

# Not What It Used To Be



**BSB'S 2021 RECRUITING WRAP-UP**

COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**JUST ANOTHER DAY** – Though traditionally viewed like a holiday, National Signing Day was rather uneventful for Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day, who had signed 21 players during the early signing period on Dec. 16.

## Ohio State, Ryan Day Have Another Drama-Free National Signing Day

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

One minute after 7 a.m. on Feb. 3, when recruits are allowed to start faxing their letters of intent to their school of choice, the Ohio State football program's social media accounts sent out a photo with the Looney Tunes' signature closing sequence, which prominently displays the phrase, "That's all, Folks!"

Thus marked the end of the second consecutive drama-free National Signing Day for the Buckeyes, who landed signatures from 21 players during the early signing period on Dec. 16-18 and then welcomed a school-record 15 of them to campus as early enrollees over the weekend of Jan. 22-24.

It wasn't entirely quiet on Feb. 3, as Ohio

State was among the final options for Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star linebacker Raesjon Davis, who committed to USC that morning. The only other player on the Buckeyes' radar, Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau, won't make his college decision until at least April, as he hopes to take visits this spring whether the NCAA relaxes its recruiting dead period or not.

"It's a very strange year," head coach Ryan Day said during his press conference that afternoon. "We're usually waiting in front of the fax machine. Instead of that, we just got done seeing (the early enrollees) in the weight room working out. Most of the class is already here, so this year is very, very different."

The list of early enrollees is star-studded and features five-stars such as Pickerington (Ohio) North defensive end Jack Sawyer; Steilacoom,

Wash., wide receiver Emeka Egbuka; Hopewell, Va., running back TreVeyon Henderson; and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep quarterback Kyle McCord, among others. But what makes the group so unique is that many of them had never met in person until they moved into their dorm rooms, while others – such as Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro four-star athlete Denzel Burke – had never even been to Columbus before last month.

"We've got 15 guys here and five or six guys that I had never met before in person, which is unbelievable," Day said. "It's the first time they've been on campus, so it's very, very unique."

"I think the thing that's amazing is we actually got to know their families and they got to know each other even better because we

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## A Win And A Loss

Alabama was clearly the best team in 2020. However, if Ohio State had at least a semi-competent secondary, the game might have been competitive.

In 2019, Ohio State gave up 156 passing yards per game. In 2020, the number was 304—a 95 percent increase. This placed Ohio State 122 out of 127 Football Bowl Subdivision teams.

DeVonta Smith, the country's best receiver, caught 12 balls for 215 yards in the first half alone. He was either uncovered or a much-slower linebacker attempted to stay with him.

Every year, all teams lose players to the NFL or graduation. We keep reading about how well Ohio State recruits, and they do. Is the problem with the secondary's lack of talent or coaching or both? It's Ryan Day's job to fix the problem, and if he doesn't make some necessary changes, 2021 could be a long year.

My first trip to the Horseshoe was in 1949. Over the years, I've enjoyed many great Ohio State victories. The recent Clemson game easily ranks in my top five for two reasons: As an underdog, Ohio State beat a very good team, and, by defeating their coach, Ohio State beat the "Mouth of the South."

**Jim Chesney**  
Bluffton, S.C.

## Smooth Transition

I have a few things I would like to share.

First, I wanted to say how much I enjoyed reading Coaches Corner in the Jan. 23 edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Bill Conley always seems to provide great perspective on the subjects he writes about. One of the truly great Buckeyes as a player, coach, recruiter and now reporter/analyst. I had the opportunity a few years ago to see Bill in person, where he relayed

a story about the recruitment of Ohio State great Eddie George. A memory I'll always cherish.

I have to admit that I was worried about the future of the football program when head coach Urban Meyer stepped down. I felt new head coach Ryan Day was too much of an unknown factor to be given the reins. I couldn't have been more wrong. Coach Day has demonstrated that he is an excellent recruiter and coach, but also a great representative of The Ohio State University.

Last item I have to write about. I've been following Buckeye football since 1968. I remember eating sauerkraut and pork on New Year's Day 1969 while watching the Rose Bowl victory over the vaunted Trojans of Southern Cal. In all the years that have passed since then, the Buckeyes have had great coaches and players, beginning with the legendary Woody Hayes, then Earle Bruce and John Cooper. When Jim Tressel became coach and quickly brought Buckeye Nation a national championship, I didn't think it could get much better. Then Meyer takes over and raises the bar even higher. Now we have Day, who has taken over the program seamlessly. It is my belief that we are enjoying the Golden Age of Buckeye football. I just hope that it continues for a long time to come.

**William Bates**  
Canal Winchester, Ohio

*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.*

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 35 Years Ago – 1986

After facing a number of issues on and off the court for much of the 1985-86 season, there was growing speculation that Ohio State head basketball coach Eldon Miller was sitting on an increasingly hot seat. Matters came to a head on Feb. 3, when Miller and OSU athletic director Rick Bay announced that Miller would be stepping down as coach at the end of the season, his tenth in Columbus.

"Early this morning, Coach Miller and I met and we agreed mutually that it was time to look for a new basketball coach for Ohio State University at the end of the current season," Bay said. "Coach Miller will continue as our head coach for the rest of the year. Our search process, which will be a national search, will begin as soon as possible."

Miller had more than his share of critics, many of whom pointed out that none of his teams had ever won a Big Ten championship, that he couldn't win the big games and that he continually failed to lure the state's top high school players to Ohio State.

### 30 Years Ago – 1991

Jimmy Jackson decided the only way to get out of his shooting slump was to keep shooting. That led him to making 8 of 17 field goals while scoring 22 points to lead the Buckeyes to a 66-59 defeat of Purdue at St. John Arena on Feb. 3.

"I wasn't about to stop shooting because I missed a few," Jackson said. "The key is if you can't hit the long shots, you need to step in and get some shorter ones and get a rhythm going."

The Buckeyes bounced back from their first defeat of the season, 75-61 at Michigan State on Jan. 31, and improved to 18-1 overall. They remained in a first-place tie with Indiana at 8-1 in the Big Ten.

"We don't have many guys like Jackson," Purdue head coach Gene Keady said. "Not many teams do. He's one of the top five players in the nation."

### 25 Years Ago – 1996

The men's basketball team pushed its record above .500 with a 63-55 defeat of visiting Wisconsin. Rick Yudt scored 20 points and Shaun Stonerook added 10 to lead the Buckeyes, who improved to 9-8 overall and 2-6 in the conference while breaking in five freshmen in the starting lineup.

"They're not going to grow up any quicker than I want them to," OSU head coach Randy Ayers said. "We just need to stay patient. I'm starting to learn that more than anyone."

The win ended a three-game losing streak that included a 77-58 loss to Michigan and served as a significant reprieve for the Buckeyes, with it coming fresh off a brutal road stretch that sent them to that .500 record.

### 20 Years Ago – 2001

New Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel was piecing together his first coaching staff in Columbus and secured hires at several key positions, including both coordinator spots. Running Tressel's offense would be Jim Bollman, who was returning to the college ranks after a stint with the Chicago Bears as a tight ends coach. He described his system as one designed for wins rather than a specific look.

"What do I like to do? If I had to put myself in one category, I am going to truly be a team guy," Bollman said. "Whatever it needs or takes for us to win, that's what we'll do."

On the other side of the ball, Tressel tabbed Michigan State defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio for the same role in Columbus. Dantonio previously worked as a graduate assistant for the Buckeyes in 1983-84.

"I think it's an opportunity of a lifetime to be back at Ohio State and be a coordinator here," Dantonio said. "If you're from Ohio, you basically bleed scarlet and gray. It's a great opportunity for me. My whole family's excited."

### 15 Years Ago – 2006

More than 100 former athletes who competed at Ohio State in women's sports prior to 1975 were honored Jan. 29 both before and at halftime of the

OSU-Illinois women's basketball game at Value City Arena. It was an honor long overdue. Several years prior, then women's Varsity "O" president Holly Cush decided to follow the lead of other schools by retroactively awarding varsity letters to any OSU woman athlete who competed before 1975—the year Title IX went into effect for university programs.

Before that, female athletes were not awarded letters at Ohio State.

### 10 Years Ago – 2011

The Ohio State men's basketball team continued its perfect start, extending its record to a spotless 24-0 overall mark and an 11-0 record in Big Ten play.

Fifth-year senior David Lighty said he thought the team had a similar personality to the 2006-07 team that made the Final Four and fell to Florida in the NCAA title game.

"With the players we have, everyone is team first and wants to win knowing that we have the opportunity in front of us to make it all the way to the national championship," he said. "But you've got to stay hungry. You can't get a big head and think you've arrived when you haven't yet."

Head coach Thad Matta said he tried to look for unselfish players on the recruiting trail but admitted that how everything pans out is often difficult to predict or control.

"We try to (look for personality types), but you just don't know what you're going to get a lot of times until you get through the rigors of practice," he said. "Every kid is different. I've tried to figure out recruiting, and there's no rhyme or reason as to why some guys are this or some guys are that. It's more challenging than that."

### Five Years Ago – 2016

Even the official Ohio State website made clear that head coach Urban Meyer had his eyes on one specific coach for the vacant offensive line coaching spot on his staff following Ed Warinner's move to the tight end coaching spot.

"There really was only one choice in Urban Meyer's mind as to who could replace Ed Warinner as coach of Ohio State's offensive linemen: Greg Studrawa," read the very first line of Studrawa's Ohio State bio.

The page went on to explain that Studrawa—a Fostoria, Ohio, native—was very familiar with his new boss, thanks to a two-year run as Meyer's offensive line coach while the current Buckeye head man was with Bowling Green. Outside of his direct ties to Ohio State, Studrawa also had early stops at Cincinnati and Wilmington College as well as Arkansas State. He spent a total of six years at Bowling Green, even after Meyer left, before taking over the offensive line at LSU in 2007, helping the Tigers top the Buckeyes in the national title game in his first season in Baton Rouge. His stay in Louisiana lasted seven seasons and included time spent as Les Miles' offensive coordinator. From there Studrawa moved on to Maryland for two seasons before being handpicked by Meyer to return to Columbus.

"I know how good of a coach he is," Meyer said soon after the hiring was announced. "There aren't many people I'd entrust our offensive line to after the job Coach Warinner has done, but Greg is one of them and I'm pleased to have him join our staff."

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### One Year Ago – 2020

Former Ohio State defensive end Alex Williams found a landing spot on Jan. 29, just a little over two weeks he entered the transfer portal, when he posted on Instagram that he would be heading to Vanderbilt.

"The Ohio State University has given me tools as a young man to grow, and I thank everyone who's been a part of said journey," Williams, who came to OSU from nearby Pickerington, said. "I've been here my entire life and grew up being in this position, but life has audibles."

Williams redshirted in 2018 and played in five games in 2019, recording eight tackles.

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## From The Message Board

**Ohio State had a rather uneventful National Signing Day since all 21 commits signed during the Early Signing Period, so we asked the readers on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff members, which one of those players they're most excited to see suit up for the Buckeyes. Here are some of the responses.**

"Definitely TreVeyon Henderson because I think he's got the speed and other attributes that we have been lacking at the running back position for the last few years."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"Henderson because he seems to be a rare player who can play from Day One. If Kyle McCord comes in and starts as a freshman, Katy bar the door considering the other quarterbacks on the roster."

– Terrier Buck

"Jack Sawyer looks like he is ready to follow the footsteps of the Bosa Brothers and Chase Young."

– AnthonyBuckeye

"Besides Henderson, I am excited to see how Evan Pryor does. He looks great and would be a good fit rotating with Henderson. I think he will come into his own in time. Also excited about Jesse

Mirco. Special teams shout-out."

– PeyoteBuck

"I wish I could argue for a more unorthodox answer, but I can't pick anyone but Henderson in good conscience. I have been telling anyone who would listen that Henderson will immediately start when he gets to Columbus, and it is because of how impressive he looks as a do-it-all running back. I haven't been covering recruiting all that long, but Henderson's highlight tape is among the most impressive that I have ever seen."

– Wyatt Crosher, BSB

"I've gone on record in saying Reid Carrico has a chance to be one of the best linebackers in Ohio State history. His work ethic is impressive, and he just has a knack for finding the football. The unit is in good hands for years to come."

– Andrew Lind, BSB

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 bsb@buckeyesports.com

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**PUBLISHER**  
 Frank Moskowitz

**ASSISTANT PUBLISHER**  
 Becky Roberts

**MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS**  
 Mark Rea

**PRINT PRODUCT COORDINATOR**  
 Andrew Lind

**ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS**  
 Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
 Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam  
 Kevin Dye Josh Winslow  
 Andrew Lind

**CONTRIBUTORS**  
 Wyatt Crosher Patrick Mayhorn  
 Bob Roehm David Breithaupt  
 Bill Conley Mark Schmetzer  
 Joe Dempsey Steve Siegfried  
 Rich Exner Jeff Svoboda  
 Mike Wachsman Craig Merz

**ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES**  
 Jan Jager Dave Tebay  
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## Ex-Buckeyes Big Part Of Super Bowl History

For only the 11th time in the history of the game, there were no former Ohio State players on the field when the Tampa Bay Buccaneers rolled to a 31-9 victory against the defending champion Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl LV.

Still, former Buckeyes are part of the rich tradition of the Super Bowl, dating back to the first game – then billed as the First AFL-NFL World Championship Game – played Jan. 15, 1967, at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Offensive tackle Jim Tyrer, who played for OSU from 1958-60, was a starting member of the Chiefs offensive line in that first Super Bowl, a game Kansas City lost to the Green Bay Packers, 35-10.

Three years later, Tyrer got his Super Bowl ring when the Chiefs took a 23-7 win against the Minnesota Vikings in Super Bowl IV. But while Tyrer was the first former Ohio State player to appear in a Super Bowl, he wasn't the first former Buckeye to win a Super Bowl title. That distinction belongs to someone we'll get to in a minute.

Mike Vrabel holds the distinction of owning the most Super Bowl championship rings among former Ohio State players. He won three titles in Super Bowls XXXVI, XXXVIII and XXXIX while playing for the New England Patriots.

Seven former Buckeyes have two Super Bowl rings each, the most recent being defensive back Malcolm Jenkins. He won his second ring as a member of the Philadelphia Eagles in Super Bowl LII, eight years after winning his first in Super Bowl XLIV while playing for the New Orleans Saints.

Ask the average Ohio State fan about the greatest Super Bowl performance by a former Buckeye, and chances are pretty good they will name Santonio Holmes and his MVP performance a dozen years ago in Super Bowl XLIII.

Holmes caught nine balls for 131 yards in that game, but it was his final catch of the game – an acrobatic, toe-tapping, ballet move in the corner of the end zone for a 6-yard touchdown reception with 35 seconds remaining – that gave the Pittsburgh Steelers a 27-23 victory against the Arizona Cardinals. Holmes remains the only former Ohio State player to earn Super Bowl MVP honors in the landmark game. But those of us of an older generation remember a Super Bowl contest during which a pair of former Buckeyes turned in superlative performances but finished as bridesmaids in the MVP voting to a much more media-friendly personality.

Super Bowl III is generally regarded as the game that forced the long-established NFL to merge with the upstart American Football League, a 16-7 victory by the swinging New York Jets and their flamboyant quarterback, "Broadway" Joe Namath, against the stodgy, old, black-high-tops-wearing Baltimore Colts. A few days before the game, while lying by the pool at the Galt Ocean Mile Hotel in Fort Lauderdale, Namath cavalierly told reporters his team was better than the Colts, that Baltimore's starting quarterback Earl Morrall would be no better than third-string on the Jets, and that his team would most definitely win the game.

"I guarantee it," Namath said with a smile. He then backed his braggadocio by leading his team to the victory and then walking off the field with his index finger wagging in the air.

But while Namath was hogging the pregame headlines and then taking home the game's MVP trophy, his performance in Super Bowl III was nothing spectacular. He completed 17 of 28 pass attempts (60.7 percent) for 206 yards, no touchdowns and no interceptions. He was also sacked twice. Meanwhile, Jets fullback Matt Snell rushed for 121 yards and one touchdown on 30 carries and added four receptions for another 40 yards. Those 30 carries established a Super Bowl record and have been eclipsed only three times since – John Riggins (38, XVII), Franco Harris (34, IX) and Larry Csonka (33, VIII).

It was actually Snell who set the tone for New York's victory and in the process became the first former Ohio State player to earn a Super Bowl ring. After a sloppy, scoreless first quarter that included missed field goals, interceptions and lost fumbles, the Jets embarked upon an 80-yard touchdown march that began with four straight Snell runs that netted 26 yards. Namath followed with four straight completions, the last of which was a flip to Snell that the fullback turned into a 12-yard gain. With a first-and-goal at the Baltimore 9, Snell carried for 5 yards and then bolted into the end zone on a 4-yard run to score the game's first touchdown.

### EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

The fact that Snell was even playing in the game, much less leading the New York attack, was remarkable. The 219-pound fullback, then in his fifth season with the Jets, had played most of the season on a bad knee. Earlier in the week, he'd had the knee drained – a painful procedure today that was even more so in January 1969 – but Snell was performing as he had at Ohio State when he was versatile enough to play halfback and tight end as well as defensive end.

"Never thought much about it," Snell once said about playing on his balky knee. "It was the biggest game of our lives. No way I was going to miss it."

The Jets nursed their 7-0 lead into the locker room at halftime and eventually padded it to 13-0 early in the fourth quarter after a pair of field goals. Baltimore finally dented the scoreboard with future Hall of Fame quarterback Johnny Unitas coming off the bench to lead a late touchdown drive.

But even though the Colts recovered the onside kick following their touchdown, they couldn't do anything with the ball and eventually turned it over on downs. Namath then handed the ball to Snell on six consecutive plays to effectively kill the rest of the clock and give the Jets their landmark victory.

After the game, when Namath was handed the MVP trophy, Snell sat on a bench in the winning locker room with a huge smile on his face. When asked about the award, he told reporters, "Joe's our leader. He deserves it."

Nearly 40 years later, when I asked him virtually the same question while researching a book I was writing, Snell offered only a slightly different answer.

"I'm not going to lie and say it wouldn't have been nice to have that trophy sitting on my mantle all these years," Snell said, "but the memories are better than the hardware."

Then he added with a hearty laugh, "Besides, Joe was the man. I mean, he was Broadway Joe. Who else were they going to give it to?"

In another part of the old Orange Bowl that night, another former Ohio State player sat in a more subdued locker room, wondering what might have been. Colts running back Tom Matte rushed for 116 yards on only 11 carries, a Super Bowl-record average of 10.5 yards per carry that still stands today. Among those carries was a 58-yarder in the second quarter, still tied for third longest in Super Bowl history. But that long run was wasted two plays later when Morrall threw his second red-zone interception of the game.

Matte was involved in another key play just before halftime. The Colts had the ball on the New York 41 with 25 seconds to go, and Morrall tried a bit of razzle-dazzle. He handed the ball to Matte on a sweep to the right – a play which

had been effective for Baltimore – and Matte, in mid-sweep, stopped and threw a long lateral back across the field to Morrall.

Far downfield in the corner near the goal line, wide receiver Jimmy Orr was jumping up and down and waving his arms frantically, completely overlooked by the Jets defense. But Morrall did not see Orr and threw instead over the middle deep toward fullback Jerry Hill. Jets safety Jim Hudson stepped in front of Hill and intercepted the ball, Morrall's third pick of the first half.

"I was the primary receiver," Orr said later. "Earl said he just didn't see me. I was open from here to Tampa."

On the first play of the second half, Matte fumbled and the Jets turned it into a 32-yard field goal to increase their lead to 10-0. When New York stopped Baltimore again, Namath took his team back down the field, and the Jets got another field goal. The Colts got their late touchdown but never really threatened again.

Asked by BSB staff writer Joe Dempsey last summer about the game and whether or not he and his teammates had underestimated their opponents, Matte replied, "Everyone thought that we were thinking that, but we didn't. We had a lot of respect for the Jets at that time, and especially Joe Namath. He was a good quarterback, had a great arm, could get rid of the ball real quick. And that's the one thing you have to do."

But just in case anyone thought the 81-year-old warhorse had come to grips with the loss so many years ago, Matte was matter-of-fact when Dempsey asked if he took any satisfaction in his yards-per-carry average remaining a Super Bowl record.

"I had a good game," Matte said, "but if you lose, who gives a s\*\*t?"

### Thoughts On Recruiting

With all due respect to those who still feel a child's thrill of Christmas morning when National Signing Day comes around each year, I long ago lost my appetite for the circus that college football recruiting has become. What used to be a nice diversion to get fans from bowl season to spring practice has turned into an overhyped exercise with breathless "experts" pretending to claim they know what impact a bunch of 17- and 18-year-olds will have on major college programs.

Which freshmen will come to Ohio State and help the Buckeyes win the 2021 national championship? The answer is probably close to zero since the number of true freshmen over the past 10 years to make any real impact during their first year on campus numbers about a half-dozen – J.K. Dobbins (2017), Nick Bosa (2016), Raekwon McMillan (2014), Joey Bosa (2013) and Braxton Miller and Ryan Shazier (2011).

Because Ryan Day has proved he can keep Urban Meyer's recruiting machine in place, many of the players signed this year by the Buckeyes will undoubtedly become major contributors to the program in the coming years. But while there is no doubt that Day can recruit player talent, the jury still seems out on whether he can recruit coaching talent. The program's defensive deficiencies were on full display during the national championship game against Alabama, yet the only staff changes on that side of the ball (at least so far) is the "promotion" of safeties coach Matt Barnes to oversee the entire secondary and the retirement of 71-year-old co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison.

Meanwhile, Notre Dame raided Luke Fickell's staff at Cincinnati and hired former OSU linebacker Marcus Freeman as its new defensive coordinator when bringing Freeman back to his alma mater would have seemed to be a no-brainer. Recruiting player talent remains the lifeblood of any college program, but if you don't coach them to the level of their potential once they get to college, what good is all that talent?



### Big Ten Announces New 2021 Schedule

The Big Ten announced the revised 2021 season football schedule for all 14 of its member programs on Feb. 5, with several key dates and locations shifted around to make up for missed home games in 2020.

For Ohio State, all 12 opponents on the schedule are identical to those that were on the original Ohio State 2021 schedule, including the nonconference trio of Oregon, Tulsa and Akron.

All three of those nonconference foes will be welcomed to Columbus in consecutive weeks, starting with Oregon on Sept. 11, Tulsa on Sept. 18 and Akron on Sept. 25. The Buckeyes will open the season on the road on Sept. 2 against Minnesota, meaning that the first four games of the schedule remain identical to the original 2021 plan.

Outside of those first four games, the

changes are minor but worth noting. After the matchup with Akron, Ohio State now plays a road game against Rutgers on Oct. 2, which was previously set to be a matchup on the road against Nebraska that's now moved to Nov. 6.

On Oct. 9, the Buckeyes take on Maryland at home, which has been flipped with the home Purdue matchup, now set for Nov. 13. On Oct. 23, Ohio State plays at Indiana, which used to be when the road game against the Scarlet Knights was scheduled.

The home game against Penn State game has been moved up from Nov. 20 to Oct. 30, flipping dates with Ohio State's home matchup against Michigan State.

Finally, there is some normalcy at the end, with the Buckeyes taking on Michigan on Nov. 27. That game remains in Ann Arbor despite the matchup between the two rivals being canceled in 2020, a game that was meant to be played in Columbus.

Elsewhere in the conference, Illinois and Nebraska will open conference play on Aug. 28 from Dublin, Ireland. The pair was originally set to travel to Ireland to square off in 2020, and there were questions regarding whether that would be rescheduled for the same location when it became safe to travel again for teams.

### Ohio State Eyeing April 17 Spring Game

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day told reporters on Feb. 3 during his National Signing Day press conference that Ohio State was tentatively looking at April 17 as the date for its annual spring game. He also mentioned that while Ohio State doesn't have set-in-stone dates for anything right now, it will begin winter workouts shortly and is looking at the beginning of March as time to kick off spring practice.

### Another Message From Publisher Frank Moskowitz

Longtime Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers know that from almost the first time we dropped a copy of BSB in the mailbox, we have had issues with prompt mail delivery. We have chronicled these postal trials and tribulations in these pages through the years.

I believe I can honestly say that the postal issues we have had, dating back to around the first of December, have been the worst that we have ever seen in terms of the length of delivery delays and the volume of subscribers affected, as well as the period of time the problems have continued.

I want to thank our readers for the tremendous amount of patience they have shown. Part of that is due to the fact that you are understanding and courteous in general. But I think your patience can also be attributed to the fact we are all realizing that the postal problems are real and widespread and not temporary.

I am not sure if it is this way everywhere, but postal receipts in Columbus now have a message on them that reads: "USPS is experiencing unprecedented volume increases and limited employee availability due to the impacts of COVID-19. We appreciate your patience."

And we at BSB also appreciate your patience.

I did want to remind you that as a complimentary service to all BSB subscribers, each issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted online in its entirety at BuckeyeSports.com before it even hits the mail. While this is no substitute for holding the paper in your hands, it can tide you over until your BSB arrives.

The BSB staff also provides electronic recruiting coverage at BuckeyeSports.com, along with other daily stories and updates, as well as presenting reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives 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.

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"We're kind of projecting out right now," Day said. "It's kind of a soft schedule based on a lot of things, but we're hoping we can play the spring game that April 17 weekend. We'll probably start the beginning of March, have four weeks of spring ball. That's not set in stone right now, but that's what we're targeting."

For Ohio State, the opportunity to return to a relatively normal spring schedule serves as a serious sigh of relief after losing almost all of spring football in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"We're planning on having a somewhat normal spring where we can have six weeks of a lead-up of working in the facility and then having a normal spring practice schedule," Day said. "The thing that isn't different is we're still

under COVID protocols, so we still can't have a lot of group things together, and we have to make sure we're still following all those things. We're still being tested and all that. But we're hoping all to be together and we're not broken up like we were last year.

"We're hoping that it gets back to normal. We were all home last spring, so at least the fact that we're going to be able to have seven weeks of offseason training and then a full spring, that at least gets us back to normal somewhat. We still have to follow COVID protocol until we start getting more information our way. And then we're hoping that maybe in the spring or late spring, we're able to get some recruits back on campus. I think a little bit over time, we are getting back to normal."

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## 2021 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2020 Record
Sept. 2	at Minnesota	TBA	TBA	3-4
Sept. 11	OREGON*	TBA	TBA	4-3
Sept. 18	TULSA*	TBA	TBA	6-3
Sept. 25	AKRON	TBA	TBA	1-5
Oct. 2	at Rutgers	TBA	TBA	3-6
Oct. 9	MARYLAND	TBA	TBA	2-3
Oct. 23	at Indiana*	TBA	TBA	6-2
Oct. 30	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	4-5
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	TBA	3-5
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	2-4
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE	TBA	TBA	2-5
Nov. 27	at Michigan	TBA	TBA	2-4
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship**	TBA	TBA	

\* 2020 bowl team

\*\* at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)

It's also a chance for the Buckeyes to make up for lost reps from last season. With a young roster – including a battle at quarterback between three players who haven't yet thrown a pass in college – Day and his staff are hoping to make up for as much lost time as possible this spring.

"Now that we have a whole year with an offseason and a spring and a preseason, this is going to allow us the best chance to put our guys in the best position to be successful," Day said.

"We missed out on a lot of snaps this year. And so a lot of these guys are still kind of figuring out where they're at in all this. So this is a big, big spring, and a big offseason – probably one of the biggest offseasons we've had in a while here for those younger guys."

### Washington Rumored For Tennessee DC Spot

Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington, one of Day's first hires when he took over as the head coach at Ohio State in 2019, was the subject of potential coaching vacancy rumors on Feb. 7. FootballScoop reported that new Tennessee head coach Josh Heupel was focusing in on the Buckeye coach, entering his third year in Columbus, as the primary target for Tennessee's open spot at defensive coordinator.

"Tennessee's pursuit of a defensive coordinator has extended into the Big Ten Conference," the report said. "Multiple sources on (Feb. 7) tell FootballScoop that the Vols' search for Josh Heupel's first defensive coordinator is centering on popular Ohio State assistant coach Al Washington.

"Sources told FootballScoop over the past 48 to 72 hours that Tennessee's search had included Zooms and additional interviews with multiple sources, including some that advanced to the stage of Tennessee discussing a three-year contract with at least one candidate.

"Though Washington has yet to call plays at the collegiate level, he's viewed as an extremely 'high-energy coach' and a valuable recruiter who relates well to his players, sources who have worked with Washington told FootballScoop."

Washington has been a star recruiter in Columbus, landing four-stars Cody Simon, Kourt Williams and Mitchell Melton in 2020, reeling in four-star Reid Carrico in 2021 and earning pledges from the four-star trio of Gabe Powers, C.J. Hicks and Dasan McCullough so far in the class of 2022.

He has also impressed Day in his work with defensive line coach Larry Johnson to develop an impressive front seven for the Buckeyes. The head coach complimented the work that those two have done up front when explaining his decision to promote Matt Barnes and Parker Fleming, which you can read more about on page 7.

### OSU Reports Revenue Increase In 2020

In Ohio State's news release of its financial

report to the NCAA, the university announced that the department of athletics brought in \$233,871,240 in the fiscal year 2020, a total that is up 11 percent from the \$210,548,239 brought in from the previous fiscal year.

"I feel for our student-athletes whose experiences have been hampered since the spring," athletic director Gene Smith said in the release. "While the full financial effect of the pandemic will be felt in the next fiscal year, I'm pleased with how the athletic department and athletes showed resiliency in adjusting to a sudden, once-in-a-lifetime situation that saw all spring sports except tennis canceled."

The total, which is measured from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020, was a net profit in FY20, with the department spending \$215,209,556, down 2.4 percent from the \$220,572,956 spent in FY19.

Those numbers put Ohio State with a net positive of \$18,661,684 in FY20, despite the final four months of that fiscal year being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The release also states that the "giving from individuals, foundations and companies" increased by nearly \$20 million, going from \$29,681,048 to \$48,197,862.

Ohio State's football team brought in \$115,510,031, which was 49.4 percent of total athletic department revenue. The program also spent \$52,616,230, just 24.4 percent of the department's total expenses.

The football team spent 12.4 percent less than the \$60,076,743 mark in FY19.

### Four Buckeyes Claim Victory At Senior Bowl

Former Ohio State linebackers Tuf Borland, Baron Browning and Justin Hilliard, along with defensive end Jonathon Cooper, all left the Senior Bowl with a victory on Jan. 30 when the National Team knocked off the American Team, 27-24.

It was a pretty good day for all four Buckeyes involved, starting with Cooper, who had two tackles, 1½ TFL and a half sack, twice teaming up with a fellow defender to take down quarterback Jamie Newman in the backfield.

Browning added a sack of his own on Newman shortly after, though he was not officially credited for it in the box score. He finished with three tackles, lining up as both a linebacker and an edge rusher.

Hilliard led the way for the Buckeyes in tackles with four, including a pair of big-time stops in the first quarter of the game. He started for the National defense, along with all three of his former OSU teammates.

Borland had the quietest day of the bunch after a bit of a rough week in Mobile, Ala., but he did notch two tackles, one for a loss, and a pass breakup that was very nearly an interception. The linebackers in particular impressed their coaches – Dolphins head coach Brian Flores and linebackers coach Anthony Campanile – according to Washington.

"Before the first day (of Senior Bowl practice), I told (Flores and Campanile), 'Don't

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

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

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

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

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take it easy on these guys,' just busting their chops a little," Washington told Yahoo Sports. "But I told them for real: 'My guys will be ready to be coached hard.'

"The first day (Campanile) hit me back and told me how professional they were, how well they worked, how well they picked everything up right away," he said. "That made me proud.

"I wish I had more time with these guys. Two years have flown by. You just see how much each of them has improved and grown over that time and you just see how good each of them are and how good they can become."

All four of these Buckeyes, along with all of their draft-eligible teammates, will learn their NFL fate during the 2021 draft, scheduled for April 29-May 1.

### Sermon Should Be Ready For Pro Day

According to a report by Dan Hope of Eleven Warriors, former Ohio State running back Trey Sermon is expecting to be a full participant in Ohio State's pro day, which is set to take place in the spring.

Sermon told Hope that he dislocated his sternoclavicular joint, which forced the senior running back to go to the hospital and have his collarbone popped back into place.

"As soon as that play happened, I kind of knew something was wrong, but I didn't want to come out of the game," Sermon said. "When it came to the point where I literally had to and I'm leaving the stadium, it hurt a lot, because we work so hard to get there. And even myself, I put in a lot of work and I've prepared so much, and not to be able to play the last game

with my brothers, it definitely hurt a lot."

He also said that he should be "good to go" in 3-4 weeks after further rehab of his injury.

On the season, Sermon rushed 116 times for 870 yards and four touchdowns, while also adding 12 receptions for 95 yards.

### DT Hamdan Announces Entry To Portal

Ohio State defensive tackle Zaid Hamdan announced on Feb. 5 that he has entered his name into the transfer portal.

The 5-11 and 265-pound Hamdan joined the Buckeye football program in January 2019 as a preferred walk-on from Mason, Ohio. He appeared in five games over the past three seasons, recording four tackles, and plans to transfer once he graduates from the university with a degree in criminology this spring.

"I would like to thank The Ohio State University for everything it has done the past three years," Hamdan said in a statement posted to his Twitter account. "I will forever cherish the memories, relationships and people I have made/met here. I would like to thank Coach (Urban) Meyer, Coach (Ryan) Day and Coach (Larry) Johnson for bringing me in and for developing me on and off the field into the man I am today.

"Thank you to the strength, nutrition, (equipment) and training staff who went above and beyond to help me in my journey as well. Thank you, Buckeye Nation and the fans for all the support. Finally, thank you to all my brothers in the locker room who have become

Continued On Page 6



Continued From Page 5

family, I love (you all). With that being said, I have decided to enter the transfer portal.”

Hamdan is the fourth Ohio State player to enter the transfer portal this offseason, following wide receiver Mookie Cooper (Missouri), linebacker Ben Schmiesing (Dayton) and long snapper Phillip Thomas (Duquesne). The last two were seniors who opted to move on after the NCAA granted all players an extra year of eligibility due to the pandemic.

Thus, Hamdan will have three years of eligibility remaining at his new school, as he redshirted with the Buckeyes in 2018. He had scholarship offers from Air Force, Army, Buffalo and Navy coming out of high school.

#### Former Buckeye QB On The Move Again

Former Ohio State quarterback Tate Martell is on the move again, as Matt Zenitz of AL.com reported on Jan. 27 that the embattled QB has entered the transfer portal for the second time in his career.

This comes after a report from The Miami Herald that Martell would be remaining at Miami but only taking classes, rather than participating with the football team.

“Being quarterback, there’s a huge responsibility of being that leader and being that face of a team, and the reason I love it is that I feel like I was literally born to do it,” Martell said in a hype video that he posted to his Twitter on Jan. 27. “I’m a natural leader ... I have

made mistakes while being in football, and I never learned how to really push myself until I learned it at Ohio State. I learned it from J.T. Barrett, Joe Burrow, Dwayne (Haskins). I learned what the standard was for a quarterback.

“I had to go through what I went through these past four years to get where I’m about to be. The pain that it’s caused is my motivation every day. This story is going to change from what it’s been to this point. Now it’s just going to take one person believing in me. I promise it’ll be one of the best decisions they ever make.

“What I’m building right now is for that team. Everything I’m going through is for that team. I’m refining myself daily, to become that person that everyone needs me to be. My family, my friends, my city, it’s all for them. I have nothing to lose and everything to prove.”

As mentioned, this will be Martell’s second foray into the portal. He originally entered in the spring of 2019, shortly after Justin Fields’ arrival in Columbus, when he eventually decided to head to South Beach to play for then-new Miami head coach Manny Diaz. After losing the battle for the starting job in 2019, Martell moved to wide receiver to get onto the field. He recorded seven rushes for 7 yards and completed his lone pass of the season, also for 7 yards. He did not record a stat in 2020 after opting out of the season.

Martell, a former four-star recruit for the Buckeyes from Bishop Gorman in Las Vegas, played sparingly during his time in Columbus as well. He completed 23 of his 28 passes in 2018 for 269 yards and a touchdown and rushed 22 times for another 128 yards and two scores.

#### Young Named Defensive ROTY

Former Ohio State and current Washington Football Team defensive end Chase Young was named the Associated Press NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year at the NFL Awards show on Feb. 6.

Young finished his rookie year with 44 tackles (32 solo), 12 quarterback hits, 10 tackles for loss and 7½ sacks in 15 games played. He also had four passes defended, four forced fumbles and three fumble recoveries.

With the honor, Young becomes the fourth former Ohio State player in five seasons to win defensive rookie of the year, joining Joey Bosa

## BSB Podcast Enhances Online Coverage

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

With the college football season now complete, the Buckeye Sports Bulletin podcast is returning to its original schedule of one weekly episode, released on Friday mornings. While there is no more football to discuss, the podcast rolls on with in-depth looks at Ohio State’s winter sports, including insight on the men’s and women’s basketball teams, the wrestling team and all of the Buckeyes’ Olympic sports.

On the most recent episode released on Feb. 5, we broke down the promotions of assistant football coaches Matt Barnes and Parker Fleming before jumping into discussions of the men’s basketball team’s big win over Iowa, the women’s team toppling the Hawkeyes as well, and the strong stretch of form that the wrestling team has found. We were also joined by Ben Goren of Forget The Protocol to talk about Northwestern’s win over the Buckeyes in women’s basketball, the struggling men’s basketball team and Pat Fitzgerald’s new defensive coordinator.

We will keep you posted on everything you need to know in Ohio State sports throughout the long football offseason.

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

The show is free for everyone. 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 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.

in 2016, Marshon Lattimore in 2017 and Nick Bosa in 2019.

Young was selected second overall in the 2020 NFL draft, behind only LSU quarterback and former Buckeye Joe Burrow, who went first to the Cincinnati Bengals.

In 2019, Young won the Chuck Bednarik and the Nagurski-Wooden awards for the best defensive player in college football. As a junior, Young finished with 21 TFL and 16½ sacks in just 12 games played.

The former Buckeye has impressed his teammates not just with his play, but with his leadership as well.

“It’s crazy unusual for a rookie to have the type of leadership that Chase has,” quarterback Alex Smith said. “Genuine leadership. I think a lot of young guys, especially high (draft) picks, I think you feel pressure to do it some way or somehow. I think Chase is so comfortable in his own skin and being who he is. I think guys respect that, but it’s rare to have a guy that young step in and really affect his teammates as positively as he has.”

