Bret Bielema is a proven winner," Illinois athletic director Josh Whitman said. "With three Big Ten championships to his credit, few coaches can match his familiarity with, and success within, the Big Ten conference. In our conversations, it became clear to me that he is a lifelong learner who is continually looking to grow and improve, and he has enjoyed unrivaled mentorship from some of the game's most distinguished coaches, including Hayden Fry, Kirk Ferentz, Bill Snyder, Barry Alvarez and Bill Belichick – all of them current or future Hall of Famers."

"Importantly to me, Bret, a native of our great state, grew up an Illini fan and is committed to seeing the football program at our state's flagship grow and prosper. Bret's blue-collar work ethic and genuine, authentic manner will allow him to form strong connections to his players and staff and positive relationships in our community and our state. These qualities, combined with his commitment to education and his track record of success, give me great confidence in his leadership of our football program."

Bielema went 68-24 as head coach of Wisconsin from 2006-12, and his overall

head-coaching record is 97-58, including his time at Arkansas.

NU AD Phillips Named ACC Commissioner

Northwestern athletic director Jim Phillips was named the next ACC commissioner on Dec. 14. Phillips, who has led the Wildcats' athletic department since April 2008, will replace John Swofford upon his retirement in June.

"Jim is well-respected throughout college athletics and knows the enterprise inside and out," Swofford said in a statement. "As I've said many times before, having been an athletic director prior to sitting in this chair is a tremendous benefit, and that will serve him well. Jim will do an excellent job, and I will be here to assist with the transition as much, or as little, as necessary. I'm thrilled for Jim and thrilled for the ACC."

Phillips had strong support from Big Ten athletic directors to become the conference's commissioner after Jim Delany's retirement in January. However, the Big Ten presidents and chancellors chose former Minnesota Vikings executive Kevin Warren, who has faced much criticism for how he handled the COVID-19 pandemic.

Credited for multiple major projects at Northwestern, Phillips led the way in constructing the \$270 million Walter Athletics Center, which is the home of the football team and other programs, and the renovation of Welsh-Ryan Arena. Phillips also held several major leadership positions with NCAA groups, and he served as the inaugural chair of the Division I council from 2015-17.

"Jim is one of the most talented athletic administrators in the country and uniquely qualified to successfully and seamlessly take over the helm of the ACC," ACC board chair Kent Syverud of Syracuse said in a statement. "Over the course of nearly 13 years, Jim has elevated and cemented Northwestern's position as an outstanding Power 5 athletics program. Northwestern's ascension in the world of intercollegiate athletics is a testament to Jim's vision, leadership and foundational dedication to the success of student-athletes. The ACC is fortunate to have someone of Jim's caliber and integrity lead the conference at this pivotal moment in intercollegiate athletics."

The Wildcats have won two Big Ten West Division titles and four bowl games during Phillips' tenure, and the men's basketball team qualified for its first NCAA Tournament appearance in 2017.

Northwestern DC Mike Hankwitz Plans To Retire

Mike Hankwitz, the longtime Northwestern defensive coordinator, will retire after the 2020 season. Hankwitz, 73, said he informed head coach Pat Fitzgerald of his plans before the season.

Hankwitz has coached for 51 seasons, spending the last 13 at Northwestern, and has been a part of 399 wins in his career. After win No. 400 eluded him against Ohio State in the 2020 Big Ten Championship Game, he will need the Wildcats to win their bowl game to hit that mark.

Strong defenses have been a hallmark of Northwestern's recent success. Entering the matchup with Ohio State,

Northwestern boasted a 6-1 record and ranked No. 2 in the country in scoring defense and No. 13 in total defense, allowing just 14.6 points and 313.9 yards per game.

During his 34 years as a defensive coordinator, Hankwitz's defenses have ranked among the top 25 nationally in yardage allowed on 15 occasions.

Hankwitz began his career at his alma mater, Michigan, where he worked as a graduate assistant from 1970-72 under coach Bo Schembechler. He also coached at Western Michigan, Purdue, Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Texas A&M and Wisconsin.

Following the Wildcats' 28-10 victory over Illinois on Dec. 12, Fitzgerald held back tears when talking about Hankwitz.

"The guys call him the GOAT (greatest of all time)," Fitzgerald said. "Today was win No. 399 for him, so the next one's a pretty big deal to our players for him. I don't want to get emotional right now, but he's the best."

MSU QB Lombardi Enters Transfer Portal

Rocky Lombardi, Michigan State's fourth-year junior quarterback, entered the transfer portal after losing his starting job to redshirt freshman Payton Thorne.

