

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 40, No. 13

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

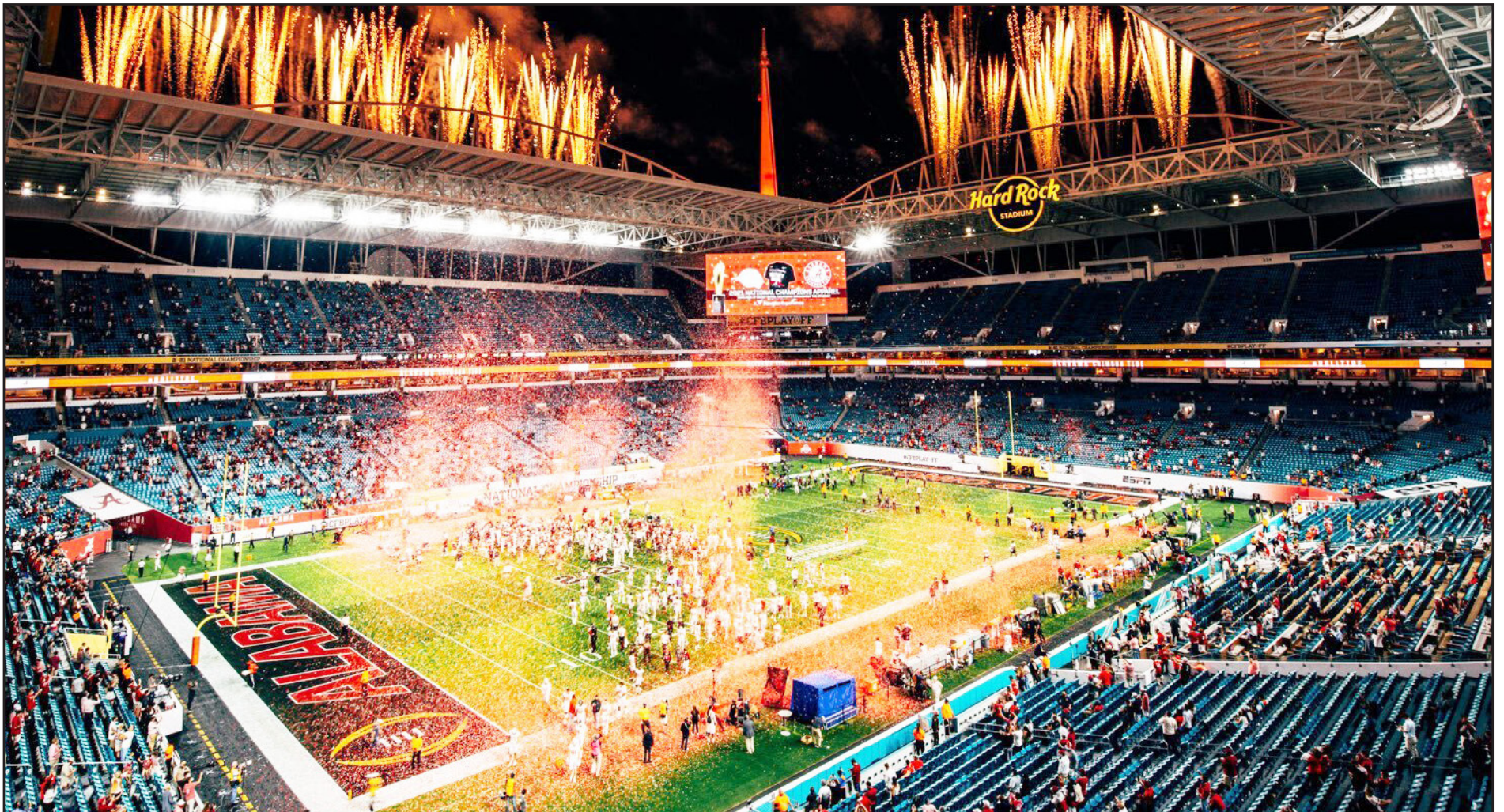
Jan. 23, 2021



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COURTESY OF THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

A DISAPPOINTING END – Ohio State players walk off the field following a 52-24 loss to Alabama in the College Football Playoff national championship at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Fla., on Jan. 11.

Loss In National Championship To Fuel Ohio State This Offseason

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

As confetti fell from the canopy at Hard Rock Stadium in celebration of Alabama's 52-24 win over Ohio State in the 2021 College Football Playoff national championship on Jan. 11, several Buckeyes lingered on the field to watch the trophy presentation, marking a disappointing end to a season in which those players believed they would ultimately be the ones raising the 24-karat gold trophy at the end of the night.

"I'm proud of our team. I'm proud of the seniors. I'm proud of the year that we've had," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said after the game. "But it was a tough night. There's a lot to unravel there. But when you look the team in the eye after the long season we've been through, it's hard to

start focusing on one or two plays or whatever it was because they've been through so much.

"I'm proud of the legacy the seniors have left behind. But you've got to give credit to Alabama. They are certainly a very good team, and they played really well tonight."

The Buckeyes overcame several obstacles this season on their journey to the national championship game, including the Big Ten postponing and reinstating a conference-only season, living in isolation in an attempt to avoid contracting coronavirus and having three games canceled, though only one was due to an outbreak within the Buckeyes' program. That also meant playing without key players for weeks at a time, most notably taking on the Crimson Tide without defensive linemen Tommy Togiai and Tyreke Smith as well as kicker Blake Haubeil, among others.

Still, Ohio State never flinched in the face of

adversity. The Buckeyes won all six games in Big Ten play, including a come-from-behind victory over Northwestern in the conference title game in which running back Trey Sermon rushed for a single-game school-record 331 yards and two touchdowns. They also avenged a controversial loss to Clemson in last year's Fiesta Bowl with a resounding 49-28 win over the Tigers in the Sugar Bowl behind a school record-tying six touchdown passes from quarterback Justin Fields.

Ohio State then ran into an Alabama team that featured several national award winners on offense, including wide receiver DeVonta Smith, who won the Heisman Trophy and Walter Camp Award as the nation's top player and the Biletnikoff Award as the country's best wide receiver; quarterback Mac Jones, who took home the Davey O'Brien Award as

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Gary Gerken, a prolific and controversial writer of BSB letters to the editor, passed away on Jan. 10. In his honor we reprint this letter he wrote following Ohio State's 13-9 loss to Michigan in 1996.

Realistic Rating

Before I comment on the 1996 Michigan fiasco, I would like to answer the letters that appeared in the BSB dated Nov. 30. Concerning the ranking I gave the 1996 team (Gerken had said they were eighth or ninth among Buckeye teams he had seen through the years), I came to my conclusion by using books and memories of the games I have seen in the past. After the Indiana and Michigan game, I wouldn't rank them in the top 15.

Concerning the remarks I made about John Cooper doing less with more, I point out what Northwestern and Wisconsin were able to accomplish in less time and coming from farther back.

In the nine years he has been at OSU, Cooper has had five seasons of four losses or more and one season of three losses and a tie. Cooper should have been gone after the 1992 season. That would have given him five years to have at least one undefeated season.

Concerning the Michigan game, I believe OSU lost when they played Indiana. When you are the No. 2 team in the country

you should not be tied 10-10 with six minutes left in the game. The poor play at Indiana carried over into the Michigan game. When a team – supposed to be as great as OSU was portrayed – can only score one offensive touchdown, then you are in big trouble and the result was no touchdowns against Michigan.

As to whether this season was a success is debatable, but as Cooper says, you have to beat Michigan. I agree. Not a success.

How could OSU look so good against Notre Dame and Penn State and so bad against Indiana and Michigan? My guess is that the players need to be motivated more by their coaching staff and they are not getting it.

I don't believe my letters are negative. I believe just the opposite.

Gary Gerken
Davenport, Iowa

If you would like to express an opinion concerning Ohio State University sports, please send your letter to BSB Letters, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, OH 43212, or email it to bsb@buckeyesports.com. Letters must be signed and include the writer's hometown and a daytime telephone number for verification. Publication priority will be given to those letters that are brief, and we reserve the right to edit letters for publication.

FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State ran into a dominant Alabama squad and lost for the first time all season, falling 52-24 in the College Football Playoff national championship game Jan. 11.

Despite the disappointing 28-point loss for the Buckeyes, there were a few players who stood out in scarlet and gray, and the BSB staff members awarded them with Buckeye leaves.

Wyatt Crosher, BSB: "There isn't really anyone I thought that deserved a Buckeye leaf after that blowout loss, but I will give it to Garrett Wilson for the touchdown catch. No one on either side of the ball really impressed me, so Wilson's nice 20-yard grab on a three-catch, 50-yard night will be enough for me to give it to him.

"I would also like to honor players like Justin Hilliard and Jonathon Cooper, not necessarily for their performances, but because they are two players who were major leaders for this team and who decided to come back and play this season out. Hilliard was a revelation this season after countless injuries, and Cooper played some of his best football, so kudos to them on two great seasons."

Joe Dempsey, BSB: "It is difficult to dole out any awards to Ohio State after a 28-point loss on the biggest stage, but there were certainly individual players deserving of praise.

"Baron Browning stood out to me for making one of the few plays that could have changed the game in the Buckeyes' favor. The senior linebacker sacked Mac Jones for a 6-yard loss on first-and-10 from the Alabama 24-yard line, stripped the ball and recovered it to set up a game-tying touchdown early in the second quarter.

"Chris Olave, a junior wide receiver, was underutilized but not by his own fault, hauling in eight of his nine targets for 69 yards. He also snagged an apparent touchdown in the fourth quarter that was ruled incomplete.

"Another player who performed well in the blowout loss was fifth-year senior punter Drue Chrisman, who placed two of his five punts inside the 20-yard line and averaged 42.8 yards per punt."

Andrew Lind, BSB: "When senior running back Trey Sermon went down with an apparent collarbone injury on Ohio State's first offensive possession of the game, you could feel the air come out of the Buckeyes' sails.

"Sermon had been on a tear of late, rushing for 524 yards and three scores in wins over Northwestern and

Clemson. If Ohio State was going to have a chance against Alabama, he needed to be at his best once again. It just wasn't meant to be, though, and he finished the game with one carry for 2 yards and a trip to the hospital.

"Sophomore Master Teague filled in admirably, scoring a pair of first-half touchdowns to knot the game at 14-all early in the second quarter. And while he ultimately wasn't able to provide the same game-breaking runs that made Ohio State's offense so potent late in the season, he deserves credit for stepping up when unexpectedly called upon."

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: "It's hard to find a whole lot to praise about Ohio State's blowout defeat against Alabama in the College Football Playoff national championship. The Buckeyes were beaten comprehensively on both sides of the football by a significantly better team, ending any hopes for another magical Buckeye playoff run sparked by the sudden emergence of an elite running back. The 2014 Buckeyes this team is not.

"However, in the face of a performance like this, there are still Buckeye leaves to be doled out, and I think that mine is going to be more of a legacy award than anything else. He didn't play especially well in this game without a strong rushing attack to keep the Buckeye offense on schedule, but quarterback Justin Fields gets the nod from me in what will certainly be his final game in the scarlet and gray.

"His career will be a bizarre one to look back on. Probably the best statistical output from any quarterback in school history, and some moments of true dominance will paint Fields' time in Columbus, but so too will a distinct lack of hardware. The all-world quarterback prospect leaves Ohio State without a Heisman trophy, without a national title, and without ever really looking like the best quarterback in the nation, as he was expected to be. A large part of that is due to the presence of Trevor Lawrence, who seems inextricably and permanently tied to Fields, but the sense of missed opportunity is certainly still there.

"However, it's very easy to make the case that Fields is the best quarterback Ohio State has ever seen. His best was completely untouchable, and even his worst was more than enough to guide the Buckeyes to an excellent two-year stretch, featuring a pair of Big Ten titles, a pair of playoff berths and 20 wins – including a revenge victory against Clemson in the 2020 playoffs – to just two losses. Those losses will haunt him and Ohio State, certainly, but the importance of opening the Ryan Day era with such a talent cannot be overstated. Fields didn't bring his best in his final college game, but his career, while complicated, deserves a legacy sticker."

BUCKEYE SPORTS .COM

From The Message Board

The 2020 season was unlike any season ever before. After Ohio State fell 52-24 to Alabama in the College Football Playoff national championship, we asked the members of the BuckeyeSports.com Forum how will they look back on this season and is there anything in particular that they will remember for as long as they live?

"I will look back on it quite positively. Undefeated B1G championship. Didn't lose to Michigan. Made College Football Playoff. Very satisfying win vs. Clemson."

– Terrier Buck

"1- WE BEAT CLEMSON!!!! That was 41 years coming.

"2-Meatchicken surrendered.

"3-How our kids fought to even have a season despite totally inept Big Ten leadership.

"4- Ran into a juggernaut in Alabama but finished being the unquestioned second-best team in the nation."

– Otis Johnson

"I will remember this as one of the greatest Buckeye teams that showed its class even during the COVID-19 pandemic infested season. Its resounding defeat of Clemson will forever remain in the fond memories of Buckeyes. The Buckeyes were probably hampered by COVID issues along both the OL and DL in the championship game. No other explanation seems to fit the drop in the performance of these lines from the Clemson game to the 'Bama game. Special players such as Justin Hilliard and Trey Sermon left a long-lasting memory of their heart and soul. A bunch of classy Buckeyes! We couldn't be more proud of them!"

– AnthonyBuckeye

"I will remember a season perforated with holes and ups and downs and a bucket of victories. No matter the sport, all Buckeyes battled hard on and off the field."

– PeyoteBuck

"I don't think I will ever forget this season, and not necessarily because of what I saw on the field. This COVID season will always be remembered for the missed games, the chaos of it, the potential that it wouldn't happen, all of that. On the field, though, the moment for me is clear: Trey Sermon's performance against Northwestern. That was one of the most stunning, remarkable individual showings I had ever seen."

– Wyatt Crosher, BSB

"For every season of college football I've ever watched, I've immediately been able to say, 'Oh, this is when (insert here) happened.' There's always one overriding theme or game that stands out. This year, though, where do I even begin? From nonconference games being canceled in the early summer to the postponement of the Big Ten-only season to the parent protests and subsequent reinstatement of the season to more games being canceled due to coronavirus outbreaks, including The Game. And through it all, Ohio State had one of the best teams in the country. It's been both a fun and anxiety-filled season that I'll simply never forget."

– Andrew Lind, BSB

Buckeye Sports Bulletin (USPS 705-690, ISSN 0883-6833.) is published 24 times a year (weekly September through November, biweekly mid-March through May and January through early March and monthly June through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications
 1350 W. Fifth Ave., Suite 30
 P.O. Box 12453
 Columbus, Ohio 43212
 (614) 486-2202
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Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$99.95/year.

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2020-21 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 40)

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The 2021 Buckeye Sports Bulletin schedule is subject to change.

The next issue (Jan. 30 cover date) will be mailed on Jan. 26.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is a privately owned newspaper and is not affiliated directly or indirectly with The Ohio State University.

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Alphabetical Analysis Sums Up Playoff Run

From the sheer satisfaction of putting Clemson and its chippy, chirpy head coach in their place to the utter dismay of watching the Alabama offense carve up the Ohio State defense like a Thanksgiving turkey, it's an understatement to say my College Football Playoff emotions ran the gamut from A to Z.

A – Alpha dog. Alabama head coach Nick Saban proved once again that his program is at the pinnacle of college football and every other coach of every other program is simply nipping at his heels. But you don't have to believe me. Check the numbers. Over the last 13 seasons, Saban has a 163-17 record (a .906 winning percentage) that includes seven SEC titles and six national championships.

B – Bowl game record. With the loss to Alabama, Ohio State missed a chance to even its all-time postseason record, dropping to 25-27 in bowl games and playoff contests.

C – COVID-19. The fact that college football was able to complete a season amid a raging pandemic is remarkable in many ways. Countless players and coaches tested positive for the virus, leading to postponements and cancellations throughout the sport. Hopefully, the long-term effect of trying to play through a pandemic that continues to claim thousands of lives on a daily basis was not a fool's errand.

D – Defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs did not exactly have his finest hour against Alabama. Coombs remains an excellent recruiter, and he has an impressive track record of producing high draft choices among his defensive backs. But head coach Ryan Day might want to think about shifting gears this offseason in terms of who actually oversees his defense.

E – Eight games. The 2020 Ohio State season consisted of only eight games, the fewest for the Buckeyes since 1941 when the team posted a 6-1-1 record under first-year head coach Paul Brown. The last time Ohio State played only six regular-season games was in 1918, a season shortened by another pandemic, an outbreak of Spanish influenza that eventually killed an estimated 20 million to 50 million worldwide.

F – First downs. Alabama piled up 33 first downs against Ohio State, tying for the second-highest total of any opponent in program history. Penn State had 33 first downs during a 63-14 win against the Buckeyes in 1994, a total matched by Texas in the 2009 Fiesta Bowl when the Longhorns took a 24-21 win. Illinois holds the opponent record for most first downs with 36, a number achieved in 1980 when Illini QB Dave Wilson threw for 621 yards and six touchdowns. The Buckeyes had only 17 first downs in that game but somehow still prevailed with a 49-42 victory.

G – Gap. Despite Ohio State's countless victories in recruiting battles throughout the country the past few years, there was a cavernous talent gap between the Alabama offense and the OSU defense. If you've gotten increasingly tired of watching OSU linebackers and defensive backs eating opposing players' dust, raise your hand. Recruiting speed on only one side of the ball does not appear to be a winning formula.

H – Healthy Hilliard. Finally able to showcase the ability that made him a five-star prospect out of high school, fifth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard made a significant impact on the OSU defense down the stretch. Despite playing in just six games (and starting only four), Hilliard led the team in tackles for loss as well as fumble recoveries. He also grabbed an interception, and his third-and-1 stop against Clemson at the end of the third quarter helped stop any swing in momentum the Tigers might have hoped for during the CFP semifinal.

I – Incredible as it might sound, Ohio State has lost 10 consecutive postseason games when playing in the state of Florida. The Buckeyes

haven't won a postseason contest in the Sunshine State since a 10-7 win against BYU in the 1985 Citrus Bowl. The only other OSU bowl victory in Florida came in the 1977 Orange Bowl when the Buckeyes handed Colorado a 27-10 defeat. That game marked the final bowl win in the coaching career of Woody Hayes.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

J – Justin Fields showcased his ability as well as his toughness against Clemson, recovering from a hard shot to the ribs late in the first half to throw for 385 yards and six touchdowns. Many observers and more than a few colleagues termed it the best performance ever by an OSU quarterback, and while I might not want to go that far, it certainly had to rank in the top three or four.

K – Kickers perfect. Due to injuries and positive COVID tests, the Buckeyes had to use three different kickers on PATs this season, but Blake Haubeil, Jake Seibert and Dominic DiMaccio still managed to go a perfect 43 for 43 on extra points. Haubeil ended his OSU career with a streak of 146 in a row. Sean Nuernberger (2014-18) holds the program and Big Ten record with 213 consecutive PATs.

L – Largest margin of victory. The Crimson Tide's 28-point victory tied the College Football Playoff championship game record for largest margin of victory. It was one of 25 new title-game records set or tied, 24 of them by Alabama. The only new mark set by the Buckeyes was the career-high 14 total tackles attributed to OSU linebacker Tuf Borland.

M – Most yardage. Alabama rolled up 621 total yards against the Buckeyes, the second-highest total surrendered by an OSU defense in program history. Only Illinois during that previously mentioned 1980 game had more. Thanks to Wilson's record passing day, the Fighting Illini amassed 659 total yards against Ohio State.

N – Near-miss. For the 26th time in the program history, the Buckeyes came within a single game of a perfect season. Nine of those 26 times – including each of the past two years – the lone blemish came during the last game of the season.

O – One-handed grab. Ohio State tight end Jeremy Ruckert made a one-handed catch late in the first quarter, a highlight-reel reception worth 36 yards that set up his team's first touchdown. Ruckert made a similar one-handed catch for a 16-yard touchdown during the 2019 Big Ten Championship Game against Wisconsin.

P – Pass defense, often a strength of the OSU defense the past several years, was a glaring weakness throughout the 2020 season. Alabama QB Mac Jones became the third opponent to throw for more than 400 yards against the Buckeyes this season. Prior to this year, Ohio State had allowed opposing quarterbacks to throw for 400 or more yards only four times since 1985.

Q – Questionable. Trailing 21-14, Ohio State faced a fourth-and-goal at the Alabama 6-yard line with about 5½ minutes remaining until halftime. Day had already seen enough of the Crimson Tide offense to understand that touchdowns were going to be of the utmost importance, yet the OSU head coach opted for a 23-yard field goal to cut his team's deficit to 21-17. The usually shoot-from-the-hip Day's conservative approach at that point, as well as nearer the end of the half, contributed to Alabama scoring two more touchdowns before the break, setting up an insurmountable 35-17 halftime lead for the Tide.

R – Record-setting futility. The Ohio State pass defense surrendered an average of 304.0

yards through the air this season, obliterating the previous mark of 273.2 set by the 1981 team.

S – Surging Sermon. Before he was injured on the first play of the national championship game, Trey Sermon was on an unprecedented run with regard to Ohio State running backs. Combined with his OSU single-game record 331 yards against Northwestern, Sermon added another 193 against Clemson to give him a two-game total of 524. The previous rushing mark for back-to-back games belonged to Eddie George, who totaled 492 yards over a two-game stretch in 1995. George ran for 178 yards against Minnesota the week before torching Illinois for 314.

T – Three TDs Times Three. Among his other exploits, Heisman Trophy winner DeVonta Smith caught three touchdown passes for Alabama and became the third Ohio State opponent this year – joining Jahan Dotson of Penn State and Ty Fryfogle of Indiana – to tally three TD receptions, something else that had never before happened to an OSU defense in any previous season.

U – Urban Meyer has agreed to become head coach of the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars, taking on the herculean task of almost completely rebuilding the franchise. Meyer has made no bones that coaching football is all he has ever wanted to do, but the stress of the job that forced him out at Ohio State isn't any less in Jacksonville. In fact, with such a rebuilding job ahead of him, the argument could be made there will be even more stress dealing with the Jaguars and billionaire owner Shahid Khan. Here's wishing Meyer the best of luck. He's going to need it.

V – Voicing Venables. For some odd reason, ESPN analyst Kirk Herbstreit likes to refer to Clemson defensive coordinator Brent Venables by using both his first and last names, so much so that viewers have invented a drinking game to play during any broadcast involving Herbstreit and Clemson. Every time the analyst utters the words "Brent Venables," you have to drink a shot of your favorite liquor. Therefore, if you participated during the OSU-Clemson game, chances are you didn't make it to the end. Herbstreit mentioned Venables by both names a total of 16 times during the telecast, while play-by-play man Chris Fowler tossed in an extra five for good measure.

W – Who's next? Neither Jack Miller nor C.J. Stroud got many reps behind Fields this season, meaning it should be a spirited battle between the two freshmen for the starting quarterback position in the spring (provided there is a typical spring camp). One thing of which we can be reasonably sure is that the loser of the battle will likely follow Joe Burrow's path into the portal.

X – X-factor. Ruckert and fellow tight end Luke Farrell became the X-factors in the Ohio State passing game during the College Football Playoff. The Buckeyes hadn't even targeted the tight end in several games this season, yet the duo combined for six catches for 102 yards and three touchdowns against Clemson and Alabama.

Y – You trippin'. That was part of Alabama running back Najee Harris' response to a reporter who asked how the Crimson Tide was able to "effortlessly" expose the Ohio State defense. "Effortlessly?" Harris replied to the question with more than a little incredulity. "You didn't see what they was doing? They was blowing my ass up. What you talking about? It wasn't effortlessly ... You trippin'. It was not easy. I am hurting."

Z – Zero chance. Someone posited the theory that Fields might want to come back for one more season with the Buckeyes to improve his overall game and up his draft stock. There is zero chance of that happening. Although the armchair scouts might not think he's ready in every facet of his game to make the leap to the NFL, pro coaches and scouts apparently think otherwise. Fields will likely be among the first two or three players taken in the NFL draft, scheduled to begin April 29 in Cleveland.



Olave, Munford, Ruckert Headline Returners

Ohio State received a decent chunk of good news in the week following the end of the 2020 college football season, with several key contributors announcing that they will either be returning to Columbus for the fourth seasons, or that they will be accepting the extra year of eligibility granted to all players.

Headlining the group of starters set to suit up once again for the Buckeyes in 2021 is wide receiver Chris Olave. Olave caught analysts off guard on Jan. 18 when he snubbed the NFL and announced his return to Columbus, despite draft projections that slotted him comfortably within the first two rounds. Serving as one of Ohio State's two primary receivers along with sophomore Garrett Wilson in 2020, Olave hauled in a team-high 50 receptions for 729 yards and seven touchdowns in just seven games. The San Marcos, Calif., native cited a desire to make more memories in Columbus as the reason for his return.

"I'd like to thank God first for this life," Olave said. "Without him none of this is possible. Thank you to the trainers, (equipment staff), and Coach Mick (Marotti) for pushing me to levels I never thought I can reach. Thank you to Coach (Ryan) Day for giving a young kid from San Diego, California the opportunity, Coach Hart (Brian Hartline) for developing me and helping me become better on and off the field. Thank you to the fans and Buckeye Nation for the support.

"There are so many great memories but we're not done yet. I'll be returning for my senior year at Ohio State."

A pair of class of 2017 standouts plan to utilize the extra season of eligibility, one on each side of the ball – cornerback Marcus Williamson and offensive tackle Thayer Munford – though the deadline for players to decide on that isn't until March.

Williamson made his intentions to return to Ohio State known well before his teammates, telling media on Jan. 6 that he planned to remain a Buckeyes, regardless of the result of the national title game.

"I'm still enjoying being a Buckeye," Williamson said. "This year has been just crazy. I know we've had a shortened season. We've lost games here or there, and I'm just ready to come back and help our unit get to the standard that we know we hold ourselves to and that we should be.

"I'm too happy to be a Buckeye, man. I'm not ready to leave yet. I've still got unfinished business."

A Westerville (Ohio) South product, Williamson started in the slot cornerback position for the Buckeyes in 2020 and will compete to fill that spot again in 2021 after recording 27 tackles and two pass breakups as a senior.

Munford's return comes, seemingly, as an opportunity for the tackle to make up for time lost due to injury. While Williamson wasn't healthy enough to find his way onto the field consistently until 2020, Munford saw a good deal of his 2019 campaign impacted by a long-term back injury that ultimately inspired a return to college following the 2019 season. Now, even with a fully healthy senior year under his belt, Munford announced on Twitter on Jan. 16 that he wants one more shot in scarlet and gray.

"For the last four years I have been so close to lifting up that trophy, but came up so short," Munford said in his announcement. "I am coming back for another year to achieve my goal of getting my degree that I promised my family and myself that I (would get) before I leave. I'm sticking with that promise that I have made."

Junior defensive tackle Tyreke Smith and tight end Jeremy Ruckert also announced they will return for his senior seasons rather than test the NFL waters.

Fields, Wade, Myers, Togiai, Davis All Departing

It wasn't all good news for the Buckeyes when it came to pro declarations, however. As has become customary at Ohio State, several starters announced that they have played their final snaps for the Buckeyes, though most of these announcements have come not from juniors, but from fourth-year players declining the extra season made available to them.

The biggest of them all, certainly, is quarterback Justin Fields, the one-time Georgia signal caller who transferred to Ohio State in 2019 to play for Ryan Day. He announced on Jan. 18 that he would be taking his talents to the NFL rather than returning for a third year at the helm for the Buckeyes.

Fields finished his Ohio State career with a 20-2 record, passing for 5,373 yards and 63 touchdowns to just nine interceptions, while completing 68.4 percent of his passing attempts. He also rushed for 15 more scores.

Also among the players leaving will be offensive guard Wyatt Davis, who is technically a fourth-year player thanks to a redshirt in 2017. Davis announced his decision via Twitter on Jan. 18.

"After months of uncertainty this past summer, I made the decision to opt back in for the opportunity to suit back up with my Ohio State brothers and compete for a National Championship," Davis said. "Although we came up short of our ultimate goal, I am incredibly proud of what the 2020 Ohio State Buckeyes accomplished.

"Thank you Buckeye Nation. I will forever be a proud Ohio State Buckeye."

Junior defensive tackle Tommy Togiai, who earned second-team All-Big Ten honors after he finished the season with 23 tackles, 4½ tackles for loss and three sacks, also announced his intentions to enter the NFL draft on Jan. 18.

"This has been one of the toughest choices I have ever faced but after discussing with my family, it's best for me to forgo my senior season and my time to declare for the 2021 NFL draft," Togiai said via Twitter.

"I want to thank the entire Buckeye Nation for their endless support and love that they have shown me. I can truly say I gave you everything I had on and off the field. I am a Buckeye for life."

Also included in the group is cornerback Shuan Wade; center Josh Myers; linebackers Baron Browning, Justin Hilliard and Tuf Borland; defensive end Jonathon Cooper; Farrell; punter Drue Chrisman; kicker Blake Haubeil; and running back Trey Sermon.

On Jan. 15, Wade was the first to offi-

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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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BSB Podcast Enhances Online Coverage

Buckeye Sports Bulletin now has a podcast to work in tandem with BuckeyeSports.com to keep BSB subscribers informed on 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 that 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 season now complete, the BSB Podcast is returning to its original schedule of one weekly episode, released on Friday mornings. The show is free to all BSB subscribers. To find it, go to your favorite podcast app or website and type in "Buckeye Sports Bulletin Podcast," and click the subscribe button. You can listen on Amazon Music, Apple Podcasts, Audible, Google Podcasts, iHeartRadio, Podbean, Spotify, Stitcher, YouTube and anywhere else that podcasts are found. For those of you that are new to the podcast world, the show is also posted at 10 a.m. every Friday on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as in the BSB Fan Forum.

cially announce his intention to declare for the NFL, though several players, including Browning, Hilliard, Borland, Cooper and Sermon had already accepted an invitation to the Senior Bowl (though that apparently was not binding, as Munford also accepted an invite).

"Despite all the challenges we've faced the past year, I am thankful and blessed that I had the opportunity to compete in the 2020 season with my teammates," Wade said. "For that I will be forever thankful.

"The 2020 season has been extremely vigilant and made me realize the work I need to put forth in my upcoming endeavors."

Wade, playing his first season as an

outside cornerback, had 35 tackles and two interceptions as a senior.

Myers followed later that same day, posting a similar statement to his Twitter account. "Ohio State will always hold an incredibly dear place in my heart, and I will undoubtedly miss it," Myers wrote.

Go to BuckeyeSports.com for updates on other players considering the NFL.

Cooper Transfers To Missouri

Mookie Cooper, who came to Ohio State in the class of 2020 ranked the 16th-best wide receiver and No. 93 overall prospect in the nation, announced that he would be play-

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 | 6-2 |
| 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 | 7-2 |
| Jan. 1 | Clemson*** | W, 49-28 | ESPN | 10-2 |
| Jan. 11 | Alabama**** | L, 52-24 | ESPN | 13-0 |

* 2020 bowl team

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

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

**** College Football Playoff National Championship at Miami Gardens, Fla. (Hard Rock Stadium)

ing out the remainder of his college career at Missouri on Jan. 5.

For Cooper, suiting up for the Tigers serves as an opportunity to return closer to home. He came to Ohio State by way of St. Louis Pattonville Senior, where he played his high school football and was considered the No. 4 recruit in his home state. He'll immediately be the highest ranked former recruit on Missouri's roster.

The former four-star didn't see any playing time for Ohio State during its chaotic 2020 campaign, as he was planted firmly below Garrett Wilson in the slot on the depth chart. He was the lone receiver from a star-studded 2020 class that included Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Julian Fleming and Gee Scott not to see any time for the Buckeyes as a true freshman.

Cooper announced his intent to enter the transfer portal prior to Ohio State's play-off matchup with Clemson, posting to his Twitter account on Dec. 24 that he would be headed elsewhere.

"I would like to publicly thank the entire Ohio State community for the time they invested in me and the bonds I have made," Cooper said. "But I have made the decision to enter the transfer portal and take my talents to a new home!"

Cooper hasn't played organized football in more than two years after losing his senior season in high school to a transfer ineligibility issue. When he arrived at Ohio State as an early enrollee in January of 2020, he told media that he expected to contribute as a freshman in Columbus.

"I expect to get on the field," Cooper said. "I'm not going to say I'm going to start, but I expect to get on the field. There's some guys ahead of me, but I feel like the way our receiver room and how it works, I feel like I'm going to be able to get some reps in, learn from the older guys and just be able to develop. And when my time fully comes in, that's when my time comes."

Meyer Accepts Head Coaching Job With Jags

Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer made major waves on Jan. 14 when the Jacksonville Jaguars announced that he would be their next head football coach, replacing Doug Marrone, who was fired following the end of the NFL regular season. Meyer's first foray into the NFL marks the end of his second retirement, which began following the 2018 season.

"This is a great day for Jacksonville and Jaguars fans everywhere," Jaguars owner Shad Khan said in a statement. "Urban Meyer is who we want and need, a leader, winner and champion who demands excellence and produces results. While Urban already enjoys a legacy in the game of football that few will ever match, his passion for the opportunity in front of him here in Jacksonville is powerful and unmistakable."

Meyer explained his decision to return

to football after two years working as an analyst for FOX in his first press conference on Jan. 15.

"Some college opportunities showed up and made (me) start thinking," Meyer said. "There's not a day that goes by that I see that grass, I see the team, I see a locker room and I don't think about coaching. And then I start thinking about the quality of life, etc., and the comment I made is it would have to be perfect.

"College, I just don't plan on doing it. I don't see that happening. The NFL has always been an intrigue. I had some opportunities in the past, but it just wasn't the right time and wasn't the right situation. We have to be in position to go win a game, and I believe this is the place.

"I felt like this was not only the right time for me to return to coaching, but the right place in Jacksonville."

He also mentioned that while he's new to the league, he's familiar with many people that have been working in it for years and took lessons from them when considering this move.

"I've had some very good friends in the National Football League that I would sit down and have very confidential conversations with," Meyer said. "Coaches, even some GMs about just what it's like."

For the former Buckeye head coach, health has always been a major concern, leading directly to his retirement from Florida in 2010 and Ohio State eight years later. He addressed that during his press conference as well, stating that he knows it's something that he needs to be aware of.

"It's something I'm going to be very conscientious of, it's something I'm going to watch very closely," Meyer said. "I will be the head coach, but I'm going to hire great coaches that are going to be expected to do their job. I'm not going to be running around like a nut on the practice field. Those days are gone. I know what it's supposed to look like, and I want to be very demanding of everyone, but it's something I'm going to watch very closely. I had that surgery in 2014 that really helped things. It's just something to watch very closely."

While Meyer still has strong ties to several people on Ohio State's current coaching and support staffs, including director of player personnel Mark Pantoni and strength and conditioning director Mickey Marotti, he said during his press conference that he didn't want to raid his old stomping grounds.

"There might be one (staffer from Ohio State joining me in Jacksonville)," Meyer said.

"I talked to (Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith) and I talked to (head coach Ryan Day) and you know my affection for both of those guys and the great university that we represented, and I won't do that," Meyer said. "Does that mean there might be one? Maybe. I'm not there yet. But I told Gene, 'Yeah, Coach Marotti, Pantoni,

A Message From BSB Publisher Frank Moskowitz

This is the first print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin since the Dec. 26 issue, which covered Ohio State's victory over Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game. While the BSB print schedule if the Buckeyes defeated Clemson in the CFP semifinal game was printed in five different places in that issue, including in my View From 15th & High column, we were overwhelmed with phone calls from subscribers looking for BSBs mailed between that last issue and now.

Let me first of all say, "Thank you!" The fact that readers are looking for their Buckeye Sports Bulletin makes it all worthwhile for us here. Let me also remind you that, when in doubt, the BSB print schedule and the date of the next issue is always printed in the credit box on page 3.

Most callers were looking for a preview of the Alabama game, in addition to coverage of the impressive victory over Clemson. We have only 24 issues to allot over each publishing year, which presents some challenges. We faced the same situation when the Buckeyes advanced to the championship game during the 2014 season and ended up with the same print schedule.

We will publish again in a week on Jan. 26 and then come back with our popular Football Recruiting Wrap-Up on Feb. 9, as we officially return to our biweekly schedule.

As for previewing the game with Alabama, the BSB staff did so extensively, posting several stories a day in the time leading up to the game at our electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers. However, one thing that many of the readers who called asked about was the two-deep roster for the game. That was not posted and I will see if we can get that added to our electronic coverage if the situation arises again.

The BSB staff also 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, 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.

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@buckeyesports.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.

If you have any questions about BuckeyeSports.com or your mail service, feel free to call us at the above number.

the whole crew's leaving,' and they're like 'What?' No, that's the best infrastructure in college sports, so no, they will not be leaving.

"There might be one, like I said, that will leave, but I am not going to do that to that organization. And I'm not sure they would go. Ohio State is home to those guys now."

The one staffer that Meyer was referring to is assistant athletic director for player development Ryan Stamper, a Jacksonville native who played for Meyer at Florida and came with him to Columbus in 2012. Stamper was responsible for working daily with Buckeye players for many of the off-the-field pieces of the Ohio State program, including the now famous "Real Life Wednesdays" program.

Stamper will serve as Jacksonville's director of player assessment.

National Title Drew Lowest Ratings Ever

Ohio State's Jan. 11 national title bout against Alabama drew all-time low television ratings for a college football national title game since the start of the Bowl Championship Subdivision era in 1998, registering just 18.9 million TV viewers.

The game, which aired in several forms across the ESPN suite of channels, actually saw lower ratings than either of the playoff semifinal games that came before it. Ohio State's victory over Clemson secured 19.1 million viewers, while Alabama's win against Notre Dame pulled 18.9 million. For comparison, the 2020 CFP national title game between LSU and Clemson drew 25.5 million viewers.

Despite the decrease in numbers, the title bout was still the most-watched non-NFL sporting event of the last year, other than the College Football Playoff semifinals.

While the drop has been attributed by some analysts to a decreasing interest in the somewhat repetitive nature of the playoff – with Alabama, Clemson and Ohio State all serving as stalwarts in the event – these struggling television numbers are consistent with similar decreases across the TV world. NFL wild-card playoff rating were down 22 percent from the 2020 edition, and other

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Continued From Page 5

professional sports, including the NBA, have seen similar stumbles.

Buckeyes No. 2 In Final Polls

Following its 52-24 loss to Alabama in the College Football Playoff National Championship, Ohio State finished No. 2 in the final Amway coaches poll and Associated Press poll of the season.

Behind the Crimson Tide in the coaches poll, Ohio State edged out Clemson, Texas A&M, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Georgia, Cincinnati, Iowa State and Northwestern to finish out the top 10. No. 13 Indiana and No. 15 Iowa represented the Big Ten outside of the top 10, while Wisconsin's 38 votes put it atop the others receiving votes category but still behind No. 25 Buffalo, which picked up 51 votes.

In the AP selection, the top 10 is identical, with the first split from the coaches poll coming at No. 12, where the AP voters slotted Indiana rather than Florida. Iowa wrapped up the Big Ten at No. 16, with the Badgers grabbing just three votes.

Davis Is No. 33 As Unanimous All-American

Davis earned unanimous All-America honors when the Walter Camp Football Foundation named him a first-team All-American on Jan. 7.

A former five-star prospect from Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco, Davis was named a first-team All-American by all five selectors that determine consensus and unanimous All-Americans, which also includes the Associated Press, American Football Coaches Association (AFCA), Football Writers Association of America (FWAA) and The Sporting News.

Davis becomes the third Buckeye to earn unanimous All-America honors over the last two seasons, joining cornerback Jeff Okudah and defensive end Chase Young in 2019. He is the 33rd unanimous All-American in school history.

Wade was selected as a consensus All-American, meaning that at least three of the five selectors picked him for their first teams. Wade was included on all lists, though he was a second-team selection on the Walter Camp and AFCA teams.

Along with Davis and Wade, Haskell Garrett was selected to the second-team on the Walter Camp, Sporting News and AP lists, as was Cooper in the AFCA list, Wilson on the FWAA second-team and Myers on The Sporting News' second-team.

Fields Wins Silver Football, No. 7 In Heisman

Ohio State's Fields received the Chicago Tribune Silver Football on Jan. 6, an award given out to the best player in the Big Ten as selected by the coaches in the conference.

Fields received 12 of the 13 possible first-place votes, with Wilson also receiving a first-place nod. Iowa defensive tackle Daviyon Nixon earned the other first-place vote.

Fields is the 22nd Ohio State player to win the award and the seventh in the past nine years. Dwayne Haskins and Chase Young won the award in 2018 and 2019, respectively, making this the third year in a row that a Buckeye player has earned the Silver Football.

Elsewhere, Fields placed No. 7 during the Heisman Trophy finalists show on Dec. 24, checking in ahead of BYU quarterback Zach Wilson (No. 8), Notre Dame QB Ian Book (No. 9) and Florida tight end Kyle Pitts (No. 10).

The Buckeye signal caller finished behind Iowa State running back Breece Hall (No. 6), Alabama running back Najee Harris (No.

5), Florida QB Kyle Trask (No. 4), Alabama QB Mac Jones (No. 3), Clemson QB Trevor Lawrence (No. 2) and the winner, Crimson Tide wideout DeVonta Smith.

Women's Basketball, Golf, Fencing Draw Bans

Following in-house and NCAA investigations into potential rule violations, Ohio State announced on Dec. 22 that it would be holding three programs – women's basketball, women's golf and fencing – out of postseason play for the 2020-21 season as part of self-imposed sanctions.

"The Ohio State University Department of Athletics is currently working cooperatively with the NCAA Enforcement Staff on an infractions case involving three sports programs: fencing, women's golf and women's basketball," a school statement said. "Ohio State has self-imposed postseason competition bans for each of the sports for the 2020-21 year. As always, we are focused on supporting our student-athletes. NCAA rules and procedures prohibit us from sharing more information at this time."

Specifically, the investigations centered around former women's basketball assistant coach Pat Klein (for more on that, check out page 36 for a full report), current women's golf head coach Therese Hession and former fencing head coach Vladimir Nazlymov.

The women's golf violations are the least severe of the three. According to report findings acquired by BSB, Hession required players to participate in more countable athletically related activities (CARA) than NCAA rules allow for in a day or week.

"Hession regularly kept the team for practice between 15 and 30 minutes longer than the scheduled practice time, resulting in daily and/or weekly CARA hour overages," the findings read. "In their interviews with the institution and enforcement staff, all of the student-athletes acknowledged that practice time routinely ran late. Some of the student-athletes expressed frustration with overages, mentioning it caused them to run late to class or tutoring sessions. However, others did not mind the overages and saw it as an opportunity to 'get better.'"

"Second, Hession did not properly calculate CARA during weeks with qualifying rounds, resulting in additional CARA overages. Under NCAA CARA legislation, golf

programs may exceed the daily maximum of four hours when individuals are participating in qualifying rounds. However, all golf programs must include any time over the four-hour daily maximum in the 20-hour weekly total.

"Hession failed to include the overages from the daily totals during qualifying rounds in the 20-hour maximum CARA per week."

While the program does still face a post-season ban, Hession remains employed as head coach but served a three-week suspension during the fall and will miss the first four dates of competition for Ohio State's 2020-21 season.

For the fencing team, Nazlymov and several unnamed assistants were found to have violated a number of NCAA rules regarding prospective recruits. In multiple cases, Ohio State was found to have provided significant impermissible benefits to recruits, including more than \$3,500 to a female recruit and at least \$1,400 to a male recruit, both within the time period of November 2017 to April 2018. Additionally, Ohio State coaches and staffers impermissibly observed prospective recruits and provided free training at non-Ohio State-affiliated fencing facilities operated by an assistant coach.

"The institution and enforcement staff agree that from November 5, 2017, to approximately April 2018, Nazlymov arranged, provided or directed members of the fencing coaching staff to provide approximately \$3,729 in impermissible recruiting inducements to a women's fencing prospective student-athlete (Prospect 1) in the form of free use of an institutional facility, training outside of scheduled local sports club time, meals and equipment," the findings state. "Further, Nazlymov and members of the fencing coaching staff impermissibly observed Prospect 1 display her athletic ability." The report goes on to mention another similar case from the same time range.