#### EA Sports Announces Return Of CFB Game

After last making a college football game in 2013, EA Sports is planning its return to college football soon, according to an announcement from the company on Feb. 2.

“We’ve heard from the millions of passionate fans requesting the return of college football video games,” EA Sports executive vice president Cam Weber said in a statement. “We love the energy, tradition and pageantry of college football, and I am beyond thrilled to say we are back in development. We have a lot of really exciting work ahead of us and a great team that is eager to bring a new game to players in the next couple of years.”

The company has already partnered with the Collegiate Licensing Company to include more than 100 teams and their stadiums, uniforms, gameday traditions and playbooks.

For EA, the plan for the game reportedly is to move forward without rosters that include the names, images or likeness of actual college players, which previously resulted in lawsuits and was the reason that the NCAA did not renew its licensing contract with EA Sports after NCAA Football 14.

The company never claimed the players in the game represented their real-life counterparts, but their uniform numbers, positions, heights, weights, hometown and ethnicity were often aligned.

NCAA rules prohibit student-athletes from profiting off of their name, image and likeness, so the new game’s rosters would be composed of randomly generated names, numbers and attributes to avoid any potential infringement on any current player’s rights. Those rules are likely to be changed in the near future, though, which would seemingly allow EA Sports to negotiate with individual players.

“We’ll just keep tabs on everything as it develops and we’ll be ready,” EA Sports vice president and general manager Daryl Holt told ESPN’s Michael Rothstein. “That won’t be a problem for us (in terms of making the game). But it’s really not an answer for us right now to decide. We’re as much passengers as anyone else.

“So we make sure we deliver what our college football game players would want in a game. And that starts with just a very immersive experience, and there’s lots of things we can do to bring the true college game play and game day to the virtual world.”

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# Continuity The Key In OSU's Shifting Coaching Staff

By WYATT CROSER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day announced on Feb. 3 that the replacement for co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison, who retired at the end of January, would come from within.

That replacement came in the form of Parker Fleming, a quality control coach for the Buckeyes for the past two seasons who will now be the special teams coordinator, taking up Mattison's full-time coaching spot.

"We kind of went through that process over the last couple weeks," Day said. "Once Greg decided he was going to retire, we kind of figured out what was right for our guys at the time and figured out what was the right decision for our team and for the defense.

"Parker Fleming is somebody that knows what we do very, very well and has the respect of our team, and we think that's a really good move there. Promoting from within is something that I believe strongly in, and I believe that it's going to be an opportunity for these guys to really be a part of our program for a long time and keep some continuity."

Prior to his position as a quality control coach, Fleming coached at Texas State, where he started as wide receivers coach before being promoted to co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach in 2017. Before his time with the Bobcats, Fleming was also the wide receivers coach at James Madison. This is not Fleming's first stint at Ohio State, with the Presbyterian grad also working as a graduate assistant for the Buckeyes in 2012 and 2013 under Urban Meyer. He has also coached quarterbacks at Capital University and Decatur High School in Georgia in prior stops.

"He's very bright, he's really sharp, he's done a really good job," Day said. "He'll step into our offensive meetings, he can go over to defense, and I think the guys on the team feel like he's a wealth of knowledge, and he gets them better. And one of the things that we talk about a lot here on special teams is that when you're in a special teams meeting, you're not just in there to get better at special teams. You're in there to get better at football, something that Matt Barnes really brought here and did a great job, and I think that Parker's really embraced that."

Speaking of Barnes, who has coached Ohio State's safeties and special teams the past two seasons, his new role will now be to coach the entire secondary, taking over there for Kerry Coombs, who will continue to be the defensive coordinator, this time without being locked to a primary position such as the secondary, which he worked with previously.

"Matt Barnes really has done an excellent job in special teams," Day said. "He has a great background on defense, and I think he's a great young coach. Speaking with the defensive staff, speaking with Kerry Coombs, what we've decided to do is take him from special teams and make him the secondary coach. I think this a great move. It's going to allow him an opportunity to have that room and also allow Kerry, free him up a little bit more to move within the linebackers, the defensive line, and also have his hands in the secondary."

Coombs spoke highly of both Barnes and Fleming on the Ryan Day radio show the same day, while also complimenting Day on making internal hires instead of looking at other collegiate programs.

"Matt Barnes is a really, really bright coach," Coombs said. "I've been working with him in the secondary for the entire season. I love Parker. Parker was one of my intern guys back when I was special teams coordinator the first go-around, and I think he's a really sharp young coach. And I love the fact that our head coach believes in hiring and promoting from within. I think that's the way things should be done. If you know people, and you've seen them and you appreciate the quality of their work, you allow them to continue to move up the ladder."

Ohio State's defense in its first year under Coombs was strong in some areas but also had some clear flaws. The Buckeyes ranked sixth in the Football Bowl Subdivision in rush defense, allowing just 97.6 yards per game. They were also tied with Ball State at No. 43 in scoring defense (25.8 points per game) and No. 59 in total defense (401.6 yards per game). That clear issue, though, was the pass defense, which surrendered 304.0 yards per game, sixth worst in the FBS.

Now Barnes will be in charge of developing the back end of Ohio State's defense, and Day thinks that will help the entire defense and, more specifically, Coombs as he moves into his second

year as a defensive coordinator.

"This is going to allow him to take a little bit of a step back. Take a little bit of a wider approach on this thing," Day said. "I think that opportunity for him to be the coordinator, bounce around a little bit. He's still going to have a major impact. He's still going to take corners, still going to take some of the nickels and work with them. But it will be just a little bit of a different role, and I think that's going to really help this year."

Day said that the moves were done with the intention of keeping the same minds on the staff and to help the secondary get more primary attention after Alabama torched the Buckeyes for 464 yards and five touchdowns through the air in the national title game.

"It was more about, how do we keep continuity on that side of the ball and how do we continue to just build what we've been working on here for a couple years, put the right people into place?" Day said. "I thought this did two things, though. One, it kept continuity, but two, it put a little bit more attention on the back end. And coming off of that last game, coming off of this season, I think that's something we had to do."

Coombs is also motivated to right the wrongs of Ohio State's defense that were exploited by the Crimson Tide on Jan. 11.

"Obviously, we didn't play our best game," Coombs said. "It's up to us to learn from it, to let it drive us and motivate us and for us to go to work tomorrow morning and every day on making sure that doesn't happen again."

Though there won't be any new full-time faces on the coaching staff for the 2021 season

at this point, there is still an opportunity for Day to add some analysts or consultants to help with improving the defensive side of the ball.

The head coach said that it is certainly a possibility for this upcoming season, but that he will be picky in his selections to make sure that the Buckeyes are bringing in someone who will mesh with the rest of the team.

"It's something that I've spent a lot of time thinking about," Day said. "I'm taking a hard look at that and seeing if there are some people around who would be the right fit. I think the big thing for us is it has to be the right fit culturally. It has to be the right personality and bring the right things to the table."

Ohio State moves into year two with Coombs at the helm of the defense, now as the sole defensive coordinator after Mattison's retirement. His first season had highs and lows, and moving into 2021, the pass defense is the clear area of focus.

But Day isn't putting all his stock into last season. He said that the constraints from COVID-19, including the lack of a true offseason and the trio of game cancellations, did not make it easy and that he wants to see what Coombs can bring to the table in year two.

"The last thing we're doing is making excuses or built-in excuses," he said. "But I think that the way the season played out with less games, I think that the way the no spring and the preseason being chopped up just didn't help. Now we have a whole year, and I think once we have a whole season and a whole year to evaluate that, I think as we sit here next year, we'll have a much better feel for where we're at."

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# Early Enrollees Already Going Through Workouts

Continued From Page 1

were forced to go on Zoom meetings and over-communicate to try and make sure to build those relationships even stronger because we weren't able to see each other in person. At the end of the day, I have to give a lot of credit to our staff and (director of player personnel) Mark Pantoni for putting together an unbelievable class. We're really excited about these guys. They're really talented football-wise. These are unbelievable kids, great students and they're off to a great start here on campus."

While the 2021 recruiting class dealt with the unprecedented and unexpected consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, which includes an NCAA-mandated recruiting dead period that prevented prospects from taking official and unofficial visits from March onward, Day credited the signees for their resolve in the face of adversity.

In fact, he strongly believes the circumstances have brought the group together in ways he's never seen before.

"I think this is the closest group I've ever been around," Day said. "I saw a couple guys having lunch together, laughing and cracking on each other and making fun of each other. They just met each other four or five days ago when they got on campus. But because of Zoom, because of how things have gone this year, they felt like they've known each other for years, though they just literally and physically met face-to-face a week ago. That's an amazing dynamic and something I didn't expect. It's clear this is a tight group."

Ohio State currently sits at 84 scholarship players for 2021, not including returning seniors such as running back Demario McCall, offensive tackle Thayer Munford, defensive tackles Haskell Garrett and Antwan Jackson, and cornerback Marcus Williamson, who will take advantage of the extra year of eligibility granted by the NCAA due to the pandemic and don't count against the 85-scholarship



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**NICE TO MEET YOU** – Ohio State head coach Ryan Day had never met Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed four-star defensive tackle Tyleik Williams, who committed to the Buckeyes without a visit, until he moved into his dorm on Jan. 23.

limit. That leaves the Buckeyes with just one open roster spot for Tuimoloau or any potential transfers, such as former Tennessee linebacker Henry To'oto'o, former USC linebacker Palaie Gaoteote or former Texas cornerback Jalen Green, all of whom have expressed interest in Ohio State and vice versa.

"It's tricky, and it's tricky now because there's a lot of dynamics in play with the extra year of eligibility," Day said, noting how the one-time transfer rule might, if passed by the NCAA, create some roster attrition in the coming months that would

put the Buckeyes even further below the scholarship limit. "If there are certain people out there that we really want to save a spot for, we will. We'll always make sure we have something available for a great player."

While Day cannot speak directly about recruits until they sign on the dotted line, there's no doubt his comments are pointed at Tuimoloau, whose situation is notable in that he did not make his college decision on National Signing Day. Although that's when most undecided prospects send in their letters of intent,

they actually have until April 1 to do so.

Prospects are not required to sign a letter of intent at any point, though, so Tuimoloau can simply sign a financial aid agreement with the school of his choice instead. Hence his plans for a late-April announcement.

The last high-profile Ohio State target who pushed his recruitment well past National Signing Day was Jeannette, Pa., five-star quarterback Terrelle Pryor, who committed to the Buckeyes on March 19, 2008, which was 43 days after the rest of his class signed. The hope is

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## COVER STORY

that Tuimoloau – who is considered the second-best defensive end and No. 3 prospect overall in the 2021 cycle – will follow Pryor’s footsteps to Columbus.


If he does commit to Ohio State, Tuimoloau would give the Buckeyes their best recruiting class in the Internet era, at least in terms of per-player average. It would raise Ohio State’s average from .9452 to .9477, which would top the 2017 class that finished with a score of .9459 and included the likes of defensive end Chase Young, cornerbacks Jeff Okudah and Shaun Wade, linebacker Baron Browning, offensive guard Wyatt Davis and running back J.K. Dobbins.

But for now, with Tuimoloau’s decision off in the distance, Ohio State has shifted its focus to building another highly rated class in 2022. The hope, at least from the Buckeyes’ point of view, is to make the next National Signing Day as drama-free as this one.

“That’s been the focus here really for the last month,” Day said. “We always

try to recruit ahead and get out in front of this. That’s the same philosophy and same mind-set that we’re going to have in this class. Until we can start having guys on campus, we’ll try to do the best we can of identifying the right culture fits, the right leaders early on and then build the class around them.


“I think one of the really important things right now in recruiting, more than ever with the way things are going with COVID and the one-time transfer rule coming down the tubes, is you have to be as honest as you ever have been in recruiting. You have to be as transparent as possible. They have to come here knowing this is where they want to be. You can’t talk them into coming to your school anymore. I don’t believe that at all. It is about being transparent, telling them exactly what this place is and then showing them all the reasons why we think it’s a great fit and building it from there. That’s been our recipe, so hopefully we can keep building from there.”




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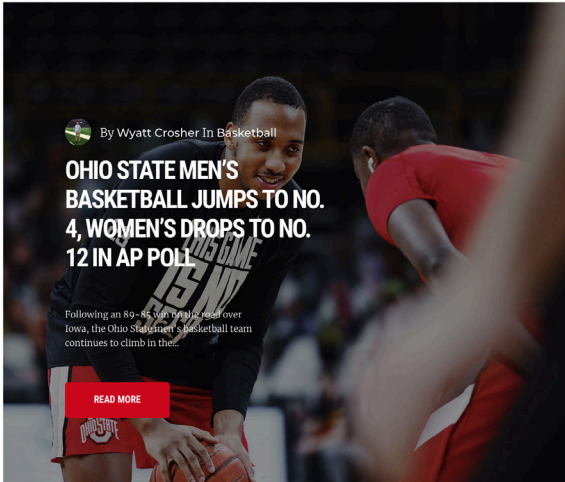
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February 7, 2021 (5:53 pm) in Sports, Wrestling

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# 5-Star DE Tuimoloau Targeting April Decision

Rather than make his college decision on National Signing Day as widely expected, Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau has decided to wait until he can take additional visits before announcing his school of choice this spring.

"He won't be making a decision until at least April," Tuimoloau's father, Ponce Faletoi, told 247Sports national recruiting editor Brandon Huffman on Jan. 28. "He still wants to take visits. Whether those are officials when the NCAA opens it up or us going out and checking those schools out, he still wants to visit a few schools."

Washington, has never been to Columbus. He has spent time on the campus of the four other finalists, however, which includes participating in a summer camp with the Crimson Tide as a sophomore and unofficial visits with the Ducks, Trojans and Huskies during his junior year.

If for some reason the NCAA extends the current dead period beyond April 15, though, Tuimoloau and his family will consider taking visits on their own dime.

"He wants to get out and see Alabama and Ohio State with us, just so we're all comfortable," Faletoi said.

The Buckeyes have long been considered the favorite in Tuimoloau's recruitment thanks to his relationship with head coach Ryan Day, defensive line coach Larry Johnson and wide receivers Gee Scott and Emeka Egbuka, the former being his former teammate and the latter being a fellow Washington native. But it's clear he's not ready to make a decision, so Ohio State's staff will have to wait a few more months before they potentially receive good news.

## Linebacker Target Commits To USC

Though a trip to Columbus last month gave Ohio State a glimmer of hope in his recruitment, Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star linebacker Raesjon Davis committed to USC on Feb. 3.

The 6-1, 215-pound Davis, who is considered the fourth-best outside linebacker and No. 48 prospect overall in the class of 2021, was a longtime LSU commitment who reopened

## Final 2021 247Sports Composite Ohio Rankings

Rank	Name	Position	High School	College
1.	Jack Sawyer	SDE	Pickerington North	Ohio State
2.	Mike Hall	DT	Streetsboro	Ohio State
3.	Reid Carrico	ILB	Ironton	Ohio State
4.	Jayden Ballard	WR	Massillon Washington	Ohio State
5.	Lorenzo Styles	WR	Pickerington Central	Notre Dame
6.	Ben Christman	OG	Richfield Revere	Ohio State
7.	Corey Kiner	RB	Cincinnati Roger Bacon	LSU
8.	Devonta Smith	CB	Cincinnati La Salle	Alabama
9.	Jaylen Anderson	APB	Perry	West Virginia
10.	Markus Allen	WR	Clayton Northmont	Wisconsin

## OSU Football Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2022 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jyaire Brown	CB	5-11	165	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West
Caleb Burton	WR	6-0	165	★★★★★	Del Valle, Texas
Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	235	★★★	Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona
Quinn Ewers	QB	6-3	195	★★★★★	Southlake (Texas) Carroll
Benji Gosnell	TE	6-4	225	★★★★	Pilot Mountain (N.C.) East Surry
C.J. Hicks	LB	6-4	218	★★★★	Kettering (Ohio) Archbishop Alter
Dasan McCullough	ATH	6-5	220	★★★★	Overland Park (Kan.) B.V. North
Gabe Powers	LB	6-4	220	★★★★	Marysville, Ohio
Jaheim Singletary	CB	6-1	170	★★★★★	Jacksonville Robert E. Lee
Tegra Tshabola	OT	6-5	340	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West

his recruitment on Dec. 21 after he did not sign with the Tigers during the early signing period. The Trojans immediately became the favorite to land his pledge thanks to proximity and his familiarity with the program, but the Buckeyes also made a push of their own due

to his relationship with Day and linebackers coach Al Washington.

Davis had been to campus only once before, conducting a two-hour look around the football facilities as part of a nationwide tour with his 7-on-7 team back in March, but he made it a

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK

Andrew Lind

Prospects have been unable to take official or unofficial visits since the NCAA implemented a recruiting dead period last March, which has been extended multiple times in the meantime and now runs through at least April 15. However, Yahoo Sports' Pete Thamel reported on Jan. 27 that the Division I Council could soon change it to a quiet period, which would allow prospects to once again make on-campus visits beginning April 16.

Tuimoloau, who named a top five on Dec. 16 of Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon, USC and



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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

point to return with his parents and uncle over the weekend of Jan. 22-24 before finalizing his decision. The trip earned rave reviews. The Davis family roamed around the city and spent time with some of Ohio State's early enrollees, thanks to a well-timed move-in, and Cincinnati La Salle three-star safety Jaylen Johnson, who drove up to Columbus just to hang out with Davis.

"I loved it there," Davis told 247Sports national recruiting analyst Greg Biggins on Jan. 29. "I would definitely say the trip moved them up my list, not just because I liked it, but my parents really liked it there, too. The best part for me was being around all the players. All the early enrollees were with me the whole time and showed us around the campus and the city itself.

"I already knew Evan (Pryor) from 7-on-7 and (TreVeyon Henderson) from the Future 50, and I was able to meet all the other guys, as well, and they were great to be around. Kyle (McCord) was super cool. I really enjoyed being around him. I knew Jack (Sawyer) already, too, and like him a lot. Jaylen (Johnson) is a great dude, and like I said, all the guys were great, and I really connected well with all of them."

Although it felt like the Buckeyes were primed to take the lead in Davis' recruitment following the visit, there was no movement in the crystal ball predictions in the days leading up to his decision, and he ultimately signed with the Trojans, where he joins a class that ranks No. 7 in the 247Sports team recruiting rankings and includes the nation's top-rated overall player, Corona (Calif.) Centennial five-star defensive end Corey Foreman.

### Arizona Receiver Sets Visit Date

Buckeye Sports Bulletin has confirmed Chandler, Ariz., four-star wide receiver Kyion Grayes will take a four-day visit to Columbus from Feb. 25-28.

The 6-1 and 170-pound Grayes, who is considered the 45th-best wide receiver and No. 312 prospect overall in the class of 2022, has never been to Ohio State, but the Buckeyes are considered the favorite in his recruitment. He'll be joined on the trip by his parents, and while he won't be able to meet with the coaching staff due to the ongoing recruiting dead period, there's a belief that he'll commit while on the visit or shortly thereafter.

Ohio State currently holds three 247Sports crystal ball predictions for Grayes, a one-time Arizona commit who also holds offers from Arizona State, Iowa State, Miami (Fla.), Michigan State, Oregon, Penn State, Texas and UCLA, among others. For more on Grayes' recruitment, see page 24.

### Quarterback Signee Wins Jim Henry Award

On Feb. 1, Ohio State five-star quarterback signee Kyle McCord was named the recipient of the 2020 Jim Henry Award, which is presented annually by the Maxwell Football Club to a senior from Delaware, New Jersey or Pennsylvania who portrays a unique balance of football prowess, academic excellence and dedicated community service.

"(McCord) faced numerous challenges both on and off the field, and he consistently rose to meet those challenges," Maxwell Football Club president Mark Dianno said in a statement. "He is a sterling example of the hard work, dedication and service that have become the hallmarks of Jim Henry Award winners."

The 6-3 and 215-pound McCord, who is considered the third-best pro-style quarterback and No. 27 prospect overall in the class of 2021, threw for 6,887 yards and 88 touchdowns to lead Philadelphia St. Joseph's

Prep to three straight state titles, both of which set city records. He committed to the Buckeyes in April of 2019 over nearly 20 offers from programs such as Boston College, Maryland, Michigan, Michigan State, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Rutgers, Syracuse, Texas A&M, Virginia Tech and West Virginia.

"The winner of the Jim Henry Award is always an excellent football player but must also set himself apart in the classroom and in the community at large," Dianno said. "Despite the many obstacles posed by the pandemic, Kyle elevated his academic performance and served several different communities in need. Kyle has indeed distinguished himself, his family, his school, his coaches and his program and is a well-deserved winner of the award."

Recent recipients of the Jim Henry Award include Clemson linebacker Keith Maguire in 2019, Notre Dame safety Shayne Simon in 2018 and former Wisconsin running back Jonathan Taylor in 2017.

### Offensive Tackle Names Top Schools

Duncanville, Texas, four-star offensive tackle Cameron Williams included Ohio State in his top 11 on Feb. 2 along with Auburn, Florida State, Georgia, Houston, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon and SMU.

The 6-6, 320-pound Williams – who is listed as the 29th-best offensive tackle and No. 239 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – received an offer from Buckeye offensive line coach Greg Studrawa during a virtual visit on April 30.

The two talk almost daily, with Williams hoping to make his first trip to Columbus when the dead period comes to an end.

Williams notably faced Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star quarterback Quinn Ewers in the state semifinals and plays in the same conference that produced Ohio State freshman wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

### Lineman Trims List Of Offers

Similarly, Miami Columbus four-star offensive tackle Julian Armella trimmed his list of more than three dozen scholarship offers to Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Miami (Fla.) and Ohio State on Feb. 4.

The 6-6, 300-pound Armella is considered the 14th-best offensive tackle and No. 133 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He began his high school career at powerhouse Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas before transferring before his junior season.

Armella has been in contact with the Buckeyes for a while, landing an offer from Studrawa in April 2019. However, the Seminoles are widely viewed as the favorite in Armella's recruitment, as his father, Enzo, played nose guard at Florida State from 1991-94.

### Ohio Quarterback Lands Big-Time Offers

Though Ohio State already holds a commitment from Ewers, there's a chance the Buckeyes take two players at the position in 2022.

One player under consideration for that spot is Medina, Ohio, three-star signal-caller Drew Allar, whose recruitment has gone national in recent weeks. He picked up offers from Kentucky, Michigan, Penn State, Texas A&M and Washington in a six-day stretch from Jan. 30 through Feb. 4.

There was a thought that Allar – who is listed as the 24th-best pro-style quarterback and No. 514 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – would fly under the radar for much of the cycle to the point where the Buckeyes could add him

Continued On Page 12



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# In-State Quarterback Receiving National Attention

Continued From Page 11

to the class late. But it is clear schools are paying attention to his strong junior season, when he threw for 2,962 yards and 26 touchdowns while leading the Battling Bees to the regional final of the state playoffs last fall.

There are a number of dynamics at play when it comes to Ohio State's pursuit of Allar, as an offer could rub Ewers – the nation's top-rated player – the wrong way. On the other hand, if the Buckeyes have significant turnover at the position due to the looming battle between McCord and freshmen Jack Miller

and C.J. Stroud, they'll be in the market for a second quarterback this cycle.

## Legacy Accepts Walk-On Offer

Northville, Mich., running back/defensive back Cayden Saunders on Jan. 29 became the second legacy prospect in the 2021 recruiting cycle to accept a preferred walk-on offer from Ohio State, joining Nashville (Tenn.) Montgomery Bell Academy three-star tight end Zac Herbstreit – the son of former quarterback and ESPN commentator Kirk Herbstreit and grandson of former running back and defensive

back Jim Herbstreit – who announced his commitment to the Buckeyes in late December.

"Playing college football has always been a dream of mine," Saunders said in a note posted to Twitter. "I've worked hard nonstop for so many years and it's beginning to pay off. Throughout all of the challenges I've faced and the people who said I would never be good enough, I chose not to give up, but push harder. Now the time has finally come to take my dedication and my talent to the next level."

The 5-11, 180-pound Saunders is the son of former Ohio State tight end Cedric Saunders, who caught 68 passes for 853 yards and

one touchdown in his four-year career with the Buckeyes from 1990-93 and earned second-team All-Big Ten honors as a senior team captain. His father also spent time in the NFL with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and NFL Europe's Scottish Claymores and is currently an NFLPA certified agent who represents former Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins, among others.

The younger Saunders, meanwhile, was named a second-team all-district defensive back by the Detroit Free Press in 2020. He will attend Ohio State on a full academic scholarship through the Morrill Scholarship Program.

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

### 35 Years Ago – 1986

With National Signing Day around the corner, Ohio State was still in pursuit of some of Ohio's top prospects.

Middletown offensive lineman John Peterson was down to a final four of Ohio State, North Carolina, Kentucky and Michigan while quarterback/defensive back Mark Pelini of Youngstown Cardinal Mooney was set to choose between Ohio State and Michigan State.

Cincinnati St. Xavier quarterback Greg Frey denied a published report he had verbally committed to Pittsburgh, saying he was still considering Boston College, North Carolina and Ohio State.

### 30 Years Ago – 1991

Six Buckeye State prospects announced their intentions to leave the state for their college ball, continuing a trend that Ohio State head coach John Cooper appeared to have quelled when he landed six in-state targets within Ohio State's first seven commitments in the 1991 class. No such luck, however, as signing day approached.

Leading the way were offensive lineman Scott Stratton and running back Brian King, both of West Chester Lakota, who committed to Penn State.

A few days later, defensive back Deollo Anderson of Youngstown Ursuline decided in favor of Michigan over OSU, and quarterback Pat Humphrey of Youngstown Rayen announced in favor of Michigan State.

It didn't stop there. Cleveland Benedictine offensive lineman Predrag Jones told BSB that he canceled his scheduled Ohio State visit and would be committing to Colorado. Then, defensive lineman Mike Stallmeyer of Cincinnati Elder announced that he'd be heading to Duke.

To make matters worse, Westerville South running back Ki-Jana Carter narrowed his list to OSU, Penn State and Notre Dame and appeared to be leaning toward Happy Valley.

### 25 Years Ago – 1996

Ohio State received a verbal commitment from Dublin (Ohio) Scioto tailback Nick Goings on Jan. 24. His commitment completed a three-week stretch in which Ohio State also obtained commitments from Spring Valley (Calif.) Monte Vista standout Michael Wiley and Sylmar, Calif., star Durrell Price.

All three were rated among the top-10 running backs in the nation by The National Recruiting Advisor.

Goings' commitment stretched the Buckeye class to 26. As of press time, the Buckeyes still had a good chance of landing at least two more players before closing the books on what looked

likely to be a top-10 class.

OSU was anxiously awaiting the scheduled announcement of a decision by Humble, Texas, wide receiver David Boston along with running back/safety Gary Berry of Columbus DeSales.

### 20 Years Ago – 2001

Hired just three weeks away from National Signing Day, new Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel was working uphill to close Ohio State's 2001 recruiting class on a strong note, despite the very tight window for meeting his new recruiting targets.

The energetic Tressel met the challenge head on, but as BSB went to press Jan. 30, he was still waiting on tangible results.

His first order of business was to secure the shaky commitments of several OSU verbals who had wavered in the weeks since John Cooper's ouster, such as Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Dillard wide receiver Chris Gamble and San Diego Mission Bay running back Ja Ja Riley.

At the same time, Tressel and his patchwork staff were going about their business, trying to entice other key prospects to visit and consider the Buckeyes.

"I think the thing you have to showcase is your university," Tressel said shortly after taking the job. "The most important part of recruiting is the student-athletes already on your team. Our guys have to do a great job when kids come visit.

"We also have to make sure our staff is ready and we show them just how great The Ohio State University is. We know we have to play catch-up, but we are ready to go."

### 15 Years Ago – 2006

With signing day rapidly approaching, Ohio State gained a significant receiver target while shedding another from its 2006 class. Cleveland Glenville wideout Ray Small became the latest in a growing line of Tarblooders to head to Ohio State, following fellow commits Robert Rose and Bryant Browning, along with players who were already on campus such as Troy Smith, Ted Ginn and Donte Whitner.

Small was as highly thought of as almost any of them, ranking No. 88 overall in Rivals.com's rankings of the nation's top 100 seniors.

Meanwhile, the Buckeyes lost another player at the same position when West Chester (Ohio) Lakota's Josh Chichester announced that he would be suiting up for Louisville rather than Ohio State.

Rumors swirled around his decommitment that the Buckeyes had cooled on him for academic reasons.

### 10 Years Ago – 2011

Ohio State signed a 23-man class headlined by five-star quarterback Braxton Miller out of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne.

Miller was already on campus as an early enrollee and apparently didn't need much time to get a welcome from his new teammates.

"When I walked to my locker spot, people were like, 'What's up, Braxton?' I was like, 'Hold on, I don't even know you. What's up?' Stuff like that has caught my eye," he said.

Miller was joined in the class by two other five-stars: Richmond (Va.) Hermitage linebacker Curtis Grant and Canton (Ohio) McKinley defensive end Steve Miller.

### Five Years Ago – 2016

There was no drama for Ohio State's coaching staff when signing day rolled around in 2016. Head coach Urban Meyer landed two commitments – Nassau (N.Y.) Community College five-star JUCO offensive tackle Malcolm Pridgeon and Columbus Walnut Ridge three-star athlete Malik Harrison – on signing day but knew beforehand that both were done deals.

With no prospects on the verge of flipping and assurances that the two he was chasing would end up as Buckeyes the following day, Meyer spent the night of Feb. 2 in a relaxed mood.

Sitting in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center with defensive coordinator Luke Fickell, defensive line coach Larry Johnson and new offensive line coach Greg Studrawa, Meyer decided to remind his assistants how well they'd done on the recruiting trail over the previous month.

"I said, 'Just to make dinner taste good tonight, let's put on the highlight tape of Jordan Fuller, Keandre Jones and Dwayne Haskins,'" Meyer said the following afternoon on his radio call-in show.

### One Year Ago – 2020

Since the introduction of the early signing period in 2017, what was once viewed as a national holiday – National Signing Day – became more of an afterthought. That was the case for the Buckeyes in 2020.

"Signing day is very different now than it used to be," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said during a press conference on Feb. 5. "We had one guy sign today, which is just (unfathomable). The landscape of recruiting has changed a lot."

The Buckeyes received letters of intent from 24 players during the early signing period, which ran from Dec. 18-20. Fourteen of those players enrolled in classes in early January and were partaking in winter workouts with hopes of making an impact early in their respective careers.



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# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler

**Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimolou won't make his college decision until at least April because he would like to take visits to Alabama and Ohio State. What do you believe will be the deciding factor in his recruitment as he seemingly chooses between those two schools?**

"The NFL draft has been a huge thing for Tuimolou, and both of these programs have put a ton of talent into the NFL at his position. So that is primarily why they are the presumed favorites. Ultimately, there will have to be a tiebreaker, and I think that will be the longer-standing relationships he has with Ohio State."

**While Ohio State will end up with 21 or 22 recruits this cycle, there are schools that consistently sign more than 25 players. How is this allowed, and can the Buckeyes ever bring home the nation's No. 1 recruiting class if they're not oversigning like Alabama does each year?**

"It is really, really difficult to win a recruiting title without taking a full class of about 25, as there is no way to complete-

ly eliminate quantity from the various formulas the recruiting sites use. The NCAA has taken some steps against oversigning in recent years, but it is certainly an advantage for schools that sign 25-plus players every single year as the cream can rise to the top and the players who don't play transfer out to make room for the next group."

**Ohio State is keeping tabs on a number of players who have entered their name into the transfer portal, such as former Tennessee linebacker Henry To'oto'o, former USC linebacker Palaie Gaoteote and former Texas cornerback Jalen Green. Do you feel like the Buckeyes have a chance with any of those players, and are there any other names we should keep in mind?**

"Those seem to be the biggest names right now. To'oto'o is listening, but that is such a heated battle right now as he has become basically a national recruit. I don't think Ohio State will go all-in on Gaoteote without knowing what To'oto'o is going to do first. I think Ohio State would definitely have a chance with Jalen Green. It just remains to be seen

how hard they are going to push, but I do believe they are doing their homework on that one and trying to figure out if it makes sense."

**Although he was the first player to commit to Ohio State for the class of 2022, there are rumors of a potential decommitment coming from West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star cornerback Jyaire Brown. Is there any validity to those rumors, and how would such a decision impact the Buckeyes?**

"I certainly think there is at least some validity to the rumors in that other teams are continuing to push for Brown, such as Notre Dame and LSU, so you have to take that seriously. Ohio State must sign three outstanding corners in 2022, and they have two right now. So if Brown were to leave, it would just put even more emphasis on keeping Jacksonville (Fla.) Robert E. Lee five-star cornerback Jaheim Singletary in the fold as the SEC schools aren't going to give up on that one but also in trying to pull off a big win or two in the race for Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South five-star Will Johnson and Houston North Shore five-star Denver Harris."

### Florida Long Snapper Commits To OSU As PWO

Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day long snapper Mason Arnold announced on Feb. 2 that he has also accepted a preferred walk-on offer from Ohio State.

The 6-2 and 240-pound Arnold is considered the sixth-best long snapper in the class of 2021 by Kornblue Kicking, the nation's premier recruiting service for kickers, punters and long snappers. He's also a two-time state wrestling finalist who sits at 18-0 this season.

Arnold – whose wrestling coach, Eric Smith, was a former wrestler for the Buckeyes – was recommended by Kornblue Kicking to special teams coach Matt Barnes, running backs coach/area recruiter Tony Alford and assistant director of player personnel Justin Perez, who offered him the walk-on opportunity.

It was only after Arnold was accepted to the university that he announced his decision, choosing Ohio State over similar offers from Kansas and Texas.

### Other Notes From Around The Country

- Ohio State handed out several new offers in recent weeks, including to 2022 Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep three-star cornerback Ryan Turner on Feb. 2; 2022 Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star defensive tackle Christen Miller and 2022 Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star defensive end Marvin Jones on Feb. 4; and 2022 Buford, Ga., unranked safety Jake Pope.

Miller hails from the same high school as Buckeye defensive tackle Antwan Jackson, and Pope comes from the same high school as offensive guard/center Harry Miller.

- Beaumont (Texas) West Brook four-star safety Bryce Anderson decommitted from LSU on Jan. 30. The 5-11, 197-pounder landed an offer from Ohio State during a virtual tour of campus with defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs and secondary coach Matt Barnes last April as the staff got to work on the 2022 cycle.

- Denton (Texas) Ryan four-star defensive tackle Bear Alexander committed to Georgia on Feb. 3. The 6-3, 325-pounder, who is considered the ninth-best defensive tackle and No. 140 prospect overall in the class of 2022, picked up an offer from Ohio State in May 2019 and listed the Buckeyes in his top 16 on Dec. 20.

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

## Superlatives For Ohio State's 2021 Recruiting Class

**Most Likely To Succeed:** When identifying prospects who will be entering a good situation and likely to succeed at the next level, it's hard to do much better than a five-star defensive end who signed up to play for Larry Johnson. Johnson has produced more elite pass rushers than just about anybody in college football, and Pickerington (Ohio) North product Jack Sawyer fits the exact profile of a future star under Johnson's tutelage.

In fact, there's a serious case to be made that Sawyer will be entering Ohio State as the best pure defensive end prospect Johnson has ever had. His 0.9982 composite rating at 247Sports puts him at fourth on the all-time Ohio State recruits list and atop the defensive line with room to spare. Noah Spence, Nick Bosa, Chase Young and Zach Harrison all crack the top 20 as well, but if recruiting hype is the guide, Sawyer is the cream of the crop for Johnson recruits.

It may not be an immediate impact because of the depth that Ohio State has at defensive end in 2021, but it's difficult to envision a scenario in which Sawyer leaves Ohio State as anything but the latest in a long line of first-round picks to exit the Johnson dojo.

**Future Captain:** Cincinnati La Salle safety Jaylen Johnson almost feels like too obvious a pick for this spot. First, he's in a position of leadership already at the safety spot, frequently occupied by the defender who best understands his team's scheme and can help to align his teammates on the fly. It's also a position that Ohio State has looked to for captains in the recent past, twice picking Jordan Fuller for the role and handing it to Tyvis Powell before him in 2015.

On top of that, Johnson is an Ohio native who committed to Ohio State nearly a year before putting pen to paper during the early signing period and never wavered in his pledge while helping to recruit other Buckeye targets during the bizarre, visit-free cycle. He'll enter Ohio State as the local recruit with something to prove as the lowest ranked non-specialist in the class, and if he's able to work his way into a starting role, it will garner a lot of respect from his teammates.

**First To The Field:** Even if Ohio State didn't have a big opening at the running back spot, it would be very difficult for the Buckeyes to justify keeping five-star Hopewell, Va., halfback TreVeyon Henderson off the field in 2021. Ranked the No. 22 player in the 247Sports composite rankings, Henderson is the kind of talent who can add an instant spark to an offense, and he's entering a running backs room without any heir apparent to Trey Sermon's throne.

That isn't to say that Ohio State has uncovered its next first-year, day one starter at halfback in the same vein as J.K. Dobbins or Maurice Clarett. There's still plenty of talent in that running backs room, and players such as Master Teague, Steele Chambers, Marcus Crowley and Miyan Williams aren't exactly going to lay down the red carpet and make room for their new competition. Each player has a different reason to carry a significant chip on his shoulder in 2021 – be it Teague looking to prove the doubters wrong, Chambers is hoping to fight his way back into the rotation, Crowley trying to show off what he can do when fully healthy or Williams attempting to parlay his late-season momentum into a larger role – and will battle as hard as they can for that spot. After all, there's just the one football.

However, Henderson is just too good and too perfect a fit for Ohio State's offense to warm the bench for long. Even if he isn't a full-time starter, Henderson will have a role in the Buckeye system from day one.

**Fan Favorite:** Ohio State fans learned the value of a truly dominant

defensive tackle – or defensive tackles, rather – in 2020 thanks to the pairing of Haskell Garrett and Tommy Togiai, which terrorized opposing offensive lines all season long. Then, with the chance to exact revenge on Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinals, it was again the devastating defensive tackle duo wreaking havoc on the Clemson front and pestering Trevor Lawrence on the way to a Buckeye victory.