Lombardi followed Spartan teammates Jeslor Boateng, Davion Williams and Devontae Dobbs into the portal, becoming the ninth football player to do so since Mel Tucker was hired Feb. 12.

During his career in green and white, Lombardi threw for 1,902 yards with 11 touchdowns and 14 interceptions in 22 career appearances, including nine starts.

In 2020, he threw for 1,090 yards and eight touchdowns with nine interceptions, completing 84 of 157 passes (53.5 percent) and adding 39 rushing yards on 32 attempts.

The 6-4, 225-pound gunslinger seized sole possession of the starting role for the first time before the season, but he struggled in the spotlight.

In his first start as a junior, Lombardi threw for 319 yards with three touchdowns and two interceptions in a 38-27 loss to Rutgers.

The Clive, Iowa, native bounced back by throwing for 323 yards and three scores with no picks in a 27-24 victory at in-state rival Michigan.

It seemed like Lombardi was on the right track until an awful outing at Iowa, when he threw for 227 yards with three interceptions in a 49-7 blowout loss. After starting the game against Indiana with two picks on 3-of-7 passing for 22 yards, he was benched for Thorne in the second quarter of a 24-0 loss.

Despite the disappointing outing against the Hoosiers, Lombardi led the Spartans in a 29-20 upset win over Big Ten West champion Northwestern two weeks later after a cancellation. The former three-star prospect completed 11 of 27 passes for 167 yards and two touchdowns, adding a career-high 65 rushing yards.

Although Lombardi appeared to be back on the rise, he floundered again against Ohio State the following week, failing to move the offense down the field. The Spartan signal caller threw for 33 yards with a pick-six via Buckeye defensive tackle Haskell Garrett. When

BIG 2020 Standings

| East Division | | | |
|----------------|---|---|-------|
| | W | L | Pct. |
| Ohio State | 6 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Indiana | 6 | 1 | .857 |
| Penn State | 4 | 5 | .444 |
| Maryland | 2 | 3 | .400 |
| Michigan | 2 | 4 | .333 |
| Rutgers | 3 | 6 | .333 |
| Michigan State | 2 | 5 | .286 |
| West Division | | | |
| | W | L | Pct. |
| Northwestern | 6 | 2 | .750 |
| Iowa | 6 | 2 | .750 |
| Wisconsin | 3 | 3 | .500 |
| Minnesota | 3 | 4 | .429 |
| Nebraska | 3 | 5 | .375 |
| Purdue | 2 | 4 | .333 |
| Illinois | 2 | 6 | .250 |

Dec. 18 Games

Nebraska 28, Rutgers 21
Purdue at Indiana, Canceled

Dec. 19 Games

Ohio State 22, Northwestern 10
Wisconsin 20, Minnesota 17 (OT)
Penn State 56, Illinois 21
Michigan at Iowa, Canceled
Michigan State at Maryland, Canceled

Bowl Games

Wake Forest vs. Wisconsin, Dec. 30, 12 p.m.
Iowa vs. Missouri, Dec. 30, 4 p.m.
Auburn vs. Northwestern, Jan. 1, 1 p.m.
Clemson vs. Ohio State, Jan. 1, 8 p.m.
Indiana vs. Ole Miss, Jan. 2, 12:30 p.m.

Lombardi was sacked in the second quarter by Ohio State defensive end Tyreke Smith, his head slammed against the turf, and he was unable to return.

Lombardi was held out of the Spartans' showdown at Penn State, and Thorne stepped in and broke his predecessor's school record for passing yards by a freshman with 325 yards in a 39-24 loss. Lombardi had thrown for 318 yards as a redshirt freshman against Purdue in 2018.

Thorne ended the season with 582 passing yards on 48-of-85 passing (56.5 percent) with three touchdowns and three picks, adding 47 yards on 25 carries and one of the Spartans' two rushing touchdowns on the year.

Michigan State added another quarterback in Temple grad transfer Anthony Russo on Dec. 16 via the portal (see below), as well as three-star recruit Hamp Fay during the early signing period.

The Spartans' other two scholarship options at quarterback are sophomore Theo Day and redshirt freshman Noah Kim.

MSU Adds Temple QB Russo As Transfer

Russo announced his move to East Lansing Dec. 16, tweeting that he is "blessed, honored, and excited to be a Spartan."

In addition to setting the Temple record for completions last season, Russo leaves the program ranked in the top four for passing yards (6,287), completions (536), attempts (899) and touchdowns (44) in school history.