"The institution and enforcement staff agree that from November or December 2017 through April 5, 2018, Nazlymov arranged, provided, directed or was aware of members of the fencing staff providing at least \$1,400 in impermissible recruiting inducements to Prospect 2 in the form of arranged housing, use of the institution's locker room and practice facility, free meals and transportation. Further, Nazlymov and members of the fencing coaching staff impermissibly observed Prospect 2 display his athletic ability."

Nazlymov retired in lieu of termination on April 17, 2018. He has been assigned a five-year show cause penalty. Former associate head coach Aleksandr Smerdin was also terminated for his involvement.

Washington Football Team Releases Haskins

The Washington Football Team released former Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins on Dec. 28, prior to the end of his second season as a professional.

"This afternoon, I met with Dwayne and informed him that we would be releasing him," Washington head coach Ron Rivera said. "I told him I believe it benefits both parties that we go our separate ways. We want to thank Dwayne for his contributions these last two seasons and wish him well moving forward."

Haskins, the 15th overall pick in the 2019 NFL draft, was benched in the fourth quarter of a Dec. 27 loss to the Carolina Panthers after he threw two interceptions and lost a fumble. He was also fined \$40,000 and stripped of his captaincy for violating the NFL's COVID-19 protocols when he was photographed without a mask while attend-

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From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

The possibility of Ohio State taking on Alabama in the annual Kickoff Classic was looking stronger and stronger following the end of the 1985 season. The opportunity existed for the Buckeyes and Crimson Tide to go against each other in the Aug. 28 event held in East Rutherford, N.J.

One week prior to the rumor surfacing about OSU and Alabama, it was supposed to be Michigan and Alabama. Michigan coach Bo Schembechler reportedly nixed the idea because his team already had an extra game in 1986 playing at Hawaii on Dec. 6.

30 Years Ago – 1991

Not since John Havlicek and Jerry Lucas wore Ohio State uniforms had the Buckeyes won as many as 12 straight games to begin a basketball season. Yet, under second-year head coach Randy Ayers, the Buckeyes started out the 1990-91 season with 12 consecutive victories.

Not since Allan Hornyak, Luke Witte and Jim Clemons patrolled the shiny hardwood of St. John Arena had Ohio State won a Big Ten basketball championship in 1971. Yet, the Buckeyes notched victories over Iowa and Michigan in their first two conference games and looked more and more like championship contenders in '91.

25 Years Ago – 1996

After a junior season of wowing OSU fans, opponents and the nation with his spectacular, game-breaking catches, Terry Glenn was on his way to the National Football League. Glenn, a Columbus native, declared his eligibility for the draft on the Jan. 10 deadline for juniors to announce their intentions.

Ohio State released a statement from the wideout.

"After great deliberation, I have decided to forgo my senior year of eligibility to pursue a career in the NFL," Glenn said in the statement. "This was not an easy decision for me to make since I have loved every minute of my time at Ohio State. It has been an honor and a privilege to have been part of the Ohio State University football program under Coach (John) Cooper."

20 Years Ago – 2001

Loss of control of the Ohio State football program ultimately meant the loss of a job for John Cooper. The man who had guided the Buckeyes' gridiron fortunes for 13 seasons was sacked Jan. 2, less than 24 hours after his team's lackluster 24-7 loss to South Carolina in the Outback Bowl.

Athletic director Andy Geiger said it wasn't necessarily the loss to the Gamecocks but an overall "deteriorating climate" in the program that led to Cooper receiving his walking papers.

Even with the loss, however, Cooper said he never saw the firing coming. He fully intended to captain the Buckeyes' ship, at least through the 2001 season.

"I was shocked," said Cooper at a press conference the evening after his termination. "It was unexpected. I thought I would coach one more year, at least I hoped that."

15 Years Ago – 2006

The senior class of the 2005 Buckeyes may have been one of head coach Jim Tressel's favorite from his two decades as a head coach.

"I think this group of seniors has been extraordinary," Tressel said. "The way they go about their business – on the field, in the locker room and in the classroom – is just exemplary. And they truly enjoy being around one another. This group has been a pleasure to be with, and I think we're all going to miss those guys."

Chief among that group was Ohio State's trio of linebackers – A.J. Hawk, Bobby Carpenter and Anthony Schlegel – who were still getting accustomed to their time in the Scarlet and Gray ending.

"You don't really think about it when you're going through winter conditioning and spring ball and lifting," Hawk said. "Then all of a sudden, four years has gone by. You've hung around the same guys all that time and then it's over."

"I don't think that part of it has hit me yet. We're all going to go our separate ways pretty soon, and I don't know if any of us are ready for that to happen."

10 Years Ago – 2011

A record 56 names were on the list of early NFL draft entries the league released Jan. 19, but none was from Ohio State. That meant the 2011 draft would be the first since 2003 in which no Buckeye underclassmen would be drafted.

"Our guys have indicated that it's important to them to gain their degrees from Ohio State and to participate in so many senior traditions that are a part of Ohio State football," Tressel said. "We're always pleased when players want to remain a part of the Buckeye program."

Along with guaranteeing the return of the 10 juniors or third-year sophomores who started the Sugar Bowl for the Buckeyes, the release of the official list brought to an end speculation that any of the five draft-eligible juniors who were suspended for the first five games of the 2011 season would go back on a pledge to Tressel to return if they were allowed to play in the bowl against Arkansas.

Those five were offensive lineman Mike Adams, running back Dan "Boom" Herron, wide receiver DeVier Posey, quarterback Terrelle Pryor and defensive end Solomon Thomas.

Five Years Ago – 2016

When Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer spoke to the media Jan. 7 after returning to Columbus to wrap up the Buckeyes' 2015 season, the coach opened the press conference by speaking at length about the success of his special teams unit in a Fiesta Bowl win over Notre Dame.

While that unit performed well, Meyer knew he was avoiding the news that everyone in attendance wanted to hear about – the nine Ohio State underclassmen who decided after the bowl win that they would leave eligibility on the table and enter the 2016 NFL draft.

"The obvious news of the week is we have some young people, a couple of fourth-year guys who decided to chase their dream," Meyer said. "Everyone was so professional about how they did this."

The players who had elected to pursue their professional careers included fourth-year players with a year of eligibility remaining in quarterback Cardale Jones, safety Tyvis Powell and receiver Michael Thomas, the latter two of whom had already earned their degrees from Ohio State.

The Buckeyes were also losing the services of three true juniors in safety Vonn Bell, defensive end Joey Bosa and running back Ezekiel Elliott as well as three redshirt sophomores in cornerback Eli Apple, linebacker Darron Lee and receiver Jalin Marshall.

One Year Ago – 2020

In the days following Ohio State's crushing 29-23 loss to Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl, it received some added crushing but expected news from three of its stars. On Dec. 30, it was running back J.K. Dobbins who announced he was leaving to enter the NFL draft. On Jan. 1, it was cornerback Jeff Okudah. On Jan. 3, it was defensive end Chase Young.

And on Jan. 4, many expected the fourth piece of bad news for Ohio State heading into 2020, because redshirt sophomore cornerback Shaun Wade had set his date to announce his decision as well.

But Wade made the surprise decision to forgo the NFL draft and return to the Buckeyes for another year, giving Ohio State a crucial returning cog in a secondary that was set to be depleted, regardless of his decision.

Wade said that the decision came because he had both personal and team goals still left to achieve.

"I want to do it to show I can play outside corner, I want to do it for the team and I want to win a national championship," Wade said. "I feel like we're going to have a great team next year, and I feel like we're going to be elite. I want to be part of it."

"It was tough, but at the end of the day I feel like I made the right decision for me."

ing a private party prior to that loss.

Haskins threw for 2,804 yards and 12 touchdowns compared to 14 interceptions in 16 career games with Washington. He passed waivers and is now an unrestricted free agent.

Freeman, Guiton Find New Coaching Gigs

A pair of former Buckeyes, linebacker Marcus Freeman (2004-08) and quarterback Kenny Guiton (2009-13), are moving up in the coaching world.

Freeman, who spent the last four seasons as Luke Fickell's defensive coordinator at Cincinnati, accepted the same position with Notre Dame on Jan. 8.

"As we looked into finding someone to run our defense, it was important to find the right fit for our program, and Marcus and his family are just that," said Notre Dame head coach Brian Kelly. "He has had great success on the field, both running a defense and in his direct work with his linebackers. Additionally, he is considered among the elite recruiters in the coaching ranks."

"The work Marcus has done elevating the programs he has been a part of speaks for

itself, but equally as important is the exceptional work he has done in building relationships with his staff and players. Marcus was our top choice to become our next defensive coordinator, and we are pleased he and his family will be joining us at Notre Dame."

Freeman, 34, helped to build one of the nation's best defenses at Cincinnati in 2020. The Bearcats finished fourth in yards per play (4.57) and eighth in scoring (16.8).

Guiton, meanwhile, was announced on Jan. 5 as the new wide receivers coach at Arkansas under head coach Sam Pittman, the same position that he filled in 2020, his lone season at Colorado State. Prior to that, he spent a year as the outside receivers coach at Louisiana Tech and two seasons in Houston as wideouts coach.

Hubbard Selected To CFB Hall Of Fame

Rudy Hubbard, the first Black assistant football coach at Ohio State, will be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame as part of its 2021 class. Hubbard worked with head coach Woody Hayes in Columbus from 1968-73 after playing for him as a running back from 1965-67.

Hubbard was best known for securing the recruitment of halfback Archie Griffin, who played out much of his career under the guidance of a different halfbacks coach but committed originally to Hubbard.

His coaching career really kicked off after that, however. He spent 12 seasons (1974-85) as the head coach at Florida A&M, where he notched an 83-48-3 record while leading the Rattlers to the inaugural Division IAA national championship in 1978.

He also claimed consecutive black college football national championships in 1977 and 1978.

That 1978 team remains the only HBCU to win a D-IAA (now the FCS) title.

Court Throws Out Conviction In Smith Case

Cardell Hayes, who was convicted of shooting and killing former Ohio State defensive end Will Smith in April 2016 following a traffic altercation, is no longer a convicted killer because of a new ruling sent down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The move was expected. The high court ruled in April of 2020 that split jury verdicts are unconstitutional, and Hayes was original-

ly convicted by a 10-2 jury. The prosecution agreed in November of 2020 that Hayes deserved a new trial, which he'll receive first at the state 4th Circuit Court of Appeal, according to a report from the New Orleans Advocate.

"Hayes' attorney, Eric Santana, said the ruling doesn't mean his client is free again," Ramon Antonio Vargas of the Advocate reported on Jan. 11. "The case first returns to the state 4th Circuit Court of Appeal, which was the last courthouse to issue an opinion in the matter, he said."

"Santana said he expects the case then will go back to Orleans Parish Criminal District Court, where Hayes faced a trial in December 2016. The decision about whether to retry Hayes and, if so, on what charges will fall to Orleans Parish District Attorney Jason Williams, who was sworn in (Jan. 11) morning."

Santana says that he is "prepared to argue that his client can't be charged with a crime more serious than manslaughter."

Hayes has maintained that the shooting was out of self-defense and that Smith fired a shot at him first, with a gun that was then whisked away from the scene.

Tigers Provided Bucks With Offseason Motivation

Continued From Page 1

the nation's top quarterback; running back Najee Harris, who won the Doak Walker Award as the country's best running back; and center Landon Dickerson, who won the Rimington Award as the nation's top center, though he did not play until the final snap of the national championship due to a torn ACL he suffered in the SEC Championship Game on Dec. 19.

Crimson Tide offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian, who is now the head coach at Texas, also won the Broyles Award, which is given annually to the best assistant coach in college football.

"Having no fans, having no season and having games canceled, it was a challenge, but I wouldn't have it any other way," Day said. "This season has been crazy, disruptive, all of the above. What I tried not to do and what we tried not to do was focus on those things and have built-in excuses. We just kept pushing forward. I thought going into the semifinal game against Clemson, we hadn't played our best game yet, and we needed to play our best game tonight against Alabama, and we didn't.


"For us to continually work through all of that and get to this moment right here was an unbelievable success. The goal of the game was not to get here, the goal was to win the game. But all that being said, I couldn't be prouder of our culture, what our kids are made of and where the program is headed."

Now, the Buckeyes find themselves in



PHOTO COURTESY THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS



NEVER FORGET – Ohio State posted the score of the 2019 Fiesta Bowl defeat to Clemson all over the Woody Hayes Athletic Center as a motivational tool for the players, including quarterback Justin Fields, who threw an interception in the end zone in the final minute of the 29-23 loss.



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COVER STORY

the same position as last offseason, coming off a loss that will motivate them throughout workouts, spring practice, fall camp and into next season. There will surely be reminders throughout the Woody Hayes Athletic Center of the 52-24 defeat, too, just as the score of the 29-23 loss to Clemson in the 2019 Fiesta Bowl was plastered all over the weight room, as Ohio State looks to make a run at a fifth straight Big Ten title and a return trip to the College Football Playoff in 2021.

“For the guys who were in the locker room who are going to be coming back, they have something to motivate them in the offseason, that feeling of coming off the field,” Day said. “We felt that way coming off the field last year against Clemson. Now we feel that way coming off the field against Alabama. We’re going to use that as a motivation in the offseason.”

This offseason will be especially critical, since the Buckeyes are set to lose all six team captains to the NFL, including Fields, center Josh Myers, offensive guard Wyatt Davis, defensive end Jonathon Cooper, cornerback Shaun Wade and linebacker Tuf Borland, who this season became just the second three-time team captain in school history, joining former quarterback J.T. Barrett.

Even so, they are confident that new leaders will emerge to make sure the team responds the right way.

“I feel like they’re going to respond the same way that they felt last year with that Clemson loss, honestly,” Cooper said after the loss to the Crimson Tide. “I am excited to watch and see what they do next year. I feel like this is just going to fuel them and motivate them to greater heights, to just achieve more. I feel like they got a taste of it and now they just need to go finish it.”

Borland echoed those sentiments.

“I think the guys that come back next year will grow from it and be better from it,” he said.

Fields, who declared for the 2021 NFL draft on Jan. 18 and is widely expected to be among the first quarterbacks selected in April, addressed the team after the loss in hopes that it would motivate them to accomplish what he and the other departees could not.

“I was just telling the young guys that they have a lot more years here left and

to remember what this feels like,” Fields said. “To never let it happen to them again. I encouraged them to get back to work as quickly as possible and just remember this feeling of walking off the field with a loss. It doesn’t really happen that much here at Ohio State, so I just told them to remember the feeling.”

One of the players expected to step into a leadership role is rising junior right tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere, who – along with returning senior Thayer Munford – is assumed to anchor the offensive line, especially with the departure of Davis and Meyers.

“We try to use everything we can to play with a chip on our shoulder and fuel us for next season,” Petit-Frere said. “After that loss to Clemson, we really left the field with a bitter taste in our mouth, saying how we left a lot of stuff on the field that could have brought us to the championship game like this year.

“When we went out to go play against Clemson, we remembered those feelings. We had a lot of those emotions when we were playing that game, but we knew to keep our poise and calm and do the job that we needed to do. So, same thing here. This is just another building block for our team to make us stronger, not only as a team, as the group we have coming back, but also for future Buckeyes.”

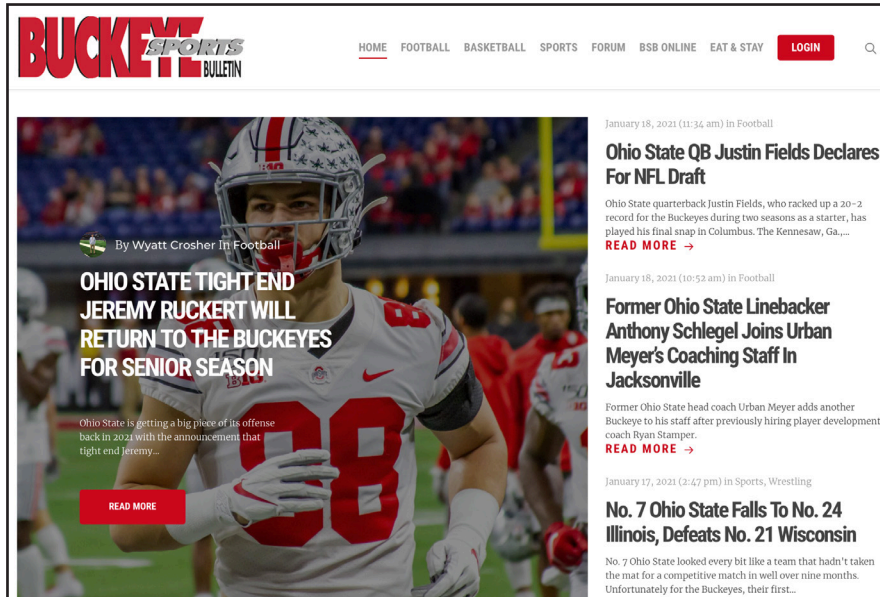
There’s no denying this anxiety-filled season took a toll on Day and the rest of the Ohio State football program. The Buckeyes, who were clearly exhausted after the national championship, will now take a deep breath and look back fondly at all they’ve accomplished before diving headfirst into putting together a game plan for how to beat the Crimson Tide.

“We need a break,” Day said. “We need to get away. These guys are missing their families and we all just need a break. We’ve already started to put together the schedule for the spring, but we all need to get away for a while. This has been a long, long road. Guys miss their families, and they deserve time to be with them.

“You can’t just go back into work here. You need some time to rest and reflect. We’ll unwind for a little while, have an opportunity to reflect on what the season has been, and then get back into it.”

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Buckeyes Fail To Slow Down 'Bama's Weapons

Coming into the game against Alabama, the storyline was that this national title matchup was a battle between two of the best offenses in the country and that Ohio State would have to keep up with the scoring from the Crimson Tide if it wanted a chance to upset the team that was the No. 1 seed throughout this season's College Football Playoff rankings.

GAME NOTEBOOK Wyatt Crosher

For the first 25 minutes of the game, the Buckeyes were up to the challenge, trailing by just four points, 21-17, following a field goal by true freshman Jake Seibert, who was playing in place of Blake Haubeil, who had tested positive with COVID-19. But from there, Alabama took over, scoring 31 of the final 38 points in the game for a 52-24 rout to earn head coach Nick Saban his seventh national title, the most for any coach in college football history.

"They're very good schematically, and they have really good personnel," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said immediately following the game. "It's one thing to have a good play, it's another thing to execute it. We didn't do that well enough on either side of the ball tonight. I don't think there's one thing. I think it's several things. We didn't finish a couple of those drives, didn't get the fourth-down conversion, two of them, and they continued to make big plays. They got up, I think, four scores on us, and we couldn't quite keep up. It was just a combination of things."

On the night, the Crimson Tide finished with 621 yards of total offense, far surpassing the previous season high of 490 yards Ohio State had allowed against Indiana on Nov. 21. Like that game, where quarterback Michael Penix threw for 491



COURTESY OF THE ALABAMA DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

COULDN'T STOP HIM – Before he was injured on a hit in the third quarter of Alabama's 52-24 win over Ohio State, Heisman Trophy-winning wide receiver DeVonta Smith caught 12 passes for 215 yards and three touchdowns.

yards and five scores, the Buckeyes struggled stopping the pass attack, this time with fourth-year junior quarterback Mac Jones at the helm.

Jones completed 36 of 45 passes for a season-high 464 yards and five touchdowns, and he did much of that damage in the first half, throwing for 220 yards in the second quarter and 342 yards in the opening 30 minutes to help Alabama jump out to a 35-17 halftime lead.

As has been the case all season, Jones had a favorite target in senior wide receiver DeVonta Smith, the winner of this year's Heisman Trophy. Smith played in less than half of this game, but his presence was felt in a big way, finishing the game with 12 receptions for 215 yards and three touchdowns.

"I don't know if I've seen (a receiver) better than that," Day said of Smith. "He just seemed to create a lot of separation. He's obviously very fast. He plays stronger than he looks. He's not a very big guy, but his play strength is significant.

He just eats up ground down the field once he gets those strides going. He has tremendous ball skills, the Heisman Trophy winner and well deserved. He's a great player."

Smith had four catches of more than 20 yards, including two receptions of 44 and 42 yards late in the second quarter, the latter good for a score, that helped expand Alabama's lead from 21-17 to 35-17 in less than a four-minute span.

"They just gave him the ball in open space, and he made plays," said Ohio State fourth-year junior cornerback Shaun Wade. "He's a great player, and they had a great scheme. They just made plays. They just came and outplayed us today."

While Jones and Smith were Alabama's two Heisman finalists, with Jones finishing third, running back Najee Harris finished just outside the threshold to become a finalist and ranked fifth in voting. Compared to his quarterback and star wide receiver, Harris' performance was subdued, but he still had a strong

showing, finishing with 158 total yards and three touchdowns.

On the ground, Harris ran 22 times for 79 yards and a pair of touchdowns, while also adding 79 yards and a touchdown on seven catches in the receiving game, with the score coming on a 26-yard play that saw Harris beat fifth-year senior linebacker Tuf Borland in space to leap into the end zone.

On the whole, it was not a strong showing from an Ohio State defense that has struggled at points throughout the season. But Day said that the team was not looking to make any widescale changes to its scheme in the game against the Crimson Tide.

"We wanted to make sure we didn't change what we do, just fundamentally, but we also had to have some change-ups because if you just sit there, they're going to pick you apart," Day said. "It's one thing to have some ideas, it's another thing to execute them. We didn't do that well enough. There were just obviously

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Game Analysis

way too many big plays, and then on offense we couldn't go score for score with them, and then the game gets out of hand.

"Our guys competed. They played all the way to the end. I wouldn't have any other group with me. They're a special group of men. We had some things that we did that we wanted to change it up. We also wanted to make sure we were doing the same things that got us to this point, but clearly it wasn't good enough."

Absences, Injuries Take Their Toll

Before Ohio State took the field, the team knew it had an uphill battle in the trenches on the defensive side of the ball without junior defensive tackle Tommy Togiai or junior defensive end Tyreke Smith in the lineup.

Still, even after a lackluster performance by the defense, fifth-year senior defensive end Jonathon Cooper was proud of all the players who stepped up in place of those two key cogs of the unit.

"Tommy and Tyreke are great players, but I have to give a lot of credit to the guys that stepped in their place," Cooper said. "Jerron Cage and Tyler Friday, Javontae (Jean-Baptiste) and Zach (Harrison) and Antwuan Jackson and Taron Vincent are all on the inside. They definitely stepped up to play. I'm very proud of them. Even with us missing a guy like Tommy and Tyreke, they stepped up and played really well in my opinion. I'm really excited to see what they all do next year."

The players who were unavailable impacted the play of the defense, but it was injuries that hampered Ohio State on the offensive side of the ball, both from prior games and from within the matchup against Alabama.

Coming into the game, the attention was on the health of junior quarterback Justin Fields, who suffered a rib injury against Clemson on a hit from linebacker James Skalski that got him ejected for targeting. Despite that injury, Fields threw for 385 yards and six touchdowns against the Tigers.

In this game, Fields made less of an impact, completing 17 of his 33 passes for 194 yards and a touchdown. He also ran the ball six times for a team-high 67 yards, including a long of 33 yards.

While he admitted that he was not 100 percent, Fields made no excuses for his performance following the defeat.

"At the end of the day I'm glad I was able to play, and we didn't get the job done," Fields said. "Of course, I could have been healthier, but I was healthy enough. I was able to be out there. We had a good game plan planned out, but they executed better than we did. 'Bama is a great team. You have to give them their respect, and we just have to be better."

The Ohio State offense was also not helped by the events of the first play of the game, where the Buckeyes lost running back Trey Sermon, who left the stadium and went to a hospital after just one carry for 2 yards.

Sermon, who had the best two-game rushing span in program history after rushing for 331 yards in the Big Ten Championship Game against Northwestern and 193 yards in the College Football Playoff Semifinal against Clemson, was a major reason the Buckeyes were even in the national title game and would have been implemented in a big way against the Crimson Tide.

What Worked Well

There were not all too many positives to take from Ohio State's 28-point loss to Alabama, but early on, the offense was able to get the ball moving. The Buckeyes countered Alabama's opening touchdown drive with an eight-play, 75-yard drive finished off with a touchdown by running back Master Teague.

Teague would score again on a 4-yard rush in the second quarter to tie the game at 14, with that play coming off a beautiful strip sack by linebacker Baron Browning. Teague finished the game with a respectable 15 carries for 65 yards and two touchdowns, serving as the primary back after Trey Sermon went down on the first play of the game.

Quarterback Justin Fields also had some moments, throwing for 194 yards and a touchdown while also rushing for 67 yards on six carries. He was the catalyst for a three-play, 75-yard touchdown drive in the third quarter that cut the deficit to 14 on a 20-yard touchdown connection with sophomore wide receiver Garrett Wilson in the third quarter.

What Didn't Work

Any success that Ohio State had on offense was completely overshadowed by how much the defense was completely dismantled by the Crimson Tide for the vast majority of the game. Alabama finished with 621 yards of total offense and 52 points after punting only one time through the first three quarters.

A whopping 464 of those yards came through the air, with quarterback Mac Jones completing 36 of his 45 passes and throwing five touchdowns. He was helped by Heisman Trophy winner DeVonta Smith, who had 12 receptions for 215 yards

and three touchdowns, all of which came in the first half before he dislocated his finger and left the game.

Running back Najee Harris was somewhat held in check on the ground, rushing 22 times for 79 yards and two touchdowns, but also played a major factor in the pass game, hauling in seven catches for 79 yards and another score.

Offensively, after keeping pace with the Crimson Tide for much of the first half, the Buckeyes lost all momentum. Following a 23-yard field goal by freshman kicker Jake Seibert, Ohio State was outscored 31-7 the rest of the game on the way to a lopsided defeat.

Play Of The Game

Following that field goal by Seibert, Alabama went on a five-play, 75-yard touchdown drive in 2:02 to take a 28-17 lead with a little over three minutes to play in the first half. Ohio State had an opportunity to counter and make it a one-score game but could not get a first down and was forced to punt the ball back to the Crimson Tide.

Then, with 2:29 to play in the half, Jones immediately found Harris for a 14-yard gain and then found him again for 4 more yards before completing a 42-yard touchdown pass to Smith to put the Crimson Tide up 35-17.

That connection would be the final one of the night for Jones and Smith after the wide receiver's injury, and it might have been the completion that truly broke the backs of Ohio State's comeback efforts before the team even reached half-time.

— Wyatt Crosher

Day said the loss of Sermon, as well as other players who were unavailable, played a role in the 28-point defeat.

"To lose Trey on the first play of the game is one of those things," Day said. "Whenever you think what's going to happen in the game it's probably not going to happen that way, to lose Trey in the first play of the game. We certainly missed Tommy Togiai in the game and a few others. But you've got to overcome it. Like I told the guys, nobody feels sorry for you, so you've just got to keep pushing forward. It's kind of been the theme of the season."

Master Teague, who left the Northwestern game early and missed the Clemson game entirely, filled in for Sermon and rushed the ball 15 times for 65 yards and two touchdowns. Sophomore offensive tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere said the offensive strategy remained the same, even after Sermon was out of the equation.

"It was tough losing Trey," Petit-Frere said. "He's a brother to us. When I heard that he was out after that first drive, it was really heartbreaking for us, not only as an offensive line, but as an offense and as a team in general. But we didn't change anything. We still had the same game plan. We all trained hard through all the players and depth chart, so if someone went down, we knew someone needed to come up. It's not like we only played with Trey. We made sure everyone was accounted for and everyone was able to play and do their job."

Later in the game, Ohio State suffered another loss on offense when junior guard and unanimous All-American Wyatt Davis had to leave the game with a leg injury. He was seen on the sidelines on crutches later in the game.

"I just talked to him. He kind of reinjured that knee," Day said on the status of Davis. "He's sore right now. I'm not sure what the diagnosis is. We'll have to check with our doctors. But he's sore. He's certainly in pain."

On the night, Ohio State rushed 29 times for 147 yards to get the team's

total yards up to 341, nearly 300 short of Alabama's final game total. The total yardage was by far the lowest the Buckeyes put up this season, coming in under the 491 yards they finished with in the season opener against Nebraska.

"They played a good game," said junior wide receiver Chris Olave. "They had some really good defense. That's a really good team over there, but they just played better ball than us today. And they came out with the win."

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Tide Rolls To 52-24 Win In Championship Game

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Led by Heisman Trophy winner DeVonta Smith, for a damaging first half at least, Alabama returned to glory in a dominating manner with a 52-24 win for the No. 1 Crimson Tide over third-ranked Ohio State in the College Football Playoff championship game before 14,926 fans at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Fla., on Jan. 11.

Alabama (13-0) scored on five of its first six possessions for a 35-17 halftime lead and was never threatened from there as former Ohio State assistant coach Nick Saban became the all-time leader in modern era national titles with seven (six at Alabama, one at LSU) to surpass Crimson Tide legend Paul "Bear" Bryant.

"We needed to play our best game tonight against Alabama, and we didn't," said Ohio State coach Ryan Day.

Smith had 12 catches for 215 yards and three touchdowns in the first half, Najee Harris had three scores and Mac Jones passed for a CFP title-game-record 464 yards and five TDs.

Smith left the game after sustaining a hand injury on the first drive of the third quarter without padding his stats.

"I don't know if I've seen anyone better than that," Day said. "He created separation and plays stronger than he looks. The Heisman Trophy winner and he deserves it."

Justin Fields was 17 of 33 for 194 yards and a touchdown to Garrett Wilson for the Buckeyes.

Alabama struck first after holding the Buckeyes to 3 yards on three plays and a punt to open the game. Trey Sermon was knocked out of the contest after gaining 2 yards on the first play.

Harris capped the 12-play, 78-yard, 5:32 drive with a 1-yard plunge on fourth down at the 8:07 mark. Jones had completions of 22 and 9 yards to Smith, a 15-yarder on third down to Jaylen Waddle to move the chains, and a 12-yard catch by Harris.

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COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

GAVE IT THEIR ALL – Senior linebacker Baron Browning forced and recovered a fumble in the second quarter of Ohio State's national championship loss to Alabama, which allowed the Buckeyes to tie the game at 14 just one play later.

Ohio State responded with an impressive eight-play, 75-yard drive to tie the score when Master Teague ran for an 8-yard TD with 4:55 left in the first to make it 7-7.

Chris Olave had a 20-yard catch to the Alabama 44, and two plays later Jeremy Ruckert made a one-handed catch for 36 to the 8. Teague on the next snap rolled around the left end for the score.

Alabama methodically marched 75 yards, using 11 plays and 4:58, to take a 14-7 lead seven seconds into the second quarter with Smith making a 5-yard TD reception. He gained 44 yards on two catches to open the drive, and Harris converted a fourth-and-1 from the 10 with a run of 3 yards. He then had two carries totaling 2 yards before the score.

The only turnover of the game enabled the Buckeyes to even the score at 14 on a 4-yard rush from Teague with 11:43 remaining in the half. Linebacker Baron Browning strip-sacked Jones and recovered the fumble at the Alabama 19. A pass interference on the first play put the ball at the 4 to set up Teague.

Harris had a 26-yard catch-and-run for an easy six to make it 21-14 with 9:00 remaining. The Crimson Tide needed only five plays and 2:43 to go 75 yards. Smith had back-to-back receptions of 16 and 13 yards, and Harris added a 13-yard run.

Ohio State closed to 21-17 on a 23-yard field goal by freshman Jake Seibert – the first of his career in his second attempt – at 5:21, but the Buckeyes could have gotten more. Runs of 28 by Fields and 29 by Teague on consecutive plays got OSU to the 15, but the Buckeyes couldn't punch it in.

On third-and-11 from the 16, Alabama safety Jordan Battle was ejected for targeting on Ruckert to give the Buckeyes a first down at the 8. Two incomplete passes and a Teague run of 2 yards forced the three-pointer.

Jones shredded the defense, complet-

ing three passes for 65 yards including a 44-yarder to Smith, when Alabama made it four TDs in five series. Smith caught another 5-yarder for a 28-17 score with 3:19 left as the Tide went 75 yards in five plays and 2:02.

Smith started and ended the next scoring sequence for a 35-17 lead with 1:48 left before the intermission when he crafted a 19-yard punt return to the Alabama 40. Jones went to Harris for 14 and 4 before Smith flew past the defense for a 42-yard TD.

More Of The Same

Alabama extended the lead to 38-17 on its first drive of the third quarter, culminating in a 20-yard field goal by Will Reichard at 7:47.

Harris had a run for 13 and a catch for 10 and Waddle caught a ball for 13 among the 16 plays, but Smith went to the sideline with a finger injury after being hit by Pete Werner.

Fields used his arm and legs to cut the margin to 38-24 in rapid fashion. He hit Garrett Wilson for 17 to the OSU 42, and after an offside penalty on Alabama, Fields took off for 33 yards to the 20. He tossed a 20-yard TD to Wilson at 6:45 of the third for the three-play, 75-yard drive that used just 1:02.

But the Tide was undeterred, and Jones guided them 75 yards in eight plays and 3:53 as he spotted Slade Bolden for a 5-yard TD with 2:52 left in the quarter to make it 45-24. The big plays were a 22-yard pass to Jahleel Billingsley and a 21-yard run by Brian Robinson.

After stopping the Buckeyes on a fourth-and-1 at the OSU 45 when Teague lost 2 yards, the Tide removed all doubt about the outcome when Harris ran it in from the 1 with 13:15 remaining in the game for the final margin.

Later, Ohio State had a 17-play possession that ended with zero points midway through the fourth quarter after Fields

threw four incompletions on first-and-goal from the 6.

The teams exchanged possessions before the Crimson Tide got the ball with 4:53 left and ran eight plays to finish the game at the OSU 47.

Jones completed 36 of 45 passes as Alabama had 621 total yards to 341 for OSU.

Teague, playing for the injured Sermon, carried 15 times for 65 yards and the two scores. Sermon had 524 rushing yards in the previous two games.

The Buckeyes had 13 players unavailable for the game including starters Tommy Togiai at defensive tackle, defensive tackle Tyreke Smith and kicker Blake Haubeil. The school didn't give reasons for their absences as usual, but the program has been hit hard by COVID-19 issues during the latter half of the season.

The Buckeyes (7-1) were seeking their sixth recognized national title and first since winning the inaugural CFP title on Jan. 12, 2015, by beating Oregon 42-20 after downing Alabama 42-35 in the semifinal.

Alabama (13-0) claimed its 18th national title, although the NCAA recognizes 16. The most recent came when the Crimson Tide defeated Georgia 26-23 on Jan. 9, 2018.

Numbers

Smith's catch total was a record for Bowl Championship Series or CFP national title games back to 1998, and his yardage total ranked second. ... Alabama had four TD drives of 75 yards. The others went 78, 60 and 43 yards. They led in time of possession (37:26-22:34) and first downs (33-19). ... Fields topped the Buckeyes with 67 yards on the ground on six carries. ... Olave had eight catches for 69 yards, and Wilson had three for 50. ... Harris had 79 yards rushing and 79 receiving. ... OSU's Tuf Borland had a game-high 14 tackles (seven solo). Justin Hilliard and Werner each had four solo and four assisted tackles for the Buckeyes.

Media Reacts To OSU's Blowout Defeat To Alabama

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

Ohio State was not able to put up much of a fight against Alabama, falling 52-24 to the Crimson Tide in the College Football Playoff national championship game, with Alabama quarterback Mac Jones (464 passing yards, five touchdowns) and wide receiver DeVonta Smith (12 catches, 215 yards, three touchdowns) leading the way. Smith had all his production in the first half.

While the game was not as back and forth as the Buckeyes' battle against Clemson the season prior, there were still plenty of opinions shared from media members, both who cover the team and who cover college football nationally, on what exactly happened in the 28-point defeat.

"Alabama proved itself again to be a tier above the rest of college football in 2020 – especially with the way it dusted Ohio State in Monday's national championship game.

"So what does the Buckeye program take away from that experience?

"On one hand, Ohio State achieved much in 2019-20. It reached the playoffs twice. It emphatically avenged itself against nemesis Clemson. It reached the national championship game and took its shot at the premier program in the sport.

"Yet the Buckeyes still could leave Hard Rock Stadium with new perspectives. From a recruiting standpoint, Ohio State learned that even brief lulls at one or two positions can spell catastrophe against teams such as 2019 LSU and 2020 Alabama. Since one of those teams will always be out there, the Buckeyes may need to make defensive adjustments to better develop and utilize their talent."

– **Nathan Baird,**
Cleveland.com

"Ohio State was down 14 players, including two starters along the defensive line, due to COVID-19. Running back Trey Sermon left with an arm injury after his first carry, and All-American guard Wyatt Davis left the game in the second quarter.

"Ohio State still managed to run the ball effectively with Master Teague, but Justin Fields was limited to 6-of-15 passing for 90 yards in the first half. Fields played through an injury in the semifinal victory against Clemson, but the Buckeyes fell too far behind in the first half because of Alabama's offense. Fields finished 17-of-33 passing for 194 yards and a score, adding 67 rushing yards as well.

"Buckeyes coach Ryan Day has done a fantastic job in two seasons since taking over for Urban Meyer. Ohio State is 20-2 with back-to-back

Big Ten championships in that stretch. But on Monday, he was playing short-handed, and his defense couldn't stop Alabama's high-powered attack."

– **Bill Bender,**
Sporting News

"Ohio State is an elite football program. Over the past several years only Alabama and Clemson have consistently performed at an equal or better level than the Buckeyes. Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, they ran into a buzzsaw of an Alabama team on Monday night, losing in blowout fashion in the College Football Playoff.

"But Ohio State is not going anywhere and 2021 should again be quite promising. In the 247Sports early Top 25, I voted Ohio State No. 2; the highest of any analyst. I can see the argument for placing the Buckeyes anywhere within the top five, but as the high man, I was asked to explain the vote.

"A good bit of my ranking is based on my faith in the recruiting Ohio State has done under coach Ryan Day. Only Alabama and Georgia have recruited at an equal or better level during his tenure, as I explained in my Blue-Chip Ratio piece. Recruiting rankings are not a guarantee of success, but recruiting at this level is an extremely strong indicator."

– **Bud Elliott,**
247Sports

"The Sugar Bowl, in retrospect, was offensive perfection from Ohio State.

"Justin Fields threw six touchdown passes and just one interception. Trey Sermon galloped for 193 yards and a score. Chris Olave torched the Clemson secondary to the tune of 132 yards and a pair of touchdowns. The offensive line blasted holes for Sermon and largely kept Fields upright. Even the tight ends got in on the action, with Jeremy Ruckert and Luke Farrell scoring a combined 21 points.

"The problem with trying to replicate perfection is, well, trying to replicate perfection. It's incredibly difficult, especially when trying to do so on the stage of a national championship game against a talented Alabama defense with Nick Saban at the helm."

– **Colin Hass-Hill,**
Eleven Warriors

"Devonta Smith was in the locker room, injured. Najee Harris was on the sideline, resting. Mac Jones was on the field, hobbling. Jaylen Waddle was there, too, hardly able to walk on his surgically repaired ankle.

"Alabama, for a few moments

anyway, actually looked a bit vulnerable.

"Then ... Touchdown, Crimson Tide.

"Ohio State's defense couldn't get a stop, not even then. And whatever slim chances the Buckeyes still had at coming back in Monday's national championship game died there, when wide receiver Slade Bolden won a footrace to the corner of the end zone on a late third-quarter scoring drive against a gassed defense just trying to hold on for dear life.

"OSU had no answer for this magical Alabama offense. No team has all season. The only hope for the Big Ten champs was that whatever number the Tide landed on, it wouldn't be so astronomical that the Buckeyes couldn't keep up.

"The final – Alabama 52, Ohio State 24 – will replace the losing margin from last year's College Football Playoff disappointment against Clemson as the target that fuels this coming offseason. But that loss last year felt like snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. Monday night was a clinic by one team that's built to contend on an annual basis and a stark reminder of the ground that Ohio State needs to make up if it wants to once again celebrate a national title."

– **Bill Landis,**
The Athletic

"Sometimes you get beat because the other guy is just that much better.

"Or in the case of Alabama, the other guys, plural – although for 30 minutes on Monday night in suburban Miami it appeared that Crimson Tide receiver DeVonta Smith might outscore Ohio State all by his lonesome.

"Regardless, the better team won. The much better team. Play 10 times and the Buckeyes maybe win two. Three, if things fall exactly right. The Tide showed it is a worthy champion by clocking OSU 52-24.

"There is no shame in Ohio State losing to Nick Saban – now with seven national titles overall – and an Alabama offense that ranks among the best ever. The Crimson Tide rolled up 389 yards in the first half alone (and 621 overall), more than OSU totaled for the game (341).

"Allowing 52 points is unacceptable, and for many scarlet and gray devotees depressingly unwatchable, but dropping chin to chest meant not seeing a performance as pretty in its perfection as it was painful for those on the wrong end of it."

– **Rob Oller,**
The Columbus Dispatch

"Ohio State's on-field log included the usual lopsided wins against inferior Big Ten competition. But the Buckeyes delivered their most complete and validating performance in the CFP semifinal against Clemson, the team that had ended Ohio State's 2019 season and many assumed would face Alabama.

"Day called the Clemson win 'a landmark game' in program history. There were more obstacles heading into the title game.

"Fields was still recovering from a massive hit to his side in the Clemson win. Between positive cases and contact tracing, COVID-19 issues began impacting the roster in November and limited position groups, like offensive line, wide receiver and linebacker. There have also been issues in recent weeks with the defensive line.

"Ohio State had three starters sidelined against Alabama, including defensive tackle Tommy Togiai, who Big Ten coaches considered the team's most disruptive defensive lineman. At one point last week, there were rumblings of potentially postponing the title game.

"Day made it clear throughout the week his team wasn't just happy to make the title game. Any minute not focused on Alabama was a minute wasted. Yet he continued to be asked, and continued to acknowledge, the difficult and draining path to South Florida.

"Ohio State will likely win more titles and play in more national championship games, but it will never have an odyssey quite like this one."

– **Adam Rittenberg,**
ESPN

"Waiting in the final chapter of what was supposed to be a fairytale for the Buckeyes was a monster, and they simply couldn't slay it.

"The offense couldn't find its top gear. The defense was absolutely picked apart. And injuries and positive tests that Ohio State had mostly shrugged off during this unprecedented season finally caught up with it in key spots as Alabama dominated the national-title matchup in a 52-24 decision on Monday night at Hard Rock Stadium.

"Make no mistake: The Buckeyes didn't make any excuses, and the Crimson Tide was clearly the better team. But Ohio State had a handful of chances that showed it belonged on the championship field before the missed opportunities and blown coverages caught up with them."

– **Austin Ward,**
Lettermen Row

BSB Quotebook: Alabama 52, Ohio State 24

Ohio State junior quarterback Justin Fields when asked how much losing senior tailback Trey Sermon to injury in the first quarter impacted what Ohio State wanted to do offensively: "Of course he was hot these last few weeks, but we have the mentality of competitive excellence. And when one man goes down, we have to bring up the next man. But we would have liked to have Trey out there. He's a baller, he's a warrior, but he wasn't able to play with us. But with or without him, we've still got to execute."

Ohio State junior wide receiver Chris Olave when asked what was in his head after having such high expectations and not having the offensive production the team wanted: "It was tough. I mean, we have high standards for ourselves, high standards for each other. We worked so hard all season to get to this point. And we didn't play our best game today. It's tough. And it's a down moment. But we just have to soak it in and bounce back."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on Fields playing through injury: "Justin has been unbelievable. He's as tough a player as I've been around. For him to go out there and play today really shows his toughness and how much he loves his brothers. He still took some shots on that hip. He was not 100 percent tonight. He was working through it and made some really good throws, made some gutsy plays, kept us in the game there for a while. He's an unbelievable player, and I'm going to miss him."

Ohio State junior tight end Jeremy Ruckert on his relationship with Fields: "Other than as a football player, you can tell just how much of a competitor he is and how truly great he is. He always puts us in a great position. And he's one of the toughest players I've ever been around. One of my toughest teammates I've ever seen. He showed that last game and coming back this game, behind the scenes, just 24/7 in our training room, getting his body right and doing everything he can to make sure he's out here. And I feel he didn't even give it away that he was hurt at all. It looked like he was standing in there strong and doing whatever he could to help us win. He's a great person, an unbelievable football player and I'm excited to watch his future."