If Streetsboro, Ohio, tackle Mike Hall is able to reach similar heights during his time in scarlet and gray, he'll have no trouble generating the kind of fanfare that Garrett and Togiai did last season. On top of that, Hall brings an instant infusion of positivity off the field. During the holiday season, he and a few of his friends teamed up to raise upwards of \$1,000 so that they could purchase clothing, food, games, posters, toys and toiletries for Safe Landing Youth Shelter, an emergency shelter for troubled young people 11 years of age and older in Akron.

**Biggest Recruiting Win:** Ohio State wasn't really in a ton of super tight recruiting battles this cycle. Perhaps that's a symptom of the lack of on-campus visits, which prevented a lot of the usual hype that recruiting battles can generate, but it may also be a case of Ohio State looking to avoid that style of recruiting. This is a program that doesn't seem interested in landing kids that aren't 100 percent sure that they want to be Buckeyes, and in many of those cases, those 100-percenters were never really looking anywhere else, at least not strongly.

With that said, Ohio State did still have to fend off suitors for several top prospects, perhaps none more than Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka. Egbuka committed to Ohio State in December after a lengthy battle between OSU and Oklahoma, home to one of the premier passing attacks in the country. To beat the Sooners for a top receiver, especially one from all the way across the country, had to feel good for Ohio State.

As an honorable mention, swinging in at the last moment to snatch Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed defensive tackle Tyleik Williams away from Virginia Tech was also very impressive.

**Underrated (For Now):** This might be the most cut-and-dried answer on the board, specifically because when BSB asked recruiting analysts for their pick of the most underrated player in the class back in December, every single one offered the same answer: Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren defensive back Jantzen Dunn.

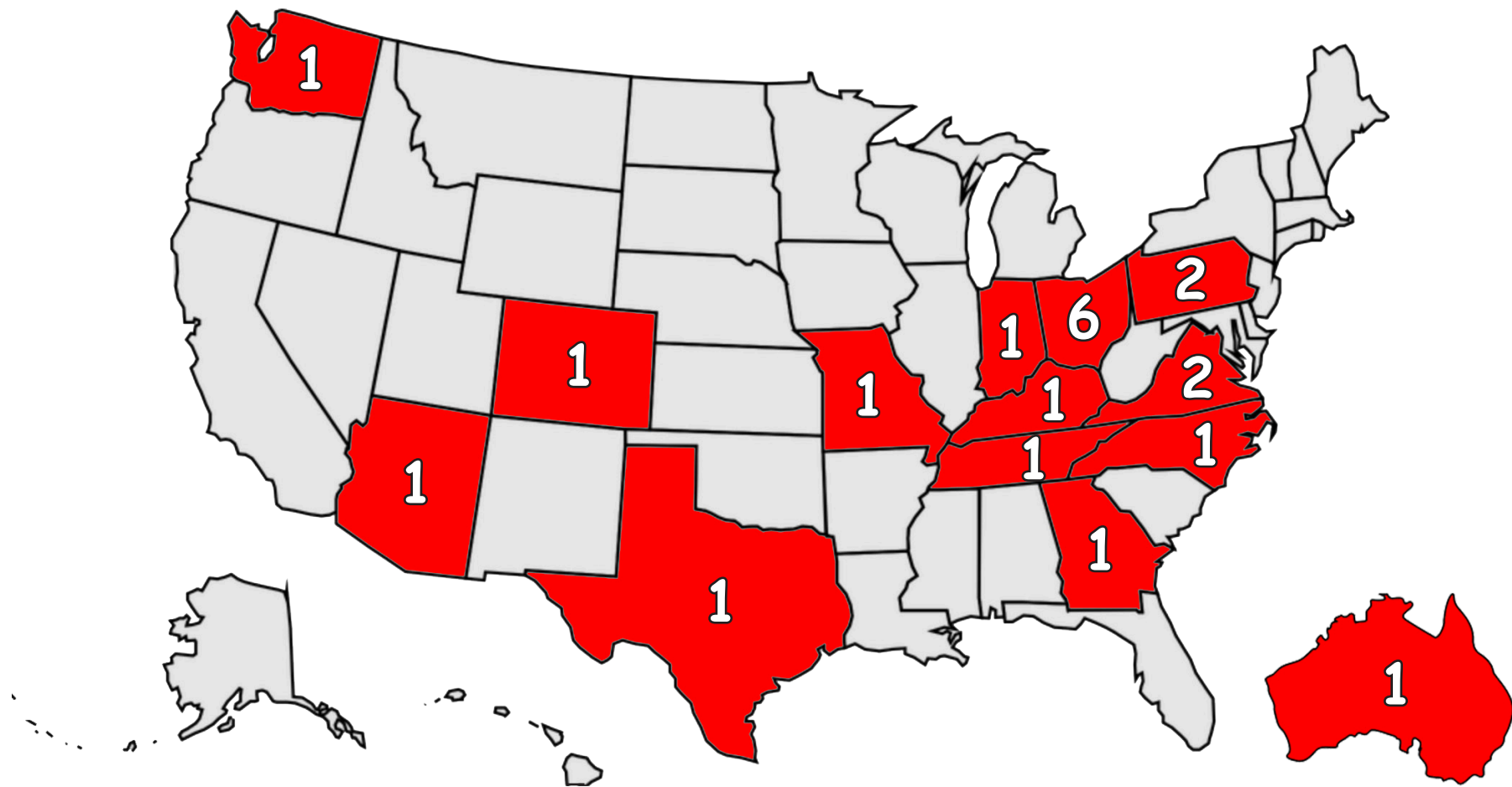
"I think Jantzen Dunn has a chance to be a really special free safety," Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler said. "I know they have a lot of defensive backs in this class, and I think they're still trying to sort out where certain guys are going to play, and I don't want to go crazy on a Malik Hooker comparison,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

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

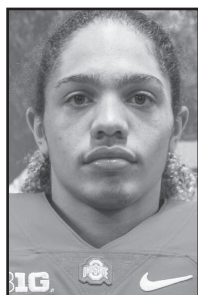
It's hard to disagree. Dunn has excellent length and athletic ability, comes to Ohio State from one of the best football programs in Kentucky and was shooting up the 247Sports rankings for essentially his entire recruitment, jumping from No. 623 on Sept. 30, 2019, to his final spot at No. 167.

– Patrick Mayhorn

# OSU's Class Of 2021



All rankings from the 247Sports composite. All statistics provided by Ohio State and MaxPreps.



## JAYDEN BALLARD

WR • 6-2 • 175  
Massillon (Ohio)  
Washington  
Rank: WR 15, Overall 99, OH 4



**ACCOLADES:** Ballard led the Tigers to three consecutive Division II state title games. He was invited to play in the Army All-American Bowl. Ballard earned a spot on the Ohio MaxPreps All-State team, hauling in 36 receptions for 573 yards and seven touchdowns as a senior. Ballard concluded his high school career with 141 receptions, 2,636 yards and 37 touchdowns, becoming Massillon's all-time leader in career receiving yards and touchdowns.

**BALLARD SAYS:** "I really liked Coach (Brian) Hartline a lot, and I think Coach (Ryan) Day is awesome as well. It's great down there, and that was just the school I want to play for. I think Coach Hartline is a great guy and he really knows the wide receiver position, so I think he can teach me a lot about playing the position. We didn't really talk that much in the beginning, but once I started opening up more, we developed a great relationship, and we talk almost every day."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Has good height. Still needs to bulk up, but is well developed in his lower body. Good athlete who also excels on the basketball court. Very natural pass-catcher who can adjust to passes and make difficult grabs. Tracks the ball well in the air and wins in contested situations. Gets off the ground quickly and attacks passes at their highest point. Long-strider with solid timed speed. Can get down the field and take the top off a defense. Shows fluidity in his route running. Currently more of a deep-ball threat than one who will make a ton of plays after the catch. Has to get stronger and keep working through the route tree, but a very talented athlete who can be a No. 1 receiver in college. Has the potential to develop into an NFL prospect." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Ballard also starred in both basketball and track and field. He boasted marks of 10.89 seconds in the 100-meter dash and 22.77 seconds in the 200-meter dash. He also displayed his athleticism by achieving 6-0 in high jump and 21-9 ¼ in long jump. He is the son of Christina March and Jamaal Ballard.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 21, 2019



## DENZEL BURKE

ATH • 6-0 • 189  
Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro  
Rank: ATH 8, Overall 194, AZ 3



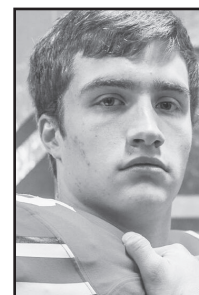
**ACCOLADES:** Burke played both defensive back and wide receiver at Saguaro and was recruited as an athlete, but he is expected to play cornerback at Ohio State, which is how he is listed on the program's roster. He had a pair of interceptions as a junior in 2019, as well as 313 receiving yards with four receiving touchdowns and 337 rushing yards on 24 carries.

**BURKE SAYS:** "I want to be challenged to reach another level. I know Ohio State will develop me into a great defensive back."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Thin build with long arms and projectable frame. Should take good on good weight over next few years. Fluid athlete that could thrive on offense or defense. Very good ball skills. Dynamic receiver with quickness to explode out of his breaks. Sets up defenders well to gain separation after the catch. Speed makes him a threat to score from anywhere. Decent in coverage as a defender with fluidity to stick to wideouts. Must improve physicality and durability. Potential multi-year starter and NFL Draft Day 3 selection." – Blair Angulo, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Burke is the son of Deya and Zafiro Burke. He played at Brophy Prep in Phoenix before transferring to Saguaro. He played in only one game during his senior season after suffering a shoulder injury.

**COMMIT DATE:** May 24, 2020



## REID CARRICO

LB • 6-3 • 225  
Ironton, OH  
Rank: ILB 5, Overall 86, OH 3



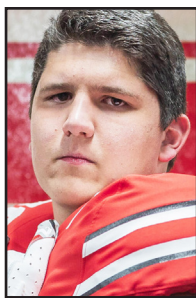
**ACCOLADES:** Carrico was the first player ever to be named the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Southeast District Player of the Year on offense and defense in the same season after recording 56 tackles, 17 tackles for loss and four sacks in 12 games in 2020. He also rushed for 1,544 yards and 25 touchdowns, leading Ironton to the Division V state championship game.

**CARRICO SAYS:** (Of his first trip to Ohio State for the 2019 Cincinnati game) "(That) was my first time going to an Ohio State game live in my life and seeing the atmosphere. I've been to a spring game, but it's not the same animal. That's really when I knew. When I went up there and I saw all the daggone tents and stuff and campers and all these people with face paint, that's when I knew. These people are diehard. I've got family who are into Ohio State and all that, and I thought, 'This is the place for me.'"

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Well built prospect who will step onto a college campus physically ready to compete. Above average height and length for his position. A good athlete who has tested well and also runs track and plays basketball with great success. That is evident on his film where he runs quickly to the football with aggression and little hesitation. He also shows that on his offensive film where he is a breakaway threat as a runner. Also has a big vertical and ball skills that should make him an asset in coverage. Will need to adjust to level of competition in college and learn to read keys at that level, but has all the physical ability to be the leader of a defense in college and an early draft choice." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Carrico will be the first player from Ironton to suit up for the Buckeyes since halfback Marcus Williams, who played as a reserve from 2006-09. He's the seventh player from the high school to head to Columbus, joining Williams, fullback Tyler Whaley (2004-07), tight end Reggie Arden (2001-04), halfback Jermon Jackson (1994-98), offensive tackle Walt DeLong (1993) and center Ken Fritz (1976-79).

**COMMIT DATE:** Sept. 10, 2019



**BEN CHRISTMAN**  
OL • 6-6 • 299  
Richfield (OH)  
Revere  
Rank: OG 7, Overall 124, OH 6



**ACCOLADES:** Christman was the top-rated offensive linemen in the state of Ohio for the 2021 class. A four-year starter, Christman was named to Cleveland.com's All-Decade team. He was named the 2020 Suburban League American Conference Co-Offensive Player of the Year. Christman was Revere's offensive line MVP and a first-team All-Suburban League selection as well as first-team all-district. He was named a Touchdown Club All-Star and Cleveland.com All-Star. Christman was also a member of Cleveland.com's 2020 All-Area squad and the 2020 Ohio MaxPreps All-State team.

**CHRISTMAN SAYS:** "The culture of Ohio State was the difference. Knowing that I wanted to be a leader of a class and just the opportunities that you can have at Ohio State, I couldn't pass on it."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Tall with good arm length. Already quite filled out and has clearly been in the weight room. Good athlete who also plays basketball. Very strong. Has no issue getting defenders to the ground and driving them backwards. Plays with a mean streak. Has good balance and keeps his feet when drive blocking. Not as refined in pass-blocking technique as he is in the run game at the moment. Must improve lateral quickness and overall explosiveness. Could play right tackle or guard in college. Will be a mauler who has a chance to play on Sundays." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Christman was a three-sport athlete at Revere, where he also played basketball and participated in track and field. His parents are Karen and Brian Christman.

**COMMIT DATE:** June 26, 2019



**JANTZEN DUNN**  
S • 6-2 • 278  
Bowling Green (Ky.)  
South Warren  
Rank: S 10, Overall 170, KY 2



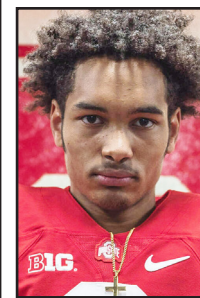
**ACCOLADES:** Dunn was a two-way player at South Warren and finished the 2019 season with 37 tackles and an interception, along with 19 receptions, six of which went for touchdowns. The season prior, Dunn had 30 tackles, a forced fumble and two fumble recoveries to help South Warren go 15-0 and win a Class 5A state title.

**DUNN SAYS:** "I watched a lot of Jordan Fuller last year and can see he had a lot of fun playing that position. As far as I know, me and the coaches talked about it, and I'd love to play that position. I play very aggressively; I love to hit people, and I'm a cover guy. I can cover anybody or any route you put on me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Long and lean with an angular frame. Thin build with long arms and thin throughout his lower body. Has plenty of room to add mass. Is a high-level athlete on the track and in combine settings, showing his explosiveness with strong marks in the vertical, long jump and broad jump in addition to very good speed and change of direction. Plays wide receiver and safety for his high school and projects on defense at the next level at safety or corner. Has top-notch play speed, closing quickly when moving downhill from his safety spot. Shows a wide range with ability to get to the sideline in zone coverage. Has the physical framework and athleticism to develop into a strong tackler and run defender over time. His wide receiver background helps with the ball skills in coverage. Has some rigidity in his backpedal and can continue improving his man cover skills. A high upside type who should continue getting better at a steady rate. Projects as a Power Five starter with the upside to develop into an NFL draft pick." – Charles Power, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Dunn ran track at South Warren, where he won the Class 3A Regional 2 long jump and high jump. He is the son of Sonja Breeze and Mitchell Dunn.

**COMMIT DATE:** April 20, 2020



**EMEKA EGBUKA**  
WR • 6-1 • 180  
Steilacoom, Wash.  
Rank: WR 1, Overall 9, WA 2



**ACCOLADES:** Egbuka, who was invited to the All-American Bowl, caught 199 passes for 3,907 yards and 61 touchdowns in three seasons at Steilacoom, which had its 2020 season postponed until the spring due to the coronavirus pandemic. He also rushed for four touchdowns and returned five punts, three interceptions and one kickoff for a score.

**EGBUKA SAYS:** "I always knew that I liked (Ohio State) from the first time I went down there."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Elite body control to go with optimal size and strength, with good top end speed and separation. Physical receiver, difficult to press but also takes advantage of any cushions given. Can adjust to each and every throw, take short passes the distance while also getting behind the secondary on deep routes. Strong hands, wide catch radius, will bring anything in range down. Consistently draws double coverage and bracket coverage and routinely gets open. Able to get consistent yards after catch. Also a skilled punt and kick returner. Can play safety, with tremendous range and ball skills. Projects as immediate Power 5 starter and future first-round NFL draft pick." – Brandon Huffman, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Egbuka's parents are Rhonda and Eric Ogilve and Henry Egbuka. He was also a stand-out baseball player, hitting .316 with 18 RBI in one season at the varsity level before focusing exclusively on football.

**COMMIT DATE:** Dec. 11, 2020



**MIKE HALL**  
DT • 6-3 • 290  
Streetsboro, Ohio  
Rank: DT 5, Overall 52, OH 2



**ACCOLADES:** Hall had his senior season cut short by a hand injury after just three games, but he led Streetsboro to its first ever playoff win and an 11-1 season as a junior in 2019. During that season, he recorded 72 tackles, 17 tackles for loss and five sacks. He earned offers from 17 schools, including Alabama, Florida State, Penn State and Tennessee. He was selected for the 2020 All-American Bowl.

**HALL SAYS:** "Everyone in my family when I was growing up, they always told me: 'I could see you playing for the Buckeyes,' but I always thought people were just talking. Ohio State was always my dream school, so I always thought they said it just to say it. But it was crazy when I got the offer. When I got the offer, it was reality. Is this real? It was a dream-come-true. I can't wait to get down there."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Looks lighter and leaner than listed size. Carries his weight well and should comfortably be able to add more in college. Explosive player who gets off the ball quickly and has good lateral agility. Plays fast and plays hard. Always looks like he is going his absolute hardest on the field. Closes quickly and runs down plays. Shows good awareness of where the ball is and gets to it quickly. Plays with good strength and leverage. Still can improve with his hands and overall technique though. Ideal three-tech who will be disruptive and a penetrator in college. Should be a multi-year starter at the high Power 5 level and have a good chance to play on Sundays." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Hall played both ways for Streetsboro, lining up both as a defensive tackle and as a versatile member of the offensive line.

**COMMIT DATE:** Feb. 1, 2020



**JORDAN HANCOCK**  
CB • 6-1 • 170  
Suwanee (Ga.)  
North Gwinnett  
Rank: CB 5, Overall 72, GA 9



**ACCOLADES:** As a junior, Hancock recorded 12 passes defended and a pair of interceptions. He helped North Gwinnett to a state championship and three regional titles in four seasons.

**HANCOCK SAYS:** "They've talked to me about Sevyn (Banks), how he's going to be a senior when I come. Shaun (Wade) is going to be gone, and they signed two corners. Clark (Phillips) decommitted. Ryan (Watts) and Lejond (Cavazos) are both coming in, and they really need me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Thin build and should add some size once he gets to college. Turned in a stellar junior season against some of the nation's toughest competition in Georgia's highest classification. Has a pure cover corner skill set with the ability to flip his hip and change direction quickly. Shows high-level ball skills as he locates and tracks the ball downfield. Closes quickly in defending the quick game. Instinctive and versatile with the ability to play multiple spots within the secondary. Doesn't shy away from contact and looks to be a willing tackler. Projects as a multi-year starter in the secondary at the Power Five level with the upside of developing into an early round NFL draft pick." – Charles Power, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Hancock decommitted from Clemson on July 14 and committed to the Buckeyes four days later. Originally he decided to opt out of his senior season due to health concerns with his family, but he joined his team in October. He also played basketball and ran track while at North Gwinnett.

**COMMIT DATE:** July 19, 2020



**MARVIN HARRISON**  
WR • 6-3 • 190  
Philadelphia  
St. Joseph's Prep  
Rank: WR 14, Overall 97, PA 5



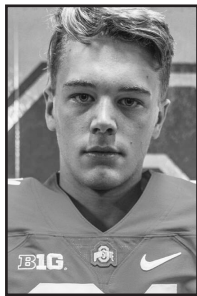
**ACCOLADES:** Harrison finished his high school career with 2,625 receiving yards and 37 touchdowns, both of which were Philadelphia Catholic League records. He snagged 144 career catches. Along with Ohio State quarterback commit Kyle McCord, he led St. Joseph's Prep to three straight Pennsylvania 6A state championships. Harrison posted eight receptions for 156 yards and two touchdowns in the 2020 state title victory over Central York.

**HARRISON SAYS:** "Coach (Brian) Hartline and Coach (Ryan) Day definitely played a huge role. Overall, Ohio State was the place where I could become the best person, player and student I can be. Those three things were what I was really looking for in a college."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Great frame with length but needs to add strength. Big, strong hands. Can eventually get to 220 pounds. Son of NFL Hall of Famer Marvin Harrison. Great route tactician. Gets out of breaks quickly and is precise in his route depths. Good release and technical at top of routes. Has separation skills. Uses size and length well to shield defenders. Red-zone threat. Catches every routine ball and tracks it well. So smooth he makes it look effortless. Needs to add strength to handle jams and become more effective blocker. High-level player for top-15 college program. Should develop into a second- or third-round NFL draft pick." – Brian Dohn, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** His parents are Keara and Marvin Harrison Sr., who was an eight-time NFL All-Pro wide receiver who spent his entire 13-year career with the Indianapolis Colts.

**COMMIT DATE:** Oct. 31, 2019



**SAM HART**

TE • 6-5 • 225  
Aurora (Colo.)  
Cherokee Trail

Rank: TE 16, Overall 392, CO 3



**ACCOLADES:** Hart was a second-team all-state selection in 2019 as a junior, racking up 31 receptions for 562 yards and seven touchdowns, while lining up as a defensive end as well. He had 233 receiving yards as a senior.

**HART SAYS:** "It's going to be crazy because a few years ago, I never would have thought I'd be in this position going into a school like Ohio State to play football and go to school there. A few years ago, I was just hoping to get a few schools to look at me and maybe go D1, FBS or maybe Power 5. It's been a great opportunity, and I've really been blessed. This whole recruiting process has been a lot of fun. I've been so happy with my decision, and I'm really excited to get up there as soon as I can."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Hart has essentially the same physical build as Jeremy Ruckert and Joe Royer coming out of high school. The three have another unifying factor in skill set. Ruckert and Royer were both essentially big receivers in high school, and while Hart plays more on the line than they did, he spends a lot of his time in the slot for his high school team. This has made him a very strong route runner, with the ability to high-point passes, while serving as a matchup nightmare for every defense he faces. Obviously, college defenses are better equipped to handle a player like Hart, but the kind of talent he has is still very rare. As a pass catcher, Hart would be ready as a freshman. He has no trouble in the receiving game, and the majority of his improvements there will be technical and minor. Just like his predecessors, Hart's obstacle at Ohio State will be run blocking. He's not bad at it; he just really hasn't been asked to do it much. At Ohio State, he'll need to block, and to do that, he'll have some learning to do." – Patrick Mayhorn, BuckeyeSports.com

**PERSONAL:** Hart was one of the best wrestlers in Colorado at 200 pounds, going 38-0 as a junior and winning the state title after making it all the way to the finals a year prior. He gave up on wrestling after his junior season to focus fully on football.

**COMMIT DATE:** Dec. 30, 2019



**TREVEYON HENDERSON**

RB • 5-11 • 195  
Hopewell, Va.

Rank: RB 1, Overall 22, VA 2



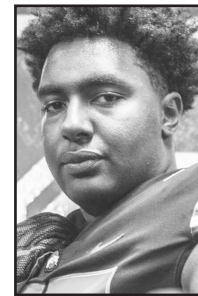
**ACCOLADES:** Henderson was named Virginia's Gatorade Player of the Year in 2019, when he rushed for 2,424 yards and 45 touchdowns to lead Hopewell to the state championship. He was invited to both the All-American Bowl and Under Armour All-America Game.

**HENDERSON SAYS:** "The people there (at Ohio State) really care about their players and their futures. They set their players up for good opportunities for life after football and things like that."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Wide-shouldered frame with ability to add 20-plus pounds and play at 215 pounds. High-level athlete with speed. Has sub 11.0 time in 100 meters. Was dominant and extremely productive in high school. Is a threat catching the ball and as a running back. Combines vision, burst, balance, cut-back ability and speed. Gets through the hole quickly but also runs with patience. Instinctive runner. Is a cerebral player and dissects play quickly. Has elite change of direction. Can score from anywhere on the field. Has to show he can pick up blitz in college. Should get on the field early in his freshman season and can make an impact with a title-contending program. Has first round NFL draft potential." – Brian Dohn, 247 Sports

**PERSONAL:** His parents are Lakeesha Hayes and Trenton Henderson. He played receiver and defensive back as a freshman and sophomore before switching to running back full-time as a junior.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 27, 2020



**DONOVAN JACKSON**

OG • 6-5 • 308  
Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal

Rank: OG 1, Overall 18, TX 3



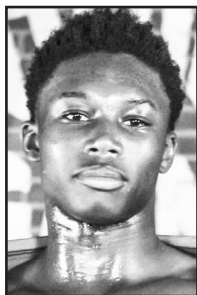
**ACCOLADES:** Jackson was named the Anthony Muñoz Offensive Lineman of the Year by the All-American Bowl Selection Committee and was a finalist for the All-American Bowl's GEICO Man of the Year award for his work with children with special needs and in food banks around the Houston metropolitan area. He was named the most valuable offensive lineman at The Opening finals in 2019.

**JACKSON SAYS:** "Ohio State is unique because you not only graduate with a great degree, but they provide so much after football."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Owns the requisite height with outstanding verified length. Legitimately elite prospect whether projected to tackle or guard. Wingspan verified at seven feet with 36-inch arms. Broad and burly with the expected play strength given his build. Plays with good leverage and bends naturally. Shows enough lateral mobility to mirror edge speed, aided by terrific reach. Capable of bullying second-level targets with impressive functional athleticism to reach them. Promising body control, even when engaged, relative to mass. Plays hard and will finish blocks to the ground. Technically sound for a high school player. Will face adjustment going from Texas private school ball to P5, but has faced strong competition in elite camps and non-district games. Extremely high-floor prospect who could virtually play anywhere on the offensive line in the long run. One of the nation's top 2021 offensive linemen and could reach NFL draft first-round status." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Jackson is the son of Melanie and Todd Jackson. He started as a freshman at left tackle at Houston Christian before transferring to Episcopal.

**COMMIT DATE:** Jan. 8, 2020



**JAKAILIN JOHNSON**

CB • 6-1 • 175  
St. Louis De Smet Jesuit

Rank: CB 3, Overall 49, MO 1



**ACCOLADES:** Johnson recorded 93 tackles, 11 interceptions and two fumble recoveries as a three-year starter at De Smet Jesuit, which won the state title his junior year and reached the championship game his senior year. He was set to play in the All-American Bowl until it was canceled due to the pandemic.

**JOHNSON SAYS:** "I had more of a relationship with the coaching staff than other schools. I want to be part of something that's going to be great."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Solid length, but still has to add weight and fill in. Has great twitch and change of direction. Shows good burst to the ball and ball skills. Despite still having room to fill in, he is a physical player who will support the run and play physically. Shows experience and comfort in both man and zone. Has seen some good competition in high school. So as long as he adds the weight and strength necessary, he will have a chance to play early. Upside is great because of play speed and smarts. Projects as a multi-year starting cornerback at a Power 5 school and potential first half of the draft selection." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** His mother is Zena Mabins, step-mother and father are Ashleigh and J.D. Johnson and guardian is Kenny Moore. He is the fifth player from the St. Louis area to sign with Ohio State in the last four recruiting cycles, including Christian Brothers College four-star wide receivers Kamryn Babb and Cameron Brown in 2018; Cardinal Ritter College four-star wide receiver Jameson Williams in 2019; and Maryland Heights Pattonville Senior four-star Mookie Cooper in 2020.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 15, 2020



**JAYLEN JOHNSON**

S • 6-1 • 200  
Cincinnati La Salle

Rank: S 29, Overall 412, OH 13



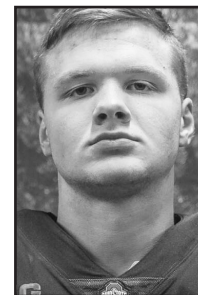
**ACCOLADES:** Johnson was named to the MaxPreps Ohio all-state team in 2020, and he was named the Greater Catholic League co-defensive back of the year. He was also named to the first-team Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association Division II All-Southwest District.

**JOHNSON SAYS:** "I let my actions on the field speak louder than anything else. I don't know exactly how to be a top player in Ohio. I'm not as high of a recruit as I'm supposed to be."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Went from 175-pound safety as he started getting recruited to a 200-pound defender as a senior who could play a hybrid role. Still capable of playing in space and covering receivers, but could also play in the box and be like an extra linebacker. Also effective as a blitz. Lined up like a Mike at times also. Shows burst and short-area explosion. Hits with power as well. Was able to run plays down which showed he has the speed to play strong safety or as a hybrid in college. Long-term, growing into linebacker is not out of the question though." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Johnson has been called the glue of the class by head coach Ryan Day for the way he made relationships with the fellow members of the class. "He's got a great way of connecting with the other recruits," Day said.

**COMMIT DATE:** Jan. 7, 2020



**KYLE MCCORD**

QB • 6-3 • 215  
Philadelphia  
St. Joseph's Prep

Rank: PRO 3, Overall 27, PA 2



**ACCOLADES:** McCord and Ohio State four-star wide receiver signee Marvin Harrison led St. Joseph's Prep to their third straight state championship in 2020. He finished his high school career as the city's all-time leader in passing yards (6,687) and passing touchdowns (88). He was also selected to play in the All-American Bowl.

**MCCORD SAYS:** "The biggest thing for me was just my relationship with the coaching staff. Seeing what the staff did with Dwayne Haskins was really impressive. Every time I'm on campus, it just feels like home. And on top of that, they recruited me the hardest out of every school."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Wide-shouldered frame with good height and size. Strong arm and accurate. Spins ball well. Poised under pressure. Great leadership qualities. Plays with high IQ. Can throw 15-yard out on line. Touch to throw over linebackers on intermediate routes. Has quick release with good arm angle. Fits balls into tight windows. Accurate throwing on run. Moves in pocket. Extends plays. Needs to continue to develop escapability. More consistency needed on deep balls. Multi-year starter at top-15 program. Projects to be an early round NFL draft pick." – Brian Dohn, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** McCord is the son of Stacy and Derek McCord. His father played quarterback at Rutgers from 1988-92.

**COMMIT DATE:** April 30, 2019





**ZEN MICHALSKI**

OT • 6-6 • 285  
Floyds Knobs (Ind.)  
Floyd Central

Rank: OT 22, Overall 310, IN 4



**ACCOLADES:** Michalski helped lead Floyd Central to a 7-3 overall record in 2020 while paving the way for an offense that averaged 37.2 points per game. He was rewarded for his performance when he was named one of the 50 best players in the state of Indiana by the Indiana Football Coaches Association, along with a selection to the first team of the All-Hoosier Hills Conference team.

**MICHALSKI SAYS:** "I chose Ohio State because it was a perfect mix of everything I wanted in a school. It's pretty close to home. I have a lot of family up there in Ohio. It's a great education too. Mainly, it was the coaches. They're some of the best people I've talked to in this whole process. If I want to go play somewhere where I'm going to develop the right way and be the best I can possibly be, it's Ohio State."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Tall with above-average arm length. Has filled in a lot and bulked up into a Power Five prospect after looking very thin and lean initially. A very good athlete who has quickness and coordination. Has good change of direction and bend. Fires out of his stance quickly and with good pad level. Has all the tools to be a great pass blocker, but needs reps against top-level competition and technical polishing there. Added 35 pounds after his junior season so we still need to see how he plays with the added weight and strength. Trajectory is headed upwards. Works very hard. Should develop into a starting left tackle and has the upside to potentially project as an NFL prospect." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Michalski was a late riser, both in the recruiting game and physically. He grew nearly six inches and gained almost 100 pounds during his high school career. His improvement brought newfound interest and an offer from Ohio State inspired him to decommit from Louisville, where he originally pledged on April 25, 2020.

**COMMIT DATE:** Oct. 3, 2020



**JESSE MIRCO**

P • 6-3 • 200  
Perth, Australia

Rank: P 6, Overall 2,007, AUS 3



**ACCOLADES:** Mirco is rated as the No. 6 punter for the 2021 class and the third-ranked prospect from Australia, according to the 247Sports composite rankings.

**MIRCO SAYS:** "I didn't have to think twice about committing to the best school in the country. I'm super excited to be a Buckeye and be a part of the best college football program in the world."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Like former Buckeyes punter Cameron Johnston, Mirco is a former Australian rules football player. So he's athletic, but he's also a bit bigger than the current NFL Pro Bowl punter. Mirco is almost 6-3 and 190-pounds, so frame-wise he'll remind Ohio State more of current punter Drue Chrisman – but with an Australian-style twist. As a young footballer in Australia, Mirco was praised for being 'extremely smart' and versatile. Now that he's preparing to be an American football punter, his focus will narrow. The sky is the limit for the Fremantle – a port city in Western Australia – native." – Jeremy Birmingham, Lettermen Row

**PERSONAL:** Mirco is a former Australian-rules football player who learned the art of American punting in just fourth months from ProKick coaches Nathan Chapman and John Smith. He is the son of Leanne and Luca Mirco.

**COMMIT DATE:** May 6, 2020



**EVAN PRYOR**

RB • 5-10 • 190  
Cornelius (N.C.)

William Amos Hough

Rank: APB 2, Overall 82, PA 4



**ACCOLADES:** Pryor didn't get the chance to play his senior season at William Amos Hough because his state canceled fall football, but he was still selected to the All-American Bowl, thanks to his showing as a junior and his performances on the camp circuit in 2019. He had 1,130 yards rushing and 11 touchdowns while adding 646 receiving yards and eight more touchdowns as a junior, and he put up a 4.31-second shuttle at The Opening regional in 2019.

**PRYOR SAYS:** "They want to take two (running backs). It's not something that runs me away. It's actually something that attracts me more, the two-back system. It will definitely help me in the long run because you want to get to that second level. That's a huge part of something I want to do. Not burning my tires out in college would be huge."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Has a compact build that has begun to fill out late in his high school career. Has the frame to carry over 210 pounds at the college level. Is a loose runner with a natural gait and body lean. Has the ability to change directions without losing much speed and shows high-level lateral agility. Looks like one of the better pass-catching running backs in the 2021 cycle. Productive and skilled in the pass game on Friday nights and in the 7-on-7 setting. Will need to keep showing high-level production consistency as a runner on a snap-to-snap basis. Projects as a multi-year starter at the Power Five level with the upside of developing into an early to mid-round NFL draft pick." – Charles Power, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Pryor was also a track star in high school, with a personal best of 10.84 in the 100 meters, which he recorded as a sophomore in 2019. He didn't get the chance to compete in 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 16, 2020



**JACK SAWYER**

DE • 6-5 • 248  
Pickerington (Ohio) North

Rank: SDE 3, Overall 4, OH 1



**ACCOLADES:** Sawyer was a MaxPreps All-American after he recorded 37 tackles, 19 tackles for loss and 13½ sacks for Pickerington North. He also played quarterback after the Panthers' starter went down, and he completed 79 of 135 passes for 1,056 yards and nine touchdowns before an injury cut his season short. Sawyer opted out of his senior season with plans of enrolling early at Ohio State and playing in a potential spring football season before the Big Ten reinstated the fall season.

**SAWYER SAYS:** "The blueprint is out there when you look at what the Bosas and Chase Young have done. I know if I go there with my head down and work as hard as I can, things are going to take care of themselves. I'm looking forward to getting there and working with the coaches."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Physically put-together prospect. Has taken weight and speed training seriously and that shows up. Likely will not add tons and tons of weight come college, but still has a little bit of room. Great athlete who is a multi-sport guy and a multi-positional guy on the football field including even some stints at quarterback. As an end, that athleticism shows up as he gets off the ball well and can bend the corner and get upfield. Also is strong enough to anchor in against the run and has the blue-collar mentality to work in the trenches. Can run plays down when they go away from him and pursues hard. True strong-side end with enough versatility to play in multiple fronts or schemes. High-level prospect who is ready to come in and compete as a freshman at the college level and has the traits of a future high draft choice." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Sawyer's father, Lyle, played football at the University of Findlay, and his mother, Michelle, was a basketball player at Pickerington High School (before it split) while his maternal grandfather played in the Pittsburgh Pirates farm system. He was the first player to commit to Ohio State head coach Ryan Day.

**COMMIT DATE:** Feb. 3, 2019



**ANDRE TURRENTINE**

S • 6-0 • 175  
Nashville (Tenn.) Ensworth

Rank: S 9, Overall 169, TN 4



**ACCOLADES:** Turrentine helped lead Ensworth to the Division II-AAA state semifinals as a junior, finishing that season with 73 total tackles as well as 248 yards and two touchdowns as a receiver on the offensive side of the ball.

**TURRENTINE SAYS:** "I think I'm going to be playing cover safety there and (free) safety. I think that will be better for me to see the whole defense and see the whole offense. I think that will bring out the best qualities in me as a player. They've communicated that to me as well. I don't know where I'm going to be up there. I'm going to do whatever I can to get on the field."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Versatile defensive back body type capable of projecting to safety or cornerback but not an imposing body in either role. Playmaker on film. Flashes in game settings and was often the best player on the field as a junior amid high quality competition and teammates. Shows great tackling instincts and ability. Takes good tackling angles. Tackles in space and on the perimeter effectively. Brings physicality from the safety position in a frame more typically suited for cornerback. Quickness and lateral ability flash. Disruptive in coverage but has a limited interception count. Ball skills show up on offense in limited touches. Not an elite athlete. Will need to improve in man coverage settings and is going to win more with instincts and effort than with traits and athleticism. Projects as a Power Five starter with enough football instincts to track towards a mid-round NFL draft pick." – Barton Simmons, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** Turrentine is the son of Jajuan and Antonio Turrentine. He committed to Ohio State in the days following shutdowns due to COVID-19, helping spark a spree of Buckeye commitments for the 2021 class in March and April.

**COMMIT DATE:** March 17, 2020



**TYLEIK WILLIAMS**

DT • 6-3 • 330  
Manassas (Va.)

Unity Reed

Rank: DT 13, Overall 164, VA 6



**ACCOLADES:** Williams earned first-team All-Virginia honors by tallying 47 tackles and 3½ sacks as an interior defensive lineman. He was selected to play in the Army All-America Bowl. Williams helped lead Stonewall Jackson to an 8-3 record and a Virginia Class 6 first-round playoff appearance as a junior.