Russo, who entered the transfer portal Dec. 7, played five seasons at Temple but will be able to continue his career courtesy of the NCAA's COVID-19 waiver for

2020 that grants an extra year of eligibility to all fall-sport athletes.

In three starts this season, Russo passed for 863 yards and nine touchdowns before getting injured and then dealing with COVID-19 protocols.

The 6-4, 240-pound signal caller joins a Spartan team that ranks No. 116 in the country in scoring (18.0 PPG) and No. 109 in yardage (330.3 YPG) this season.

Michigan Cancels Matchup With Iowa Due To COVID-19

The Big Ten matchup between Michigan and Iowa was canceled due to COVID-19 concerns within the Wolverines' football program.

Michigan's coronavirus situation has not improved since it canceled its annual rivalry game against Ohio State. The Wolverines, who practiced Dec. 14, were scheduled to take on the No. 18 Hawkeyes on Dec. 19 as part of the Big Ten's champions week.

"I am very proud of the way that our players worked to try and get back onto the field, but the numbers simply don't support us taking the field on Saturday," said Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel. "This has been a very challenging and difficult 2020 for everyone, and we want to make sure we are doing what is right for our student-athletes at every step along the way, and that ultimately is ensuring their health, safety and welfare."

The Wolverines' season will likely conclude with a 2-4 record, marking the school's first losing record since 2014 when the team went 5-7 in Brady Hoke's last year.

Current head coach Jim Harbaugh, who is 49-22 in six seasons at Michigan, is expected to engage in conversations about a possible new contract. The former Michigan quarterback's contract expires after the 2021 season, and both he and Manuel had said they planned to discuss his future following the end of the 2020 campaign.

The Hawkeyes, who won six straight after an 0-2 start, will take on Missouri in the Music City Bowl in Nashville on Dec. 30.

Iowa HC Ferentz Tests Positive For COVID-19

Iowa head football coach Kirk Ferentz tested positive for COVID-19, which was announced Dec. 18.

Ferentz tested positive on Dec. 17 and a follow-up test confirmed the initial positive result, though he was asymptomatic. Regardless, he will be in isolation away from the team and other coaches until Dec. 27.

"We have been fortunate this season to have played eight games and to have very few positive cases," Ferentz said in a statement. "When the team returns to practice on (Dec. 22), I will participate via Zoom, and our collective focus will be on preparing for the bowl game."

The Hawkeyes' matchup with the Wolverines had already been canceled due to COVID-19 cases at Michigan when the news of Ferentz's positive tests broke. Iowa had given its student-athletes the week off to prepare for academic finals and to enjoy the holiday season following the cancellation.

Iowa concluded the regular season with a 6-2 ledger after starting 0-2. After losing to Purdue and Northwestern to start the season, the Hawkeyes finished strong, winning five of their final six games by two scores or more.

IU-Purdue Rivalry Game Canceled

Indiana and Purdue usually square off annually for a rivalry game, but the two programs will not meet this year.

Due to COVID-19, the showdown was canceled for the second time in two weeks.

Both Indiana athletic director Scott Dolson and Purdue AD Mike Bobinski expressed how the rivalry game could not happen despite how badly they wanted to continue the tradition of playing for the Old Oaken Bucket.

"Both universities worked extremely hard in an effort to play," they said in a joint statement, "but at this time it just isn't possible."

Approximately 125 games since late August have been postponed or canceled.

The Boilermakers' season may be over at 2-4, but it remained unclear if they would pursue a bowl game opportunity when BSB went to press.

Purdue head coach Jeff Brohm was asked Dec. 14 whether his team might be interested in playing in a bowl since there is no minimum number of wins required this season.

"We're not looking down that road," Brohm said.

Indiana sits with a 6-1 record and ranked No. 11 in the final College Football Playoff rankings.

MD-MSU Matchup Canceled Again

Maryland and Michigan State were set to play in College Park, Md., as part of Big Ten champions week, but their matchup was canceled for the second time this season due to COVID-19.

The Spartans and Terrapins were originally scheduled to face off Nov. 21 before that game was postponed.

"This has been a season of promise and of adversity," said Maryland head coach Mike Locksley. "Our team has demonstrated a tremendous work ethic, resolve and displayed Maryland pride throughout this unique season. We have battled two opponents each week, the team we matched up with on the field and COVID. Together, we experienced tremendous highs and we are deeply disappointed that we will not be able to test ourselves on the field against Michigan State."

U-M Punter Hart Enters Transfer Portal

Michigan punter Will Hart, a fifth-year senior, entered the transfer portal.