Fields on what his two years at Ohio State meant to him: "The last few years have been great. I've made a lot of friendships and made a lot of brothers. We definitely wanted a different outcome, but I'm definitely going to miss everybody."

Fields on how the loss will motivate him in the offseason: "It's going to motivate me a lot. We didn't get the turnout that we wanted to, didn't get the result that we wanted. But that's just going to make us work harder. This team deals with adversity very well. We've been through a lot of adversity this past year. We're just going to use it to get back and just work our butts off."

Ohio State fifth-year senior defensive end Jonathon Cooper when asked about facing an offense like Alabama's and how the defense felt in practice with its preparation: "A lot of credit to Alabama. They're a great team. We knew that coming in. They're coached very well, and they have good players. We felt like we did a good job preparing all week. There's not much I can say hon-

estly. You guys saw the game. They're a good team. I feel like we didn't execute and didn't tackle as well as we should have, as a whole defense. We just had to be better. Unfortunately, we were not. They took advantage of that."

Ohio State fourth-year junior cornerback Shaun Wade when asked if returning for the season was worth it for him despite the loss in the national championship: "Oh, yeah, definitely it was worth it. I see myself growing as a man and as a team, and all the young guys growing as men, all the things that we went through, the adversity. I'm happy I came back, and I'm just glad we got here. I'm upset we didn't get the win, but I'm definitely happy I came back and accomplished some big things with this team. I'm proud of them. I'm proud of everybody."

Wade on if he will return again or enter the NFL draft: "I really can't say. You know, I do want to come back and everything. I have to talk to my parents. It is upsetting that we got here, and we just didn't accomplish the goal. And that's just been my goal, winning a national championship and just winning big games like this. I'll just go back with my parents, go talk to them and just go from there."

Alabama senior wide receiver DeVonta Smith when asked what he thought about Wade wanting to cover him and how he felt the matchup went after his 12-catch, 215-yard, three-touchdown first half: "Well, I mean, I just practiced hard all week, just worked, came to do my job. It just worked out well for me and the team."

Alabama head coach Nick Saban when asked how tough it was to see Smith get hurt after the season he had: "Well, he really dislocated his finger. I told Smitty after the game, I said, 'You're the only player that I know that missed a whole half because of your finger.' It was dislocated and they couldn't get it back in. If they'd have got it back in, he would have been fine. He actually wanted to play, we just didn't allow him to. He's a great competitor. I heard somebody say he set some kind of record in the first half of the game. Heavens knows what he would have done if he played the whole game. But you're talking about the ultimate warrior, ultimate competitor. I'm so happy for him that he was recognized as the best player in college football because I don't think anybody has done more for their team than he has for our team."

Ohio State fifth-year senior linebacker Tuf Borland on his vantage point when Alabama's Heisman Trophy-winning receiver in Smith beat him on a route for a touchdown: "Just three deep down. We know one of the issues is protecting the seams, so it kind of just happened. He's a Heisman Trophy winner, so give him credit. He's a good player. So I'll work to get it fixed."

Day on facing the offensive firepower of the Crimson Tide: "They're very good schematically, and they have really good personnel. And so, it's one thing to have a good play, it's another thing to execute it. We didn't do that well enough on either side of the ball tonight."

Day when asked if he needs to change his defensive scheme for future matchups with teams that have the kind of talent that Alabama

had on the national title stage: "We did do some different things. We changed up some of the looks and played some two high, which is not something we typically do a lot of. We pressured some more the last couple games. So I thought we did mix it up a decent amount. But again, it's another thing to actually execute it. When you're playing against elite players, and this is probably one of the better offenses in college football in a long time, the margin for error is tiny. I think it's probably more the execution. I thought at least in the first half we did a decent job against the run game, which was a huge emphasis point was we had to stop the run. And they're very well-balanced, so that's a challenge when you go against a team like this. But clearly, we didn't hold up well enough in the pass game."

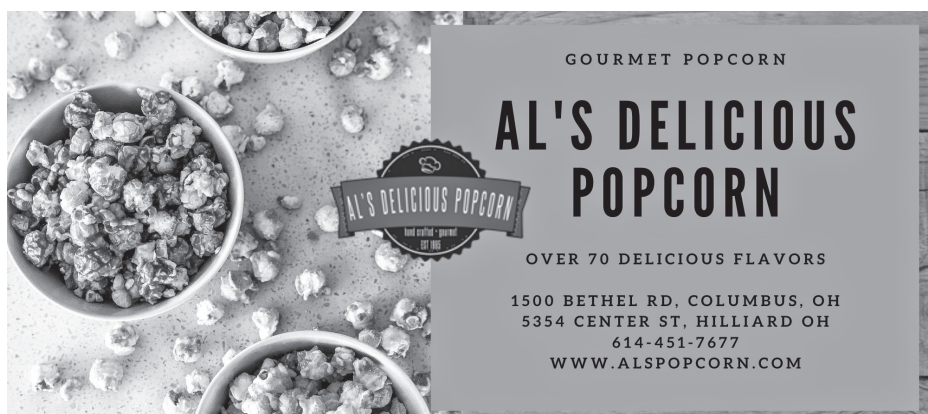
Fields when asked what his message was to the younger players whom he spoke to on the field following the loss: "I was just telling the young guys that they have a lot more years left, and I was just telling them to remember what this feels like, never let it happen to them again. Of course, they were down. They have time left, so I encouraged them to get back to work as quickly as possible and just remember this feeling of walking off the field with a loss. I just told them to remember the feeling."

Alabama sophomore wide receiver John Metchie III on being a Canadian and playing on a big stage like the national championship: "It feels great. I do it for all my people back home who continue to support me. I remember watching these national championship games when I was a kid in Canada and dreaming of playing in it. So being able to finally play in one and win one, as a matter of fact, is surreal. It's something that's kind of hard to put words to describe."

Smith on the toughness of junior wide receiver Jaylen Waddle to play through injury: "It just shows the commitment, how much he loves his team. Him just wanting to be out there, just doing what he can, give us everything he's got. That was just the message. Give us what you got, we'll take anything."

Alabama fourth-year junior quarterback Mac Jones when asked if Nick Saban is the greatest college football coach of all time: "C'mon, man. Of course, he is. How could he not be? He does it the right way. He recruits well, but more importantly develops great players and young men. I'm just so blessed that he gave me a chance to come here along with all my teammates. I wouldn't trade it for anything. He's the greatest to ever do it. He'll be the greatest for a long time."

Alabama senior tailback Najee Harris when asked how he was able to expose holes in Ohio State's really good front so effortlessly: "Effortlessly? You didn't see what they were doing? They were blowing my ass up. What are you talking about? It wasn't effortlessly. I'll tell you what. They did their thing, to be honest with you. It was just, you know, what they did is every time we did a play-action, they just shot the gaps. The linebackers, we had a couple of them to play a lot of fakes. That's why we were able to throw so many bubbles and slants and all that. But bro, they were blowing my ass out. You're tripping. It was not easy. I am hurting."



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The Numbers Game

Alabama 52, Ohio State 24

Jan. 11, 2021 – Hard Rock Stadium, Miami Gardens, Fla.

| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F |
|-------------------|---|----|----|---|----|
| OHIO STATE | 7 | 10 | 7 | 0 | 24 |
| ALABAMA | 7 | 28 | 10 | 7 | 52 |

First Quarter

UA – Harris, 1-yard run (Reichard kick), 8:07; 12 plays, 78 yards, 5:32 TOP.
OSU – Teague, 8-yard run (Seibert kick), 4:55; 8 plays, 75 yards, 3:12 TOP.

Second Quarter

UA – Smith, 5-yard pass from Jones (Reichard kick), 14:53; 11 plays, 75 yards, 4:58 TOP.

OSU – Teague, 4-yard run (Seibert kick), 11:43; 1 plays, 19 yards, 0:11 TOP.

UA – Harris, 26-yard run (Reichard kick), 9:00; 5 plays, 75 yards, 2:43 TOP.

OSU – Seibert, 23-yard field goal, 5:21; 9 plays, 69 yards, 3:39 TOP.

UA – Smith, 5-yard pass from Jones (Reichard kick), 3:19; 5 plays, 75 yards, 2:02 TOP.

UA – Smith, 42-yard pass from Jones (Reichard kick), 1:48; 3 plays, 60 yards, 0:41 TOP.

Third Quarter

UA – Reichard, 20-yard field goal, 7:47; 16 plays, 75 yards, 7:08 TOP.

OSU – Wilson, 20-yard pass from Fields (Seibert kick), 6:45; 3 plays, 75 yards, 1:02 TOP.

UA – Bolden, 5-yard pass from Jones (Reichard kick), 2:52; 8 plays, 75 yards, 3:53 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

UA – Harris, 1-yard run (Reichard kick), 13:15; 6 plays, 43 yards, 2:47 TOP.

Att. – 14,926

Weather – 69 degrees, fair, wind 3 mph SW

Team Statistics

| | OSU | UA |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| First Downs | 19 | 33 |
| Rushing | 5 | 10 |
| Passing | 11 | 22 |
| Penalty | 3 | 1 |
| Rushes-Yards | 29-147 | 38-157 |
| Passing Yards | 194 | 464 |
| Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.) | 17-33-0 | 36-45-0 |
| Offensive Plays | 62 | 83 |
| Total Net Yards | 341 | 621 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 6-14 | 6-11 |
| Punts-Avg. | 5-42.8 | 2-38.0 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 0-0 | 1-1 |
| Penalties | 4-29 | 6-44 |
| Time of Possession | 22:34 | 37:26 |

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Fields 6-67; Teague 15-65; Crowley 6-14; Sermon 1-2; TEAM 1-(-1). **UA:** Harris 22-79; Robinson 10-69; Jones 4-11; TEAM 2-(-2).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Fields 17-33-0-194-1. **UA:** Jones 36-45-0-464-5.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Olave 8-69; Wilson 3-50; Smith-Njigba 2-20; Ruckert 1-36; Williams 1-14; Crowley 1-4; Teague 1-1. **UA:** Smith 12-215; Metchie 8-81; Harris 7-79; Waddle 3-34; Bolden 3-16; Billingsley 2-27; Williams 1-12.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Chrisman 5-42.8. **UA:** Scott 2-38.0.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Wilson 1-3.0. **UA:** Smith 2-9.0.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) OSU: None. **UA:** Billingsley 1-7.0; Smith 1-6.0.

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

FORCED FUMBLES – OSU: Browning. **UA:** None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – OSU: Browning 1-0. **UA:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS – OSU: None. **UA:** None.

SACKS – OSU: Browning 1.0-6; Jackson 1.0-1. **UA:** Barmore 1.0-6.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – OSU: Hilliard 2.0-3; Browning 1.0-6; Wade 1.0-2; Jackson 1.0-1. **UA:** Barmore 2.0-8; Allen 1.0-4; Surtain 1.0-3.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU: Borland 7-7-14; Werner 4-4-8; Hilliard 4-4-8; Banks 6-1-7; Proctor 4-1-5; Browning 4-1-5; Jackson 4-1-5; Wade 2-3-5; Gant 3-0-3; Williamson 2-0-2; Cooper 1-1-2; Harrison 1-1-2; Friday 1-1-2; Garrett 1-1-2; Vincent 0-2-2; Ransom 1-0-1; Simon 1-0-1; Williams 1-0-1. **UA:** Harris 3-3-6; Moses 2-4-6; Barmore 3-2-5; Branch 3-1-4; Hellams 3-1-4; Allen 2-2-4; Battle 3-0-3; Jobe 3-0-3; Surtain 2-1-3; Anderson 2-1-3; Wright 2-0-2; Davis 1-0-1; Moody 1-0-1; Ray 0-1-1.

Players In The Game

OSU – Fields, Sermon, Williams, Olave, Wilson, Farrell, Munford, Jones, Myers, Davis, Petit-Frere, Cooper, Cage, Garrett, Jean-Baptiste, Werner, Borland, Hilliard, Proctor, Banks, Wade, Williamson, Ransom, McCall, Mitchell, Fleming, Robinson, Brock, Jackson, Browning, Vincent, Booker, Harrison, Smith-Njigba, Scott, Stover, Shaw, Babb, Gant, Chambers, Hooker, Crowley, Johnson, Teague, Rossi, Pope, Simon, Friday, Cupp, Vimahi, Wray, Miller, Johnson, Hausmann, Hamilton, Ruckert, McKenzie, Chrisman, Potter, Seibert.

UA – Leatherwood, Brown, Owens, Ekiyor, Neal, Scott, Jones, Harris, Metchie, Smith, Billingsley, Robinson, Dale, Barmore, Moses, Harris, Anderson, Surtain, Jobe, Hellams, Battle, Branch, Kaho, Davis, Bolden, Williams, Wright, Allen, Baker, Young, Moore, Reichard, Waddle, Ray, Sanders, McClellan, Banks, McMillon, Moody, Fletcher, Young, Mathis, Smith, Dickerson, Brown, Latu, Forristall, Tension, Eboigbe.

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 |
| Jan. 1 | (3) Clemson (2) | W, 49-28 | 3,000 |
| Jan. 11 | (3) Alabama (1) | L, 52-24 | 14,926 |

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 | 199 | 166 |
| Rushing | 88 | 44 |
| Passing | 91 | 110 |
| Penalty | 20 | 12 |
| Average Per Game/Rush | 256.9 | 97.6 |
| Average Per Game/Pass | 262.5 | 304.0 |
| Total Offense | 4155 | 3213 |
| Total Plays | 570 | 549 |
| Average Per Game | 519.4 | 401.6 |
| Average Per Play | 7.3 | 5.9 |
| Penalties-Yards | 49-435 | 45-414 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 9-3 | 16-12 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 52-106 | 39-105 |
| Percentage | 49% | 37% |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 5-9 | 8-15 |
| Percentage | 56% | 53% |
| Sacks-Yards | 21-129 | 21-133 |
| Time Of Possession Avg. | 32:19 | 27:36 |

Score

| By Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | OT | Tot. | Avg. |
|-------------|----|-----|----|----|----|------|------|
| Ohio State | 80 | 114 | 76 | 58 | 0 | 328 | 41.0 |
| Opponents | 41 | 48 | 54 | 63 | 0 | 206 | 25.8 |

Individual Statistics

| Rushing | Att. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Trey Sermon | 116 | 870 | 7.5 | 4 | 65 |
| Master Teague | 104 | 514 | 4.9 | 8 | 41 |
| Justin Fields | 81 | 383 | 4.7 | 5 | 44 |
| Steele Chambers | 9 | 87 | 9.6 | 0 | 38 |
| Garrett Wilson | 2 | 67 | 33.5 | 0 | 62 |
| Miyan Williams | 10 | 64 | 6.4 | 0 | 15 |
| C.J. Stroud | 1 | 48 | 48.0 | 1 | 48 |
| Jack Miller | 2 | 23 | 11.5 | 1 | 21 |
| Xavier Johnson | 4 | 17 | 4.2 | 0 | 7 |
| Marcus Crowley | 6 | 14 | 2.3 | 0 | 4 |
| Demario McCall | 1 | 12 | 12.0 | 0 | 12 |
| Chris Olave | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| TEAM | 8 | -43 | -5.4 | 0 | 0 |
| OSU Totals | 345 | 2055 | 6.0 | 19 | 65 |
| OPP Totals | 233 | 781 | 3.4 | 10 | 66 |

| Passing | Comp. | Att. | Pct. | Yds. | TD-INT | Effic. |
|-------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Justin Fields | 158 | 225 | 70.2 | 2100 | 22-6 | 175.6 |
| OSU Totals | 158 | 225 | 70.2 | 2100 | 22-6 | 175.6 |
| OPP Totals | 209 | 316 | 66.1 | 2432 | 16-7 | 143.1 |

| Receiving | Rec. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
|--------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Chris Olave | 50 | 729 | 14.6 | 7 | 56 |
| Garrett Wilson | 43 | 723 | 16.8 | 6 | 65 |
| Jeremy Ruckert | 13 | 151 | 11.6 | 5 | 36 |
| Trey Sermon | 12 | 95 | 7.9 | 0 | 34 |
| Jaxon Smith-Njigba | 10 | 49 | 4.9 | 1 | 15 |
| Jameson Williams | 9 | 154 | 17.1 | 2 | 45 |
| Julian Fleming | 7 | 74 | 10.6 | 0 | 23 |
| Master Teague | 5 | 46 | 9.2 | 0 | 23 |
| Luke Farrell | 5 | 37 | 7.4 | 1 | 16 |
| Demario McCall | 1 | 27 | 27.0 | 0 | 27 |
| Jake Hausmann | 1 | 13 | 13.0 | 0 | 13 |
| Marcus Crowley | 1 | 4 | 4.0 | 0 | 4 |
| Wyatt Davis | 1 | -2 | -2.0 | 0 | -2 |
| OSU Totals | 158 | 2100 | 13.3 | 22 | 65 |
| OPP Totals | 209 | 2432 | 11.6 | 16 | 68 |

| Scoring | TD | EPK | EPR | EPRC | FG | PTS |
|------------------|----|-------|-----|------|-----|-----|
| Master Teague | 8 | - | - | - | - | 48 |
| Chris Olave | 7 | - | - | - | - | 42 |
| Blake Haubeil | - | 24-24 | - | - | 5-7 | 39 |
| Garrett Wilson | 6 | - | - | - | - | 36 |
| Justin Fields | 5 | - | - | - | - | 30 |
| Jeremy Ruckert | 5 | - | - | - | - | 30 |
| Trey Sermon | 4 | - | - | - | - | 24 |
| Jake Seibert | - | 16-16 | - | - | 1-2 | 19 |
| Jameson Williams | 2 | - | - | - | - | 12 |
| Dominic DiMaggio | - | 3-3 | - | - | 1-2 | 6 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Jack Miller | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Haskell Garrett | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Luke Farrell | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| C.J. Stroud | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Jaxon Smith-Njigba | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Shaun Wade | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Sevyn Banks | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| OSU Totals | 44 | 43-43 | - | 0-1 | 7-11 | 328 |
| OPP Totals | 27 | 21-21 | 0-1 | 0-5 | 7-8 | 206 |

| FG Distance | 0-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50+ | Total |
|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Blake Haubeil | 2-3 | 1-1 | 2-3 | 0-0 | 5-7 |
| Dominic DiMaggio | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1-2 |
| Jake Seibert | 1-1 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 1-2 |
| OSU Totals | 4-6 | 1-1 | 2-4 | 0-0 | 7-11 |
| OPP Totals | 2-2 | 3-3 | 1-2 | 1-1 | 7-8 |

| Punting | No. | Yds. | Avg. | Bk | Long |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Drue Chrisman | 27 | 1216 | 45.0 | 0 | 74 |
| Zach Hoover | 3 | 118 | 39.3 | 0 | 43 |
| OSU Totals | 30 | 1334 | 44.5 | 0 | 74 |
| OPP Totals | 41 | 1828 | 44.6 | 0 | 57 |

| Interceptions | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Shaun Wade | 2 | 36 | 18.0 | 1 | 36 |
| Sevyn Banks | 1 | 38 | 38.0 | 0 | 38 |
| 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 | 7 | 105 | 15.0 | 2 | 38 |
| OPP Totals | 6 | 57 | 9.5 | 0 | 33 |

| Punt Returns | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Garrett Wilson | 7 | 51 | 7.3 | 0 | 22 |
| Jaxon Smith-Njigba | 3 | 11 | 3.7 | 0 | 7 |
| OSU Totals | 10 | 62 | 6.2 | 0 | 22 |
| OPP Totals | 5 | 98 | 19.6 | 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 | 19 | 337 | 17.7 | 0 | 39 |

| Def. Leaders | Solo | Asst. | Tot. | TFL-Yds. | Sacks |
|-------------------|------|-------|------|----------|--------|
| Pete Werner | 28 | 26 | 54 | 2.5-10 | 1.0-5 |
| Tuf Borland | 22 | 26 | 48 | 3.5-16 | 1.5-12 |
| Shaun Wade | 24 | 11 | 35 | 1.0-2 | - |
| Justin Hilliard | 20 | 13 | 33 | 5.0-16 | - |
| Baron Browning | 20 | 10 | 30 | 3.0-13 | 1.0-6 |
| Marcus Williamson | 20 | 7 | 27 | - | - |
| Jonathon Cooper | 12 | 12 | 24 | 3.5-29 | 3.5-29 |

Buckeyes Familiar With Coming Up Just Short

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

Ohio State fell to Alabama in the College Football Playoff national championship on Jan. 11, a disappointing end to a season full of unique challenges and circumstances due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Buckeyes did win their fourth straight Big Ten title and avenge a controversial loss to Clemson with a convincing victory in the Sugar Bowl, but there's no doubt the season will be defined by the 52-24 blowout at the hands of the Crimson Tide.

"No one ever talks about getting to the national championship; they talk about winning a national championship," head coach Ryan Day said in the days leading up to the game. "Along the way, there are certain goals you have to reach to get to this point, but the ultimate goal is to win this game. You have goals of beating your rival, winning the conference, winning the semifinal and, finally, this game. You have to check off those boxes. But ultimately, this is the final goal."

With that, this year's Ohio State squad becomes one of eight teams in school history that needed only to win their last game in order to be crowned national champions and lost. Below is a look back at those teams.

1969

Led by quarterback Rex Kern, running back Jim Otis and defensive back Jack Tatum, Ohio State rode a 22-game winning streak into the season finale against Michigan.

The top-ranked Buckeyes could not play in a bowl game that season, as the Big Ten sent just one team to the postseason at the time and did not allow a school to represent the conference in the Rose Bowl in consecutive years. So they needed only a victory over the Wolverines to clinch their second straight national championship.

Michigan, meanwhile, was in a period of rebuilding under first-year head coach and former Ohio State assistant Bo Schembechler but entered the game with four consecutive wins. A victory would send the Wolverines to

the Rose Bowl instead of Purdue, which they had beaten earlier in the season.

Ohio State struck first on a 1-yard run by Otis to make the score 6-0 following a missed extra point, but Michigan responded with a long kickoff return that set up a 3-yard touchdown by running back Garvie Craw. It was the first time all season the Buckeyes had trailed in a game.

The Buckeyes subsequently marched down the field and took the lead on a 22-yard pass from Kern to tight end Jan White, but the two-point conversion attempt failed.

Ohio State would not score again and crossed midfield just once the rest of the game, whereas Craw found the end zone two more times in the second quarter and Ted Killian kicked a field goal to give Michigan a 24-12 halftime lead that was ultimately the final score.

Kern threw four interceptions and the Buckeyes committed seven total turnovers, including two more interceptions and a fumble from backup quarterback Ron Maciejowski.

1970

The following season, Ohio State closed the regular season with a 20-9 win over No. 4 Michigan and clinched a date with 12th-ranked Stanford in the Rose Bowl.

With a 9-0 record, the Buckeyes were recognized as national champions by the National Football Foundation, which at the time announced its selection prior to bowl games. And thanks to No. 1 Texas' loss to Notre Dame in the Cotton Bowl, second-ranked Ohio State needed only a win over the Indians – now known as the Cardinal – to capture the Associated Press title.

The Buckeyes did not get off to a great start, as Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Jim Plunkett led Stanford to 10 points on Stanford's first two drives. Ohio State fought back with a pair of John Brockington 1-yard runs to take a 14-10 lead at halftime.

The teams exchanged field goals in the third quarter before Plunkett engineered two fourth-quarter touchdown drives, giving Stanford a 27-17 win and the Buckeyes their only blemish on an otherwise perfect season.

1974

Despite a 16-13 loss at Michigan State in early November, Ohio State won a share of the Big Ten and earned the Big Ten's Rose Bowl berth by virtue of its 12-10 win over No. 2 Michigan in the regular-season finale.

That meant the third-ranked Buckeyes would face off against No. 5 USC for the third straight time in Pasadena, Calif., with the teams splitting their previous two meetings after the Big Ten did away with the "no repeat" rule in 1972. But unlike those two contests, where the winner scored 42 points, this game was mostly a defensive struggle.

Ohio State took a 7-3 lead in the second quarter behind a two 2-yard run from fullback Champ Henson but failed to turn a pair of red-zone opportunities in the third quarter into points. That set the stage for a back-and-forth fourth quarter.

Trojans quarterback – and eventual athletic director – Pat Haden put USC ahead with an 8-yard touchdown pass to tight end Jim Obradovich. The Buckeyes responded with a 3-yard touchdown run by quarterback Cornelius Greene and extended the lead to 17-10 with a 32-yard field goal by Tom Klaban midway through the fourth quarter.

Haden's 38-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver John McKay Jr. brought the Trojans within a point with 2:03 remaining. McKay's father, USC's head coach, opted to go for two and the win, which Hayden converted to wideout Sheldon Diggs.

Still, Ohio State had a chance to win the game, but a 62-yard field-goal attempt by Tom Skladany fell short. Had the Buckeyes come away victorious, they would have been named national champions by virtue of No. 1 Oklahoma being placed on probation and ineligible for a bowl game.

1975

Ohio State returned to Pasadena again the next year in what would ultimately be head coach Woody Hayes' eighth and final appearance in the Rose Bowl.

There, the top-rated Buckeyes – led by two-time Heisman Trophy-winning running back Archie Griffin – would take on UCLA for the second time that season, having defeated the Bruins at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum in early October, 41-20.

Ohio State dominated the first half in terms of yardage but led just 3-0 at halftime thanks to a Klaban 42-yard field goal on the opening possession of the game.

UCLA opted to throw the ball more in the third quarter, often utilizing play-action passes on first down to catch the Buckeyes off guard. The Bruins racked up 366 yards of total offense in the second half and scored 23 of the game's next 30 points, including 16- and 67-yard passes from All-America quarterback John Sciarra and a 54-yard run by Wendell Tyler, to win 23-10.

Ohio State's running back tandem of Griffin and Pete Johnson were limited to just 38 yards and one score in the half, with Johnson cutting into UCLA's lead with a 3-yard run early in the fourth quarter. The loss dropped the Buckeyes to No. 3 in the final polls.

1979

Earle Bruce's tenure at Ohio State got off to a promising start, with the Buckeyes making their way from unranked to open the year to No. 1 following an 18-15 win at 13th-ranked Michigan to end the regular season. That meant another date with No. 3 USC in the Rose Bowl.

After spotting the Trojans a 10-0 lead, Ohio

State tied the game in the second quarter with a 35-yard field goal by Vlade Janakievski and a 67-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Art Schlichter to wide receiver Gary Williams. The Buckeyes took the lead and added to it with a pair of Janakievski field goals in the third and fourth quarters, but USC marched 83 yards in eight plays, including a 1-yard touchdown run by Heisman Trophy winner Charles White, to take a 17-16 lead with just 1:32 remaining.

Ohio State had time to retake the lead, but Schlichter threw four straight incompletions to turn the ball over on downs. The Buckeyes once again fell in the final polls because of the loss, finishing fourth behind Alabama, USC and Oklahoma.

2006

Head coach Jim Tressel – who led the program to the 2002 national championship with an improbable win over Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl – had top-ranked Ohio State on the brink of another title following an undefeated regular season that was highlighted by a 24-7 win at No. 2 Texas and a 42-39 victory over No. 2 Michigan.

The Buckeyes, led by Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Troy Smith, were matched up with Florida and second-year head coach Urban Meyer in the inaugural stand-alone BCS national championship in Glendale, Ariz. They got off to a quick start when wide receiver Ted Ginn returned the opening kickoff 93 yards for a touchdown, but he was injured in the celebration and would miss the remainder of the game.

It was all Florida from there, as the Gators limited Smith to just 4 of 14 passing for 35 yards and an interception and sacked him five times in a 41-14 win. The game marked the first of three national championships for Meyer, including two with the Gators before he become the head coach at Ohio State and won the inaugural College Football Playoff title.

2007

Ohio State's path back to the national championship game wasn't so simple, as the Buckeyes fell to unranked Illinois, 28-21, in the penultimate game of the regular season. Thus, many expected Ohio State to represent the Big Ten in the Rose Bowl following a 14-3 win at No. 23 Michigan on Nov. 17. But then chaos ensued.

Second-ranked Oregon and No. 4 Oklahoma lost on Nov. 17, No. 1 LSU and No. 2 Kansas lost on Nov. 24, and No. 1 Missouri and No. 2 West Virginia lost on Dec. 1, which moved the Buckeyes all the way from seventh in the BCS standings to No. 1 in three short weeks.

LSU also backed into the championship game, which was held in the Tigers' backyard at the Louisiana Superdome, and the Tigers seemed to be no match for Ohio State in the early going. The Buckeyes seemed motivated to prove their worth after the blow-out loss to Florida the year prior and jumped out to a 10-0 lead behind a Chris "Beanie" Wells 65-yard touchdown run and a 25-yard field goal from kicker Ryan Pretorius.

LSU then scored 31 straight points behind quarterback Matt Flynn, who threw four touchdown passes compared to just one interception, while Ohio State made the score respectable with late touchdown passes from Todd Boeckman to wide receivers Brian Robiskie and Brian Hartline.

The loss dropped the Buckeyes to 0-9 in bowl games against SEC opponents.

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Hilliard Leaves Legacy Of Perseverance At OSU

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Justin Hilliard overcame many obstacles to become a key cog in the Ohio State defense as a sixth-year senior. Though the season concluded in a disappointing loss to Alabama in the national championship, Hilliard held his head high on his way out.

Hilliard, who became a team captain in his final season, posted a heartfelt message to Twitter the day after the title game with a photo of him giving a speech to his teammates in the locker room.

"Greatest honor of my life," Hilliard's post read.

The talented linebacker is a fierce competitor, but even after a tough 28-point loss in the national championship, he expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to help lead the Buckeyes on the field.

Hilliard was playing his best ball down the stretch for Ohio State in pursuit of national supremacy, yet he would not have even been there if not for relentless perseverance.

"My journey here has been interesting," Hilliard said. "I've had so many times where I didn't know if I was going to be able to push through."

"The first three years here at Ohio State were probably the toughest, because year after year I had a biceps tear on my right and then biceps tear on my left again. After injuries started stacking up, I had those thoughts in my mind, was I going to keep playing? I think a lot of times when you hear like three- or four-, six-

month season-ending injuries, a lot of people usually call it quits.

"I thought about that, but I'm so thankful for the teammates I have here, for the coaches, Coach (Urban) Meyer especially. In that time I was going through a lot of those injuries, he was pushing me through. All my position coaches, D-coordinators in the past, I'm so lucky to have them, because honestly, if it wasn't for some of those conversations I had with them and with my family and teammates, I honestly probably wouldn't still be playing."

Head coach Ryan Day and the rest of the Buckeyes were glad to have Hilliard out there in the 2020 Big Ten Championship Game against Northwestern, which they might not have won 22-10 without him.

Hilliard recorded a team-high nine tackles (five solo) including two tackles for loss, and he recovered a fumble and made an excellent play to pick off Wildcats quarterback Peyton Ramsey.

With Ohio State trailing 10-6, Northwestern went right down the field on the opening drive of the second half until reaching the red zone. On third-and-8 from the Ohio State 9-yard line, Ramsey attacked Hilliard in a man-to-man situation, but the linebacker leapt in the air and came down with the ball.

"Oh my god, how about the interception he had in the one-on-one? Day said postgame Dec. 19. "I mean, he played his tail off."

Following a big-time performance to help his team claim the conference title, Hilliard brought his best against a familiar foe in

Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal.

The former five-star prospect from Cincinnati St. Xavier posted eight tackles (six solo), one TFL and one fumble recovery in a 49-28 victory over the Tigers. Beating Clemson to reach the national championship game made Hilliard's unlikely journey more special, reflecting on watching Ohio State win the 2014 national title while being recruited by fellow Cincinnati and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs.

"After the game, the first person I celebrated with was Coach Coombs," Hilliard said. "He said, 'Who would have thought when I was getting recruited that we would be back here six years later?'"

"Just reflecting back on the journey – some of the ups and downs this team went through, the linebackers went through, the defense went through, I went through – to get back to this point right now is just amazing."

The resilient linebacker's success may have come as a surprise to some, but not to his teammates, who felt more pride than shock.

"He's a guy that's pretty much seen it all," fifth-year senior linebacker Tuf Borland said of Hilliard. "The good, the bad, the ugly, he's seen it all. He's fought through so much on and off the field, and to see the success that he's having, it's awesome."

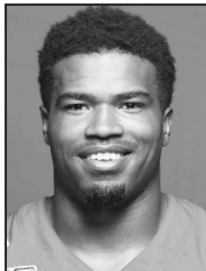
"Justin, he's an unbelievable player, but he's an unbelievable person, as well. Again, just to see the success that he's having – one, nobody is surprised because of how hard he works, and two, he just deserves everything that comes his way because he's a warrior, always has been, and he's getting everything he deserves."

In the monumental win over Clemson, Hilliard made key stops for the Buckeye defense. With Ohio State leading 21-14 early in the second quarter, Hilliard held Tiger receiver Amari Rodgers 4 yards short of a first down on second-and-10 with a solid tackle, leading to an eventual punt.

After the Buckeyes extended their lead to 28-14, Hilliard came up with another big play against Rodgers on a second-and-10. The veteran 'backer jumped on Rodgers' route, tackling him 3 yards behind the line of scrimmage, which led to another punt.

In the second half, Hilliard helped put the nail in Clemson's coffin. With the Scarlet and Gray up 42-21 in the third quarter, Hilliard recovered a Trevor Lawrence fumble that was forced by junior defensive tackle Tommy Togiai.

After Ohio State's drive stalled out, the Tiger offense tried to cut down a 21-point deficit. Clemson faced third-and-1 from its own 22, and Hilliard corralled All-American tailback Travis Etienne for no gain. After a false start, the Tigers punted the ball away along with their chances at a comeback.



Justin Hilliard

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I have enjoyed working in Assisted Living for 18 years. I am a Certified Dementia Practitioner, Arthritis Exercise Instructor, Alzheimer's Support Group Leader and have had Sensory Training for Dementia. I am also a Chair Chi Instructor and a 200 Hour Yoga Instructor. I love making a difference in the residents' lives and helping them have special moments of joy throughout their day.

In my spare time I enjoy spending time with my family and long distance bicycle rides on trails. I rode my bike across the state of Missouri, camping along the way on the Katy Trail. I also enjoy yoga as a way to exercise and remain balanced.

I look forward to helping your family and loved one and welcoming them to our Danbury Family!

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Kristel Smith

Director of Admissions and Marketing

My name is Kristel Smith and I have the honor to serve as the Director of Admissions and Marketing at Parkside Village. I started working at Parkside in 2012 before the doors even opened and have greatly enjoyed watching it grow into the amazing community it is today. I enjoy developing relationships with our residents as well as helping people. It's such an incredibly fulfilling job!

I have two beautiful children, a son who is 18 years old and a daughter who is 13 going on 30. In my spare time, I enjoy decorating, arts and crafts, playing piano at my church, watching movies, and hanging out with my family.

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Fields Leads Sugar Bowl Rout Of Clemson

Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields could not have picked a better time to play the game of his life.

One game after a nightmare outing against Northwestern, and one year after a loss to Clemson that ended in a Fields interception on a miscommunication, Fields torched the Tigers to give Ohio State a 49-28 win in the Sugar Bowl.

The final numbers for Fields were outstanding: 22 completions on 28 passes for 385 yards and six touchdowns. That would have been the performance of a lifetime against just about anyone, let alone in a College Football Playoff semifinal against No. 2 Clemson. And if that weren't impressive enough, Fields did the majority of his

GAME NOTEBOOK Ryan Ginn

work in immense pain, nursing a rib injury that came on a hit that got Clemson linebacker James Skalski ejected for targeting.

The pain was so bad that Fields said he received injections in the sideline medical tent, but he continued.

"I don't know exactly what it was," said Ohio State coach Ryan Day. "I said, 'What happened?' He goes, 'I took a shot and it kind of hurts over here.' I said, 'Well, why don't you go get with the doctors and we'll kind of figure that part of it out.' He's tough. We'll get an assessment here tonight, maybe into tomorrow, and figure out exactly what it was and what happened. But I really don't know. I just asked, 'Can you do it?' He says yes, and we kept rolling from there."

The touchdowns came in bunches, but the most critical stretch came in the second quarter after his injury. Almost immediately after the hit, Fields tossed a 9-yard touchdown to wide receiver Chris Olave. After a Clemson punt, Fields orchestrated a drive that squeezed in one more touchdown



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

SLINGING IT – Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields, left, and head coach Ryan Day embrace after Fields was named the most valuable offensive player of the Sugar Bowl for throwing a school record-tying six touchdown passes.

before halftime, finding Jeremy Ruckert in the end zone with 11 seconds left.

After briefly facing the possibility of being without Fields for the rest of the game (instead he missed only one play), Ohio State instead walked into the locker room at

halftime with a three-touchdown lead.

Less than two weeks earlier, Fields had been used by detractors as an argument to keep Ohio State out of the playoffs. Against Northwestern in the Big Ten title game, he completed just 12 of 27 passes with two

interceptions and no touchdowns. His mistakes frequently undid the work of running back Trey Sermon, and he looked like a shell of his typical self.

Fields looked inward. Day said he thought Fields learned a lot about himself as a quarterback. That came primarily from the extra work the junior quarterback put into his preparation for the Clemson game.

"I prepared for this game like I've never prepared for a game before," Fields said. "I think that showed on the field, and I'm just proud of my brothers, proud of my teammates and proud of the way they played."

The Buckeyes got to see the absolute best of Fields, a warrior who played the best game of his life less than two weeks after the worst game of his life – and did so in a tremendous amount of pain.

"I mean, my body is pretty beat up right now," Fields said. "But, you know, I'm happy. And my teammates are happy. And this is a feeling like no other. So I know my body is going to be hurting tomorrow morning, but it's worth it for this win and for my teammates. So I think that's really what pushed me. I was just thinking all the things that we've sacrificed as a team. That's really what got me through the whole game."

Powerful Sermon

Ohio State running back Trey Sermon followed up a dominant Big Ten Championship Game performance with another strong showing against the Tigers. One game after setting a team record with 331 rushing yards against Northwestern, Sermon gashed Clemson for 193 yards and a touchdown.

Sermon was electric from the start, establishing a potent ground threat that helped pave the way for Fields' big day. On the Buckeyes' second drive of the game, Sermon took a Fields pass for a 34-yard gain to get Ohio State into striking range. One play later, he put the Buckeyes on the scoreboard with a 32-yard touchdown run.

"He's been excellent," Day said. "He's been a difference-maker. He really wasn't early on. I think he was kind of finding his way. But wow, I mean, whether it's in the pass game, whether it's in protection, and

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Ohio State junior quarterback Justin Fields received offensive player of the game honors, and rightfully so, and running back Trey Sermon will garner tons of attention for 254 yards from scrimmage, but the Buckeye offensive line deserves tons of credit for a dominant showing. The big men up front paved the way for Ohio State to run for 254 yards and one touchdown on 44 carries for a 5.8 yards-per-rush average. The Buckeye offensive line allowed only two sacks, giving Fields ample time to complete 22 of his 28 passes for 385 yards and six touchdowns.

Not only did Ohio State's offensive line, along with the help of tight ends Luke Farrell and Jeremy Ruckert, open up big holes in the run game and provide Fields with a clean pocket, but it did it without typical starter Harry Miller. Third-year sophomore Matthew Jones stepped up in a huge way at left guard in Miller's place, and the Buckeyes dominated a stout Clemson front all night.

What Didn't Work

It is difficult to cherry-pick issues with a 21-point victory by an underdog in a College Football Playoff game against a top-tier team such as Clemson, but Ohio State was not perfect. While the Buckeyes almost entirely shut down the Tigers' vaunted rushing attack by holding them to 44 yards on 22 carries, they were susceptible to giving up plays through the air.

Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence completed 33 of 48 passes for 400 yards and two touchdowns against Ohio State, and while his pass volume was high, 400 passing yards is still substantial. Clemson completed some easy passes for first

downs, especially in the first quarter, which will be a point of emphasis for the Buckeyes against the high-octane Alabama offense in the national title game.

Cornell Powell was able to lose All-America cornerback Shaun Wade on a few double moves that led to a big day for the Tigers' top target, hauling in eight receptions for 139 yards and two scores in a losing effort.

Play Of The Game

In a big game like this, we'll go with plays of the game. The most important sequence of plays for the Buckeyes came early in the game when they were trailing Clemson 7-0. Ohio State had gone three-and-out after the Tigers drove down the field on the game's opening drive for a touchdown.

Another stalled-out drive would have given Clemson an opportunity to go up two scores, but Ohio State's offense rose to the occasion. Fields hit junior wide receiver Chris Olave for an 11-yard gain to the Ohio State 34-yard line to open the drive. Then Fields hit Sermon on a checkdown for a 34-yard gain to the Clemson 32. The Buckeyes went back to Sermon, who gashed the Tigers for a 32-yard score to even the game at 7, sparking the 254-yard performance by the Oklahoma transfer.

Another pivotal play came at the end of the first quarter with the game tied at 14. The Tigers went three-and-out after Powell was tackled 2 yards short of the first-down marker, and on the first play of the second quarter, they punted on fourth-and-2 from their 43. Once the Buckeyes got the ball back, they scored touchdowns on three straight drives to end the first half, changing the course of the game.

– Joe Dempsey

obviously running the football, he's been special."

His play through the first two games of the postseason drew comparisons to the way Ezekiel Elliott closed out the 2014 season. After not even making first-team All-Big Ten that year, Elliott exploded for 220 yards against Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game, 230 yards against Alabama in the Sugar Bowl and 246 yards against Oregon in the CFP National Championship.

After transferring to Ohio State from Oklahoma, Sermon spent the early part of the season as a relative nonfactor in the Buckeyes' offense. He did not break the 100-yard mark until the fifth game of the season when he managed 112 yards in the rout of Michigan State. Prior to that, his yardage totals had averaged about half that.

Sermon clearly got things figured out against Northwestern, scoring a pair of touchdowns to go with his record-setting yardage.

OSU Prevents Sign Stealing

In the buildup to the Sugar Bowl, much was made of Clemson defensive coordinator Brent Venables' ability to decode opponents' offensive signals. The practice is more frowned upon than illegal, but Day made clear that he was aware of it and planned to stop the Tigers from having as much success with it as they did in the previous year's playoff game.

"He seems to always know exactly what the other team is doing in terms of the plays that they're running, each play," Day said of Venables. "He seems to call the right defense into that play a lot. Why that is, I don't really know. But I can tell you he's been doing it for a really long time."

The Buckeyes seem to have found the antidote to Venables' operation by simply not giving Clemson's defense time to react to its offensive looks. Sometimes the Buckeyes used a huddle, while other times they loitered near the line of scrimmage. But either way, when the play call came in there was usually just a couple of seconds between Ohio State getting set and the ball being snapped.

This quick-set strategy visibly threw off Clemson's timing. Not only were the Tigers not getting the signals in time, but they also occasionally weren't even ready for the snap because they were watching their own sideline instead of the Buckeyes. On Sermon's touchdown, for example, Clemson's linemen were standing up and staring at the Clemson sideline all the way up until the point when Ohio State quickly got set. With just a couple of seconds before the snap, the defensive line didn't even have time to get into a stance before the ball was snapped. Scrambling from the start of the play, they were bulldozed by Ohio State's offensive line, and Sermon quickly got to the second level where he continued untouched for a score.

When Fields was asked about the rationale behind the huddles and quick snaps, his answer was as short and quick as the Buckeyes' time in their pre-snap stances.

"We just didn't want them stealing our signals," he said.

Olave Redeems Mistake

Perhaps nobody wanted a 2020 season more than Olave. The Buckeyes' national championship hopes in 2019 were dashed when Olave broke off his route in the end zone and Clemson intercepted Fields' pass thrown to where Olave would have been. The last-minute interception ended a promising season in which Ohio State looked

to be championship-caliber throughout the year.

He almost suffered another terrible stroke of luck when he tested positive for COVID-19 and missed the Big Ten Championship Game against Northwestern. But the Buckeyes were able to get him back in time to face the Tigers, albeit after dealing with an illness and missing a good amount of practice.