**WILLIAMS SAYS:** "With the Buckeyes, it's just a great brotherhood. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I fit in perfectly. I'm cool with all the commits. All the coaches are cool. It's just a great place to be. It is going to be a great honor playing for Coach (Larry Johnson). He's real special when it comes to coaching. Also, he puts players in the draft and develops them well, and I believe he can do the same for me."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Excellent frame with lean build. Long and athletic in space. Can easily add 30 pounds. Explodes at snap. Covers ground quickly in first three steps. Impressive body control for size. Runs well and can redirect down line of scrimmage. Disengages quickly and locates ball carrier well. Good tackler. Has to play with lower pad level. Adding strength in the lower and upper body integral to play inside. Possesses good technique but must refine moves. Continued development with hand usage important. Multi-year starter at top-20 program. Day 3 NFL draft potential." – Brian Dohn, 247Sports

**PERSONAL:** He is the son of Gloria Williams.

**COMMIT DATE:** Aug. 27, 2020

# 'Not Average' Hall Strives To Be Great At Ohio State

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Growing up in Streetsboro, Ohio, Mike Hall always knew he wanted to don scarlet and gray as a collegiate athlete. He had a long way to go before that would even become a possibility, however.

Part of what made Ohio State such an intriguing destination for Hall was the historic run at the end of the 2014 season. The Buckeyes blasted Wisconsin 59-0 in the 2014 Big Ten Championship Game before taking down powerhouse Alabama in the College Football Playoff semifinal and beating Oregon to become national champs. Hall was only a sixth-grader, and that title run left a lasting impression on him.

"It was my dream school ever since I was young," Hall told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "Growing up, I always watched the Buckeyes. I always wanted to be a Buckeye when I saw them play, especially after the 2014 national championship game. Seeing your hometown college team winning a national championship, it's crazy. And at the same time, everyone was so excited, everybody was talking about it. So why not go to the best school in the country?"

The fact that Hall wanted to play at Ohio State after watching the program win a national championship shows that he had interest from a young age, but so do many Ohio kids. The important element Hall needed to achieve his dream was a mutual interest from the coaches in Columbus.

A young Hall enjoyed playing football, and the defensive tackle enjoyed success largely due to his impressive size for his age. The reality is that he was still a far way from entering Ohio State's radar as a prospect, even as an underclassman at Streetsboro High School.

His high school coach, Lonnel Harrison, saw great potential in Hall but knew that he would never reach his goals unless he became a harder worker.

"Before I really started pushing him, I would watch him, and he just went off nat-



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE HALL

**FAST RISER** – After leading Streetsboro, Ohio, to the state playoffs as a junior, Ohio State four-star defensive tackle signee Mike Hall jumped 136 spots in the 247Sports composite recruiting rankings from No. 228 to No. 92 overall. He then finished the 2021 recruiting cycle as the nation's No. 52 overall prospect despite playing in just three games as a senior due to a broken hand.

ural ability." Harrison said. "He was bigger and stronger than guys he was going up against. I told him he hadn't really even touched into his actual talent. He was basically pushing people around because he was bigger. So I told him if he actually touched into his actual talent and did the work, the offseason training and everything, he could become great.

"Times where he would think that he

had a great practice or a great game, I would tell him, 'No, you haven't even touched on being great yet.' One thing I told him, I said, 'You can't be average. If you want to be average, then you'll just be an average player. You cannot let yourself be average.' So he took that to heart, and he started working hard in the offseason and in-season. He started taking a leadership role, and in the end, he just blossomed."

That message was relayed to Hall when he was a sophomore at Streetsboro, and it changed the trajectory of his entire journey. At first, he was taken aback by Harrison's words, but once he figured out the meaning, he made a big jump.

"I can't thank him enough," Hall said of Harrison. "Still to this day, I thank him every day for taking the time out to get to know me, and one thing I'll always remember about him – every day he always tells me, 'You're not average.' He always tells me that. At first, I didn't know why like, 'What is this man talking about?' But as I got older and started to mature, I realized what he was talking about.

"He had seen something in me that I didn't even see in myself. So I kind of used that as motivation one day sophomore year. And then I started to work out more, just do extra reps on stuff. And then, that's when I got my first (college) offer and then I just went crazy from there."

After being credited with 17 tackles and two tackles for loss as a sophomore in 2018, Hall became a different player moving forward.

Hall erupted as a junior, helping lead Streetsboro to an 11-1 record and an Ohio Division III regional semifinal appearance.

He lived in opposing backfields, recording 72 tackles, 17 TFL, four sacks, four forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries. His superb play earned him an offer from Ohio State on Oct. 28, 2019.

Despite the immense success on the field, the internet rankings were slow to give Hall credit as a recruit. Hall found himself rated No. 633 overall by 247Sports after a ranking update on Nov. 14, 2019, which he used as fuel through the offseason.

"It definitely motivated me more because I felt as if I could compete with the best out of those other guys that were ranked higher than me," Hall said. "So, I really didn't pay attention too much to the rankings and all that, because at the end of the day, rankings don't prove how much better you are or who's the best and all that. If you really want it bad enough, then you can achieve anything as long as you put your mind to it, really."

Hall had grown up considerably from his sophomore to junior year, and his relentless work ethic gave him confidence that he could achieve his goals regardless of rankings. On Feb. 1, 2020, Hall committed to his dream school, Ohio State.

By Feb. 28, 2020, Hall had climbed all the way to No. 120 in 247Sports overall rankings. His hard work was paying off, and Harrison saw it happening firsthand. His coach implored him to become more versatile of a player along the defensive line.

"He had great feet and he's not a slow kid," Harrison said. "He had a good 40 time. He's a fast kid and he has good feet. I told him if he worked on his hands and feet, then he would be more aggressive

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as a pass rusher instead of just bullying his way in and pushing everybody around. Because it's going to get to the point where there's going to be offensive linemen at 330-340 pounds, so you're not going to be able to bull-rush every time. You have to incorporate something else in your pass rush. And he did that in the offseason by working on his hands and his feet. He's really quick off the ball."

Entering his senior season, Hall had the best offseason of his young career. He was becoming the force that Harrison had envisioned, and the recruiting services were taking notice. Hall sprang to No. 59 in 247Sports overall rankings in a May 31, 2020, update.

Early in his senior season at Streetsboro, however, Hall suffered a broken hand. Surprisingly, the injury did not slow down the 6-3, 290-pound defensive tackle much.

"When he broke his hand, just because he did the extra work, and he worked on his hands and feet, I mean, he was basically still just as dominant," Harrison said. "He learned how to use the broken hand and he knew how to use it to his benefit still, so it didn't hinder anything.

"Because of the hard work and everything he did, he still knew how to attack an offensive lineman and still keep the same type of pass rush he had before he broke. He tackled the same, so it actually didn't affect him much at all. It's just another obstacle and hurdle he knew he had to cross, and he did it."

Hall still posted 41 tackles, 12 TFL and two sacks despite the injury. Hall could have ended his season early and focused on preparing for college, but for him, there was no decision.

"He could have easily been like, 'I'm already going to Ohio State, and I broke my hand. I'm going to shut it down,'" Harrison said. "He could have easily done that, but he didn't. He's a team guy. He stuck around, he stuck with it. He said, 'Anything for the team. I'm going to keep going.'

"I know people were in his ear saying, 'You're going to Ohio State, man, just shut it down. You don't have anything else to prove.' But he didn't want to do that because of the closeness and the bond of his other teammates he had, so he stuck it out and he stayed dominant."

The selflessness Hall showed while playing through injury is a great example of the type of young man that the Buckeyes wanted in recruiting. Although he was always a defensive tackle prospect, Hall started both ways for Streetsboro from his sophomore year through his senior year – only to help the team.

"He didn't have to, but he did it because we needed him," Harrison said. "He's always been a team-first player. He really didn't care about his stats and what he was doing. It was always about the team and winning games for him. That's why he would always say 'Wherever you need me,' and if we needed him in a certain position and he hadn't played there – 'Coach, I'll work on it. Wherever you need me to help the team.' That's what he was willing to do, so when we needed him on the offensive line, he was willing. He didn't fight it. He said, 'All right Coach, put me where you need me.' And it worked out for us."

Offensive line is not a glorified position, and Hall was a defensive line recruit, but that did not stop him from stepping up for his teammates.

"It was more so what the team needed," Hall explained. "It wasn't that I wanted to play. I hate offense, to be honest with you.

As a leader of the team, you have to make that decision to step up as a leader and take the responsibility of it. It was what the team needed, so I was willing to do whatever the team needed to win and come close to a state championship."

Both physically and mentally, Hall had the makeup that Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson and head coach Ryan Day were looking for at defensive tackle. However, the Buckeyes were not the only suitors – Alabama made a strong push for Hall, causing rumors to swirl.

"Ohio State was my dream school, so regardless of what Alabama had to offer, I just stuck with my dream school," Hall said. "Because when you grow up watching one team forever, it's kind of hard to move down South, even though I have a lot of family down there. Most of my family is from Alabama. But I didn't want to move that far from home. I just wanted to be far enough from home where I could have a little privacy, but at the same time, I'm close enough to home where I could always come back."

Hall, who had climbed to become 247Sports' No. 36 overall prospect in a Nov. 30 update, had transformed into one of the most coveted interior defensive linemen in the country. He earned rave reviews from 247Sports' national recruiting analyst Allen Trieu, who projects Hall as a future second-round pick in the NFL.

"He's an explosive player who gets off the ball quickly and has good lateral agility," Trieu wrote of Hall. "He plays fast and plays hard. It always looks like he is going his absolute hardest on the field. He closes quickly and runs down plays. He shows good awareness of where the ball is and gets to it quickly and plays with good strength and leverage."

Hall stands out on tape as an explosive player for his size, and his abilities make him seem like a perfect fit to play the three-technique in Ohio State's scheme. Johnson sees Hall's potential to thrive in that spot, according to the Buckeye signee.

"We talk about it all the time," Hall said of fitting into Johnson's system. "Just going from my junior film to my senior film, we were talking about how much quicker I got, my lateral quickness and just my explosiveness, and like getting more feel for the game and using my body more. And that's what he was talking about. He was saying those types of things, and, 'You'll fit just right into our system at Ohio State.'"

With former Ohio State standout defensive tackle Tommy Togiai entering the 2021 NFL draft, there will be more opportunities for Hall along the Buckeye front in the fall. BSB asked Hall about his excitement to potentially see the field as a true freshman.

"That's not even a question for me,"

said the confident Hall. "Regardless of who stayed or who left, at the end of the day, I don't care if everybody came back. The first day I step at Ohio State, I'm going 110 percent on everything. It doesn't matter if it's in the books or on the field. I'm coming in there and I'm fighting for a spot, regardless of who I go against."

It is clear that Hall is not the typical teenager, and that becomes even more clear when learning about his passion for philanthropy. Teaming up with his friend Marvin Montgomery, Hall helped raise \$1,000 to provide children in low-income areas with gifts for Christmas through Shelter Care.

"I just wanted to do something because of the new year especially, with COVID getting crazier day by day," Hall said. "I just felt that we should just give back to other kids that were in need, because you should always give back if you can. It's always good to do a good deed from day to day or from time to time."

The money raising efforts for Shelter Care drew attention, but it was not the first time Hall had given back. He and Montgomery came together to buy lunch at Chipotle for EMS workers toward the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. These acts of caring may be unusual for the typical person, but those who know Hall have come to expect that type of behavior.

"It didn't catch us by surprise," Harrison said. "That's just Mike. He's one of those kids, he's not too big for the moment. He's always there. He's not like one of those kids that's like, 'OK, I'm going to Ohio State, and I'm untouchable, you can't speak to me.' He's not one of those types of kids. He will always do what he can to help others. And he always put others first."

"When he came to me about doing that, raising money for getting underprivileged kids or kids that didn't have anything gifts for Christmas, I thought it was a great idea. He did it on his own. He went out and bought gifts, and he delivered them. And we as a coaching staff and a community were very proud of him."

Where does Hall's passion for giving back come from?

"That's how my mom always taught me when I was growing up," Hall said. "She always told me, 'If you can give to others in need, you should do it.'"

Hall, who is close with his mother, expressed his gratitude for her support.

"She's definitely a legendary mom, for sure," Hall said.

Hall and his mother have made an impression on Day and his staff, prompting the third-year head coach to mention both during the early signing period in December.

"He's an unbelievably talented young man," Day said. "A special, special person."

He and his mom have been great."

Hall is one of many talented members in the Buckeyes' 2021 recruiting class, which ranks No. 2 in the country. Along with Pickerington North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer, Ironton four-star inside linebacker Reid Carrico, Massillon Washington four-star wide receiver Jayden Ballard, Richfield Revere four-star guard Ben Christman, and Cincinnati La Salle three-star safety Jaylen Johnson, Hall is a part of a loaded class of in-state talent.

"All of these guys in Ohio are going to be really good players here," Day said. "You just know it. Sometimes you're not sure. You just know because we've really had to dig into who these people are even more because of the unique year this has been. This Ohio group is really, really special."

How good is Ohio State's 2021 class? Hall is the seventh-highest rated member of the Buckeyes' group, and there are only three prospects signed to other Big Ten teams who are rated higher than him in the 247Sports composite rankings (Michigan quarterback J.J. McCarthy, Wisconsin offensive tackle Nolan Rucci and Maryland inside linebacker Terrence Lewis).

Hall is the nation's fifth-ranked defensive tackle and No. 52 overall prospect. He and his classmates have high expectations for their Ohio State careers.

"We talk about this every day," Hall said. "We were saying, as soon as we get down the first day, it's strictly business because all we talk about is winning national championships, being the best class to ever come out of The Ohio State. That's definitely top priority right now. Winning three national championships, winning gold pants, just being the best that we can be."

Although he is passionate and fired up to make an early impact in Columbus, Hall is not naive about the high expectations that come with being a Buckeye.

"Coach Day has definitely been reminding us every day when we talk – that is the standard when you come to Ohio State. Either go big or go home," Hall said. "If your intentions aren't high, then Ohio State isn't the school for you."

It is safe to say Ohio State is the school for Mike Hall.

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# Ohio State Finishes Second In Consensus Poll

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

On the football field, Ohio State finished as the runner-up team of the 2020 football season, taking down Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal before ultimately falling short in the national championship game against Alabama.

In the 2021 edition of the Buckeye Sports Bulletin consensus poll, the results look much like they did on Jan. 11. The Crimson Tide hold the top recruiting class in the consensus poll, earning a unanimous first-place selection from the four recruiting outlets used in the poll: 247Sports, Bleacher Report, ESPN and Rivals.

Ohio State ranks second in the consensus poll, as well as in every individual ranking, an improvement on the 2020 class ranking, which finished in fifth place behind Georgia, Clemson, Alabama and LSU.

This ranking continues an upward recruiting trajectory for Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, whose first class, which was primarily crafted by former head coach Urban Meyer, ranked No. 15 in the consensus poll. That trajectory is set possibly to go up again, with the Buckeyes currently holding the top recruiting class for 2022.

In this No. 2 overall class, though, Ohio State has five five-star commits, 13 four-stars and three three-stars, according to 247Sports, for a grand total of 21 total commits, six fewer than the top-ranked Crimson Tide, who brought in the greatest class of all

time on the 247Sports rankings.

Alabama's 327.91 total class score is over 19 points above the Buckeyes' 309.49, though the two programs are much closer in average recruit ranking, with the Crimson Tide (95.00) holding a slight advantage over Ohio State (94.52) in that category.

Still, the Buckeyes earned some big recruiting wins, gaining commitments from two of their five-stars – Pickerington North defensive end Jack Sawyer and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep quarterback Kyle McCord – very early on to help bolster the remainder of the class, getting those two commitments in February and April of 2019, respectively.

The three other five-stars in the Buckeyes' 2021 class – Steilacoom, Wash., wide receiver Emeka Egbuka; Hopewell, Va. running back TreVeyon Henderson; and Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal guard Donovan Jackson – each are rated as the top prospect at their respective positions in the 247Sports composite rankings and help to solidify Ohio State's spot as the silver medalist for this group of recruits. Sawyer is also the top-ranked prospect by ESPN for 2021.

But even that impressive haul of recruits was not enough to contest Alabama's big haul of prospects, which includes seven five-stars, 16 four-stars and four three-stars. At the top of the list is Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy offensive tackle J.C. Latham, who rose all the way from the No. 118 prospect in the country in June 2019 to the current No. 2 overall player in the 2021 class.

Latham chose the Crimson Tide despite months of being expected to land in

Columbus and play for Ohio State, ultimately committing to Alabama on June 12, 2020.

Ohio State and Alabama had various recruiting battles throughout this class and are still currently in one for Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive tackle J.T. Tuimolou, who is not deciding until at least April. Along with Latham and Tuimolou, Belleville, Mich., five-star defensive tackle Damon Payne was recruited heavily by the Buckeyes before choosing Alabama, and Cincinnati La Salle four-star cornerback Devonta Smith (no relation to the Crimson Tide receiver of the same name) was committed to Ohio State before decommitting and selecting the Crimson Tide on June 29, 2020.

The other five-star commits in Alabama's class include Fort Worth (Texas) All Saints Episcopal offensive tackle Tommy Brockermeier, IMG Academy wide receiver Jacorey Brooks, Pinson (Ala.) Valley cornerback Ga'Quincy McKinstry, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas defensive end Dallas Turner and Garland (Texas) Lakeview Centennial running back Camar Wheaton.

Alabama has assembled what statistically is the most impressive class in the modern recruiting era and did so despite a very slow start to building it.

"If you brought up the Crimson Tide finishing with the greatest class ever signed on paper last March, you would have likely been laughed out of the room," wrote 247Sports Alabama recruiting writer Hank South. "After five-star quarterback Drake

Maye flipped to North Carolina, leaving 'Bama with just one commitment in its class, well outside the top 50 in the rankings, the outlook didn't appear as rosy in the spring. There was no question Alabama would eventually assemble one of the top classes in the country, but top class ever? Not so fast. Then came the summer surge.

"Alabama reeled off a series of commitments from late April to mid-August, five of which graded as five-star recruits – wide receiver Jacorey Brooks, offensive tackles J.C. Latham and Tommy Brockermeier, edge rusher Dallas Turner, and defensive tackle Damon Payne. Alabama was firing on all cylinders filling its needs at wide receiver, offensive and defensive line, and elsewhere. This all while not having any in-person contact with prospects due to the pandemic. Pick a position and you could argue that Alabama assembled the most talent of anyone this cycle in that grouping."

The clear No. 3 behind Alabama and Ohio State is Georgia, which finished third in three out of the four rankings, with just Rivals putting the Bulldogs lower, placing them sixth. Head coach Kirby Smart continues his hot run of strong recruiting classes but comes down from his top spot in the BSB consensus poll from a year ago.

This time around, Smart brought in four five-stars: Cochran (Ga.) Bleckley County offensive tackle Amarius Mims, Dallas (Ga.) Paulding County linebacker Smael Mondon, IMG Academy linebacker Xavian Sorey and Bogart (Ga.) Prince Avenue Christian School quarterback Brock Vandagriff, three

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**BSB Consensus Poll**

Rk.	Team	Pts.
1.	Alabama (4)	100
2.	<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>96</b>
3.	Georgia	89
4.	Clemson	84
5.	LSU	83
6.	Texas A&M	82
7.	Oregon	81
8.	USC	73
9.	Notre Dame	65
10.	Michigan	62
11.	Florida	60
12.	Miami (FL)	57
13.	Oklahoma	54
14.	North Carolina	49
15.	Wisconsin	43
16.	Texas	41
17.	Ole Miss	34
18.	Tennessee	33
19.	Maryland	29
20.	Nebraska	19
21.	Iowa	10
22.	Arkansas	9
T-23.	Florida State	8
	Penn State	8
T-25.	California	6
	Mississippi State	6

*Teams received points based on their placement in four top-25 polls. Points assigned to teams are in inverse proportion to their placement in a poll (25 points for first, 24 for second, etc.). First-place votes are in parentheses. Also receiving votes in the poll were Missouri (5), Pittsburgh (5), Washington (4), Virginia (3) and NC State (2).*

of whom came from within the state.

Mims is the top player in the group, ranking as the No. 7 overall prospect in the class and the top recruit in the state of Georgia, while Vandagriff is the second-best dual-threat quarterback and No. 16 prospect in the class. He becomes the first five-star quarterback to commit to Georgia since Justin Fields in 2018. Fields spent one year with the Bulldogs before transferring to Ohio State.

Past Georgia was a real battle in rankings No. 4-7 in the consensus poll, but it was Clemson which narrowly claimed the fourth spot a year after finishing in second. The slight drop was due to a lesser number of commitments, 19, than any other program in the top 10. But the talent is still evident, as shown by the 94.02 per-recruit ranking for the Tigers on 247Sports, the best by any team other than Alabama or Ohio State.

Head coach Dabo Swinney brought in three five-stars, all of whom were targets for Ohio State in the cycle. Fairfax (Va.) Robinson Secondary offensive tackle Tristan Leigh had a lengthy recruitment battle that featured, among other teams, Clemson, LSU, Ohio State and Oklahoma, but the No. 13 overall prospect ultimately signed with Swinney and the Tigers on Dec. 18.

Matthews (N.C.) Weddington running back Will Shipley, the top all-purpose back and No. 31 overall prospect in the class, also had interest from the Buckeyes, but Ohio State earned a commitment from Cornelius

**National Recruiting Experts' Rankings**

247SPORTS	RIVALS	ESPN	BLEACHER REPORT
1. Alabama	1. Alabama	1. Alabama	1. Alabama
2. Ohio State	2. Ohio State	2. Ohio State	2. Ohio State
3. Georgia	3. Texas A&M	3. Georgia	3. Georgia
4. LSU	4. Oregon	4. Clemson	4. Clemson
5. Clemson	5. LSU	5. Oregon	5. LSU
6. Oregon	6. Georgia	6. Texas A&M	6. Texas A&M
7. Texas A&M	7. Clemson	7. LSU	7. USC
8. USC	8. USC	8. USC	8. Oregon
9. Notre Dame	9. Michigan	9. Notre Dame	9. Michigan
10. Michigan	10. Notre Dame	10. Florida	10. Florida

(N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star Evan Pryor, the No. 2 all-purpose back, on March 16, as well as Henderson on March 27 before Shipley eventually committed to Clemson on May 5.

The last five-star for the Tigers is Suwannee (Ga.) North Gwinnett linebacker Barrett Carter, who has been committed to Clemson since May 19. While Ohio State had recruited Carter since before that commitment, there appeared to be a chance for a flip when four-star cornerback Jordan Hancock, Carter's teammate at North Gwinnett, decommitted from Clemson on July 14 and flipped to the Buckeyes five days later.

But Carter stayed strong in his pledge to the Tigers and signed with the team on Dec. 16 during the early signing period.

Also in Clemson's class is Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Cardinal Gibbons four-star wide receiver Troy Stellato, who narrowed his final schools down to just Clemson and Ohio State during his recruitment before going with the Tigers on June 5, 2020.

Rounding out the top five is another Tigers, this time LSU, which narrowly beat out Texas A&M and Oregon by one and two points, respectively. LSU's top-five ranking comes after finishing in fourth, one spot above Ohio State, in the 2020 consensus poll.

After winning a national championship in 2019, it was quite a drop-off on the field for head coach Ed Orgeron's team, finishing with a 5-5 record, including a 37-point loss to Auburn and a 38-point defeat to Alabama.

On the recruiting trail, though, Orgeron continued the momentum from the year prior, bringing in a haul of two five-stars, 15 four-stars and five three-stars for a 247 score of 291.37, a score that actually narrowly beats out Clemson (291.20) thanks to LSU's three extra commits.

The pair of five-star commits leading the class starts with Houma (La.) Terrebonne defensive tackle Maason Smith, the second-best defensive tackle and No. 19 overall prospect in the class. He is also the top recruit in the state of Louisiana.

Orgeron also brought in the second-best in-state prospect as his other five-star commit, Lafayette (La.) Christian Academy safety Sage Ryan, the second-best safety and No. 29 prospect in 2021.

Another big win for LSU in this class was with Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway four-star safety Derrick Davis, the No. 4 safety and No. 64 prospect overall. Davis' recruiting battle came down to the Tigers, Ohio State and Penn State, and despite the Nittany Lions holding the majority of the crystal ball predictions in the months before his decision, on Nov. 7 Davis chose to join Orgeron in Baton Rouge.

Ohio State held a big lead over the rest of the Big Ten in the consensus poll, with Michigan's 10th-place ranking being the

next closest. The Wolverines moved up three spots from last year's poll, thanks in part to their lone five-star acquisition: IMG Academy quarterback J.J. McCarthy, the No. 24 prospect in the class.

Wisconsin is the next Big Ten team to show up in the poll, coming in at No. 15. The Badgers also brought in a five-star in Lititz (Pa.) Warwick offensive tackle Nolan Rucci, who is ranked 15th in the class.

Four more spots down is Maryland at No. 19., The class is highlighted by a single five-star, with the Terrapins' ace being Miami (Fla.) Central linebacker Terrence Lewis, the top inside linebacker and 20th-best prospect in 2021. McCarthy, Rucci and Lewis are the lone five-stars to commit to a Big Ten school other than Ohio State.

Three more Big Ten teams sneaked into the top 25: Nebraska at No. 20, Iowa at No. 21 and Penn State in a tie with Florida State at No. 23. More can be found in our Big Ten Recruiting Wrap-Up on page 22.

**Consensus Poll Fast Facts**

- Once again, the SEC remains the conference with the most recognition in the consensus poll, finishing with nine teams in the top 25, including Mississippi State, which finished tied for 25th. The SEC makes up four of the top six teams in the poll and has a 10th team, Missouri, that was 1.24 points away from also making the cut.
- The Big Ten was right behind the SEC with seven teams in the poll, which all were previously mentioned. Though the conference held the second-most teams in the top 25, most were not in strong positions, with four ranking between spots 19-23.
- Next in the conference rankings was the ACC with five teams, if Notre Dame is included in the mix after playing within the conference for the 2020 season. Three more ACC teams – Pittsburgh, Virginia and N.C. State – all were mentioned in various rankings but just missed making the cut.
- The Pac-12 is next with three entries

on the list, including two in the top eight in Oregon and USC. The Trojans signed the top prospect in the entire class, Corona (Calif.) Centennial defensive end Corey Foreman, according to the 247Sports composite rankings. Washington also received votes but finished outside of the top 25 despite signing Bellevue (Wash.) Kennedy Catholic five-star quarterback Sam Huard, the top pro-style quarterback and No. 11 overall prospect in 2021.

• Finishing up the conference rankings is the Big 12, with just two teams listed in the rankings with Oklahoma and Texas. The Sooners finished in 11th with only 16 commitments, the fewest of any team in the top 25. No programs from outside of the Power Five conferences made the cut or received a vote in the consensus poll.

• The top six of Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, LSU, Ohio State and Texas A&M remained the top six from last year's consensus poll, but in different order. The Buckeyes moved up three spots to No. 2, the Crimson Tide moved up two spots to No. 1 and LSU moved down one spot to No. 5, while both Georgia and Clemson moved down two spots to No. 3 and 4, respectively. The Aggies remained in sixth for the second straight year.

• USC is the highest-ranked team in the poll this season that was not ranked in 2020, climbing all the way to eighth place. In total, eight new teams made the poll: Wisconsin (15th), Ole Miss (17th), Maryland (19th), Iowa (21st), Arkansas (22nd), California (25th) and Mississippi State (25th), along with the Trojans.

• With new teams in the poll, that means old teams had to exit the poll. The biggest fall from grace was Auburn, which did not make the top 25 after ranking seventh in 2020. Six more teams missed out on returning to the consensus poll: Washington (16th in 2020), South Carolina (19th), Kentucky (22nd), Stanford (23rd), Arizona State (24th) and Georgia Tech (25th).



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# Big Ten Boasts 7 Schools In Top 25 Rankings

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

Just like on the field, Ohio State continued its dominance over the Big Ten in recruiting in the 2021 cycle, topping the conference for the second straight year and ranking second nationally.

Outside of Ohio State, most of the Big Ten recruited relatively well. Michigan (No. 10), Wisconsin (15), Maryland (19), Nebraska (20), Penn State (21) and Iowa (23) all ranked within the top 25 programs nationally in the 247Sports composite team rankings.

In terms of average signee rating, Penn State (89.07) finished third in the conference behind Ohio State (94.52) and Michigan (90.30). Following the Nittany Lions are Wisconsin (89.04), Iowa (87.77), Nebraska (87.65), Maryland (87.37), Minnesota (87.18), Indiana (86.60), Northwestern (86.26), Michigan State (85.65), Rutgers (85.40), Purdue (85.11) and Illinois (84.22).

The bottom half of the Big Ten in the composite rankings featured Minnesota (No. 37), Rutgers (41), Michigan State (43), Northwestern (49), Indiana (54), Purdue (73) and Illinois (74).

What follows is a rundown of each Big Ten team's recruiting class – excluding Ohio State and Michigan (a recap of the Wolverines' haul can be found on page 23) – listed in order of final team ranking. Each team's number of commits is listed in parentheses.

## No. 15 Wisconsin (21)

Beyond Ohio State and Michigan, Paul Chryst's Badgers ranked third in the Big Ten in recruiting for the 2021 class. Wisconsin's 2021 class ranked fourth in the conference in average recruit rating at 89.04, behind the Buckeyes, Wolverines and Nittany Lions.

Lititz (Pa.) Warwick five-star offensive tackle Nolan Rucci heads Wisconsin's 15th-ranked class. Pennsylvania's top prospect is the No. 5 offensive tackle and No. 15 overall recruit nationally.

Outside of Rucci, Wisconsin's next two top prospects are also offensive tackles in Grafton, Wis., four-star J.P. Benzschawel and Lakeville

(Minn.) South four-star Riley Mahlman.

The other three four-stars brought in by the Badgers were Tiffin (Iowa) Clear Creek Amana weakside defensive end T.J. Bollers; Muskego, Wis., safety Hunter Wohler; and Fond du Lac, Wis., inside linebacker Braelon Allen. Bollers is the No. 9 weakside defensive end and No. 155 overall prospect in the nation, Wohler is the No. 13 safety and No. 205 overall recruit nationally, and Allen is the No. 14 inside 'backer and No. 216 overall prospect in the country.

Wisconsin also signed 15 three-star prospects. The team's top three-star commit is Clayton (Ohio) Northmont wide receiver Markus Allen, who is the No. 61 wideout and No. 375 recruit regardless of position. The Badgers also added Hilliard (Ohio) Bradley tight end Jack Pugh, who drew interest from the Buckeyes.

## No. 19 Maryland (23)

Maryland head coach Mike Locksley may have surprised some by signing a top-20 class nationwide and the fourth best in the Big Ten.

The Terrapins' defense-heavy class features defensive prospects for its top eight commits, and their top eight commits are expected to play on that side of the ball.

Miami Central five-star inside linebacker Terrence Lewis, who is the No. 1 inside 'backer and No. 20 overall recruit nationally in the class, leads the group as the highest rated player.

Gaithersburg (Md.) Quince Orchard four-star weakside defensive end Demeioun Robinson is another highly coveted commit secured by Locksley's staff, ranking No. 4 at his position and No. 67 overall in the country. Jacksonville (Fla.) Sandalwood four-star outside linebacker Branden Jennings is also a big-time signee for Maryland, ranking No. 7 among outside 'backers and No. 108 among all prospects.

The other two four-star signees for Maryland are a pair of defensive tackles in Washington (D.C.) St. John's product Taizse Johnson and Upper Marlboro (Md.) Charles Herbert Flowers product Tommy Akingsbesote, who are ranked No. 18 and No. 20 nationally at the position.

Antwain Littleton – Johnson's teammate at St. John's – is regarded as the No. 1 fullback in the country as well as the No. 684 overall recruit. The 6-0, 265-pounder starred at tailback along with fellow three-star commit Colby McDonald, a three-star running back. Littleton could play inside linebacker for the Terps.

## No. 20 Nebraska (20)

Nebraska head coach Scott Frost once again signed a solid class in 2021, headlined by Council Bluffs (Iowa) Lewis Central four-star tight end Thomas Fidone, who is the nation's No. 2 tight end and No. 93 overall prospect.

The national recruiting scheme continued to work for the Huskers, signing a pair of linebackers who were the top recruits in their respective states. Mililani, Hawaii, four-star linebacker Wyden Ho'ohuli is Hawaii's top prospect as well as the No. 10 inside 'backer in the country. Sioux Falls (S.D.) Washington four-star outside linebacker Randolph Kpai is the No. 1 recruit in South Dakota and the No. 15 outside linebacker nationally.

Nebraska's fourth four-star signee will provide another massive body to the Husker offensive line in Omaha (Neb.) Elkhorn South offensive tackle Teddy Prochazka, who is the No. 2 recruit in the state. Prochazka, a 6-8, 280-pound tackle, is the No. 18 offensive tackle and No. 242 overall recruit in the country.

Kearney (Neb.) Catholic three-star dual-threat quarterback Heinrich Haarberg also highlights the Huskers' talented class. The 6-5, 185-pound signal caller is the No. 17 dual-threat quarterback in the nation.

Frost and Nebraska director of player personnel Sean Dillon also secured the signature of the top prospect in the country from a preparatory school in Oakdale (Conn.) St. Thomas More three-star athlete Marques Buford, who hails from Cedar Hill, Texas.

## No. 21 Penn State (16)

Although Penn State and James Franklin signed the No. 21 class in the country, they added only one player ranked in the top 150. Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star offensive tackle Landon Tengwall (6-6, 300) highlights the Nittany Lions' class as the seventh-ranked player at his position and No. 53 recruit regardless of position.

Penn State also signed Malvern (Pa.) Prep four-star wide receiver Lonnie White, who is the No. 27 wideout and No. 167 overall prospect nationally. In addition to Tengwall and White, the Lions signed four more four-star recruits, including three defensive backs.

Following a disappointing 4-5 season, Penn State had needs at many positions, including depth in the secondary. The program brought in a pair of talented four-star safeties in Detroit Martin Luther King product Jaylen Reed (6-0, 190) and Severn (Md.) Archbishop Spalding product Zakee Wheatley (6-2, 180), ranked No. 17 and No. 22 at their position, respectively.

The Nittany Lions also added Detroit Cass Tech four-star cornerback Kalen King and his brother, three-star inside linebacker Kobe King.

Three-star pro-style quarterback signee Christian Veilleux hails from Potomac (Md.) The Bullis School, which is the same program that produced former Ohio State standout signal caller Dwayne Haskins.

Even though Penn State finished sixth in the conference and No. 21 nationally, the program still signed top-notch talent. Only having 16 signees hurt their overall rankings, but the Lions ranked third in the Big Ten and No. 16 nationally in average player rating at 89.07.

## No. 23 Iowa (19)

After starting the 2020 campaign 0-2, the Hawkeyes won their final six games, and that success helped them on the recruiting trail. Iowa secured more signees who had at least four stars than every Big Ten school besides Ohio State and Michigan with seven.

Iowa's top signee was Winnetka (Ill.) New Trier four-star offensive tackle David Davidkov (6-6, 295), who is the No. 17 prospect at his position and No. 149 overall nationally. He is also the top recruit from Illinois.

The Hawkeyes did not stop improving their offensive line with Davidkov, also adding Cedar Rapids (Iowa) John F. Kennedy four-star guard Connor Colby (6-5, 305) and Blue Springs, Mo., four-star offensive tackle Beau Stephens (6-6, 295). Colby is the nation's No. 14 guard and No. 225 overall recruit, while Stephens is the No. 26 tackle and No. 352 overall prospect nationally.

Eden Prairie, Minn., four-star weakside defensive end Justice Sullivan signed to Iowa as the No. 20 player at his position, No. 300 overall, and No. 2 in his state.

Iowa also brought in a pair of excellent four-star athletes in Arland Bruce from Ankeny, Iowa, and Keagan Johnson from Bellevue (Neb.) West. Ida Grove (Iowa) Battle Creek safety Cooper DeJean is the other four-star signee and the No. 25 safety in the country.

Broadview Heights (Ohio) Brecksville-Broadview Heights three-star dual-threat quarterback Joey Labas (6-4, 190) is the lone signal caller and lone Ohio product in the Hawkeyes' class. Labas is ranked No. 18 among dual-threat quarterbacks and No. 641 overall, as well as No. 24 among recruits in the Buckeye State.

## No. 37 Minnesota (18)

Coming into 2020 with a ton of preseason hype, the Golden Gophers were a disappointment during the COVID-riddled season. They finished 3-4 after many predicted them to compete for the Big Ten West title.

Despite the struggles on the field, Minnesota moved up one spot in both the national and Big Ten recruiting rankings to No. 37 and No. 8, respectively. Head coach P.J. Fleck and Co. signed four four-star prospects, all at positions of high importance.

Antioch (Ill.) Community four-star dual-threat quarterback Athan Kaliakmanis (6-4, 205) headlines the class as the No. 12 dual-threat signal caller and No. 316 overall recruit in the country.

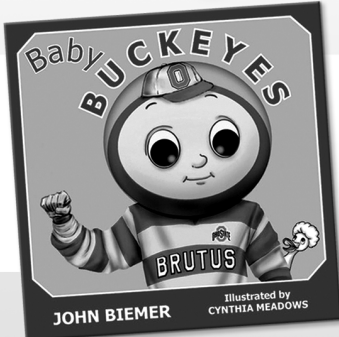
The Gophers had success in the desert, bringing in Goodyear (Ariz.) Desert Edge four-star cornerback Steven Ortiz to help strengthen a struggling defense. Ortiz (6-0, 175) is the No. 27 corner and No. 322 overall prospect in the nation.

Minnesota also signed a potential heir to the running back position, which has featured standout Mohamed Ibrahim, who will be a fifth-year senior in 2021. Country Club Hills (Ill.) Hillcrest four-star tailback Mar'Keise Irving is a talented signee, ranking No. 17 among running backs and No. 342 overall nationally.

Shakopee, Minn., four-star strongside defensive end Deven Eastern (6-6, 280) is another highlight in Minnesota's class, rated the No. 23 prospect at his position and No. 357 overall.

Dublin (Ohio) Coffman three-star outside linebacker Devon Williams was the lone Ohio product to sign with the Gophers. The 6-1, 215-pounder is ranked No. 38 at his position and No. 592 overall.

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**Big Ten Team Rankings**

Rk.	Team	Signees
2.	Ohio State.....	21
10.	Michigan.....	23
15.	Wisconsin.....	21
19.	Maryland.....	23
20.	Nebraska.....	20
21.	Penn State.....	16
23.	Iowa.....	19
37.	Minnesota.....	18
41.	Rutgers.....	21
43.	Michigan State.....	19
49.	Northwestern.....	16
54.	Indiana.....	14
73.	Purdue.....	15
74.	Illinois.....	16

\*247Sports composite rankings

**No. 41 Rutgers (21)**

After finishing No. 61 in the country and No. 13 in the Big Ten in the 2020 recruiting cycle, Rutgers jumped to No. 41 and No. 9 for 2021.