"I am forever thankful for the University of Michigan and Michigan football for providing me with such a great experience," Hart wrote on Twitter. "I am now seeking a graduate transfer opportunity for my final year of eligibility!"

Hart had not punted since the Wolverines lost to Michigan State on Oct. 31 but the former All-American continued to play on special teams, serving as the holder for 16 snaps in his past four games.

Fourth-year junior punter Brad Robbins took over for Hart following Michigan's second game of the season against MSU.

Hart, who had averaged 45.4 yards per punt from 2018-19, was demoted to backup duties. In 2018, Hart averaged 47.0 yards per punt, earning him Big Ten Eddleman-Fields Punter of the Year honors as a first-team all-conference punter

and Sports Illustrated second-team All-American recognition. He earned second-team All-Big Ten status from the media and third-team status from the coaches in 2019.

Although Hart is a fifth-year senior, he can keep playing because the NCAA announced prior to the season that all players will be granted a free year of eligibility.

Hart became the second contributor for Michigan to enter the transfer portal in a week, following offensive lineman Zach Carpenter.

Hart hails from Hunting Valley, Ohio, and Carpenter is from Cincinnati.

PSU QB Johnson Transfers To FAU

Penn State quarterback Michael Johnson Jr. announced he will transfer to Florida Atlantic University after entering the NCAA transfer portal in June. The former four-star quarterback will have four remaining years of eligibility after just one year of redshirting in Happy Valley.

Coming out of Eugene, Ore., Johnson committed to Penn State's 2019 class as the No. 15 dual-threat quarterback in the country after receiving 29 total offers.

When he took his redshirt during the 2019 season, Johnson did not play a snap.

Even after his departure, the Nittany Lion quarterback room will remain crowded. Penn State has fourth-year junior Sean Clifford and third-year sophomore Will Levis, with redshirt freshman Ta'Quan Roberson and true freshman Micah Bowens behind them, and 2021 three-star commit Christian Veilleux joining the team in January.

Top Performers Across The B1G

The top performer in the Big Ten outside of Ohio State was Penn State wide receiver Jahan Dotson. The junior stand-out corralled six catches for 189 yards and two touchdowns in the Nittany Lions' 56-21 demolition of Illinois.

Nebraska quarterback Adrian Martinez helped lead his team to 620 yards of offense and scored the game-winning touchdown against Rutgers in a 28-21 win. The junior dual-threat signal caller threw for 255 yards and one touchdown with just four incompletions, adding 157 rushing yards and two scores.

Husker sophomore slot receiver Wan'Dale Robinson and senior tailback Dedrick Mills also thrived in Nebraska's seven-point victory over the Scarlet Knights. While Robinson tallied 114 yards from scrimmage and two scores, Mills amassed 235 yards from scrimmage, including 191 on the ground.

Former walk-on turned captain Garrett Groshek stood out for Wisconsin in its 20-17 overtime win against Minnesota. The senior tailback gashed the Gophers for 154 rushing yards, including a 39-yard touchdown, and added four receptions for 13 yards for the Badgers.

Groshek's Minnesota counterpart, fourth-year junior tailback Mohamed Ibrahim, rushed for 151 yards in the three-point loss.

Wisconsin sophomore linebacker Leo Chenal deserves credit for a strong performance against Minnesota, posting a game-high 13 tackles (10 solo), five tackles for loss, two sacks, one forced fumble and one pass breakup.

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Playoff Presents Opportunity For Ohio State

It's not so bad being the underdog. You can't win the game without being in the game. And history tells us that when it comes to the college football playoffs, seedings don't matter a whole lot anyway.

The higher-seeded team is 9- to date in the playoffs. The top-seeded team did not win a title until year six. That was last year's championship by Joe Burrow's LSU Tigers.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

A whole lot of other teams are sitting at home. A handful of others will be playing in lesser bowls.

Yet third-seeded Ohio State for the fourth time in the seven-year history of the playoffs will be in the game – the center stage for college football that has made most every other bowl game irrelevant.

Only Alabama and Clemson have been to the playoffs more often, six times each. Until this year, only one other school has been to the playoffs more than once. That's Oklahoma, 0-4 in its playoff appearances.

However many questions and concerns linger about the 2020 Ohio State Buckeyes, this trip to the playoffs further stamps OSU as one of the three elite teams of college football – far above any others.

Like it or not for the good of college football, the playoffs have led to a concentration of talent – a separation between the elite and the rest. The top players more than ever seem to be flocking to Alabama, Ohio State and Clemson.

That's one reason the Buckeyes were able to endure a roster short of 20-plus players in each of their last two games to win, and by the end of each game, convincingly so.