No worries – all Olave needed was a chance. He delivered in a big way for Ohio State and for himself, erasing the 2019 nightmare with six catches for 132 yards and two touchdowns. Those totals led the team in all three categories.

"That (2019 Fiesta Bowl) game didn't sit well with him, the way he came off that field," Day said. "You know, how many

times did he have to watch that play? He and Justin watched that play over and over again – it just made them sick.

"We were really nervous when he went down with COVID that we weren't going to get him back. He practiced, didn't really practice fully. So it was a little dicey going into the week, but he started to get his legs back underneath him towards the end of the week and then comes out and plays the way he does in a big spot. One of the more clutch players, I think, as a receiver in maybe the history of Ohio State football when you think back on it. Wow, what a player he is."

Dabo Defends No. 11 Ranking

Perhaps the only thing Clemson coach Dabo Swinney did well on Jan. 1 was stay

on message. After Ohio State thrashed the Tigers to end their season, Swinney again defended the fact that he put the Buckeyes No. 11 in his coaches poll ballot, albeit with some compliments and grace sprinkled in.

"No, I don't regret any of that," Swinney said. "Polls have nothing to do with motivation. Both teams were highly motivated to play."

"And listen, they're a great team. As I said, that had nothing to do with Ohio State. I said they were good enough to beat us, good enough to win the whole dang thing. But I didn't think anybody that didn't play at least nine games, in my poll, that I wasn't going to put them in the top 10. So I wasn't going to change that just because there was a chance we could play them. So I don't have any regret about that."

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 49, Clemson 28

Jan. 1, 2021 –Mercedes-Benz Superdome, New Orleans, LA.

| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F |
|-------------------|----|----|---|---|----|
| OHIO STATE | 14 | 21 | 7 | 7 | 49 |
| CLEMSON | 14 | 0 | 7 | 7 | 28 |

First Quarter

CU – Lawrence, 2-yard run (Potter kick), 12:10; 8 plays, 82 yards, 2:50 TOP.

OSU – Sermon, 32-yard rush (Haubeil kick), 7:59; 3 plays, 77 yards, 1:12 TOP.

CU – Etienne, 3-yard run (Potter kick), 5:01; 7 plays, 75 yards, 2:58 TOP.

OSU – Farrell, 8-yard pass from Fields (Haubeil kick), 1:36; 6 plays, 75 yards, 3:25 TOP.

Second Quarter

OSU – Ruckert, 17-yard pass from Fields (Haubeil kick), 10:35; 9 plays, 84 yards, 4:16 TOP.

OSU – Olave, 9-yard pass from Fields (Haubeil kick), 5:12; 9 plays, 75 yards, 4:25 TOP.

OSU – Ruckert, 12-yard pass from Fields (Haubeil kick), 0:11; 12 plays, 80 yards, 3:09 TOP.

Third Quarter

CU – Powell, 10-yard pass from Lawrence (Potter kick), 7:56; 9 plays, 80 yards, 3:49 TOP.

OSU – Olave, 56-yard pass from Fields (Haubeil kick), 4:55; 7 plays, 91 yards, 3:00 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Williams, 45-yard pass from Fields (Haubeil kick), 14:03; 2 plays, 59 yards, 0:49 TOP.

CU – Powell, 26-yard pass from Lawrence (Potter kick), 10:42; 10 plays, 75 yards, 3:21 TOP.

Att. – 3,000

Weather – Indoor

Team Statistics

| | OSU | CU |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| First Downs | 26 | 23 |
| Rushing | 10 | 4 |
| Passing | 15 | 17 |
| Penalty | 1 | 2 |
| Rushes-Yards | 44-254 | 22-44 |
| Passing Yards | 385 | 400 |
| Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.) | 22-28-1 | 33-48-1 |
| Offensive Plays | 72 | 70 |
| Total Net Yards | 639 | 444 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 5-12 | 5-12 |
| Punts-Avg. | 4-47.2 | 5-47.4 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 1-0 | 3-1 |
| Penalties | 9-95 | 3-20 |
| Time of Possession | 34:05 | 25:55 |

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Sermon 31-193; Fields 8-42; Williams 3-21; TEAM 2-(-2). CU: Etienne 10-32; Dixon 2-20; Lawrence 10-(-8).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Fields 22-28-1-385-6. CU: Lawrence 33-48-1-400-2.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Olave 6-132; Sermon 4-61; Williams 3-62; Ruckert 3-55; Wilson 2-52; Smith-Njigba 2-12; Farrell 2-11. CU: Powell 8-139; Rodgers 8-54; Williams 5-45; Etienne 4-64; Galloway 2-38; Allen 2-35; Spector 2-16; Ladson 1-9; Dixon 1-0.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Chrisman 4-47.2. CU: Spiers 5-47.4.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Wilson 2-7.0. CU: None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) OSU: None. CU: Etienne 2-20.5.

MISSED FIELD GOALS – OSU: None. CU: None.

FORCED FUMBLES – OSU: Togiati, Smith, Cooper. CU: Spector.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – OSU: Hilliard 1-0. CU: None.

INTERCEPTIONS – OSU: Banks 1-38. CU: Jones 1-0.

SACKS – OSU: Smith 1.0-13; Cooper 1.0-6. CU: Bresee 1.0-8; Spector 1.0-3.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – OSU: Smith 1.0-13; Cooper 1.0-6; Browning 1.0-4; Togiati 1.0-3; Hilliard 1.0-3. CU: Bresee 2.5-12; Murphy 1.5-4; Spector 1.0-3; Greene 1.0-3.

TACKLES (Solo-Assst-Tot.) – OSU: Wade 7-2-9; Werner 5-4-9; Hilliard 6-2-8; Borland 4-4-8; Togiati 4-0-4; Banks 4-0-4; Williamson 2-1-3; Ransom 2-0-2; Smith 2-0-2; Cooper 2-0-2; Browning 1-1-2; Garrett 1-0-1; Proctor 1-0-1; Gant 1-0-1. CU: Zanders 5-1-6; Charleston 5-1-6; Bresee 4-1-5; Patterson 4-0-4; Greene 4-0-4; Spector 3-1-4; Davis 3-0-3; Booth 3-0-3; Goodrich 2-1-3; Skalski 2-1-3; Murphy 2-1-3; Pinckney 2-1-3; Mascoll 1-2-3; Turner 2-0-2; Thornton 1-1-2; Henry 1-1-2; Powell 1-0-1; Jones 1-0-1; Kendrick 1-0-1; Putnam 1-0-1; Jones 1-0-1.

Players In The Game

OSU – Munford, Jones, Myers, Davis, Petit-Frere, Farrell, Olave, Fields, Sermon, Wilson, Williams, Cooper, Togiati, Garrett, Smith, Werner, Borland, Browning, Banks, Williamson, Proctor, Wade, Watts, Johnson, Ransom, DiMaccio, Mitchell, McCall, Robinson, Jackson, Vincent, Booker, Jean-Baptiste, Smith-Njigba, Scott, Stover, Babb, Gant, Chambers, Hooker, Crowley, Johnson, Williams, Hoover, Rossi, Simon, Hilliard, Hausmann, Hamilton, Ruckert, Chrisman, Haubeil.

CU – Carman, Bockhorst, Stewart, Putnam, McFadden, Galloway, Rodgers, Lawrence, Etienne, Williams, Powell, Henry, Davis, Bresee, Simpson, Skalski, Kendrick, Goodrich, Zanders, Thornton, Charleston, Greene, Patterson, Spector, Pace, Swinney, Dixon, Ladson, Donnelly, Davis, Johnson, Jones, Mascoll, Spector, Venables, Swint, Dukes, Williams, Rencher, Booth, Turner, Phillips, Jones, Mellusi, Potter, Maguire, Orhororo, Turner, Bentley, Pinckney, Maddox, Spiers, Upshaw, Trotter, Williams, Parks, Allen, Lay, Murphy.

Buckeyes Tame Tigers

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Justin Fields and his Ohio State teammates answered the critics who thought his subpar year and a COVID-19-shortened season were reasons the No. 3 Buckeyes did not deserve a spot in the CFP semifinal against Clemson on Jan. 1.

He had a performance for the ages when he threw for 385 yards and six touchdowns as the Buckeyes downed No. 2 Clemson 49-28 in the Sugar Bowl at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans to advance to the CFP final.

Clemson (10-2) led 7-0 and 14-7 before the Buckeyes reeled off 28 unanswered points for a 35-14 halftime lead, and Ohio State led 49-21 early in the fourth quarter.

Not only did the Buckeyes avenge a 29-23 loss in the 2019 semifinal, but they also won for the first time ever against the Tiger after four losses.

“It really fueled our whole season,” Fields said of last year’s game. “That loss really pushed us in the offseason. Even more so, we were just glad to get this opportunity back to be able to play these guys again.”

Fields completed 22 of 28 passes with one interception and ran for 42 yards, and the Buckeyes had 639 total yards. Trey Sermon ran 31 times for 193 yards, Chris Olave made six catches for 132 yards and two TDs, and Jeremy Ruckert had a pair of touchdown receptions for the Buckeyes.

Ohio State was once again without several key players among the 16 listed as unavailable by the school. Included were starting guard Harry Miller, second-leading rusher Master Teague and defensive ends Zach Harrison and Tyler Friday.

It’s unclear how many absences were COVID-19 related, although Teague was injured during the Big Ten title game vs. Northwestern.

Clemson offensive coordinator Tony Elliott missed the game because of the virus, but the Tigers didn’t miss a beat in taking the lead in the Sugar Bowl.

Trevor Lawrence engineered an 82-yard, eight-play opening series in 2:50 that culminated in his 2-yard TD run for the 7-0 lead.

He was 4 for 5 for 72 yards. He hit Travis Etienne for 26 yards on the third play from scrimmage, and later, facing a third-and-5 from the OSU 32, Lawrence found Cornell Powell for 27 yards along the left sideline to the 5. Etienne gained 3 yards on the ground before the Lawrence score.

On their second possession starting from their own 23, the Buckeyes responded in a hurry, needing only three plays that required 72 seconds.

Fields hit Olave for 11 on a slant, then Sermon caught a pass out of the backfield and went 34 yards to the Clemson 32. On the next play, Sermon ran through a hole on the left side for a TD to make it 7-7 at 7:59 of the first.

Back came Clemson. Braden Galloway had a 15-yard catch before Amari Rodgers and Etienne had 16-yard grabs. A 15-yard run by Lyn-J Dixon put the ball at the 3, and Etienne ran it in from there for to cap the 75-yard march for a 14-7 lead with 5:01 left.

OSU moved 75 yards in six plays and 3:25 to tie the score at 14 with 1:36 left

in the eventful first quarter when Fields tossed an 8-yard scoring strike to Luke Farrell for the tight end’s first TD of the season.

A 47-yard diving catch by Garrett Wilson had given the Buckeyes the ball at the 8, but a 2-yard loss on a run by Sermon and a false start left OSU facing 2nd-and-goal from the 15. Fields used his legs for 7 yards before the score.

After a Clemson punt that put Ohio State at its own 16 to start the second quarter, the Buckeyes tore big chunks in the Tigers’ defense, beginning with an 11-yard pass to Olave. Sermon rushed for 14, and Jaxon Smith-Njigba caught a 12-yarder to the Clemson 36 when the Buckeyes needed 4 on third down.

Fields ran his way for 17 to the 19, and Sermon carried for 2 to set up a well-designed 17-yard touchdown to the tight end Ruckert to put OSU ahead 21-14 at the 10:35 mark. Fields rolled left then threw back to an open Ruckert to complete the nine-play, 84-yard, 4:16 series.

A targeting call reared its head again, but unlike last year’s loss to the Tigers in the semifinal when OSU cornerback Shaun Wade was ejected late in the second quarter, the Buckeyes benefited this time.

Fields threw his third TD to extend the score to 28-14 with 5:12 left in the second, but how OSU got there was the story. Sermon had a 30-yard gain to the 27, but on third down from the 30 and looking at 13 yards to move the chains, Fields took off for 11 but was tackled hard in the mid-section by linebacker James Skalski.

The play was reviewed and Skalski was ejected for targeting because he led with the crown of his helmet. The penalty placed the ball on the 9, but Fields was injured and C.J. Stroud came in to hand off to Sermon for no gain. Fields returned and connected with Olave for the score on the ninth play of the 75-yard drive that consumed 4:25 off the clock.

Fields, Sermon and Co. took a 35-14 advantage into the locker room when Ruckert, who had the only three TDs this season by the tight ends coming into the game, made the catch on a second-and-10 from the 12 for the score with 11 seconds to play. Ruckert earlier had a 26-yard reception on the 12-play drive that went 80 yards in 3:09.

The Tigers were without safety Nolan Turner, whose interception of Fields in the waning seconds last year secured the win, for the first half after he was ejected for targeting vs. Notre Dame in the second half of the ACC championship game.

Fields in the first half was 16 of 18 for 220 yards and ran six times for 53 yards as the Buckeyes amassed 394 total yards. Sermon rushed for 121 yards on 17 attempts. Clemson had 201 yards through two quarters.

The Buckeyes got the ball to start the second half and were in position to blow it wide open after a 36-yard catch by Olave. But on third-and-8 from the 12, Mike Jones intercepted a tipped Fields pass in the end zone.

It inspired Clemson to march 80 yards in nine plays and 3:49 to pull to within 35-21 on a 10-yard TD pass from Lawrence to Powell at 7:56 of the third quarter. Powell had a 29-yard catch to the 10 two plays earlier.

With the momentum in Clemson’s

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 49, Clemson 28

Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney on if he regretted putting Ohio State at No. 11 in his coaches poll ballot: "No, I don't regret any of that. The polls have nothing to do with motivation. Both teams were highly motivated to play. And listen, they're a great team. As I said, that had nothing to do with Ohio State. I said they were good enough to beat us, good enough to win the whole dang thing. And I didn't think anybody that didn't play at least nine games – in my poll, I wasn't going to put them in the top 10."

Ohio State junior center Josh Myers on if Swinney's comments gave Ohio State any added motivation: "I think that just gives us extra motivation, extra ways that we can get our guys going, get our guys pumped about this game. I think it's really important to be gracious in victory and defeat, and so that's what we're doing, and I'm not going to say anything else about that and what they said. That was a good football team, respect to them, but comments and stuff like that just gives us extra motivation."

Swinney on what went wrong in his team's defeat: "You have to give Ohio State credit for that. They were awesome. They absolutely dominated the line of scrimmage. You can't win games like this if you can't stop the run

and then the big plays, and I think they had five straight touchdowns (actually four), and we just really couldn't respond like we needed to."

Ohio State junior wide receiver Chris Olave on what this win meant to him: "It means a lot. Just thank God first of all. I'm glad my family got to be here. It's been a tough year, but I just had to fight through adversity, and luckily, I came out in the end and had a huge game today. And I'm just blessed and love my teammates, love my coaches, and it's all glory to God."

Olave on how he feels after getting redemption for the Clemson game from last season: "I feel great. I mean coming off last year was tough for me, trying to train all year just to be in this position, and we finally got here, and just being able to beat these guys and have fun with my teammates most importantly. I'm just blessed, and I'm proud to be here."

Ohio State senior running back Trey Sermon on how he's continued to get more comfortable in the offense: "I have gotten extremely comfortable over time, just getting used to the flow of the offense and really just getting in sync with the offensive line. I mean each week I feel like I've been getting better and better at it."

Myers on blocking for Sermon these past few games: "It makes life fun, man. Trey and the offensive line complement each other. When we do well, Trey does well. When Trey does well, we do well. And it's a whole lot of fun, especially after the start of the season that we had and people just being like, 'What's up with your run game?' even though we were leading the Big Ten in rushing yards."

Sermon on if his early struggles on the field led to any frustration: "It was definitely frustrating at first, but I knew if I just continued to work hard and just trust my coach that it was going to pay off."

Clemson junior quarterback Trevor Lawrence on Ohio State's performance against his team: "Ohio State, they played a heck of a game. You have to give it to them, obviously. They kicked our butt tonight."

Ohio State senior defensive tackle Haskell Garrett on what worked well defensively against Clemson: "We just played our game, did our job, and we just hung in there and didn't jump out of gaps, just played assignments sound. And like Coach (Ryan) Day said, 'Do your job and that's all you can really do.' "

favor, the Buckeyes began their next series from the 9 after botching the kick-off. On third down with 10 to go, Fields tossed a pass out to Sermon and he rambled 14 yards to keep the drive alive at the Buckeye 23. Sermon thought he had not been tackled to the ground and continued running. The call on the field was for a 91-yard TD catch, but it was overruled after video review.

Freshman Miyan Williams relieved Sermon and had runs for 6 and 15 yards followed by no gain at the OSU 44. That's when Fields stepped back and lased a 56-yard TD to Olave down the middle to up the count to 42-21 with 4:55 left in the third. It was a 91-yard sequence that used 3:00 and seven plays.

Clemson's next drive ended in a turnover at the OSU 40 when Tommy Togia strip-sacked Lawrence for 3 yards and Justin Hilliard pounced on the fumble at the Buckeyes' 43. OSU was stopped at the OSU 47 after Fields was sacked, and Drue

Chrisman punted to the 13.

The Tigers then punted it back to the Buckeyes to start the fourth, and Fields delivered another masterful ball to Jameson Williams for his sixth TD, a 45-yard strike with 14:03 left in the game to make it 49-21. It was the second play of the series. The first was Sermon's 14-yard gallop.

Lawrence threw a 26-yard TD pass to Powell to move the Tigers to within 49-28 with 10:42 to play on a third-and-16. The big play was a third-down pass interference call on Wade that moved the ball to the OSU 20.

Clemson reached the OSU 35 midway through the fourth only to have Lawrence absorb a 13-yard sack by Tyreke Smith. Lawrence fumbled but the Tigers recovered at the OSU 48. After a 15-yard catch by Powell to the 33, two incompletions followed and the Buckeyes took over.

OSU punted and Clemson was headed for a cosmetic score when on fourth-and-6

from the 8, Sevyn Banks made an interception in the end zone and returned it 38 yards with 1:30 left. Ohio State then ran three plays to finish off the victory.

Numbers

Fields set the OSU record for bowl passing yards and touchdown passes. ...

The 49 points are a bowl record as are 639 total yards (385 pass, 254 rush) ... Ohio State's 49 points topped the previous bowl high of 47 scored against BYU in the 1982 Holiday Bowl. ... Lawrence was 33 of 48 for 400 yards, two TDs and one pick. ... Of Clemson's 444 yards, only 44 on 22 carries (2.0 average) were on the ground.

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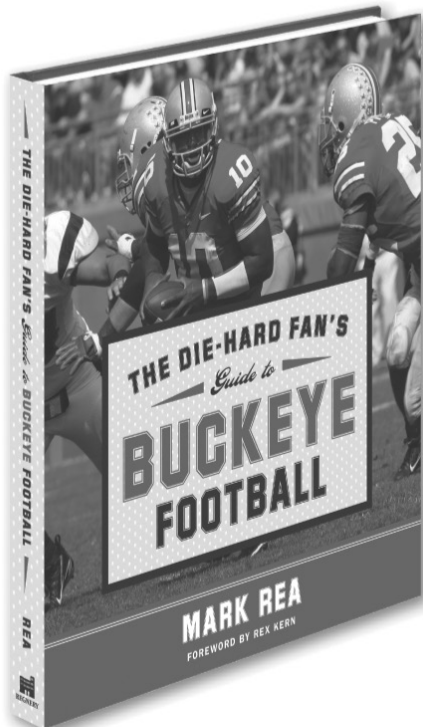
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Offense Leads The Way In Season's Top Plays

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It was a shortened season for Ohio State, first by the amount of games on the schedule, and second because of the three cancellations throughout the Big Ten slate, but the Buckeyes still battled all the way to the national championship game before falling short against Alabama.

But even with just eight games to work with, there were plenty of standout plays made by Ohio State throughout its 2020 season, and the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff took a look at the top-10 plays from this up-and-down campaign that got the Buckeyes all the way to the national title.

10. Fields Threads The Needle (Michigan State – Dec. 5)

Junior quarterback Justin Fields did not have the strongest statistical performance of his collegiate career against Michigan State, but it was still a strong showing, completing 17 of 24 passes for 199 yards and two touchdowns, while also rushing 13 times for 104 yards and two more scores.

Those numbers became more impressive considering how many players the Buckeyes had missing for their game against the Spartans, including three starting offensive linemen in Thayer Munford, Josh Myers and Nicholas Petit-Frere. Those losses showed up on the opening drive, where Harry Miller, now under center after playing guard all year, had some

snaps that were off target, but Fields still corralled them on the way to a touchdown.

But the No. 10 play of the season came on the third drive of the game for Ohio State. Following a 44-yard Fields run and an incomplete pass, the third-year quarterback rolled out to his right on second-and-10 and threw a contested ball to sophomore wide receiver Garrett Wilson between two defenders.

This throw had to be perfect to hit the window, and it was, as the near defender could not make a leaping play to bat the ball away and the deeper defensive back was left lost as Wilson ran in on the sidelines for a 28-yard score to make it 14-0 early on.

9. Air Ruckert Returns (Alabama – Jan. 11)

Ohio State's 52-24 loss to the Crimson Tide is one that the team will likely hope to forget, but it did not come without a few memorable plays in the Buckeyes' favor.

One that missed the cut of this list was a strip sack by senior linebacker Baron Browning on Alabama quarterback Mac Jones that immediately led to a touchdown, but the one that came in at No. 9 on this list was one of the best catches of the season for the Scarlet and Gray.

Junior tight end Jeremy Ruckert hauled in a 36-yard catch from Fields to get down to the Alabama 8-yard line before sophomore running back Master Teague punched it in to tie the game at 7-7.

The special part of the play was how

Ruckert brought in the catch – with one hand in stride, similar to his touchdown catch in the Big Ten Championship Game against Wisconsin from a season ago.

"Like I've always said, if the ball comes my way, I'll do everything I can to make the play," Ruckert said after the game. "If it doesn't, I'll do whatever I can to help my team. And whatever my assignment is, I'll do it as hard as I can and as long as I can."

8. Garrett's Pick-Six (Michigan State – Dec. 5)

Nobody was even sure that senior defensive tackle Haskell Garrett would play for Ohio State this season after he was shot in the face during the offseason while reportedly trying to break up an altercation.

Not only did Garrett play in 2020, but he was one of Ohio State's best defensive players, making a sack in his opening game against Nebraska and highlighting his monumental season with this play against the Spartans. On a third-and-9 from the Michigan State 2, Garrett tipped a pass from Spartan quarterback Rocky Lombardi and intercepted the ball in the end zone, resulting in a touchdown.

"It's pretty athletic to tip it and catch your own tip," said Larry Johnson, defensive line coach and acting head coach against Michigan State. "That's pretty good. What a great story, though. Haskell Garrett, here's a guy that's probably lucky that he's still here but yet continues to play great football and do great things for us. I'm really proud of where he's at right now and the things he's doing for our defense."

Garrett finished the season with 20 tackles, four TFL, two sacks and this interception, which was the peak of an All-American-caliber year from a defensive lineman who was shot less than two months before the season began.

7. Wilson Breaks Free (Penn State – Oct. 31)

Wilson did enough through the air this season that it is possible to forget about his highlight-reel moment as a member of the running game.

The Halloween matchup against Penn State was highlighted as soon as the Big Ten released its new schedule, and though the Nittany Lions ended up being less of a threat than expected, starting the season 0-5 before winning their last four games, they still represented one of the more talented foes Ohio State faced in the regular season.

After a touchback by the Buckeyes, they immediately turned up the gas. On the first play from scrimmage, Garrett took a sweep play and burst through the hole for 62 yards all the way to the Penn State 13-yard line.

From there, Teague had rushes of 9 and 4 yards, the latter of which resulted in the first touchdown of the game in an eventual 38-25 win to move Ohio State to 2-0.

On the season, Wilson had just one other rush for 5 yards, but this 62-yard play to open the game, on what was thought at the time to be Ohio State's toughest in-conference opponent, remains one of the best plays of the season.

6. Misdirection As An Art Form (Clemson – Jan. 1)

Ohio State's 49-28 win over Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal is the clear highlight game of the season, and

there were plenty of moments within that important victory that stand out.

One of those was this touchdown connection that may have been the play call of the season.

With the teams tied 14-14 and the Buckeyes forcing the first Clemson punt of the game, Ohio State had an opportunity to take its first lead of the contest. Starting at the Ohio State 16, Fields led a terrific drive all the way down to the Clemson 17 before the true artwork began.

On second-and-8, Fields rolled left, the offensive line perfectly blocked the rush, and then Fields looked back right to a wide-open Ruckert, who made his way to the end zone for the score.

This touchdown led to two more before the teams hit halftime, and Ohio State never trailed again. The use of the tight ends in the offense might be the butt end of a joke at this point, but Ruckert and fifth-year senior Luke Farrell combined for five receptions, 66 yards and three touchdowns in Ohio State's most pivotal win of the season, proving the position's worth as a receiving threat when it matters most.

"I think, throughout the year, I've missed the tight ends a lot on a lot of plays," Fields said. "It was pretty much just going back to the basics and seeing the plays that they were open on and kind of utilizing those guys. Those are two of the best tight ends in the country, and I'm just glad we finally got to use them."

5. Sermon Makes History (Northwestern – Dec. 19)

Trey Sermon came to Ohio State from Oklahoma with the hopes of making a name for himself on a championship contender. Through five games of the season, Sermon had some flashes, but he was still missing that moment that made the transfer from the Sooners truly worthy of that achievement.

That moment came in the Big Ten Championship Game, where the senior running back single-handedly carried the Buckeyes over the Wildcats with a performance for the ages that will not soon be forgotten.

"There was a time probably after week two or week three, we really weren't sure what's going on, 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," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said of Sermon after the game against Northwestern. "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."

Sermon, taking over after a Teague injury, rushed 29 times for a program-record 331 yards against the Wildcats, scoring Ohio State's only two touchdowns in a 22-10 victory.

"When I'm in the zone, I just feel like personally, everything just really slows down," Sermon said. "The game really slows down, and I'm able to just see everything develop and just continue to be decisive and just make the right reads, make the right cuts."

There are plenty of plays to pick from in this historic performance, but the one he broke the record on stands out. On a second-and-3 from the Northwestern 31, Sermon took a carry up the middle and almost immediately broke a tackle, found

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

a hole to the right side of the field and somehow hurdled a Wildcat defender while stumbling to the ground, all for a 23-yard gain to set up first-and-goal.

It was maybe the defining play on a day that also featured runs of 21, 25, 28, 33 and 65 yards.

4. Hilliard Shifts Momentum (Northwestern – Dec. 19)

The Big Ten Championship Game was the sloppiest victory of Ohio State's season, outside of Sermon's performance, but it was a win that propelled the Buckeyes into the College Football Playoff for the second year in a row.

Ohio State had to come back from a halftime deficit, and that 10-6 Wildcats lead threatened to get larger on Northwestern's first drive of the third quarter. Quarterback Peyton Ramsey led the Wildcats down to the Ohio State 9 and faced a third-and-8 before an unlikely hero stopped the drive.

Sixth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard, filling in for Browning, picked off a Ramsey fade in the end zone, getting Ohio State the ball back and stopping the lead from expanding to seven, or potentially 11 points.

"How about the interception he had in the one-on-one?" Day said. "I mean, he played his tail off."

It was the highlight play for Hilliard, a former five-star prospect who returned to the Buckeyes for a sixth season because of multiple injuries he had suffered in his earlier years with the team.

"This whole journey, man, it's been tough, but it's been such a blessing at the same time," Hilliard said. "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, I knew I had to step up in a bigger role."

3. Smith-Njigba Toe-Taps (Nebraska – Oct. 24)

The most hyped-up portion of Ohio State's 2020 recruiting class, which included four top-100 players and a pair of five-stars in Julian Fleming and Jaxon Smith-Njigba, was the receiving corps.

The true freshman wideouts did not have the immediate impact that many were expecting, as Fleming led the way with 74 yards and Smith-Njigba led with 10 receptions, but the latter of the pair showed how much talent he possessed in the first game of the regular season.

That big play came late in a game against Nebraska that was already decided, but it was the skill by Smith-Njigba that made it memorable. Starting at the Nebraska 42 thanks to a strong Wilson punt return, Fields drove down to the 5-yard line before earning a first-and-goal.

Fields threw to Smith-Njigba and the pair connected, but the officials called it out of bounds. But, on further review, it turned out that the first-year receiver managed to toe-tap one foot in bounds while all the momentum from his body was going out of bounds, and the play was ruled a touchdown.

Ohio State led 45-17 after the score, and while it was not important as far as winning the contest, it may have been the most skilled play of the season from any player on the team, and it came from a true freshman.

"I know for him, that was huge," Wilson said. "Because going into this game, we had talked about making plays and stuff like that. When you play receiver, that's kind of just something that comes up in conversation. For him to make that play

in that game at that point, that was super awesome. I know we were all super excited for him. We got to dance and everything like that. It was just a big play, and we were excited to see him do that, but we all knew he could do it."

2. Wade Saves Game (Indiana – Nov. 21)

It was not the strongest year for junior cornerback Shaun Wade, who elected to return to Ohio State after debating entering the 2020 NFL draft, but one play from Wade stands out among the rest.

The Buckeyes' pass defense against Indiana was not spectacular, allowing 491 passing yards from Hoosiers quarterback Michael Penix, but one particular play from Wade changed the course of the game.

After facing a 35-7 deficit, Indiana had scored 14 unanswered points and once again had the ball. On second-and-10, Penix looked the way of Miles Marshall, and Wade read the route and jumped it, intercepting the ball and returning it 36 yards for a touchdown to give the Buckeyes a 21-point lead.

"The pick-six, just watching film I knew it was coming," Wade said. "They run outside on that bunch, so I knew it was coming."

That was the last points Ohio State scored in the game and, despite Indiana's best efforts, was the game winning score in a 42-35 victory for the Buckeyes.

"Shaun Wade's pick-six was huge," Day said. "That was a big, big play. Anytime you get a defensive score like that, that was big."

1. Fields Launches (Clemson – Jan. 1)

In eight games, Fields finished his junior season completing 70.2 percent of his passes for 2,100 yards and 22 touchdowns to six interceptions, but none of his throws may have been more impressive, or more important, than this backbreaker against Clemson to help secure a trip to the national championship.

The Tigers had just cut the deficit to 14 points, 35-21, with a nine-play, 80-yard drive in the third quarter. Although Ohio State still had a two-score lead, the game was far from locked up.

Starting their drive at their own 9-yard line, the Buckeyes earned a pair of first downs up to their 44, and after a rush for no gain by freshman running back Miyan Williams, Fields took a shot downfield.

That shot ended with a 56-yard bomb to junior wide receiver Chris Olave, perfectly in stride over two defenders to give the Buckeyes a 42-21 lead that would not be tested for the rest of the game.

After an offseason thinking about the final offensive play of the 2019 season – the interception by Clemson's Nolan Turner to seal the 29-23 win thanks to a miscommunication between Fields and Olave – this deep touchdown grab signified everything the pair had worked on to take down the Tigers in 2020.

"That game didn't sit well with him, the way he came off that field," Day said of Olave. "You know, how many times did he have to watch that play – he and Justin watch that play over and over again, the kid Turner getting the pick at the end of the game? It just made them sick. They're such great competitors that they were hungry. They wanted to come back and win."

Olave finished the game with six catches for 132 yards and two scores and was a key contributor in taking down Clemson for the first time in program history.



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OSU Ends Title Drought With Win Vs. Miami (Fla.)

By STEVE HELWAGEN

Throughout the 2020 Ohio State football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* has been "playing" its 40th anniversary football season with recaps of the biggest Ohio State games of each corresponding week or corresponding type of game in our publishing history. In this issue we cap off the series with the biggest national championship game. There have only been two in the BSB era – 2002 and 2014. We chose the 2002 title game because it was Ohio State's first in 34 years and because of the dramatic nature of the regular season and the dramatic nature of the victory over the invincible Miami Hurricanes. Additional stories about the double-overtime upset of the Hurricanes will be reprinted at BuckeyeSports.com on Thursday, Jan. 21.

After 34 years of near misses and close calls, the wait is finally over for Ohio State and its legion of fans.

The Buckeyes defied the odds by pulling off a 31-24 double-overtime upset of top-ranked Miami (Fla.) to claim the national championship Jan. 3 at the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl in Tempe, Ariz.

The victory, cheered on by as many as 50,000 OSU fans who made the cross-country journey to see the Buckeyes in person, gave Ohio State its fifth consensus national championship and seventh overall.

In typical OSU style, it came in heart-stopping fashion. Miami rallied to force the game into overtime with a final-play field goal then surged ahead 24-17 in the first overtime.

OSU converted a pair of tricky fourth downs – including one on a controversial pass interference penalty – before tying the game. Then, in the second OT, OSU's Maurice Claret powered in on a 5-yard run before the defense stopped Miami on downs inside the OSU 2.

The final play saw OSU linebacker Cie Grant pressure Miami's Ken Dorsey, a Heisman Trophy finalist, into an incomplete.

Miami's string of 34 straight wins was history, while OSU's wait of 34 years – dating to the 1968 national championship season – was also complete.

"I tell you what, we are so proud of these young men," said OSU coach Jim Tressel, who won a national championship in his second year on the job. "We have always had the best damn band in the land. Now we've got the best damn team in the land."

Tressel's Buckeyes (14-0), ranked second nationally coming into the game, were the only Division I-A team to finish the year undefeated.

"Anytime you stand alone at the top of the mountain with the people you love, it is



FILE PHOTO

THE BEST DAMN TEAM IN THE LAND – Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, pictured with his wife, Ellen, led Ohio State to a 31-24 double-overtime win over Miami (Fla.) in the 2003 Fiesta Bowl, giving the Buckeyes their first national title in 34 years.

a great feeling," said Tressel, who previously won four Division I-AA national championships at Youngstown State.

Ohio State had been a player on the national scene under John Cooper throughout much of the 1990s, finishing second in the AP poll in both 1996 and '98.

But OSU's rise to championship status this season seemed unlikely just five months ago. The Buckeyes, coming off a disappointing 7-5 campaign, were ranked just 13th in the initial Associated Press poll.

The team's 13 seniors had seen upheaval in the program, missing a bowl game after a 6-6 season in 1999 and seeing Cooper fired after an 8-4 year in 2000.

Since the inception of the AP poll in 1936, OSU had never failed to make the final poll in more than three straight years. But OSU was looking at just such a string heading into this season.

"It was important for us to get the respect back in our program," said Claret, who ended a dynamic freshman year with 1,237 yards rushing and 18 touchdowns. "After this, people will look at us and take

us more seriously."

Tressel noted how everything came into proper alignment for the Buckeyes this season.

"We are so proud of those 13 seniors and of those coaches," Tressel said. "The leadership that both of these groups gave, credit them. Throw in the fact that the young players believed, throw in the fact that our crowd was electric and energized us."

OSU became the first Big Ten team to play in the designated championship game in the brief five-year history of the Bowl Championship Series. The Buckeyes emerged from this dramatic win with the conference's first unanimous national championship since 1968. (Michigan split the 1997 national title with Nebraska.)

"This is such a great feeling," said OSU tight end Ben Hartsock. "I think it's important to understand what this means to our whole state. Every away game we go to, there are people waiting to meet us at the airport."

"It is a worldwide thing. It is neat to see the way Ohio State reaches out to people.

It's amazing."

OSU safety and co-captain Mike Doss set the tone for the title run when he decided last January to stick around for his senior year. He could have joined teammates Derek Ross and Darnell Sanders in leaving school early for the NFL. But he was rewarded for his decision by earning All-American honors for the third time as well as a national championship ring.

"I believed in our team," said Doss, who set up OSU's first touchdown with an interception. "Twelve months ago on Jan. 9, my mom's birthday, I made the decision to come back. I had one goal in mind and that was to win a national championship."

"I have won a championship on every level since I was 8 years old. I was able to come back, and we got it done."

The Buckeyes also were aided by an unprecedented showing of support. It was estimated that as many as 80 percent of the 77,502 in attendance at Sun Devil Stadium were rooting for OSU. Many of those fans had paid \$500 and up for their tickets to the title game.

"This was like the Ohio State branch campus today," Hartsock said. "This was the 'Shoe for the day. It seemed like there was a 1,000-1 ratio of Ohio State fans. That really was a spark for us, offensively and defensively."

A Fitting Conclusion

Between the Bowl Alliance (1995-97) and the first four years of the BCS, only one of the designated title games was decided by a touchdown or less, as Tennessee edged Florida State 23-16 in the 1999 Fiesta Bowl.

But after the Buckeyes rallied to defeat Miami, many college football pundits were calling the game – which lasted a robust three hours and 56 minutes – perhaps the greatest title game ever.

"Miami is a great football team and that's what the national championship game should go like – double overtime," Tressel said.

Miami (12-1) was bidding to become the game's first repeat national champion since Nebraska in 1994-95. The Hurricanes were installed as a 13-point favorite.

But if the Buckeyes were supposed to roll over and become Miami's 35th straight victim, they never got that memo.

"I never thought of us as underdogs," Claret said. "We all believed in ourselves."

The championship game was the kind of back-and-forth affair Ohio State thrived upon during the regular season.

"It was tough, but that's why you play the game," said OSU offensive tackle Shane Olivea. "To come out here and have the opportunity, it was unbelievable. Hey, no one gave us a chance. Not one person gave us a chance and that's why you play

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the game.”

Miami opened the scoring with a first-quarter touchdown drive. OSU then grabbed a 14-7 halftime lead after capitalizing on a pair of UM turnovers.

OSU led the entire second half until a 50-yard punt return by Roscoe Parrish set up Todd Sievers' 40-yard field goal on the final play of regulation, which tied the game at 17 and forced overtime.

Miami opened the first overtime with a touchdown to go up 24-17. OSU converted a sticky fourth-and-14 predicament with a 17-yard pass from Craig Krenzle to Michael Jenkins.

Moments later, OSU faced a fourth-and-3 at the Miami 5. Krenzle threw incomplete in the end zone to Chris Gamble, but UM cornerback Glenn Sharpe was flagged for pass interference. Miami had already begun its victory celebration when the judge made his call, throwing the flag 3-1/2 seconds after the play ended.

Given new life, OSU knotted the score at 24 on a 1-yard Krenzle quarterback sneak.

“We didn’t panic,” said OSU safety and co-captain Donnie Nickey. “We didn’t do that all season, either. We had it in our minds to never surrender and not to give up all season.”

OSU went first in the second overtime and scored in a methodical five plays. Clarett’s 5-yard TD run put the Buckeyes up and set the tone for the defense, which allowed Miami to get all the way down to the OSU 1 before stopping the Canes cold.

When Dorsey’s final pass fell harmlessly to the ground, a raucous OSU celebration ensued on the field. After accepting the various championship trophies, Tressel convened his team for its usual postgame ritual – a rendition of “Carmen Ohio” with the OSU marching band.

“It feels real good,” said Gamble, OSU’s two-way star and a native of the Miami suburb of Sunrise. “Ever since I went back home for the holiday everyone was like, ‘Oh, you all are going to lose to Miami.’”

“I just want to let everybody back home know I did it and the team did it.”

For Doss and several of the seniors, beating Miami was a fitting way to go out: They opened their careers with a 23-12 loss to the Canes in the 1999 Kickoff Classic.

“All the teams I’ve played against in my career, I’ve ended up either .500 or with a winning record against them,” Doss said. “Miami was the last one I needed. They had a 34-game winning streak, but we knew if we snapped that we would be national champions.”

A Season To Remember

Ohio State led the nation with seven games decided by a touchdown or less, including the title game victory.

Over the course of the year, these Buckeyes were in and out of tough spots more than Harry Houdini.

But where other teams would have fractured or folded, this OSU team typically pulled together.

“These guys were so willing to grow together and learn to care about each other,” Tressel said. “They have been through transition and a lot of adversity.”

“They each have a role, not one more important than the other.”

Hartsock added, “Just about every game has been tight for us. We haven’t won pretty, but we’ve won.”

While few outside the program believed a national championship was in the cards, the players themselves began to believe.

“Everyone deserves credit,” said defensive end Simon Fraser, who sacked Dorsey

late in regulation. “Everyone believed we could get it done. Right out of camp, we had the mind-set and the attitude to go the whole way.

“We grew together as a team. The camaraderie on this team is unbelievable. This is something that books are written about.”

OSU survived close calls at Cincinnati and Wisconsin early in the season. The 23-19 win at UC was predicated by a late defensive stand in the red zone, capped by a Will Allen interception in the end zone.

The Buckeyes then rallied for wins over Penn State and at Purdue and Illinois. OSU went to overtime for the first time in school history to secure the 23-16 win over the Illini.

“We’d been in overtime before,” noted OSU defensive tackle David Thompson. “Miami hadn’t been in overtime before. I knew we had to just keep fighting and keep playing. Our team stuck together. That’s the thing about Ohio State football this year. We play to the last minute. We stick together.”

The 14-9 season-ending victory over Michigan – also capped by a late interception by Allen near the goal line – gave the Buckeyes a school-record 13 wins and secured their spot in the national title game.

“After the Michigan game, we had written a chapter in history,” Hartsock said. “I think we would have been remembered even if we had lost the national championship game.”

“But we hung in and got the win here. I think we’ll be one of the teams that people will always talk about. It is a new era of greatness at Ohio State. To be part of that is overwhelming.”

No team in the previous 112 years of Ohio State football had ever won more than 11 games. So, yes, it seems this 14-game winner will be revered for a quite a while.

“I think we all had that in the back of our minds going into the game that we’d be part of Ohio State history for a very long time,” said OSU linebacker Matt Wilhelm. “We were out to get some respect and out to make history.”

Can They Repeat?

One of the obvious questions in the afterglow of the Miami victory was whether the Buckeyes could repeat in 2003.

At least on paper, each of the nation’s final top five – OSU, Miami, Georgia, USC and Oklahoma – will go into the offseason with serious designs on winning the national title at next year’s Sugar Bowl.

“We want to start a winning streak like Miami did,” Gamble confirmed. “We want to be back here in the championship game again next year.”

Tressel said those questions are inevitable, although he wanted his team to savor this win for a short while before getting back to work.

“These guys are going to enjoy this, celebrate with class and they’ll be very proud of their accomplishments,” Tressel said. “Those younger guys go back to school on (Jan. 6) and I don’t think we’ll throw them into the weight room right away but a lot of this is about what comes next. We’ll go to work pretty soon.”

Now that the underclassmen have a taste of a championship, it may be hard to accept anything less.

“I think the only way to top this is to do it two more times,” said OSU kicker Mike Nugent. “I’ve got two years left, so hopefully we can keep doing it.”

This story originally appeared in the Jan. 11, 2003, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 31, Miami (Fla.) 24 (2OT)

Jan. 3, 2003 – Sun Devil Stadium; Tempe, Ariz.

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|----|---|---|----|-----|----|
| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | OT | 2OT | F |
| OHIO STATE | 0 | 14 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 7 | 31 |
| MIAMI (FLA.) | 7 | 0 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 24 |

First Quarter

UM – Parrish, 25-yard pass from Dorsey (Sievers kick), 4:09; 5 plays, 52 yards, 2:12 TOP.

Second Quarter

OSU – Krenzle, 1-yard run (Nugent kick), 2:28; 7 plays, 17 yards, 3:08 TOP.

OSU – Clarett, 7-yard run (Nugent kick), 1:10; 2 plays, 14 yards, 1:05 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Nugent, 44-yard field goal, 8:33; 4 plays, 1 yard, 2:00 TOP.

UM – McGahee, 9-yard run (Sievers kick), 2:11; 7 plays, 55 yards, 2:54 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

UM – Sievers, 40-yard field goal, 0:00; 4 plays, 3 yards, 2:02 TOP.

First Overtime

UM – Winslow, 7-yard pass from Dorsey (Sievers kick); 5 plays, 25 yards.

OSU – Krenzle, 1-yard run (Nugent kick); 11 plays, 25 yards.

Second Overtime

OSU – Clarett, 5-yard run (Nugent kick); 5 plays, 25 yards.