Head coach Greg Schiano's class is highlighted by a pair of four-star signees on the defensive side of the ball. Camden, N.J., cornerback Alijah Clark (6-2, 180) is the No. 22 corner in the country and No. 274 prospect regardless of position. Newark (N.J.) West Side outside linebacker Khayri Banton is the other four-star signee, ranking No. 17 at his position and No. 279 overall.

Nine of Rutgers' 21 signees hail from New Jersey, where the school is located, but Schiano showed some reach by adding three recruits each from Florida and Ohio.

The top Ohio signee for the Scarlet Knights is Columbus Independence three-star athlete Shawn Munnerlyn (6-5, 205), who is the No. 59 athlete and No. 816 overall prospect nationally. Rutgers also signed Akron Hoban three-star wide receiver Brayden Fox and Hudson, Ohio, three-star offensive tackle Kevin Toth.

Fox is the nephew of former Buckeye cornerback Dustin Fox. Brayden also had four great uncles play at Ohio State for Woody Hayes (Dick Kuhn, Ken Kuhn, Mark Stier and Tim Fox).

**No. 43 Michigan State (19)**

The Spartans finished one spot higher nationally than they did during the 2020 recruiting cycle and stayed put at 10th in the Big Ten in 2021.

Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star outside linebacker Ma'a Gaoteote headlines Michigan State's class as a significant signee. The highly coveted Gaoteote ranks No. 10 among outside linebackers and No. 160 among all prospects nationally.

Beyond Gaoteote, the Spartans signed a slew of potentially underrated recruits from across the country. They went south to get Opelousas (La.) Catholic School three-star wide receiver Keon Coleman (6-4, 200), who is the No. 62 wideout and No. 378 overall prospect in the country.

They also added a few big bodies to bolster a weak offensive line in East Lansing, Mich., three-star tackle Ethan Boyd (6-7, 285), Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional three-star guard Geno VanDeMark (6-5, 295), Princeton (N.J.) Hun School three-star guard Kevin Wigenton (6-5, 290) and JUCO prospect Brandon Baldwin (6-7, 315) from Independence (Kan.) Community College.

Michigan State will strive to develop those bruisers up front to potentially protect another 2021 signee, Fort Worth (Texas) All Saints Episcopal three-star pro-style quarterback Hampton Fay, in the future.

Perhaps the most important parts of the Spartans' 2021 group are the trio of under-the-radar defensive backs they added, including two from Ohio. Head coach Mel Tucker

**U-M Finishes With Nation's 10th-Best Class**

Despite a disappointing 2-4 season, Michigan thrived in recruiting its 2021 class, which is ranked No. 10 nationally and second in the Big Ten behind Ohio State. Michigan's lone five-star prospect is Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy quarterback J.J. McCarthy, who is the No. 2 pro-style quarterback and No. 24 overall recruit in the nation.

Twelve four-star prospects bolstered head coach Jim Harbaugh's group, which included significant offensive talent in West Bloomfield, Mich., tailback Donovan Edwards, who is the No. 3 running back in the nation; Fresno (Calif.) Central East wide receiver Xavier Worthy, who is the No. 8 wideout nationally; Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei wide receiver Cristian Dixon; and Needham (Mass.) St. Sebastian's tight end Louis Hansen.

Michigan also addressed its need for offensive linemen by picking up Sterling Heights (Mich.) Adlai Stevenson offensive tackle Giovanni El-Hadi, who is the No. 11 tackle and No. 87 recruit nationally. The Maize and Blue also added Detroit Cass Tech center Raheem Anderson and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy center Greg Crippen.

On the defensive side of the ball, Michigan added five four-star prospects, all along the front seven. Brentwood (Tenn.) Ravenwood outside linebacker Junior Colson leads the group as the fifth-ranked outside 'backer and No. 89 overall prospect.

Oak Park, Mich., defensive tackle Rayshaun Berry and Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep defensive tackle George Rooks will provide the Wolverines with a strong interior presence for the future. Ft. Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas inside linebacker Jaydon Hood and Suffield (Conn.) Academy strongside defensive end Kechaun Bennett are the other two four-star recruits on defense.

Michigan also signed 10 three-star recruits, with Del Valle, Texas, tailback Tavierre Dunlap as the highest ranked at No. 406 overall and No. 20 among running backs.

- Joe Dempsey

secured signatures from Venice, Fla., three-star corner Charles Brantley (6-0, 160); Akron Hoban three-star safety A.J. Kirk (6-0, 200); and Euclid, Ohio, three-star safety Michael Gravely Jr. (6-1, 193). Kirk is the younger brother of former Ohio State three-time All-American and 2002 national champion Mike Doss.

**No. 49 Northwestern (16)**

Coming off an ugly 3-9 season in 2019, Northwestern bounced back in a big way by finishing as Big Ten West champs with a 7-2 record and a Citrus Bowl win over Auburn. The Wildcats concluded the 2020 campaign at No. 10 in the Associated Press top 25 poll, marking their highest finish in 25 years after they ended at No. 8 in 1995.

The fact that they signed only 16 commits hurt head coach Pat Fitzgerald when it came to recruiting rankings, but they still snagged some talented prospects in the process.

Mobile (Ala.) McGill Toolen four-star wide receiver Jordan Mosely is the highest-rated member of the Cats' 2021 class, ranking No. 50 among wideouts and No. 302 overall. Lake Forest, Ill., four-star inside linebacker Mac Uihlein fits well into Northwestern's defensive scheme, and he is rated the No. 17 inside linebacker and No. 329 overall recruit.

Livonia (Mich.) Detroit Country Day four-star offensive tackle Caleb Tiernan gives the Wildcats a big presence on the offensive line at 6-7 and 280 pounds. He is the No. 27 offensive tackle and No. 354 prospect regardless of position in the nation.

Northwestern tapped into the talent-rich state of Ohio for three signees, headlined by Solon, Ohio, three-star strongside defensive end Najee Story (6-4, 235), who is the No. 25 player at his position and No. 386 overall prospect nationally.

The Wildcats also added Cleveland St. Ignatius three-star outside linebacker Aidan Hubbard (6-4, 218) and Pickerington (Ohio) Central three-star safety Garner Wallace (6-5, 185).

**No. 54 Indiana (14)**

Indiana had a solid season in 2020, ending the year at 6-2 and ranked No. 12 in the AP poll despite an Outback Bowl loss to Ole Miss without starting quarterback Michael Penix, who missed the final two games with a torn ACL.

The Hoosier passing game was dangerous last season, with Penix throwing for 491 yards and five touchdowns against Big Ten champion Ohio State in a 42-35 loss in Columbus. Tom Allen and his staff used the success on the field to reel in talented recruits on the offensive side of the ball in the 2021 class.

Indianapolis Lawrence North four-star

dual-threat quarterback Donaven McCulley (6-5, 195) is the prized jewel of the Hoosiers' class, ranking ninth among dual-threat signal callers and No. 235 among all prospects nationally.

Indiana also added signatures from a trio of talented wide receivers, headlined by Atlanta Westlake four-star wideout Jaquez Smith, who is the No. 41 receiver and No. 263 overall recruit in the class. Joining Smith as wide receiver signees are Fairfield (Ala.) Preparatory School three-star wide receiver Malachi Holt-Bennett and Cedar Hills (Texas) Trinity Christian School three-star wideout Jordyn Williams.

**No. 73 Purdue (15)**

The Boilermakers ended the 2020 recruiting cycle as the seventh-ranked team in the Big Ten and No. 32 in the nation. They took a big step back in 2021 after suffering their third straight losing season at 2-4 in 2020.

Purdue left National Signing Day as the second-to-the-last program in the conference in recruiting and No. 73 nationally.

Head coach Jeff Brohm and his staff must be grateful that the brother of top signee Yann Karlaftis is one of the team's best players in defensive end George Karlaftis. Not only is the West Lafayette, Ind., outside linebacker the Boilermakers' only four-star signee, he is their only signee ranked within the top 700 prospects.

The younger Karlaftis elected to join his

brother at Purdue as the No. 16 outside linebacker and No. 261 overall recruit in the country.

Beyond Karlaftis, the Boilermakers' top signee was Baton Rouge (La.) Scotlandville Magnet three-star safety Jah'von Grigsby, who is rated the No. 55 safety and No. 714 overall prospect nationally. Brohm also brought in under-the-radar wideouts in Belleville, Mich., product Deion Burks and Brownsburg, Ind., product Preston Terrell.

**No. 74 Illinois (16)**

Just one spot behind Purdue in the national recruiting rankings, Illinois rounds out the Big Ten teams in the 2021 cycle.

The Illini's last-place finish in the conference's recruiting rankings does not come as much surprise since the program fired Lovie Smith in December before replacing him with Bret Bielema.

Saint Louis DeSmet three-star offensive guard Brody Wisecarver (6-4, 317) was a catch with an overall national ranking at No. 485, and he is No. 27 among guards.

Illinois added a signal caller in DeSoto, Texas, three-star quarterback Samari Collier (6-3, 220). He is ranked No. 33 among dual-threat signal callers.

The Illini also added Wilmette (Ill.) Loyola Academy three-star center Josh Kreutz, who is the No. 14 center nationally. Kreutz is the son of six-time NFL Pro Bowl center Olin Kreutz, who played for Smith on the Bears.

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# Buckeyes Aiming For Top-Rated Class In 2022

By ANDREW LIND  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

While its 2021 recruiting class finished second to Alabama in the 247Sports team rankings, Ohio State's 2022 haul has the chance to be even better.

In fact, the Buckeyes have already secured pledges from 10 of the nation's top-rated prospects, including Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star quarterback Quinn Ewers; Jacksonville (Fla.) Robert E. Lee five-star cornerback Jaheim Singletary; Del Valle, Texas, five-star wide receiver Caleb Burton; Marysville, Ohio, four-star linebacker Gabe Powers; Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star linebacker C.J. Hicks; Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley North four-star athlete Dasan McCullough; West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star cornerback Jyaire Brown; West Chester Lakota West four-star offensive tackle Tegra Tshabola; Pilot Mountain (N.C.) East Surry four-star tight end Benji Gosnell; and Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona three-star tight end Bennett Christian.

To put Ohio State's stellar start in perspective, the rest of the country holds a combined four commitments from five-star prospects compared to the Buckeyes' three five-star pledges.

Head coach Ryan Day and his staff aren't done there, though. They've identified several other highly rated players who could give Ohio State a shot at the No. 1 spot in the team recruiting rankings for the first time in the Internet era, which are grouped below by position and listed in order of their composite rankings.

## Nicholas Singleton, RB Reading (Pa.) Governor Mifflin

The 6-0, 210-pound Singleton has named Ohio State as one of the schools standing out in his recruitment due to his relationship with running backs coach Tony Alford. He's never been to campus or seen the football facilities in an official recruiting capacity due to the pandemic and associated dead period, but he did make a trip to Columbus with his parents on Oct. 24, at which time they toured campus.

Singleton, who is considered the seventh-best running back and No. 111 prospect overall in the class of 2022, rushed for 1,303

## Class Of 2022 National Prospects

Ten of the top players OSU is pursuing in the 2022 class from around the nation, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.

Overall Rk.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	Top Colleges
8.	Will Johnson	CB	6-3	190	★★★★★	Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South	U-M, OSU, USC
17.	Shawn Murphy	ILB	6-2	215	★★★★★	Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed	ALA, CLEM, OSU
21.	Zach Rice	OT	6-6	282	★★★★★	Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy	UNC, ND, OSU
76.	Xavier Nwankpa	S	6-2	190	★★★★	Altoona (Iowa) Southeast Polk	IOWA, LSU, OSU
81.	Caden Curry	DT	6-5	250	★★★★	Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove	ALA, ND, OSU
102.	Kiyaunta Goodwin	OT	6-7	300	★★★★	Charlestown, Ind.	ALA, UK, OSU
111.	Nicholas Singleton	RB	6-0	210	★★★★	Reading (Pa.) Governor Mifflin	ND, OSU, PSU
162.	Kojo Antwi	WR	6-1	185	★★★★	Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert	A&M, UGA, OSU
252.	Dallan Hayden	RB	5-11	195	★★★★	Memphis Christian Brothers	ND, OSU, TENN
312.	Kyion Grayes	WR	6-1	170	★★★★	Chandler, Ariz.	ARIZ, ORE, OSU

yards and 24 touchdowns in just eight games last fall. He holds more than 30 scholarship offers, with Notre Dame, Penn State, South Carolina and Wisconsin viewed as the biggest threat to the Buckeyes' chances.

"He has a good frame with the ability to play at 210 pounds," 247Sports national recruiting analyst Brian Dohn said. "He is a highly productive player, has the burst to get through holes and the speed to finish runs. He gets the edge with ease at the high school level and runs away from the secondary. He shows vision and cut-back ability when running between the tackles. He sticks his foot in the ground and is decisive as a one-cut runner. He does not waste movement. He's not challenged to be a physical runner very often. He has to show the ability to move laterally and be elusive in tight spaces. His improvement as pass catcher would accentuate his game. He's a multi-year starter at a top-10 program and has Day Three NFL draft potential."

## Dallan Hayden, RB Memphis Christian Brothers

Like Singletary, the 5-11 and 195-pound Hayden has built a strong bond with Alford from afar. The Buckeyes' running backs coach also serves as the area recruiter for the state, and his track record in landing prospects from Tennessee – including running backs Master Teague and Mitch Rossi, offensive tackle Max Wray and defensive lineman Cormontae Hamilton – has paid dividends so far in Hayden's recruitment.

Hayden is widely viewed as one of the more underrated prospects in the cycle, coming in as

the 25th-best running back and No. 252 prospect overall for 2022. Offers from Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Oregon, Tennessee and Texas A&M only speak to that.

The son of former Volunteers running back Aaron Hayden – who played professionally for the then-San Diego Chargers, Green Bay Packers and Philadelphia Eagles – Hayden was recently named the MaxPreps Tennessee High School Football Player of the Year after he rushed for 2,010 yards and 24 touchdowns in just nine games. That included seven consecutive 200-yard games to start the season.

Ohio State plans to take just one running back this cycle, but other names to keep in mind at the position include Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Kaytron Allen and Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star Damari Alston.

## Kojo Antwi, WR Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert

Despite holding offers from more than 30 programs, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Notre Dame, Tennessee, Texas, Texas A&M and USC, Antwi's best relationship is with Ohio State and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

In fact, the two have talked every day since the Buckeyes extended a scholarship offer in November, including FaceTiming just 15 minutes before the 49-28 Sugar Bowl win over Clemson on Jan. 1.

The 6-1 and 185-pound Antwi, who is considered the 19th-best wide receiver and No. 162 prospect overall in the class of 2022, is the 7-on-7

teammate of Tiger (Ga.) Rabun County five-star quarterback Gunner Stockton, who committed to the home-state Bulldogs on Jan. 28. It should come as no surprise, then, that the 247Sports crystal ball predictions are split between Georgia and Ohio State.

Antwi's recruitment will effectively come down to official visits, which he hopes to take beginning in April. If that happens, expect a midsummer decision.

## Kyion Grayes, WR Chandler, Ariz.

The 6-1, 170-pound Grayes is a one-time Arizona commit whose recent rise through the recruiting rankings, overall frame and interest in Ohio State have garnered numerous comparisons to current wide receiver Chris Olave.

Grayes, who is considered the 46th-best wide receiver and No. 312 prospect overall in the class of 2022, caught 28 passes for 556 yards and 10 touchdowns to lead the Wolves to the state championship this season. He was a relatively unknown prospect until the Buckeyes extended a scholarship offer in October.

Since then, he's picked up offers from the likes of LSU, Oregon and Texas. But his growing relationship with Day, Hartline, director of player personnel Mark Pantoni and offensive quality control coach Keenan Bailey is a big reason that Ohio State is widely expected to land his pledge in the coming months. Some believe it's only a matter of him making his first trip to Columbus.

"Grayes has a lean, narrow build with projectable length and room to add mass to frame," said 247Sports recruiting analyst Blair Angulo. "He's a well-rounded pass-catcher with a knack for getting open. He's a fluid route runner who sets up defenders to generate space. He's instinctive and creative in possession. He shows great body control after the catch. He has good burst off the line of scrimmage. He has very good hands and is a coordinated catcher who can reel in the ball away from his body. He's a technician on underneath plays and can weave his way through traffic. He could continue to add speed and physicality to his game. He's a potential multi-year starter at the Power Five level and has upside to garner looks from NFL draft scouts down the road."

In addition to the previously mentioned Burton, the Buckeyes hope to take two more wide receivers in 2022. Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star C.J. Williams and Chicago St. Rita four-star Kaleb Brown are some other options to fill those remaining spots.

## Zach Rice, OT Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian

Considered the top-rated offensive tackle and No. 21 prospect overall in the class of 2022, the 6-6 and 282-pound Rice has narrowed down his list of nearly three dozen scholarship offers to North Carolina, Notre Dame and Ohio State.

Rice landed an offer from the Buckeyes in April, and though he's never been to campus,

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## RECRUITING WRAP-UP: LOOKING AHEAD

he talks regularly with Day, offensive line coach Greg Studrawa and graduate assistant Kenny Cook, as well as some of Ohio State's current players, including freshman offensive tackle Paris Johnson.

Rice has made it clear he could commit to his school of choice at any time, and unless the recruiting dead period comes to an end sooner rather than later, it's unlikely he picks the Buckeyes.

"Rice already holds good weight and has room to add mass in his lower body," said 247Sports national writer Charles Power. "He has shown strong reactive quickness in camp settings. He combines his physical tools with advanced technical acuity on Friday nights. He works at right tackle for his high school and is well ahead of the curve as a player, often dominating the competition. He shows heavy hands and a strong punch on contact in addition to his ability to redirect and anchor within his pass set. He plays with a high level of physicality and works to finish blocks. He does not play the strongest competition at the high school level but has fared well against some top prospects in camp settings. He projects as a multi-year starter at the Power Five level with the upside to develop into an early round NFL Draft pick."

### Kiyaunta Goodwin, OT Charlestown, Ind.

Ohio State has had plenty of success in recruiting the state of Indiana in recent years, landing wide receivers Terry McLaurin and Austin Mack; offensive linemen Dawand Jones, Josh Fryar and Zen Michalski; and linebackers Pete Werner and Craig Young.

The Buckeyes hope that carries over to 2022, when the 6-7 and 300-pound Goodwin is considered the 10th-best offensive tackle and No. 102 prospect overall.

Goodwin has been to Ohio State on numerous occasions, including attending a practice in spring 2018 and a game that fall. He finally landed an offer from Studrawa last August, and there's an overriding belief that he'll commit to the Buckeyes whenever he's able to return to campus.

After missing out on some of their top targets at the position in the 2021 cycle, offensive tackle is viewed as one of Ohio State's top priorities for 2022. The staff already holds a commitment from Tshabola, but other players of note include Daleville (Va.) Lord Botetourt five-star Gunner Givens; Fond Du Lac (Wis.) St. Mary's Springs four-star Billy Schrauth; and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-three-star Aliou Bah.

### Caden Curry, DT Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove

The only player in Indiana with a higher ranking than Goodwin is Curry, who has a strong relationship with Larry Johnson and Ohio State offensive coordinator/area recruiter Kevin Wilson.

The 6-5 and 250-pound Curry, who is considered the seventh-best defensive tackle and No. 81 prospect overall in the class of 2022, has family ties to the Columbus area and admittedly grew up rooting for the Buckeyes. But that doesn't automatically guarantee he'll pick Ohio State, especially with such programs as Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, Michigan, Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Texas and USC in pursuit of his pledge.

Curry doesn't plan to make a decision until he can take official visits, but he should start narrowing down his options thanks to his ability to conduct virtual visits.

Ohio State, meanwhile, is still looking for its first commitment along the defensive line but is in a good spot with a number of the nation's top-rated prospects. That includes Philadelphia Imhotep Charter five-star defensive end Enai White; Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson five-star defensive end Jeremiah Alexander;

## Class Of 2022 In-State Prospects

The top 10 players in the state of Ohio for the 2022 class, as rated in the 247Sports composite rankings.

Overall Rk.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	Top Colleges
33.	<b>Gabe Powers</b>	<b>OLB</b>	<b>6-4</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>★★★★</b>	<b>Marysville</b>	<b>Committed to Ohio State</b>
38.	<b>C.J. Hicks</b>	<b>OLB</b>	<b>6-4</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>★★★★</b>	<b>Kettering Archbishop Alter</b>	<b>Committed to Ohio State</b>
123.	<b>Jyaire Brown</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>6-0</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>★★★★</b>	<b>West Chester Lakota West</b>	<b>Committed to Ohio State</b>
125.	Aamil Wagner	OT	6-6	250	★★★★	Huber Heights Wayne	UK, U-M, CIN
130.	Kaden Saunders	WR	5-10	172	★★★★	Westerville South	Committed to Penn State
138.	<b>Tegra Tshabola</b>	<b>OT</b>	<b>6-5</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>★★★★</b>	<b>West Chester Lakota West</b>	<b>Committed to Ohio State</b>
161.	Gi'Bran Payne	RB	5-10	190	★★★★	Cincinnati La Salle	NW, PSU, PUR
194.	Blake Miller	OT	6-6	315	★★★★	Strongsville	Committed to Clemson
238.	Trey Bixby	SDE	6-5	245	★★★★	Lakewood St. Edward	Committed to Minnesota
256.	Derrick Shepard	DT	6-3	295	★★★★	Kettering Archbishop Alter	Committed to Cincinnati

Baltimore St. Frances four-star end Derrick Moore; Greensboro (N.C.) Grimsley four-star tackle Travis Shaw; Columbus (Ga.) Hardaway four-star tackle Mykel Williams; and Sicklerville (N.J.) Timber Creek three-star end Jihaad Campbell.

### Shawn Murphy, ILB Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed

The former high school teammate of Ohio State four-star defensive tackle signee Tyleik Williams, Murphy is considered the top-rated linebacker and No. 17 prospect overall in the class of 2022. The two have discussed playing together at the next level as well, which is why the Buckeyes are viewed as the favorite in Murphy's recruitment.

Murphy has been to Columbus just once, attending the Under Armour Elite Underclassmen camp last summer, but he wasn't able to meet with the coaches while in town due to the recruiting dead period.

Still, he's grown close with Day, defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, linebackers coach Al Washington and defensive line coach/area recruiter Larry Johnson, who offered him a scholarship back in April 2019.

"Murphy has a lean frame with length and carries 200 pounds like it is 180 pounds," Dohn said. "He has excellent explosion and body control. He runs well and possesses tremendous stop-and-start ability. He filters through traffic and locates the ball carrier. He diagnoses plays quickly. He plays downhill and physical. He's a good blitz and chases down plays from behind. He needs to continue to develop upper-body strength. His ability to stack and shed needs development and it's important for him to work on depth drop in the passing game. He's a multi-year starter at an elite program and has Day One NFL draft potential."

With Powers, Hicks and McCullough – who is listed as an athlete but will play outside linebacker in college – already in the fold, Ohio State can be selective in its pursuit of one more linebacker for 2022. Other options include Salisbury, N.C., four-star Jalon Walker; Shelby, N.C., four-star Malaki Hamrick; and Manvel, Texas, three-star Justin Medlock.

### Will Johnson, CB Grosse Point (Mich.) South

Despite being the son of former Michigan defensive back Deon Johnson (1991-94), the 6-3 and 190-pound Johnson has shown significant interest in Ohio State. He even took it upon himself to travel to Columbus on Dec. 12 to tour campus for the first time.

Johnson, who is considered the fourth-best cornerback and No. 8 prospect overall in the class of 2022, landed an offer from Day and Coombs during a virtual visit last April. He then included Ohio State in his top five along with Arizona State, Michigan, Oklahoma and USC in November.

Of course, the Wolverines are considered the favorite in his recruitment given his father's ties to the program and the fact that he grew up with Michigan paraphernalia around his home. But the Buckeyes are easily the biggest threat in his recruitment due to their history of sending

defensive backs to the NFL.

"He has great size and is still growing," 247Sports national recruiting analyst Allen Trieu said. "He has length but is also filled-in and looks like a prototypical outside cornerback prospect. He's a good athlete who excels on the basketball court and has shown top-notch ball skills on the football field. He has the size and ball-tracking ability to defend bigger outside receivers. He has good technique. He's smooth in his backpedal and transition. He's smart as far as zone coverage. He has yet to time at an event or in track, so verified speed is one question mark right now. It is possible he will outgrow cornerback if he keeps getting taller and bigger, but at present, he projects as a blue-chip boundary cornerback who will be an impact college player and have a good chance to be a higher draft choice."

Ohio State holds a pair of commitments at cornerback in Brown and Singletary and hopes to add at least one more player at the position, with Houston North Shore five-star Denver Harris and St. Louis Lutheran North four-star Toriano Pride also among the staff's top targets.

### Xavier Nwankpa, S Altoona (Iowa) Southeast Polk

The 6-2 and 190-pound Nwankpa has been at or near the top of Ohio State's priority chart since September, when Day, Coombs and then safeties/special teams coach Matt Barnes extended a scholarship offer to him during a virtual visit. He has also been extremely active in group chats with the Buckeyes' current crop of commitments.

Nwankpa, who is listed as the seventh-best safety and No. 76 prospect overall in the class of 2022, recently trimmed his list of more than two dozen offers to Arizona State, Clemson, Iowa, Iowa State, LSU, Missouri, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Penn State and Texas and Wisconsin. There's an expectation that the Buckeyes will be among the final schools standing once he's ready to make a decision.

"Nwankpa has great height and length and has added good weight to his frame through his high school career," Trieu said. "As a junior, he was excellent on defense, offense and special teams. He's not afraid to deliver big hits and can also come down and blitz. He can also play man-to-man out on the corner or go into the deep part of the secondary. He has long arms, and his ball skills make him able to challenge any receiver or tight end on contested balls. He shows smooth change of direction and has good acceleration. He's a long strider who can cover a lot of ground. He shows instincts and smarts and gets himself into good position to make plays. He can still get stronger and refine man-to-man technique. He should be a great all-around safety who can line up in a variety of spots. He has a chance to be an early impact guy in college and has all the markings of an early-round draft pick."

After signing six versatile defensive backs in 2021, safety isn't a significant need for Ohio State this cycle.

The Buckeyes will likely take just one player at the position in 2021, with Williamstown, N.J., five-star Keon Sabb and Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star Zion Branch among their other top options.

### Solidifying The Home State

Ohio State typically lands commitments from the best in-state prospects each cycle, and the class of 2022 should be no different thanks to an emphasis from Day on establishing those relationships early in the process.

The Buckeyes have already locked down pledges from the top two players in the state in Powers and Hicks, as well as a pair of teammates in Brown and Tshabola, and have a handful of others on their priority chart.

That doesn't include Westerville South four-star wide receiver Kaden Saunders, Strongsville four-star offensive tackle Blake Miller or Kettering Alter four-star defensive tackle Derrick Shepard, who are all among the top 10 players in Ohio but already committed to Penn State, Clemson and Cincinnati, respectively, due to an overall lack of interest from the Buckeyes.

Below are some of the remaining in-state prospects who have been in contact with Ohio State and are worth monitoring as potential offer candidates for the Buckeyes in the 2022 cycle.

### Aamil Wagner, OT Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne

An ideal offensive tackle prospect from a physical standpoint, the 6-6, 250-pound Wagner has picked up more than 20 offers from programs such as Cincinnati, Iowa, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Oregon, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Stanford and Tennessee.

Studrawa and Wilson don't like to offer or accept commitments from players they haven't worked out with in person, so Wagner will most likely have to camp at Ohio State this summer in order to prove his worth to the Buckeyes' coaching staff.

### Gi'Bran Payne, RB Cincinnati La Salle

The 5-10 and 190-pound Payne is listed as the 15th-best running back and No. 161 prospect overall in the class of 2022, though he rushed for just 235 rushing yards, had 181 receiving yards and scored eight total touchdowns while dealing with an injury during his junior season.

Payne named a top seven of Alabama, Florida, Michigan, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Penn State and Purdue in November. It's unlikely Ohio State gets involved in his recruitment unless it misses out on a number of higher-rated prospects.

### Trey Bixby, DE Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward

While the 6-5 and 245-pound Bixby will be a rare four-year starter at St. Edward, his recruitment hasn't taken off like many expected it would. He hasn't participated in many camps, either, which is something he'll need to do in order for Larry Johnson to offer him a scholarship.

Bixby, who is considered the 14th-best strongside defensive end and No. 238 prospect overall in the 2022 class, has been committed to Minnesota since August. The Golden Gophers have a strict no-visit policy, too, so he would have to feel good about his chances of landing an offer from Ohio State in order to visit Columbus.

# Buckeyes Keep Plowing Through Big Ten Opponents

The metaphor was mixed but the message wasn't when Duane Washington described how Ohio State has surprised prognosticators with a can-do attitude that has pushed the fourth-ranked Buckeyes near the top of the Big Ten standings and the national rankings.

He spoke Feb. 4 following the 89-85 win at then-No. 8 Iowa about a day that included an adventure with the team bus in a snowstorm after the morning shoot-around.

## COURT REPORT Craig Merz

"We got stuck on the hill right outside the gym for like an hour," he said. "We couldn't get out. We had to call the plow people to come in and plow for us. It kind of reminded me somewhat of the deal we had at Northwestern last year. The fire alarm went off.

"It was kind of a wrench in the road that only was going to make us go even harder."

Whatever road the Buckeyes (15-4, 9-4) were traveling led to unprecedented success with the victory at Carver-Hawkeye Arena, marking their team-record fourth straight road win against a top-15 opponent (No. 15 Rutgers, No. 14 Illinois and No. 10 Wisconsin).

Not bad for a team that was picked seventh in the conference in the pre-season polling of beat writers by The Athletic and The Columbus Dispatch.

"We're going to shock all the guys who thought we were going to be whatever we were (projected) in the Big Ten," Washington said. "We're going to just keep doing what we're doing every single day, get better, and that's been our approach. Trusting the process has definitely been in our favor, and we're going

to keep doing it the same way."

The day after the Iowa game, the daily CBS Sports rankings had the Buckeyes fourth behind top-ranked Gonzaga, Baylor and Michigan and a spot ahead of Illinois.

It's clear that the Buckeyes won't be sneaking up on anybody for the remainder of the season, except maybe for head coach Chris Holtmann, as evidenced by the videos on the program's Twitter and Instagram accounts of him getting punked by the players.

They show him entering an empty locker room after a big victory, looking around quizzically then being mobbed by the players before joining the celebration.

Those are fun looks at the team but also insightful to the bond that has been built through some trying times. There have been injuries, illness and patches of inconsistencies – OSU lost two of its first three conference games – yet Holtmann has built a unit that can go 11 deep with transfers and freshmen alike contributing.

"It's been a rewarding group to coach," Holtmann said. "Winning helps but as we know with this league, you can play well and still lose. What I've felt good about is that they've felt rewarded by winning some games.

"In the midst of a pandemic, in the midst of a lot of question marks about our team, it's been a phenomenal group to coach."

The Buckeyes' balance paid off against Iowa when Washington, E.J. Liddell and Kyle Young each had 16 points and Justice Sueing had 12 points and 11 rebounds.

Forward Justin Ahrens hit a trio of three-pointers late for his nine points, and freshman Zed Key came off the bench to add eight points.

"I think guys are playing to their strengths, and I think we have to keep doing that," Holtmann said. "We've had different bench guys step up, and it's been good to see."

Washington, who has learned to con-

## 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

tribute through defense and ball handling when he's in a shooting slump, said there is a good mix.

"We have a lot of veteran guys, a lot of younger guys with a lot of energy," he said. "It's super exciting when those things can come together and everybody's working toward a bigger goal and everybody's bought in, and we're just having so much fun and loving each other."

Holtmann echoes those themes. He's gotten quality leadership from veterans such as Young, C.J. Walker and Seth Towns.

"Our group's competitive spirit, really from day one, has been tremendous," the coach said. "Their connectedness has been really good. What I've said about this group from day one, and I don't think I've come off this, is I love their maturity.

"We've got a nice blend of younger and old guys. We've got talented players, but I love this group. I think their maturity's good, and I feel really good about coaching this group."

### Century Club

Young played in his 100th game for the Buckeyes against Iowa – finally. There were times the senior forward had to wonder if he would reach that mark after a series of setbacks along the way.

He missed time as a freshman when he had his tonsils removed, missed four games as a sophomore because of a stress fracture in his leg and last season was out two games following an appendectomy.

Young plays a hard game, and the wear and tear has taken a toll. On Jan. 26 Holtmann said he must monitor Young's practice time because of a lower-leg injury, yet the Massillon (Ohio) Jackson product has played every game this season.

"The best ability is availability and he's been that and he's been that pretty consistently," Holtmann said. "He's obviously banged up and gotten through some difficult times with his lower-leg injuries but I love him as a kid, I love him as a player. He's so important to our program."

Young made a basket to put OSU up 71-70 on the Hawkeyes and hit his second triple in as many attempts for an 85-79 lead with 3:28 to play. He was 5 of 17 (29.4 percent) from distance entering the game.

He picked a heck of time for the first multiple three-pointer game of his career.

"I haven't taken a lot of threes," Young said. "My numbers aren't high there, but it's something I've continued to work on. I'm trying to do what my team needs me.

I was feeling confident."

Holtmann has a fondness for Young, who committed to Butler when Holtmann coached there then followed him to Columbus in June 2017 to be part of the freshman recruits with Musa Jallow and Kaleb Wesson.

"It's hard to overstate how important he was in adding, kind of on the fly, to that class with Musa and Kaleb," Holtmann said. "You have a good player, and he brought real consistency in a lot of ways. He's never not bought into how we do things, and that's invaluable beyond just his talent."

### So Long

Senior guard Jimmy Sotos must feel like the kid who wanted an ice cream cone but his mom said the ice cream truck wasn't coming. Then it did and he got one big lick before the ice cream fell to the ground and he was left wanting for more.

That was Sotos getting a taste of playing for the Buckeyes before it fell away.

He transferred from Bucknell last year with the idea of sitting out the 2020-21 season per NCAA rules, just as Sueing did when he arrived from California.

The situation changed when point guard Abel Porter, a grad transfer from Utah State with immediate eligibility, was forced to retire because of a genetic heart condition.

Sotos sought a waiver to play this season, and it was granted after an initial denial. He played 12 games, but in a start for the injured Walker at Rutgers on Jan. 9, he dived for a ball late in the game and hasn't played since.

Holtmann on Feb. 3 said Sotos would undergo surgery for a shoulder separation and be lost for the season.

"He was disappointed," Holtmann said. "If you saw him after the Rutgers game, he was emotional. We had a moment there just because he was emotional. I think he knew at that point that it could be over."

Sotos played in 12 games, averaging 1.7 points and 1.1 assists in 9.6 minutes. In his final game, he opened the scoring against Rutgers with a three-pointer and added another on his second shot for his only points in 27:54 of playing time.

"I'm disappointed for Jimmy," Holtmann said. "He gave us great contributions."

The recovery time is six months, the coach said. The good news is because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCAA is allowing athletes an extra year of eligibility so Sotos can return for the 2021-22 season as was his original plan.

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# Buckeyes Breeze Through Brutal Big Ten Slate

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since BSB last went to press, the Ohio State men's basketball team rose to No. 4 in the Associated Press top 25 poll with three straight victories, including a thrilling comeback win against No. 8 Iowa on the road.

During that three-game stretch, sophomore forward E.J. Liddell led the Buckeyes with 19.3 points per game, along with 7.3 rebounds and 1.7 blocks per contest, while shooting 51.5 percent from the field, 40.0 percent from three and 88.0 percent from the foul line.

Liddell, who is the team's leading scorer, guided his squad while the second-leading scorer, Duane Washington, struggled to find his shot. In the same three-game span, the junior guard shot 27.8 percent from the floor and 29.2 percent from beyond the arc, while posting averages of 10.7 points and 3.7 assists per game.

When Ohio State took down the Hawkeyes in their building, it became the first Big Ten team to win nine games in the conference. The Buckeyes boasted a 9-4 record in conference play and a 6-0 ledger in nonconference action.

In many ways, head coach Chris Holtmann's group has exceeded expectations and put itself in a great position in the push toward the NCAA Tournament. However, the team continues to take a day-by-day approach amid a gantlet of a Big Ten slate.

"We are who we are," Washington said after the win over the Hawkeyes. "We're not going to stop being us. I think the best part about it is we just celebrated, and the first thing Coach said is 'We've got a big one on Monday (Feb. 8 at Maryland).' I mean, we strive for perfection here. We understand it's a long season with very, very tough teams on our schedule. And for us, we're all bought in. We're in a really good spot here, and we're going to keep this energy going."

## Liddell Leads The Way Over PSU

No. 13 Ohio State defeated Penn State 83-79 at Value City Arena on Jan. 27 with Liddell leading the way for the Buckeyes (13-4, 7-4) with 22 points and seven rebounds.

"He was tremendous, particularly late with his free throws," Holtmann said of Liddell. "He was tremendous at attacking late. I thought he played with great force, particularly in the last part of the game."

Liddell shot 6 of 9 from the floor and 10 of 10 from the charity stripe, granting senior guard C.J. Walker's wish.

"C.J. Walker before the game actually was like, 'Can you please go 100 percent from the line tonight?'" Liddell said.

Ohio State was a sizzling 20 of 21 from the line for the game (95.2 percent) to go along with 51.9 percent shooting from the floor (28 of 54).

Junior wing Justice Sueing played well all-around with 13 points and a team-high 10 boards, along with five steals and two blocks against Penn State (5-7, 2-6).

"I'm really proud of him," Holtmann said of Sueing. "He made big plays tonight. He had four steals in the first half, and his activity across the game was really important for us."

Penn State held the lead for much of the second half, pushing it to 70-62 with 8:14 left on a three-pointer by Izaiah Brockington from Myreon Jones. Freshman forward Zed Key responded with a strong finish inside before Brockington split a pair of free throws on Walker's fourth foul to make it 71-64 with 7:34

to play.

Liddell hit a pair of foul shots and scored through contact in the paint to cut the deficit to 71-68 with 5:29 on the clock for the Buckeyes.

Penn State sophomore wing Seth Lundy drew senior forward Kyle Young's fifth and final foul with 5:01 to play and knocked down both free throws to push the Nittany Lions' lead to 73-68.