Need three new offensive linemen at Michigan State? No problem. Job done in the end, after a few bad center-quarterback exchanges earlier on.

Need a new punter for the title game in place of one of the great punters Ohio State has had? Hardly noticed a difference in the results.

A passing game wrecked with the loss of perhaps OSU's best receiver, plus other receivers and the receiving coach? The fix in this case was a running back from playoff-veteran Oklahoma on the ready for 300-plus rushing yards.

Other schools just don't have the luxury to dig so deep and so often on their roster. Sure, it's happened before at Ohio State, perhaps most notably when Cardale Jones took over as OSU's third QB option in 2014 to lead the Buckeyes to the national title.

Two other examples come to mind quickly, both involving what at the time were largely unknown freshmen, both times in wins at Michigan.

James Laurinaitis in 2005 was forced into duty after linebacker Bobby Carpenter broke his ankle on the first play of the game. And

in Ann Arbor in 2013, Pat Elflein unexpectedly was called upon after offensive lineman Marcus Hall was ejected. Both Laurinaitis and Elflein came through just fine, in what amounted to their debuts on the big stage.

But the depth these days at Ohio State is far deeper than it was then. This is also the case at Alabama and Clemson.

You can now pretty much start any season assuming that all three will be favorites to make the playoffs.

Others can get in the hunt, but it takes special circumstances for another school to rise that high. That happened last year for LSU, riding the Heisman play of Burrow, the only time a school not named Ohio State, Alabama or Clemson has won the playoff championship.

This is not to say that Ohio State, Alabama and Clemson are guaranteed playoff appearances. It's just that something has to go wrong for them not to make it. They have to be upset once, maybe twice, for their season to fall flat. Alabama was absent last year. Clemson missed out in 2014.

Ohio State, Buckeye fans know all too well, was left out in 2015, 2017 and 2018.

All this is another way to say that Buckeye fans should be very happy that their team, albeit a big preseason favorite, navigated the uncertainty of the 2020 college football season to return to the playoffs.

An underdog for sure. But underdogs still have a chance. The teams left out have no chance now.

More Playoff History

Dogs/Favorites: The higher-seeded team is 9-9 overall, going 1-5 in the championship game and 8-4 in the semis.

Seeded champions: LSU's win last year was the first by a No. 1 seed. The second-seeded team has won three titles, the third-seeded team none and the fourth-seeded team two. The No. 2s to win were Clemson in 2016 and 2018, and Alabama in 2015. The No. 4s to win were Ohio State in 2014 and Alabama in 2017.

Compared to the BCS: The No. 1 team in the country was 8-8 in the 16 BCS title games predating the playoffs, including only 3-6 over the last nine games. Ohio State won as the underdog in 2002 and lost as the favorite in both 2006 and 2007.

Playoff appearances through this season: Alabama (6), Clemson (6), Ohio State (4), Oklahoma (4), Notre Dame (2) and one each for Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Michigan State, Oregon and Washington.

Playoff titles: Alabama (2), Clemson (2), LSU (1) and Ohio State (1).

Semifinal winners and their records: Only six separate teams have won semifinal games: Alabama (4-1), Clemson (4-1), LSU (1-0), Georgia (1-0), Oregon (1-0) and Ohio State (1-2). Five other teams have appeared in the semis, losing each time: Michigan State (0-1), Notre Dame (0-1), Washington (0-1), Florida State (0-1) and Oklahoma (0-4).

Playoff records overall: Alabama (6-3), Clemson (6-3), Ohio State (2-2), LSU (2-0), Oregon (1-1), Georgia (1-1), Oklahoma (0-4), and losing in their only playoff game: Florida State, Michigan State, Notre Dame and Washington.

One Game In 28 Days

A big reason why OSU (1) deserves credit for its Big Ten title, (2) is hard to figure out and (3) may not have enough time left to get in a groove is that the Buckeyes have played so little football.

Consider this.

In the 28 days between OSU's win over

Indiana on Nov. 21 and the Big Ten title game on Dec. 19, OSU played just once. Yes, one game over a 28-day stretch. And that game was a roster-depleted win at Michigan State.

Should Fields Turn Pro?

Justin Fields is the best OSU quarterback in my memory, which goes back to the 1970s and Cornelius Greene.

This means Fields is better than any of these (the 21 who led OSU in passing for at least one season from Greene until Fields): Rod Gerald, Art Schlichter, Mike Tomczak, Jim Karsatos, Tom Tupa, Greg Frey, Kent Graham, Kirk Herbstreit, Bobby Hoving, Stanley Jackson, Joe Germaine, Steve Bellisari, Craig Krenzel, Justin Zwick, Troy Smith, Todd Boeckman, Terrelle Pryor, Braxton Miller, J.T. Barrett, Cardale Jones and Dwayne Haskins.