Att. – 77,502

Team Statistics

| | OSU | UM |
|--------------------------|--------|---------|
| First Downs | 14 | 19 |
| Rushing | 7 | 3 |
| Passing | 6 | 14 |
| Penalty | 1 | 2 |
| Rushes-Yards | 52-145 | 33-65 |
| Passing Yards | 122 | 304 |
| Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.) | 7-21-2 | 29-44-2 |
| Offensive Plays | 73 | 77 |
| Total Net Yards | 267 | 369 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 6-18 | 6-18 |
| Punts-Avg. | 6-47.7 | 4-43.2 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 0-0 | 3-3 |
| Penalties | 9-49 | 6-30 |
| Time of Possession | 31:27 | 28:33 |

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Krenzle 19-81; Clarett 23-47; Ross 9-17; Groom 1-0. **UM:** McGahee 20-67; Payton 8-17; Hill 1-0; Dorsey 4-(-19).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Krenzle 7-21-2-122-0. **UM:** Dorsey 28-43-2-296-2; Crudup 1-1-0-8-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Jenkins 4-45; Gamble 2-69; Vance 1-8. **UM:** Winslow 11-122; Parrish 5-70; Johnson 4-54; Sands 3-34; McGahee 3-5; Hill 1-8; Payton 1-7; Geathers 1-4.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – OSU: Groom 6-47.7-63. **UM:** Capshaw 3-43.3-44.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Gamble 1-1.0. **UM:** Parrish 2-28.0.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – OSU: M. Hall 1-15.0. **UM:** Johnson 1-39.0.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – OSU: Allen 1-0; Clarett 1-0; Scott 1-0. **UM:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS – OSU: Doss 1-35; Fox 1-12. **UM:** Taylor 2-28.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Peterson 2-10; Fraser 1-5; Smith 1-3. **UM:** Green 1-4.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Peterson 3-12; Wilhelm 3-5; Smith 2-4; Fraser 1-5; Doss 1-1; Allen 1-1; Anderson 1-1; Thompson 1-1. **UM:** McIntosh 2-3; Wilfork 1-7; Green 1-4; Williams 1-2; McDougle 1-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU: Wilhelm 6-4-10; Doss 3-6-9; Smith 6-2-8; Fox 5-2-7; Grant 4-3-7; Peterson 4-1-5; Gamble 3-2-5; Nickey 3-2-5; Allen 3-2-5; Reynolds 3-1-4; Anderson 1-3-4; Thompson 0-3-3; Everett 1-0-1; Childress 1-0-1; Clarett 1-0-1; Scott 1-0-1; Fraser 1-0-1; Groom 0-1-1; Kudla 0-1-1; TEAM 0-1-1. **UM:** Vilma 5-9-14; Sikes 2-10-12; Taylor 2-9-11; Williams 3-5-8; McIntosh 2-6-8; Walters 4-3-7; Rolle 2-2-4; Harris 1-3-4; Joseph 2-1-3; Green 2-1-3; Haji-Rasouli 2-0-2; Sharpe 1-1-2; Williams 1-1-2; McDougle 1-1-2; McGahee 1-0-1; Wilfork 1-0-1; Marshall 1-0-1; Scott 1-0-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – OSU: Smith, Anderson, Peterson, Scott, Grant, Wilhelm, Reynolds, Fox, Gamble, Nickey, Doss, Groom, Jenkins, Sims, Clarke, Stepanovich, Bishop, Olivea, Hartsock, Gamble, Krenzle, Clarett, Joe, Nugent, Childress, Moore, Vance, D’Andrea, Carter, Conwell, Salley, Allen, Hall, Ross, O’Neill, Carpenter, Schnittker, Hawk, Tucker, Underwood, Kne, Douglas, Mangold, Kudla, Andrews, Fraser, Hamby, Arden, Caldwell, Bond, Green, Thompson, Everett. **UM:** Johnson, C. Joseph, Haji-Rasouli, Romberg, Myers, Carey, Winslow, Parrish, Dorsey, McGahee, Hill, Sievers, Green, Walters, W. Joseph, McDougle, D.J. Williams, Vilma, McIntosh, Marshall, Rolle, Taylor, Sikes, Capshaw, Geathers, Sands, Crudup, Jennings, Maxey, Threat, Scott, Sharpe, Payton, Peattie, Humphrey, L. Williams, Clark, McCllover, Weaver, Kunz, Harvey, Rodriguez, Wilfork, Jolla, D. Williams, Winston, Harris, A. Williams.

Florida 5-Star Cornerback Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State followed up its impressive win over Clemson in the Sugar Bowl with yet another victory over the Tigers when the Buckeyes landed a commitment on Jan. 2 from Jacksonville (Fla.) Robert E. Lee five-star cornerback Jaheim Singletary.

The 6-1, 170-pound Singletary is considered the fifth-best cornerback and No. 10 prospect overall in the class of 2022 after he recorded 18 tackles, six pass breakups, three interceptions and one blocked field goal to lead the Generals to an appearance in the state semifinals last fall. He chose Ohio State over finalists Clemson, Florida and Georgia.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

Singletary landed an offer from the Buckeyes in early November, whereas the Bulldogs (May 2019), Gators (June) and Tigers (July) have been in contact much longer. Nevertheless, head coach Ryan Day and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs made quite the impression in just a few short weeks, pushing Ohio State to the forefront of Singletary's recruitment.

One thing helping the Buckeyes in their pursuit of Singletary was their success in Jacksonville in recent years, landing five-star cornerbacks Shaun Wade and Tyreke Johnson in 2017 and 2018, respectively, as well as four-star running back Marcus Crowley in 2019. Singletary is familiar with all three players.

"I'm going there because it's DBU and because of Coach Coombs," Singletary said in his announcement video posted to Twitter. "He puts guys in the league first round, and it's not promised. It's based off your work ethic. And just the love. Ohio State came in and actually took over my recruitment. They were doing everything to get me."

Ohio State now holds a pair of commitments at cornerback for the class of 2022 in Singletary and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Jyair Brown. The Buckeyes hope to add at least one more player at the position, with Houston North Shore five-star Denver Harris; Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star Domani Jackson; Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South five-star Will Johnson; and St. Louis Lutheran North four-star Toriano Pride among the staff's top targets.

Legacy Tight End Accepts Preferred Walk-On Offer

Nashville Montgomery Bell Academy tight end Zak Herbstreit, the son of former Ohio State quarterback and ESPN commentator Kirk Herbstreit and grandson of former running back and defensive back Jim Herbstreit, announced Dec. 23 that he has accepted a preferred walk-on offer from the Buckeyes.

The 6-2, 217-pound Herbstreit is not ranked by any recruiting services for the class of 2021. He caught just nine passes for 157 yards and two touchdowns to help the Big Red to the state semifinals this fall. He did hold scholarship offers from Dayton, Tennessee-Martin and Tennessee Tech, however.

Herbstreit's older brothers, twins Jake and Tye, are in their second seasons as walk-ons at Clemson, where the former is a safety and the latter is a wide receiver. Neither was offered the opportunity by then-Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, who reportedly expressed regret for that decision thereafter.

"When it came time to go to school, they just happened to go to a Clemson camp going into their senior year and did pretty well. (Tigers head coach) Dabo (Swinney) kind of kept an eye on them and stayed in touch with them and offered them an opportunity to be preferred walk-ons," Kirk said during a conference call in October. "They decided to take him up on it. It was really as simple as that."

"Urban felt awful on the back end of that. He apologized quite a bit. I would love to have seen them go to Ohio State, but I'm not going to tell them. 'You have to go to Ohio State,' when Urban Meyer hasn't offered you a preferred walk-on. It wasn't really an option."

On the other hand, Zak has been in contact with Day for several months, which led to his decision to join the program. He now has a chance to become part of the first grandfather-father-son trio to be named team captains for the Buckeyes. Jim was a team captain under Woody Hayes in 1960 and Kirk was a team captain under John Cooper in 1992.

California Corner Sets Decision Date

The previously mentioned Jackson announced on Jan. 13 that he'll make his college decision among Arizona State, Clemson, Michigan, Ohio State, Oklahoma and USC on Jan. 23.

The 6-1, 185-pound Jackson is considered the top-rated cornerback and No. 3 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He's recorded 62 tackles, 12 pass breakups, three interceptions and one fumble recovery in 20 games with the Monarchs, who are set to begin their postponed fall season later this month.

Jackson landed an offer from the Buckeyes during a virtual visit last April, and although he's never been to campus, he's built a strong bond with Day, Coombs and linebackers coach Al Washington from afar. He hoped to make his first trip to Columbus during the season but couldn't due to the ongoing recruiting dead period.

The Trojans have made a push in recent weeks both as the hometown program and because of Jackson's growing relationship with associate head coach/cornerbacks coach Donte Williams. That has led to Jackson trending toward USC as his commitment date nears, with the Trojans holding all eight crystal ball predictions, something Ohio State had previously led in.

Linebacker Target Nears Decision

Jackson won't be the only player from Santa Ana Mater Dei who makes his college decision in the coming weeks. Four-star linebacker Raesjon Davis announced on Jan. 6 he'll choose among LSU, Ohio State, Oregon, USC and Vanderbilt on the traditional National Signing Day on Feb. 3.

Along with Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloua, the 6-1 and 215-pound Davis – who is considered the fourth-best outside linebacker and No. 45 prospect overall in



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAHHEIM SINGLETARY

NEXT IN LINE – Jaheim Singletary committed to Ohio State on Jan. 2, following in the footsteps of fellow Jacksonville, Fla., natives Shaun Wade, Tyreke Johnson and Marcus Crowley.

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 |
| Jakaillin 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 |
|-------------------|------|------|-----|-------|-----------------------------------|
| Jyair 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 |
| Jaheim Singletary | CB | 6-1 | 170 | ★★★★★ | Jacksonville Robert E. Lee |
| Tegra Tshabola | OT | 6-5 | 340 | ★★★★ | West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West |

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

"I just always loved Ohio State."

With that, Matt Closson, a 6-2, 220-pound senior at Delphos (Ohio) Jefferson High School, announced that he had made a verbal commitment to attend Ohio State University to continue both his education and football career.

The announcement ended the recruiting derby for Closson, the Associated Press Ohio Class A Lineman of the Year, who would finalize the commitment on Feb. 12 with the signing of his national letter of intent.

"I thought it would be great to play there," said Closson, a linebacker/fullback in high school. "When I went down there, that made up my mind."

Ohio State recruited Closson at either of his prep positions, but he said that he had no preference on his spot at the next level.

30 Years Ago – 1991

Two more high school prospects jumped on the Ohio State bandwagon as the Buckeyes began their stretch drive in the 1991 recruiting season.

Verbally committing to the Buckeyes were tight end Steve Langenkamp of Cincinnati Moeller and wide receiver DeWayne Carter of Orchard Lake, Mich.

The commitments brought the year's total of future Buckeyes to seven. Langenkamp and Carter joined quarterback Bob Hoying of St. Henry, Ohio; offensive lineman Greg Kuszmaul of Warren (Ohio) John F. Kennedy; tight end Kevin Niekamp of St. Henry, Ohio; linebacker Craig Powell of Youngstown (Ohio) Rayen; and defensive back Marlon Kerner of Columbus Brookhaven.

25 Years Ago – 1996

The Ohio State football recruiting effort slowed to almost a crawl with no players visiting over the weekend of Jan. 12 and perhaps only a handful of prospects tentatively scheduled to visit over the following weeks.

The Buckeyes still had 23 verbal commitments for the 1996 class.

It was believed that Ohio State might take as many as 27 players with the class, figuring that one or several players in the class would not qualify academically or that one or several current Buckeyes on scholarship would leave the team by injury waiver, transferring or quitting.

20 Years Ago – 2001

The firing of OSU head coach John Cooper left the football program's recruiting efforts up in the air just one month before National Signing Day on Feb. 7.

While some key prospects immediately dropped Ohio State and canceled visits upon learning of the news, others insisted that they would still look at the school. In fact, the Buckeyes received their 14th verbal commitment for 2001 over the weekend of Jan. 5-7 when Cincinnati Moeller tight end Ryan Hamby visited and committed to OSU.

"The coaching thing, that was probably the least of my worries," Hamby said after announcing his pledge. "With the candidates they are going after, I know they are going to get a good coach."

15 Years Ago – 2006

Ohio State's recruiting class, which had held fewer than 10 commitments in December, was rapidly filling up as National Signing Day approached.

Ohio State added six more recruits to what had been a nine-man class in the span of just a month, including two in a one-week span from Jan. 9-16 with a third apparently close to being on the way. Out-of-staters Walter Dublin, a defensive end from Sarasota, Fla., and Washington (Pa.) Trinity tight end Andy Miller were the latest to make their pledges, with Michigan native Aaron Gant, a defensive back from Orchard Lake (Mich.) St. Mary's, seemingly ready to make his announcement at any time.

10 Years Ago – 2011

When it came time for Jim Tressel to send out thank you cards to those who helped him assemble his 2011 recruiting class, he might have wanted to include one to Urban Meyer.

With a little more than a week remaining until the Feb. 2 National Signing Day, the Ohio State coach found himself putting the finishing touches on a class that looked likely to finish among the top five in the nation. As Tressel had done so, he had been among the top beneficiaries of Meyer's sudden retirement from the head position at Florida.

Following that move, the Buckeyes landed a former Gator verbal commitment in four-star outside linebacker Ryan Shazier from Plantation, Fla., and they looked to be in the running for another former Gator commitment as well as a third player who was considering Florida at one point in his recruitment

As BSB went to press, the Buckeyes had just completed hosting Florida verbal pledge JaJuan Story for an official visit during the weekend of Jan. 21, and the four-star wide receiver from Brooksville (Fla.) Nature Coast Tech was set to make his decision between either Ohio State or Florida. They were also considered the odds-on favorite to land the nation's top uncommitted outside linebacker in Curtis Grant from Richmond (Va.) Hermitage.

Five Years Ago – 2016

Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall three-star safety Jahsen Wint announced his commitment to the Buckeyes on Jan. 2, becoming the 18th member of the class of 2016. It was initially thought he might commit on Christmas Eve, but he merely decommitted from Temple and waited another week to pledge to the Buckeyes.

Wint took an official visit to Columbus the weekend of Dec. 11, the last chance to do so before the recruiting dead period began and on-campus visits or in-person contact between players and coaches became illegal.

"Basically, when I went on the official visit, I went to see what they were about," Wint told Scout.com after committing. "It's a great program. I like how hard they work. Everybody on the team is working for the same goal, and that's winning the national championship every single year. My coach had a big role in my commitment."

"He basically told me the pros and cons of every school. He told me the crazy part is I have a chance of starting at Ohio State, which is crazy. They have a couple DBs leaving, so I can come in there and try to make an impact."

One Year Ago – 2020

Ohio State landed its second commitment in as many days when Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal four-star offensive lineman Donovan Jackson pledged his services to the Buckeyes on Jan. 8. A day prior, Ohio State had secured a pledge from Cincinnati La Salle three-star safety Jaylen Johnson.

The 6-4, 308-pound Jackson was considered the top-rated offensive guard and No. 57 prospect overall in the class of 2021. He was named the offensive line MVP at The Opening Finals the previous summer and then led the Knights to the 4A state title in the fall.

He picked Ohio State over finalists Georgia, Stanford, Texas and Texas A&M.

the class of 2021 – is perceived as one of just two targets remaining for the Buckeyes in the current cycle.

Davis, who was committed to the Tigers but did not sign with the program during the early signing period and then reopened his recruitment on Dec. 31, visited Ohio State for a few hours last March as part of a country-wide tour that happened just before the coronavirus pandemic brought recruiting to a halt. His relationship with Day, Coombs and Washington has grown tremendously since, and he hopes to make it back to campus in the coming weeks before making a final decision, even though he won't be able to meet with the coaching staff due to the dead period.

"Ohio State is a great program," Davis told 247Sports national recruiting analyst Greg Biggins "When you look at what they're doing now and how well they're recruiting, it's almost a sure thing if you go there, you're going to make it to the playoffs and have a great shot to get drafted. They win and develop. That's who they are as a program."

"Hopefully, I can find a time to visit out there. I'm not just saying that, either. I really do want to visit and even though I don't have a date yet, it has to happen. My parents really want to check out the place, and my interest is definitely real."

The Buckeyes just signed a linebacker in Ironton, Ohio, four-star Reid Carrico, and the depth on the current roster has allowed Washington to be selective in his pursuit of other players at the position. Davis would be an added luxury at this point, even if most

prognosticators ultimately expect him to choose the hometown Trojans.

Offensive Tackle Picks Clemson

Fairfax (Va.) Robinson Secondary five-star offensive tackle Tristan Leigh publicly committed to Clemson during NBC's two-hour special called "All-American Bowl: Declaration Day" on Jan. 2, though actually he had secretly signed with the Tigers during the early signing period Dec. 16-18.

The 6-5, 270-pound Leigh – who is considered the fourth-best offensive tackle and No. 11 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – listed Alabama, Clemson, LSU, Ohio State and Oklahoma as his final five schools in July, but it was highly unlikely he would land with the Buckeyes since he hadn't been to Columbus in more than a year.

Leigh's announcement was a surprise to many, as he had been trending toward the Sooners since he attended an unofficial gathering of commits and top targets in Norman, Okla., this summer. But apparently proximity to home played a larger role than anticipated, and he chose the Tigers as a result.

Ohio State, meanwhile, signed three offensive linemen during the early signing period in Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal five-star guard Donovan Jackson; Richfield (Ohio) Revere four-star guard Ben Christman; and Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central four-star tackle Zen Michalski. There are no efforts to add another this cycle, especially since the staff already holds one commitment at tackle for the class of 2022 in West

Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Tegra Tshabola and feels good about its chances with several of its top targets, including Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy five-star Zach Rice; Daleville (Va.) Lord Botetort five-star Gunner Givens; Fond Du Lac (Wisc.) St. Mary's Springs four-star Billy Schrauth; Charlestown, Ind., four-star Kiyaunta Goodwin; Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Aliou Bah; and Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Aamil Wagner.

Linebacker Commit Selects Under Armour Game

On Dec. 31, Marysville, Ohio, four-star linebacker Gabe Powers became the fourth member of Ohio State's 2022 recruiting class to accept an invitation to the Under Armour All-America Game.

The 6-4, 220-pound Powers, who is considered the second-best outside linebacker and No. 33 prospect overall in his cycle, committed to the Buckeyes in August over offers from programs such as Boston College, Florida State, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Notre Dame, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Stanford, Tennessee, West Virginia and Wisconsin, among others.

Powers will be joined at the Under Armour All-America Game by the aforementioned Brown; Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star linebacker C.J. Hicks; and Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley North four-star athlete Dasan McCullough. It will take place at Camping World Stadium in Orlando in early January 2022.

Receiver Pledge Chooses All-American Bowl

Similarity, Del Valle, Texas, five-star wide receiver Caleb Burton became the first member of Ohio State's 2022 recruiting class to accept an invitation to the All-American Bowl, flipping his pledge from the Under Armour All-America Game on Jan. 3.

The 6-0, 165-pound Burton, who is considered the top-rated wide receiver and No. 14 prospect overall in his class, pledged his services to the Buckeyes on Nov. 23 over finalists Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Oklahoma, Oregon, Stanford, Texas and USC.

Ohio State is typically well-represented at the All-American Bowl, which takes place each January at the Alamodome in San Antonio. The Buckeyes were set to send a nation-leading 13 commits this year, including Carrico; Jackson; Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer; Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka; Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson; Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep five-star quarterback Kyle McCord; St. Louis De Smet Jesuit four-star cornerback Jakailin Johnson; Streetsboro, Ohio, four-star defensive tackle Mike Hall; Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star wide receiver Jayden Ballard; Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star cornerback Jordan Hancock; Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star running back Evan Pryor; Philadelphia

Continued On Page 30

Commits Accept Invitations To All-Star Games

Continued From Page 29

St. Joseph's Prep four-star wide receiver Marvin Harrison; and Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed four-star defensive tackle Tyleik Williams, but the game was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Offensive Guard Signee Wins National Award

Speaking of Jackson, he became the second Ohio State signee in as many years to be named the Anthony Muñoz Lineman of the Year, which is presented annually to the nation's best offensive or defensive lineman of the year, during the All-American Bowl's virtual awards ceremony on Dec. 30.

The award is named after the Hall of Fame offensive lineman who played 13 seasons with the Cincinnati Bengals.

The 6-4, 308-pound Jackson – who is considered the top-rated offensive guard and No. 17 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – joins freshman offensive tackle Paris Johnson, who won the award during the 2020 recruiting cycle.

Jackson was also nominated for the All-American Bowl's GEICO Man of the Year Award. He earned the nomination in large part due to his work with children with special needs and in food banks around the Houston metropolitan area.

That award, which Ohio State sophomore wide receiver Garrett Wilson won in 2019 and Johnson won in 2020, was given to Oklahoma five-star quarterback signee Caleb Williams, though. Past OSU finalists

include sophomore offensive guard Harry Miller and sophomore defensive end Zach Harrison in 2019 and freshman safety Kourt Williams in 2020.

Several Players Include Ohio State Among Top Schools

Over the next few months, prospects from the 2022 and 2023 recruiting classes will begin to trim down their extensive list of scholarship offers in hopes of taking visits during the spring – provided the NCAA doesn't extend the ongoing recruiting dead period beyond its current end date of April 15.

That includes Humble (Texas) Atascocita four-star offense tackle Kam Dewberry, who put Ohio State in his top 10 on Dec. 29 alongside Alabama, Auburn, Baylor, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Oklahoma, Texas and Texas A&M.

The 6-4, 313-pound Dewberry is considered the 11th-best offensive tackle and No. 115 prospect overall in the 2022 cycle. He landed an offer from the Buckeyes last January, though he's not been able to make his way to campus in the year since.

Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert four-star wide receiver Kojo Antwi, meanwhile, listed Ohio State in his top eight on Dec. 30 along with Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas A&M and USC.

The 6-1, 185-pound Antwi is considered the 19th-best wide receiver and No. 162 prospect overall for 2022, but is considered one of the Buckeyes' top targets at the position, along with Chandler, Ariz., four-star

Kyion Grayes.

Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star offensive tackle Tyler Booker included Ohio State in his top 10 on Dec. 31 with Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Jackson State, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Oregon, Penn State and Texas A&M.

The 6-4, 315-pound Booker, who is considered the third-best offensive tackle and No. 35 prospect overall in the class of 2022, picked up an offer from the Buckeyes and offensive line coach Greg Studrawa in October.

Des Moines (Iowa) Southeast Polk four-star safety Xavier Nwankpa listed Ohio State in his top 12 on Jan. 1 along with Arizona State, Clemson, Iowa, Iowa State, LSU, Missouri, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Penn State, Texas and Wisconsin.

The 6-2, 190-pound Nwankpa is considered the seventh-best safety and No. 76 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He's regarded as the staff's top target at the position and has been crystal balled to the Buckeyes by 247Sports recruiting insider Steve Lorenz.

Columbus (Ga.) Hardaway four-star defensive tackle Mykel Williams included Ohio State in his top 10 on Jan. 1. Also included were Alabama, Arizona State, Clemson, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Kentucky, LSU, Penn State and USC.

The 6-5, 255-pound Williams is listed as the fourth-best defensive tackle and No. 41 prospect overall in the 2022 cycle. He landed an offer from the Buckeyes in May.

Memphis Christian Brothers four-star running back Dallon Hayden placed Ohio

State in his top four on Jan. 1 along with Notre Dame, Oregon and Tennessee.

While the 5-11 and 195-pound Hayden is considered the 25th-best running back and No. 252 prospect overall in the class of 2022, he's believed to be one of the Buckeyes' top targets at his position. The Volunteers are the presumed favorite in his recruitment, however.

West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star athlete Dillon Tatum included Ohio State in his top 10 on Jan. 1 with Baylor, Georgia, Michigan, Michigan State, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Penn State, USC and Wisconsin.

The 5-11, 190-pound Tatum is rated the 12th-best athlete and No. 246 prospect overall in the 2022 cycle and is projected by the Buckeyes to be a slot cornerback at the next level.

He appears to be leaning toward the Wolverines, with whom his high school teammate, four-star running back Donovan Edwards, signed in December.

The previously mentioned Rice named a top three of North Carolina, Notre Dame and Ohio State on Jan. 5.

The 6-6, 282-pound Rice, who is considered the top-rated offensive tackle and No. 21 prospect overall in the class of 2022, also indicated that a decision could come at any time. If that happens, don't expect it to be the Buckeyes.

Orlando (Fla.) Evans four-star safety Markeith Williams included Ohio State in his top three on Jan. 5. Alabama and Florida were also listed.

The 6-3, 180-pound Williams, who is

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler

What's the latest on 2021 Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau, who narrowed down his list of offers to Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon, Washington and USC on Dec. 16, and how likely is it that he holds off on making his college decision beyond the traditional National Signing Day on Feb. 3?

"It has been pretty much a holding pattern for a while now with J.T. There is definitely a chance that he holds out beyond the February signing day to see if he can somehow make visits in April and May before enrolling at his school of choice over the summer. I still like where Ohio State stands here and think it is the team to beat with Alabama hot on its heels."

On a similar note, 2021 Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star linebacker Raesjon Davis is set to make his decision among LSU, Ohio State, Oregon and USC on Feb. 3. Where do you think he ends up?

"Right now, this looks like a decision that could

come down to geography, which is great news for USC. I think the Trojans have the inside track with Ohio State running second. It could be tough to pull this one off without a real visit, though Davis could potentially still fly into Columbus for a couple of days in the coming weeks."

Though Ohio State appeared to be the favorite in his recruitment, Lewisville, Texas, four-star wide receiver Armani Winfield committed to the home-state Longhorns on Dec. 12. Do you think this a significant win for new head coach Steve Sarkisian or simply a matter of the Buckeyes having other targets ahead of Winfield on their list of priorities?

"I definitely think it's a big win for Sarkisian. Ohio State liked Winfield quite a bit and it looked very much like he would follow the Quinn Ewers and Caleb Burton commitments and pledge to the Buckeyes. With that said, Ohio State has done such a great job recruiting the position that a lost battle or two isn't going to sting too bad."

Speaking of Sarkisian, do you think his

hiring will have any impact on Ohio State holding onto commitments from 2022 Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star quarterback Ewers and 2022 Del Valle, Texas, five-star wide receiver Burton, or are they solid in their pledge to the Buckeyes?

"There is always that new coach excitement that gives schools a recruiting boost. Eventually, that excitement has to be validated with results on the field, but right now Sark is in that window where he can sell hopes, dreams and playing time, and he's certainly going to do that and certainly going to reach back out to guys like Ewers and Burton."

"Ewers still has his best relationships with the Ohio State staff and had to know that Herman not being there would be a possibility when he decommitted. The 2022 class could be wild as kids will eventually be able to make visits, some for really the first time in their process, so chaos is very possible around the nation in the cycle, but I think there is a lot of optimism that the Buckeyes will be able to hold on to these two."

ranked the 14th-best safety and No. 229 prospect overall in the 2022 cycle, landed an offer from the Buckeyes last January and plans to visit campus for the first time when the recruiting dead period comes to a close.

Bradenton IMG Academy four-star running back Kaytron Allen celebrated his 17th birthday on Jan. 8 by unveiling his top-10 schools of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Ohio State, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas and USC.

The 5-11, 206-pound Allen – who originally hails from Norfolk, Va. – is listed as the eight-best running back and No. 116 prospect overall in the class of 2022. Most prognosticators expect him to end up with the Crimson Tide.

While announcing his decommitment from the Bulldogs on Jan. 9, Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy four-star athlete Treyaun Webb announced a top six of Florida, Georgia, LSU, Ohio State, Oklahoma and Penn State.

The 6-0, 188-pound Webb, who hails from the same high school as Ohio State's

Wade, Johnson and Crowley, is considered the fourth-best athlete and No. 32 prospect overall in the 2023 cycle. He's projected to play cornerback at the next level.

Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed five-star linebacker Shawn Murphy listed Ohio State in his top eight on Jan. 13 along with Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma, Oregon and Penn State.

The 6-2 and 215-pound Murphy is the top-rated inside linebacker and No. 17 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He is the former teammate of Tyleik Williams, and most expect him to follow Williams' lead to Columbus.

Texas Receiver Stays Home

Although Ohio State held more than 92 percent of his 247Sports crystal ball predictions, Lewisville, Texas, four-star wide receiver Armani Winfield committed to Texas on Dec. 12.

The 6-2, 180-pound Winfield, who is considered the 12th-best wide receiver and No.

79 prospect in the class of 2022, included the Buckeyes, Longhorns and others in his top nine back in November. There was a thought that he might commit to Ohio State shortly thereafter, but sources have indicated the Buckeyes were not ready to accept his pledge with Antwi and Grayes – and even Chicago St. Rita four-star Kaleb Brown – higher on their priority chart.

Winfield switched his attention to Texas when it hired new head coach Steve

Sarkisian, whose Alabama offense's performance against Ohio State in the national championship resulted in Winfield's commitment to the Longhorns. He reportedly pledged his services to wide receivers coach Andre Coleman at halftime of the Crimson Tide's 52-24 win on Jan. 11.

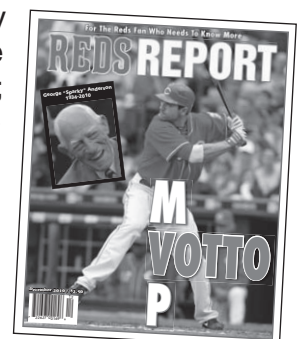
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Surging Buckeyes Making A Point To Add Depth

Former world heavyweight champion Mike Tyson is credited with saying, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face."

For Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann, it wasn't one blow to the head but a series of jabs that forced him to change plans and improvise the revolving door at point guard this season.

The shots kept coming until he was forced to start a forward at that position as well as bring a player off the bench who had only been enrolled in school about a month.

COURT REPORT Craig Merz

He first lost starting point guard C.J. Walker then backup Jimmy Sotos to injuries in mid-January, but the makeshift lineup didn't stop the Buckeyes (11-3, 5-3 Big Ten) from winning their third straight in an 87-81 victory at Illinois on Jan. 16.

Three days earlier after an 81-71 win over Northwestern, Holtmann was prompted to say, "You should look at my practice plan. It's interesting looking at all of our potential lineups and moving guys around. In terms of moving the lineups around, this is the greatest challenge of my coaching career."

What brought him to that conclusion?

Let's go back to the beginning, rather, prior to the beginning of the season in early November.

Walker, a senior, was slated to run the point, and Holtmann was excited to add Utah State graduate transfer Abel Porter as a capable backup. Porter had played in all 34 games the previous season, averaging 5.6 points and 3.2 assists for the Aggies.

At that juncture, California transfer Justice Sueing, after sitting out the NCAA mandated season while also undergoing foot surgery in January 2020, was Holtmann's choice to play a significant role on the interior.

Meanwhile, Sotos, a guard who had transferred from Bucknell, was appealing his denial of immediate eligibility so his status for the 2020-21 season was unknown, and Meechie Johnson was in high school and part of a strong 2021 recruiting class.

Johnson, a Cleveland Garfield Heights product, was the No. 2 prospect in Ohio behind Buckeye commit Malaki Branham of Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary.

What looked like a good plan soon became a series of twists and turns. Porter had to retire because of a congenital heart condition before ever playing a game for the Buckeyes.

Fortunately, Sotos gained his eligibility soon after and slowly worked his way into meaningful reserve minutes. Sueing proved to be an invaluable addition, and sensing an opportunity to add depth to the backcourt, Holtmann approached Johnson about reclassifying to the 2020 class, which he did.

Difference Makers

All was moving along relatively smoothly, considering games were being played in the toughest conference during the COVID-19 pandemic, until Holtmann announced prior to the Jan. 9 game at Rutgers that Walker would be out indefinitely because of torn ligaments in his right hand.

Sotos stepped into the starting role vs. the Scarlet Knights, hit two early triples and finished with six points and four assists in 28 minutes but exited with under four minutes remaining holding his right shoulder after a collision.

He like, Walker, missed the Northwestern and Illini games. Against

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 |

the Wildcats, Sueing made his first career start at point guard along with Duane Washington at the No. 2 spot. Justin Ahrens moved into Sueing's forward position alongside E.J. Liddell and Kyle Young.

Washington relieved Sueing at times, as did Johnson, who made his debut against Rutgers without taking a shot in four minutes but hit both three-point attempts among his three shots for six points in 11 minutes vs. the Wildcats. Sueing for his part, had 13 points and seven rebounds.

Give Holtmann credit. It was prescient of him after Porter's departure to give Sueing a look at point guard.

"We played with Justice and began to teach him the point because of knowing that we were losing Abel for the season," Holtmann said. "And we have had that in the back of our minds that we were going to do that."

"This was something that, back when Abel went down, that we had looked at doing with Justice. And we spent a lot of practice time working on it, so we weren't totally caught off guard."

"He's a little bit unsung in all of this because we forced him into the point guard position."

Sueing shrugged off his performance against Northwestern.

"With me being next up, running the PG, I had to learn it pretty quick and pretty fast," he said. "My coaches and team have a lot of confidence in me to trust my versatility on the floor. Once I got the hang of it, they let me play and play through the game. It wasn't too much. I've been familiar with the plays."

He'd rather talk about Johnson, who already is showing a bit of the swagger expected from someone older and more experienced.

"Meechie, he's full of confidence and we love that about him," Sueing said after the Northwestern game. "Being a point guard on the floor, you have to be able to carry a team and lead them the right way."

"He's a young buck on the team, but he's really taking in all the lessons, all the advice and criticism that we can give him, and he got his little two threes off tonight, got his confidence going and we're going to continue to build that for him."

Holtmann has been impressed by how much Johnson has soaked up in a limited amount of time in the program.

"Meechie Johnson has really helped this team from day one both in practice

and now in games," he said. "It says a lot about the kind of young man he is. He's also fearless as a player. We knew that when we recruited him."

"You're throwing him in mid-year. Now you're saying, 'Hey, hop in, play 15, 10 minutes in the best league in the country. And, oh by the way, you're going to play one of the most important positions on the floor. Learn our defensive system. Learn our offensive system. And by the way, don't overthink, just play.' That's a lot to ask a young man. To his credit, he's been very attentive, really bought in."

Of course, it hasn't all gone smoothly. The Buckeyes (11-3, 5-3 Big Ten) squandered all but three of an 18-point lead at Illinois before holding off the Illini.

Sueing had nine points but five turnovers under pressure. Johnson made a trey amid his two shots, and Washington, after a career-high 23 points and six assists vs. Northwestern, had 11 and two, respectively, with three turnovers against the Illini.

On the other hand, Ahrens has hit critical three-pointers in each of his two starts since the injuries hit.

Holtmann after the Illinois game did not give an update on Walker or Sotos, but Walker was reported to have been doing some shooting prior to the game.

Without his top point guards, Holtmann has learned much about his team during the win streak.

"I think what it says about our young men right now, at this point, is they've really embraced what each guy can bring to the team and they've been able to come in and play effectively," he said. "We've had to mix and match the lineup a lot just because we've had a season unlike any others with injuries and they haven't really been COVID issues, but it's been unlike anything else we've had."

"What we found out, what we kind of knew, is that we were going to have some depth, and a strength of our team could be our depth if our guys embrace the role and play it at a high level, and so far, they've done that and we'll see if they continue to do that."

Who's Next?

The Buckeyes' schedule has been affected twice by the COVID-19 issues in the Penn State program.

Their Jan. 6 home game vs. Nittany Lions was postponed with a new date not set.

Also, to accommodate Penn State's rearrangement of its schedule, the Buckeyes were to host Purdue on Jan. 19 in a game originally scheduled for Jan. 27.



C.J. Walker

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Buckeyes Battle Brutal Big Ten Slate Shorthanded

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State men's basketball team went 5-2 since the last BSB, battling a slew of injuries to play solid basketball during the stretch.

Buckeye fourth-year junior wing Musa Jallow missed the Nebraska game Dec. 30 due to COVID-19 contact tracing before fifth-year senior point guard C.J. Walker was held out due to torn ligaments in his wrist that he had been playing through all season.

Senior guard Jimmy Sotos stepped in for Walker against Rutgers on Jan. 9 but suffered a shoulder injury in that game.

Freshman guard Meechie Johnson, originally a 2021 commit who reclassified, took on a bigger role following Sotos' injury. Junior guard Duane Washington and fourth-year junior wing Justice Sueing took on more playmaking responsibilities due to the Buckeyes' lack of depth at the position.

Ohio State also had its first game postponed due to the coronavirus, a Jan. 6 matchup with Penn State that could not be played on schedule due to positive COVID tests within the Nittany Lions' program.

Overall, head coach Chris Holtmann appreciated how his team handled the setbacks faced this season, dating back to Utah State point guard transfer Abel Porter being ruled medically unable to play due to a heart condition.

"This is the most proud I've been of our team the entire year," Holtmann said after an 81-71 win against Northwestern Jan. 13. "I thought Northwestern played well, and I thought we played pretty well. Not perfect. But this is the most proud I've been of our group - being down a couple ball-handlers, having a number of guys step up. They had a week to prepare. I knew they would play well, and they did."

OSU Makes Comeback To Upset Rutgers

The No. 23 Buckeyes overcame a 16-point deficit in the second half to defeat No. 11 Rutgers 80-68 at Value City Arena on Dec. 23.

The Buckeyes (7-1, 1-1) won the Big Ten battle with a 27-5 run, when they held the Scarlet Knights (6-1, 2-1) without a field goal for 8:47, as part of a 42-15 stretch to close the game.

"That was a heck of a win," Holtmann said. "We had to be really resilient. We put ourselves in a bind and some of that was how well Rutgers was playing. But players win games and our guys responded."

Washington paced Ohio State with a then-career-high 22 points, while sophomore forward E.J. Liddell (21 points and six rebounds) and senior forward Kyle Young (17 points and 12 boards) set the tone in the paint with career scoring highs as well.

"A 42-15 run, that's good basketball, and that's what we pride ourselves on," Washington said. "During the second half, we had a way to come out down 10 and stick to it, play Buckeye basketball and just keep grinding. Grinding, grind-

ing, grinding - that's how Big Ten games work."

After the Scarlet Knights started red-hot at 53.8 percent (7 of 13) from beyond the arc in the first half, the Buckeyes held them to just 25 percent (3 of 12) on threes in the second half.

Ohio State's efforts on the glass and improved efficiency also led to the big comeback.

The Buckeyes outrebounded the visitors 45-25 on the game, including 26-8 in the second half. They also nearly doubled Rutgers' points in the paint with 38-20.

"Both teams like to get into the paint a lot," Liddell said. "And we felt like whoever scored more paint points, whoever got more offensive rebounds, and rebounds in general, was going to win the game."

The Scarlet and Gray shot 57.1 percent (16 of 28) from the field in the second half after just 36.7 percent (11 of 30) in the first frame.

The winning run was sparked by Jallow, who drew the fifth foul on Rutgers rim protector Myles Johnson, a junior center, after grabbing an offensive rebound with 8:44 left.

"That was just another opportunity to go into the paint and dominate the paint for all of us," Liddell said of Johnson fouling out. "And also on the offensive rebounds - I don't know how many offensive rebounds Kyle had (5), but he was a big factor in that, and also Musa too."

After Jallow split the pair of foul shots, he grabbed another offensive rebound on the ensuing possession and slammed the ball home for an and-one put-back dunk to cut the Rutgers lead to 59-55 with 8:04 left.

The Scarlet Knights hit a pair of foul shots to push their lead back to six, but the Buckeyes roared to a 69-61 lead with 3:06 to play on a 14-0 run with six points from Liddell and four each from Washington and Young.

After the Buckeyes took an eight-point lead with just over three minutes on the clock, they knocked down 9 of 12 free throws and added an authoritative Jallow dunk during an 11-7 game-ending stretch.

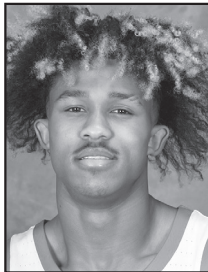
Earlier in the half, Washington had heated up from deep for the Buckeyes, hitting three triples as part of an 11-5 stretch for Ohio State to cut the visitors' lead to 53-43 with 12:43 left.

The other Buckeye bucket was the first of graduate forward Seth Towns' career in Scarlet and Gray, coming off an offensive rebound.

"Duane's big threes gave us some real momentum, cut the lead to where it was manageable," Holtmann said. "And then at that point, I thought we were much better defensively."

Rutgers had responded to a strong start to the second half by the Buckeyes with a 10-0 spurt on eight points from junior guard Ron Harper and two from senior guard Jacob Young to push its lead to 48-32 with 15:38 to play, the largest lead in the game for either team.

Harper led Rutgers with 20 points and six rebounds, while Jacob Young added 12 points and five assists and Montez



Meechie Johnson

Ohio State 80, Rutgers 68

| Dec. 23, 2020 Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | 1 | | 2 | | F | | | | | | |
| Rutgers (6-1, 2-1) | | 38 | | 30 | | 68 | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (7-1, 1-1) | | 28 | | 52 | | 80 | | | | | | |
| Rutgers | | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | |
| Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | | |
| Mulcahy | 32 | 2-4 | 2-2 | 1-2 | 5 | 3 | 7 | | | | | |
| Mathis | 32 | 5-10 | 4-8 | 1-3 | 0 | 4 | 16 | | | | | |
| Johnson | 16 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 1 | 5 | 2 | | | | | |
| Harper Jr. | 36 | 8-20 | 0-0 | 0-6 | 0 | 2 | 20 | | | | | |
| Young | 29 | 4-7 | 3-4 | 0-2 | 5 | 2 | 12 | | | | | |
| Baker | 31 | 3-12 | 0-1 | 0-3 | 1 | 0 | 8 | | | | | |
| Doucoure | 21 | 1-3 | 1-2 | 1-1 | 0 | 4 | 3 | | | | | |
| Reiber | 2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 24-58 | 10-25 | 4-21 | 12 | 22 | 68 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 41.4%. FT: 58.8%. Three-point field goals: 10-25 (Harper Jr. 4-10, Mathis 2-4, Baker 2-6, Mulcahy 1-2, Young 1-3). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Mulcahy, Mathis, Johnson). Turnovers: 9 (Johnson 3, Young 3, Baker, Mulcahy). Steals: 3 (Young, Baker, Doucoure). Technical fouls: TEAM. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | |
| Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | | |
| Washington | 34 | 6-14 | 6-7 | 0-6 | 3 | 4 | 22 | | | | | |
| Walker | 35 | 0-6 | 2-2 | 0-3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | | | | | |
| Sueing | 15 | 0-3 | 2-2 | 1-1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | | | | | |
| Young | 31 | 7-9 | 3-4 | 5-7 | 0 | 1 | 17 | | | | | |
| Liddell | 30 | 8-14 | 5-7 | 1-5 | 3 | 4 | 21 | | | | | |
| Sotos | 3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Jallow | 23 | 2-4 | 4-5 | 2-5 | 0 | 1 | 8 | | | | | |
| Brown | 4 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 9 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | | | | | |
| Key | 8 | 2-3 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | | | | | |
| Towns | 6 | 2-3 | 0-0 | 2-2 | 0 | 1 | 4 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 27-58 | 22-29 | 12-33 | 12 | 20 | 80 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 46.6%. FT: 75.9%. Three-point field goals: 4-19 (Washington 4-11, Sueing 0-2, Liddell 0-2, Walker 0-1, Jallow 0-1, Brown 0-1, Ahrens 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 5 (Liddell 2, Walker, Young, Key). Turnovers: 11 (Walker 4, Washington 3, Ahrens 2, Sueing, Key). Steals: 2 (Walker, Ahrens). Officials: Boroski, Szelc, Young. Attendance: N/A. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Northwestern 71, Ohio State 70

| Dec. 26, 2020 Welsh-Ryan Arena • Evanston, Ill. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | 1 | | 2 | | F | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (7-2, 1-2) | | 34 | | 36 | | 70 | | | | | | |
| Northwestern (6-1, 3-0) | | 34 | | 37 | | 71 | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | |
| Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | | |
| Washington | 35 | 1-9 | 4-4 | 0-5 | 4 | 0 | 7 | | | | | |
| Walker | 39 | 3-9 | 0-0 | 2-2 | 5 | 3 | 6 | | | | | |
| Sueing | 16 | 3-8 | 0-0 | 1-4 | 3 | 2 | 6 | | | | | |
| Young | 26 | 5-9 | 4-4 | 2-6 | 0 | 1 | 14 | | | | | |
| Liddell | 30 | 6-11 | 3-4 | 2-6 | 2 | 3 | 15 | | | | | |
| Sotos | 5 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Jallow | 22 | 3-5 | 0-1 | 1-1 | 0 | 2 | 6 | | | | | |
| Brown | 4 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 2-2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Key | 5 | 1-2 | 1-2 | 1-0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | | | | | |
| Towns | 17 | 4-5 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 0 | 3 | 11 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 27-61 | 12-15 | 11-29 | 15 | 70 | | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 44.3%. FT: 80.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-20 (Towns 3-4, Washington 1-6, Sueing 0-3, Walker 0-2, Jallow 0-2, Young 0-1, Liddell 0-1, Sotos 0-1). Team rebounds: 0. Blocked shots: 1 (Liddell). Turnovers: 10 (Walker 3, Sueing 2, Liddell 2, Washington, Jallow, Towns). Steals: 3 (Washington, Liddell, Sotos). | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Northwestern | | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | |
| Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | | |
| Buie | 30 | 6-11 | 0-1 | 0-1 | 5 | 1 | 14 | | | | | |
| Audige | 32 | 2-8 | 2-4 | 0-5 | 3 | 0 | 7 | | | | | |
| Kopp | 32 | 9-16 | 2-2 | 0-2 | 3 | 1 | 23 | | | | | |
| Gaines | 18 | 1-3 | 0-0 | 1-0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| Nance | 25 | 4-7 | 2-2 | 1-3 | 2 | 3 | 10 | | | | | |
| Greer | 15 | 1-3 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | | | | | |
| Berry | 11 | 0-2 | 3-3 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | | | | | |
| Young | 19 | 4-6 | 0-0 | 2-5 | 3 | 1 | 8 | | | | | |
| Beran | 18 | 1-2 | 0-2 | 0-3 | 4 | 5 | 2 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 28-58 | 9-14 | 4-22 | 24 | 14 | 71 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 48.3%. FT: 64.3%. Three-point field goals: 6-16 (Kopp 3-4, Buie 2-4, Audige 1-3, Nance 0-2, Berry 0-2, Gaines 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 5 (Audige 2, Gaines 2, Beran). Turnovers: 5 (Young 2, Audige, Gaines, Berry). Steals: 7 (Kopp 3, Buie, Nance, Greer, Berry). Officials: Carstensen, Scirocco, Daily. Attendance: N/A. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Mathis pitched in 16 points.