Sueing finished strong off an offensive rebound and Washington drilled a pair of foul shots to cut the deficit to 73-72 with 4:14 to play.

Walker fouled out with 3:29 left, but Penn State senior guard Jamari Wheeler missed both free throws, giving Ohio State an opportunity.

Liddell finished through contact again to regain the lead for Ohio State at 74-73 with 3:12 on the clock. Myles Dread drilled a triple for Penn State before Washington answered for the Buckeyes with a three of his own. Then Lundy knocked down a step-back three to take a 79-77 lead with just 2:07 remaining.

Sueing drew a foul on Lundy and then calmly knocked down a pair of foul shots to tie the game at 79 with 1:37 left. Then, Sueing stole the ball from Lundy for his fifth takeaway of the night to get the Buckeyes the ball back.

"We saw that Lundy has the hot hand, he had it throughout the entire game, and we knew that on that possession that he was going to try and get a shot off," Sueing said. "So I knew that he was looking to score. He turned away from me, he exposed the ball a little bit, and that was just enough for me to get a hand on it and take it the other way, which we needed. We needed a stop on that possession."

The Buckeyes went to Liddell at the elbow, and he drew a trip to the line, where the sophomore put both free throws in for an 81-79 Buckeye lead with 59 seconds to play.

After the Scarlet and Gray got a stop, Penn State forced a shot-clock violation with just 16 seconds left. Ohio State stopped the visitors again, and then Liddell netted another pair of foul shots to seal the four-point win.

"I was just emphasizing in the last four-minute war that it's winning time," Liddell said. "And there is no better feeling than to get up there and win it for the team. I mean, ice the game, put us up by four. And I was just up there thinking, 'Let's finish the game, let's win, let's go home.'"

Through the opening five minutes, the had Buckeyes roared to a 14-2 lead, starting with two free throws by Liddell and including a pair of three-pointers from junior wing Justin Ahrens, along with and-one finishes from Young and Key.

Penn State cut the deficit to 23-16 with 8:55 until halftime on a layup by John Harrar, but Key responded with a pair of jumpers to push the lead back to 11.

The Nittany Lions cut the Buckeye lead down to 31-27 with 4:40 until intermission on a converted and-one by Harrar following an offensive rebound, but the Buckeyes stretched the lead back to 11 when Walker finished an and-one on a fastbreak to put Ohio State up 41-30 with 2:18 until the midway point.

Aided by three turnovers from Ohio State, the Nittany Lions ended the half on a 9-2 run through the final 1:58 and trailed 43-39 at the break.

Walker opened the second half with a three-pointer off an offensive rebound that was tipped out by Young on a hustle play, putting Ohio State up 46-39 just 22 seconds into the second half.

The visitors then used a 10-0 run to take their first lead of the game at 49-46 just 4:39

## Ohio State 83, Penn State 79

Jan. 27, 2021											
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio											
	1	2	F								
<b>Penn State (5-7, 2-6)</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>79</b>								
<b>Ohio State (13-4, 7-4)</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>83</b>								
Penn State	Total FG	FT	Reb.								
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Jones	27	4-9	0-0	0-0	3	2	10				
Lundy	38	7-16	8-10	1-3	0	3	26				
Wheeler	30	2-4	0-2	2-2	3	0	4				
Brockington	33	7-15	3-5	0-3	2	4	18				
Harrar	31	4-10	7-7	6-4	1	3	15				
Dread	24	2-4	0-0	0-3	0	3	6				
McCloskey	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0				
Buttrick	14	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	4	0				
Tsimbila	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>26-59</b>	<b>18-24</b>	<b>11-17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>79</b>				
<b>Percentages:</b>	<b>FG:</b> 44.1%	<b>FT:</b> 75.0%	<b>Three-point field goals:</b> 9-19 (Lundy 4-8, Jones 2-4, Dread 2-4, Brockington 1-2, Wheeler 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 4. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 0. <b>Turnovers:</b> 11 (Lundy 3, Brockington 3, Jones, Harrar, Dread, Buttrick, Tsimbila). <b>Steals:</b> 6 (Wheeler 2, Jones, Brockington, Harrar, Buttrick).								
Ohio State	Total FG	FT	Reb.								
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Washington	33	2-11	2-2	0-3	6	2	8				
Ahrens	22	3-6	0-0	1-0	1	0	9				
Sueing	30	5-7	3-3	2-8	1	2	13				
Young	27	3-3	3-3	2-3	0	5	10				
Liddell	29	6-9	10-10	0-7	0	3	22				
Johnson	4	1-2	0-1	0-0	0	0	2				
Jallow	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0				
Brown	5	1-1	0-0	1-0	0	0	2				
Walker	26	2-8	1-1	1-2	3	5	6				
Key	9	5-5	1-1	2-0	0	1	11				
Towns	11	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	2	0				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>28-54</b>	<b>20-21</b>	<b>10-26</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>83</b>				
<b>Percentages:</b>	<b>FG:</b> 51.9%	<b>FT:</b> 95.2%	<b>Three-point field goals:</b> 7-22 (Ahrens 3-6, Washington 2-9, Young 1-1, Walker 1-3, Liddell 0-1, Johnson 0-1, Towns 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 3. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Sueing 2, Liddell, Key). <b>Turnovers:</b> 17 (Washington 4, Sueing 3, Liddell 3, Walker 3, Ahrens, Young, Johnson, TEAM). <b>Steals:</b> 6 (Sueing 5, Washington).								
<b>Officials:</b>	Szelc, Beaver, Wells. <b>Attendance:</b> N/A.										

## Ohio State 79, Michigan State 62

Jan. 31, 2021											
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio											
	1	2	F								
<b>Michigan State (8-6, 2-6)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>62</b>								
<b>Ohio State (14-4, 8-4)</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>79</b>								
Michigan State	Total FG	FT	Reb.								
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Henry	30	2-8	6-8	1-6	3	4	10				
Langford	32	4-15	4-4	0-0	2	3	14				
Watts	26	2-9	1-2	0-0	2	1	6				
Kithier	9	2-2	0-0	0-1	1	3	4				
Hauser	34	5-11	0-1	0-5	1	3	11				
Loyer	19	1-2	0-0	0-4	1	2	3				
Hoggard	5	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0				
Sissoko	5	0-0	0-1	1-1	0	0	0				
Hall	14	0-1	4-5	2-3	1	1	4				
Bingham	8	0-1	4-4	1-3	0	3	4				
Marble	16	1-3	4-6	1-4	0	4	6				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>17-53</b>	<b>23-31</b>	<b>9-28</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>62</b>				
<b>Percentages:</b>	<b>FG:</b> 32.1%	<b>FT:</b> 74.2%	<b>Three-point field goals:</b> 5-24 (Langford 2-9, Loyer 1-2, Watts 1-3, Hauser 1-5, Hall 0-1, Henry 0-4). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 4. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 2 (Hauser, Marble). <b>Turnovers:</b> 10 (Watts 2, Henry, Langford, Kithier, Hauser, Loyer, Hoggard, Hall, Marble). <b>Steals:</b> 2 (Henry, Marble).								
Ohio State	Total FG	FT	Reb.								
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Washington	30	2-10	2-2	0-2	3	2	8				
Ahrens	23	2-5	1-3	0-3	0	4	7				
Sueing	27	4-7	9-10	1-6	2	3	17				
Young	18	3-4	0-0	3-4	1	4	6				
Liddell	28	6-12	7-9	2-6	0	3	20				
Johnson	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0				
Jallow	16	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	3	0				
Brown	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0				
Walker	25	3-8	4-4	0-2	2	1	10				
Key	12	2-3	0-1	0-3	0	0	4				
Towns	11	3-5	0-0	0-1	0	2	7				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>25-55</b>	<b>23-29</b>	<b>6-32</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>79</b>				
<b>Percentages:</b>	<b>FG:</b> 45.5%	<b>FT:</b> 79.3%	<b>Three-point field goals:</b> 6-18 (Ahrens 2-5, Washington 2-6, Towns 1-2, Liddell 1-3, Sueing 0-1, Walker 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 5. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 3 (Liddell 2, Jallow). <b>Turnovers:</b> 9 (Walker 3, Washington 2, Ahrens, Sueing, Young, Liddell). <b>Steals:</b> 6 (Walker 3, Liddell 2, Sueing).								
<b>Officials:</b>	Sciroto, Pfeifer, Kueneman. <b>Attendance:</b> N/A.										

into the second half on a pair of foul shots each from Harrar and Lundy that were bookended by three-pointers by Jones.

Sueing tied the game at 49 by converting an and-one dunk on a strong left-handed drive with 14:54 on the clock. After Sueing eliminated the three-point deficit, neither team led by more than two for 2:22 until the Nittany Lions went up 57-53, ahead of the closing stretch.

Penn State was led by 26 points by Lundy, while Brockington added 18 points, and Harrar gave a double-double effort with a career-high 15 points and 10 boards.

"We knew going into this game that Penn State wasn't going to hold back," Sueing said. "They're a good team. They can get going really fast, and that's what they did, especially in the second half. They got themselves going and made it real tough on us. But nonetheless, our team, we're used to doing that every day in practice, having to come back in situations when we're down by five, down 10, down by however many points.

"We just knew as long as we stuck together, made the right plays, and stayed poised, we knew we were going to come out with the win."

## Bucks Thrash Spartans At Home

The No. 13 Buckeyes defeated Michigan State 79-62 at Value City Arena on Jan. 31 with Liddell again taking control for the Buckeyes (14-4, 8-4) with 20 points and eight rebounds in the 17-point victory over the Spartans (8-6, 2-6).

Despite three-pointers from Liddell and Ahrens in the opening two minutes, Ohio State trailed the Spartans 7-6 through the 16:59 mark.

Liddell gave the Buckeyes a 9-7 lead by converting an old-fashioned three-point play with 16:40 until halftime, and they did not squander that advantage. A midrange jumper from Liddell and a smooth right-handed hook by Young pushed the lead to 13-7 five minutes into the contest.

"Our plan was to come out, set the rules early, be the more aggressive team, tougher

team," Young said. "And I think we were able to do that offensively and defensively early on, which helped carry us throughout the rest of the game."

Michigan State cut the deficit to two at the 13:05 mark on a pair of free throws by Aaron Henry, but Ohio state controlled the first half. The Buckeyes took their largest lead of the stanza at 42-28 on a triple by Ahrens with 1:28 until intermission. They led 42-30 at the half.

After committing just one first-half turnover, Ohio State gave the ball away three times in the first four minutes of the second half.

"We have to be better," Holtmann said. "We had some sloppy possessions. We just have to be better, and we have to be better in those moments. It's not easy or else everybody could do that. And there are sometimes you're going to play and teams are going to make a run on you because they're good, and it's the best league in the country and they're talented teams you're playing.

"And Michigan State's obviously a talented team and give them credit for that, but I did think a couple of the possessions were self-inflicted. At the same time, a Tom Izzo team is not going to fold, they're not going to quit. They're going to fight to the very end, and we expected that. But there are certain things that I'm looking at and saying we do have to clean up."

Despite the sloppy start to the half, the Buckeyes maintained their double-digit advantage thanks to two blocks and two free throws by Liddell and a steal and finish by Sueing.

Liddell showed great patience when he went to his right-handed hook with 14:59 on the clock to push the Buckeye lead to 48-34. Spartan junior forward Joey Hauser responded with a bucket, but the next basket came via Ohio State senior forward Seth Towns on a difficult midrange jumper following a shot fake.

The Buckeye lead swelled to 61-41 with 9:12 to play with an 11-3 stretch comprising six points by Sueing, a midrange jumper by

Continued On Page 28

## Ohio State Wins Offensive Showdown At Iowa

Continued From Page 27

Liddell and a triple by Washington.

"We don't win the game without him having the second half he did," Holtmann said of Sueing, who had 11 points and four rebounds in the final frame.

Once Ohio State pushed its lead to 20, the Spartans bounced back with back-to-back three-pointers. Liddell responded with an old-fashioned three-point play, and Towns hit a turnaround fadeaway off the glass with two Spartan foul shots in between leaving the score at 66-49. The Green and White continued to battle, using a 10-2 spurt to cut the Buckeye lead to 68-59 with 4:20 left.

"There are just certain little things we've got to do at the end of the stretch, whether it's fouling – we had a lot of bad fouls in the second half, whether it was on jump shots, I had one that I found on a jump shot, or offensive rebounds – they had a lot of second-chance points," Walker said. "Making sure teams don't get second chances and rebounding – it's

just little things that we've got to get better on, and I feel like that we will improve on after we watch film and we know what we need to improve on."

Walker helped Ohio State hold off the late Spartan surge, knocking down a pair of foul shots in a one-and-one situation and burying a midrange jumper to push the lead to 72-60 with 3:26 on the clock.

Following a pair of free throws by Michigan State, Liddell drilled two foul shots, and Young hit a fadeaway jumper after grabbing an offensive rebound to put the Buckeyes up 76-62 with 2:14 to play as Ohio State coasted to the 17-point victory.

Walker finished with 10 points and a team-high three steals, while Sueing added 17 points and seven boards.

Joshua Langford led Michigan State with 14 points, while Hauser added 11, and Henry scored 10 points and grabbed seven rebounds.

Defensively, Ohio State held MSU to just 32.1 percent shooting (17 of 53) and only 20.8 from beyond the arc (5 of 24).

## OSU Wins Comeback Thriller At Iowa

No. 7 Ohio State overcame an 11-point deficit in the second half to defeat No. 8 Iowa 89-85 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena on Feb. 4.

"I'm sure that was a fun game to watch," Holtmann said. "It was a fun game to be a part of. Not as much when we were down 11, but we have an incredibly resilient bunch – as much as any group I've ever coached. I give our players a lot of credit. This Iowa team is tremendous. They are really, really good, and (Iowa head coach) Fran (McCaffery) does a great job. They're talented, very well-coached, extremely hard to guard.

"We knew they were going to make some runs. We had to be able to weather some runs and find a way to score ourselves. If you can't score against them, you're not going to beat them. Our guys played with great poise, particularly when we were down, and for that, I'm most proud."

The Buckeyes (15-4, 9-4) were led by 16-point efforts from Young, Liddell and Washington. Sueing added 12 points, a game-high 11 rebounds and five assists, while Walker dished a game-high nine helpers.

"It was just fun the whole game," Young said. "Both teams were competing super hard. We knew what kind of game it was going to be coming into it. We've been prepping and putting in the work for it, so we were just happy to be out here, and we were competing the best we could."

The Hawkeyes (13-5, 7-4) pushed their lead to 61-50 with 14:29 left in the game off consecutive three-pointers by junior wing Joe Wieskamp and senior center Luka Garza.

Washington then came up big for the Buckeyes, capping a 7-0 spurt with a pair of three-pointers to cut the deficit to 61-57 with 13:18 to play.

"He got on a string there where he played with a lot of confidence, and it spread," Holtmann said of Washington. "It gave the rest of the group a lot of confidence. That's who Duane is. And as long as he's taking good ones, I want him hunting."

Young and his teammates felt the spark ignited by Washington when he swung the momentum back in the Buckeyes' favor.

"As good of a team as Iowa is, you know they're going to make runs, and you know they're going to be able to score and get stops, so for us, it was just sticking with it, not getting discouraged," Young said. "We always say don't flinch, so that was big for us. And then (Washington) hit those big threes and got us hyped up and got us right back in the game."

The Big Ten powers battled back and forth with Wieskamp putting Iowa up 66-62 on a feed from Garza with 10:55 left.

Freshman guard Eugene Brown banked in a three-pointer before Young gave Ohio State its first lead of the second half at 67-66 with 10:12 remaining. Then Young threw down a powerful two-handed slam on an excellent pass by Liddell to give the Buckeyes a 71-70 edge with 8:10 on the clock.

Iowa tied the game at 75 on a three-pointer by senior guard Jordan Bohannon from Garza, but then the Buckeyes and Ahrens took over.

Following a free throw by Key, Ahrens hit his first triple to push the lead to 79-75 with 4:27 left. Iowa sophomore forward Jack Nunge answered with a three of his own.

Ahrens knocked down another three-pointer to push the lead to 82-78 with 3:55 to play on a find by Walker. After Wieskamp made a free throw, Young nailed a three-pointer to push the edge to six points with 3:28 left.

Following two foul shots by Nunge,

## Ohio State 89, Iowa 85

Feb. 4, 2021 Carver-Hawkeye Arena • Iowa City, Iowa.										
		1		2		F				
Ohio State (15-4, 9-4)		42		47		89				
Iowa (13-5, 7-4)		45		40		85				
Ohio State	Total FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.				
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.				
Washington	27 6-15	1-2	0-3	2	1	16				
Ahrens	19 3-8	0-0	0-2	1	2	9				
Sueing	34 5-9	0-1	4-7	5	1	12				
Young	32 5-6	4-4	2-4	0	3	16				
Liddell	27 5-12	5-6	2-5	3	3	16				
Johnson	10 2-3	0-0	0-0	0	0	6				
Jallow	2 0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0				
Brown	4 1-2	0-0	1-0	0	0	3				
Walker	25 1-5	1-2	0-4	9	4	3				
Key	14 3-3	2-4	2-5	0	4	8				
Towns	6 0-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	0				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200 31-65</b>	<b>13-19</b>	<b>11-32</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>89</b>				
<b>Percentages: FG: 47.7%. FT: 68.4%. Three-point field goals: 14-32 (Ahrens 3-8, Washington 3-9, Young 2-2, Sueing 2-3, Johnson 2-3, Liddell 1-1, Brown 1-2, Walker 0-2, Towns 0-2). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 4 (Liddell 2, Jallow, Key). Turnovers: 6 (Ahrens, Sueing, Liddell, Johnson, Jallow, Walker). Steals: 4 (Ahrens, Sueing, Young, Walker).</b>										
Iowa	Total FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.				
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.				
Bohannon	36 5-11	4-4	0-2	6	2	18				
Wieskamp	37 6-14	1-2	1-9	2	1	17				
Murray	20 2-8	1-2	4-2	0	2	5				
C. McCaffery	27 1-5	0-1	2-0	3	2	3				
Garza	36 6-13	3-6	2-5	5	3	16				
Toussaint	7 0-1	0-0	0-1	2	2	0				
Nunge	23 6-12	2-2	2-4	2	0	18				
Ulis	0+ 0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0				
Perkins	0+ 0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0				
P. McCaffery	13 4-4	0-0	0-1	0	0	8				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200 30-68</b>	<b>11-17</b>	<b>11-25</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>85</b>				
<b>Percentages: FG: 44.1%. FT: 64.7%. Three-point field goals: 14-32 (Nunge 4-7, Bohannon 4-8, Wieskamp 4-8, Garza 1-3, C. McCaffery 1-4, Murray 0-2). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 6 (Nunge 2, Bohannon, C. McCaffery, Toussaint, P. McCaffery). Steals: 4 (Bohannon, Wieskamp, C. McCaffery, P. McCaffery). Officials: Boroski, Garrison, Ek. Attendance: 503.</b>										

Ahrens connected on his third triple in 1:48 of play to extend the lead to 88-81 with 2:39 on the clock.

"He came in really confident," Holtmann said of Ahrens. "He came in hunting shots, and (assistant coach) Ryan Pedon put him in great positions a couple times with a couple of his calls from the bench. But give Justin credit, man, he was hunting."

The Hawkeyes did not give up at home, cutting the deficit to 88-85 on a pair of free throws by Bohannon and a layup by Nunge. Washington knocked down one foul shot to push the lead to 89-85 with 17 seconds left, and Ohio State held on for the four-point win after a trio of air balls on three-point attempts from the Hawkeyes.

The largest lead Ohio State held in the game was a 20-12 advantage when Key finished at the rim after grabbing an offensive rebound with 11:35 until halftime. Iowa responded with a 10-0 run led by five points from Nunge to take a 22-20 lead with 10:12 until intermission.

Neither team led by more than four points from 11:18 to 3:30 until the Hawkeyes went up 39-34 on a Nunge triple after a nifty pass fake to freeze the Scarlet and Gray defense.

Ohio State freshman guard Meechie Johnson drilled a pair of three-pointers to regain the lead for the visiting Buckeyes at 40-39 with 1:38 until halftime.

"You look at a guy like Meechie Johnson today," Holtmann said. "He really stemmed the tide for us a little bit when we were on our heels a little bit there at the end of the first half by just making a couple shots and then providing some defensive activity."

The Hawkeyes ended the half with a 45-42 lead with three players scoring 11 points in Garza, Bohannon and Nunge during the first 20 minutes. Overall, Bohannon and Nunge paced Iowa with a game-high 18 points apiece, while Wieskamp added 17 points and 10 boards, and Garza posted 16 points with seven rebounds and five assists.

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# Hutcherson Becomes Spark Plug In First Season

The Ohio State women's basketball team has ridden an even distribution of scoring on the way to a 12-2 record through its first 14 games, with its entire starting five averaging at least 10 points per game.

But the Buckeyes have also found strong production from their bench on the way to averaging more than 80 points per contest. One of those contributors is freshman forward Gabby Hutcherson, who may be averaging just 3.7 points per game but has made her presence felt in ways beyond the box score.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Grosher

Watch any Ohio State game and it would be difficult to not notice Hutcherson on the sidelines, constantly getting out of her chair to get excited about a crucial three-pointer or an impressive drive to the rim that draws an and-one.

Hutcherson said she takes pride in bringing that energy to the team whether she is on the floor or not.

"They think I'm psycho, but it helps them out in the long run," Hutcherson said. "I love being that spark to help them out and get the boost under their butt. I think it's the most important part because the fans, obviously we love our fans and they bring a lot to us. They give us the confidence, too. So not having that - we have our parents there and stuff like that, but beforehand, we didn't have that at all. We have each other and that's it. So if nobody else is going to do it, I feel like I have to do it."

The energy and the play on the court have caught the attention of head coach Kevin McGuff, who has been impressed with Hutcherson's performances, as well as her ability to provide a spark, throughout her first season with the team.

"She's a great kid, brings a lot of energy," McGuff said. "She's got an awesome personality, really is about the team and the group and about winning and doing whatever she can do to contribute to that. She's great on the bench, and we are really fortunate to have her."

On the season, Hutcherson is averaging just 12.7 minutes per game, but she did see a run of extended play once Ohio State returned to play following a lengthy hiatus due to a COVID-19 outbreak.

When the Buckeyes returned, they were still without a handful of players, including a pair of forwards in Dorka Juhasz and Rebeka Mikulasikova. That led to Hutcherson seeing 26 minutes of action each against Penn State and Illinois on Jan. 4 and 7, as well as 23 minutes

against Iowa on Jan. 13 when Mikulasikova returned but Juhasz remained out.

"I came in here obviously knowing as a freshman I'd have to work for my spot to play on the floor," Hutcherson said. "Then, unfortunately, Dorka and Rebeka were out with COVID and stuff, so in that time when they were out, I knew I had to step up. That a big moment for me, having to mature a bit and just be ready right away off the jump."

Hutcherson averaged 8.0 points, 4.7 rebounds and 1.7 steals per game in that three-game stretch, including 12 points on 5-of-10 shooting in her first collegiate road game against the Illini.

"That girl, let me tell you," junior forward Aaliyah Patty said after the Illinois win. "As a freshman, you come in, you don't really know your role. Everything is just thrown at you so quick. But for a freshman, I think she's handling it very well, as you can see today. I think she steps up when we need her to step up, which, that's good for her. She's been playing very well."

Though Hutcherson had only five points against the Hawkeyes, she hit the biggest shot of her college career as part of an 84-82 overtime win that snapped Iowa's 42-game home winning streak.

With Ohio State down 71-69 and 1:52 to play, sophomore guard Madison Greene forced a turnover which led to Hutcherson finding some space behind the arc. The first-year forward seized the opportunity, burying a three to give the Buckeyes their first lead since the first quarter.

"That was a huge shot," McGuff said. "She's been playing really well, and she's just continuing to get better. She's working really hard in practice. It was a huge moment for her."

Now, with Ohio State currently without any inactive players on the roster, Hutcherson has gone back to a shortened role off the bench, but she continues to make her presence known through energetic play and enthusiastic celebrations for her teammates.

Once again in a game against the Hawkeyes, this time on Feb. 4, Hutcherson subbed in with 5:44 to play in the third quarter. Within 24 seconds, she grabbed a defensive rebound and hit a three-pointer to extend Ohio State's lead to 16, the largest lead the Buckeyes had all night on the way to a 92-87 victory.

Hutcherson said she knows how important it is to sub into games ready to make an impact and that she takes pride in providing that jolt of energy to the team when she comes on the floor.

"It's like you have to step up right away," Hutcherson said on Jan. 27. "You have to have the energy, have to be prepared to go in the game. When you get the score and get the run going, it really does boost your confidence a lot because you feel like you get your team going and get them back on their feet."

## 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

## Bell Continues Breaking Records In Florida

Former Ohio State guard Kierstan Bell has made quite the early impression on her new team, Florida Gulf Coast, putting up historic numbers for a program that has not yet lost with Bell in the lineup.

After a 1-2 start to the season before Bell was eligible, the Eagles are 12-0 since, with Bell leading the way in multiple categories. In those 12 games, Bell is averaging 23.0 points, 10.8 rebounds and 2.5 blocks per game, all team highs, while shooting 54.8 percent from the field and 42.4 percent from three.

During an 84-62 win over Stetson on Jan. 30 to move Florida Gulf Coast to 13-2, Bell tallied 25 points and 11 rebounds for her ninth double-double, breaking the program's Division I era single-season record for most double-doubles in a season, a record that was previously held jointly by Sarah Hansen and Whitney Knight.

In one season with Ohio State prior to trans-

ferring, Bell was second on the team with 10.9 points per game and third with 4.4 rebounds per game. She shot 39.4 percent from the field and 31.8 percent from deep.

## Greene Earns January Buck Of The Month

Greene is the winner of the Plank's Lady Buck of the Month honor for her excellent play in January.

In Ohio State's seven games in January, in which the Buckeyes amassed a 6-1 record, Greene averaged 15.7 points, 5.3 rebounds and 3.4 assists per game, including a pair of 24-point scoring outbursts against Penn State and Maryland, as well as a 20-point showing against Iowa. She shot 43.7 percent from the field and 35.0 percent from three.

Greene also played very well defensively, averaging 2.9 steals per contest in January, highlighted by a six-steal performance against Iowa and a five-steal performance against the Terrapins.

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# Buckeyes Win 4 Of 5 During Difficult B1G Stretch

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Last time Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press, the Ohio State women's basketball team was just starting a span of four games against ranked opponents, opening the stretch up with a close victory over previously undefeated Michigan.

The Buckeyes ended up going 3-1 in that four-game span, taking down Maryland and Indiana before falling on the road against Northwestern. The wins over the Terrapins and Hoosiers moved Ohio State all the way up to No. 11 in the Associated Press top 25 poll.

After the loss to the Wildcats, Ohio State bounced back with its second win of the season over Iowa and then a blowout victory over Minnesota in the team's only game against the Gophers for the season.

"I think it was a great confidence booster for us," junior forward Dorka Juhasz said after the Minnesota win. "Since Northwestern we've been a little bit off at the starts and everything, and I think we started this game really well. We came out and we did everything we wanted to."

## Buckeyes Down Maryland, Snap Terrapin Win Streak

After trailing by three points heading into the third, No. 14 Ohio State capitalized on a pair of big runs in the quarter to take a 62-60 lead over No. 7 Maryland into the final quarter of play on its way to an 88-86 victory at Value City Arena on Jan. 25.

To start the fourth, Maryland went on a 7-0 run to regain a five-point advantage, with five of those points coming from preseason All-Big Ten guard Ashley Owusu, who led Maryland with 33 points, six rebounds and nine assists.

But the Buckeyes dominated in the middle of the fourth, going on a 21-5 run in the final frame for the win, snapping Maryland's 10-game win streak and 24-game regular-season win streak in the Big Ten dating back to last season.

"They've got a great team and they've been playing exceptionally well this year, so I knew this was going to be a real challenge for us of course," said Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff. "I think it was a great game. Both teams played really well. Both teams made big plays. I just think we made a couple more down the stretch to give us a chance to win."

Just when it looked like the Terrapins were about to pull away and make it 11 wins in a row, Ohio State (9-1, 5-1) went on a 13-2 run, first with seven straight points by sophomore guard Jacy Sheldon and then with back-to-back threes by senior guard Braxtin Miller, to take a 75-69 lead with 4:22 to go.

"I was just trying to help and play hard," Miller said. "I think my teammates are awesome. They kind of made me feel the energy in the moment. But at the moment, I was just really locked in and trying to do anything I could to help the team."

After an Owusu basket with 6:06 to play that tied the game at 69, Maryland (11-2, 7-1) was held without a field goal until Alaysia Styles hit a layup with 1:27 to go.

But, even with the Buckeye lead ballooning to 83-72 with 1:47 left in the game, three Ohio State turnovers late gave Maryland some life, cutting the deficit to six points with 59 seconds remaining, 83-77. Ohio State held on, though, hitting key free throws down the stretch for the two-point win.

The trio of sophomore guard Madison Greene, Sheldon and Miller led the way for Ohio State with 24, 21 and 18 points, respective-

ly. Greene (five) and Miller (three) also combined for eight steals to help force 16 Terrapin turnovers, six of which were by Owusu.

"We knew she was one of the best players on the team, so we just had to stay in front of her and just try to slow her down," Greene said of Owusu. "We knew she liked to drive to the basket and use her body a lot, so we just tried to focus on that and tried to slow her game down."

Following a Diamond Miller basket to put Maryland up five at the start of the third, the Buckeyes went on an 8-0 run to go up 44-41. Then, later in the quarter with the Terrapins back up four, Ohio State rattled off a 10-1 run that ended with a three by Greene for a 56-51 advantage with 3:16 to go in the period.

Miller, Maryland's leading scorer (17.9 points per game) coming into the contest, was mostly held in check, finishing with 10 points on 4-of-9 shooting.

Senior guard and Harvard transfer Katie Benzan has been a key addition for Maryland all season, leading the team with 43 three-point makes on a blistering 50.6-percent shooting from behind the arc.

She continued that hot shooting against Ohio State, hitting on 5 of 7 attempts from three in the first half for a half-high 15 points. She finished with 22 points and seven made threes.

Benzan was the big reason for Maryland's 39-36 halftime lead, as was an 11-0 Terrapin run in the second quarter that gave Maryland a 31-29 lead with 6:24 to go before the break. But the Buckeyes stayed in it much in thanks to Greene, who had 13 points and four steals in the opening 20 minutes.

Junior forward Aaliyah Patty was listed as a game-time decision for the Buckeyes while she deals with a shoulder injury, but she did not play for the second-straight game.

After two straight ranked victories, McGuff complimented the effort and the relentlessness that his team showed to earn wins over both the Wolverines and Terrapins.

"I think our competitive character is as good as it's been probably since I've been here," McGuff said. "These kids really fight and scratch and claw and play for each other. I think you saw that now in the last couple of games for sure, and that's how you beat a team as good as Maryland. They are a great team, and we were going to have to play extremely well, and I think for the most part we did."

## Ohio State Continues Streak On Road Over Hoosiers

In the win over then-undefeated Michigan, Sheldon led the way with 20 points for Ohio State. Against Maryland, Greene led the Buckeyes with 24 points.

Those two guards have often been the heroes for this team early on this season, but Greene and Sheldon combined to miss their first 13 shots from the field in the 78-70 road win Jan. 28 against Indiana, finishing the game a combined 1 of 15.

Still, the Buckeyes stayed in the game against the Hoosiers and notched their third straight victory over a ranked opponent, thanks in part to a 25-point effort by Miller.

The three-game stretch over ranked teams is tied for the longest in program history, matched only by the 1992-93 team during its run all the way to the national championship game.

"I'm really just proud of our effort," McGuff said. "We got off to a slow start, obviously, but our kids hung together, showed some toughness and some grit, and ultimately played really well to beat a great team on the road here."

Ohio State trailed the Hoosiers 54-53 heading into the fourth quarter and were shooting

## Ohio State 88, Maryland 86

Jan. 25, 2021												
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio												
		1	2	3	4	F						
Maryland (11-2, 7-1)		20	19	21	26	86						
Ohio State (9-1, 5-1)		26	10	26	26	88						
Maryland		Total	FG	FT	Reb.							
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Collins	16	0-2	0-0	0-0	1	3	0					
Bibby	39	4-14	3-3	2-3	0	3	13					
Miller	34	4-9	2-4	2-3	0	1	10					
Benzan	40	7-13	1-2	0-7	3	3	22					
Owusu	40	11-24	10-12	2-4	9	0	33					
Masonius	6	0-2	0-0	2-2	1	2	0					
Styles	34	4-6	0-0	3-4	0	5	8					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>30-70</b>	<b>16-21</b>	<b>14-24</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>86</b>						
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 42.9% FT: 76.2% <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 10-26 (Benzan 7-12, Bibby 2-8, Owusu 1-4, Miller 0-2). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 4. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 2 (Miller). <b>Turnovers:</b> 16 (Owusu 6, Collins 3, Bibby 2, Miller 2, Benzan 2, Styles). <b>Steals:</b> 8 (Owusu 3, Miller 2, Styles 2, Benzan).												
Ohio State		Total	FG	FT	Reb.							
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Juhasz	37	2-8	2-4	6-10	1	3	6					
Beacham	24	2-4	2-2	3-5	2	0	6					
Greene	38	9-15	5-5	4-0	7	3	24					
Sheldon	32	8-16	3-4	0-2	1	1	21					
Miller	36	6-14	3-3	1-1	2	2	18					
Poole	12	1-7	2-2	0-1	0	2	4					
Harris	3	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	3					
Mikulasikova	17	2-3	0-0	0-5	0	4	4					
Hutcherson	3	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	2					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>32-70</b>	<b>17-20</b>	<b>3-3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>88</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 45.7% FT: 85.0% <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 7-15 (Miller 3-4, Sheldon 2-4, Greene 1-2, Harris 1-2, Juhasz 0-1, Poole 0-1, Mikulasikova 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 6. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 1 (Beacham). <b>Turnovers:</b> 17 (Greene 6, Sheldon 4, Mikulasikova 3, Beacham, Miller, Poole, TEAM). <b>Steals:</b> 11 (Greene 5, Miller 3, Juhasz, Beacham, Poole). <b>Officials:</b> Pethtel, Enlund, Morris. <b>Attendance:</b> 52.												

just 33.3 percent (18 of 54) from the field through the first 30 minutes of play.

Sheldon's first make of the game at the end of the third quarter started a 13-0 run that had the Buckeyes hold the Hoosiers scoreless for the first 4:46 of the fourth quarter to take a 64-54 lead.

Indiana followed that with a six-point stretch to cut the deficit down to four, but the Buckeyes countered that with a 7-0 run to go back up 11. Ohio State held on the rest of the way for the eight-point victory to move to 10-1 overall and 6-1 in conference play.

"I think we just tried a lot of different things," Miller said on the offensive success of the team, "getting some screens, attacking the basket. In the post they did a really good job of taking their defenders with them and things like that, so I think a lot of different things were just working out for us, and we just kind of all attacked that."

Along with Miller, Juhasz had a strong bounce-back performance after a six-point showing against the Terrapins, finishing with a double-double of 19 points and 12 rebounds.

"Obviously Maryland, I wasn't really great on offense," Juhasz said. "I tried to focus more on my defense, rebounding. I came out different this game, and I kind of stepped up a little bit on offense to help my team."

It looked like this game had the potential to be over quickly once Indiana opened the game on an 11-0 run, holding Ohio State scoreless for the first 4:05 as the team missed its first eight shots before a Juhasz three-pointer. That started an Ohio State 11-1 run, and the Buckeyes trailed by just five points, 20-15, after the first quarter of play.

McGuff said there were not any real tactical changes that Ohio State made after going down by double digits out of the gate.

"Really we just started playing," McGuff said. "I don't know that it was anything schematically we weren't doing. We just didn't have the same focus that we normally have. We just had to get a timeout there and get them reorganized and just go from there."

The Buckeyes trailed the Hoosiers 39-38 at halftime after a layup at the buzzer by Indiana sophomore forward Mackenzie Holmes, who

## Ohio State 78, Indiana 70

Jan. 29, 2021												
Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall • Bloomington, Ind.												
		1	2	3	4	F						
Ohio State (10-1, 6-1)		15	23	15	25	78						
Indiana (9-4, 7-2)		20	19	15	16	70						
Ohio State		Total	FG	FT	Reb.							
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Juhasz	35	8-16	1-4	3-9	2	3	13					
Patty	28	4-14	5-6	2-1	0	3	19					
Greene	34	0-5	7-9	1-4	2	3	7					
Sheldon	29	1-10	2-4	0-4	3	2	4					
Miller	37	9-16	4-4	1-4	0	1	25					
Beacham	5	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	3	0					
Poole	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	3	0					
Harris	11	2-3	2-4	3-1	0	3	7					
Mikulasikova	12	1-4	1-2	0-3	0	1	3					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>25-69</b>	<b>22-33</b>	<b>13-30</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>78</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 36.2% FT: 66.7% <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 6-23 (Miller 3-5, Juhasz 2-8, Harris 1-2, Patty 0-1, Greene 0-1, Mikulasikova 0-2, Sheldon 0-4). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 5. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Juhasz 2, Patty, Mikulasikova). <b>Turnovers:</b> 8 (Sheldon 4, Juhasz, Patty, Beacham, Mikulasikova). <b>Steals:</b> 11 (Miller 5, Juhasz 2, Greene 2, Sheldon 2).												
Indiana		Total	FG	FT	Reb.							
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Gulbe	35	3-6	0-0	4-4	1	4	6					
Holmes	33	7-10	3-4	6-4	0	4	17					
Penn	31	3-15	0-0	1-4	3	4	6					
Patberg	36	3-14	2-2	1-8	4	3	9					
Berger	37	8-15	10-14	0-10	2	4	26					
Warthen	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0					
Cardano-Hillary	14	1-5	0-4	1-3	2	2	2					
Browne	12	2-2	0-0	0-2	0	2	4					
Moore-McNeil	0	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Waggoner	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>27-68</b>	<b>15-24</b>	<b>14-35</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>70</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 39.7% FT: 62.5% <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 1-14 (Patberg 1-5, Gulbe 0-1, Berger 0-1, Moore-McNeil 0-1, Penn 0-3, Cardano-Hillary 0-3). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 1. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 6 (Holmes 5, Penn). <b>Turnovers:</b> 17 (Holmes 4, Cardano-Hillary 4, Penn 3, Patberg 2, Berger 2, Gulbe, Browne). <b>Steals:</b> 2 (Gulbe, Penn). <b>Officials:</b> Cruse, Maxey, Tobin. <b>Attendance:</b> N/A.												

had 11 points in the opening 20 minutes. Ohio State was led by Miller, who finished the half with 16 points and five steals.