But should Fields turn pro after this season?

One argument is that a big payday would be a certainty. His arm strength, accuracy and speed are sure to impress the NFL evaluators looking for pure talent. But would Fields be leaving money on the table and be limiting the odds of a second, bigger payday (after his rookie contracts expires) if he comes out too early?

The two young pro quarterbacks in Ohio – Joe Burrow and Baker Mayfield – both significantly improved their draft position and NFL readiness by spending five years in college, not the three that Fields has logged to date.

And I wonder if Dwayne Haskins would have been better prepared for NFL success if he had stuck around college for another year to get more experience, experience that may have put him on a better track to the second and much larger NFL contract.

On the flip side, Fields after three years may be a very, very high pick in this spring's NFL draft, far higher than Burrow or Mayfield would have been after three college years, and even higher than Haskins at 15th overall.

One growing argument among analysts is that Fields needs more time to develop, in part because of the short and disjointed 2020 season.

Fields has started 20 college games. Some of what the critics are saying appears to be true. He doesn't seem to look around the field as quickly as more experienced quarterbacks; sometimes he appears to be slow to make decisions.

Accurately projecting where Fields would go in the 2021 draft, and whether his stock could be significantly improved by waiting another season, could be critical.

After being picked 15th in 2019, Haskins signed a four-year contract reported to be worth \$14.4 million. The No. 6 pick that year, Daniel Jones, received \$25.6 million. And No. 1 pick Kyler Murray signed for \$35 million over the same four years.

Doing the math there, that's a \$20.6 million difference from No. 1 to No. 15. But of course, there's always the risk of a career-changing injury in staying in school.

Only Justin Fields can decide what's the best plan for Justin Fields.

The Meyer/Day Record

Ohio State is 93-10 since Urban Meyer took over as coach in 2013, followed by Ryan Day.

The nemesis is obvious.

Clemson accounts for three of the 10 losses (2013, 2016 and 2019).

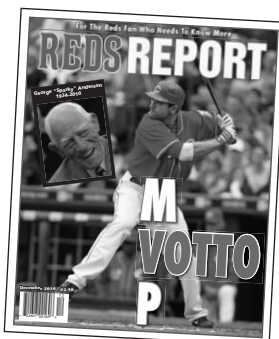
Ohio State's only other losses have been to Michigan State (2013 and 2015), Virginia Tech (2014), Penn State (2016), Oklahoma (2017), Iowa (2017) and Purdue (2018).

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Running The Ball Paid Off In The End (Zone)

I write a column in an Ohio State sports paper. It's my job to Monday-morning quarterback. Our readers are the most rabid of Ohio State fans. It's in their nature to Monday-morning quarterback when their beloved Buckeyes struggle.

The funny thing is that in today's electronic, social media driven world, you don't even have to wait until Monday morning to quarterback. Now you can critique the Buckeyes in real time. And boy, that's what was happening in the first half of Ohio State's Big Ten championship win over a game, well-coached, but over-matched Northwestern team.

It was clear early that Justin Fields and the Ohio State passing attack were not clicking on all cylinders. Whether it was because of the absence of the steady Chris Olave or it just wasn't Fields' day, the Buckeyes were only 9 of 20 for 101 yards passing in the first half with an interception and three sacks totaling 29 yards. Five of those completions came on Ohio State's first drive of game, a 16-play, 8:26 affair that should have set the tempo for the game but, after a costly holding penalty, unfortunately ended up yielding just three points.

While the aerial attack was looking completely out of sync, Trey Sermon carried seven times in the first half for 60 yards and Master Teague added a pair of carries for another 23 net yards and was last seen ripping off a 27-yard run before leaving the game with an unspecified injury. That's nine carries for 83 yards between the two running backs, good for a 9.2-yard average if you were wondering.

Posters on our BuckeyeSports.com "Official Game Thread" were pleading for the Buckeye coaches to just run the ball. But time and time again, after Sermon or Teague would log a solid run, the Buckeye staff would call another pass. Later, when I got in the car to drive to the office, the guys on the 97.1 The Fan postgame show were talking about how Twitter had blown up with fans also pleading for the Buckeyes to run the ball. (In the spirit of full disclosure, I don't really understand Twitter, but I got the drift.)