Bucks Blow Lead, Fall By 1 To Cats

No. 23 Ohio State blew a seven-point second-half lead to fall to Northwestern 71-70 at Welsh-Ryan Arena in Evanston, Ill., on Dec. 26.

"We just needed to work on being more poised late down the stretch," Kyle Young said. "There were a few defensive situations we weren't locked in fully, and it hurt us in the end. We've got to stay more poised down the stretch."

After a clutch stop by Ohio State on Northwestern's final legitimate possession, Holtmann drew up a play for Washington to drive to his right for the win.

Washington missed the layup, and Liddell had the offensive rebound ripped away from him by Northwestern sophomore guard Boo Buie to end the Buckeyes' hopes.

"It was a great look, nearly uncontested at the rim, we just didn't execute, and those things happen," Towns said. "We had a good opportunity to get a rebound with E.J. Everything worked out how Coach drew it up. It just didn't fall for us."

Young had shown great poise by swishing through a contested left-handed hook to tie the game at 68 with 1:23 left, but Northwestern (6-1, 3-0) rose to the occasion at home.

"Our guys were stopping the ball too much," Holtmann said. "We didn't move it enough on enough possessions. And we had a good possession there with Kyle, as he finished in the post. We struggled a little bit with some of their traps of E.J., but all in all, we just weren't moving the ball enough there."

Buie drilled a contested step-back three-pointer to take a three-point lead with 64 seconds left.

Young then drew a foul while hustling for an offensive rebound and calmly knocked down both foul shots with 47 ticks until the final buzzer to make it 71-70.

Young finished with 14 points and eight boards, while Liddell paced the Buckeyes (7-2, 1-2) with 15 points along with eight rebounds.

"I thought both those guys played really well, and I thought collectively we rebounded it well," Holtmann said of Young and Liddell. "We rebounded well on both ends, and we've got to do that, particularly with some of our lineups where we might be giving up some shooting. We have to do a good job on the glass on offense."

The Buckeyes had led 64-57 with 6:59 on the clock, but they struggled down the stretch, committing two turnovers and allowing two dunks in a 1:25 span.

Northwestern forward Miller Kopp paced the Cats with 14 first-half points and three steals, and the sharpshooter finished with a game-high 23 points.

Buie posted 14 points and five assists after scoring just four points with two assists in the first half.

Ohio State Blows Out Huskers With Stellar Defense

No. 25 Ohio State cruised to a 90-54 victory over Nebraska behind stellar defensive effort at Value City Arena on Dec. 30.

"Overall, it was a really solid performance by our guys," Holtmann said. "We were able to defend them with great purpose, had really good technique, certainly made some shots. Our ball movement was exceptional. And that's what we have to continue to be."

The Buckeyes (8-2, 2-2) held visiting Nebraska (4-6, 0-3) to 28.3 percent shoot-

Continued On Page 34

Ohio State Continues To Play Well At Home

Continued From Page 33

ing (17 of 60) and 15.2 percent on threes (5 of 33), and they forced 15 turnovers with five blocked shots.

"The biggest thing was just our coaches really wanted us to come out and set that first punch," Sueing said. "So we made it a big emphasis for all of us, especially coming in after a loss. We wanted to come in and swing that and hit that first punch, so we could get going."

Junior wing Justin Ahrens led Ohio State with 18 points by making 6 of 9 three-pointers in 20 minutes off the bench.

Freshman center Zed Key scored a career-high 14 points in just 14 minutes, while Washington added 13 points.

Nebraska junior guard Teddy Allen made a layup to cut the Buckeye lead to 42-26 with 17:53 on the clock, but Ohio State all but put the game away with a 12-0 streak, sparked by two triples by Washington and capped by a coast-to-coast take by Sueing.

The 12-0 run was part of a dominant 28-3 stretch that spanned 8:53 and was highlighted by an alley-oop slam by Young from Washington, who had three assists.

The 28-3 extended run gave the Scarlet and Gray a 70-29 lead, which proved to be insurmountable for the Huskers, who finished the final nine minutes with a 25-20 edge in a 36-point loss.

In the first half, Allen evened the game at 13 on a three-pointer with 13:15 until halftime, but Ohio State went on a 15-0 spurt spanning 6:07.

The early game-breaking run was sparked by hustle plays, with Liddell taking a charge and diving on the floor for a rebound, along with three steals and one block.

The Buckeyes' 15-point run was part of a 25-8 stretch for the final 13:15 of the first half.

"It was our attention to detail," Sueing said of Ohio State's improved defense against Nebraska. "It was a big emphasis this past week for practice. In the beginning, our shots might not have been falling. That's something that we know throughout the game is shots are going to eventually start to drop for us as we continue to play, but defense is something we can always control with our effort, and how hard we play. So as long as we keep up our end on that side of the court, we know that our offense will eventually flow in."

The Buckeyes' ball movement was vastly superior to that of the Huskers. They dished out 16 assists to just three for head coach Fred Hoiberg's squad.

"We made some shots, but our ball movement had a lot to do with that," Holtmann said. "I thought we really moved the ball (well)."

Allen led the Huskers with 13 points on 3-of-9 shooting, while fourth-year junior forward Lat Mayen's seven points marked the second most for the visitors.

Gophers, Robbins Dominate Buckeyes

Liam Robbins led Minnesota to a 77-60 victory over Ohio State with a dominant performance at Williams Arena on Jan. 3. Robbins, a junior center, scored 27 points, grabbed 14 rebounds, blocked five shots, and posted four assists and two steals in an authoritative outing, for which Liddell blamed himself.

"We were supposed to come out and use our mobility and quickness against him and be just very physical and wear him down," Liddell said. "And we just didn't do that. We weren't physical enough. I just put that on myself, and I felt like I let down my team."

Washington led Ohio State with 21 points, while Liddell was the only other Buckeye in double digits with 10 points and seven rebounds.

The Buckeyes struggled on offense against the physical nature of the Gophers' defense, shooting just 31.1 percent from the field (19 of 61) and 25.9 percent from three (7 of 27) with 11 turnovers.

"Obviously, we've got to finish over size and height better," Holtmann said. "And we will. Some of it was that we didn't play smart enough when we did get to the paint across the board offensively. I'll take responsibility for that. We just didn't make good enough paint decisions, and it wasn't just our bigs, it wasn't our guards. We just didn't make good enough paint decisions, and then, we had a couple that honestly just didn't go down for us."

The Gophers shot 43.6 percent from the floor (24 of 55) and 40.9 percent from beyond the arc (9 of 22) on their way to the 17-point win at home.

Robbins, a 7-0 transfer from Drake, gave the Gophers their largest lead of the game at 74-55 on a rebound put-back with 5:07 left, and they coasted to their win over the Buckeyes down the stretch.

Washington had cut Minnesota's



Duane Washington

Ohio State 90, Nebraska 54

| Dec. 30, 2020 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 1 | 2 | F | | | | | | | | |
| Nebraska (4-6, 0-3) | | 21 | 33 | 54 | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (8-2, 2-2) | | 38 | 52 | 90 | | | | | | | | |
| Nebraska | | Total | FG | FT | Reb. | | | | | | | |
| Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | | |
| Allen | 22 | 3-9 | 5-6 | 0-3 | 2 | 4 | 13 | | | | | |
| McGowens | 25 | 2-5 | 1-2 | 1-0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | | | | | |
| Mayen | 21 | 2-8 | 2-2 | 1-1 | 0 | 1 | 7 | | | | | |
| Ouedraogo | 21 | 1-3 | 2-4 | 3-2 | 0 | 1 | 4 | | | | | |
| Banton | 27 | 3-11 | 0-0 | 1-7 | 0 | 1 | 6 | | | | | |
| Wood | 4 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Stevenson | 14 | 1-5 | 4-6 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | | | | | |
| Webster | 21 | 1-8 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| Lakes | 14 | 2-5 | 0-0 | 1-1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | | | | | |
| Thorbjarnarson | 23 | 1-3 | 0-0 | 0-5 | 0 | 4 | 2 | | | | | |
| Andre | 7 | 1-1 | 1-1 | 1-1 | 0 | 4 | 3 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 17-60 | 15-21 | 13-22 | 3 | 20 | 54 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 28.3%. FT: 71.4%. Three-point field goals: 5-33 (Allen 2-5, McGowen 1-2, Lakes 1-4, Mayen 1-6, Wood 0-2, Thorbjarnarson 0-2, Stevenson 0-3, Banton 0-4, Webster 0-5). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 3 (Ouedraogo, Banton, Stevenson). Turnovers: 15 (McGowens 3, Allen 2, Banton 2, Stevenson 2, Thorbjarnarson 2, Mayen, Ouedraogo, Webster, Andre). Steals: 6 (Thorbjarnarson 2, McGowens, Banton, Wood, Lakes). | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | | Total | FG | FT | Reb. | | | | | | | |
| Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | | |
| Washington | 23 | 5-11 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 3 | 2 | 13 | | | | | |
| Walker | 21 | 1-5 | 2-2 | 0-2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | | | | | |
| Sueing | 22 | 5-8 | 1-1 | 2-4 | 2 | 3 | 12 | | | | | |
| Young | 20 | 3-4 | 0-1 | 0-4 | 2 | 2 | 6 | | | | | |
| Liddell | 20 | 3-5 | 1-2 | 1-3 | 2 | 2 | 8 | | | | | |
| Sotos | 14 | 0-2 | 2-2 | 1-2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | | | | | |
| Brown | 21 | 0-5 | 0-0 | 2-4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 20 | 6-10 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 0 | 18 | | | | | |
| Key | 14 | 5-5 | 4-6 | 1-3 | 0 | 2 | 14 | | | | | |
| Towns | 15 | 2-5 | 6-6 | 0-2 | 3 | 3 | 11 | | | | | |
| Davidson | 4 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Hookfin | 5 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 31-63 | 12-32 | 11-34 | 18 | 90 | | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 49.2%. FT: 80.0%. Three-point field goals: 12-32 (Ahrens 6-9, Washington 3-7, Liddell 1-1, Sueing 1-4, Towns 1-4, Walker 0-1, Hookfin 0-1, Sotos 0-2, Brown 0-3). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 5 (Liddell 2, Brown 2, Key). Turnovers: 10 (Washington 2, Liddell 2, Young, Ahrens, Key, Towns, Davidson, Hookfin). Steals: 3 (Sueing, Liddell, Ahrens). Officials: Boroski, Kimble, Eppley. Attendance: N/A. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Minnesota 77, Ohio State 60

| Jan. 3, 2021 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Williams Arena • Minneapolis, Minn. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 1 | 2 | F | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (9-2, 2-3) | | 37 | 23 | 60 | | | | | | | | |
| Minnesota (10-2, 3-2) | | 43 | 34 | 77 | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | | Total | FG | FT | Reb. | | | | | | | |
| Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | | |
| Washington | 26 | 7-12 | 2-2 | 0-1 | 1 | 1 | 21 | | | | | |
| Walker | 23 | 0-5 | 2-2 | 0-1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | | | | |
| Sueing | 24 | 2-6 | 2-2 | 2-2 | 3 | 3 | 6 | | | | | |
| Young | 25 | 1-5 | 2-2 | 2-1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | | | | | |
| Liddell | 34 | 3-11 | 4-6 | 2-5 | 1 | 3 | 10 | | | | | |
| Sotos | 9 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | | | | | |
| Jallow | 6 | 1-3 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | | | | | |
| Brown | 16 | 2-5 | 1-2 | 1-3 | 1 | 0 | 5 | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 21 | 1-4 | 1-2 | 1-6 | 0 | 1 | 4 | | | | | |
| Key | 13 | 2-5 | 0-1 | 1-0 | 0 | 4 | 4 | | | | | |
| Towns | 3 | 0-3 | 1-2 | 1-1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 19-61 | 15-21 | 6-1 | 11 | 19 | 60 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 31.1%. FT: 71.4%. Three-point field goals: 7-27 (Washington 5-7, Young 1-1, Ahrens 1-4, Jallow 0-2, Towns 0-2, Sotos 0-2, Sueing 0-3, Liddell 0-3, Brown 0-3). Team rebounds: 7. Blocked shots: 3 (Young, Liddell, Sotos). Turnovers: 11 (Washington 3, Brown 2, Sotos 2, Sueing, Liddell, Ahrens, TEAM). Steals: 1 (Liddell). | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Minnesota | | Total | FG | FT | Reb. | | | | | | | |
| Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | | |
| Johnson | 22 | 1-3 | 0-0 | 0-4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | | | | | |
| Robbins | 36 | 7-13 | 12-17 | 6-8 | 4 | 2 | 27 | | | | | |
| Carr | 38 | 3-12 | 8-11 | 0-6 | 3 | 1 | 15 | | | | | |
| Gach | 25 | 4-10 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 3 | 10 | | | | | |
| Kalscheur | 35 | 5-9 | 0-0 | 2-3 | 3 | 2 | 13 | | | | | |
| Curry | 12 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Mashburn | 11 | 4-5 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 2 | 10 | | | | | |
| Williams | 10 | 0-1 | 0-1 | 1-1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | | | | | |
| Ihnen | 9 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | | | | | |
| Freeman | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Conroy | 0+ | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Mitchell | 0+ | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 28-58 | 9-14 | 4-22 | 24 | 14 | 77 | | | | | |
| Percentages: FG: 43.6%. FT: 69.0%. Three-point field goals: 9-22 (Kalscheur 3-6, Mashburn 2-2, Gach 2-5, Carr 1-3, Robbins 1-4, Johnson 0-1, Ihnen 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 6 (Robbins 5, Ihnen). Turnovers: 9 (Robbins 3, Mashburn 2, Johnson, Carr, Williams, TEAM). Officials: Riley, Higgins, Beaver. Attendance: N/A. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

rebounds and three blocks, and a solid all-around outing from Sueing, who posted 12 points, 10 boards, and five assists.

"We're really just reading the game and sharing the ball, that's the biggest thing," Sueing said. "Being able to share the ball and move the defense really puts us in a good position against other teams, especially with the versatility, the talent that we have through all five positions."

"And then, more importantly on defense - I feel like our offense will always come around - but as long as we hold up on defense, and we stay aggressive and we stay locked in, it's always going to translate to offense, and it did."

Rutgers (7-4, 3-4) fought hard until the end, but Ohio State hit 5 of 6 free throws in the final minute to hold on for an 11-point victory on the road.

Ohio State roared on a 22-4 run to end the first half, turning a six-point deficit to a 42-30 lead at the break across the final 7:48. The game-breaking rally was sparked by back-to-back triples by Liddell and Washington and capped by a behind-the-back move for another three for Washington.

Opening the second half with a turnaround fadeaway jumper by Liddell and a three-pointer by Young, the Buckeyes put a bow on an extended 27-4 run that spanned 10:14 overall and gave them a 47-30 edge just 1:26 into the second half.

An 8-2 spurt by the Buckeye bench gave the visitors a 65-43 lead with 9:37 to play, but the Scarlet Knights rallied on a 14-2 run to cut the deficit to 67-57 with 3:50 on the clock.

After Rutgers had clawed back to cut the lead to 10, the Buckeyes responded with a dunk by Young and a strong left-handed layup by Washington to extend the edge to 71-57 with 2:40 left.

Young's run-ending slam came on a

lead to 59-50 with 11:12 to play, the last time the deficit reached single digits.

The Gophers responded with an 8-0 run capped by an and-one by junior guard Marcus Carr to put them up 67-50 with 9:17 left.

"I didn't feel like physically we came out with the necessary stuff there to start the second half," Holtmann said. "Some of that was I think our guys were frustrated with missing a couple shots. It was up and down there for a little bit. Our guys did look a little fatigued across the board. We've got to handle physicality better."

After trailing by 11 points just four minutes into the game, Ohio State answered with its best stretch of the game with a 12-1 spurt spanning 4:21. Washington led the run with eight points while hitting two triples and a floater.

The Buckeyes took their only lead of the game on a powerful two-handed slam by Liddell on a smooth bounce pass from Washington putting them up 28-27 with 5:54 until halftime.

"Our job was to come in here and make them uncomfortable, and we didn't do our job at a high enough level," Washington said. "And they just got what they wanted, punked us basically and it was their night."

OSU Uses Big Run To Take Down Rutgers

Similar to the matchup on Dec. 23, the Scarlet and Gray rode the momentum from a 27-4 mid-game run to defeat No. 15 Rutgers 79-68 at the Rutgers Athletic Center Jan. 9.

The Buckeyes (9-3, 3-3) were led by 17 points from Washington, a 15-point performance by Liddell, who added six



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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

superb pass by Liddell out of a double team.

"The biggest play in the game was our ability to score late when we were having trouble scoring and E.J. making that pass to Kyle on the post trap," Holtmann said. "They were switching the defense a little bit. They were going zone to man some. That bothered us a little bit. But E.J. made a great pass there, a great decision. That gave us a little bit of a breather with a couple minutes to go."

The Scarlet and Gray led 74-61 with just 92 seconds on the clock, but senior guard Jacob Young ripped off five quick points to cut the deficit to single digits, 74-66, with 59 ticks left.

"We just didn't handle it very well, but our guys responded," Holtmann said of Rutgers' late pressure. "We were able to get enough stops. I think our defense carried us."

Overall, Ohio State dominated on the glass, outrebounding Rutgers 43-29. In addition to the outings of Liddell and Sueing, Kyle Young scored 13 points and grabbed five rebounds, while Key added eight points and six boards inside.

"How we came out with our energy level and intensity was better," Kyle Young said. "We were more committed to what we were doing with setting the tone. You definitely can tell the difference when that happens, and that's something we need to continue to improve on."

Jacob Young paced Rutgers with 19 points on 9-of-15 shooting.

Buckeyes Avenge Loss To Wildcats

The No. 21 Buckeyes defeated Northwestern 81-71 at Value City Arena Jan. 13.

Ohio State (10-3, 4-3) beat the Wildcats (6-5, 3-4) with a 12-0 stretch with 1:05 remaining in the second half sparked by a three-pointer by Ahrens, followed by back-to-back finishes through fouls by Sueing and Young, and four points from Washington.

"It was kind of a blast-action play that we ran for Justice to get to his left hand and get downhill, maybe draw a foul or get to the hole and have a layup," Ahrens said of his final three-pointer. "But they honestly played it pretty well. They knew that he was trying to get to his left hand, so he took a few dribbles, made a pivot, kicked me the ball and my defender's hand was down so I put it up. I honestly didn't know if it was going in or not, but I was confident, so it went in and I was pretty fired up."

While the play was called for Sueing, the alignment of the sharpshooting Ahrens on the ball side was not an accident by Holtmann.

"That's why we put Justin on ball side, so that (Sueing) would have potentially some space on the drive there," Holtmann said of Ahrens. "And the young man hit a really, really big shot, the biggest shot of his career so far."

The game-winning run spanned 3:21 overall and pushed Ohio State's lead to 79-66 with just 65 seconds left.

Washington led the Buckeyes with a career-high 23 points and dished six assists, and Ahrens added 12 points on four three-pointers in his first start in place of Walker and Sotos.

"I feel like he's done a really, really good job of seeing the floor, like Justice has been getting better at," Ahrens said of Washington. "I think he had six assists

Ohio State 79, Rutgers 68

| Jan. 9, 2021 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Rutgers Athletic Center • Piscataway, N.J. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | | 2 | | F | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (9-3, 3-3) | 42 | 37 | 79 | | | | | | | | | |
| Rutgers (7-4, 3-4) | 30 | 38 | 68 | | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Sotos | 28 | 2-6 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 4 | 3 | 6 | | | | | |
| Washington | 34 | 6-14 | 1-2 | 1-0 | 1 | 1 | 17 | | | | | |
| Sueing | 30 | 3-4 | 6-9 | 2-8 | 5 | 4 | 12 | | | | | |
| Young | 30 | 6-9 | 0-0 | 2-3 | 0 | 1 | 13 | | | | | |
| Liddell | 30 | 5-9 | 4-6 | 0-6 | 2 | 1 | 15 | | | | | |
| Johnson | 4 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Jallow | 9 | 0-0 | 2-2 | 0-2 | 0 | 3 | 2 | | | | | |
| Brown | 4 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 11 | 1-4 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | | | | | |
| Key | 9 | 1-1 | 6-9 | 2-4 | 1 | 1 | 8 | | | | | |
| Towns | 9 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 25-49 | 19-28 | 9-34 | 14 | 14 | 79 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 51.0% | FT: 67.9% | Three-point | | | | | | | | | |
| field goals: | 10-24 (Washington 4-8, Sotos 2-5, Young 1-2, Liddell 1-2, Towns 1-2, Ahrens 1-4, Sueing 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 5 (Liddell 3, Key 2). Turnovers: 11 (Washington 4, Sueing 2, Sotos, Liddell, Jallow, Ahrens, Key). Steals: 3 (Washington 2, Sotos). | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rutgers | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Baker | 29 | 2-10 | 0-1 | 1-1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | | | | | |
| Mathis | 24 | 3-9 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0 | 1 | 7 | | | | | |
| Johnson | 25 | 3-5 | 2-3 | 4-4 | 0 | 3 | 8 | | | | | |
| Harper | 34 | 5-12 | 0-0 | 1-3 | 2 | 3 | 11 | | | | | |
| Young | 30 | 9-15 | 0-1 | 0-2 | 2 | 2 | 19 | | | | | |
| Palmquist | 5 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Mulcahy | 22 | 3-4 | 1-2 | 0-4 | 3 | 3 | 7 | | | | | |
| Doucoure | 2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Reiber | 5 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | | | | | |
| McConnell | 12 | 4-9 | 2-3 | 1-3 | 3 | 4 | 12 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 29-66 | 5-10 | 8-21 | 13 | 22 | 68 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 43.9% | FT: 50.0% | Three-point | | | | | | | | | |
| field goals: | 5-20 (McConnell 2-5, Mathis 1-2, Young 1-3, Harper 1-4, Reiber 0-1, Baker 0-5). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Baker, Johnson, Harper). Turnovers: 5 (Johnson 2, Baker, Young, Reiber). Steals: 8 (Johnson 2, Young 2, Mulcahy 2, Baker, Harper). Officials: Carstensen, Eppley, Garrison. Attendance: N/A. | | | | | | | | | | | |

tonight with one turnover, that's a really good stat to have.

"So credit to him for handling the ball the way he has been and reading certain situations, and ultimately taking good shots, which he has been doing these past couple games."

Holtmann, who has been tough on Washington through three years, also loved what he saw from him down the stretch.

"His decision-making in the last four minutes probably won the game for us," Holtmann said of Washington.

Sueing stepped up with some minutes at guard because of how shorthanded Ohio State was in the backcourt, scoring 13 points with seven boards.

On the interior, Young scored 12 points on 5-of-5 shooting and grabbed nine rebounds, while Liddell went 0 for 6 in a six-point, 10-rebound effort.

Young gave Ohio State its biggest lead of the game when he slammed home an alley-oop lob from Washington to push the edge to 53-40 with 15:07 on the clock.

After the Buckeyes took the 13-point lead, the Wildcats ripped off an 8-0 run aided by two turnovers and capped by consecutive triples from Kopp to cut the deficit to 53-48 with 13:54 remaining.

Holtmann's squad answered with an 11-4 stretch to make it 64-52 with 9:32 left, highlighted by back-to-back slams by Jallow and Young.

The Wildcats rallied on a 14-3 run to cut the 12-point Ohio State lead to one with 4:21 on the clock.

An 8-0 streak as part of that run featured back-to-back three-pointers by junior forward Pete Nance and Buie.

"We had to be tough and smart down the stretch," Holtmann said. "The game was never out of reach. When you're a college basketball coach you know that thing can go away in a heartbeat. And they made a couple threes - they banked in one and they had one rattle around the

Ohio State 81, Northwestern 71

| Jan. 13, 2021 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | | 2 | | F | | | | | | | |
| Northwestern (6-5, 3-4) | 33 | 38 | 71 | | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (10-3, 4-3) | 42 | 49 | 81 | | | | | | | | | |
| Northwestern | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Buie | 35 | 1-9 | 2-2 | 1-2 | 5 | 3 | 5 | | | | | |
| Audige | 33 | 11-23 | 2-3 | 1-4 | 2 | 4 | 25 | | | | | |
| Kopp | 37 | 4-11 | 6-6 | 1-8 | 0 | 2 | 16 | | | | | |
| Nance | 20 | 4-8 | 2-2 | 1-4 | 0 | 4 | 12 | | | | | |
| Beran | 24 | 0-3 | 0-1 | 0-4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | | | | | |
| Greer | 7 | 0-0 | 2-2 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | | | | | |
| Berry | 8 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | | | | | |
| Gaines | 16 | 1-2 | 0-1 | 0-2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| Young | 20 | 4-5 | 1-4 | 2-1 | 1 | 2 | 9 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 25-63 | 15-21 | 8-27 | 9 | 21 | 71 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 39.7% | FT: 71.4% | Three-point | | | | | | | | | |
| field goals: | 6-23 (Nance 2-2, Kopp 2-5, Buie 1-6, Audige 1-7, Beran 0-1, Berry 0-2). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 1 (Beran). Turnovers: 4 (Kopp, Beran, Gaines, Young). Steals: 5 (Buie 2, Kopp 2, Beran, Young). Technical fouls: 1 (Audige). | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Washington | 36 | 7-17 | 6-8 | 0-3 | 6 | 0 | 23 | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 23 | 4-5 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 3 | 12 | | | | | |
| Sueing | 34 | 5-9 | 2-3 | 0-7 | 1 | 2 | 13 | | | | | |
| Young | 36 | 5-5 | 2-3 | 1-8 | 0 | 3 | 12 | | | | | |
| Liddell | 24 | 0-6 | 6-8 | 0-10 | 2 | 3 | 6 | | | | | |
| Sotos | 3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Johnson | 11 | 2-3 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | | | | | |
| Jallow | 13 | 1-2 | 0-1 | 0-1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| Brown | 2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Key | 18 | 3-6 | 1-2 | 3-0 | 2 | 3 | 7 | | | | | |
| Towns | 3 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 27-54 | 17-25 | 5-34 | 12 | 18 | 81 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 50.0% | FT: 68.0% | Three-point | | | | | | | | | |
| field goals: | 10-25 (Ahrens 4-5, Washington 3-11, Johnson 2-2, Sueing 1-4, Jallow 0-1, Liddell 0-2). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 2 (Young, Key). Turnovers: 11 (Liddell 5, Washington, Sueing, Young, Johnson, Jallow, Key). Steals: 1 (Jallow). Officials: Szalc, Green, Pfeifer. Attendance: N/A. | | | | | | | | | | | |

rim - they made plays, give them credit. Our guys responded with great poise down the stretch. It's why I'm so proud of them."

Northwestern third-year sophomore guard Chase Audige erupted in the first half, scoring 19 of the Wildcats' first 23 points and reaching 21 points in the first 20 minutes.

Audige finished with a game-high 25 points for the Wildcats, while Kopp added 16 points and nine boards.

Liddell Leads Bucks Over Illini

Liddell led the No. 21 Buckeyes to an 87-81 victory over No. 14 Illinois at the State Farm Center in Champaign, Ill., on Jan. 16.

Liddell, a two-time Illinois Mr. Basketball winner, starred for Ohio State in his first game at Illinois, scoring a career-high 26 points and grabbing seven rebounds while knocking down more three-pointers (four) than he had all season (three).

"It is my home-state school, but that's not what motivated me today," Liddell said. "It was my teammates. I felt like I needed to do more to help us win today. I didn't really have the best game against Northwestern, and that's why they stayed in it most of the time. But I felt like today I just did everything I could for my teammates, and today it was just scoring, and that's how we got the win."

Washington came up clutch at the free-throw stripe for the Buckeyes (11-3, 5-3), connecting on 4 of 4 foul shots in the final 23 seconds to hold off Illinois, who cut the lead to 83-81 with 15 ticks left on a three-pointer by freshman sharpshooter Adam Miller.

Earlier in the game against Illinois' full-court press, Ahrens had drilled his third three-pointer in a seven-minute stretch to push the Buckeyes' lead to 74-63 with 4:40 to play.

"That was a great example of him not flinching," Holtmann said of Ahrens.

Ohio State 87, Illinois 81

| Jan. 16, 2021 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|------------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| State Farm Center • Champaign, Ill. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | | 2 | | F | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (11-3, 5-3) | 43 | 44 | 87 | | | | | | | | | |
| Illinois (9-5, 5-3) | 28 | 53 | 81 | | | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Washington | 31 | 3-10 | 4-4 | 0-1 | 2 | 2 | 11 | | | | | |
| Ahrens | 30 | 4-6 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 5 | 11 | | | | | |
| Sueing | 34 | 2-6 | 5-6 | 2-5 | 4 | 1 | 9 | | | | | |
| Young | 24 | 2-3 | 2-2 | 1-1 | 3 | 3 | 6 | | | | | |
| Liddell | 27 | 10-16 | 2-4 | 1-6 | 1 | 4 | 26 | | | | | |
| Johnson | 6 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | | | | | |
| Jallow | 6 | 0-1 | 2-4 | 0-1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | | | | | |
| Brown | 3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Key | 13 | 3-4 | 2-2 | 1-3 | 0 | 3 | 8 | | | | | |
| Towns | 15 | 4-6 | 1-1 | 1-2 | 0 | 0 | 11 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 29-54 | 18-23 | 7-21 | 12 | 20 | 87 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 53.7% | FT: 78.3% | Three-point | | | | | | | | | |
| field goals: | 11-21 (Liddell 4-7, Ahrens 3-5, Towns 2-3, Johnson 1-1, Washington 1-4, Young 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 1 (Jallow). Turnovers: 14 (Sueing 5, Washington 3, TEAM 3, Ahrens, Key, Towns). Steals: 6 (Sueing 2, Ahrens, Young, Key, Towns). | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Illinois | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Frazier | 37 | 8-9 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 4 | 3 | 8 | | | | | |
| Dosunmu | 35 | 6-16 | 9-10 | 2-2 | 5 | 3 | 22 | | | | | |
| Williams | 21 | 1-4 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | | | | | |
| Cockburn | 32 | 7-7 | 1-5 | 6-5 | 0 | 3 | 15 | | | | | |
| Miller | 32 | 4-9 | 3-3 | 2-5 | 0 | 2 | 14 | | | | | |
| Grandison | 13 | 3-6 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 3 | 4 | 8 | | | | | |
| Curbelo | 12 | 1-3 | 0-1 | 0-2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | | | | |
| Bezhanishvili | 14 | 4-6 | 1-1 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 9 | | | | | |
| Hawkins | 4 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 29-60 | 14-20 | 10-19 | 15 | 20 | 81 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 48.3% | FT: 70.0% | Three-point | | | | | | | | | |
| field goals: | 9-26 (Miller 3-8, Grandison 2-4, Frazier 2-5, Dosunmu 1-3, Williams 1-3, Bezhanishvili 0-1, Curbelo 0-2). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 1 (Grandison). Turnovers: 10 (Cockburn 3, Curbelo 2, Frazier, Dosunmu, Williams, Bezhanishvili, Hawkins). Steals: 6 (Frazier 2, Dosunmu 2, Williams, Miller). Officials: Sciroto, Boroski, Riley. Attendance: 175. | | | | | | | | | | | |

"They were making runs, they were playing well. But the reality is that was probably the best shot we were going to get on that possession, even though it was in transition and early in the clock, I just don't know if we're going to get a better look than Justin with a wide-open three."

Illinois junior guard Ayo Dosunmu scored four straight points to cut Ohio State's lead to 74-67 with 3:38 left, but Liddell answered with a smooth jumper and split a pair of foul shots to push the lead back to 10 with 2:28 on the clock.

The Illini (9-5, 5-3) used a 7-1 spurt to cut it to 78-74 with 48 seconds on the clock, with a three-pointer from junior wing Jacob Grandison sandwiched between two strong finishes by 7-0 sophomore center Kofi Cockburn.

The teams went back and forth from there, with the Illini closing to 83-81 with 15 seconds to play on a three-pointer by Adam Miller. The Buckeyes closed out the game with a pair of free throws each by Washington and Jallow.

In the first half, after Illinois tied the game at 15 with 12:49 until halftime, the Buckeyes blasted the Illini on a 15-0 run, capped by eight straight points from Liddell, including a pair of triples, to make it 30-15 at the 9:34 mark. The Buckeyes led by the same 15-point margin, 43-28 at the break.

"Players win games," Holtmann said. "I'm really proud of our guys' effort today. They made plays throughout the game and down the stretch. We have tremendous respect for this Illinois team and came in knowing obviously they were coming off a tough loss. They're really talented and well-coached, so it's obviously a win that we feel proud of and excited about. We had a number of guys step up."

"Everybody who played in the game made great contributions."

Dosunmu led the Illini with 22 points and five assists, adding two steals. Cockburn added 15 points and 11 boards, finishing 7 for 7 from the

OSU Self-Imposes Postseason Ban Due To Klein

Former Ohio State women's basketball associate head coach Patrick Klein, who resigned from the program in August of 2019 following his placement on administrative leave, violated Ohio State's sexual harassment policy through text messages and social media interactions with at least 13 student-athletes, an investigation into Klein's violations of NCAA rules and university policy has found.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

Buckeye Sports Bulletin obtained documents that say that Klein's behavior toward these certain student-athletes "consisted of a pervasive pattern of conduct that was reasonably perceived to be sexual in nature and that it interfered with the athletic experience of those student-athletes," according to the case report of the investigation.

Ohio State's summary disposition document to the NCAA stated that Klein "utilized gifts to befriend several of the women's basketball student-athletes inappropriately."

These infractions, as well as ones in women's golf and fencing led to "self-imposed

postseason competition bans for each of the sports for the 2020-21 year," according to a statement from an Ohio State spokesman.

"The Ohio State University Department of Athletics is currently working cooperatively with the NCAA Enforcement Staff on an infractions case involving three sports programs: fencing, women's golf and women's basketball," the statement from an OSU spokesman said. "Ohio State has self-imposed postseason competition bans for each of the sports for the 2020-21 year. As always, we are focused on supporting our student-athletes. NCAA rules and procedures prohibit us from sharing more information at this time."

Along with the postseason ban, the women's basketball team will also have wins vacated "for competitions during which student-athletes participated while ineligible," a 7 percent scholarship reduction for the current academic year, as well as a seven-week ban on unofficial visits, four fewer official visits and a two-week ban on recruiting communications.

The official visits during the 2020-21 academic year must also occur within one mile of campus or at Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff's house as part of the self-imposed penalties.

The Ohio State investigation found that Klein provided gifts to certain athletes, including paying for meals, purchasing gifts, paying \$100 for bottle service at a club and

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 |
| Mya Perry | SG | 5-10 | N/A | Reynoldsburg, Ohio |

providing \$70 to a student for a rental car.

The findings state that Klein "provided approximately \$740 in impermissible benefits" to student athletes.

Klein also had further recruiting violations with the program, including requesting current and former student-athletes to assist in recruitments despite those players never having a pre-existing relationship with said recruits.

Regarding the sexual harassment violations, the report stated that "the concerns reported were regarding unwelcome sexual advances and/or prohibited relationships with more than one student-athlete during the course of 2013-19.

"Additionally, on July 11, 2019, Employee and Labor Relations was made aware of additional concerns raised to Athletics Human Resources in which it was reported extra benefits and gifts were provided student-athletes."

Klein denied allegations of inappropriate conversations through any medium and denied that he ever spent one-on-one time with a student-athlete when he was interviewed for Ohio State's investigation.

Despite Klein's denial, in the analysis of the findings, the report said, "The evidence supports all of the witnesses' accounts and also affected the credibility of the statements he provided."

The messages described in the report to five identified former student-athletes included Klein asking about their boyfriends, "displaying generally flirtatious behavior, and telling a student-athlete about his preference in women and asking that same student-athlete for pictures of her friends."

Some of the topics discussed in these messages were Klein "inquiring about the interest of student-athletes in the opposite sex," sharing his personal interests in women, and a conversation with a player about masturbation, according to Ohio State's case report.

These messages were also noted to be sent later at night, something that was described as making it feel inappropriate because of his position on the coaching staff.

Klein had also asked the recipients "to delete messages from him or that he used Snapchat due to those messages deleting automatically," according to three witnesses, who independently substantiated those claims.

The five student-athletes identified as receiving these text messages could not be reached for interviews during the investigation. Eight witnesses who did not receive these messages said they were aware of others who did and described them as inappropriate.

When talking about Klein's behavior, one witness stated, "That's just Patrick."

There was also a student enrolled at Ohio State not involved with the women's basketball program who "indicated that she had also received messages from Klein that were inappropriate." These messages included comments on her appearance, how she was dressed, and one instance she described as "extreme" that involved Klein asking her "to come to his house and engage in sexual acts." That witness also said Klein told her to delete the messages he had sent.

McGuff spoke to BSB following the news but could not get into specifics regarding the case as it is still ongoing with the NCAA.

"We're still working with the NCAA, and until they fully process this case, I can't really speak on it," McGuff said. "I'm focused on trying to get the kids back after Christmas and moving forward."

Ohio State's report also stated that "none of the witnesses believed that head coach Kevin McGuff was aware of Klein's behavior toward student-athletes. None of the witnesses had reported the messages or Klein's behavior to McGuff."

Klein had been with the Ohio State program for eight years starting in the 2011-12 season, when he joined head coach Jim Foster's staff as an assistant after a stint at Illinois. He then worked under McGuff when he took over in 2013, earning a promotion to the associate head coach position prior to the start of the 2016-17 season.

Even before the 2011 campaign, Klein was a former Ohio State graduate in 2005 and was a student manager for the team

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during his final year as an undergrad before working under Foster as a graduate assistant from 2005-07.

Klein resigned from the program on Aug. 2, 2019, one week after he was placed on administrative leave by Ohio State as the university looked into "allegations of violations of NCAA rules and university policy within the women's basketball program."

"Over the course of the past two weeks it has come to my attention that some of my actions as a coach have not adhered strictly to the NCAA rules," Klein said in the statement announcing his resignation. "I've also been made aware that in some instances, my communications with some student-athletes may have been too informal or in some cases even inappropriate, violating university policy. I apologize for these mistakes and realize that I should have used better judgment.

"In light of the above, I've determined that it's in my best interests, as well as the program's, to resign and take time to reflect, spend time with my family, and focus on the next chapter of my professional career."

As part of the Ohio State case report, Klein and 35 witnesses were interviewed, including eight current coaches and support staff, four former staff members, one former student employee, 11 current players on the women's basketball team, 11 former players from 2010-19 and the one former student who was not affiliated with the women's basketball program.

Klein did not participate in the NCAA's investigation, failing to respond to any requests to cooperate. The NCAA called this a Level I violation, the most severe level, labeling it a "severe breach of conduct."

"To date, neither Klein nor Klein's attorney have contacted the enforcement staff for an interview or responded to any processing materials," the report states. "The enforcement staff considers Klein to be a non-participating involved individual. Because Klein failed to participate in the processing of this case, including the submission of this summary disposition report, he failed to contest the violations involving him."

How The Buckeyes Are Moving Forward

The results of the Klein investigation dropped on Dec. 22, right in the middle of Ohio State's 25-day span between games due to COVID-19 problems within the program, problems that existed even when the Buckeyes returned to play on Jan. 4 against Penn State.

In that game, Ohio State was without three of its 12 players in guard Rikki Harris, forward Dorka Juhasz and forward Rebeka Mikulasikova, and McGuff said following the Nittany Lions' matchup that he does not think the team could have followed coronavirus protocols any better to avoid the spread.

"We didn't have any hint of it for the

whole school year so far," McGuff said. "I mean we probably did too good of a job in controlling it. I know I have a lot of other coaching colleagues who, in August and September, October, November, they were kind of getting hit, and they were through it, but our kids have been very vigilant, extremely committed to doing everything they can to avoid it and to keep it out of our program, but it's just so widespread right now, it's just really difficult."

The COVID issues and the absences on the floor mixed with a postseason ban that was slapped on the program during a dead period without games for more than three weeks all should have led to a team that came out less motivated than the one that last played on Dec. 10.

Except it didn't. Instead, Ohio State came out firing against the Nittany Lions, jumping out to a 22-12 lead after one quarter and ultimately won the game 82-69 to continue its undefeated season.

With no tournament aspirations left to play for, Ohio State went undefeated through the first seven games of the season, and the team has used this ban as a new inspiration to go out and prove the level of talent the Buckeyes have on this roster.

"We were definitely upset by the news, but we're just going to use that as motivation to work harder and prove that we're a really great team and we deserve to be in the postseason," sophomore guard Madison Greene said after the 13-point win over Penn State. "We can't show that this year, so hopefully we can just keep working and do it next year."

There's another reason that Ohio State has continued to play strong basketball despite the lack of opportunity for a Big Ten tournament and NCAA tournament this year. It's something that the entire team has preached from before the season began: team chemistry.

Senior guard Braxtin Miller said after the overtime win against Iowa on Jan. 13 that it is as simple as the desire to play with this group that is adding fuel to the fire of having as strong a season as possible.

"I just think we really like each other," Miller said. "I think that, as a team, we really enjoy playing together, we really enjoy hanging out. And so we know that, even though it might not be the best situation, being able to just play together through this and have each other through this and push each other is still fun, and still gives us a reason to say, 'You know what? We aren't going to be able to play postseason, but everybody will remember Ohio State was still really good, and we did it together.'"

Greene echoed the sentiments of her teammate, saying that there is enough joy in simply playing with this group to keep pushing forward through the season.

"I think we were here to play together and play basketball and just have fun,"

Greene said. "We can't really worry about the postseason ban, but we're here to play every game as hard as we can and we're ready to keep fighting."