Miller finished the game with five rebounds and five steals to go along with her 25 points on 9-of-16 shooting.

"She was really efficient," McGuff said. "Our team executed really well in the second half, and I think she was a big part of that. Madison and Jacy didn't have their normal nights so we really needed her to step up, and she did a great job. It was a great game for Braxtin."

Indiana was led by junior guard Grace Berger, who finished with 26 points and 10 rebounds in 37 minutes. She shot 8 of 15 from the field and was 10 of 14 from the free-throw line.

Patty returned to the lineup after missing the previous two games with a shoulder injury. She finished with 13 points in 28 minutes, and Juhasz said it was very important to have her back after the absence.

"It helps a lot, just for me," she said. "It kind of takes the pressure off me, too, because I know that I can always count on her going for rebounds, and I think we had some great connections today. It was really good to have her back. She still has to get a little bit back in after her injury, but I think she played great. I think she played really tough today, and obviously she's a very important piece of our team."

## Win Streak Gets Snapped In Evanston

It was a defensive battle from start to finish in Ohio State's fourth consecutive matchup against a ranked opponent on Feb. 1. With a chance to make program history with a fourth straight win against ranked teams, the Buckeyes fell short, losing on the road to Northwestern 69-57.

"It was very frustrating," Juhasz said. "It was obviously very disappointing that, just by looking back at the past games, we did such a good job working hard and playing hard for each other, and this game it was just very off, and obviously they took advantage of that."

# OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

The Buckeyes trailed 51-46 after three quarters of play, clinging to life thanks to some strong defense and an eight-point third quarter by sophomore forward Rebeka Mikulasikova.

Ohio State eventually cut the deficit to just one, 51-50, after an and-one by Patty with 7:30 to go in the game. But the Buckeyes did not score again for the next 3:19 until Patty hit two more free throws, this time bringing the deficit down to 55-52.

But a 9-3 run by the Wildcats helped to seal the game and drop Ohio State to 10-2 on the season and 5-2 in the Big Ten.

Junior guard Veronica Burton was the difference-maker for Northwestern, finishing with a near triple-double: 20 points, 15 rebounds and nine assists, while shooting 5 of 11 from the field.

"We had a hard time keeping her in front," McGuff said. "She's really quick and aggressive driving the basket, so we didn't guard the ball as well as we should have. She really killed us tonight."

Juhasz was the top player for the Buckeyes, ending the night with a double-double of 11 points and 14 rebounds, though she shot only 4 of 12 from the field and 2 of 9 from the free-throw line.

It was an ugly start to the game for Ohio State. The Buckeyes scored just eight points in the first quarter and shooting just 20 percent (3 of 15) from the field, falling behind 15-8.

"Their defense was really good, but I think our biggest issue was we didn't start the game with the focus and energy that we've been playing with," McGuff said. "We spotted Northwestern such a big lead, and you can't do that against a good team like them on the road."

Juhasz agreed with her head coach, pointing to the effort and energy from the Buckeyes instead of the defensive prowess of the Wildcats.

"I don't think our offense was the main problem," Juhasz said. "I think our energy, our defense, just the way we started the game, it's not acceptable. And we knew that starting the game like that against a great team that is a very aggressive defense, they're going to score. They're going to start very strong."

It only got worse to begin the second quarter, with the Buckeyes not making a basket until there was 4:32 remaining in the half. That, combined with a 5:14 spell without a field goal to end the first, meant that the Buckeyes went 10:42 without a make from the field, going down 28-11 in the process.

On the night, Ohio State shot just 28.6 percent (18 of 63) from the field and 29.4 percent (5 of 17) from three.

But after a Juhasz and-one to end the cold streak, Ohio State ended the first half strong, going on a 14-4 run to bring the deficit back to seven points at the break, 32-25.

Burton was big for the Wildcats early, finishing the first half with 10 points, nine rebounds and six assists, all of which were game highs at that point.

Northwestern shot 42.4 percent (25 of 59) overall and just 8.3 percent (1 of 12) from deep, not impressive numbers, but enough to take the victory thanks to Ohio State's offensive struggles.

"This is 100 percent on us," Juhasz said of the loss. "I mean Northwestern is a great team, but I think we would have played a better game if we were more focused and just together and just, defensively, as aggressive as they were."

## Sheldon Leads Season Sweep Of Hawkeyes

Ohio State bounced back from its second loss of the season, taking down Iowa 92-87 at Value City Arena for the first sweep of a home-and-home series against the Hawkeyes since 2008.

"Northwestern was a great team and they played a great game against us, but I

## Northwestern 69, Ohio State 57

Feb. 1, 2021  
Welsh-Ryan Arena • Evanston, Ill.

		1	2	3	4	F
<b>Ohio State (10-2, 6-2)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>57</b>	
<b>N'Western (10-3, 8-3)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>69</b>	

Ohio State	Total FG FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Juhasz	33	4-12	2-9	6-8	1	1	11
Patty	31	2-9	5-5	2-4	1	5	10
Greene	31	3-14	2-2	1-0	3	4	9
Sheldon	36	2-10	4-6	0-4	2	3	8
Miller	32	2-8	0-0	1-2	3	5	5
Poole	14	2-3	0-0	0-1	2	1	4
Beacham	3	0-1	2-2	0-1	0	1	2
Mikulasikova	11	3-5	1-1	0-3	0	0	8
Harris	7	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Hutcherson	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0

**Totals** 200 18-63 16-25 12-26 12 21 57  
**Percentages:** FG: 28.6%. FT: 64.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-17 (Patty 1-2, Mikulasikova 1-2, Greene 1-3, Miller 1-3, Juhasz 1-4, Poole 0-1, Sheldon 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Juhasz 2, Patty, Greene, Mikulasikova). **Turnovers:** 16 (Juhasz 4, Greene 3, Miller 3, Patty 2, Sheldon, Poole, Beacham, Hutcherson). **Steals:** 9 (Juhasz 4, Patty, Greene, Sheldon, Miller, Poole).

Northwestern	Total FG FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Mott	16	1-4	0-0	1-3	1	4	2
Wood	39	3-6	2-3	2-5	4	2	8
Pulliam	39	6-19	3-6	1-9	3	3	15
Burton	36	5-11	10-14	3-12	9	2	20
Hamilton	35	5-8	2-2	0-1	0	2	13
Morris	24	4-6	1-1	0-2	0	4	9
Satterwhite	10	1-4	0-0	0-0	1	0	2
Rainey	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0

**Totals** 200 25-59 18-26 10-36 18 17 69  
**Percentages:** FG: 42.4%. FT: 69.2%. **Three-point field goals:** 1-12 (Hamilton 1-1, Burton 0-3, Satterwhite 0-3, Pulliam 0-5). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** 9 (Mott 3, Morris 3, Wood 2, Burton). **Turnovers:** 15 (Hamilton 5, Wood 3, Pulliam 3, Morris 2, Burton, Satterwhite). **Steals:** 10 (Burton 4, Wood 3, Mott, Hamilton, Morris). **Officials:** Napier, Thompson, Berger. **Attendance:** N/A.

think our main focus was kind of refocusing, talking about what we need to accomplish this game," Sheldon said. "I think we definitely did a great job of kind of fixing what we did against Northwestern and putting that into play tonight."

The Buckeyes (11-2, 7-2) led by as many as 16 points in the third quarter, but Iowa (10-5, 6-5) finished the frame on a 14-7 run to cut the deficit to just six, 63-57, going into the final 10 minutes.

The Hawkeyes relied on their star for the majority of the scoring, with true freshman guard Caitlin Clark tallying 30 points, 21 of which were in the second half, as well as nine assists.

"She's an incredibly gifted player," McGuff said. "She's going to have an incredible career at Iowa. She's so good with the ball in her hands, and she's obviously extremely efficient when she shoots the ball from the three-point line, but she can also drive it. And I thought tonight, too, she got her teammates involved and made them better as well."

But, despite a slow start to the contest, Juhasz stepped up for Ohio State late, scoring eight of Ohio State's first 11 points in the fourth quarter, finishing the game with a double-double of 16 points and 10 rebounds.

It wasn't smooth sailing for the Buckeyes though, with the Hawkeyes consistently scoring to stay within striking distance. Ohio State then found a new focal point of the offense late in Sheldon, who had 14 fourth-quarter points to help secure the five-point victory.

After struggling to get her shot going in the past two matchups, Sheldon bounced back in a big way, finishing the game with a career-high 29 points on 8-of-12 shooting. She was also 12 of 14 from the line.

"She was really efficient offensively," McGuff said. "She got out in transition, which allowed her to get to the rim, allowed her to get to the free-throw line. Overall, it was a really good performance for her on offense."

Sheldon credited her teammates for the reason she was so successful against the Hawkeyes.

"We moved the ball really, really well tonight," Sheldon said. "That was a huge part of it. We got in the paint, kicked it out. We had

## Ohio State 92, Iowa 87

Feb. 4, 2021  
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

		1	2	3	4	F
<b>Iowa (10-5, 6-5)</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>87</b>	
<b>Ohio State (11-2, 7-2)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>92</b>	

Iowa	Total FG FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Warnock	31	5-10	1-2	1-4	4	2	12
Czinano	27	6-10	2-2	1-5	1	4	14
Martin	24	1-5	5-5	1-4	2	5	7
Clark	36	10-21	6-6	0-4	9	5	30
Marshall	26	1-4	2-2	1-0	1	2	4
Taiwo	25	5-8	2-3	2-0	2	1	13
Cook	16	3-4	1-2	0-3	0	1	7
Meyer	9	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Goodman	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Sevillian	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0

**Totals** 200 31-63 19-22 8-25 19 22 87  
**Percentages:** FG: 49.2%. FT: 86.4%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-22 (Clark 4-11, Taiwo 1-2, Warnock 1-4, Meyer 0-1, Martin 0-2, Marshall 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Warnock, Marshall). **Turnovers:** 14 (Clark 7, Warnock 2, Taiwo 2, Marshall, Cook, TEAM). **Steals:** 4 (Marshall 3, Taiwo).

Ohio State	Total FG FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Juhasz	32	8-16	0-1	5-5	2	3	16
Patty	21	6-12	2-2	1-5	2	5	15
Greene	35	3-6	5-6	1-2	9	5	12
Sheldon	34	8-12	12-14	0-5	1	1	29
Miller	37	2-8	1-4	2-1	5	3	6
Mikulasikova	13	0-4	0-0	1-1	0	2	0
Hutcherson	7	2-3	0-0	2-3	1	0	5
Poole	10	1-1	1-2	0-1	0	0	4
Harris	4	0-1	1-2	0-1	0	1	1
Beacham	8	2-4	0-0	0-0	0	0	4

**Totals** 200 32-67 22-31 15-24 20 92  
**Percentages:** FG: 47.8%. FT: 71.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 6-19 (Patty 1-1, Poole 1-1, Greene 1-2, Hutcherson 1-2, Sheldon 1-3, Miller 1-3, Harris 0-1, Mikulasikova 0-2, Juhasz 0-4). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Juhasz, Sheldon, Hutcherson). **Turnovers:** 14 (Greene 3, Sheldon 3, Juhasz 2, Patty 2, Miller 2, Mikulasikova, Poole). **Steals:** 7 (Miller 2, Juhasz, Patty, Sheldon, Mikulasikova, Poole). **Officials:** Enterline, Cross, Cruse. **Attendance:** 54.

a lot of offensive rebounds, which was also awesome. So that was all my teammates. They were making great passes."

Ohio State struggled with a slow start for the third consecutive game, falling behind 9-2 after committing three turnovers and missing its first five shots from the field.

But the Buckeyes rebounded thanks to Sheldon, who had the team's first nine points. Sheldon's strong start helped build momentum, and Ohio State really started to get going after a three by Miller to go up 17-15 with 1:59 to play in the period.

That three was the start of a 15-3 run that stretched into the second quarter, which ended with the Buckeyes up 11, 41-30. Sheldon led all scorers with 15 points, while Patty added nine points and four rebounds in the first 20 minutes.

Fouls were a big part of this matchup, with the teams combining for 42 (Ohio State 20, Iowa 22) in the game. The Buckeyes hit 22 of their 31 attempts from the free-throw line (71.0 percent), while the Hawkeyes made 19 of 22 (86.4%).

Overall from the field, Ohio State shot 47.8 percent (32 of 67) and 31.6 percent (6 of 19) from three. Iowa was efficient on the night, hitting on 49.2 percent (31 of 63) of its shots. It was not the same story from deep for the Hawkeyes, who hit just 27.3 percent (6 of 22) from behind the arc.

## OSU Defeats Gophers With Dominant Third Quarter

Ohio State picked up its first lopsided victory in weeks, taking down Minnesota 83-59 without ever trailing or without ever having the game tied after the first points of the game on Feb. 7 in Value City Arena.

"I think it was good for the team," McGuff said. "We got to play a lot of people. I think overall we played pretty well. It was just a good win against a good Minnesota team."

It wasn't quite a blowout at half, with the Buckeyes leading by just nine, 39-30, going into the break, but after that lead was cut to 39-32 at the start of the third quarter, Ohio State began to take over.

"We kind of gave them a little bit of confidence coming into the half," freshman guard

## Ohio State 83, Minnesota 59

Feb. 7, 2021  
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

		1	2	3	4	F
<b>Minnesota (5-9, 4-8)</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>59</b>	
<b>Ohio State (12-2, 8-2)</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>83</b>	

Minnesota	Total FG FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Sissoko	24	5-8	3-3	1-8	0	1	13
Sconiers	21	5-8	2-4	0-2	0	2	12
Smith	30	1-5	0-0	1-3	2	0	2
Powell	18	1-6	2-2	0-0	1	3	5
Scalia	31	4-9	2-2	0-1	2	2	12
Mershon	19	0-1	0-0	1-1	1	3	0
Bagwell Katalinich	10	1-3	0-0	2-1	1	3	2
Strande	19	2-5	2-2	1-3	1	1	7
Borowicz	22	2-8	1-2	1-4	3	3	6
Cumming	4	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	3	0
Hedman	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0

**Totals** 200 21-55 12-15 8-27 11 21 59  
**Percentages:** FG: 38.2%. FT: 80.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 5-17 (Scalia 2-5, Powell 1-3, Strande 1-3, Borowicz 1-5, Cumming 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Sconiers). **Turnovers:** 25 (Sissoko 6, Powell 4, Borowicz 4, Scalia 3, Smith 2, Bagwell Katalinich 2, Cumming 2, Sconiers, Strande). **Steals:** 6 (Sissoko, Powell, Mershon, Strande, Borowicz, Cumming).

Ohio State	Total FG FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Juhasz	24	7-10	2-5	4-6	1	3	18
Patty	29	5-10	2-2	2-8	0	3	14
Greene	23	2-6	2-2	0-1	3	2	8
Sheldon	25	8-14	1-1	2-1	4	0	17
Miller	31	2-7	0-1	2-1	3	1	5
Harris	14	2-3	1-2	0-5	0	0	6
Beacham	11	1-5	0-0	2-2	0	2	2
Hutcherson	13	0-2	2-2	0-0	1	3	2
Poole	19	3-6	1-3	1-2	2	1	8
Jones	8	0-3	0-0	0-0	0	2	0
Bristow	3	0-0	3-4	0-0	0	0	3

**Totals** 200 30-66 14-22 14-29 14 17 83  
**Percentages:** FG: 45.5%. FT: 63.6%. **Three-point field goals:** 9-26 (Juhasz 2-3, Greene 2-3, Patty 2-4, Harris 1-2, Poole 1-3, Miller 1-4, Beacham 0-1, Hutcherson 0-2, Sheldon 0-4). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Juhasz 2, Patty). **Turnovers:** 18 (Sheldon 4, Poole 4, Harris 3, Patty 2, Greene 2, Miller, Hutcherson, Bristow). **Officials:** Cross, Hall, Broderick. **Attendance:** 58.

Kateri Poole said. "But we got right back after it coming into the second half."

The Buckeyes answered the half-opening bucket by Kadiatou Sissoko by going on a 15-0 run to expand the margin to 22 points, 54-32, with 6:20 left in the quarter. The Buckeyes would expand the lead to as many as 28 points in the quarter.

Poole said at least part of the difference was finding Sheldon, who had eight points on 4-of-4 shooting in the third, in transition for easy layups.

"We stopped putting the ball on the floor and we started passing," Poole said. "A lot of outlets were given to Jacy. We go over it in practice when we get the rebound to look up, and she's always the first one up the court, so I think that worked for us a lot."

Ohio State led 66-41 heading into the fourth and never had that lead go less than 20 points until there was 2:17 to play and the Buckeyes were playing deep into their bench.

The win moved Ohio State to 12-2 overall and 8-2 in the Big Ten. Minnesota fell to 5-9 and 4-8.

Juhasz and Sheldon led the way for Ohio State in scoring with 18 and 17 points, respectively. Juhasz shot 7 of 10 and brought in 10 rebounds, while Sheldon added three steals. Patty finished with a double-double of 14 points and 10 rebounds.

For the game, Ohio State shot 45.5 percent (30 of 66) from the field and 34.6 percent (9 of 26) from three. It held Minnesota to 38.2-percent shooting (21 of 55) overall and 29.4 percent (5 of 17) from deep, while also forcing 25 Gophers turnovers.

Sissoko led the Gophers with 13 points and nine rebounds. Sophomore guard Jasmine Powell, Minnesota's leading scorer heading into the contest, finished with five points and four turnovers and shot just 1 of 6 from the field.

Mikulasikova did not play against Minnesota due to an illness, according to an Ohio State spokesman, but she was on the sidelines for the game.

She previously missed matchups against Penn State and Illinois due to COVID-19 protocols.

# Moyse Makes The Cut As Buckeyes' Goaltender

Evan Moyse had an eventful final week of January on and off the ice with a new look and a milestone moment in goal for Ohio State.

On Jan. 27 he decided to cut off what he estimated was 13 to 14 inches of hair and donate it to a charity. On the 29th, the senior from Olmsted Falls, Ohio, played just his third career game when Tommy Nappier was injured during a 5-1 loss to Minnesota at Value City Arena.

The following night Moyse made his first start for the Buckeyes, allowing four goals on 26 shots in a 5-2 loss to the No. 4 Golden Gophers (they had an empty-net goal as well).

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"I thought Evan did a great job," OSU coach Steve Rohlik said. "I'm proud of him. He put a lot of work in, and he stepped up to the challenge."

As the third-string netminder behind Nappier and Ryan Snowden, who was unavailable for the previous three series prior to Minnesota, it's unusual to get much playing time much less a start.

In fact, Notre Dame senior Nick Sanford had never gotten into a game for the Fighting Irish until 4:26 remained in the 8-1 win over the Buckeyes at VCA on Feb. 6. He stopped the only shot he faced and at the end of the game was mobbed as if he had just clinched a national championship.

Rohlik has had experience going deep into the roster, or off the roster in this case, in the 2013-14 season when he employed four starters out of necessity. At one point after one player left the program and the starter, Matt Tomkins, was injured, No. 3 goalie Logan Davis took over and was

backed by a former high school goalie playing for the Ohio State baseball team as well as another goalie from the OSU club hockey program.

Moyse said he was calm when informed of his start against the lethal Gophers, who had scored 20 goals in two games against Arizona State the previous weekend.

"Obviously, you want to try and win, but at the same time I knew the odds weren't really in my favor," he said. "It was definitely in the back of my mind, but at the end of the day I've started a million times. Granted, I haven't done it for four years or whatever, but I've done it a million times at different levels. I think goalie is one of the most transferable positions in sports because all you've got to do is just stop the puck."

He said he was relaxed the day of the start.

"I don't really think I was ever super nervous, but it's definitely a different feeling because when you're in it from the start, you're playing to win," he said. "When you go in the other times it's, 'Let's stop the bleeding here. Let's not let in any more goals.'"

Having made three saves without allowing a goal in the final 11:33 the previous night against the Gophers helped him prepare for the start.

"It was nice," he said of his relief role. "My thought process when I get into those type of games is to go out there and have fun with it because at that point a lot of times those games are kind of over. You want to make sure you're doing your best, but go have fun with it."

Even though he had played only 36:07 in his previous two mop-up appearances this season, Moyse said he felt fine physically going 60 minutes as a starter.

"Mentally, it was just one puck at a time, one save at a time and don't try to put too much pressure on myself," he said. "My old goalie coaches always said you separate the game into five-minute segments. I think it's important regardless of what you're doing

to give yourself little mental breaks here and there to keep yourself sharp."

Moyse was called upon again in the previously mentioned blowout loss to Notre Dame and stopped 11 of 14 shots in 30:03 in relief of Snowden. Moyse for the season has a 3.80 goals-against average and a .860 save percentage.

An equally important thing for him was how much hair he had shorn. He had been growing it since Christmas of 2019, with a modest trim in the fall for team photos, but it had become "really annoying," Moyse said.

When he was playing junior hockey in Wisconsin he had a similar predicament and decided to donate his locks to Pantene Beautiful Lengths to make wigs for women with cancer.

This time he went to Royal Rhino Club barbershop and lounge in Columbus. His hair went to a Kids For Wigs affiliate near his hometown to help children with cancer.

He had the sides cut tight but left a good amount sprouting on top, enough for teammate Tate Singleton to say Moyse looked like a palm tree.

"I haven't really had hair that was anywhere even close to this short since my freshman year," Moyse said. "A lot of the guys have never seen me with anything but either super long hair or my hair in a bun. A lot of guys didn't even recognize me."

### On The Mark

Sophomore forward Mark Cheremeta is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for January after garnering two goals and four assists for six points in eight games.

Highlights for the Boston University transfer were two goals in a 5-2 loss to Penn State on Jan. 9 and two assists in a 5-1 win at Michigan State on Jan. 23.

### Slumping

A rough season got worse for the Buckeyes (5-14-1, 5-13-0-0-1-0 Big Ten) in the four games since BSB last went to press.

They lost all of them – by a combined 24-5 score – to Minnesota and Notre Dame to extend their losing streak to five games.

They've lost eight of the past nine games while being outscored 41-14.

Ohio State's power play not only was ineffective in the two games vs. Minnesota (1 for 8), but the Gophers scored a short-handed goal at critical junctures in each game, leading to the 5-1 and 5-2 wins.

In the opener at Value City Arena, Jackson LaCombe scored a shorby at 6:32 of the first period for a 1-0 Minnesota lead.

OSU never recovered, and Sampo Ranta made it 2-0 five minutes later. The Gophers would build the lead to 5-0 nearly nine minutes into the third before the Buckeyes broke the shutout bid of Jack LaFontaine at 15:41 when Quinn Preston scored.

In the rematch, the Buckeyes trailed 1-0 early in the second period before allowing a 5-on-3 goal and another power-play score to make it 3-0. Singleton drew OSU to within 3-1 at 7:11, but LaCombe again scored shorthanded at 18:59 of the second for a 4-1 lead. Kamil Sadlocha scored at 14:54 of the third to make it 4-2, but the Gophers got their fifth tally into an empty net with 20 seconds left.

The Notre Dame series exposed the Buckeyes' specialty teams again. In the 6-1 loss on Feb. 5, OSU in the first period had a five-minute power play that included a 5-on-3 for two minutes but couldn't break the scoreless tie. The Irish got a goal later in the first and four more in the second period for a 5-1 lead as Singleton had the lone Buckeye tally.

In the series finale, Notre Dame scored three times on a five-minute power play for a 3-0 score after the first period and extended the lead to 6-0 through 40 minutes before Sadlocha scored to make it 7-1 in the eventual 8-1 defeat.

### Next

Ohio State plays at Penn State on Feb. 12-13. Michigan visits Columbus on Feb. 19-20 for 5:30 p.m. games. All four will be on BTN+.

For a complete recap of Ohio State's series against Minnesota and Notre Dame, go to BSB's [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com) website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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# OSU Grapplers Finding Footing In Strange Season

As strange as it is to consider, the Ohio State wrestling team is already well past the halfway point of the 2021 college wrestling season as it enters February, with the Big Ten and national championships looming large to open March.

Sure, this time of year usually marks the beginning of the homestretch for the Buckeyes, but it also usually does so after a nonconference chunk to open the season that drags into the new year, followed by the opening of Big Ten play. For reference, at this time last year, Ohio State wrestling held a 10-3 record overall and had participated in two invitationals, one at Michigan State and one at the annual Cliff Keen contest.

## ON THE MAT Patrick Mayhorn

In 2021, entering the homestretch, the Buckeyes sit at 5-2, have just two duals remaining before title-play begins and still seem to be working out exactly what they want their starting lineup to look like, with significant question marks remaining at 141 pounds, 157 pounds and 197 pounds, along with concerns about the starters at 133, 184 and heavyweight. That's a whole lot of uncertainty to be carrying into March, especially when this is a time of year that usually has the lineup all but finalized and the coaching staff as satisfied as they will be with the wrestlers they're entrusting to compete for titles.

"It's been a challenge, there's no question," said Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan. "Our first match right away was a Big Ten match. It's also just a challenge, just to think of who our best team is. You're in duals right away. You've got a couple of dual meets to decide who your starters are going to be. We wrestled the guys off initially, and typically you can beat somebody in the room, but we want to see who wrestles more freely in competition. That's been another challenge for us. Our starting lineup is still not figured out.

"Typically heading into the national tournament you're going to have 30 matches. These guys are going to have five or six matches. The more I go through this year, the more I've texted Ryan Day and said, 'Dude you're my hero.'"

Despite all of the brand-new obstacles that come with a unique season like this one, Ohio State does seem to be finding some comfort as it gets into the groove of the season. After a shaky start to the season that had Illinois upset Ohio State in a tri-meet with the Fighting Illini, Buckeyes and Wisconsin, OSU rattled off four straight wins over Wisconsin (25-9), Rutgers (19-4), Michigan State (24-9) and Maryland (41-0) on its way to the second tri-meet of the season.

That tri-meet went similarly to the first one, but the Buckeye momentum really doesn't seem to be quelled, despite a 33-14 loss to the top-ranked Iowa Hawkeyes, paired with a 23-12 victory over Purdue at that meet. Much of that momentum and optimism comes not necessarily from the team play at large, but from individual performances from wrestlers such as Malik Heinselman, Sammy Sasso, Kaleb Romero and Ethan Smith, all of whom appear to be Big Ten podium contenders.

"I think if we polled the Buckeye fans, they would say the same thing our coaching staff says," Ryan said when asked about which wrestlers have impressed him thus far. "It's pretty

clear. Kaleb Romero, he wrestles from start to finish. His objective is to score as many points as he can. Malik Heinselman has done a really good job this year. And I would say Sammy Sasso. Those are probably three of the guys that stand out."

Still, despite improvement and promise with two regular-season duals left on the calendar, Ohio State is dealing with the same challenges as it was at the beginning of the season in January and just looking to keep everything under control as best it can.

"I think the biggest challenge for us is the preseason," Ryan said. "We were off for seven months, and we're never off. To have student-athletes off on their own for seven months, you have them coming back in, in all different levels of shape. You have the challenge of testing and when you do test positive, you're out for 4-6 weeks, so managing that emotionally, being in quarantine, managing physically, not knowing who you're going to have week to week. This presents a lot of problems, but also a lot of opportunity.

"The teams that manage the best are going to have the best chance of doing well at the end, but this has really been a year about, quite frankly for us as a staff, managing expectations. We always want to be the best team in the country, and this is a year where you have to just take one step at a time."

### Heinselman Earns Black Shirt

For his impressive 5-0 start to the season, Heinselman, the starter at 125 pounds for Ohio State, was welcomed to the exclusive club of "black shirts" within Ohio State's program on Feb. 3. For those uninitiated, the black shirts are awarded to wrestlers within Ohio State's program who go above and beyond, as Ryan explained to BSB last season when Sasso was given his.

"The black shirt is just an outward appearance of an inward lifestyle – a clean lifestyle across the board," Ryan explained.

"When you walk into our room watching Ohio State wrestling practice, you'll see all of our student-athletes in gray, you'll see the coaches in red, and you'll see a handful of guys in black. The thing about the black shirts is that it's not to diminish the guys in gray. Being part of the team is a noble thing."

Entering the season, Ohio State had three wrestlers donning the black attire – Sasso, Romero and Smith – after rolling through the 2019-20 season with five total black shirts including former standouts Luke Pletcher and Kollin Moore. Think of it as a sort of modified team captain. Now, with Heinselman on board, the Buckeyes have their fourth true leader of the team.

"He came to Ohio State, he's been in gray for quite a while, but he is no longer in gray," Ryan said in a video posted to the Ohio State wrestling Twitter account. "We talked to the rest of the black shirts, and they all agreed that Malik Heinselman should throw away his gray gear and start wearing black gear. He's avenged three losses from last year already, and he has some big (matches) coming up. Give it up (for him)."

For Heinselman, the honor comes thanks in large part to the significant steps that he's made on the mat since his sophomore campaign in 2019. As Ryan mentioned, he's avenged multiple losses in emphatic fashion, and he looks to be one of the most stable forces in the Buckeye lineup entering the end of the regular season.

"I want to say thank you, guys, especially since last year was a tough year," Heinselman said. "Just a lot of positivity from every sin-

gle one of you guys, especially Sasso, (assistant coach) J (Jaggers), Tom (Ryan), (Gavin) Hoffman. All of you guys. Thank you."

### OSU Not Fazed By Lack Of Crowd

While the condensed schedule, lack of non-conference duals and disjointed offseason are the biggest and most noticeable results of the coronavirus pandemic on the college wrestling season, the lack of fans in the stands has been a substantial and jarring change as well, just as it is in every sport that Ohio State has played in the last year. The Covelli Center, usually packed to the brim during the 2019-20 season, takes on a strange, almost eerie tone when filled exclusively with the family members of the participating wrestlers.

That feeling isn't lost on Ohio State's wrestlers or coaches, but it is something that they're becoming more comfortable with as the season rolls on, even if it presents some challenges.

"It's a bit surreal, to be honest, because our experience in Covelli, it grew immediately into one of the elite home facilities in the country for this sport," Ryan told BSB. "Day one was Stanford. It was packed and there was a level of excitement that our student-athletes became accustomed to. So to walk into the arena with nobody there, I think it really brought awareness to the state that we're in, the reality of COVID and what this season is going to look like at home. Despite that, it's a competition, so the objective is to win and compete hard. But it was different for sure."

So how are the Buckeyes avoiding being distracted by that vacuum created by the absence

of crowd energy?

"I think these guys love the sport," Ryan said. "They have a great respect for the program and where the program is. They've got a great respect for each other, the camaraderie that goes into being part of a team like this. But there's no question that in crunch time, when you need a takedown – I mean the Gas Tank, Gary (Traub), was birthed in Covelli. It was the fans, the incredible energy that human beings feed off of. I mean there's no question that we feed off of (that) energy, and to not have it is different.

"And sometimes the reality is that we can use the opposing team's energy to feed off of. So whether you're at your home place, and it's nice to be cheered for, but it's also nice to be cheered against, because typically things are going well if you're getting cheered against."

For the athletes specifically, it's all about staying out of their own way and focusing entirely on the task at hand, rather than stopping to consider the nature of the event.

"I'd say that (it's) just making sure that you're focusing on just the match and not letting anything else come into your mind," heavyweight Tate Orndorff said. "If you're just focused on that match, I mean the crowd will help you, but when it's not there it's not a factor. Growing up as a wrestler, a lot of people watch it but it's not like football or basketball where there are always fans watching. There are a lot of tournaments you go to and there are a lot of matches you wrestle at practice where there are no fans. It's just your coach and you're just wrestling. I'd say that you become pretty used to it just through experience."

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# Northwestern, Fitzgerald Agree To Extension

Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald agreed to a 10-year contract extension with the program through 2030. Multiple NFL franchises made strong pushes for Fitzgerald this year, according to Yahoo Sports' Pete Thamel.

Fitzgerald is the winningest coach in Northwestern history after reaching the 100-win milestone in the 2020 season opener against Maryland and concluding the campaign with his 106th victory in the 2021 Citrus Bowl over Auburn.

## BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

"We have one of the best coaches in college football and, more importantly, a leader uncommonly suited to this university," former Northwestern athletic director Jim Phillips said. "Over the course of his tenure, Coach Fitzgerald has built a culture of unwavering belief in excellence both on and off the field and led our Wildcats to unprecedented sustained success. They boast incredible achievement in the classroom, in the community and in competition, and will for years to come."

In the history of Northwestern football, 14 of the Wildcats' 16 all-time bowl appearances have come with Fitzgerald as a player or coach. He is the sixth-longest tenured head coach in the Football Bowl Subdivision.

As a linebacker for Northwestern, Fitzgerald won both the Bronko Nagurski Trophy and Chuck Bednarik Award twice as the best defensive player in college football. He also led the Wildcats to a pair of Big Ten championships as a player.

As a coach, Fitzgerald won the 2020 Bobby Dodd National Coach of the Year award in his 15th season at the helm. He also earned the 2018 Big Ten Coach of the Year honor.

In 2020, Northwestern finished 7-2 and reached the Big Ten Championship Game. The Wildcats have won the Big Ten West division title twice in the last three seasons.



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### U-M Athletics Extends Pause

The Michigan men's basketball team postponed its Feb. 11 game against Illinois, extending the athletic program's two-week pause. The Wolverines, who are a top seed in the latest bracketology from ESPN's Joe Lunardi, will miss their fifth consecutive game.

According to a Jan. 30 joint statement from Michigan, Illinois and the Big Ten, the game was postponed due to "return-to-play planning." The Wolverines said they expect to return for their showdown at Wisconsin on Feb. 14.

In January, the state's department of health and human services closed the University of Michigan's athletic facilities, paused competitions and practices for every team and required every player, coach and staff member to quarantine for 14 days amid growing concerns about a new strain of the coronavirus.

Head coach Juwan Howard's team sits atop the Big Ten with a 13-1 record, including 8-1 in the conference. The squad had just returned from a 70-53 win at Purdue when the school announced the decision.

The Wolverines have missed games against Penn State, Indiana, Northwestern, Michigan State and Illinois. The matchup with the Illini would have been a key matchup in a tight race for the Big Ten title as well as the competition for a high seed in the one-site NCAA Tournament in Indianapolis.

When the school announced its program-wide pause in January, it also said that it did not know the status of any games beyond the 14 days.

### PSU LB Dixon Enters Transfer Portal

Penn State redshirt freshman Lance Dixon, a highly rated player in the 2019 recruiting class, entered his name in the NCAA transfer portal with four years of eligibility remaining.

Dixon, who was the No. 9 outside linebacker and No. 179 overall prospect in 2019, hails from West Bloomfield, Mich.

Dixon played in all nine games in 2020 as part of the Nittany Lions' linebacker rotation. He started against Ohio State at outside linebacker, recording a career-high five tackles (four solo) with his first forced fumble. Dixon concluded his redshirt freshman campaign with 10 tackles (seven solo), 2½ tackles for loss and one forced fumble.

Penn State head coach James Franklin said in November that he "couldn't be more excited about (Dixon) and his future." However, it was expected Dixon would have once again entered the 2021 season as a backup for returning starter and captain Jesse Luketa, who missed the first half against the Buckeyes due to an ejection in the prior game.

Dixon became the fourth player from the Lions' 2019 recruiting class to enter the portal, along with wide receiver T.J. Jones, quarterback Michael Johnson and wide receiver John Dunmore.

### PSU QB Levis Transfers To Kentucky

Former Penn State quarterback Will Levis announced he will transfer to Kentucky on Feb. 5. The third-year sophomore signal caller had announced his intentions of transferring Jan. 28.

"Penn State will forever have a special place in my heart," Levis wrote. "I am extremely proud to be leaving here as an alumnus. I can't thank Coach Franklin and the rest of the Penn State football staff, both past and present, enough for everything they have

done to develop me both as a player and a human being.

"I am extremely grateful to have been given the opportunity to be able to play and contribute for such a historic program. The blood, sweat and tears that I have shed alongside my brothers here are deeply engraved in my memory and will never be forgotten."

Levis made multiple starts during his three seasons in Happy Valley, but he failed to take the starting gig from fifth-year senior Sean Clifford, who won it ahead of the 2019 season after Trace McSorley graduated.

At Kentucky, Levis enters a quarterback room that does not have a named starter heading into spring practice. As a graduate transfer, the Middletown, Conn., will be immediately eligible to play and expects to compete for the starting job.

The Nittany Lions have just three scholarship quarterbacks: Clifford, third-year sophomore Ta'Quan Roberson, and true freshman Christian Veilleux. Penn State's quarterbacks will play for new offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Mike Yurcich, a former Ohio State assistant who was hired to replace Kirk Ciarrocca in January.

Levis became the eighth Penn State player to enter the portal since the season ended, joining Dixon, Jones, defensive linemen Antonio Shelton and Judge Culpepper, offensive lineman C.J. Thorpe, quarterback Micah Bowers and defensive back Drew Hartlaub.

Penn State opens the 2021 season at Wisconsin on Sept. 4.

### Nebraska QB McCaffrey Enters Portal With 2 Others

Nebraska third-year sophomore quarterback Luke McCaffrey was among three Husker offensive players to enter the transfer portal, along with fifth-year senior wide receiver Kade Warner and fourth-year junior center Will Farniok.

"After struggling with this decision for weeks, I have decided to enter the transfer portal and explore my options," McCaffrey posted to Twitter. "I am thankful for the support Nebraska fans have shown me. I have so much love for my coaches and teammates from my time here. I am excited for the future."

McCaffrey started two games and played in seven as a redshirt freshman in 2020 when he split time with junior Adrian Martinez. On the season, he completed 48 of 76 passes for 466 yards and one touchdown with six interceptions, adding 364 rushing yards with three rushing touchdowns. His first career start came against Penn State on Nov. 14, where he led the Cornhuskers to a 30-23 win, tossing for 152 yards and one touchdown and rushing for 67 yards and a score.

The stellar outing against the Nittany Lions earned McCaffrey the start the following weekend against Illinois. The former four-star prospect from Littleton (Colo.) Valor Christian School completed 15 of 26 passes for 134 yards with three interceptions against the Illini, adding 122 rushing yards and two scores. His struggles as a passer relegated him to backup duties behind Martinez during the final four games of the season.

Warner, a former walk-on, was voted a captain by his teammates as a fourth-year junior in 2020. He tallied five receptions for 40 yards.

Farniok played in four games over the past two seasons.

### U-M QB Dylan McCaffrey Transfers To Northern Colorado

Former Michigan quarterback Dylan

McCaffrey transferred to Northern Colorado, joining his father, Ed McCaffrey, who is the head coach.

Dylan McCaffrey, who was once rated the No. 6 quarterback recruit in the country, communicated with many more prominent programs but chose to play for his father.

"He wanted to come home, he wanted to live in Colorado, and he wanted to play at UNC," Ed McCaffrey said. "As a coach, obviously, I'm extremely thrilled because he makes us a whole lot better. But also, as a father, it's a really cool experience being able to coach your son."

Dylan McCaffrey graduated from Michigan with two years of eligibility left and is expected to assume the starting quarterback role when Northern Colorado plays a modified non-conference schedule in late spring. He left Ann Arbor after playing in only 13 games. After redshirting in 2017, he played two seasons before opting out in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

McCaffrey's former high school coach at Littleton (Colo.) Valor Christian, Rod Sherman, was surprised Dylan chose an FCS school given his ability that helped him win three state titles. Sherman expressed confidence that the Bears will instantly be contenders in the Big Sky Conference.

"You'd have to think with him they have a chance to compete for a national championship," Sherman said.

McCaffrey has experience coaching his sons throughout their careers. His oldest son, Max, is also Northern Colorado's wide receivers coach.

"When we're on the football field, when we're in the weight room, and when we're getting ready to play a game, I'm a coach. Dylan is one of many players that I coach and everybody is treated the same and it's a meritocracy," McCaffrey said. "You have to have thick skin and (take) constructive criticism. But you can't live that 24 hours a day. There needs to be a break and there needs to be a boundary. Luckily, I made all my mistakes with Max. Then learned with Christian and with Dylan and with Luke. We've grown used to that dynamic, and I feel very comfortable."

### PSU Assistant Bowen Joins Meyer In Jacksonville

Penn State tight ends coach Tyler Bowen will reportedly join former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer's staff with the Jacksonville Jaguars.

The Nittany Lions' tight end room had success the last three seasons under Bowen, who also became co-offensive coordinator following the 2019 campaign.

Pat Friermuth became the starting tight end as a true freshman in Bowen's first season in 2018 and developed into the Big Ten's tight end of the year as a junior in 2020. Friermuth, who totaled 92 catches for 1,185 yards and a school-record 16 touchdowns in 30 career games, declared for the 2021 NFL draft in December.

Bowen, who is also Penn State's offensive recruiting coordinator, is the program's highest-rated staff member in the 2021 recruiting rankings, credited with four commitments in the cycle and instrumental in landing four-star offensive tackle Landon Tengwall.

Before becoming a Lion, Bowen coached for one season under Joe Moorhead at Fordham as the offensive line coach and took over offensive coordinator responsibilities when Moorhead moved to Penn State. He coached Maryland's offensive line in 2017 before moving to Happy Valley.

# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

## 2021 FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 Minnesota; 11 OREGON; 18 TULSA; 25 AKRON.

Oct. 2 Rutgers; 9 MARYLAND; 23 Indiana; 30 PENN STATE.

Nov. 6 Nebraska; 13 PURDUE; 20 MICHIGAN STATE; 27 Michigan.

Dec. 4 Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis.

### MEN'S BASKETBALL (15-4, 9-4)

Nov. 25 ILLINOIS STATE, W 94-67; 29 UMASS LOWELL, 74-64.

Dec. 2 MOREHEAD STATE, W 77-44; 5 ALABAMA A&M, Canceled; 8 Notre Dame, W 90-85; 13 CLEVELAND STATE, W 67-61; 16 Purdue, L 67-60; 19 vs. UCLA at Cleveland, W 77-70; 23 RUTGERS, W 80-68; 26 Northwestern, L 71-70; 30 NEBRASKA, W 90-54.

Jan. 3 Minnesota, L 77-60; 9 Rutgers, W 79-68; 13 NORTHWESTERN, W 81-71; 16 Illinois, W 87-81; 19 PURDUE 67-65; 23 Wisconsin, 74-62; 27 PENN STATE, W 83-79; 31 MICHIGAN STATE, W 79-62.

Feb. 4 Iowa, W 89-85; 8 Maryland, 9 p.m.; 13 INDIANA, 12 p.m. 18 Penn State; 21 MICHIGAN, 1 p.m.; 25 Michigan State; 28 IOWA, 4 p.m.

March 6 ILLINOIS; 10-13 Big Ten Tournament at Chicago.

### WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (12-2, 8-2)

Nov. 25 AKRON, Canceled; 29 DUQUESNE, W 82-47.

Dec. 2 KENT STATE, W 103-47; 6 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 96-63; 10 MIAMI (OHIO), W 104-65; 15 SAINT MARY'S, Canceled; 31 MICHIGAN STATE, Postponed.

Jan. 4 PENN STATE, W 82-69; 7 Illinois, W 78-55; 10 RUTGERS, Postponed; 13 Iowa, W 84-82 (OT); 16 Nebraska, L 63-55; 21 MICHIGAN, W 81-77; 25 MARYLAND, W 88-86; 28 Indiana, W 78-70.

Feb. 1 Northwestern, L 69-57; 4 IOWA, W 92-87; 7 MINNESOTA, W 83-59; 10 Wisconsin, 7 p.m.; 14 NORTHWESTERN, 12:30 p.m.; 18 PURDUE; 21 Michigan, 2 p.m.; 24 Penn State; 27 INDIANA.

March 5 Rutgers.

### MEN'S GOLF

Feb. 5-6 Big Ten Match Play at Palm Coast, Fla., NTS 14-16 Kiawah Classic at Kiawah Island Resort, S.C.

March 8-9 Spartan Collegiate at Sea Island, Ga.; 15-16 Valspar Collegiate Invitational at Palm City, Fla.

April 10-11 Boilermaker Invitational at West Lafayette, Ind.; 16-17 ASU Thunderbird Invitational at Phoenix, Ariz.; 24-25 ROBERT KEPLER INTERCOLLEGIATE; 30 Big Ten Championship at Carmel, Ind.

May 1-2 Big Ten Championship at Carmel, Ind.; 17-19 NCAA Regional; 28-31 NCAA Championship at Scottsdale, Ariz.

June 1-2 NCAA Championship at Scottsdale, Ariz.

### WOMEN'S GOLF (1-1)

Jan. 16 vs. Northwestern at Jupiter, Fla., L 4-1-1; 18 Florida Atlantic, W 301-300.

Feb. 8-9 FAU Paradise Invitational; 21-23 Gators Invitational; 26-28 Florida State Match Up.

March 15-16 Briar's Creek Invitational at John's Island, S.C.; 26-28 Clemson Invitational.

April 17-19 Indiana Invitational.

### MEN'S GYMNASTICS (1-1)

Jan. 23 Illinois, L 402.550-396.250; 30 Navy, W 397.200-382.000; 31 Michigan, Postponed.

Feb. 7 MINNESOTA, 7:30 p.m.; 14 PENN STATE, 1 p.m.; 26 Winter Cup at Indianapolis; 28 Winter Cup at Indianapolis.

March 6 Nebraska, 7 p.m.; 13 IOWA, 1 p.m.; 21 VIRTUAL MEET.

### WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS (1-3)

Jan. 16 Michigan, L 197.225-196.000; 23 Iowa, L 196.550-193.800; 30 MICHIGAN, Postponed; 30 Michigan State, L 195.775-195.325.

Feb. 7 MICHIGAN STATE, 4 p.m.; 14 Rutgers, 1 p.m.; 21 Penn State, 2 p.m.; 26 Big Five Meet at College Park, Md., 5 p.m.

March 7 PENN STATE, 2 p.m.; 12 MICHIGAN STATE, 6 p.m.

### MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (5-14-1, 5-13)

Nov. 23 Minnesota, L 4-1; 24 Minnesota, L 2-0; 28 MICHIGAN STATE, L 3-2 (OT); 29 MICHIGAN STATE, W 4-2.

Dec. 3 WISCONSIN, W 4-2; 4 WISCONSIN, L 3-1; 12 Notre Dame, L 3-0; 13 Notre Dame, W 3-2; 17 ARIZONA STATE, T 4-4 (OT); 18 ARIZONA STATE, L 3-2.

Jan. 8 PENN STATE, W 6-3; 9 PENN STATE, L 5-2; 15 Michigan, L 4-2; 16 Michigan, L 5-0; 23

Michigan State, W 5-1; 24 Michigan State, L 2-0; 29 MINNESOTA, L 5-1; 30 MINNESOTA, L 5-2.

Feb. 5 NOTRE DAME, L 6-1; 6 NOTRE DAME, L 8-1; 12 Penn State; 13 Penn State, 2 p.m.; 19 MICHIGAN, 5:30 p.m.; 20 MICHIGAN, 5:30 p.m.; 26 Wisconsin, 8 p.m.; 27 Wisconsin.

March 4 ARIZONA STATE, 5:30 p.m.; 5 ARIZONA STATE, 5:30 p.m.

### WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (9-5, 9-5)

Nov. 21 Minnesota, L 4-0; 22 Minnesota, W 2-1; 27 WISCONSIN, W 3-2; 28 WISCONSIN, L 5-0.

Dec. 11 MINNESOTA, Postponed, 12 MINNESOTA, Postponed; 18 Wisconsin, Postponed; 19 Wisconsin, Postponed.

Jan. 1 BEMIDJI STATE, W 4-1; 2 BEMIDJI STATE, 7-1; 8 Wisconsin, L 2-1; 9 Wisconsin, W 2-1 (OT); 15 Minnesota Duluth, L 2-0; 16 Minnesota Duluth, W 1-0; 22 MINNESOTA STATE, W 3-0; 23 MINNESOTA STATE, W 7-2; 29 MINNESOTA, L 7-4; 30 MINNESOTA, W 3-1.

Feb. 12 Minnesota, 7:07 p.m.; 13 Minnesota, 4:07 p.m.; 19 ST. CLOUD STATE, 6:07 p.m.; 20 ST. CLOUD STATE, 3:07 p.m.

### SWIMMING & DIVING

Jan. 16 PENN STATE/RUTGERS, Men W 163.5-134.5, Women W 157-141; 22-23 Indiana, Men L 185-115, Women L 166-134.

Feb. 6 Purdue, Indiana and Rutgers at West Lafayette, Ind., NTS; 23-27 Big Ten Women's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn. 24-27 Big Ten Diving Championships at West Lafayette, Ind.

March 2-6 Big Ten Men's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn.; 17-20 Women's NCAA Championship at Greensboro, N.C.; 24-27 Men's NCAA Championship at Greensboro, N.C.

### MEN'S TENNIS (1-1)

Jan. 15-18 Ohio State Invitational; 22 MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE, W 4-0; 23 VIRGINIA, L 4-2.

Feb. 13 MICHIGAN STATE, 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.; 19 Northwestern, 6 p.m.; 21 Illinois, 12 p.m.; 27 PENN STATE, 3 p.m.

March 5 PURDUE, 6 p.m.; 7 INDIANA, 12 p.m.; 12 Michigan State, 2 p.m.; 14 Michigan, 12 p.m.; 19 Minnesota, 3 p.m.; 21 Wisconsin, 12 p.m.; 26 NEBRASKA, 6 p.m.; 28 IOWA, 12 p.m.

April 4 Penn State, 12 p.m.; 9 Purdue, 2 p.m.; 11 Indiana, 12 p.m.; 16 MICHIGAN STATE, 6 p.m.; 18

MICHIGAN, 12 p.m.

### WOMEN'S TENNIS (1-0)

Jan. 16-18 Michigan Invitational at Ann Arbor, Mich., NTS; 23 SYRACUSE, W 4-0; 23 VIRGINIA, W 4-2.

Feb. 5 North Carolina (ITA Championships) at Stillwater, Okla., L 4-0; 6 Georgia Tech (ITA Championships), W 4-3; 13 PURDUE; 14 INDIANA; 20 Maryland; 21 Rutgers; 27 MICHIGAN STATE; 28 MICHIGAN.

March 6 Nebraska; 7 Iowa; 14 Penn State; 20 MARYLAND; 21 RUTGERS; 27 Michigan State; 28 Michigan.

April 10 MINNESOTA; 11 WISCONSIN; 18 PENN STATE.

### MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (2-3, 1-0)

Jan. 22 PENN STATE, L 3-0; 23 PENN STATE, W 3-0; 29 Penn State, L 3-0; 30 Penn State, L 3-0.

Feb. 5 LEWIS, W 3-1; 6 LEWIS, L 3-0; 12 McKendree, 8:30 p.m.; 13 McKendree, 8 p.m.; 20 LOYOLA CHICAGO, 4 p.m.; 21 LOYOLA CHICAGO, 4 p.m.; 27 Ball State, 7:30 p.m.

March 11 BALL STATE, 6 p.m.; 19 Purdue Fort Wayne, 6 p.m.; 20 Purdue Fort Wayne, 3 p.m.; 26 LINDENWOOD, 7 p.m.; 27 LINDENWOOD, 7 p.m.

April 2 Quincy, 8 p.m.; 3 Quincy, 8 p.m.

### WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (4-0)

Jan. 22 MARYLAND, W 3-2; 23 MARYLAND, W 3-2; 26 Penn State, Postponed; 31 Michigan State, W 3-0.

Feb. 1 Michigan State, W 3-2; 6 Michigan State, W 3-2; 12 IOWA, 6 p.m.; 13 IOWA, 6 p.m.; 19 Illinois, 6 p.m.; 20 Illinois, 4 p.m.; 26 Rutgers, 5 p.m.; 27 Rutgers, 5 p.m.

March 5 MINNESOTA, 6 p.m.; 6 MINNESOTA, 6 p.m.; 12 Nebraska; 13 Nebraska; 19 MICHIGAN, 6 p.m.; 20 MICHIGAN, 6 p.m.; 26 PURDUE, 2 p.m.; 27 PURDUE, 2 p.m.

April 2 Indiana, 4 p.m.; 3 Indiana, 4 p.m.

### WRESTLING (5-2)

Jan. 17 Illinois, L 18-15; 17 vs. Wisconsin at Champaign, Ill., W 25-9; 24 RUTGERS, W 19-14; 29 MICHIGAN STATE, W 24-9; 31 Maryland, W 41-0.

Feb. 7 vs. Iowa at West Lafayette, Ind., L 33-14; 7 Purdue, W 23-12; 12 Michigan; 19 PENN STATE.

March 6-7 Big Ten Championships; 18-20 NCAA Championships.

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# Buckeye Recruits Among Nation's Best For 2021

It comes as no surprise to anyone that the No. 1 ingredient for team success at the collegiate level is the quality of recruits brought into a given program. I claim the No. 2 ingredient is the ability of a football program to keep those athletes in the program.

The NCAA has made it easier than ever to transfer, and the NFL is attractive to the best underclassman players. College coaches often must spend as much time re-recruiting their own athletes each year as they do going after high school talent for future seasons.

## COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

The real success for a Power Five program such as Ohio State is the year-in and year-out consistency in recruiting and in retaining the very best players in the country. Other ingredients necessary for a football program to achieve at a high level are an excellent strength and conditioning program, developing an offensive and defensive scheme that matches the talent, motivating the players, and fundamental skill development for each athlete.

Still, it all starts with bringing in as many highly talented players as you can on a regular basis.

The Buckeyes again signed one of the premier classes in the country this season. Ranked by most recruiting experts as the No. 2 class behind Alabama, it is comprised of 21 players. Of those 21, 18 are rated four- or five-star talent with all 18 being in the ESPN top-300 players in the country. Five of these signees are also ranked the No. 1 or 2 player in the country at their positions.

With the exception of the linebacker position, the Buckeye coaching staff brought in the right numbers to replace the voids created by graduation and exit to the professional ranks. Ohio State has also got a good jump on the 2022 class with at least 10 commitments already, and two of those, Gabe Powers and C.J. Hicks, are among the best linebackers in the country.

It is tough in today's world of college football to keep a stockpile of talent in the cupboard, but the Buckeye coaching staff sure does a good job of keeping it full.

### In-State Dominance

The Buckeye defense missed the outside-pass-rush pressure brought by players such as Chase Young in 2020. Incoming freshman Jack Sawyer might fit the bill at the rush end position this fall. Sawyer is from Pickerington (Ohio) North, and even though he opted out

of playing his senior year, he has the length and all the tools to be a great player at the next level.

As an outside pass rusher, he is extremely quick off the ball and uses a variety of pass-rush techniques in defeating opposing offensive tackles. He is a tough guy with speed, a complete athlete who also played quarterback. Tackle Mike Hall, from Streetsboro, Ohio, will join Sawyer on the defensive front. This 300-pounder is developed beyond his years physically and technically as a defensive lineman. Powerful in the legs and strong in the upper body, Hall is impossible to block one-on-one. His quick hands and feet make him an outstanding pass rusher like Sawyer. Hall is also stout against the run and could see early playing time in his career at Ohio State.

The Buckeyes lost all three of their starting linebackers this year, and the signing of Ironton, Ohio, four-star Reid Carrico was essential. Tougher than nails, he is a punishing tackler who explodes through the ball carrier and drives his legs after contact. He is an instinctive middle 'backer who reads and reacts instantly to the offensive play and blocking scheme.

Lack of experience in the secondary was a major issue in 2020. One guy who could help in this area is Jaylen Johnson from Cincinnati La Salle. He covers like a defensive back but hits like a linebacker. Johnson is a real hard hitter and can cover a lot of turf quickly as he closes on receivers and running backs. He is impressive on run support, keeping inside-out leverage on the football as well as being a sure tackler in space. He comes off the edge like lightning on the safety blitz and gives great effort to make a play in the offensive backfield.

In Ryan Day's offense you cannot get caught being short on receivers, so the Bucks signed three of the nation's best in the 2021 recruiting class, one of those three being Jayden Ballard out of Massillon (Ohio) Washington. He is one of the top wideouts in the country running vertical routes. Ballard runs the fade, post and middle seam routes to perfection. He finds the creases in two- and three-deep coverages and consistently wins the one-on-one battles with corners. He also demonstrates the ability to keep feet in bounds when making difficult receptions along the sidelines.

Offensive coaches know you "can't plow the field without the horses," and Ohio State may have recruited the biggest horse around in 6-6 and 299-pound Ben Christman from Richfield (Ohio) Revere. He is one of the most athletic big men in the country who is an equally effective run blocker and pass protector. An exceptionally good knee bender for his size, Christman plays with great leverage coming out of his stance and delivers a devastating first punch. He is a very versatile

lineman and can play either guard or tackle for the Buckeyes.

### National Reach

If there is one word that describes Ohio State's recruiting class it would be "diversity," not in terms of the makeup of the athletes but in terms of the geographical scope of the signees. The 2021 class is represented by 13 different states. The class also stretched beyond the borders of the United States when the coaching staff signed Jesse Mirco, a punter from Fremantle, Australia.

The injuries to Buckeye running backs in 2020, including the devastating loss of Trey Sermon early in the national championship game, prove a team cannot have enough quality players at that position. Buckeye coaches invaded Virginia and North Carolina for running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Evan Pryor.

These are the first two ESPN top-300 running backs for Ohio State since the 2019 recruiting class, with Henderson being ranked No. 1 and Pryor at No. 7. These two backs are similar in many ways, displaying great vision, elusiveness in the open field and the ability to kick it into a second gear when necessary. Pryor also is a threat as a pass receiver and kickoff returner.

They both also have good size, tipping the scales at just under 200 pounds. To go along with Ballard at the wide receiver position, the Buckeyes brought in Washington's Emeka Egbuka and Philadelphia's Marvin Harrison.

These two tall targets have sure hands and are excellent route runners coming out of high school. Egbuka has the smooth and fluid motions of Chris Olave, and Harrison is especially impressive vs. man coverage.

The addition of tight end Sam Hart of Aurora, Colo., more than replenishes the talent needed for the passing game.

The most versatile of athletes fall in the "athlete" category in terms of recruiting – players who can play multiple positions. Players of the past such as Joey Galloway, Shawn Springs, Terry Glenn and Chris Gamble all fell into that special category. Those names in the 2021 class are Andre Turrentine, Jantzen Dunn and Denzel Burke.

Turrentine and Dunn will most likely end up in the secondary due to their overall athleticism and the physicality they play with even though both were exceptional high school receivers as well. They could end up playing alongside Jakailin Johnson and Jordan Hancock, the fourth- and fifth-ranked corners, respectively, in the country. Burke could add even more depth to the wide receiver position.

Every year college football programs need to sign at least one quarterback in their recruiting class. It is the one position where the desire to play often outweighs the reasons to stay. Patience is not often a virtue for a quarterback.

The Buckeyes return two highly touted quarterbacks in C.J. Stroud and Jack Miller and already have a commitment from the top player at the same position for 2022 in Quinn Ewers of Southlake, Texas.

That competition did not keep Kyle McCord of Philadelphia from signing with the Buckeyes for 2021. McCord is a pro-style drop-back quarterback with a quick release and a rocket arm.

There is no argument that the number and quality of this year's recruited and signed skilled athletes, in and out of state, are exceptional. That doesn't diminish the abilities of the "men up front" who are coming to Columbus. Joining Jack Sawyer and Mike Hall on the defensive front is Tyleik Williams of Manassas, Va.

He displays great mobility for his size (6-3, 330 pounds) and is stout against the run. Williams can play either defensive tackle or nose guard.

Offensively, linemen Donovan Jackson from Texas and Zen Michalski from Indiana will definitely bolster a front that lost two outstanding players in Wyatt Davis and Josh Myers.

Along with Christman, the three freshmen will add 895 pounds of muscle to the offensive line. Besides their strength, Jackson and Michalski play with good pad level, drive their feet and are great finishers. Like Christman, they have the controlled nastiness that offensive line coaches are looking for in the position.

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# Gap Widens Between Recruiting Haves, Have-Nots

Recruiting doesn't win football games, but it sure increases your chances. With that in mind, Buckeye fans should feel pretty good about the seasons (plural) ahead.

It's not so much that Ohio State ranked second nationally in recruiting, depending on the service, for the class of 2021. It's the separation between the top teams and the rest.

## EXNER POINT Rich Exner

Take, for example, the CBS Sports top 25, not a lot different from many others. Ohio State was second behind Alabama. Michigan was 10th. On the surface, that sounds like Michigan is right behind Ohio State, within striking distance for talent in this class.

But take a closer look. In this ranking, Ohio State had five five-star recruits; Michigan had one.

Ohio State's highest-ranked recruits were rated fourth nationally (Jack Sawyer), ninth (Emeka Egbuka), 18th (Donovan Jackson) and 22nd (TreVeyon Henderson) before you reached the first Michigan player on the list.

Michigan had five top-100 players – a

pretty nice haul. But Ohio State had a dozen in this particular ranking.

Will Michigan's top recruit – 24th-ranked J.J. McCarthy – end up being better than the four Buckeyes ranked above? Quite possibly. These recruiting rankings are imperfect.

But look at the odds. I'll take my chances any day with the team with 12 top-100 recruits over the school with five.

And what we're talking about here is the separation between the best Big Ten team and the school considered to have the second-best recruiting season in the conference. Imagine the difference as you move down the list.

This makes it easy to understand why the same schools keep going back to the college football playoffs. Twenty of the 28 playoff spots over seven seasons to date have gone to just four schools – Alabama, Clemson, Ohio State and Oklahoma. That's left only eight invitations for the rest of the country.

### The Quarterback Shuffle

While landing the prized recruit is an especially big deal at quarterback, let's not forget the so recent history.

Joe Burrow began at Ohio State, ended up at LSU. Justin Fields signed with Georgia, ended up at Ohio State. Tate Martell signed as a promising QB recruit by Ohio State, then went to Miami, then back into the transfer portal this winter.

Jalen Hurts went from Alabama to Oklahoma to the NFL. Baker Mayfield

went from Texas Tech to Oklahoma to the NFL.

The list goes on from there.

Here's the point. Ohio State is in good shape with three promising young quarterbacks from whom to choose the next starter. The Buckeyes will have the first shot at the best of them. But I'm guessing we'll hear a lot from two, maybe all three, during their college careers – somewhere.

This is another way to say that the schools that lost the recruiting battle for these players might still be in the game.

### Schedule Watching

Let's sure hope we're back to close to normal for the college football season in the fall. I'm optimistic, listening to the experts who know the science of this and watching the trends.

There's a huge focus on vaccines. I have to believe that before summer, most anyone who wants a vaccine will have the opportunity to receive one. And, every day, the world's best doctors are learning more about the virus.

But something unusual, regardless, is lurking for the 2021 football season.

An in-conference season opener. Yes I know, Ohio State opened the 2017 season with a win at Indiana. But that was the outlier. We're used to either a cream puff on opening day or a marquee nonconference matchup.

Toss out the 2020 season, when the entire season was in-conference. The season just doesn't normally start in the Big Ten.

Volume Number 40 on the cover of this Buckeye Sports Bulletin means we're in our 40th year of covering Ohio State sports, starting in 1981. Only once before did the season start in the Big Ten, that being the 2017 Indiana game.

Or look at it this way. Earle Bruce never opened a season in the Big Ten. John Cooper never opened a season in the Big Ten. Neither did Jim Tressel.

Some of the big games included the old Kickoff Classic in the Meadowlands

against Alabama in 1986, a trip to West Virginia as the nation's preseason No. 1 in 1998, the 2003 game under the lights at home against Washington, and the 2015 opener at Virginia Tech, a rematch of OSU's last loss at the time.

More often, however, the opener has been sure wins against lower-level opponents – in-state games against the likes of Youngstown State, Akron, Bowling Green and Miami of Ohio, or visitors from afar such as Rice or Wyoming.

This Minnesota opener takes on special significance. No, Minnesota won't be a preseason top 10. But the Gophers have been very credible of late, and the game is in Minnesota on a Thursday night. The atmosphere – assuming a full crowd will be permitted – will be electric at the start.

Minnesota will have everything to gain and little to lose.

Ohio State will have a lot to lose, but little more to gain than passing one test on the way to what the Buckeyes hope will be another perfect Big Ten season.

This game adds urgency to fall training camp. It's kind of exciting, if not unusual.

### Memory Lane

How many of these games do you remember? Here are the Buckeye opening day opponents starting with 2019 and going backward to Bruce's first season to start the post-Woody Hayes era in 1979:

Florida Atlantic, Oregon State, Indiana, Bowling Green, Virginia Tech, Navy, Buffalo, Miami Ohio, Akron and Marshall in 2010.

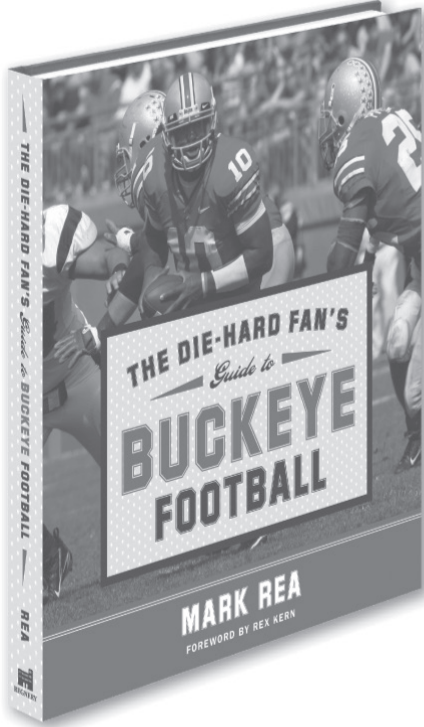
Navy, Youngstown State, Youngstown State, Northern Illinois, Miami of Ohio, Cincinnati, Washington, Texas Tech, Akron and Fresno State in 2000.

Miami of Florida, West Virginia, Wyoming, Rice, Boston College, Fresno State, Rice, Louisville, Arizona and Texas Tech in 1990.

Oklahoma State, Syracuse, West Virginia, Alabama, Pitt, Oregon State, Oregon, Baylor, Duke, Syracuse and Syracuse in 1979.

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# Day Passes On Outside Help For Secondary

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Twenty years ago, new Ohio State football coach Jim Tressel had just put together his first Buckeye coaching staff.

Trivia time. Who were the members of that staff? The answer will come later. Given that one of the coaches is on our staff, I did pretty poorly on this question.

With Ohio State's 2021 recruiting class all but signed, sealed and delivered during the early signing period back in December, most of the discussion on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum on the traditional National Signing Day of Feb. 3 was not about recruiting, but about changes on OSU's defensive coaching staff.

Remember that the last vision that Ohio State football fans have of their beloved Buckeyes is fleet Alabama receivers rampaging through the OSU secondary. The Tide added 464 passing yards to an Ohio State pass-defense ledger that ended up leaving the team 122nd in the nation.

The recent retirement of co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison left head coach Ryan Day the opportunity to reorganize the defensive staff in general and the pass defense in particular. It seems like Buckeye fans were expecting a bold move from Day. And I think they got a bold move.

Day elected to stand pat with his defensive personnel, making Kerry Coombs the sole defensive coordinator, taking away any specific duties he had with the secondary, and giving Matt Barnes, who had been working with the safeties and special teams, control of the entire defensive backfield. They also promoted quality control coach Parker Fleming to special teams coordinator.

"(Barnes) has a great background on defense, and I think he's a great young coach," Day said in announcing the staff changes. "Speaking with the defensive staff, speaking with Kerry Coombs, what we've decided to do is take him from special teams and make him the secondary coach. I think this a great move. It's going to allow him an opportunity to have that room and also allow Kerry, free him up a little bit more to move within the linebackers, the defensive line, and also have his hands in the secondary."

That's all well and good. But truth be told, Barnes' stint as safeties coach at Ohio State is his only experience coaching in the secondary, after he served as linebackers and special teams coach at Maryland from 2016-18 in his only other major-college on-field job.

I think Buckeye fans were hoping for outside help to shore up a pass defense that was exposed not only by Alabama, but also by conference foe Indiana, which passed for 491 yards against the Buckeyes this past season.

When the pass defense struggled in the early years of the Urban Meyer regime, Meyer brought in Chris Ash, who had extensive experience working with defensive backfields on the major-college level. The result was a national championship in 2014. When the Buckeyes had historic problems on the defensive side of the ball in 2018, Day, when he took over as head coach, brought in Jeff Hafley, who also had extensive experience coaching in the secondary on both the college and pro levels. The result was an undefeated regular season and a place in the playoffs.

I think Buckeye fans were looking for a hiring similar to those. Instead, Day elected to promote from within.

"It was more about, how do we keep continuity on that side of the ball and how do we continue to just build what we've been working on here for a couple years, put the right people into place?" Day said. "I thought this did two things, though. One, it kept continuity, but two, it put a little bit more attention on the back end. And

coming off of that last game, coming off of this season, I think that's something we had to do."

By taking some of Coombs' duties with the secondary away, however, many might disagree that it's putting "a little bit more attention on the back end." The jury may still be out on Coombs as a defensive coordinator, but few question his work with defensive backs.

During his first stay in Columbus, in the four-year period between 2014 and 2017 which included two Big Ten titles and the previously mentioned national championship, Ohio State finished no lower than No. 13 nationally in opponent passer rating, rising to as high as No. 3 in 2016. That year, Ohio State was also tied for fourth in the country with 21 interceptions, including a nation's-leading seven that were returned for TDs. And Coombs' track record of putting defensive backs into the NFL is well documented.

But Coombs, himself, likes the fact that his head coach is promoting from within.

"I love the fact that our head coach believes in hiring and promoting from within," Coombs said. "I think that's the way things should be done. If you know people, and you've seen them and you appreciate the quality of their work, you allow them to continue to move up the ladder."

As I implied, reshuffling the defensive deck rather than seeking outside help was a bold move on Day's part. It will be interesting to see what nemesis Nick Saban does on his Alabama staff now that it appears his cornerbacks coach, Karl Scott, is apparently off to the NFL's Minnesota Vikings. Will Saban make a splashy move when he replaces Scott, as well as four other assistants who have moved on after winning the national championship? Or promote from within?

Day has made his strategic decision for now.

"Promoting from within is something that I believe strongly in, and I believe that it's going to be an opportunity for these guys to really be a part of our program for a long time and keep some continuity," he said.

Regardless of how Saban handles his coaching vacancies, Alabama has some continuity going too. The Crimson Tide continue to be the team to beat.

### A Relic Of The Past

As mentioned, traditional signing day on Feb. 3 was very quiet. It's kind of sad. Before the early signing period, signing day used to be like a national holiday for college football fans. The only thing I can liken it to might be the first day of March Madness, when much of American takes all or part of the day off.

I don't know that people normally took National Signing Day off, but they certainly paid close attention to how their favorite team stacked up against its rivals and watched for any intrigue or last-minute commitments.

If you think about it, with players verbally committing earlier and earlier and all sorts of services out there tracking these verbals and constantly ranking and re-ranking them, the drama of signing day had lessened through the years anyway. When I started in this business, the bulk of commitments were not announced until signing day, so fans were offered a dose of recruiting sensory overload on that day.

Now, the bulk of the action takes place during the early signing period in December. With that period coming during the holidays and with teams prepping for their bowl games, cou-

pled with the 24/7 coverage of recruiting, some of the pageantry and glamour has been lost.

In our popular From the Pages of BSB feature in this issue, Day is quoted addressing this issue on the traditional signing day last year.

"Signing day is very different now than it used to be," Day said during his press conference. "We had one guy sign today, which is just (unfathomable). The landscape of recruiting has changed a lot."

Day doubled up on that sentiment in his remarks this year:

"It's a very strange year," Day said during his press conference. "We're usually waiting in front of the fax machine. Instead of that, we just got done seeing (the early enrollees) in the weight room working out. Most of the class is already here, so this year is very, very different."

### Tressel's First Staff

Let's see how you did recalling Tressel's first staff back in 2001.

Jim Bollman was the offensive coordinator and coached centers and guards. He came to the Buckeyes from the NFL's Chicago Bears. Bollman coached with Tressel for five years at Youngstown State before leaving for Virginia. He also was on Saban's staff at Michigan State.

Ken Conatser was special teams coordinator. He had previously been at YSU for 15 seasons.

BSB's own Bill Conley was recruiting coordinator and coached tight ends, carrying over from John Cooper's staff. He also coached under Earle Bruce and had a successful career as a prep coach in Ohio.

Joe Daniels coached quarterbacks and receivers. Daniels came to OSU from the University of Cincinnati. He had also coached at Boston College, West Virginia and Pitt and had stints in the NFL with Cleveland and Buffalo.

Defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio came to Ohio State from Michigan State, where he had been for six seasons and served under Saban. He was with Tressel at YSU from 1986-90 before moving on to Kansas and then the Spartans.

The defensive line was handled by Jim Heacock, who was another holdover from Cooper's staff. Heacock was head coach at Illinois State before joining Cooper in 1996 and also coached at Washington from 1983-87.

Mark Snyder was Tressel's linebackers coach. He came to Columbus from the University of Minnesota. He, too, coached with Tressel at Youngstown State, logging six seasons with the Penguins.

Tressel's running backs coach was familiar to Buckeye fans in former Ohio State star Tim Spencer. After a professional playing career, he joined Cooper's staff in 1994 and was retained by Tressel.

And finally, Tressel's defensive backs were handled by Mel Tucker. Tucker came to Ohio State from LSU, where he coached DBs for Saban. Tucker was a graduate assistant under Saban at Michigan State before joining Terry Hoepfner's staff at Miami (Ohio).

### Letter Challenge Continues

I threw out the challenge in this space last issue to revive the tradition of Letters to the Editor. A couple of you have already accepted the challenge, and I will throw out a couple of other topics. What do you think of the recent coaching staff moves? Do you miss the pageantry of traditional signing day? Or come up with

your own topic and start the debate.

Send your letters to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Or save the stamp and the hassle and email it to bsb@buckeyesports.com.

The letter challenge was spurred by the passing of prolific BSB letter writer Gary Gerken.

While readers may not know this, we have a very rigorous editing process here at Buckeye Sports Bulletin and have so dating back to our beginnings and particularly to the arrival of the late assistant publisher Karen Wachsmann in the early 1980s. Hopefully, you don't see a lot of mistakes of the factual or grammatical variety in BSB, though longtime reader and sometimes ad rep Hal Leiner prides himself in picking out the occasional factual flaw.

When I spoke of Gerken's passing in the Jan. 23 issue of BSB, however, an anecdote that I recounted was edited to the point it was unintelligible. It was an anecdote that said a lot about my relationship with Gary and I wanted to recount it the way it was originally written.

"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 something politically incorrect that involves Native Americans, which is ironic because one thing Gary was not was politically correct. I begrudgingly gave the scrapbook back to him, and that's the last I saw him."

### A Point In History

For our Reprint Thursday feature at BuckeyeSports.com on Feb. 4, we ran reprints of stories covering the 2004 football loss at Iowa. Normally, a 33-7 conference loss would not be a game that we would memorialize with reprints. The game had come up kind of randomly on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum. As I got to thinking about it, the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Hawkeyes was a significant game in Ohio State football history.

For one thing, it marked what might have been the lowest point in the Tressel era at Ohio State – at least on the field.

It left Ohio State (3-3, 0-3) with its first 0-3 start in the Big Ten since 1988. A loss to Indiana the following week would have equaled Ohio State's record for the worst start in conference play that was set in 1922.

But the game can also be seen as the start of the Troy Smith era in Columbus. Sophomore phenom Justin Zwick was knocked of the game early in the second half. Zwick had been 6 of 14 for 74 yards and an interception and lost a fumble on the play that he was injured.

Iowa quickly scored, and by the time fellow sophomore Smith took over, Ohio State was behind 17-0.

Smith's numbers were modest that game. He was 8 of 12 passing for 76 yards. He was sacked twice, leaving him with seven net yards on six carries with a long of 13. He threw a meaningless 23-yard touchdown pass to Rory Nicol with 2:19 left in the game for the Buckeyes' only points.

Zwick was unable to answer the bell for the Indiana game – which the Buckeye won 30-7 – because of a sore shoulder, and Smith became the starter and held on to the job.

By the time the Michigan game rolled around, Smith put up a game for the ages. He was 13 of 23 passing for 241 yards and a pair of scores and ripped the Wolverines for 145 yards rushing on 18 carries for an 8.1-yard average and another score along with a long of 46, leading Ohio State to a 37-21 victory.

Two years later he was the Heisman Trophy winner.

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