Woody Hayes has been gone for over 30 years now and last coached over 40 years ago. He would barely recognize the game as it is played today. But if he had come back to this earth on Dec. 19, he would have seen the way the Ohio State offensive line was overpowering the Northwestern defense, the way Sermon and Teague were hitting the holes, and he would have said, "Men, we're going to ram the ball down their darn (my word, not his) throats and we are going to keep ramming it and we are going to wear them down and we are going to win this darn game, ah-hunh."

And that's what the Buckeyes ultimately did, though it took them a long time to decide to do it.

On Ohio State's first possession of the second half, Sermon opened with runs of 13 and 12 yards. So Ohio State calls a pass on the next play, and Fields is promptly picked off. On the Buckeyes' next possession, Sermon dashed for 65 yards and Fields added an 8-yard run to the Wildcat 20. Two more incompletions and Blake Haubeil misses a field goal, and Northwestern is still leading 10-6 midway through the third quarter.

That's when Ohio State finally got with the program.

After the Wildcats missed a field goal of their own, the Buckeyes marched 71 yards on seven plays, all on the ground, with Sermon going in from the 9 to give Ohio State a 13-10 lead, one it would never relinquish.

The rest, as they say, is history – literally – with Sermon racking up 331 yards on 29 carries, breaking records set by two of the greatest

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

running backs in Ohio State history, Eddie George and Ezekiel Elliott.

"We were always going to be aggressive," head coach Ryan Day explained of the early attempts to pass the ball. "That's just the way we are, and we didn't execute great. I think we'll probably look back and have a lot to coach off of and to fix, but the run game started to go, and to run for over 300-plus yards. We wanted to throw on them early, wear them down a little bit and then run it a little bit in the second half, and that's kind of what played out."

Coach, you want to "wear them down a little bit"? Try pounding on them from the get-go.

I love what Day and Kevin Wilson have brought to the Ohio State offense and the quarterbacks and receivers who are suddenly coming to Ohio State because of it. But as John Cooper used to say, "Win the surest way."

This is one of the rare times I have been critical of the popular Day. But Woody passed stubbornness on to Earle Bruce and Bruce passed it on to Urban Meyer. I hope Urban didn't pass it on to Day.

Sermon had shown flashes, including rushing for 112 yards on 10 carries in Ohio State's previous game against Michigan State, what seems like months ago. But I'm not sure anyone saw his game against the Wildcats coming, with his name suddenly being mentioned in the same breath as George and Elliott. If let loose earlier, Sermon might have gained 431 yards.

After the game, Buckeye announcers Paul Keels and Jim Lachey mentioned to defensive end Jonathon Cooper that he sees Sermon in practice every day and asked what the Oklahoma transfer had shown him. I don't think the broadcast team got the answer they exactly expected.

"I'm not going to lie," Cooper said of watching Sermon in the Northwestern game. "I was like, who is that guy? Who is that?"

Day admitted that in this pandemic-ravaged season, with limited preseason practice, the coaches didn't really know what they had in Sermon either.

"There was a time probably after week two or week three, we really weren't sure what's going on," Day said of Sermon and his slow start as a Buckeye. "Just maybe not hitting the hole right, didn't have a lot of confidence, and we didn't know Trey, so we weren't sure exactly what we had there. And then to see him persevere, again through all that, to play the way he did in this game and break records like that? That's tremendous, against a really good run-stopping defense."

The Buckeyes will need a lot more than just Sermon to beat Clemson in the CFP playoffs, including a return to Heisman-contending form by Fields. But Ohio State's newfound star running back will give the Clemson coaches one more thing to worry about and make the Ohio State coaches less reluctant to lean on Sermon if the sledding gets tough.

And while I'm thinking about Clemson, a couple of thoughts on how not to beat the Tigers.

Against Northwestern, the Buckeyes were flagged for five penalties, not an egregious number. But two of them really stick out to me.

The first, as mentioned, came on Ohio State's opening possession – a hold on a Fields' touchdown run that called the score back and resulted in just a field goal. It was truly a penalty that might have altered the trajectory of

the entire game. The second penalty was an inexcusable delay-of-game penalty as the play clock ran out, costing the Buckeyes 5 yards on a third-and-2 at the Wildcat 20. Ohio State had to settle for a field-goal attempt, the one Haubeil missed.

If you want to beat a great team like Clemson, you can't make penalties like those.

But the other thing to remember is both those penalties led to field-goal tries. Think back to last year against the Tigers. Ohio State settled for three field goals in the first half. Score touchdowns on those trips into the red zone and bad calls couldn't have kept the Buckeyes from victory in what proved to be a 29-23 Clemson win.

When you have the opportunity, you must get six, not three.

Other Standouts

Sermon was not the only player to excel against Northwestern.

While the Buckeye defense seemed bewildered at times, several players stood out to me on that side of the ball.

Anyone who reads this column regularly knows that I always pull for Justin Hilliard, who has toughed out a tough-luck career at Ohio State. It seems like when he gets into a game, he generally makes things happen. He may have turned in his best game as a Buckeye against Northwestern.

Hilliard was credited with a team-leading nine tackles, including two for loss, a fumble recovery and an interception, both coming at key times. Not bad for a guy who was seeing significant minutes only because Baron Browning was out. If Sermon hadn't exploded, Hilliard could have very easily taken home game MVP honors.

Safety Josh Proctor also had a solid game. He was credited with four tackles and an interception.

And what more can I say about Haskell Garrett? I'm still trying to figure out how he landed on only the All-Big Ten third team. I know interior defensive linemen don't rack up huge stats, but have the Big Ten coaches and media been watching? The guy has been a disruptive force in every game, and his play against Northwestern was no different. He was in on five tackles and had a pair for loss with a sack.

You're on my first team, Haskell.

I was also admittedly concerned when it was announced that punter Drue Chrisman, a special teams weapon for the Buckeyes, was not going to play. Kudos to Zach Hoover for filling in admirably, putting two of his three punts inside the 10. If you weren't paying attention, you would have assumed that was Chrisman out there.

And in my weekly tight end watch, for the third game in a row, the group did not have a reception. But if the offensive line was dominating like that, you know the tight ends had a hand in it.

"The tight ends played really hard, and they're the guys that get lost in the mix, too, these tight ends" Day said. "I mean they block their tails off."

40th Anniversary Roses

Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 40th anniversary season has reached the postseason. In this issue we feature the top bowl game in our first 39 years that were not associated with the BCS

or CFP. The choice of the Rose Bowl following the 1996 season was an easy one. It was perhaps the biggest win in the John Cooper era and the first trip to Pasadena in 12 years, and it ended up being the first Rose Bowl win for the Buckeyes since the 1973 season.

Not only did the Buckeyes beat an undefeated Arizona State team led by a dynamic quarterback in Jake "The Snake" Plummer, but they won in dramatic fashion. Joe Germaine marched his team 65 yards in the final 1:40, connecting with David Boston for the winning touchdown with 19 seconds left for the 20-17 victory.

As is explained in our revisit with that contest on page 34 of this issue, the game had added significance for the Buckeyes because in their previous game they had suffered another difficult loss to archrival Michigan, all but knocking the then-undefeated team out of national championship contention. Ohio State had a really good team that year, as good as or maybe even better than the 1998 squad that famously missed out on the national crown, so it was a bitter pill to swallow.

The win helped ease some of the pain from that loss and allowed the Buckeyes to finish runner-up to champion Florida in the final AP poll.

The game also takes on significance, in retrospect, because it was in what proved to be the waning days of Rose Bowl glory. Younger people have a hard time understanding the grandeur and stature of the Rose Bowl in its heyday. Looking back at that 1996 game, former BSB editor Steve Helwage sums it up quite nicely.

"The Rose Bowl is a special game," Helwage said. "It doesn't mean as much today because we have the playoff and everything, but back then, the Big Ten champion went to the Rose Bowl every year. And Ohio State hadn't been there in 12 years and hadn't won one in 23 years. So for them to break through and win one, that was the story. That was just unheard of. A whole generation of Ohio State fans had never seen them win a Rose Bowl. That kind of started what became the golden age, this modern era."

Championship Schedule

Just a reminder that this is the last weekly issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin for 2020. There are two possible mailing dates for the next print issue.

If Ohio State defeats Clemson and advances to the College Football Playoff championship game Jan. 11, the next print issue of BSB will be published Jan. 19. If Ohio State loses to the Tigers, BSB will be published on the regularly scheduled date of Jan. 12.

Either way, there will be a large gap between this issue and the next BSB. Don't forget to check out our BuckeyeSports.com website daily for any news between now and then, especially with the possible COVID impact.

Happy Holidays from the entire Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff. We know that 2021 will be a better year for all of us.

A Friend Passes

I am saddened by the recent passing of our neighbor, Joe Hanna. There are few people in this world gentler, kinder and more generous than Joe was. He had a bit of a tough way to go toward the end, but he faced his last days with the dignity that anyone who knew him would have expected.

I will remember Joe most for his intense love of his family and the fact that was able to carve out a little bit of that love for his crazy neighbors Frank and Heidi.

Joe, we miss you already.

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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