Rutgers Game Postponed For Opponent COVID-19 Issues

For the sixth time this season, Ohio State women's basketball had a game postponed or canceled due to COVID-19.

This time, it was a 2 p.m. matchup against Rutgers scheduled for Jan. 10 that was postponed due to coronavirus issues within the Scarlet Knights program. Rutgers also had its matchup Jan. 7 against Purdue postponed for the same reason.

Ohio State, at the time of the announcement, had played five total games and had lost six on the schedule – games against Akron, Saint Mary's (Calif.), Iowa, Maryland, Michigan State and now Rutgers – though the four against Big Ten opponents can potentially be rescheduled at a later date.

Three of those lost games were due to Ohio State's issues with COVID-19, while the Zips' and Scarlet Knights' games were due to troubles with the virus for its opposition. The game against Saint Mary's did not happen due to strict travel restrictions in the state of California where the program is located.

Buckeyes Add Local Guard To 2022 Class

Reynoldsburg, Ohio, guard Mya Perry became the second commitment to Ohio State women's basketball's 2022 class, announcing her commitment as the clock struck 12 on the new year.

"Perry is a sharpshooter and a big-time scorer," 270Hoops wrote of Perry on Oct. 19. "Her size at the guard position allows her to take the ball to the hoop effectively and fin-

ishes well through contact. She defends the perimeter well and does not back down as a defender and rebounder in the post. Mya Perry comes from great stock and looks to be the next stellar player in the family."

The 5-10 Perry, the sister of Dayton forward Maliya Perry, joins Centerville, Ohio, four-star wing Cottie McMahon in Ohio State's 2022 class, while the Buckeyes also have commitments from guards Kaitlyn Costner and Taylor Thierry in their 2021 class, both of whom have officially signed.

The current Reynoldsburg junior guard received her offer from Ohio State on Dec. 5 and made a decision to commit within the month. Perry helped her team start out the 2020-21 season ranked No. 12 in the country according to MaxPreps.

Sheldon Takes First Lady Buck Of The Month

With only four games to evaluate between the end of November and December, it is sophomore guard Jacy Sheldon who takes the opening Plank's Lady Buck of the Month.

Sheldon started off the season with a bang, leading the team with 20 points in the opening win over Duquesne on Nov. 29 and not slowing down much from there. Through the first four games, Sheldon averaged 17.3 points per game on 65.9-percent shooting, while also hitting six of her 15 attempts (40.0 percent) from three.

She did more than score as well, bringing in 3.8 rebounds and dishing out 3.3 assists per game while also making an impact defensively with 2.0 steals per contest.

Sheldon narrowly edged out Juhasz, who averaged 17.8 points and 10.5 rebounds through the first four games of the season. The junior forward shot 52.6 percent from the field and also added one block per contest in those four games.

Plank's Cafe



Jacy Sheldon
Sophomore Guard
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Ohio State Comes Out On Fire After Cancellations

By WYATT CROSER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Due to COVID-19 problems in the program, Ohio State had not played a game in 25 days when it took on Penn State on Jan. 4. During that time, the Buckeyes were also hit with a postseason ban following the results of the Patrick Klein investigation, which is covered in depth on page 36.

None of that mattered though, as Ohio State immediately continued on its winning ways, taking down Penn State, Illinois and Iowa before falling at Nebraska on its way to a 7-1 start to the season and a 3-1 start to Big Ten play.

Buckeyes Return To Play With Comfortable Victory

Ohio State women's basketball had not played a game since Dec. 10 after issues with COVID-19 within the team. Even after the extended layoff, the Buckeyes were without three players, leaving just nine to play against Penn State at Value City Arena.

Regardless, without the help of All-Big Ten forward Dorka Juhasz, guard Rikki Harris and forward Rebeka Mikulasikova, Ohio State still came out and won its first Big Ten game of the season, taking down Penn State 82-69 Jan. 4 to move to 5-0 on the year.

"I was really proud of our effort," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "I thought we played really hard. Obviously it's been real choppy here for the last three weeks, and we could have used that as an excuse, but our kids came out and I thought they played extremely hard."

Ohio State jumped out to a 22-12 lead after the first quarter that ballooned to 31-12 as part of a 15-0 run to end the first frame and start the second.

The Buckeyes led 47-31 at the half thanks to 16 points by sophomore guard Madison Greene, who was a perfect 6-of-6 shooting from the field in the opening 20 minutes.

Penn State (3-4, 0-3 Big Ten) battled back in the third quarter, cutting the margin

to seven, 58-51, after a 14-3 run that was led by guard Makenna Marisa, who had 12 points in the frame. But Jacy Sheldon hit a pair of threes for Ohio State to push the lead back to double digits.

Again, the Nittany Lions continued to fight, cutting the lead to seven with 7:21 to play in the fourth quarter.

But a basket by freshman forward Gabby Hutcherson and then another make and a pair of free throws by Greene brought the lead back to 13, helping to seal the victory.

"Penn State's good, and they played really fast, and I thought we got a little bit worn down in that stretch and they made us pay," McGuff said. "They have a good team and they got hot. So we had to kind of get ourselves back together, but I was really proud of the fact that we stayed together, and we continued to fight through it."

Greene finished with 24 points, 10 rebounds and five assists, while Sheldon ended the game with 21 points, 13 of which came in the second half.

"We were really spaced out and it opened up the lane for me to drive and get to the basket, so it was really on my teammates," Greene said. "We moved the ball really well and we just got open looks."

On the double-digit rebounding effort, Greene said after the game that she had no idea she finished with that many boards.

"Honestly, I didn't know I had 10 rebounds," Greene said. "Usually guards like me and Jacy, we usually go back, but today, I just got in there, tried to box out and apparently I got a lot of rebounds."

Hutcherson saw the most minutes of her collegiate career thanks to the short bench and foul trouble from junior forward Aaliyah Patty. She finished with seven points and six rebounds in 26 minutes.

On the other end, Marisa was the top player for Penn State, finishing with 21 points and nine rebounds on 9-of-16 shooting.

The Buckeyes shot 44.3 percent (31 of 70) on the night, including 28.0 percent (7 of 25) from three, while the Nittany Lions shot 41.2 percent (28 of 68) overall and 28.6 percent (6 of 21) from deep.

Hevynne Bristow, a transfer guard from Providence who was expected to redshirt this season, played in her first game of the year after the NCAA changed its rules and allowed for automatic immediate eligibility this season. She did not score but saw action in the second quarter.

Even with no NCAA tournament goals to strive for this season, McGuff said this roster has a different motivation to go out and win each game moving forward.

"It's tough. That was a real blow to the kids, and it's even tougher given the fact that we're coming off a season last year where I thought we were playing really well at the end of the year then didn't get to go to the postseason because of COVID," McGuff said. "That was certainly difficult, but this team has great competitive character, they really care for each other and I think the biggest thing is that they want to play for each other."

Ohio State Dominates Illini For Sixth Straight Win

Ohio State women's basketball moved to 6-0 and 2-0 in the Big Ten with relative ease, taking down Illinois 78-55 in the team's first road game of the season Jan. 7.

The Buckeyes led by 10 after one quarter and by 15 at halftime, but the Fighting

Ohio State 82, Penn State 69

| Jan. 4, 2021 | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--|--------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|--|--|--|
| Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F | | | | | |
| Penn State (3-4, 0-3) | 12 | 19 | 22 | 16 | 69 | | | | | |
| Ohio State (5-0, 1-0) | 22 | 25 | 19 | 16 | 82 | | | | | |
| Penn State | Total FG FT Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | |
| Cash | 15 | 2-8 | 0-6 | 1-5 | 0 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| Thornton | 13 | 0-3 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| Burke | 27 | 1-6 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | | | |
| Marisa | 35 | 9-16 | 1-2 | 2-7 | 2 | 1 | 21 | | | |
| Jekot | 36 | 7-17 | 3-5 | 2-4 | 1 | 1 | 19 | | | |
| Camden | 12 | 1-2 | 2-2 | 0-0 | 1 | 2 | 5 | | | |
| Beverley | 30 | 6-8 | 1-1 | 2-3 | 3 | 0 | 14 | | | |
| Sabel | 16 | 2-5 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | | | |
| Hagens | 14 | 0-3 | 0-0 | 1-1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| Thomas | 3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 28-66 | 7-16 | 10-29 | 8 | 13 | 69 | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 41.2% | FT: 43.8% | Three-point field goals: 6-21 (Jekot 2-5, Marisa 2-4, Camden 1-2, Beverley 1-1, Burke 0-5, Thornton 0-2, Cash 0-1, Sabel 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 3 (Burke, Marisa, Camden). Turnovers: 15 (Cash 5, Marisa 3, Burke 2, Jekot 2, Sabel 2, Hagens). Steals: 5 (Beverley 2, Cash, Thornton, Hagens). | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total FG FT Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | |
| Patty | 24 | 3-7 | 3-4 | 0-7 | 1 | 4 | 9 | | | |
| Beacham | 32 | 3-7 | 2-2 | 2-5 | 0 | 2 | 8 | | | |
| Greene | 39 | 9-17 | 5-5 | 3-7 | 5 | 1 | 24 | | | |
| Sheldon | 40 | 8-19 | 2-3 | 2-1 | 3 | 3 | 21 | | | |
| Miller | 33 | 4-11 | 1-2 | 1-5 | 3 | 1 | 10 | | | |
| Hutcherson | 26 | 3-6 | 0-0 | 0-6 | 1 | 1 | 7 | | | |
| Poole | 6 | 1-3 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | | | |
| Bristow | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 31-70 | 13-16 | 11-34 | 13 | 15 | 82 | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 44.3% | FT: 81.3% | Three-point field goals: 7-25 (Sheldon 3-9, Miller 1-5, Hutcherson 1-4, Greene 1-3, Poole 1-2, Patty 0-2). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 8 (Miller 3, Sheldon 2, Hutcherson 2, Beacham). Turnovers: 14 (Miller 4, Greene 3, Patty 2, Beacham 2, Sheldon, Hutcherson, TEAM). Steals: 9 (Hutcherson 3, Beacham 2, Greene, Sheldon, Miller, Poole). Officials: Enlund, Broderick, Statore. Attendance: N/A. | | | | | | | |

Ohio State 78, Illinois 55

| Jan. 7, 2021 | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--|-------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|--|--|--|
| State Farm Center • Champaign, Ill. | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F | | | | | |
| Ohio State (6-0, 2-0) | 18 | 20 | 25 | 15 | 78 | | | | | |
| Illinois (2-5, 0-4) | 8 | 15 | 15 | 17 | 55 | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total FG FT Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | |
| Patty | 31 | 8-15 | 0-0 | 1-10 | 2 | 3 | 18 | | | |
| Beacham | 16 | 0-4 | 2-2 | 2-3 | 0 | 4 | 2 | | | |
| Greene | 34 | 4-7 | 0-0 | 2-3 | 4 | 1 | 9 | | | |
| Sheldon | 35 | 7-15 | 2-2 | 0-3 | 3 | 1 | 20 | | | |
| Miller | 33 | 3-8 | 2-2 | 0-2 | 5 | 2 | 8 | | | |
| Hutcherson | 26 | 5-10 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 2 | 4 | 12 | | | |
| Poole | 15 | 1-3 | 4-6 | 0-4 | 1 | 0 | 7 | | | |
| Bristow | 9 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 1-0 | 1 | 3 | 2 | | | |
| Jones | 2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 29-64 | 10-12 | 8-28 | 18 | 18 | 78 | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 45.3% | FT: 83.3% | Three-point field goals: 10-25 (Sheldon 4-9, Hutcherson 2-4, Patty 2-3, Greene 1-3, Poole 1-2, Miller 0-3, Beacham 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Patty, Greene, Bristow). Turnovers: 16 (Sheldon 5, Greene 4, Patty 2, Hutcherson 2, Miller, Poole, TEAM). Steals: 12 (Miller 3, Greene 2, Sheldon 2, Hutcherson 2, Patty, Beacham, Bristow). | | | | | | | |
| Illinois | Total FG FT Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | |
| Myles | 28 | 6-12 | 3-3 | 1-7 | 2 | 3 | 15 | | | |
| Rubin | 29 | 1-3 | 4-6 | 3-0 | 0 | 3 | 6 | | | |
| Ephraim | 30 | 2-4 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | | | |
| Terry | 34 | 4-12 | 1-1 | 0-10 | 3 | 2 | 12 | | | |
| Peebles | 35 | 4-13 | 2-3 | 1-2 | 2 | 2 | 11 | | | |
| Amusan | 20 | 3-8 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 2 | 7 | | | |
| Robins | 13 | 0-3 | 0-0 | 1-1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| Panagiotopoulou | 9 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | |
| O'Malley | 2 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| Porter | 2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 20-58 | 10-13 | 9-28 | 10 | 19 | 55 | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 34.5% | FT: 76.9% | Three-point field goals: 5-19 (Terry 3-6, Peebles 1-5, Amusan 1-4, Robins 0-2, Ephraim 0-1, Panagiotopoulou 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 4 (Rubin 2, Terry, Panagiotopoulou). Turnovers: 25 (Terry 8, Ephraim 6, Myles 4, Rubin 3, Peebles, Amusan, Robins, Panagiotopoulou). Steals: 7 (Terry 3, Myles 2, Amusan, Robins). Officials: Daley, Cross, Herriman-Carmota. Attendance: N/A. | | | | | | | |

Illini made their fight happen at the start of the third quarter. After a buzzer-beater three by Solape Amusan to end the first half, Illinois (2-5, 0-4) built on that to go on a 10-0 run and cut the deficit to 38-30.

But the game never got closer from there, with Ohio State going on a 22-2 run to take a 60-32 advantage late in the third quarter, and the Buckeyes never led by less than 19 points after that point.

"I thought we were very lethargic coming out of the half and didn't get off to a good start," McGuff said. "I think one of the keys to taking back control of the game was we started to press a little bit, and we turned them over. We were able to turn those turnovers into points."

Both teams struggled with turning over the ball, with Ohio State finishing with 16 turnovers, still far less than the 25 by Illinois. The Buckeyes outscored the Illini 29-16 on points off turnovers.

Once again, the Buckeyes were without Harris, Juhasz and Mikulasikova, and once again, Sheldon stepped up, finishing with 20 points and with a career-high four three-point makes on nine attempts.

"She's really talented, she works incredibly hard on her game," McGuff said. "It's not by accident that she puts up these types of numbers, and I think she's also just a really good fit in our system."

Patty also made a big impact against the Illini, racking up 18 points and 11 rebounds on 8-of-15 shooting in 31 minutes of play.

"They're two big key players on our team, so I know I have to step up and help them out," Patty said about playing without Juhasz and Mikulasikova in the lineup. "We definitely miss them being on the floor, so we're excited to get them back soon."

Patty and Sheldon were the lone scorers in the first quarter that saw Ohio State take an early 18-8 lead. Sheldon led all scorers with 11 points, while Patty added seven of

her own, though the third-year forward was unaware all the team's scoring was coming from two players.

"I had no idea, no clue," Patty said. "Just finding an open area, calling for the ball, just putting the ball in the hole and doing what we had to do for our team."

In the second quarter, it was Hutcherson who stepped up with seven points on 3-of-4 shooting. She finished with 12 points in 25 minutes.

"I felt like I had come out a little bit slow in the first quarter," Hutcherson said. "I just mentally told myself that I had to step it up, especially if we wanted to keep the lead as big as we did and increase it."

On the night, Ohio State shot 29 of 64 (45.3 percent) from the field and 10 of 25 (40.0 percent) from three while holding Illinois to 20 of 58 (34.5 percent) overall and 5 of 19 (26.3 percent) from deep.

The Illini were led by two key contributors in Kennedi Myles and Jeanae Terry. Myles finished with a team-high 15 points and eight rebounds, while Terry added 12 points and a team-high 10 rebounds.

Ohio State's next scheduled game on Jan. 10 against Rutgers was postponed due to COVID-19 issues within the Scarlet Knights program. That meant that the Buckeyes were next scheduled to face Iowa, which was 8-1 on the season at that point and was set to present the Buckeyes' with their toughest test to date.

But on the team's performance through six games, Patty said the team chemistry was incredibly high as Ohio State continued its undefeated start, despite the multiple unexpected ups and downs early on due to COVID-19.

"I think we just all come together," Patty said. "We've faced so much adversity, but it's just coming together as a team, playing for each other. We want to win, we want to



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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

keep fighting. We just want to keep going hard for each other."

Bucks Make Big Comeback To Take Down Hawkeyes In OT

After trailing by 14 in the second half without its All-Big Ten forward and in an arena that had not seen a home loss in multiple seasons, the Ohio State women's basketball team still pulled through, taking down Iowa 84-82 in overtime on Jan. 13.

The victory snapped Iowa's home win streak of 42 games, which was the second-longest streak in Division I behind Baylor (61), a mark that was also snapped that day against Iowa State.

"I'm just really proud of our kids," McGuff said. "I mean, man, we fought and scratched and clawed and just played so hard in that second half against a great Iowa team. This is a great win, and I'm just really happy for our players."

Three Buckeyes scored 18 points or more, with the trio of guards in Greene (20), senior Braxtin Miller (18) and Sheldon (18) leading the way for Ohio State offensively.

After Iowa extended its lead to 14 after a Caitlin Clark basket to open the third quarter, the Buckeyes battled back throughout the second half, and after a steal by Greene, it was Hutcherson, the true freshman, who buried a three to give Ohio State a 72-71 lead with 1:29 to play.

"That was a huge shot, and she's been playing really well, and she's just continuing to get better," McGuff said of Hutcherson. "She's working really hard in practice, but a huge moment for her."

However, Iowa guard Kate Martin split her free throws to tie the game at 72, and the Buckeyes had a chance to win in regulation, but Sheldon missed a runner as time expired.

After Miller opened the scoring in overtime for Ohio State, Iowa went on a 6-0 run, including four by forward Monika Czinano, who had struggled all game. Czinano, who was averaging 20.2 points per game coming into the contest, fouled out in overtime with nine points.

Once again, the Buckeyes battled back, this time with a 6-0 run of their own, and it was Greene who made a contested layup to give Ohio State an 80-78 lead with 1:58 to play.

Clark hit a pair of free throws to tie the game, but Sheldon came right back with a basket to give Ohio State another two-point advantage.

Clark, a true freshman who came into the game second in the Big Ten with 25.6 points per game, finished with 27 points, 10 rebounds and five assists.

"She's really good," McGuff said of Clark. "I mean she's a special player and she's just so dynamic and she can shoot with range. She creates her shot with step backs and things like that as well as anybody I've seen in a long time. She's as good as advertised, maybe even better."

The first-year Iowa guard missed a three-pointer, and after the Buckeyes struggled from the free-throw line all game, Harris hit 1 of 2 to put Ohio State up 83-80 with 48.4 seconds to play.

Iowa forward McKenna Warnock hit a tough layup to make it a one-point game, and after another free-throw split by Ohio State, this time by Greene, the lead was just two points.

But Ohio State shut down Iowa on its final possession, securing a 7-0 record with a final three-point miss by Clark.

"We're really proud of each other," Greene said. "We worked hard, and it was a struggle. Throughout the whole game

we were down, but we kept fighting and we ended up winning. I'm just proud of the team, and we just did what we had to do."

To open the game, both teams started out red-hot from the field, scoring 15 points combined in the first 1:45. Iowa (8-3, 4-3) jumped out to a 26-17 lead after the first quarter thanks to 13 points from Clark, who hit five of her six shots in the frame.

Both teams cooled off a bit in the second quarter, but Ohio State specifically struggled at the end of the first half, hitting just one of its final eight shots in the second frame, and trailed 44-32 after a buzzer beating tip-in from Martin.

Ohio State was also outrebounded 27-15 in the first half before bouncing back to rebound Iowa 27-23 the rest of the way. McGuff said that was key in earning the comeback win.

"We were down I think 12 on the boards in the first half, and then we were plus-four in the second, so that was the first thing we talked about," McGuff said about the halftime adjustments. "We were giving them too many opportunities. They're too good of an offensive team to give them second-chance points."

Miller led Ohio State with 11 points at halftime, while Sheldon chipped in nine points and four assists. Both Miller and Sheldon shot 4 of 7 from the field in the opening 20 minutes.

Juhasz was unavailable for the third straight game but was on the sidelines for the first time since her absence. Harris and Mikulasikova did return after missing the past two games, and the duo combined for seven points and eight rebounds.

While Mikulasikova came in during the first quarter, Harris did not see game action until the second half but brought in some key rebounds and added a block and steal in pivotal moments during Ohio State's comeback.

"She played really hard," McGuff said on Harris. "She played with toughness. She made some huge hustle plays down the stretch when we really needed it, got the ball back, tough rebounds. She just played really hard."

Undefeated Season Ends In Lincoln

The Ohio State women's basketball team had its undefeated stretch to start the season stopped at seven games at the hands of Nebraska, which took down the Buckeyes 63-55 on the road Jan. 16.

The loss moved Ohio State to 7-1 and 3-1 in the Big Ten, while the Cornhuskers improved to 7-4 and 5-3 in the conference and also stay undefeated at home in six games at the Pinnacle Bank Arena.

"Give Nebraska credit, they played harder, they were more prepared, they played a better game, they played more to win," McGuff said. "It was just a disappointing performance on our part. We just really lacked focus and energy today."

The Buckeyes, who were averaging 89.9 points per game and shooting 50.2 percent from the field on the season coming into this game, had one of the worst shooting performances in program history against Nebraska.

Ohio State was completely shut down on offense, shooting 27.2 percent from the field, the seventh-worst rate in team history.

The record was set in a Jan. 3, 1991, game against Purdue where the Buckeyes shot 24.2 percent (15 of 62) in a 105-45 loss.

"Our shots weren't falling today, but that's definitely not an excuse," Sheldon said. "I think we knew Nebraska wanted to

Ohio State 84, Iowa 82 (OT)

| Jan. 13, 2021 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|------------------|--|---|--|---|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Carver-Hawkeye Arena • Iowa City, Iowa | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | OT | F | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (7-0, 3-0) | 17 | 15 | 22 | 18 | 12 | 84 | | | | | | |
| Iowa (8-3, 4-3) | 26 | 18 | 15 | 13 | 10 | 82 | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Patty | 34 | 5-11 | 1-1 | 4-5 | 1 | 3 | 12 | | | | | |
| Beacham | 14 | 1-1 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| Greene | 42 | 9-20 | 1-5 | 2-3 | 2 | 3 | 20 | | | | | |
| Sheldon | 37 | 7-15 | 3-3 | 1-2 | 4 | 3 | 18 | | | | | |
| Miller | 30 | 7-15 | 2-4 | 1-3 | 3 | 3 | 18 | | | | | |
| Mikulasikova | 12 | 2-6 | 0-0 | 0-5 | 0 | 4 | 4 | | | | | |
| Poole | 13 | 0-1 | 2-4 | 0-2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| Hutcherson | 23 | 2-6 | 0-0 | 0-5 | 0 | 1 | 5 | | | | | |
| Harris | 10 | 1-4 | 1-3 | 2-1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | | | | | |
| Totals | 225 | 34-79 | 10-20 | 13-29 | 21 | 84 | 84 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 43.0% | FT: 50.0% | | Three-point field goals: 6-25 (Miller 2-5, Sheldon 1-5, Patty 1-4, Hutcherson 1-3, Greene 1-1, Mikulasikova 0-3, Harris 0-3, Poole 0-1). | | Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Poole, Harris). | | | | | | |
| | Turnovers: 11 (Patty 4, Miller 3, Beacham, Greene, Sheldon, Poole). | | Steals: 9 (Greene 6, Miller, Hutcherson, Harris). | | | | | | | | | |
| Iowa | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Warnock | 37 | 6-9 | 0-0 | 0-12 | 5 | 2 | 14 | | | | | |
| Czinano | 30 | 4-8 | 1-4 | 1-3 | 0 | 5 | 9 | | | | | |
| Martin | 37 | 3-7 | 3-4 | 3-1 | 2 | 1 | 9 | | | | | |
| Clark | 40 | 9-20 | 6-8 | 2-8 | 5 | 1 | 27 | | | | | |
| Marshall | 35 | 3-8 | 4-5 | 0-6 | 2 | 2 | 10 | | | | | |
| Meyer | 15 | 2-8 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 1 | 2 | 5 | | | | | |
| Cook | 19 | 2-3 | 1-3 | 4-1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | | | | | |
| Taiwo | 11 | 1-4 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0 | 2 | 3 | | | | | |
| Goodman | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Totals | 225 | 30-67 | 15-24 | 13-37 | 17 | 82 | 82 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 44.8% | FT: 62.5% | | Three-point field goals: 7-22 (Clark 3-9, Warnock 2-3, Meyer 1-5, Taiwo 1-3, Marshall 0-2). | | Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 5 (Czinano 2, Clark 2, Warnock). | | | | | | |
| | Turnovers: 18 (Clark 6, Czinano 5, Martin 3, Marshall 2, Warnock, Meyer). | | Steals: 4 (Marshall 2, Czinano, Clark). | | Officials: McConnell, Zentz, Roberts. | | | | | | | |
| | Attendance: 326. | | | | | | | | | | | |

Nebraska 63, Ohio State 55

| Jan. 16, 2021 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|------------------|--|---|---|---|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Pinnacle Bank Arena • Lincoln, Neb. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State (7-1, 3-1) | 12 | 9 | 15 | 19 | 55 | | | | | | | |
| Nebraska (7-4, 5-3) | 14 | 16 | 15 | 18 | 63 | | | | | | | |
| Ohio State | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Juhasz | 28 | 5-17 | 2-3 | 6-6 | 0 | 2 | 13 | | | | | |
| Patty | 30 | 6-17 | 1-2 | 2-3 | 2 | 3 | 13 | | | | | |
| Greene | 36 | 3-13 | 3-4 | 3-3 | 2 | 3 | 11 | | | | | |
| Sheldon | 31 | 5-16 | 0-2 | 4-3 | 0 | 4 | 11 | | | | | |
| Miller | 33 | 2-10 | 0-0 | 0-4 | 0 | 1 | 4 | | | | | |
| Poole | 13 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Hutcherson | 13 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | | | | | |
| Beacham | 3 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 1-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |
| Harris | 6 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Mikulasikova | 8 | 0-2 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 22-81 | 6-11 | 18-26 | 6 | 15 | 55 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 27.2% | FT: 54.5% | | Three-point field goals: 5-27 (Greene 2-7, Juhasz 1-5, Sheldon 1-5, Hutcherson 1-2, Patty 0-3, Miller 0-3, Poole 0-1, Harris 0-1). | | Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Patty 2, Hutcherson). | | | | | | |
| | Turnovers: 6 (Juhasz 3, Greene, Miller, Mikulasikova). | | Steals: 9 (Juhasz 2, Patty 2, Greene 2, Sheldon, Miller, Hutcherson). | | | | | | | | | |
| Nebraska | Total FG FT | | Reb. | | | | | | | | | |
| | Min. | M-A | M-A | O-D | A | PF | Pts. | | | | | |
| Cravens | 29 | 3-4 | 0-0 | 2-12 | 1 | 4 | 6 | | | | | |
| Cain | 38 | 10-14 | 2-7 | 4-8 | 1 | 1 | 22 | | | | | |
| Scoggin | 33 | 3-9 | 0-0 | 0-5 | 2 | 4 | 7 | | | | | |
| Haiby | 39 | 2-11 | 7-7 | 2-6 | 10 | 2 | 11 | | | | | |
| Porter | 20 | 1-6 | 0-0 | 0-5 | 0 | 0 | 3 | | | | | |
| Brown | 28 | 5-9 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 1 | 0 | 14 | | | | | |
| Stewart | 13 | 0-5 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Totals | 200 | 24-58 | 9-14 | 9-45 | 17 | 12 | 63 | | | | | |
| Percentages: | FG: 41.4% | FT: 64.3% | | Three-point field goals: 6-22 (Brown 4-8, Scoggin 1-5, Porter 1-4, Stewart 0-3, Haiby 0-2). | | Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 11 (Cain 9, Cravens, Stewart). | | | | | | |
| | Turnovers: 19 (Scoggin 6, Stewart 3, TEAM 3, Cravens 2, Cain 2, Haiby 2, Porter). | | Steals: 2 (Cravens, Haiby). | | Officials: Daley, Enterline, Thompson. | | | | | | | |
| | Attendance: N/A. | | | | | | | | | | | |

slow it down, keep the game in the 50s, and we let them do it, so that's on us. We didn't play our best game, but hopefully we have another shot at them."

Despite the offensive struggles, Ohio State was down just six points, 57-51, with 2:05 to play thanks to a three-point make by Juhasz, who played in her first game since Dec. 10. After a Nebraska turnover, Greene hit another three to make it a three-point game with 1:24 to go in the fourth quarter.

But Nebraska guard Sam Haiby, who had made only one of her first 10 attempts, got a crucial and-one to make it 60-54 with 44 seconds to go in the game.

Though she didn't shoot well, Haiby was still very productive against Ohio State, tallying 11 points, eight rebounds and 10 assists.

Following the and-one, Kait Cain split a pair of free throws, and Greene turned it over on a travel call, leading to the Cornhuskers holding onto the win.

Cain, Nebraska's 6-5 senior center and the program's all-time leader in blocks, had a strong performance, finishing the game with 22 points, 12 rebounds and nine blocks on 10-of-14 shooting. Four of her blocks came in the fourth quarter.

"We had no answer today," McGuff said on guarding Cain. "We didn't prepare very well. We didn't have a good plan as coaches, and certainly, we didn't have anybody that could come close to guarding her today."

Juhasz struggled in her first game back but still finished with a double-double, racking up 13 points and 12 rebounds while hitting on five of her 17 attempts from the field.

"It's good to have her back," McGuff said. "She was a little bit out of rhythm I think from being off for so long."

Even with the shooting struggles, four Buckeyes – Greene, Juhasz, Patty and Sheldon – finished in double figures.

Nebraska outscored Ohio State 16-9 in the second quarter to take a 30-21 lead into halftime. Cain led the Cornhuskers with 11 points and five rebounds in the opening 20 minutes.

The Buckeyes really struggled against Nebraska's stifling defense in the first half, shooting just 9 of 37 (24.3 percent) from the field and 1 of 13 (7.7 percent) from three. Sheldon led the team with seven points.

Ohio State opened the third quarter on a 6-0 run to cut the deficit to three points, but Nebraska outscored the Buckeyes by six the rest of the frame to cancel it out and take a 45-36 lead into the fourth quarter.

Ohio State was next scheduled for a Jan. 21 home matchup against Michigan. The Wolverines were ranked No. 13 in the AP poll and were undefeated at 10-0 on the season.

"We'll take a lot (from this game)," Sheldon said. "We'll go back and watch film, definitely learn a lot from this game, and then focus on our next game, the Team up North."

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Ahac Sees Golden Opportunity To Develop Game

The COVID-19 pandemic cost Layton Ahac chances to develop his game, so the Ohio State sophomore defenseman is focused on the opportunities ahead of him.

Not only was the Buckeyes' postseason run ended prematurely in March when most sports worldwide were canceled because of the virus, but so was the summer prospects camp for the Vegas Golden Knights of the NHL, and for a time in late summer it appeared the 2020-21 Big Ten hockey season was in jeopardy.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

Ahac, a third-round draft pick by Vegas in June 2019, attended the Golden Knights' camp soon thereafter for his first glimpse of how he compared to other players of his age and talent.

There was no chance to do that in the summer of 2020.

"There's definitely a bit of a letdown situation going on when that happened," he said. "Last year after the draft I flew out right away.

"I learned so much in a short amount of time. I was looking forward to going back, so not having the camp was definitely different. The show goes on. You continue to try to get better and hope there's a camp next summer."

Those camps, which all NHL teams hold, are beneficial not only to the players but the staff that evaluates players. Ahac said Vegas stayed in contact with him throughout the offseason and offered advice on training tips.

It wasn't easy to get ice time when Ahac went home to North Vancouver, British Columbia, because the rinks were shut down for several months.

He worked out on his own until ice became available and set his sight on his second season with the Buckeyes.

Ahac (6-2, 195) played all 36 games and had three assists in 2019-20. He also had an impressive plus-10 to share the lead among all conference freshmen and was third among Big Ten defensemen.

"What you saw from Layton last year was just the tip of what he's capable of," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik.

When the Big Ten announced in August that fall sports had been canceled, Ahac was apprehensive. Although hockey is considered a winter sport, the season had been set to begin in October but was delayed with no guarantee of starting.

Once the conference allowed football to play beginning Oct. 23, Ahac was relieved when the Big Ten announced the hockey season would commence in late November.

"I was worried there," he said. "But you can only control what you can control. Finding out we officially got a start date, that was big news. I was looking forward to that date because you always train toward that start date."

Even though the Buckeyes will play eight fewer regular-season games than last season, Ahac is thrilled by the opportunity to showcase his improvement.

"Coming into this year I have more of an idea of what to expect than my freshman year," he said. "I've been through it all, played all the Big Ten teams.

"So for me it's playing with more confidence and stepping into a bigger role. We lost a ton of good players, particularly a few senior defensemen. I'm just trying to fill their shoes every day.

"Anytime you can step into a bigger role and be more of an impactful player, you want to make the most of it. This year I have had the opportunity to step into that role, and I think coming up for the rest of this year and for next year I want to continue to get better."

He reached a milestone vs. Arizona State on Dec. 18 when he scored his first OSU goal.

"It definitely was a relief," Ahac said. "I was gripping the stick hard for a little bit there. It just came down to one shot. I knew it was going to happen. It was just a

matter of time."

He's tried to increase his offensive production.

"It was a big focus for me," he said. "I wanted to get up in the rush more and have confidence doing that, being this is my second year. I've been through it and I'm familiar with the situation and I know how college hockey should be played. Now, I've got to do it."

Through 15 games he has seven points (one goal and six assists).

He's just now taking advantage of his athleticism and quickness. He credits participating in numerous sports as part of a sports-oriented family. His grandfather Zane Ahac was a world-class rower. His father, Alan, is the director of international events for Volleyball Canada, and an older sister, Danika, was a volleyball player at Queens University.

Ahac started skating at age 5 after watching the hometown Vancouver Canucks on TV with his dad, but he also played football, basketball, soccer, volleyball and baseball. All helped him become the hockey player he is.

"You can look at basketball and you get hand-eye coordination," he said. "For football, strength and physicality, and soccer, maybe footwork.

"Every sport has one or more different things that you can bring in, and those things have stuck with me and been my roots."

His second favorite sport was football. "I was actually on the offensive line. I was a short, chubby kid until I hit my growth spurt, then I was a tight end."

Hockey became his main interest around age 13.

"I always found hockey was my passion, and just growing up, no matter what, I wanted to play hockey," he said. "As you get along, hockey becomes more competitive and you have less time for other things. I still played other sports as long as I could."

He started in hockey as a forward with the Canucks' Alex Burrows as his favorite player. Ahac even wore the No. 14 of his idol.

Ahac switched to defense after fracturing his kneecap and never returned to the front line. He went from No. 8 to 2 to his current 4.

"When my knee was all healed, I switched to defense just because I thought it was easier to start off with less skating," he said. "I kind of fell in love with the position after that."

Time Flies

Plans to decrease the length of games had been discussed before the pandemic led to empty arenas for Big Ten games, but the timing was right to implement the measures and they are working.

The two intermissions have each been reduced by three minutes to 12 and two of the three media timeouts have been eliminated in each period, saving another combined eight minutes.

Ohio State averaged 2:07 for its first 12 games whereas the fastest game last season was 2:10. The Buckeyes this season have already played in 1:56 and 1:59 with the two longest games (2:20 and 2:16) having gone to overtime.

In the 2019-20 season the Buckeyes twice had overtime/shootout games extend to 2:55. There were also games that lasted 2:40 and 2:37.

The Big Ten said before the season that the moves were made to minimize the opportunity for COVID-19 transmission, but trying to fit a game within a two-hour television window had long been discussed.

It will be interesting to see if the experiment continues when fans attend, likely not until next season. The media timeouts are used for promotions and fan interactions while shorter intermissions reduce time to sell concessions without missing game action.

Icer Of The Month

Freshman Travis Treloar is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for the combined games in November and December. He had nine points (three goals and six assists) in 10 games.

Treloar's first career point came in his third game when he scored against Michigan State on Nov. 28. He recorded two points (goal and assist) the next night against the Spartans, as well as Dec. 3 (goal and assist) against Wisconsin and a pair of assists in the Dec. 13 game versus Notre Dame.

Next

Ohio State plays at Michigan State on Jan. 23-24 before home games vs. Minnesota (Jan. 29-30) and Notre Dame (Feb. 5-6).

For a recap of Ohio State's series against Penn State and Michigan on Jan. 8-9 and Jan. 15-16, respectively, go to BSB's BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Michigan Extends Harbaugh Through 2025

Jim Harbaugh signed a contract extension to remain Michigan's head football coach through the 2025 season.

"I continue to believe that Jim is the right man to lead our program in pursuit of Big Ten and CFP championships," said Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel. "Our program didn't achieve at a level that anyone expected this year, but I know those setbacks will drive the coaches, players and staff moving forward. Jim is a tireless worker and competitor. Following the completion of the season we talked for many hours on what it will take for Jim to lead and get us back on the right trajectory."

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

Harbaugh, who is 49-22 in six seasons at Michigan, signed a contract that will pay him a base salary of \$4 million in 2021, which will increase to \$4.426 million in 2025.

The former Wolverine quarterback can earn a maximum bonus of \$3.475 million in each year of the contract, including \$1 million bonuses for winning the Big Ten championship and the College Football Playoff national championship, as well as \$500,000 bonuses for winning the Big Ten East Division and reaching the CFP.

If Michigan were to fire Harbaugh in 2021, it would owe him \$4 million. That guarantee decreased by \$1 million each subsequent year of the contract. Harbaugh's buyout to leave Michigan begins at \$2 million in 2021 and drops by half a million in each subsequent year until 2025.

"Over the past few weeks, Warde and I had discussions that have been honest, open, insightful and constructive in moving our football program forward - discussions that I look forward to continuing over the months and years ahead," Harbaugh said. "We have a plan. There is work to be done and challenges to be addressed. These challenges are being addressed as we continue to strive for excellence in the classroom and championships on the field, a message that I hope is noted in the language of our agreed-upon contract."

Prior to the extension, Harbaugh had one year left on his initial contract at Michigan, which paid him more than \$8 million in 2020.

The Maize and Blue finished the 2020 season at 2-4 after canceling their final three games because of COVID-19 concerns within the program.

After finishing 7-6 and 5-7 in Brady Hoke's final two seasons at the helm, Michigan won at least eight games in Harbaugh's first five seasons and finished in the top 18 four of those years. However, Harbaugh and Co. have failed to beat archrival Ohio State and have dropped four straight bowl games.

Former U-M DC Joins Arizona

Following his firing at Michigan,

defensive coordinator Don Brown accepted the same role at Arizona.

Wildcats head coach Jedd Fisch and Brown worked together in Ann Arbor in 2016 as assistants under Harbaugh. Brown, who is known as Dr. Blitz, arrived at Michigan in 2016 with an aggressive defensive scheme that emphasized man-to-man coverage principles and attacking blitzes.

The Maize and Blue struggled defensively throughout. Michigan ranked No. 95 in scoring defense at 34.5 points allowed per game and No. 89 in total defense at 434.3 yards allowed per game this past season.

Those numbers are a significant downgrade from the previous four years of Brown's tenure when the Wolverine defense finished in the top 25 nationally in scoring defense and the top 11 in total defense each year, including three straight years in the top three.

Brown joined Michigan from Boston College following the 2015 season and helped turn the program's defensive identity around instantly. The Wolverines' 2016 defense was particularly elite, ranking first nationally in total defense with 261.8 yards allowed per game and second in scoring defense, allowing 14.1 points.

The 2017 defense was similarly special, allowing 271.0 yards per game to rank third nationally and 18.8 points per game, which was No. 13 in the FBS.

Despite the success of Michigan's defense under Brown, his tenure was blemished by his unit's struggles against Ohio State.

In 2018, the Wolverines brought the nation's No. 1 defense to Columbus with a legitimate chance to make the CFP, but they left with a 62-39 season-crushing defeat where they surrendered 567 yards. Michigan still finished second in the country in total defense at 275.2 yards allowed per game and No. 16 in scoring defense at 19.4 points allowed.

The following year signaled the beginning of the end for Brown's time in Ann Arbor. His defense gave up 20.7 points

per game to rank No. 25 nationally and 307.2 yards per game to rank No. 11, but a 56-27 loss to the Buckeyes where the Wolverine defense afforded 577 yards condemned a decent 2019 season.

Brown was the eighth-highest paid

assistant coach in the country, earning \$1.7 million (\$1.1 million in base salary and \$600,000 from a retention bonus that was earned April 1), according to USA

Continued On Page 42



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Big Ten Programs Active In NCAA Transfer Portal

Continued From Page 41

Today Sports. The Spencer, Mass., native was the highest-paid assistant coach in the Big Ten.

PSU Adds RB Lovett, CB Dixon Via Portal

Penn State picked up a pair of transfers early in the offseason, adding former Baylor running back John Lovett and former South Carolina cornerback John Dixon.

When Lovett was coming out of high school as a three-star prospect at Burlington (N.J.) Cherokee, the Nittany Lions were high on his list before he chose to play for the Bears. Now a grad transfer, Lovett is excited to see what Happy Valley has to offer.

"I was probably going to play in the Big Ten (out of high school) until Coach (Matt) Rhule got the job at Baylor and I came down to Baylor," Lovett said.

"Something clicked at Baylor and it felt right, but I am still glad Penn State recruited me when I hit the transfer portal. Penn State was high on my list, and I always liked Penn State.

"To me, there are three top schools in college football for running backs. I would say Alabama, Georgia and Penn State. I would say those are the top three schools right now."

Lovett was solid in Waco, totaling 1,803 yards and 17 touchdowns on 355 carries, adding 29 catches for 183 yards and one touchdown as a pass-catcher in four seasons with the Bears.

Dixon played in 10 games for the Gamecocks in 2020, including eight starts, tallying 34 tackles (28 solo), five pass breakups and one fumble recovery. As a true freshman in 2019, the Tampa, Fla., native notched three tackles (two solo), one tackle for loss (TFL) and one interception.

Dixon entered the transfer portal

following the firing of Will Muschamp as South Carolina's head coach. As a three-star recruit out of Tampa (Fla.) Chamberlain, Dixon was a target for Penn State and was recruited by current cornerbacks coach Terry Smith, and he has a connection through childhood friend Jordan Miner.

Miner signed with the Nittany Lions in 2018 but was unable to suit up for his college career due to the discovery of a heart condition.

Dixon took an official visit to Happy Valley as a prospect for Penn State's White Out game against Ohio State in 2018, which was a heartbreaking 27-26 loss for the Lions.

Head coach James Franklin entered the offseason with his eyes on the transfer portal, hoping to add talented depth at a few positions.

"When you talk about transfers, we're going to be looking at defensive ends, we're going to be looking at defensive backs from a transfer perspective or in the second recruiting cycle," Franklin said during the early signing period. "Those are areas that we're going to be focused on. So, any high school coaches or prospects that may be listening to this, those positions, as well as maybe some others, are going to be very, very important for us moving forward."

Nebraska Adds RB Stepp, WR Toure By Way Of Portal

Former Southern Cal tailback Markese Stepp transferred to Nebraska, bolstering the Husker running back room.

Stepp took 45 carries for 165 yards (3.7 yards per carry) and three touchdowns as a third-year sophomore in 2020, adding three catches for 28 yards. The Trojans played only six games due to coronavirus pandemic restrictions and the Pac-12's shortened season. USC elected not to play in a bowl game following its 5-1 regular season.

In 2019, the 6-0, 235-pound Stepp ran the ball 48 times for 307 yards, averaging 6.4 yards per carry and adding three scores as a redshirt freshman.

In addition to Stepp, former Montana wide receiver Samori Toure decided to join the Husker offense as a transfer.

As a 6-3, 190-pound wideout, Toure put together a dominant junior campaign in the Big Sky, which is one of the FCS' best conferences, hauling in 87 catches for 1,495 yards and 13 touchdowns in 2019.

Within an hour of entering the transfer portal, Toure heard from Florida State, Miami (Fla.), home-state Oregon

and many more notable FBS programs.

"I was really happy to see that other people recognize that I can play at that level," Toure said. "I was really grateful to have all those schools reach out to me."

He joined the Huskers as a graduate transfer.

Purdue Picks Up South Carolina DL Anderson

Purdue added former South Carolina defensive lineman Joseph Anderson through the transfer portal.

A few days after announcing he would leave the Gamecocks, the redshirt freshman dropped the news of his new destination in West Lafayette, Ind.

"This one for you pops! I would like to thank the USC staff and my brothers that I went to battle with. With long prayers and thoughts, me and my family have decided that I should transfer and play for Purdue University," Anderson posted on Twitter.

Anderson, who was the No. 134 overall prospect and No. 8 strongside defensive end in 2019, became the fifth former Gamecock to transfer in the past month.

As a four-star prospect out of Murfreesboro (Tenn.) Oakland, Anderson was the third highest-rated player in South Carolina's 2019 class. The highly touted prospect did not make much of an impact in Columbia, S.C., though, posting three tackles in four games in 2020 after redshirting as a freshman.

Former U-M OL Carpenter Transfers To Indiana

Former Michigan offensive lineman Zach Carpenter chose to stay in the Big Ten, transferring to Indiana.

Carpenter, a sophomore, made his collegiate debut in 2020 when he came into the game at center against Minnesota in the Wolverines' season opener on Oct. 24. The Cincinnati Moeller product made his first career start against Rutgers on Nov. 21.

The former three-star prospect primarily contributed on special teams. As a recruit, he was the No. 33 offensive guard in the country and No. 20 overall prospect in Ohio.

Indiana originally recruited Carpenter out of high school, as did Clemson, Oregon, Cincinnati, Minnesota, Iowa State, Arkansas and Ole Miss.

Since Hoosier center Harry Crider declared for the NFL draft, Carpenter is expected to have a strong chance at starting in the middle in Bloomington.

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Standout DE Hutchinson Returns To Michigan

Michigan defensive end Aidan Hutchinson will forgo the NFL draft for now and return to play another season for the Wolverines.

Hutchinson, a junior, suffered a leg injury in Michigan's third game of the season against Indiana which required season-ending surgery. He debated declaring for the draft but felt like he had unfinished business.

"I talked about this with my family and we just came up with the decision that it would be best for me to return for the team's interest and my interest," Hutchinson said. "I really thought this team needs me this next season, I'm going to do everything I can to get this team back to where it needs to be. That's my priority No. 1."

In the 2020 season opener against Minnesota, Hutchinson led the Maize and Blue defensive line with eight tackles (five solo). He posted seven tackles (four solo) in the second game against Michigan State, but it ended up being his final full game.

As a sophomore in 2019, Hutchinson had a great year, recording 68 tackles (34 solo), 10 tackles for loss, 4½ sacks, two forced fumbles and six pass breakups.

"I feel like my leadership, I wanted to come back to help this team and it was my responsibility to come back," Hutchinson said. "Being injured, I didn't get a chance to get a lot of film. I figured coming back, kill it next year, I think that will help my draft stock. I thought from a team aspect and a personal aspect this was the best decision for me to make."

Thanks to the NCAA granting each student-athlete an extra year of eligibility due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Hutchinson will have two years of eligibility remaining.

His return is important for a struggling Wolverine defense, which will lose projected first-round pick Kwity Paye, who is the third-ranked defensive end in the draft, according to ESPN's Mel Kiper.

Nebraska WR Robinson Transfers To Kentucky

Former Nebraska wide receiver Wan'Dale Robinson transferred to Kentucky just four days after entering the transfer portal.

The move was not a surprise from the Frankfort, Ky., native, who said he wants to be closer to his mother, who was hospitalized after a COVID-19 diagnosis late last year.

Also, Robinson was verbally committed to the Wildcats as a four-star high school prospect before flipping to the Huskers five weeks later.

At Nebraska, Robinson set school records for the most catches (40) and receiving yards (453) by a true freshman on his way to earning honorable-mention All-Big Ten honors from the media. He added 340 rushing yards and three scores, as well as 236 yards on 11 kick returns to earn second-team All-American accolades.

As a sophomore, Robinson led the Huskers with 51 receptions and 461 receiving yards while reeling in one touchdown. The versatile athlete also had 240 rushing yards and one score.

U-W QB Coan Chooses Notre Dame

Former Wisconsin starting quarter-

back Jack Coan has transferred to Notre Dame.

Coan, a senior, did not play for the Badgers in 2020 after breaking his foot in preseason practice, giving way to redshirt freshman Graham Mertz. Notre Dame expects Coan to replace Ian Book as its starting signal caller, as Book is expected to move on.

For the Badgers in 2019, Coan threw for 2,727 yards and 18 touchdowns to five interceptions while completing 69.6 percent of his passes and leading the Badgers to a 10-4 record and Rose Bowl appearance following a 34-21 loss to Ohio State in the Big Ten title game.

"Being at Wisconsin has been the experience of a lifetime that I will cherish forever," Coan wrote. "Thank you to my teammates, coaches, athletic trainers, and support staff who have helped me in my time here. I have officially decided to enter the transfer portal. While this decision was not easy, I know it's the right one for my family and I. Thank you for everything Wisconsin! I'll love you forever!"

Notre Dame and Wisconsin are scheduled to face off in the 2021 season on Sept. 25 at Soldier Field in Chicago.

Iowa's Music City Bowl Matchup Canceled

Iowa won its final six games after a 0-2 start and had its eyes set on a matchup with Missouri in the Music City Bowl. However, issues with COVID-19 within the Tigers' program prompted a cancellation, one of 17 bowl games canceled.

"On behalf of our whole team, it's just extremely disappointing to end the season this way," Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz said. "This is two games in a row now where we just haven't been able to get to the finish line. That's certainly disappointing. I feel terrible for our players, first and foremost.

"I can't say enough about the group that we've been able to work with this year. It's just been a remarkable group of players, remarkable young people."

Iowa made it through the entire regular season without having a game canceled but lost its Big Ten Conference Champions Week game against Michigan because of coronavirus issues within the Wolverines' program before losing its bowl game.

Wildcat Defense Helps Send Hankwitz Out With 400th Win

Northwestern ended an excellent 2020 season with the program's fourth-straight bowl victory, a 35-19 win over Auburn in the VRBO Citrus Bowl.

The win marked the 400th career win for defensive coordinator Mike Hankwitz, who announced he was retiring at the end of the campaign. In his final outing, Hankwitz's defense played brilliantly against the Tigers.

Fifth-year senior linebacker Paddy Fisher stood out in the Wildcats' 16-point bowl win, leading all players with 12 total tackles to bring his career total to 404 tackles, marking the most of any active FBS player. He is the sixth player in program history to reach at least 400 tackles and the first since Wildcat linebackers coach Tim McGarigle, who is the FBS' leader in career tackles with 545.

Northwestern's 16-point margin of victory was its largest ever in a bowl game, as well as the largest against an SEC school in program history. The Wildcats racked up 457 yards, and quarterback

Peyton Ramsey threw for 291 yards and three touchdowns.

Hoosiers Fall To Ole Miss

Indiana fell to Ole Miss, 26-20, in the Outback Bowl. Junior running back Stevie Scott led the Hoosiers with 19 carries for 99 yards and both of their touchdowns in the six-point loss to the Tigers.

Third-year sophomore quarterback Jack Tuttle, who had taken over for an injured Michael Penix earlier in the season, battled through a separated shoulder to throw for 201 yards, no touchdowns and one interception on 26-for-45 passing.

"I'm disappointed for our players," head coach Tom Allen said. "They've been through so much. What an amazing season it's been in so many ways. They've given so much, worked so hard. I'm heartbroken for them they weren't able to finish."

Badgers Best Demon Deacons

Wisconsin rallied in the second half to defeat Wake Forest, 42-28, in the Duke's Mayo Bowl.

Redshirt freshman quarterback Graham Mertz accounted for three touchdowns and the Badgers converted four second-half interceptions into 21 points to top the Demon Deacons.

Mertz passed for 130 yards and scored the first two rushing touchdowns of his career. The win gave Wisconsin a 4-3 final ledger, securing the program's 19th consecutive season with a winning record, which is the third-longest streak among FBS teams.

Senior linebacker Jack Sanborn

notched 11 tackles and an interception to take home MVP honors.

Many B1G Standouts Declare For NFL Draft

Following the end of the season, many Big Ten standouts decided to forgo their remaining eligibility to declare for the 2021 NFL draft.

Penn State lost defensive end Jayson Oweh and tight end Pat Freiermuth, while Illinois' linebacker Jake Hanson and guard Kendrick Green also opted to go pro.

Indiana defensive back Jamar Johnson announced his decision to turn his focus to the NFL as did his teammates Crider and Scott.

The conference's defensive player of the year, Iowa defensive tackle Daviyon Nixon, also chose to pursue a professional career.

Additionally, The Big Ten lost two top defensive backs in Northwestern's Greg Newsome and Michigan State's Shakur Brown.

Unlike their teammate Hutchinson, Michigan offensive lineman Jalen Mayfield and linebacker Cameron McGrone elected to go pro early.

The growing group of elite Big Ten players who declared for the NFL draft joined an already stellar list of names that had previously announced, including Purdue wide receiver Rondale Moore, Minnesota wideout Rashod Bateman, Penn State linebacker Micah Parsons, Northwestern offensive tackle Rashawn Slater, Wisconsin cornerback Rachad Wildgoose, and Michigan receiver Nico Collins and corner Ambry Thomas, all of whom opted out of the 2020 season at one point or another.

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Buckeyes Show Resilience During 2020 Season

The 2020 college football season was one that many people would like to forget, but I am not one of them. The lessons of life that the sport of football teaches you – such as fighting through disappointments, not getting discouraged when things look bleak, and staying together through hard times – were never more apparent than in 2020.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

The persistence of the Ohio State football team during the most uncertain times in the history of college football made one proud to be a Buckeye. The dream season didn't end like all of us hoped, but at least there was a season and the team fought and achieved at a very high level against all odds.

To make it to the national championship game with the limited number of competitions and under the most restrictive medical protocol ever is truly remarkable. Hopefully, the Buckeyes will never go through another season like this, but it cannot be disputed that everyone is tougher and more resilient because of it.

Biggest Surprise Of Season

The biggest surprise of 2020 was that the season was able to be played. On Aug. 11, Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren announced the Big Ten would not have a fall football season. Not only was this decision unpopular among coaches, players, parents and fans, but then he said the football season might be delayed until the spring, which was a completely ridiculous idea.

Ironically, during this same time, Warren's son, Powers, was playing for Mississippi State, a member school of the SEC. The SEC along with the ACC decided to keep a 10-game schedule with one nonconference opponent and nine conference games with the season starting Sept. 26. These two conferences

decided a short delay was better than no season at all while the other Power Five football conferences were in a state of limbo.

Finally, due to pressure from schools such as Ohio State, Penn State, Michigan and Nebraska, along with encouragement from Dr. Jim Borchers regarding COVID safety protocols, the Big Ten changed its original decision and the football season would start in late October. This decision excited the teams and fans, but the limited number of games put the Big Ten behind the eight ball in terms of their chances for a team to make it to the College Football Playoff.

The tough COVID playing standards and restrictions, along with teams needing to have played six games in order to make it in to the Big Ten Championship Game, gave conference football programs little confidence the season would actually be able to be completed.

Despite the odds, and after the conference rescinded the six-game requirement, the best team in the Big Ten, the Ohio State Buckeyes, would qualify for the championship game against Northwestern. The conference and the Buckeyes threaded a small needle in finishing the regular season despite some cancellations, and Ohio State had a chance to be selected as one of the four teams to make it into the playoffs.

Almost the entire season the Buckeyes had to play shorthanded and didn't know from game to game who would pass protocol in order to play. Once Ohio State was selected by the playoff committee to be one of the final four, sharp criticism was levied by teams like Clemson, Florida and Texas A&M that said the Buckeyes did not deserve to be there because of the limited number of games played.

This lack of respect shown to the Buckeyes was a blessing in disguise as they used it as extra motivation going into their first playoff game.

Unflappable Ryan Day

In just his second full season as the head football coach at Ohio State, Ryan Day has done more than just earn his stripes. Day has proved he is as competent as any other head coach in the country.

More important is the fact his players play the game with confidence, tenacity and enthusiasm. Day is a true strategist when it comes to putting an offensive game plan together. The college game and the pro game are closer than ever in terms of style and complexity.

The experience Day has had at both levels, despite his youthfulness, resonates in a way that sets him apart from most other college coaches. His teams are well prepared and focused going into each game. Day goes about his trade without seeking fanfare or praise, insisting it's "team" above all else. He expects his players to express such an unselfish attitude as well. Do not think for a moment that a fire doesn't burn inside Day despite his outward appearances and media interviews. He is a true competitor who sets high standards for himself, his staff and his players. He can raise his voice to whatever octave he needs to get his point across.

At the same time, he teaches the game of football like a professor teaches his students, and Day expects and demands everyone get an A in his class. In a season when there were many uncertainties week to week, day to day and practice to practice, the Buckeye head coach handled the situation masterfully.

No one was more disappointed than Day after the loss to Alabama, only his second

loss as a college head coach. Who knows how long Day will be the head football coach at Ohio State, but one thing for certain, he found the formula for success in the most difficult of times.

Season Offensive Analysis

Statistically the Buckeye offense had an outstanding season by finishing in the top 10 nationally in the categories of total yards per game and rushing yardage and 11th in points per game. The near 50-50 balance between run and pass yardage made it tough for opposing defenses to scheme against the Buckeyes.

Players that were supposed to play well did exactly that this season. Justin Fields had another superb year with both his arm and legs and, not surprisingly, was the most dynamic player on the team. His talents, ability to play hurt and leadership have been inspiring, and he will go down as one of the all-time great quarterbacks at Ohio State.

The Ohio State offensive line emerged as the absolute best line in the Big Ten and one of the very best in the country. Led by Wyatt Davis, Josh Myers and Thayer Munford, the offensive line powered through opposing defensive fronts in putting up 256.9 yards of rushing offense per game despite not knowing from game to game who would be able to play. No unit embodied the phrase "next man up" more than the offensive line.

Talent at the wide receiver position is nothing new at Ohio State, and 2020 was no exception.

Chris Olave's precise route running and sure hands along with Garrett Wilson's speed and versatility made the Buckeye passing attack as effective as the running game. Add the tight end position to this group, and you saw possibly the best duo of big-play-making receivers, ever, at Ohio State.

The development of Trey Sermon at running back was exciting to watch. He continued to get better and more confident with each game, and his running abilities along with his talents catching the ball out of the backfield made him a huge scoring threat to defenses. It is tough to imagine how much better he would have been with a few more games under his belt. Time and COVID were his two greatest detractors. Despite getting hurt on the first play of the national championship game, his stock as a quality running back went up this season.

Season Defensive Analysis

As steady as the Buckeye offense was this season, the defense was much less consistent in terms of performance. Do not get me wrong, the Buckeye defense was one of the nation's best in terms of stopping the run. The experienced linebacking corps and physical defensive front displayed the ability to shut down opposing running attacks in giving up less than 100 yards per game on the ground. The stout Buckeye front seven helped Ohio State finish sixth in the nation against the run (97.6 yards per game).

The look of the Buckeye pass rush was different in several ways from the last few years. There was no one-man show at the defensive end position. There were no Bosa brothers or no Chase Young who stood out above the rest in terms of pressuring opposing quarterbacks.

The 2020 defensive line was more of a group presence in terms of pass rush. While pressure from the edges wasn't as apparent, the defensive push up the middle was very impressive. The constant and consistent

performances by interior defensive linemen Tommy Togiai and Haskell Garrett along with the steady play from defensive ends Jonathon Cooper, Tyreke Smith and Zach Harrison gave the Ohio State defense an effective, but not flashy, pass rush.

The secondary of 2020 was the least reliable unit on the defensive field. Depleted by graduation and exits to the NFL, the lack of experience was apparent from the outset of the season.

An array of mistakes, blown coverages and missed tackles in the open field plagued the defense secondary. Opposing offenses, through various schemes, were able to pick on this unit to the point of it not being in the top 100 of defenses in the country against the pass (No. 122, 304.0). There was improvement as the season progressed, and there is a promising future for the secondary with the much needed experience gained this year.

The brightest light on defense this season was the emergence of Justin Hilliard as a complete player at the linebacking position. His athleticism and physical play against both the run and the pass were impressive.

Like Sermon on offense, Hilliard improved weekly to the point of being one of the best players on the defensive side of the field. Hilliard was a guy who paid his dues on the taxi squad and earned the right to become a mainstay on the defense due to his hard work and dedication. He was fun to watch and a great inspiration and role model for players who are not immediate superstars.

The Tide Rolled

The Buckeyes had a chance to finish this strange and unique season as national champions if they could upset the powerful and talented Crimson Tide of Alabama.

The Bucks went into the game as underdogs by about the same number of points as they had been against Clemson. The night didn't start, or end, for the Scarlet and Gray as hoped. Togiai and Smith along with kicker Blake Haubeil became the latest victims of the coronavirus, which plagued the Buckeyes all season.

To make matters worse, running back Sermon went out on the first play with a collarbone injury, and All-American offensive guard Wyatt Davis would be lost during the game as well. Just as it had been all season, the deck seemed stacked against the Buckeyes from the outset, and this time they couldn't draw to an inside straight.

No. 1 Alabama was too strong and had many more skilled weapons than Ohio State. It was apparent from the first Crimson Tide offensive possession that the Buckeye defense was going to have trouble stopping the powerful Alabama offensive unit that had three of the top five Heisman Trophy candidates, including Heisman winner DeVonta Smith, on it.

The speed and athleticism of their receivers and running backs along with the arm of quarterback Mac Jones were superior to an Ohio State defense that didn't have the experience or talent to slow down the Crimson Tide scoring machine. Alabama was the better team and deserved to win, and Nick Saban earned another national championship along with the victory. Saban surpassed legendary coach Paul "Bear" Bryant in that category with his seventh title.

The proud Buckeyes deserved to be there, but Alabama deserved the title. Hopefully, the Buckeyes will be back to the national championship soon, with a much different outcome and under normal circumstances.



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The Ups And Downs Of A Turbulent Season

The roller-coaster ride is over for the College Football Playoff and a most unusual season.

Some parting thoughts:

The Good: Ohio State was the nation's second-best team. That's not as good as No. 1, but it's a lot better than being one of the more than 100 teams sitting at home on championship night. Ask fans of Penn State, Michigan, Georgia, even Clemson and Notre Dame, and I'm sure they would have preferred their team

his job.

The Funny: Hearing the crowd's chants of "Dabo, Dabo" mocking Clemson coach Dabo Swinney (we'll just call him No. 11 from here on out) after Ohio State clearly demonstrated on the field that the Buckeyes deserved to be ranked second, not 11th as No. 11 said in filling out his pre-playoff ballot. This chant wouldn't have been worth a laugh if it were not who made up the limited Buckeye crowd at the Sugar Bowl – mostly family and close friends of Buckeye players and coaches. I would have loved to be able to listen in on some of those dinner-table discussions. Weaker than his pick was No. 11's explanation that OSU didn't play enough games, ignoring the fact the OSU did play enough games as determined ahead of time by the playoff rules.

The Bad: Losing running back Trey Sermon after just one carry diminished the Buckeyes' chances right off the bat against Alabama. He was running angry – by that I mean with strong determination – over the previous two games. He had the ability to turn short gains into longer ones. Not only did that threat drop off when OSU had to go to the season's original starter, Master Teague, but it depleted the depth at the position. When Teague rested, Marcus Crowley was pushed into duty. Crowley did show spurts of potential a season ago, but his six carries against Alabama were the only times he ran the football this season.

The Good: Ryan Day's 23-2 record all-time, which of course has all been at Ohio State. That's an incredible start to a head-coaching career.

The Amazing: A 52-2 record. That's the combined college record for Justin Fields and Trevor Lawrence when they are not playing against each other. The lone losses? The last two national championship games. Neither has lost during the regular season.

Overall, Lawrence is 34-2 as a starter, losing to Fields and Ohio State in this season's national semifinal and to Joe Burrow and LSU in the previous season's national championship game. Fields is 20-2, losing to Lawrence and Clemson in the 2019 semifinal and to Alabama in this season's title game.

The Bad: Watching this season's playoffs brought back bad memories of the missed opportunity a season ago. The 2019 team was packed with more stars and was a better football team – taking nothing away from what the 2020 team accomplished. In fact, the 2019 team could be compared to the talent displayed by Alabama this season. But injuries, bad calls by the officials and bad luck – all rolled together – prevented that better OSU team from advancing to the national championship game.

The Good: What fun it was to see the talent displayed throughout the season by Ohio State's two wideouts. In just seven games, Chris Olave wound up with 50 receptions for 729 yards and seven TDs, and Garrett Wilson had 43 catches for 723 yards and six touchdowns.

The Very Good: Justin Fields, I would argue, is the best quarterback in Ohio State history. I base that on what I've seen on the field and what the numbers say. I can't comment on Rex Kern or anyone earlier than

Kern because my memory only goes back to the days of Cornelius Greene in the mid-1970s. Until now, I would have argued for Art Schlichter, the fourth player taken overall in the 1982 NFL draft, a spot ahead of Jim McMahon and six picks ahead of Marcus Allen. But even in adjusting for the different eras, I believe Fields tops Schlichter.

The Question: Is it too early for Fields to go pro? It's difficult to argue about the guaranteed money. There are millions upon millions waiting for him somewhere high in the draft. Possibly, there could be even more cash if he waited and moved up higher in the draft in another year. But is he ready to make the best of his NFL opportunity, leading to a long career and multiple huge contracts?

The last three No. 1 overall picks are all doing well in the NFL but spent five years (Joe Burrow), four years (Kyler Murray) and five years (Baker Mayfield) in college.

True, Clemson's Lawrence, like Fields, is just three years removed from high school. But he's started 36 games to Fields' 22.

Or look at it this way. Fields has thrown 618 college passes in prepping for the pros. Lawrence has thrown 1,138 passes. Burrow and Mayfield threw 945 and 1,497 passes, respectively, at the college level.

Meh: Urban Meyer's hiring as the head coach for Jacksonville. Good for Meyer, who is the biggest reason that Ohio State is at or near the top of the college football world. But as a follower of sports in Ohio, not much to get excited about one way or the other about his move to the NFL. I'm more interested in who will be Ohio State's quarterback in 2021.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

to make it as far as Ohio State did.

The Bad: It's too bad the Buckeyes limped into the title game with a team depleted by COVID-19. Would a Buckeyes' team at full strength have beaten Alabama? Likely not. But such a team may have been more competitive and stuck around the game long enough to keep it within reach to pull off an upset.

The Good: Seeing Ohio's State's defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs doing snow angels with the confetti (in the place of snow) after the Sugar Bowl victory over Clemson. One of the reasons I found this special is that Coombs has been probably the most animated coach on the sidelines during both of his stints as an assistant for the Buckeyes. He clearly enjoys

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Buckeyes Should Feel No Shame In CFP Loss

They said it couldn't be done.

The voices that shouted how unsafe it was to play football this fall, the nattering nabobs of negativity in the sports media who were all but hoping that things fell apart – none of them thought there would even be a championship game.

And yet there was Ohio State, going head-to-head with Alabama for all the marbles.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Even if the result wasn't to the liking of Buckeye Nation, there should be some satisfaction that the season was able to reach its zenith, and that Ohio State was able to overcome mountains of adversity to make it to the championship stage.

Sure, a loss stings, especially when a team is so close to pulling off a championship. But it wouldn't be wrong to forgive this Ohio State bunch, which was once again operating at less than full strength against the juggernaut that was the 2020 Crimson Tide.

Beating down dopey Dabo Swinney and his Clemson team – especially after all of the nonsense he spouted in the lead-up to the Sugar Bowl – is just about enough to salve the wound of the title game loss.

Yes, there were moments of what-could-have-been for the Buckeyes.

What if Justin Fields connects with Garrett Wilson for a second-quarter touchdown instead of having to settle for a field goal and playing uphill the rest of the way? What if Ohio State had been more aggressive with blitz packages to throw Mac Jones off rhythm? What if the Buckeyes had doubled Heisman winner DeVonta Smith, at least slowed him down enough to where he wasn't the dominant player despite sitting out the second half? What if Trey Sermon doesn't go out with an injury on the first play?

All reasonable questions – ones that cannot be answered in the aftermath of the loss.

My only real gripe about the game was the fact that OSU was so stubborn on defense. Normally a good pressure team, the Buckeyes' front wasn't nearly effective enough at getting Jones off his spot and upsetting his timing. If your front can't generate pressure, you counter with blitzes. It worked once when Baron Browning smacked Jones and forced a fumble, which Ohio State turned into a tying touchdown early in the second quarter. But it didn't happen often enough, and that's largely because the Buckeyes stayed in a 4-4 look most of the night.

When a team is as lethal outside as Alabama is, wouldn't it have been better to employ a 4-2-5 scheme? You throw another coverage guy into the mix, and it would still allow you to have a safety underneath or as the primary blitzer, without giving up too much on the back end. But asking linebackers to cover Alabama's speed is a losing proposition – and that was never more evident than when Tuf Borland was helplessly chasing Smith after he got behind the second level of coverage. It bordered on comical, really. I don't blame Borland, as he was merely carrying out his assignment. I blame the defensive coaching staff, which wasn't able to adjust or thrive in the glare of

the brightest lights.

The loss of Sermon was also big, though not big enough to overshadow the defensive issues.

The way Sermon had been rolling, it's reasonable to assume that he could have played a large role in the Buckeyes grinding the clock and playing physical football against Alabama. Notre Dame had some success with that approach in the Rose Bowl, and keeping the Crimson Tide offense on the sideline is a wise move. Once Sermon went out, it was up to Master Teague to get the job done. While he had some success in the first half (and ended the night with a pair of touchdowns), he's not the freight train that Sermon proved to be. Outside of a 29-yard burst that set the Buckeyes up in Alabama's red zone on the drive that ended up being three points instead of seven, Teague's 14 other carries netted 36 yards. So the rushing attack was not as lethal as OSU had hoped it would be.

Now that the game is in the books, the wish-fors and missed chances are gone. It's time to turn the page to 2021, to the third chapter of the Ryan Day Era.

Will the Buckeyes finally break through and hoist the trophy? Will there be star power at quarterback with Fields off to the professional ranks? Will the season be more along the lines of a normal one, with fans and nonconference games? The answers to these questions and more will be answered starting in August.

Bright Future

No matter who plays quarterback for the Buckeyes next season, it will be a step down from Fields. Whether C.J. Stroud, Jack Miller or incoming frosh Kyle McCord, the face behind center will be a new one. That likely means Ohio State takes a step back next season – not large enough to lose the favorite's role in the Big Ten, but just big enough to be on the outside looking in at the College Football Playoff.

It's really important to go into a season with an established quarterback and a veteran offensive line. Alabama showed that, welcoming back four starters up front and Jones, who started four times in 2019 and understood the offensive system. Sure, it didn't hurt to have Najee Harris in the backfield and Smith as a receiving weapon. But cohesion along the offensive line and savvy quarterback play are the best ingredients for a run at a national championship.

Not only will OSU need to replace Fields, but it will also have to fill in two spots along the offensive line. Juniors Josh Myers and Wyatt Davis are both set to go to the NFL draft (though Davis had not announced his decision as of press time), leaving holes at center and right guard, respectively. On the miracle chance that both would have come back, the Buckeyes would have had the best returning offensive line in college football in 2021.

As it is, the group should still be formidable, especially with the return of senior left tackle Thayer Munford. One of the highest graded tackles in college football by Pro Football Focus, Munford brings tenacity and experience to the trenches. Harry Miller will likely slide over from left guard to center, where he could have a very bright future, while right tackle will be held down by Nicholas Petit-Frere. Like Munford, Petit-Frere was excellent in protection and could make a major leap into national consciousness next season.

That leaves both guard spots up for grabs,

and you have to think one of them will go to mauler Paris Johnson, who got his feet wet in 2020 and should be able to make a big-time impact next season. The other will be contested by the Jones boys, Matthew and Dawand. Both have played, so experience isn't a real concern.

Even if Chris Olave hadn't spurned the NFL for one more year, one position Buckeye fans don't have to worry about, it's receiver. There is an embarrassment of riches in that room, and Wilson looks to be the next colossal star – if he's not there already. The backfield will get some tweaking, too, as Sermon heads off after his fabulous late-season exploits. Teague returns, but to these eyes he's still a complementary back. Incoming frosh TreVeyon Henderson has the goods – at least on film – to seize the starting role and make a real impact on the ground game. A healthy Marcus Crowley should help depth, along with Miyon Williams, Steele Chambers and Evan Pryor, another highly touted incoming runner.

Defensively, the linebacking corps will be completely new, but there is ample depth at that spot. The concern is that little of it is proven.

The defensive front should once again be lethal, with Haskell Garrett returning to wreak havoc inside.

Pass rushing will once again be a committee approach, at least until someone emerges. Zach Harrison has the best shot at doing so, though Tyreke Smith could also loom large should he decide to come back for another season, too.

The secondary has some question marks but a lot of young, hungry talent, and it will not be a surprise if it is better in 2021. Shaun Wade's decision to turn pro was to be expected, though it certainly wouldn't have hurt him to come back for another year and embrace a return to slot corner, or even a safety spot. It's evident that Wade can't play on the outside, and nickel corners aren't typically drafted very high. But he could be going to the next level with a massive chip on his shoulder, and sometimes that's the only thing needed to get things rolling.

Sevyn Banks had his ups and downs at the other corner but by season's end was OSU's best cover man. A healthy Cam Brown could line up opposite, but you'd best believe that Lejond Cavazos will make his presence felt next year. At safety, Josh Proctor established himself as a big-time hitter, and while Marcus Williamson was a liability in coverage there is still a role for him when OSU goes to nickel or dime. The coaches were high on freshman Kourt Williams coming into the season, but an injury stopped him before he ever got started. Assuming a successful recovery, Williams will be right in the mix at safety, as will Lathan Ransom and Marcus Hooker.

Making The Leap

When the news came out about Urban Meyer taking the head-coaching gig for the Jacksonville Jaguars, there was a bit of surprise from this corner.

The NFL is a wholly different animal, and many a great college coach has crashed and burned at the next level – Nick Saban, Steve Spurrier and Lou Holtz among them. The Jimmy Johnsons and Pete Carrolls seem to be more exception than rule, but Meyer apparently relishes the challenge of taking the league's most moribund franchise and making it relevant for one of the few times in its history.

Meyer has always been about implementing a culture and being able to control things, and that seems to work well with college kids. Will older guys making millions of dollars be as receptive to hard-nosed coaching and pushback and challenging as the college guys are? That's one of the biggest questions, because if Meyer doesn't bond with his players and can't get them to buy in, then it won't matter how much talent is on hand. The Jags will continue along their path to nowhere.

There do seem to be things in Meyer's favor – Jacksonville has the top overall pick, a ton of salary cap room and a host of picks in the first four rounds. So it's quite possible that the bottom-of-the-barrel roster is transformed into one that can at the very least compete in 2021. The cherry on top would be Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, who, barring an upset of Buster Douglas-like proportions, is set to be the top overall selection. Lawrence has been one of the most touted players in college football since he stepped on to the field as a freshman, and he hasn't done anything to dissuade scouts from calling him the best quarterback prospect to come into the draft since Stanford's Andrew Luck.

Now, there will be some people who believe that Meyer's ties to Ohio State mean that he will pull a swerve and select Fields. Not gonna happen, folks.

For one thing, Lawrence is easily the top quarterback in the draft – heck, he's probably the top player, period. Fields may not be even the second-best signal-caller available, so for Meyer to go out on a limb and take him just because of some "allegiance" to Ohio State would be ludicrous. The job of a coach is to help his team win as many games as possible. You do that with talent, and Lawrence has the highest amount of that. He's the choice.

There was some worry that Meyer would pillage the Ohio State coaching staff for his crew in Jacksonville, but other than director of player development Ryan Stamer – who played for Meyer at Florida and who is a Jacksonville native – the current assistants appear to be safe. Recruiting director Mark Pantoni and strength coach Mickey Marotti were the names most associated with Meyer, but both appear to be staying in Columbus. That will help with continuity, and means that Day won't have to throw himself into a wholesale search for assistants in the off-season.

Ohio's NFL allegiance is currently behind the Cleveland Browns, but it wouldn't be surprising to see a whole lot of teal and gold apparel in the Columbus area in coming weeks and months. Most Ohio State fans seem pleased that Meyer is back in the game, and a healthy number will likely follow the Jaguars' exploits in 2021 and beyond.

Speaking of healthy – maybe the biggest question is how Meyer will deal with constant losing. On the rare occasion that Ohio State dropped a game on Meyer's watch, it was evident how much it bothered him. The losses are more frequent in the NFL, especially for the Jags, who went 1-15 this season. Even if Lawrence can make them competitive, they are probably looking at a ceiling of six victories next year. That means 10 setbacks. Can Meyer handle that? And will the sting of losses be lessened when he figures out that an 8-8 team can make it to the postseason?

All of those things – along with how well he adapts to the pro game – bear watching.

Little Solace For OSU In Losing To Better Team

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

You cover enough Ohio State football over 40-plus years and games start to remind you of other games. Such was the case for me as the Buckeyes played in the College Football Playoff.

After the Buckeyes thoroughly dominated 40-plus year nemesis Clemson, 49-28, for one of my more satisfying wins watching Ohio State, I thought back to 2014. When the Buckeyes scored a convincing win over Alabama in the CFP semifinals, I remember thinking that even if OSU lost to Oregon in the final I would be happy, because the Buckeyes had proved they belonged on the big stage with their victory over the Crimson Tide, the *crème de la crème* then, as they are still now.

I never got to find out if I would really feel that way, because the Buckeyes easily dispatched the Ducks, 42-20, to win the 2014 national championship.

When the Buckeyes knocked off the Tigers on Jan. 1, I felt the same way. They had finally gotten the Clemson monkey off their backs, and I felt like I could live with it if they went on to lose to the Tide.

As it turned out, I didn't do so well when Alabama ended up crushing the Buckeyes, 52-24. Maybe if Ohio State had played the Crimson Tide a little tougher, I would not have felt so bad about the loss. But I felt pretty bad.

My thought as I watched the championship game unfold was, "where did that defense that defeated Clemson come from" and "where did it go in the 10 days between the semifinal victory and the game with Alabama?"

I had been worried about the defense all season. In fairness to the Buckeye stop troops, their development had been stunted by the fits and starts of the season caused by the pandemic. I figured that if Ohio State were to finally defeat the Tigers, it would be by matching them in an offensive shootout. The Buckeyes upheld their end of that bargain by posting 49 points, but the Ohio State defense came out of seemingly nowhere to hold the mighty Tigers to just 28.

True, Clemson's "generational" quarterback Trevor Lawrence passed for 400 yards, but the Buckeyes defense kept the plays in front of them and it took Lawrence 48 passes to reach that number, with a long of only 29. Meanwhile, the Buckeyes were holding the Tiger ground game to just 44 yards, Lawrence being credited with a net of negative-8.

On the other hand, Lawrence's counterpart, Justin Fields, was having a game for the ages despite playing through a painful injury that would have surely sidelined mere mortals. Fields was 22 of 28 for 385 yards and six TD passes, two to Chris Olave as that duo made up for their miscommunication at the end of the game with Clemson the previous year that had doomed the Buckeyes.

The OSU passing attack was complemented by Trey Sermon, who kept up his postseason run with 193 yards on 31 carries, easily outdueling Clemson's Travis Etienne, who gained only 32 yards on 10 tries. Both backs helped their teams' passing attack, with Sermon grabbing four Fields' passes for 61 yards and Etienne catching four from Lawrence for 64.

Unfortunately, Sermon was knocked out of the national championship game after gaining 2 yards on the first play from scrimmage.

After Alabama demolished the Buckeyes, many asked me if I thought the game would have been different if Ohio State had the services of Sermon.

"I'm not so sure," I would tell them. "Sermon can't play or coach defense."

And there's the rub. The defense that magically appeared against Clemson vanished just as quickly in the game against the Tide.

Again, I was reminded of a Buckeye game from the past. This time it was the 40-35 Orange Bowl loss to – you guessed it – Clemson to cap off the 2013 season. As you may recall, in that game Tiger receiver Sammy Watkins set Orange Bowl records with 16 receptions for 227 yards.

Fast-forward to this season, and here is Heisman Trophy winner DeVonta Smith running virtually unfettered through the Buckeye defense for 12 catches, 215 yards and three touchdowns in one half. As I watched him cut through the Buckeyes like the proverbial warm knife through butter, I couldn't help but recall words that I knew I had written in this space about Watkins, seven years previously.

A quick check of the BSB archives found my recollection to be accurate.

"As he continued to rip through the Ohio State defense," I wrote in the Jan. 18, 2014, BSB, "I wished that the Buckeyes would just sell out to stop Watkins and make somebody else beat them."

Smith was finally stopped, but not by the Buckeyes. He was knocked out of the game for the bulk of the second half with a hand injury. Who knows how bad the carnage might have been if he had played the whole game? I'm not sure selling out to stop Smith would have made a difference in the game's outcome. John Metchie and Najee Harris, out of the backfield, both had success receiving against the Buckeye defense, as did a gimpy Jaylen Waddle.

Tide quarterback Mac Jones was 11 of 15 in the second half for 122 yards and a score without Smith. Alabama, which took a 35-17 lead into the locker room at the intermission, was perfectly willing to eat up clock in the second half. The Tide ran 25 of their 38 rushing plays in the second half, good for 110 of their 157 rushing yards.

In fact, I think one of the key sequences of the game came when Alabama took the second-half kickoff and mounted a 16-play drive that burned just shy of half the third-quarter clock. The march resulted in only a field goal but left the Buckeyes down three touchdowns with that much less time to make up the difference.

And let's face it. The Buckeye offensive triumvirate of coaches Ryan Day and Kevin Wilson and quarterback Fields weren't having their best of days.

Fields was just 17 of 33 for 194 yards, though he added 67 yards on six carries. After watching the Day/Wilson combo dazzle us on offense for the last two seasons, it was Alabama offense coordinator Steve Sarkisian who was doing the dazzling this time around. The Crimson Tide outgained the Buckeyes 621-341, with 69 of those Buckeye yards coming on a 17-play OSU drive in the fourth quarter that resulted in no points when Ohio State, trailing 52-24, needed to strike quickly if it had any vague hope of winning the game.

Someone suggested on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum that the Ohio State staff seemed lost after losing Sermon. That notion, again, harkened back to a past game, this time the national championship game during the 2006 season, when the Buckeyes lost Ted Ginn Jr. on the opening kickoff, which he had returned for a touchdown. With Ginn out of the lineup, the high-powered Buckeyes gained just 82 total yards as they fell to Urban Meyer's Florida, 41-14.

To put the blame for the loss on the absence of Sermon is a little unfair to Master Teague, who gained 65 yards rushing on 15 carries (4.3 average) and scored a pair of touchdowns with a long of 29. He actually did as well or better on the ground than Harris, who gained 79 yards on 22 tries for just a 3.6-yard average and two scores with a long of 13.

Where Sermon might have made a difference and where Harris excelled was in the passing game. Harris caught seven passes for 79 yards and a score, while Teague had one catch for 1 yard.

I work on Saturdays, obviously, so I hadn't seen Alabama play this season. After watching Nick Saban's group dismantle the Buckeyes, I can honestly say that they were the better team. I'm not saying Ohio State couldn't beat Alabama. But they would have had to have brought their "A" game. Maybe even "A+," especially on defense. You know, like they brought against Clemson.

With the Buckeyes not beating Alabama, we don't have to go through that whole thing about having an asterisk attached to their national championship. I go back and forth on whether the 2020 crown would have made this team the Roger Maris of college football.

On the one hand, it would have been hard to recognize an Ohio State team that played only five regular-season games and did not face its archrival Michigan, the traditional gateway to the postseason, as national champions.

On the other hand, if a team had closed out the season by defeating Clemson and Alabama, back-to-back, it would have been hard not to.

A Tough Playoff

One person who did not have a good playoff was erstwhile Buckeye and ESPN broadcaster Kirk Herbstreit. First, he tested positive for COVID right before the playoffs and had to call the Ohio State-Clemson game from his home.

We're getting used to things like calling a big game from home in this COVID world and Herbstreit did fine, but I must ask: If you were a football fan who dropped down from another planet and heard Herbstreit call a Clemson game, who would you think was head coach of the Tigers – Dabo Swinney or Brent Venables? In the two playoff games with Clemson that I have heard Herby call in the past two seasons, it's "Venables, Venables, Venables," with rarely a mention of Swinney.

For the record, in those two playoff games, Venables' defenses have given up 516 and 639 yards to the Buckeyes. That's a 577.5-yard average. To put that figure into perspective, it would have ranked last in the nation this season by more than 50 yards.

Am I missing something? Even Kerry Coombs gave up only 444 against Clemson.

And speaking of Coombs, Herbstreit continually mispronounced his name during OSU's victory over Clemson and had a funky pronunciation of Haskell Garrett's first name. In the Alabama game, with injured All-America Buckeye lineman Wyatt Davis down on the ground for an extended period, Herby continually referred to the downed player as Antwan Jackson, who wears the same number on defense but was obviously not the All-American who plays offense. Herbstreit had plenty of time to make the correction and surely was being told in his ear that it wasn't Jackson, but just went on his merry way. A poster on our

BuckeyeSports.com live game thread insisted that Herbstreit also called Tommy Togia "Tony."

Everyone makes mistakes, me at the top of the list. But for someone at the pinnacle of his profession, Herbstreit should do better than that. Maybe he was feeling the effects of the virus. Seriously.

OSU Wins National Title!

Sadly, Ohio State did not win the title this season, but they were national champions in our 40th Anniversary season. We cap off this series, which chronicled the biggest games of each corresponding week or corresponding type of game in our previous 39 years of publishing looking at national titles of the BSB era. There were only two, 2002 and 2014, and we chose 2002 because it was OSU's first title in 34 years and because of the exciting nature of the entire season.

"We have always had the best damn band in the land," head coach Jim Tressel said after his Buckeyes upset Miami (Fla.), the Alabama of its day, 31-24 in double overtime. "Now we've got the best damn team in the land."

The Buckeye players understood the significance of the victory.

"I think we would have been remembered even if we had lost the national championship game," tight end Ben Hartsock said. "But we hung in and got the win here. I think we'll be one of the teams that people will always talk about. It is a new era of greatness at Ohio State. To be part of that is overwhelming."

Hartsock was right. Not only do people still talk about the 2002 Buckeyes, but the team kicked off an era of Buckeye greatness that continues today.

Letter-Writing Legend

It is with sadness that I report the passing on Jan. 10 of prolific and controversial BSB letter writer Gary Gerken. Gary was legendary for his negativity and his absolute hatred of John Cooper. But boy, he cranked out the letters. If Ohio State won a game 42-0, Gary wondered why they didn't win 52-0. And there was absolutely nothing that Coop could do right, especially when it came to beating Michigan.

In Gary's heyday, when I would go out to speak to alumni groups around the country and it came time for questions, invariably the first query was whether Gerken was real or I had just made him up. Let me say for the 100th time, I am not creative enough to make up someone like Gary, nor did I have time to write all those letters.

In recent years, he started having problems with his hands. For a while, he dictated letters to his son Fred, and then he stopped doing even that and then we stopped hearing from him. We presumed he had fallen into ill health (by his own admission he had suffered numerous concussions through the years), and we finally learned through a reader of his passing.

I spoke to Gary many times through the years and argued with him to the point of having to hang up on several occasions, and for those who still think he didn't exist, I actually met him a couple of times. The last time I saw him, we were amid a disagreement over a scrapbook that someone had put together for him with all his BSB letters. He had given the scrapbook to me as a gift and then, a few years later, he wanted it back. I accused him of being politically incorrect, which is ironic because one thing Gary was not was politically correct. I begrudgingly gave the scrapbook back, and that's the last I saw of him.

In his honor, we are reprinting one of his letters to the editor in our Fan Forum section.

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>



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention