

Ohio State Men's Basketball Buys Into Team Success

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With only three games left on the regular-season schedule, the Ohio State men's basketball team has an opportunity to earn a No. 1 seed for the NCAA Tournament. Just like everyone expected, right?

Not quite.

The Buckeyes were projected to finish seventh in the Big Ten in an unofficial preseason media poll administered by The Athletic and The Columbus Dispatch.

Yet, with tournament time rapidly approaching, Ohio State is the No. 4 team in the country.

Head coach Chris Holtmann's squad boasts big-time wins over Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin, as well as series sweeps of Penn State and Rutgers. The unit has taken down many of the top teams in the nation with exceptional teamwork, with the whole unit buying into team success.

Part of what has helped lead the Scarlet and Gray to an 18-5 start is each player's commitment to thriving in his role. There are many talented players in Columbus, but they have collectively put the team ahead of their individual aspirations, leading to Ohio State ranking third nationally in offensive efficiency, according to KenPom.

Holtmann saw his team struggle with fitting into roles midway through the 2019-20 campaign, but once the players became more comfortable, they enjoyed more success.

"We went through some bumpy parts (last season) where guys were maybe trying to figure out roles in January, and then the schedule just got the best of us," Holtmann said. "We had really good buy-in in February and March leading into the tournament last year as well. That's always a fluid thing with every team but up to this point, it's been a really positive thing. And it's hard to quantify the amount of points that gains you."

It may be easy to forget that the Buckeyes started 9-0 last season, ascending to No. 1 in the AP Poll. That is largely because they lost seven of their next 10 games, struggling immensely to regain their identity.

The team bonded together through the tough times, however, and ripped off nine wins in 12 games, including impressive triumphs over Purdue, Maryland and Illinois, as well as two over Michigan.

Ohio State had high hopes for the 2020 Big Ten tournament and the NCAA Tournament, but the COVID-19 pandemic ended the season just when the squad was finding its groove.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

BOUGHT IN – Ohio State sophomore forward E.J. Liddell is averaging a team-high 15.9 points and 6.8 rebounds per game while leading the Buckeyes to an 18-5 record this season.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

What Was Meyer Thinking?

At the University of Florida, Urban Meyer resigned under a cloud of inappropriate behavior on the part of some players and his inability to address the issues. In the closing days of Meyer's coaching career at The Ohio State University, there were revelations of alleged domestic violence on the part of Zach Smith, who worked for Meyer both at Florida and Ohio State. The Smith affair complicated Meyer's legacy at his point of retirement in 2018 and tarnished the reputation of the Ohio State football program, as well as the university.

Ironically, Meyer then remained on at Ohio State to teach a course in "character and leadership." He stated that he gave a great deal of thought to the position before accepting the challenge and wanted the course to be one of the university's most-popular offerings.

Meyer's character and leadership skills have once again come into question when, as the new head coach of the Jacksonville Jaguars, he hired Chris Doyle as the director of sports performance. Doyle, recently terminated from a 20-year career at the University of Iowa due to allegations of racist remarks, belittling and bullying football players over the years, was known to Meyer, who vetted Doyle. In light of pressure regarding Doyle's background as it became more widely known, Doyle submitted

his resignation to Meyer on Feb. 12.

In his book "Not For Long," written in 2018, Dr. Robert Turner noted that 70 percent of the players in the NFL are African-American. Urban Meyer, as head coach of a major professional team, as well as coaches at all levels of play, must be in-tune with the Black Lives Matter movement. The coaching profession must provide leadership to challenge racial injustice to bring socially acceptable standards of behavior and healing to black athletes and to mentor white athletes to respect their fellow players.

As the author on a course on "character and leadership" and in light of the current social atmosphere in the United States, what was Meyer thinking when he selected Doyle? Is it time for Meyer to seek a different career path and truly retire from coaching?

Joseph H. Huber
Walpole, Mass.

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From The Message Board

With Ohio State in the conversation for a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament, we asked the readers on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff members, if fourth-year head coach Chris Holtmann has met or exceeded the expectations they had for him at the time of his hiring. Here are some of the responses:

"Ohio State seemed to suffer from too many egos during the Thad Matta years. Since Holtmann took over I see the players working as a team with egos in check. Perhaps Holtmann is better with dealing with the off court dramas than Matta. I see this same spirit in the Lady Bucks this year. It's a pleasure to watch both teams play."

– Peyote Buck

"When AD Gene Smith hired Holtmann, he gave him a long contract, saying, 'The roster needs a lot of work.' I am not sure the roster is as strong as I had hoped after four years, but given the transfer mania these days, the roster is probably as good as could be expected. I'm going to say this year's results will determine whether or not he's exceeded expectations."

– Terrier Buck

"The Buckeyes have to be happy to have Chris Holtmann as the head coach. I'm proud of his demeanor both on and off the court. He reflects well upon The Ohio State University. Leading a winning program with class is what alumni and fans want to see in a head coach. I am thankful that we landed Coach Holtmann and not Archie Miller, who was often labeled as the heir apparent to Thad. I think Indiana would swap coaches with Ohio State in an instant."

– Luckeeman

"Chris Holtmann has certainly exceeded my expectations as Ohio State's head men's basketball coach. He inherited a program

in disarray after the team had missed the NCAA Tournament two years in a row and lost many players via transfer. Holtmann helped the Buckeyes return to the tourney in his first season, and 2020 would have been their third straight trip before the COVID-19 pandemic ended the season early.

"In his four seasons, Ohio State has been ranked as high as No. 13 each year. The success on the court goes hand in hand with the culture of team-first basketball instilled by Holtmann since his arrival in 2017. And I think that has been what has impressed me the most – Holtmann has been able to get more out of his players than expected, and they have overcome expectations each year."

– Joe Dempsey, BSB

"It's hard to say that he hasn't at least reached expectations, though I'm not sure that I would go much further than that at this point. The expectations for Holtmann were to return Ohio State to NCAA Tournament play and to a consistent top-five finish in the Big Ten, both of which required him to pull the program out of the late-stage Matta tailspin.

"I think that he's unquestionably accomplished that. However, to exceed expectations I think he'll need a real tournament run to at least the Sweet 16 or even the Elite Eight. He has the team to do it this year and certainly could pull it off, but until then I think he's mostly just done his job, not significantly beyond it though."

– Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

Fired by Ohio State on Feb. 4, former men's basketball coach Eldon Miller was hired 24 days later to the same position at Northern Iowa.

"I couldn't be happier about it," he said upon accepting a five-year contract worth \$50,000 annually. After coaching the Buckeyes to a 68-55 win over Minnesota in his final game at St. John Arena, Miller called coaching at Ohio State a lifelong dream.

"It will be something that will be part of my life forever," he said. "There's no way I could begin to tell you what it means to me to have coached here 10 years. It's first class all the way."

30 Years Ago – 1991

Heading into the final three games of the season, Ohio State stood just one victory away from clinching at least a share of its first Big Ten basketball championship in 20 years.

In a crazy turn of events occurring over a 48-hour period, Iowa shocked Indiana 80-79 in overtime and the Buckeyes survived to secure a 63-62 victory over Minnesota.

OSU increased its league-leading record to 14-1 while the Hoosiers, who rebounded Feb. 24 with a nationally televised 112-79 win over Michigan, were 2½ games behind at 11-3.

25 Years Ago – 1996

Ohio State star women's basketball player Katie Smith was wrapping up a college career that had seen her claim the Big Ten women's scoring record and the 1996 Big Ten Player of the Year honor as well as earning her strong consideration for the 1996 Olympic team, all while leading the Buckeyes to the top of the conference and a national title appearance.

Still, that she hadn't yet claimed that elusive title proved a constant frustration for the Buckeye senior.

"I've accomplished a lot of things," Smith said. "I was an All-American, we made the national title game, being a part of the USA Basketball circuit. There are other things that might have been possible ... that can be a little frustrating but with a few more wins here and there it might have been different."

In the last weeks of her final campaign, however, Smith would need to lead her Buckeyes to a Big Ten title to even qualify for the NCAA tournament. OSU sat at 18-11 entering the conference tournament.

20 Years Ago – 2001

As Frank Williams' three-pointer fell short at the buzzer and the Ohio State men's basketball team wrapped up a 63-61 upset of Illinois Feb. 22, OSU coach Jim O'Brien raised his right arm and pumped his fist.

Certainly he was celebrating a win over the nation's No. 3 team, but O'Brien may have also been realizing another mission was accomplished – an invitation to the NCAA Tournament.

"This helps us build a strong case," said O'Brien when asked about the impact of the victory for the Buckeye tournament chances.

15 Years Ago – 2006

After its Feb. 18 tussle with visiting Northwestern, the Ohio State men's basketball team likely had to remind itself that a win is a win, no matter how ugly it might have been.

The Buckeyes (19-4, 8-4) overcame a dismal start and a determined bunch of Wildcats (12-12, 4-8) to keep pace near the top of the Big Ten standings with a 61-52 victory at Value City Arena.

The visitors proved to be trouble for the Buckeyes from the very beginning. Northwestern scored the first nine points of the game and held the prolific OSU offense – which entered the game tops in the Big Ten at 78.6 points per game – without a field goal until just

past eight minutes into the first half.

"We came out to start the game and could not buy a basket," head coach Thad Matta said. "To our guys' credit, they kept defending down 9-0 and then held them to 20 points in the first half."

10 Years Ago – 2011

The top-ranked men's basketball team entered March with a 27-2 record, and Matta had a familiar-looking player to thank for that success.

The former Xavier coach said Jared Sullinger, who was averaging 17.4 points and 9.8 rebounds per contest, reminded him of former Musketeers star David West.

"As I watched Jared in the summer, he reminded me of David West from the standpoint of he's going to get 25 points and 15 rebounds every time he takes the floor," Matta said. "His intellect for how to play, taking charges – he's a guy that will shot-fake a guy, lean into him and as he's laying the ball in say, 'That's your third foul,' before the ball goes in. He knows what's going on at all times."

Five Years Ago – 2016

When Ohio State played Michigan State in the final week of February, Matta saw exactly what he hoped his team could become. He saw players comfortable in their well-defined roles, strong leaders and a veteran presence.

The problem for Ohio State was that that embodiment came from Ohio State's opponents. The Buckeyes were bludgeoned by the Spartans, losing 81-62 on Feb. 23. The defeat came to a senior-laden team as a trio of Spartans seniors scored 60 combined points, nearly matching Ohio State's total in the game.

"I think experience is so key in life," Matta said after his senior-less team lost to Michigan State. "I think back to watching (Denzel) Valentine as a freshman, then a sophomore and a junior and you look at him now and it's amazing the player that he's developed into. You look at a guy like (Matt) Costello and just in terms of his natural progression to the level he's playing at right now.

"Those are the things when you're coaching a young basketball team that you say, 'Hey, the future is bright,' but we've got to keep coaching every day."

The Buckeyes seemed to learn from the Spartans as Matta's team dispatched Iowa 68-64 with a late rally in the final home game of the season Feb. 28. It was a win that required Ohio State to come back from a late six-point deficit and handed a fourth defeat in five games to an Iowa team limping to the finish.

One Year Ago – 2020

Ohio State senior cornerback Amir Riep and fifth-year senior linebacker/safety Jahsen Wint were arrested and charged with rape and kidnapping by Columbus Police on Feb. 12 and subsequently dismissed from the football program by head coach Ryan Day.

"I am not making any statement on the criminal charges, but it is clear they did not live up to our standards and my expectations," Day said in a statement released that evening. "The athletics department will make sure they both continue to have access to the health and well-being resources available to students and student-athletes. Due to the ongoing criminal investigation, I will not be commenting further."

Both men were then indicted by the Franklin County grand jury during a preliminary hearing on Feb. 21 on two counts of rape and one count of kidnapping, both first-degree felonies.

"If convicted on these charges, both men face a maximum consecutive term of 33 years of incarceration, as well as registration as sex offenders," Franklin County prosecutor Ron O'Brien said in a statement.

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OPINION

Remembering Another OSU-UM Cage Match

The entertainment value of fourth-ranked Ohio State's 92-87 loss to No. 3 Michigan at Value City Arena on Feb. 21 was likely far greater than the importance of the outcome.

Obviously, it would have been beneficial to the Buckeyes to maintain their recent seven-game winning streak and stay unbeaten at home against the Wolverines since 2014. But truth be told, barring a late-season collapse, each team is going to earn a lofty seed in the upcoming NCAA Tournament.

The pregame hype of a matchup between the two rivals – first meeting ever when both OSU and Michigan were top-five teams, etc. – was to be expected for a couple of programs that have combined for exactly four Final Four appearances (two apiece) over the past 20 years. But the game's significance paled in comparison to one played nearly 30 years ago, a contest that marked the beginning of the end of one era at Ohio State and the beginning of another at Michigan.

The Buckeyes and Wolverines battled one another at the 1992 Southeast Regional final at Rupp Arena in Lexington, Ky., for the right to go to the Final Four. At the time, Michigan had won the NCAA Tournament title just three seasons before, but Ohio State hadn't been to a Final Four since 1968.

Despite cold shooting throughout the game, OSU managed to dig its way out of a 37-31 half-time deficit and had a chance to win it in regulation. But Chris Jent couldn't get his off-balance jumper in the final seconds to go, and Michigan eventually won a 75-71 decision in overtime.

The Wolverines were led by five cocky freshmen known as the Fab Five, a group that included current Michigan head coach Juwan Howard. The team went on to play for the NCAA Tournament title that year, but its two Final Four games were later vacated due to recruiting violations, many of which included the Fab Five.

Meanwhile, the Ohio State program took a long time to recover from the soul-crushing loss. Denied a chance to meet Cincinnati in the Final Four the following weekend in what would have been the first game between the in-state rivals since the 1962 NCAA Tournament final, the Buckeyes spiraled downward under head coach Randy Ayers. After posting a record of 70-23 over his first three seasons, Ayers was just 54-85 over his final five seasons and was fired following the 1996-97 season. His career rebounded nicely, however. Ayers has been a coach in the NBA for most of the last two decades and is currently an assistant for Phoenix Suns head coach Monty Williams.

The starting five for Ohio State in that 1992 regional final didn't have a catchy nickname, but each has found success over the years.

Star player Jim Jackson left Ohio State after his junior season in 1992 and embarked upon a nomadic NBA career that took him to 12 different teams in 15 years. After retirement, Jackson joined the Big Ten Network as an analyst and has continued his broadcast career with Fox Sports and Turner Sports.

Jent enjoyed a 11-year pro career that included brief NBA stays with the Houston Rockets and New York Knicks, and since 2003 he has been an assistant coach, including two separate stints at OSU. He is currently on Atlanta Hawks head coach Lloyd Pierce's staff.

Ohio State center Lawrence Funderburke played nine seasons in the NBA with the Sacramento Kings, mostly as a backup for Chris Webber, another member of the Fab Five. Today, Funderburke is a certified financial planner, the author of three books, a motivational speaker, and CEO and co-founder of the nonprofit Lawrence Funderburke Youth Organization.

Point guard Mark Baker played professionally overseas for a decade but did appear in one NBA game in 1999 with the Toronto Raptors.

Baker later became a coach and athletic director in his native Dayton before allegations surfaced that Dayton Dunbar had used an ineligible player in the state tournament. Dunbar was placed on probation, and in 2018, Baker was reassigned from AD to associate director of truancy for Dayton Public Schools.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Finally, Jamaal Brown left basketball behind and returned to Texas, where he had been a star player at Sam Houston High School in Arlington. He is currently a sales merchandiser for Frito Lay in Arlington and is heavily involved in community service. That includes a spot on the executive board of the Otis and Rosie Brown Foundation, a nonprofit organization benefiting at-risk children and families in North Texas.

The foundation is named for Brown's parents and was founded by his sister, Thasunda Brown Duckett, who is the chief executive officer of Chase Consumer Banking as well as a member of the board of directors of Nike Inc.

Pondering Bygone Eras

The Feb. 5 passing of All-America and College Football Hall of Fame lineman Aurelius Thomas brought back a flood of memories. I didn't cover Thomas while he was playing for the Buckeyes from 1955-57, but I interviewed him many times for a variety of projects over the years, and he couldn't have been more accommodating.

Born in Muskogee, Okla., Thomas moved with his family to Columbus at a young age and never left. He was a star at East High School before a stellar career at Ohio State and then was equally successful in business – first as an educator and coach and later in the insurance field. He was a tireless advocate of community service, volunteered his time to numerous boards and agencies, and rightfully received numerous awards and honors for his contributions.

During our visits over the years, however, Thomas seemed less comfortable talking about himself than about teammates and coaches, particularly Woody Hayes and how the Hayes for whom he played seemed much different from the intemperate one who became almost a caricature of himself later in his career.

"There were always two sides to Coach Hayes," Thomas once told me. "There was the public side and the side that he shared only with the team. That's kind of sad, too, because I think people nowadays have the perception of him as this crazy, old fool stomping around the sidelines and punching players. Nothing could be further from the truth. Coach Hayes was one of the kindest, most honest, most loyal human beings I have ever met."

Thomas' passing robs us of one more link to the 28-year Hayes era that historians generally divide into two parts – the period from the coach's hiring in 1951 to the university Faculty Council's vote to deny a Rose Bowl trip to the 1961 team, and the subsequent years when Hayes let the bitterness of that vote eat away at him until he finally snapped on the sideline of the 1978 Gator Bowl.

Thomas was 86 years old when he died, and that also left me to ponder how many other former Buckeyes of bygone eras are still with us.

The oldest living Ohio State football player is Cecil "Cy" Souders, who celebrated his 100th birthday on Jan. 3. Souders is a native of Bucyrus, Ohio, but had planned to play his college football at LSU before being convinced by Ohio State

head coach John Wilce to play for the Buckeyes.

Souders was one of the youngest members of the 1942 team, the first in school history to win a national championship. He played two more seasons before joining the U.S. Navy in World War II and then returned to Ohio State in 1946, earning first-team All-Big Ten as well as first-team All-American honors that year. He was also voted team MVP.

In addition to be the oldest living former Buckeye, Souders is also thought to be the oldest living former NFL player. He was an end for the Detroit Lions from 1947-49 and totaled 17 receptions for 203 yards and one touchdown during his pro career.

The oldest living former Ohio State captain is 98-year-old Chuck Csuri, who was born July 4, 1922. Csuri joined the Buckeyes in 1941 and was a teammate with Souders on the '42 championship team. After a stint with the U.S. Army in World War II during which he won a Bronze star for heroism during the Battle of the Bulge, Csuri returned to play with OSU for the 1946 season. He later became a pioneer in computer graphics, computer animation and digital fine art, and he remains a professor emeritus at the Ohio State Advanced Computing Center for Art and Design, which he founded.

Csuri is listed in the official Ohio State Football Media Guide as being a captain of the 1943 squad – a pretty good trick since he had already been drafted and was in Officers' Training School in New Jersey. But Csuri, who was an All-American as well as team MVP in 1942, had been voted by his teammates to serve as a captain the following year. That honor was held for him until he returned to the Buckeyes in 1946, and he served as team captain that season with two-time All-America lineman Warren Amling.

John Cooper holds the distinction of being the oldest living former head coach at Ohio State. Coop, a member of the College Football Hall of Fame who compiled a 111-43-4 record in 13 seasons with the Buckeyes, was born July 2, 1937, and just might be one of the healthiest looking 83-year-olds you'll ever meet.

Coop is the proverbial spring chicken compared to Ralph Staub, who at 92 is the oldest living former assistant coach. Staub, born April 11, 1928, was a member of Hayes' staff at OSU from 1970 through 1976 immediately before a four-year stint as head coach at his alma mater Cincinnati. Staub later coached two seasons in the NFL with the old Houston Oilers and also served as a scout for Dallas Cowboys head coach Tom Landry.

Also 92 is former Arizona head coach Darrell Mudra, the oldest living coach who can claim a nonconference victory against Ohio State. Mudra, a member of the College Football Hall of Fame who preferred to coach from the press box rather than roam the sideline, led the Wildcats into Ohio Stadium and left with a 14-7 victory against the Buckeyes in the 1967 season opener. Mudra compiled exactly 200 wins during a 26-year career that included stops at Adams State, North Dakota State, Arizona, Western Illinois, Florida State, Eastern Illinois and Northern Iowa.

Finally, there is former Iowa head coach Jerry Burns, who celebrated his 94th birthday on Jan. 24, making him the oldest living former Big Ten coach with a victory against Ohio State on his résumé. Burns engineered a 28-14 home win against the Buckeyes in 1962, the only victory against OSU in five tries as head coach of the Hawkeyes from 1961 through 1965.

Burns had another, more famous encounter with Ohio State. He was a senior quarterback at Michigan in 1950 when the Wolverines scored a 9-3 win against the Buckeyes in what has become known as "The Snow Bowl."



Washington Staying With OSU After UT Courtship

After a heated battle between Ohio State and Tennessee for the services of OSU linebackers coach Al Washington, it was the Buckeyes who came out victorious, with Washington reaffirming his commitment to OSU on Feb. 11.

That came after several days of public courtship by Tennessee under new head coach Josh Heupel, who wanted to bring in the 36-year-old Buckeye assistant for Tennessee's vacant defensive coordinator position. Washington was reportedly set to accept the position but had a change of heart at the last minute and decided instead to stick with Ohio State, while likely securing a hefty raise and potential promotion in the process.

Lettermen Row's Austin Ward reported shortly after the news broke that his sources "indicated a raise and new responsibility as the run-game coordinator was already in the works" for Washington at Ohio State for this upcoming season.

Washington has spent the past two seasons with the Buckeyes after being hired to head coach Ryan Day's initial staff in 2019. He's a Columbus native, and his dad, Al Washington Sr., was a linebacker for Ohio State from 1977-80. The younger Washington played his college ball at Boston College from 2002-05, returning as a coach from 2012-16, where he met Day.

After a year working under Luke Fickell at Cincinnati and another year at Michigan, Washington was brought in by Day along with Matt Barnes, Greg Mattison and Jeff Hafley to help man his first defensive staff along with the incumbent defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

According to a report from FootballScoop, Washington was offered both a positional raise and a significant salary by Tennessee, but he ultimately didn't want to leave Columbus.

"According to both Southeastern Conference and Big Ten sources, the deal (from Tennessee) is said to be a three-year offer with a total value between \$1.2 and \$1.5 million per year, on average," FootballScoop reported on Feb. 8.

As of March 2020, Washington was pulling in \$515,000 to coach the Buckeye linebackers in the 2020 season. As mentioned, that figure is expected to increase significantly this offseason.

Buckeyes Hire Barnett, Rhoads, Fitch

Ohio State announced a trio of support staff hires from Feb. 10-15, including a pair of analysts and the replacement

for former director of player development Ryan Stamper, who left to join Urban Meyer's staff with the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Leading the way is former Vanderbilt offensive coordinator and 2020 interim head coach Todd Fitch, who is joining Ohio State's coaching staff as a quality control coach for the offense according to Ohio State's staff directory.

Fitch has been a coach in college football for 34 years, starting as a graduate assistant at Ohio Wesleyan in 1986, then coaching at various programs, including Bowling Green, Colorado State, Connecticut, East Carolina, Iowa State, South Carolina, South Florida and West Virginia.

In 2013, Fitch was hired as wide receivers coach and passing game coordinator at Boston College, where he worked with Day, who was the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at the time. The pair worked together for two seasons before Day left to coach in the NFL and Fitch took over his position as BC offensive coordinator in 2015.

Since then, Fitch was the offensive coordinator for four seasons at Louisiana Tech before taking over as the offensive coordinator for the Commodores in 2020.

Ohio State is also bringing in former Iowa State head coach Paul Rhoads as a defensive quality control coach. The quality control job is similar to what Alabama has done under Nick Saban, hiring former assistants and head coaches and providing them with game film to watch, so that they can share their thoughts with the on-field staff.

A former graduate assistant at Ohio State in 1991, the 54-year-old Rhoads was the Cyclones' head coach from 2009-15. Before that, he was the defensive coordinator at Pittsburgh (2000-07) and Auburn (2008). After being fired by Iowa State, Rhoads spent time at Arkansas as the defensive coordinator and defensive backs coach from 2016-17, as the defensive backs coach at UCLA in 2018-19 and at Arizona, where he was the defensive coordinator in 2020.

The addition of an analyst is new for Ohio State. Typically, those spots were filled by up-and-comers in the coaching community like new special teams coordinator Parker Fleming or quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis, not seasoned veterans with an appeal more about their expertise than their potential to become an on-field staffer.

Day was asked about potentially adding an experienced coach to the support staff during his press conference on Feb. 3, particularly as the Buckeyes looked to replace the experience lost with former co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison's retirement.

"It's something that I've spent a lot of time thinking about," Day said. "Every program is different. You have to do what's right for your program. Now that I'm going into (my third year as head coach), 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 that it has to be the right fit, culturally. It has to be the right personality that brings the right things to the table. So, certainly, I'm looking at all those things and over the next couple of weeks, we'll have an opportunity to bring some guys in and possibly talk about those types of things."

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BSB Podcast Enhances Online Coverage

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

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's 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 OSU Olympic sports. On the most recent episode released on Feb. 19, we take a look at the updated 2021 Big Ten football schedule, featuring a full breakdown of every team's 12-game slate with division standings picks.

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 who are new to the podcast world, the show is also posted at 10 a.m. every Friday on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as in the BSB Fan Forum.

hiring was first reported on Feb. 10, Ohio State officially hired former Buckeye safety C.J. Barnett as its new director of player development for external affairs on Feb. 15, Day announced. Barnett is a former four-star prospect from Clayton (Ohio) Northmont who played for the Buckeyes from 2010-13.

"C.J. is the perfect fit for what we were looking for in terms of our player

development position," Day said. "We'll miss Ryan Stamper, as he helped our program become the standard when it comes to helping players prepare for life and success off the field. C.J. is going to come in and build onto that standard and enhance it, too. His experiences as a player and as a member of the Columbus Police Department make him exactly the kind of person our players can learn and

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)				

grow from. We're thrilled that he's back with our program."

Barnett recorded 224 tackles and eight interceptions during his career with the Buckeyes, including a team-high four interceptions in 2013. He was named a team captain as a senior.

After a brief training camp stint with the NFL's New York Giants, Barnett worked as a sales consultant for Byers Mazda in Dublin, Ohio. He then became a Columbus Police officer in July 2018, where he spent the last two years.

Now, Barnett will be tasked with handling Ohio State's community outreach and preparing players for life after football through the Buckeyes' "Real Life Wednesdays" program.

"I am really pleased to be coming back to work for a program that has given so much to me," Barnett said. "I look forward to using my experiences to become a trusted advocate and resource for our players in all areas of their lives. I look forward to getting to work for Coach Day and this staff, and on behalf of the players, and to help grow the already strong culture that exists in this program."

OSU Staffer Headed To BC

While Washington will remain in Columbus after turning down the opportunity to become Tennessee's defensive coordinator, the Buckeyes are losing support staff assistant Michael Cibene to Boston College.

A native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Cibene walked on to the Ohio State football program and played safety from 2013-16. He spent the last two seasons as a support staffer at Ohio State, notably filling in as the linebackers coach when Washington missed the Big Ten Championship Game due to a positive coronavirus test.

Cibene is set to be reunited in Chestnut Hill with Hafley, who is now the Eagles' head coach, as well as several other staff members who were previously at Ohio State, including linebackers coach Sean Duggan, special teams coordinator Matt Thurin and strength and conditioning coach Phil Matusz. It's unclear what his exact role will be, however.

Aurelias Thomas Dies At 86 Years Old

Former Ohio State All-America guard and College Football Hall of Famer Aurelias Thomas passed away on Feb. 5 at the age of 86 according to a university statement.

A Columbus native, Thomas played for the Buckeyes from 1954-57. He weighed just 202 pounds, which was considered undersized for a guard in his era, yet was described as someone who had "tremendous technique as a blocker and mobility

as a tackler" and "was always able to outmaneuver opponents who were bigger."

As a senior, Thomas led Ohio State to a 9-1 record and a 10-7 victory over Oregon in the Rose Bowl, after which the Buckeyes were named national champions by the coaches and Football Writers Association polls.

Thomas was selected by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 22nd round of the 1958 NFL draft, though he never played in the league. He instead became an assistant coach at Ohio State for the following season before finding his calling as a teacher in the Columbus Public School system, where he taught science and physical education for 20 years. He also coached football for six years, including four at Columbus East and two at Columbus Central, and he helped 40 students earn college scholarships during that time.

Later, Thomas spent 16 years at New York Life Insurance before starting a brokerage in Columbus. He was also a very active member of the community as a trustee of both the Varsity "O" Alumni Association and Ohio State University Student Loan Foundation, president of the Columbus Recreation Board, advisor to the Small Business Group for Southern Ohio, volunteer agent for the United Negro College Fund and president of the Columbus Leadership Conference.

Thomas was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1989 and the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame in 1992.

Sermon Raising Money For Domestic Violence Victims

Former Ohio State running back Trey Sermon has partnered with his mother's foundation, Arise by Faith, in order to "help raise awareness and support victims of domestic violence," according to a Feb. 16 tweet.

According to Sermon, Arise by Faith is a nonprofit organization that helps survivors of domestic violence and "will develop programs to tackle the issue of domestic violence and assist current victims," as well as create "a support system that is dedicated to help the client's healing journey."

Sermon's mother is a domestic violence survivor, and the former Ohio State back tells her story on the campaign's website.

"My mom is by far the toughest person I know," Sermon wrote. "Both of her brothers have passed away, one of whom was shot seven times. Her mother died in an untimely fashion and then, two weeks later, her father was killed in a car accident. She had an abusive childhood and then she entered into an abusive relationship with the man who eventually killed her baby boy. Years later, her sec-

Spring Football, Tournament Coverage Coming Up

Spring football and basketball tournament time are hopefully coming up, and Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers will want to keep up on all the latest Ohio State sports news. The next print issue of BSB is scheduled to be mailed March 9, but the BSB staff posts daily reports and stories at our BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all subscribers.

The BSB staff also provides electronic recruiting coverage at BuckeyeSports.com, 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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If you have any questions about BuckeyeSports.com or your mail service, feel free to call us at the above number.

ond-born, a daughter, died at birth.

"Unfortunately, my mother's story of domestic violence and abuse is all too common, and ever since COVID-19 happened, domestic violence rates have been skyrocketing. Victims are forced to stay in a closed space with their abusers every single day, leading to increasing violence. It also becomes much easier for abusers to get away with their actions.

"My mother could have succumbed to all of this tragedy and trauma, and no one would have blamed her. Instead, she is taking her experiences and using them to help and build strength in others."

Sermon is raising money in bulk one-time payments, or with a payment that is done per vertical inch at his Pro Day performance, meaning a \$1 donation on a 30-inch vertical jump would then become a \$30 donation.

The Sermon family was the subject of a lengthy Sports Illustrated feature in January prior to Ohio State's title game against Alabama, which kicked off in Florida, Sermon's home state that his mother departed after her abusive ex-boyfriend was imprisoned for killing her son.

Oregon Starting QB In Transfer Portal

Ohio State didn't get the opportunity to square off against Oregon as originally planned in 2020, but when the Ducks arrive in Columbus on Sept. 11, they'll do so with a new name atop the quarterback position on the depth chart.

Tyler Shough, who started all seven games for Oregon in 2020, announced he was entering the transfer portal on Feb. 12. He then committed to Texas Tech on Feb. 22.

"I would like to thank my coaches at Oregon for the opportunity and many lessons learned these past three years," Shough said in a statement posted to his Twitter feed. "Huge thank you to the fans and Eugene community for welcoming me here and making this place special."

While he claimed the starting role during his redshirt sophomore season, it was never a clean break for the Chandler (Ariz.) Hamilton product. Boston College transfer Anthony Brown played frequently off the bench as the season came to a close. He announced his plan to return to Oregon for 2021, further muddying the waters for Shough, who completed 63.5 percent of his throws with 13 passing TDs and six interceptions in 2020.

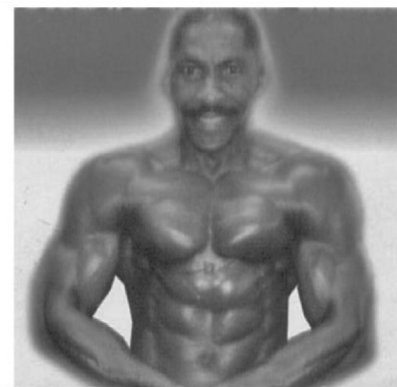
"There was enough clarity to start Tyler, which is what we did," head coach Mario Cristobal said, "but there was enough good play by Anthony to where we felt it merited him playing, and that's what we did."

On top of Brown's return, Oregon welcomed four-star 2021 quarterback Ty Thompson to the fray. Thompson has reportedly turned heads in Eugene and will compete with Brown for the starting role.

"I don't think it's totally out of the realm of possibility that Ty Thompson – who is on campus right now and arrived shortly after the Fiesta Bowl – (turned) Tyler Shough's head," Duck Territory writer Eric Skopil said on The College Football Daily. "They're from the same home state and know some of the same people. I know that. Maybe he was going like, 'Boy, this kid is really, really special.'"

Brown, who appears to be the favorite to lead the Ducks into Columbus, completed 15 of his 23 passing attempts for 164 yards and two touchdowns while rushing seven times for 40 yards and two

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more scores in 2020. He was a three-year starter for Boston College, completing 54.9 percent of his passes for 4,738 yards, 40 touchdowns and 20 interceptions, though he has suffered a pair of anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tears in his career – one in 2017, one in 2019.

Baseball, Softball Teams Have Schedules

The Ohio State baseball team announced its Big Ten-only schedule for the 2021 season on Feb. 17. The Buckeyes will open play with a four-game series against Illinois in Greenville, S.C., on March 5-7.

The Buckeyes, who enter their 11th season under the direction of head coach Greg Beals, will play 44 games over the course of 13 weeks, concluding with a three-game series against Northwestern at Bill Davis Stadium in Columbus over Memorial Day weekend.

The second weekend of the season includes a unique setup, in which Ohio State will play two games against Nebraska and two games against Iowa at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, home to the NFL's Minnesota Vikings.

Beals is 303-238-1 during his tenure at Ohio State, which includes three NCAA Regional appearances and two Big Ten tournament titles. He's produced 36 All-Big Ten honorees, 24 MLB draft picks and three All-Americans. The Buckeyes got off to a rough start in 2020 prior to the cancellation of the season, opening the season 6-8. They'll look to bounce back from that in 2021 with an experienced roster, led by star pitcher Seth Lonsway, who was named to the USA Baseball Golden Spikes Award Preseason Watch List on Feb. 18. The award is given to the nation's best amateur baseball player.

Meanwhile, the softball team announced its 2021 schedule a week prior on Feb. 9, with a similar 44-game, all-Big Ten set up. The Buckeyes will open their season with a trip to Sleepy Hollow Sports Complex in Leesburg, Fla., where they will play three opponents the weekend of Feb. 26-28 – Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska – all for doubleheaders.

Ohio State will remain in Leesburg through March 14 to take on Wisconsin in a three-game series on March 11-12 and Northwestern on March 13-14.

Then, the Buckeyes will open home play with a four-game series against Maryland from March 26-28.

They'll close the season at home as well, against Michigan State in a four-game series from May 14-16. There will be no Big Ten softball tournament.

Bowen Catches On With Cardinals

Former Ohio State tackle and guard Branden Bowen has a new home. The Utah native is getting another chance in the NFL, signing on with the Arizona Cardinals on Feb. 17 as "a potential offensive line depth piece" according to a story from Arizona Cardinals senior writer Darren Urban.

Bowen was a multiyear contributor during his time in Columbus. After joining the Buckeyes as a three-star recruit in the class of 2015, Bowen worked his way into the starting lineup as the right guard for the first six games of the 2017 season. However, a broken leg sidelined him for the remainder of the season and held him out of the entire 2018 campaign.

He returned as a starter for Ohio State in 2019 however, taking over as the right tackle. Following his senior season, Bowen went unselected in the NFL draft but was signed as a free agent by the Carolina Panthers. His time there was short-lived after he was included among preseason cuts.

Now in Arizona, Bowen will look to fight for a more permanent role in 2021 and beyond.

"He enters a mix on the offensive line – and in particular right tackle – that could have some changes," Urban wrote. "Last year's starter at right tackle, Kelvin Beachum, is a free agent. Marcus Gilbert returns from opting out of 2020 for COVID reasons with one year still on his contract. The Cardinals also have 2020 third-round pick Josh Jones with a chance to start at right tackle."

Former Buckeyes Posey, Webb Earn Extensions

A pair of former Buckeyes are re-upping with their teams in the Canadian football league. The Hamilton Tiger-Cats announced Feb. 5 that they had re-signed former Ohio State wide receiver DeVier Posey to a one-year deal, replacing the contract the two sides signed prior to the canceled 2020 season.

Posey, who was selected by the Houston Texans in the third round of the 2012 NFL draft, has spent the last four seasons in the CFL with the Toronto Argonauts (2016-17), British Columbia Lions (2018) and Montreal Alouettes (2019). He's caught 144 passes for 2,080

yards and 30 touchdowns, including seven receptions for 175 yards in the Argonauts' Grey Cup victory in 2017. He was named the game's most valuable player after he set a Grey Cup record with a 100-yard reception.

Posey also had brief stints with the NFL's New York Jets, Denver Broncos and Baltimore Ravens. He caught just 22 passes in the NFL for 272 yards.

Elsewhere, former Buckeye safety Damon Webb received an extension from the Saskatchewan Roughriders on Feb. 13, the details of which have not been released. Webb signed with Saskatchewan originally in 2020 after being released by the Tennessee Titans in 2019. The CFL didn't play a season in 2020, so Webb's first Canadian league action will come in Saskatchewan's preseason matchup with Winnipeg on May 28.

As a Buckeye, he recorded 131 tackles, four tackles for loss, two touchdowns from six interceptions, seven pass deflections, one forced fumble and two fumble recoveries.

Browns Cut Former Offensive Guard Pridgeon

Former Ohio State offensive guard Malcolm Pridgeon was waived by the Cleveland Browns on Feb. 9, ending his short-lived tenure with the franchise. A native of Central Islip, N.Y., Pridgeon joined the Buckeyes in 2016 as a transfer from Nassau Community College.

After suffering a knee injury in camp and redshirting that fall, he started all 28 games for Ohio State between 2017-18, helping the Buckeyes to Big Ten championships in both seasons and victories in the Cotton and Rose bowls.

Pridgeon signed as an undrafted free agent with the Houston Texans in 2019 but was waived at the start of the regular season. The Browns signed him to their practice squad shortly thereafter.

On Aug. 6, Pridgeon opted out of the 2020 season because of concerns with the coronavirus pandemic. He shared in a recent story from ESPN's Elizabeth Merrill that his mother passed away last March due to complications from the virus and that he is also at higher risk of complications because he suffers from hypertension.

"Of course I wish I was out there," Pridgeon said. "I can't look back on it. That causes stress that I don't need. I feel like if someone was in my shoes, they would have made the same decision I made."

Pridgeon was not claimed by another team within 24 hours and is now an unrestricted free agent and able to sign anywhere, though he is unsure if he'll be able to continue his professional career.

"I feel hurt," Pridgeon said. "I don't know if I'll ever get picked to play on the team after I opted out."

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Walker's Return From Injury Sparked Win Streak

Continued From Page 1

The Buckeyes had somewhat significant roster turnover, but they still returned several key contributors from last season and they have led the way to a successful season so far.

Walker's Return Provides Boost

Before falling to Michigan on Feb. 21, Ohio State had won seven games in a row starting with a win at Wisconsin on Jan. 23.

The winning streak coincided with the return of fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker from a hand injury. The former Florida State transfer missed four games due to torn ligaments in his wrist, an injury sustained in the preseason. The ultra-competitive Walker could not stay away from the game for long.

"Some of that was a situation where he thought he might be able to be out for a little bit and manage it all right," Holtmann said. "I think he just missed it so bad that he was like, 'Hey, if I've got to come back a little bit earlier, I've got to come back a little bit earlier. I don't want to be out.'"

"I think everybody understands this is his last year. He's going to go on and play professionally after this. He wanted to play in every game. So I think he was balancing that with the normal health. And he had to get cleared by the doctor and re-evaluated by the hand surgeon, all that. But once he got the OK, I think he was just anxious to get back."

Walker has played significant minutes for the Buckeyes, logging at least 30 minutes in eight straight games following the season opener. Although he's typically a starter, Walker moved to the sixth-man role off the bench when he returned from injury.

His coach has been impressed with the team-first approach of Walker, who has still seen solid minutes despite not starting. The left-handed point guard has averaged 27.0 minutes per game and played at least 30 minutes in two of the eight games since his return.

"C.J. wants to play," Holtmann said. "Like any young man, he wants to play minutes. He's been in there in virtually every late-game situation – not all of them, but a lot of them. He'll start other games. I'm sure he'll start on senior day. He loves to play, and he loves his team."

In the Buckeyes' 89-85 victory at Iowa on Feb. 4, Walker dished out a career-high nine

assists in 25 minutes off the bench, displaying the playmaking ability that has made him such an essential player.

Walker scored only three points against the Hawkeyes, but he has found his touch of late, averaging 12.3 points per game in the past four contests. In a 73-65 victory at Maryland on Feb. 8, Walker scored 11 points and dished out three assists before he scored 10 points with four assists and two steals in a 78-59 win over Indiana on Feb. 13.

He followed up a solid performance in the lopsided win over the Hoosiers with one of his best outings as a Buckeye, scoring 13 points and handing out seven helpers in a 92-82 win at Penn State on Feb. 18.

"The Big Ten, it gets tough," Walker said. "You just have to make it over that hump, and I feel like a lot of teams kind of forget what my capabilities are on the offensive end and the defensive end. I just take advantage of it. I've just been really confident."

"Toward the end of the season, I just want to win."

Although Ohio State dropped its game to Michigan on Feb. 21, Walker scored 15 points on 6-of-9 shooting with three assists.

While Walker was out, the Buckeyes won three of four games, leading the point guard to tell Holtmann that he did not want to mess up the rhythm upon his return. The fourth-year head coach decided to start utilizing Walker as the first man off the bench, a role which he has embraced.

"It's a credit to him that he's been able to kind of come back, assimilate to a group that was winning some games and also helped us continue to perform at a really high level," Holtmann said. "He's given us some things on both ends that have been really good, but particularly it allows us to play more guys. It provides us another paint-touch threat, another ball-handler and a guy at the point of attack defensively that can really help us. We need that from him. We don't have the ability collectively – outside of C.J. and Meechie (Johnson), we've not shown the ability to put great pressure on the ball from our guards, and that's affected our defense some. He helps that."

"And then at the same time, I thought when he was out, there were some games where we clearly wore down, our ball-handling wore down. So just to have him back has been phe-

nomenal."

As for the wrist, Walker still feels pain when contacted and requires hours of treatment while continuing to recover. Regardless, he has played with the fiery competitiveness that helped draw Holtmann to him as a recruit when he was coaching at Butler.

"He's been who he is," Holtmann said. "He's still injured. His hand still bothers him. But he's managed to play well in spite of it."

Young Sets Tone For Team

Ohio State senior forward Kyle Young has been a steady force for the Buckeyes since arriving on campus in 2017. He is the kind of player whom opposing coaches rave about because of his toughness, high-level effort and willingness to do the dirty work.

Young has battled through injuries during most of his time in scarlet and gray, but that has not stopped the former Massillon (Ohio) Jackson standout from helping his team on a consistent basis.

Once again as a senior, Young has been battling through injuries but has pushed through the pain to take the floor on game days. How important is Young to Ohio State basketball? His absence affects the team, even if it's just on the practice floor.

"I think he's a great example," Holtmann said. "We miss him when he can't practice, honestly. It affects our practice in a lot of ways."

Fortunately for the Buckeyes, Young has been able to suit up through the pain. They probably would not have beaten Iowa or Maryland without his stellar play on both ends of the floor.

In Ohio State's four-point victory at Iowa, Young scored 16 points on 5-of-6 shooting, including 2 of 2 from beyond the arc, and he added six rebounds and one steal.

"We need that from him," Holtmann said. "He understands that. He's playing with great confidence now. Kyle's ability to make open shots, to make post-ups, to finish around the glass, to create extra possessions has been really good. It's going to continue to need to be a factor for us."

"He's a really good player and underrated in a lot of ways."

Young followed up his solid showing in Iowa City with a career-high scoring night against

Maryland, posting 18 points on 7-of-12 shooting, including 1 of 2 from deep.

"Early on, I wasn't really playing as tough as I should," Young said. "On a few finishes, even on the defensive end, I wasn't playing with as much force as I should. So I wanted to switch that up pretty quick and was able to do that."

The 6-8, 225-pound forward added four rebounds, two blocks, one steal and one assist in the Buckeyes' eight-point win over the Terrapins.

"He was phenomenal," Holtmann said. "I thought he led the way."

When watching Ohio State, the high motor, physicality and toughness that Young plays with are apparent. He brings relentless effort regularly, giving his teammates a big man they can trust will have their backs.

"I always tell people if I had to pick one guy to go in a tussle with, I'm picking Kyle Young," Duane Washington said. "That's the guy I'm bringing with me everywhere I go."

In addition to his toughness, Young has continued to improve during his time in Columbus. He passed out a career-high five assists in the 10-point victory at Penn State, along with eight points, two boards, two blocks and two steals.

Another major area of improvement for Young has been his three-point shooting. In fact, the three three-pointers that Young made against Iowa and Maryland combined nearly marked his total prior to this season (four).

Young shot just 13.8 percent (4 of 29) from beyond the arc in his first three seasons. Instead of giving up on the outside shot, Young worked tirelessly to improve as a deep threat and drastically improved as a senior. He is shooting 34.8 percent (8 of 23) from three-point range on the season, doubling his previous total and vastly improving his efficiency.

Many of Ohio State's players took large steps forward this season, but Young's improvement has not been lost among the coaching staff.

"I'm just really happy for him that his game has continued to grow because it really has," Holtmann said. "He's taken a giant leap. We've talked about E.J. (Liddell) having improved, and he has. He's been tremendous. And Duane (Washington) and Justin (Ahrens). Kyle Young, throw him in there. His growth has been really, really important for us."

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Michigan 5-Star Corner Sets Announcement Date

Grosse Point (Mich.) South five-star cornerback Will Johnson announced he will make his college decision among Michigan, Ohio State and USC on Feb. 28.

The 6-3, 190-pound Johnson is considered the fourth-best cornerback and No. 8 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He recorded 26 tackles, four pass breakups, two interceptions and one tackle to earn all-state honors this past season. He also added 273 all-purpose yards and six touchdowns on offense.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

The 6-3 and 190-pound Johnson, who is the son of former Wolverines cornerback Deon Johnson (1991-94), landed an offer from the Buckeyes during a virtual visit with head coach Ryan Day and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs last April. He then made his first and only trip to Columbus on Dec. 12, at which time he toured campus with his parents and made stops at Ohio Stadium and the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, though they couldn't meet with the coaching staff due to the ongoing recruiting dead period.

That visit seemingly thrust Ohio State to the forefront of Johnson's recruitment, but

Michigan quickly jumped back into the lead with the hiring of new co-defensive coordinator and defensive backs coach Maurice Linguist, who spent the 2020 season as the secondary coach for the NFL's Dallas Cowboys. There, Linguist notably coached former Wolverines cornerback Jourdan Lewis, who had a pre-existing relationship with Johnson and offered an endorsement of his one-time position coach.

It's expected that Johnson will choose the Wolverines as a result, though it's impressive the Buckeyes were able to make things so close, especially considering he never met Day or Coombs in person and grew up with Michigan paraphernalia around his home. There's a slight chance he chooses the Trojans, though, given his desire to play alongside 2022 Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star cornerback Domani Jackson, who pledged his services to USC on Jan. 23.

Additionally if Johnson wants to move away from home, playing for the Trojans would certainly be much more palatable for his family and friends than him choosing the Buckeyes.

With Johnson likely out of the picture, Ohio State will continue to pursue a handful of the nation's top cornerbacks with the hopes of adding one more alongside Jacksonville (Fla.) Robert E. Lee five-star Jaheim Singletary and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Jyaire Brown. Other names to keep in mind include Mauldin, S.C., five-star Jeadyn Lukus; Denton (Texas) Ryan four-star Austin Jordan; St. Louis Lutheran North four-star Toriano



PHOTO COURTESY OF WILL JOHNSON

PICK A SIDE – Grosse Point (Mich.) South five-star cornerback Will Johnson is set to choose among Michigan, Ohio State and USC on Feb. 28.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce secured a 28-man recruiting class for his 1986 group and compared himself to a fisherman in the process.

"Recruiting is always tough," said Bruce, who spent Feb. 12 in and around St. John Arena as he waited for word that each of those who had given verbal commitments to Ohio State had, indeed, signed their names on the dotted line. "There's no such thing as any easy road in recruiting."

"I relate to the fishermen. When you go fishing, it's kind of funny, but when you get back, you like to talk about all the big ones that got in the boat. You don't spend too much time talking about the ones you let get away. So that's what we're doing right now – drawing on the real good football players that are coming to Ohio State."

The signing of 28 recruits represented the largest catch for Bruce since he replaced Woody Hayes at the Buckeye helm for the 1979 season.

30 Years Ago – 1991

St. Louis McCluer fullback Will Hill chose Ohio State despite knowing the position was already deep with veterans Scottie Graham, Raymont Harris, William Houston and Tyrone Harrison.

"Football is a competitive game, and I think everyone gets better the more competition they have," Hill said. "You don't have anybody to push you, where's the motivation?"

He became the second St. Louis-area recruit to join Ohio State in as many years, joining tailback Butler By'not'e in the crowded Buckeye backfield.

25 Years Ago – 1996

Los Angeles Dorsey linebacker Na'il Diggs spent the week-end of Feb. 24-25 on an official visit to Ohio State.

Diggs arrived in Columbus with his sister, Roslyn Simpson, and her husband, former USC basketball coach Charlie Parker, both of whom Diggs had been living with through his high school career.

It was Parker's controversial firing from USC – one day

before the Feb. 7 national signing day – that caused Diggs to rethink his commitment to play football for the Trojans. He was considering Ohio State and Arizona only and told BSB that his visit to Ohio State was "pretty good."

20 Years Ago – 2001

Among the early targets for the class of 2002 was Avon Lake, Ohio, linebacker Mike D'Andrea.

"Ohio State had made an offer prior to the coaching change," said Avon Lake head coach Dave Dlugosz. "I think Coach (Jim) Tressel was named on a Thursday, and by that Sunday he was on my cell phone guaranteeing me that the offer still stands."

An unofficial visit was planned for March 10, but D'Andrea had already been to Nebraska, Notre Dame and Michigan. He had offers from those schools as well as Oklahoma, Boston College, Pittsburgh, Purdue and Wake Forest.

15 Years Ago – 2006

Cincinnati LaSalle defensive end Ben Martin told BSB he'd had conflicted rooting interests when Ohio State and Notre Dame played in the Fiesta Bowl the previous January.

"There were some plays where I was rooting for Notre Dame, and then the next series I'd be liking what Ohio State did," he said. "It wasn't easy to sit through, I do know that."

The talented end was considering both schools heavily and looked forward to taking official visits to both for the upcoming football season.

10 Years Ago – 2011

Michigan extended a scholarship offer to Ohio State commit Kyle Kalis, a four-star offensive tackle from Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward.

"I'm pretty much set on Ohio State, but my mind is still open at this point," he said. "I talked to (U-M offensive line coach) Darrell Funk, and he said they would have offered me when I was 15 if they were the coaches here. He said they really want me, they really need me and how excited they are to get to know me. They want me to come up to see Michigan

and get the blue-carpet treatment."

Five Years Ago – 2016

Ohio State got a pleasant surprise Feb. 9 when Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star defensive tackle Haskell Garrett announced his commitment, but the Buckeyes looked as though they would have to work to keep him in the fold.

"I think this is almost like the commitments we've seen out of south Florida where when you get a junior this early, that just means he knows what state your school is located in," recruiting analyst Bill Greene said. "You've got to keep recruiting him. They've whiffed on this position in each of the last two years but already have a commitment from Jerron Cage, who is a four-star, so you're thrilled to get Haskell Garrett. They're also recruiting Fred Hansard from the East Coast, and if they could land two of these three, they would be thrilled. If you get all three, it's a banner day."

Garrett (6-2, 270) was the No. 2 defensive tackle and No. 22 overall prospect in the class of 2017. He began his high school career at Honolulu St. Louis, the high school that produced former Oregon Ducks quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Mariota.

One Year Ago – 2020

On Feb. 13, Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star running back Evan Pryor narrowed down his list of nearly three dozen scholarship offers to a final six of Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Penn State and USC. The 5-10, 190-pound Pryor was considered the fifth-best running back and the No. 84 prospect overall in the 2021 recruiting.

The Buckeyes were expected to take two running backs in the 2021 class, and Pryor had been among the staff's top priorities at the position since assistant coach Tony Alford extended a scholarship offer in February of 2019.

The two had become close in the meantime, with Pryor receiving one-on-one instruction from Alford during an instructional camp in Columbus in mid-June and then returning to campus for an unofficial visit for the 28-17 win over Penn State in late November.

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

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	6-0	178	★★★★	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

Pride; and Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star Ryan Turner.

Dead Period Extended Again

Although there was optimism that the ongoing recruiting dead period would finally be coming to an end in April, the NCAA Division I Council voted on Feb. 17 to extend it through the end of May.

"After careful consideration of all available information, the council agreed that an extension of the dead period was necessary," NCAA Division I Council chairman and Pennsylvania athletic director M. Grace Calhoun said in a statement. "However, there is a strong commitment to use the next several weeks to outline the transition plan back to recruiting activities post-June 1 and to provide those plans to prospective student-athletes, their families and the NCAA membership no later than April 15."

Prospective student-athletes have been unable to conduct official or unofficial visits since the dead period was implemented last March, but multiple reports suggested the council could change it to a quiet period to allow prospects to make on-campus visits once again beginning April 16. As a result, several Ohio State commitments and targets were planning to make their way to Columbus the following weekend, which coincides with the Buckeyes' annual spring game on April 17, though that will no longer be the case.

Ohio State's lone remaining target from the class of 2021, Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimolou, was also hoping to take an official visit with the Buckeyes before announcing his college decision in late April, but now he'll have to make the trip at his own expense and won't be able to interact with the coaching staff or tour the athletic facilities, similar to the self-guided tours notably taken by 2021 USC four-star linebacker signee Raesjon Davis, 2021 Ohio State four-star offensive tackle signee Zen Michalski and 2022 Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona three-star tight end Bennett Christian, who committed to the Buckeyes shortly after his visit in September, among others.

Even if the NCAA does put a plan in place to resume recruiting activities on June 1, it's unclear what that will mean for summer camps, which typically take place in early June. Given the reluctance to allow in-person interactions, sources within the Ohio State football program have not expressed confidence that the NCAA will permit full-contact camps anytime soon.

Commit's Father Accepts B1G Job

After a three-year stint as the running backs coach for the Kansas City Chiefs, Deland McCullough – the father of Ohio State four-star athlete commit Dasan McCullough – announced on Feb. 8 he had

accepted the job as the new associate head coach and running backs coach at Indiana.

After the news broke, the younger McCullough, who committed to the Buckeyes last August, was asked about the strength of his pledge and used it as an opportunity to talk a little smack to his father in the process.

"I'm beyond happy for my dad and this opportunity," he shared in a graphic posted to Twitter. "It's going to feel good beating him for three or four years. I'm a Buckeye."

McCullough is considered the sixth-best athlete and No. 54 prospect overall in the class of 2022 but will play linebacker at the next level, where he'll team up with a pair of the nation's top-rated players in Marysville, Ohio, four-star Gabe Powers and Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star C.J. Hicks. He previously attended Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley North but will finish out his high school career at Bloomington (Ind.) South, the same school his older brother, Deland Jr., attended during their father's previous stint with the Hoosiers from 2011-16.

When he officially enrolls at his new high school, McCullough will become the highest-ranked player in the state of Indiana and will be in the conversation to be the best player from the Hoosier State to ever sign with Ohio State, though he'll need a slight bump in the rankings to surpass former Fort Wayne Paul Harding four-star running back Rod Smith, who was the No. 45 overall prospect when he signed with the Buckeyes in the class of 2010.

Five-Star DT Names Top Schools

Ohio State already holds a commitment from the top-rated offensive player in the class of 2022 in Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star quarterback Quinn Ewers and finds itself in a position to land the country's best defensive player, as well, after Cordova (Tenn.) St. Benedict at Auburndale five-star defensive tackle Walter Nolan included the Buckeyes in his top 10 on Feb. 12, along with Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Florida, LSU, Michigan, Oregon, Tennessee and USC.

As mentioned, the 6-4 and 300-pound Nolan is considered the top-rated defensive tackle and No. 2 prospect overall in his cycle after he recorded 92 tackles, 26 tackles for loss, 21 quarterback hurries, two sacks, two forced fumbles and one fumble recovery to lead Olive Branch, Miss., to the state playoffs in 2019. He then transferred to Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy last February but returned to the Memphis area over the summer without ever playing a snap for the Ascenders.

Nolan, who garnered first-team all-region and all-metro honors this past fall, landed a scholarship offer from defensive line coach Larry Johnson during a virtual

Continued On Page 10



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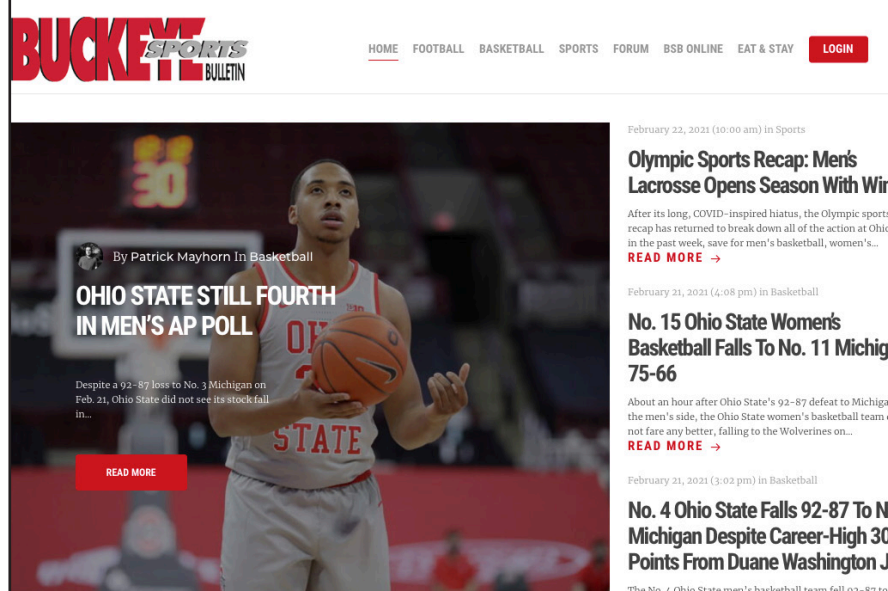
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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

DT Puts OSU In Top 10

Continued From Page 9

visit in November and has maintained contact with Johnson and defensive graduate assistant Lorenzo Jackson ever since. He's never been to campus but hopes to visit for the first time when the recruiting dead period comes to a close.

If Ohio State does ultimately sign both Ewers and Nolen, the Buckeyes will become just the fourth school to land the nation's top-rated player on both sides of the ball, according to the 247Sports composite team rankings, joining Texas with quarterback Vince Young and defensive tackle Rodrique Wright in 2002; Ole Miss with offensive tackle Laremy Tunsil and defensive end Robert Nkemdiche in 2013; and Clemson with quarterback Trevor Lawrence and defensive end Xavier Thomas in 2018. No team has ever signed the top two players overall, though.

The Buckeyes are still looking for their first commitment along the defensive line but are in a good spot with a number of top players at the position. That includes Philadelphia Imhotep Charter five-star end Enai White; Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson five-star end Jeremiah Alexander; Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star tackle Caden Curry; 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, among others.

Four-Star Corner Trims List Of Offers

The previously mentioned Jordan included Ohio State in his top 10 on Feb. 15. Also listed were Auburn, Georgia, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Penn State, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

The 5-11, 185-pound Jordan is considered the 19th-best cornerback and No. 167 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He recorded four forced fumbles, three interceptions and two fumble recoveries that he returned for a touchdown to lead the Raiders to a state title this past fall. He's also a track star who has posted times of 10.98 seconds and 22.08 seconds in the 100- and 200-meter dashes, respectively.

While Jordan landed an offer from former co-defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley in October 2019, he's built a strong relationship over the last year with defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs and secondary coach Matt Barnes. He's never been to campus but hopes to make his first trip when the dead period comes to an end.

One thing that helps the Buckeyes in their pursuit of Jordan is that they've recruited the state of Texas well in recent years, so there's no doubt they'll get a boost in the race to land his pledge with Ewers and Del Valle five-star wide receiver Caleb Burton already in the fold.

Ohio State Offers In-State Offensive Lineman

Ohio State offered a scholarship to Findlay, Ohio, offensive lineman Luke Montgomery on Feb. 18, making him the third in-state prospect from the class of 2023 to land an offer from the Buckeyes, joining Mentor four-star defensive end Brenan Vernon and Pickerington Central safety Sonny Styles.

The 6-5, 260-pound Montgomery is not

yet ranked by any major recruiting sites but figures to be one of the top-rated prospects in his class. He's already picked up offers from Cincinnati, Florida State, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Virginia, Virginia Tech and West Virginia, among others. He also excels on the basketball court, as he previously played for LeBron James' North Coast Blue Chips AAU team and now competes for Indiana Elite.

Day, offensive line coach Greg Studrawa – who grew up in Fostoria, just 25 minutes from Montgomery's hometown – and graduate assistant Kennedy Cook have been in contact with Montgomery for several months now, and the two sides speak a couple of times each week. The Buckeyes hoped to get him on campus for an unofficial visit and then offer this spring, but the recent extension of the dead period meant they couldn't wait any longer or they risked falling behind other programs in the race to land his pledge.

It also seems unlikely that there will be summer recruiting camps, and the inability to work with Montgomery in that setting means Ohio State is confident in his future development – especially since he's never played offensive tackle but will transition to the position as a junior after playing tight end and defensive end in the past.

Given Montgomery's growing offer sheet, he doesn't plan to make his college decision until the spring or summer before his senior year. But his family is close to sophomore offensive tackle Paris Johnson's family, and he's been building a relationship with Vernon and Powers, which certainly works in the Buckeyes' favor moving forward.

Ohio State Offer A Game-Changer

Ohio State extended an offer to Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star defensive tackle Christen Miller on Feb. 4, and it didn't take long for defensive line coach Larry Johnson to make an impact in his recruitment.

In fact, the 6-5 and 285-pound Miller – who is considered the 10th-best defensive tackle and No. 159 prospect overall in the class of 2022 and hails from the same high school that produced senior defensive tackle Antwan Jackson – quickly added the Buckeyes to the list of top schools he had unveiled just a few hours earlier that day that previously included only Florida, Georgia, Georgia Tech and Indiana.

Miller and his teammate, 2022 defensive end Joshua White, visited Ohio State last October for the season opener against Nebraska, though the recruiting dead period prevented them from attending the game or meeting with the coaching staff. It's clear that trip made a lasting impression, though.

Miller plans to make his college decision on April 4, with the home-state Bulldogs widely considered the favorite to land his pledge. If he's intent on taking another visit to Columbus before making a commitment, he'll have to do it on his own dime once again or push his announcement date back a couple of months.

White, meanwhile, included Ohio State in his top six on Feb. 7 alongside Arkansas, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Mississippi State and Nebraska. The 6-4, 240-pound White is not yet ranked by any major recruiting sites but has drawn comparisons to Jackson since he transferred from DeKalb (Ga.) Stephenson last summer.

ASK AN ANALYST

With Lettermen Row's Jeremy Birmingham

With the NCAA extending the recruiting dead period through at least May 31, is it possible that 2021 Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimolaou will accelerate his decision timeline, or do you anticipate he'll still take visits on his own dime before announcing his school of choice in April?

"It looks like Tuimolaou is still intending to make visits with his family at some point, but the dead period being pushed back means that there's no reason to wait until April to do that if he wants to move up the visits. He and his family have handled his recruitment very privately, and it wouldn't be a surprise to see them pop up on campuses without any fanfare or notice of any kind."

Ohio State already holds commitments from the top three players and four of the top six players in the state for the class of 2022 in Marysville four-star linebacker Gabe Powers, Kettering Alter four-star linebacker C.J. Hicks, West Chester Lakota West four-star cornerback Jyaire Brown and his teammate, four-star offensive tackle Tegra Tshabola, while the only other local player with an offer at this juncture, Strongsville three-star offensive tackle

Blake Miller, has pledged his services to Clemson. Do you think there are any players worth keeping an eye on as potential offer candidates?

"The state of Ohio has, as always, a number of talented players that are still being evaluated by Ohio State, and I think the primary two to monitor heading into the summer and their senior seasons are Lakewood St. Edward four-star defensive end Trey Bixby and Kettering Archbishop Alter four-star defensive tackle Derrick Shepard. Committed to Minnesota and Cincinnati, respectively, they're both worth watching, especially if the Buckeyes are able to hold any sort of evaluation period or camp this summer, though that seems less and less likely."

Ohio State finally offered a scholarship on Feb. 18 to 2023 Findlay, Ohio, lineman Luke Montgomery, who over the last few months also landed offers from Cincinnati, Florida State, Kentucky, Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State, Virginia Tech and West Virginia, among others. Do you believe it's only a matter of time before he joins the fold?

"There's no doubt that the offer from the Buckeyes will serve as a recruitment-changer for Montgomery, but with

the big offers he's already been entertaining, it wouldn't be a surprise to see him take a little time to sort out a decision. That time may not be a bad thing for him or Ohio State, as the relationship needs to develop a bit more and Montgomery himself would be well-served to put some more good offensive line film to his résumé. Eventually, though, it would be surprising if he wasn't a leader of the 2023 Ohio State recruiting class."

Though he was the first player to commit to Ohio State for the class of 2022, doing so last April, there seems to be some concern about the strength of Brown's pledge. How come?

"This recruiting cycle is going to be full of these stories, I think. Kids are committing much sooner than ever before and doing it without real hard facts about the schools they've pledged to, since they can't visit and are being vocal about keeping their options open. Brown is a talented player that the Buckeyes would love to have in their 2022 class, but both parties need to be honest about the fact that there are ongoing evaluations. At some point, Brown will probably feel compelled to visit other schools, if able. As long as he's honest about his intentions and plans that won't be a problem for Ohio State."

Other Notes From Around The Country

- Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra five-star quarterback Maalik Murphy committed to Texas on Feb. 13. He's one of just four quarterbacks in the class of 2022 to hold an offer from Ohio State, joining Ewers; Tiger (Ga.) Rabun County five-star Gunner Stockton; and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic three-star Steve Angeli.

- Though he was considered one of Ohio State's top targets at the cornerback position for the 2022 recruiting cycle, Houston North Shore five-star Denver Harris announced a top four of Alabama, LSU, Texas and Texas A&M on Feb. 21.

- Ohio State extended a handful of offers since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, including to 2023 Waco (Texas) Connally running back Tre Wisner on

Feb. 10; 2023 Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence tight end Ty Lockwood on Feb. 17; and 2023 Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton four-star defensive end Lebbeus Overton; 2023 Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic four-star running back Justin Haynes and Albany (Ga.) Dougherty Comprehensive defensive end Stantavious Smith on Feb. 18.

Overton's offer is especially notable

given it was a two-sport offer, giving him the chance to play both football and basketball for the Buckeyes. He is the teammate of 2022 Ohio State four-star point guard commit Bruce Thornton.

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Inexperience And Potential Highlight QB Battle

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State did well at the quarterback position during the 2020 recruiting cycle, bringing in a pair of four-star recruits in Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud who both looked like they could develop into Justin Fields' successor when Fields, as most expected, departed for the NFL after his junior season.

Although it is never easy to bring in a new quarterback without starting experience, it seemed that both Miller and Stroud would get ample in-game experience during garbage time, with the Buckeyes coming off a 2019 season when they outscored every regular-season opponent by 10 or more and 11 of the 12 teams by 24 or more, finishing with the best point differential (33.2) in the Football Bowl Subdivision.

In that 2019 campaign, backup quarterback Chris Chugunov played in 10 games and third-string quarterback Gunnar Hoak played in five, with the pair combining for 49 pass attempts, which may not be substantial but would have been enough to give head coach Ryan Day a taste of what is to come from both Miller and Stroud.

But then, the COVID-19 pandemic shortened the season to a maximum of eight regular-season games, which was shortened even further after three cancellations, which meant that Ohio State had just five opportunities to get a lead large enough to give either of its true freshman signal callers a chance to prove his worth.

Miller and Stroud saw time in three regular-season games, combining for 17 total snaps in wins over Nebraska, Rutgers and Michigan State. And while both showed their capabilities in the run game, with Miller scoring a rushing touchdown against the Cornhuskers and Stroud doing the same against the Spartans, neither threw a single collegiate pass in 2020.

Then, as expected, Fields entered the 2021 NFL draft, and Ohio State is now in a place it was hoping not to be heading into this off-season when it came to the quarterbacks room.

"You recruit guys for a reason, and you've got to develop them, and you've got to get them out there and you've got to let them play," Day said. "They haven't played in games. I mean, they've had a couple reps here and there, but they haven't actually played. They've practiced a lot, so I think they're getting a feel for the offense, which is great. But there's nothing like game reps. As you guys know, you don't really know until you get them in the game. So that's been hard for them. So maybe once we get going in the spring, we'll try to figure out how to address that issue."

Of course, another quarterback entering the battle without a collegiate throw is five-star prospect Kyle McCord, who Day said is going to compete for the starting job immediately out of high school.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke with three recruiting writers – Jeremy Birmingham of Lettermen Row, Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop and Ari Wasserman of The Athletic – on what their thoughts are on the incoming quarterback battle and what they have seen from each of the quarterbacks in high school that could make a difference when spring football begins.

Looking back at the start of the 2020 season, Birmingham said that he was certainly expecting Miller and Stroud to be able to show their talents on the field, especially before the pandemic took its toll on Ohio State's schedule, which previously included nonconference matchups against Bowling

Green, Buffalo and Oregon.

"Prior to the COVID stuff happening and with the expectation that there was going to be a full season, I think that, when you looked at the Buckeyes' schedule, you thought that there could have been an opportunity for both C.J. and Jack to play a pretty healthy amount in that first month," Birmingham said. "Clearly, last year any meaningful rep was going to be taken by Justin, but also they knew that they had to start preparing someone for the future. And then, clearly, that didn't get a chance to happen because of the way the schedule ended up being."

Even if the two quarterbacks in the 2020 class had been able to get more meaningful on-field action, that didn't necessarily mean that Day would have a clear-cut decision made as far as who was going to be Ohio State's quarterback of the future.

Wasserman said that he was also expecting more snaps for Miller and Stroud but that he was not expecting an answer on Fields' successor by the end of the 2020 season.

"My expectation was never that either of them was going to win the job," Wasserman said. "Going into the year I thought for the very least in a condensed season that Ohio State would dominate teams and keep Justin Fields out for precautionary reasons, like in second halves and stuff if they got ahead, and that both guys would be able to play a ton because I thought it was a pivotal year for both of them to kind of prove what they can do and gain some valuable experience. I thought that Ryan Day would want to avoid the situation that they're now in which is having a starting quarterback who's never thrown a pass in college football."

"It didn't go that way. Part of the reason why is they had some games canceled against teams that they probably would have blown out. They had some closer games against teams that you might not have expected them to be close with, and it just didn't happen that way. But my expectation was that both would play and both would gain experience and that we'd have kind of a better grasp of who these guys are during this off-season, and right now we don't."

Birmingham shared a similar sentiment, saying that he isn't sure that the Buckeyes were even planning to have a solid answer on the backup quarterback last year.

"I thought that they would split it up half and half," Birmingham said. "I don't know that even Ohio State expected either one of those guys to sort of pull ahead, nor did they really need one of them to. What they really needed for them was just to get reps."

Miller and Stroud split 17 regular-season snaps, with Miller earning 10, including the first snaps of either backup during the Nebraska game, and Stroud had seven, primarily coming in the Michigan State game heading into post-season play. There, it was expected that neither first-year quarterback would have to be thrust onto the field in such important games for Ohio State's quest for a national championship.

That was indeed the case against Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game, but in the College Football Playoff semifinal against Clemson, an opportunity arose. Fields took a shot to his ribs on a hit by Tigers linebacker James Skalski that led to his ejection for targeting. The next play, while Ohio State was evaluating the extent of Fields' injury, it was Stroud who came in as the replacement.

Although Stroud took only one snap, handing the ball off to running back Trey Sermon for no gain before Fields came back and immediately threw a 9-yard touchdown to wide receiver Chris Olave, that moment was pivotal to

Greene as far as who may have an advantage in the quarterback battle next season.

"The telltale sign was when Fields got hurt in the playoffs, he missed one play, but at the time, when he walks off the field, you don't know if he's ever coming back," Greene said. "You don't know, at that point. Stroud got put in in the playoffs, everything on the line, playing for a national championship. So that was all we really needed to see to know who was ahead of who at that point."

"It was pretty clear to me that when they went to Stroud at that point, he's the guy that's ahead of Miller, because that was all the marbles, that wasn't garbage time. The first game of the year was Nebraska, and they put Miller in first there, but that didn't really mean that much to me. But when you're in the playoffs, and you're fighting for your lives, that meant something to me when they turn to Stroud. So I think Stroud's got the advantage."

Stroud came to Ohio State as a four-star prospect out of Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., ranking as the No. 42 overall prospect and the second-best pro-style quarterback in the 2020 class. While that was his ranking in the 247Sports composite, which is compiled from 247Sports' own rankings along with those of two other media sources, the 247Sports rankings themselves had Stroud as a five-star, ranking him No. 29 in the class.

But the road to being a top-50 prospect was not something that many expected. Stroud was ranked as low as No. 860 in the composite rankings on Feb. 28, 2019. Eventually, Stroud started to pick up some recognition, moving up to No. 511 on May 31 of the same year, but his meteoric rise began at the Elite 11 Finals, where he was named MVP of the competition on July 3, 2019.

"He wasn't just dinking and dunking," Barton Simmons, who is now the general manager at Vanderbilt but was at 247Sports at the time, wrote on Stroud. "Stroud mixed his throws up, completing passes all over the field and he showed the ability to hit tight windows on deeper breaking routes. A relative unknown on a national scale heading into the event, Stroud looks poised to be a darling of any school, blueblood or otherwise, that is on the hunt for a quarterback."

The performance jumped Stroud 259 spots to No. 252 and set him up to prove something in his senior season, which he more than managed to accomplish.

In 2018, Stroud's junior year, he completed 60.0 percent of his passes for 2,342 yards, 19 touchdowns and six interceptions, numbers that showed potential but that didn't fly off the page. In 2019, Stroud had increases in his statistics all across the board, completing 65.9 percent of his passes for 3,878 yards, 47 touchdowns and nine interceptions.

"He didn't play much as a sophomore at all," Greene said. "And then his junior year, he was OK. He was decent, but then his senior year he took a leap. He was also a heck of a basketball player and played a lot of summer basketball and stuff like that. So he was just kind of a late developer. But his senior year was amazing. By the time Christmas came around, Thanksgiving came around, you knew that guy was amazing. He just got better and better."

Wasserman said that the buzz around Stroud really began with his Elite 11 performance and that Stroud is a good example of a high school prospect who showed his potential late, something that many recruits in the 2021 cycle, and possibly beyond, may struggle to show to programs because of canceled games and missing camps because of the coronavirus.

"He camped his ass off and performed really

well and had a really great senior season, and basically is the poster child of what players in the COVID era haven't had the opportunity to do," Wasserman said. "How many C.J. Strouds were there in the 2021 class who never got to participate in all the camps and didn't have senior seasons?"

"If he was a year younger, he might be at Baylor right now, so I think that everybody views him as the favorite to win the job, and he's a tremendous athlete and a tremendous football player and comes from a diverse background of Los Angeles where he has had some pretty interesting life experience. So when it comes to leadership and understanding of what it is to be an adult, I think that he has an edge there. But a meteoric rise in his senior season is a nice way to go into college."

Even without a pass attempt to his college résumé, Stroud (6-3, 205) found a way to impress late in a 52-12 blowout win over Michigan State. With under five minutes to play in the fourth quarter, Stroud called his own number on a run play, took it to the right and burst through a massive gap in the defense to break for a 48-yard touchdown.

It was Stroud's only registered stat on the season, which gives him a remarkable 48.0 yards per carry heading into 2021, while also showing some of that athleticism that he possesses as a quarterback, even after rushing for 234 total yards and five rushing scores in his final two high school seasons.

"He's athletic enough to make plays with his feet," Birmingham said. "People see that. And he played at Rancho Cucamonga, which was not one of California's best high schools, but he made them competitive. And he certainly was a kid that once you saw him around players of his caliber, you could see how he's in a different space."

But Stroud's spot at the top of the depth chart for the upcoming season is by no means set in stone, and one of the quarterbacks he will have to beat out is the one he shared the room with all last year in Miller.

Miller was also a four-star coming out of high school, ranking as the 13th-best pro-style quarterback and No. 334 prospect overall out of Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chapparal in the 2020 class. He was also a very early commitment for the Buckeyes, announcing his pledge on July 1, 2018, behind only cornerback Lejond Cavazos and offensive tackles Paris Johnson and Max Wray, though Cavazos would eventually decommit and recommit following the departure of head coach Urban Meyer.

That is a stark contrast to Stroud, who committed and signed on the same day – Dec. 18, 2019 – during the early signing period.

Those differences make sense considering the near-opposite trajectories that Miller and Stroud took during their recruitments. While Stroud took until the Elite 11 Finals and his senior season to become the highly touted prospect he would ultimately become, Miller immediately garnered national attention for his play in his freshman season.

During that 2016 campaign, Miller played at Scottsdale Christian and dominated the competition, completing 58.6 percent of his passes for 3,653 yards, 53 touchdowns and 15 interceptions. He also ran the ball 92 times for 831 yards (9.0 yards per carry) and eight scores. He picked up an offer from Louisiana Tech before 2016 was over then followed that up with various offers, including from Arizona, Florida State and Ole Miss, before he even played as a sophomore.

"I mean he was a really good prospect," Wasserman said. "He's got a live arm. He's way more able to run than people give him credit

for. And I guess you could probably make the argument that he's the most pure dual-threat quarterback that Ohio State has. Ryan Day's brilliance is his ability to take the talent that they have at that position, and I think you just make a decision based on who's the best and design the offense around him. And Urban Meyer would like to say this, that designing an offense around an elite player is the easy part. Getting the elite player is hard. So I don't know that you'll pick a quarterback based on who has the dual-threat ability, but he was a good runner."

Miller transferred to Scottsdale Chapparral for his sophomore season, not for an increased level of competition, but because, according to Jack Miller Sr. in a report by Richard Obert of AZCentral, his son was going through counseling after his freshman season after a family friend, Gerard Mauvis, was struck by a car and killed on his way to see Miller play at Scottsdale Christian on Sept. 30, 2016.

But Miller was never able to find the same level of magic at Chapparral that he found at Christian. Miller averaged 1,929.0 passing yards and 20.7 passing touchdowns during his sophomore, junior and senior years, completing 55.7 percent of his passes in that span.

In the run game, Miller had just 566 yards and six touchdowns combined over the three seasons, numbers that fall well short of what he accomplished in just his freshman year.

Some of that lack of development can be attributed to Miller's struggles with injuries while at Chapparral, where he sustained injuries to his back, MCL and shoulder. Miller played 10 games in 2017, eight games in 2018 and seven in 2019 after playing 13 as a freshman at Christian.

"When you get injured as much as he did and kind of had some of the rankings fall and sat out a lot of the camps and wasn't able to play as much as he would have liked, it kind of gives you an idea that this isn't a complete picture of who Jack Miller is," Wasserman said. "I think the early ratings that a player gets when they are sophomores and juniors is more so about projection to what they're going to be when they're seniors, and Jack never really got an opportunity to develop into that potential. So even though his ratings slipped, I do think he's a very good quarterback and somebody who has a unique skill set when it comes to running the football."

Birmingham said that Miller's blocking protection also didn't do the developing quarterback any favors as he tried to improve his game.

"The offensive line there was very mediocre, and I'm saying that kindly," Birmingham said. "If you watch his tape, especially his junior tape, he was just running around like a chicken with his head cut off a lot, and I think it really slowed down his development. But you always saw when he had time to set his feet and make a throw, he was accurate, he was on time and that's what Ohio State liked a lot when they saw him in the summer of 2017 was that he was the kid who really put the ball on the spot."

Like Stroud, Miller (6-3, 215) earned all of his Ohio State statistics in one game, carrying the ball two times for 23 yards in Ohio State's season opener against Nebraska. There, Miller had a lengthy carry of 21 yards before punching it in from 2 yards out for his first collegiate score, a score that Day would later apologize to Nebraska head coach Scott Frost about for running up the score in what was a 52-17 victory.

"I feel bad about that," Day said. "I had a younger quarterback in the game, and I didn't feel like we had the personnel to take the knee. I probably should have done that. So I just want to publicly apologize to them, to Scott."

Past the two returning scholarship quarterbacks is McCord, the lone five-star of the group who comes from Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep

as the third-best pro-style quarterback and No. 27 overall prospect in the 2021 class. His play in high school earned him a comparison to Los Angeles Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford by 247Sports national recruiting analyst Brian Dohn.

"Wide-shouldered frame with good height and size," Dohn wrote. "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."

Like Miller, McCord flashed early and committed early, earning the starting job at St. Joseph's Prep as a sophomore and immediately impressing, completing 66.5 percent of his passes for 2,883 yards and 38 touchdowns on the way to the first of what would be three consecutive state championships in his high school career.

"I just hope that people understand that five-stars means that the people who project these athletes view them as potential first-round draft picks," Wasserman said. "McCord has a really, really big arm, and a lot of people view him in a way where he is a transcendent talent, and maybe if Ohio State's roster was stacked up a little differently, I would give him more of a chance to win the job because of ability alone. He certainly has the ability to do it."

McCord followed that season up with a junior year throwing for 2,399 yards and 31 touchdowns, a season that was cut four games short due to injury. But in a shortened senior season due to the pandemic, the five-star signal-caller dominated, throwing for 1,582 yards, 21 touchdowns and just three interceptions in a six-game season all the way to another state title.

He completed 64.7 percent of his passes on the season and had a six-touchdown performance in the semifinal before throwing for 336 yards and four scores in the state championship game.

"Kyle is sort of the quintessential quarterback prospect," Birmingham said. "He comes from a big-time high school, St. Joe's Prep. He's won state championships. He's the son of a quarterback (Derek McCord, who played at Rutgers). He's been trained by (former NFL player) Phil Simms. I mean, all the things that the other guys haven't really had on their side – the big-time high school, all the coaching, the athletic lineage, the ability to be around NFL guys – I mean, all those things that he's had."

"And then you combine that with the fact that he's 6-3, 215 pounds, physically, he might be the most college-ready of that group. And then he throws probably the best ball. He's got the biggest arm of the group, for sure."

Greene said that he would not pick against Stroud as the favorite for winning the starting job at Ohio State this season, but he also warned against doubting McCord too much considering the talent that he possesses.

"I wouldn't say he has no chance to start this year. I would not say that," Greene said. "He's really good, and he would be more college-ready coming out of his high school program than Stroud was coming out of his high school program. McCord, he's further along, further developed than what Stroud was, but Stroud got the year under Ryan Day in the system, so we'll see. I mean, I wouldn't rubber-stamp Stroud as the automatic starter over McCord, not at all. McCord is really good, and people are winning with freshman quarterbacks now."

Wasserman agrees that McCord's talent

gives him a real chance at earning the job, but he thinks that there is more in play for Day when considering the depth that Ohio State is hoping to have at the quarterback position for years to come.

"We can't ignore the elephant in the room here, and that elephant is that if a true freshman wins the job and beats out two players who are a year ahead of him, that's going to decimate the room," Wasserman said. "McCord will cause those two to leave if he wins the job, so not only are you trying to find the best possible quarterback to win the battle, but you also have to play the game the right way because you don't want to lose incredibly valuable depth. I think in order for McCord to win the job as a true freshman, he's going to have to be leaps and bounds better than the two quarterbacks who have been in the program for a year."

The transfer portal has become a consistent fixture in college football, allowing various players to go to new programs, often with the intention of finding a more sizable role with a new team. In some cases, Ohio State has benefited greatly from the transfer portal, bringing in players such as Fields, guard Jonah Jackson from Rutgers and Sermon from Oklahoma.

But the Buckeyes have also had their fair share of departures, some of which were most notably at the quarterback position, with Matthew Baldwin leaving for TCU and Tate Martell leaving for Miami (Fla.) in the same offseason. A year before that, it was Joe Burrow who left for LSU and eventually became a Heisman Trophy winner, a national champion and the No. 1 pick in the 2020 NFL draft.

"I don't know what happened at the college level, but something happened in the last five or six years where freshman quarterbacks feel like they should play as freshmen," Wasserman said. "In the past, it used to be come in, learn the offense, get bigger, get stronger, get faster, develop, and then when you're a redshirt sophomore you have two years at it and then you go be a draft pick. Now it's more of a question of how fast can these guys start and when are they going to start."

Still, despite the growing occurrence of players using the portal, Birmingham said that it will likely not have much of an impact on whom Day decides to name his starting quarterback in week one.

"I think that outside looking in, you may think that it would," Birmingham said. "But we're not being paid six-plus million dollars a year to win football games, and your job is to put the best players out there and then let the chips fall where they may. I think that it's naive to believe that a transfer doesn't happen at some point, because that's just the way the game is trending. But I think what you see Ohio State do rather than go out there and try to find someone that is a potential fly in the ointment for whichever quarterbacks are in there."

While juggling three quarterbacks this offseason is difficult enough, there will be another name added to the mix in 2022. That name is Quinn Ewers, Ohio State's five-star commit out of Southlake (Texas) Carroll. He is currently not only the top prospect in the 2022 class but is tied for the highest-rated prospect in the modern recruiting era, scoring a perfect 1.0000 composite ranking.

As a sophomore in 2019, Ewers completed 72.4 percent of his passes for 4,003 yards and 45 touchdowns to just three interceptions, while also rushing for 568 yards and nine more touchdowns in 14 games. He followed that up with a junior year when he completed 66.0 percent of his throws for 2,442 yards and 28 scores to five picks in eight games.

Ewers flipped his commitment from Texas to Ohio State on Nov. 19 and would currently be the highest rated prospect to ever play for the Buckeyes if his commitment and recruiting

ranking holds, an honor currently held by Fields.

Despite all of that, Greene does not think that this year's quarterback battle will be impacted by what Ewers is expected to bring to Columbus in the near future.

"That wouldn't come into play at all. Those are just high school rankings," Greene said. "Ryan Day, he has to win, and they've got a team that is going to be favored to win the Big Ten next year, and winning the Big Ten almost guarantees you a spot into the playoffs. He's looking at winning a national title next year, so he can't worry about Quinn Ewers at all. And again, there's no guarantee that Quinn Ewers is going to be better than Miller, Stroud or McCord. Those are just high school rankings. Sometimes we hit and sometimes we miss them."

The commitment of Ewers also could put pressure on McCord, who finds himself between two quarterbacks with a year of experience at Ohio State and the highest rated recruit in Ohio State history behind him.

But Birmingham said McCord is ready for the challenge that awaits him this year and that he cannot be worried about a player who has not yet arrived on campus.

"When Quinn committed, Kyle McCord told me pretty straight up, 'If I'm worried about being beat out by a guy behind me, I'm not going to beat the guys in front of me,'" Birmingham said. "Certainly those discussions, those concerns become more real if you're the third-string guy. But for right now, for everyone in that room, the goal was to be the starter at Ohio State, and who cares what's coming next."

Greene echoed Birmingham's sentiments and is not ready to count McCord out as a real starting candidate this year.

"I'm just telling you, don't sleep on Kyle McCord," Greene said. "He can play. I don't think people are real excited about Kyle, because they're so excited about C.J. Stroud. And then of course, everybody's so hyped up about Quinn Ewers, and they should be. But I'm just telling you, Kyle McCord is not like a bridge guy that will just hang in there until somebody beats him out. He could end up being the starter at Ohio State and beat out Stroud and Ewers. So it'll be fun to watch and compete."

Fields leaves Ohio State as one of the most decorated quarterbacks in program history and is likely to become a top-10 pick in the upcoming NFL draft, but Ohio State has three quarterbacks with loads of talent who all have a chance to try to fill the big shoes he is leaving behind.

Considering what this quarterback room looked like just a few seasons ago, according to Greene, this is a strong place for Day and company to be.

"I think they're in great shape," Greene said. "It wasn't that long ago that we were watching Tate Martell and Matthew Baldwin and it looked like they might be next up at Ohio State. You don't want that. These guys are so much further ahead of Martell and Baldwin, it's not even funny."

As far as trying to predict how the quarterback battle will shake out not just this year but for years to come, Wasserman said it's best to leave that to the psychics.

"I had been covering Ohio State for a decade, and I used to spend hours on podcasts every year trying to project the future of the quarterback position and who's going to start and what year, and every time it never turns out the way I said it was going to," Wasserman said. "In terms of projecting what things are going to look like at the quarterback position in 2024, you might as well just call Miss Cleo or something and try to figure this out because I don't know that anybody really knows exactly how things will play out when you've got four kids this talented."

Breaking Down OSU's Pre-Spring Depth Chart

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

Though no official date has been set, Ohio State is preparing to begin spring practices in early March, culminating with the annual spring game on April 17.

Plenty of talent returns from a squad that won its fourth straight Big Ten title, avenged a controversial loss to Clemson and made it to the national championship game. But, then again, there are also a number of question marks on the roster after the Buckeyes lost a Heisman Trophy finalist in quarterback Justin Fields, a unanimous All-American in offensive guard Wyatt Davis, a consensus All-American in cornerback Shaun Wade and the program's single-game rushing leader in running back Trey Sermon, among others.

What follows is Buckeye Sports Bulletin's pre-spring projection of Ohio State's depth chart, which will be updated over the next few weeks as various position battles begin to sort themselves out. However, it does not account for the extra year of eligibility granted to student-athletes due to the coronavirus pandemic unless otherwise noted, as the NCAA has not yet made a determination on if the players will retain their class designation from 2020 or if they will simply tack on the additional year on the back end if necessary.

Quarterback

Under normal circumstances, Ohio State would have been able to get sophomore quarterbacks Jack Miller (6-3, 215) and C.J. Stroud (6-3, 205) playing time in the non-conference portion of the schedule or in games that got out of hand, but the Buckeyes weren't afforded such opportunities in 2020.

In fact, Fields played a majority of the snaps this past fall, coming off the field only on the final drives of wins over Nebraska, Rutgers and Michigan State, as well as when he took a shot to the ribs in the victory against Clemson. Neither Miller nor Stroud threw a pass as a result, though both had a rushing touchdown in limited duty.

That, of course, is a concern for head coach Ryan Day as he heads into his third season at the helm.

"Anytime you're playing with quarterbacks who haven't played, your comfort level is not real high, I can promise you that," Day said on Dec. 16.

The lack of returning experience in the quarterback room ultimately makes it a three-way battle, with early enrollee freshman Kyle McCord (6-3, 215) looking to become the first true freshman signal-caller to start for the Buckeyes since Braxton Miller in 2011.

"He will compete for the job," Day said. "I know he's excited about getting here early on and competing the minute he walks in the door."

No matter who wins the battle, though, Ohio State will enter the 2021 season with an unknown commodity behind center. That makes spring practice – and eventually fall camp – all the more important.

"I wish we were further along," Day said on Jan. 22. "We're going to have to find ways this spring between C.J., Jack and Kyle to give them as many game-like situations to figure out what exactly we've got. We can't go into that first game without knowing."

Running Back

While the quarterback battle figures to get the most attention this spring, figuring out who will line up beside him in the backfield

will be equally important.

Ohio State has to replace Sermon, the Oklahoma graduate transfer whose 524 yards and three scores against Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game and Clemson in the Sugar Bowl brought back memories of former running back Ezekiel Elliott's unprecedented three-game stretch on the way to the 2014 national championship. But he suffered a shoulder injury on the first play of the loss to Alabama, and while junior Master Teague picked up the slack with two touchdowns of his own, it was clear the Buckeyes were planning to make Sermon a focal point of the offense against the Crimson Tide.

Teague (5-11, 225) will be the frontrunner as the spring begins after he rushed for 514 yards and eight touchdowns last season. But he'll also face stiff competition from five other scholarship running backs, including junior Marcus Crowley (6-1, 205), sophomores Steele Chambers (6-1, 220) and Miyan Williams (5-8, 227) and early enrollees TreVeyon Henderson (5-11, 195) and Evan Pryor (5-10, 190).

"There's a lot of depth and certainly a lot of talent," Day said on Jan. 22. "What a great opportunity this spring to have these guys go compete. We're going to try to do the best we can to simulate games this spring to get a feel for where these guys are at."

"Master comes back, which is great. He brings some experience to the table. Marcus Crowley is now coming off that ACL (injury suffered in November 2019), so now we get to see the best version of him. Miyan really popped this year, showed some great things. Steele is going to get an opportunity to compete, and then you have two young guys (in Henderson and Pryor), I know that they are coming in here to play. There's a lot of depth there, but there is also an opportunity for those guys to come in and compete. It's going to be exciting to watch."

The amount of talent and varying skills in the room should give Ohio State the opportunity to have a complementary two-running back system in 2021, most likely with Teague taking on the role former running back Mike Weber had in 2017 when freshman J.K. Dobbins ascended to the top of the depth chart and received the bulk of the carries. The key for running backs coach Tony Alford could be getting Henderson or Pryor up to speed on pass-blocking and other responsibilities that often keep freshmen running backs off the field.

"You're looking for versatility, but you're also looking for accountability," Day said. "A big part of that is holding on to the football. If you cannot hold on to the football you cannot play running back at Ohio State. That's the No. 1 thing. Being able to pass protect, being able to run routes, but then also having versatility in the run game."

Senior Demario McCall (5-9, 195) and sophomore walk-on Xavier Johnson (6-2, 215) also figure to be in the conversation for playing time as do-it-all backs.

Wide Receiver

Ohio State's offensive attack received an unexpected boost when Chris Olave announced on Jan. 20 that he was putting his dreams of playing professional football on hold for one more year to return to Ohio State for his senior season.

After two straight years of losing all three starting wide receivers to graduation or the NFL, the Buckeyes don't lose a single player that was part of the rotation last season.

The group is headlined by Olave (6-1, 188)

and junior Garrett Wilson (6-0, 193), who were recently named by Pro Football Focus as the top two wide receivers in college football after the duo combined for 93 receptions for 1,452 yards and 13 touchdowns in eight games.

Those two will no doubt be the top targets for whoever wins the quarterback battle, but there is a ton of talent waiting in the wings, too. Junior Jameson Williams (6-2, 188) and sophomores Julian Fleming (6-2, 200), Jaxon Smith-Njigba (6-0, 196) and Gee Scott (6-3, 210) all saw playing time last fall, while early enrollees Jayden Ballard (6-2, 175), Emeka Egbuka (6-1, 180) and Marvin Harrison (6-3, 190) all hope to make their mark.

"We have a really good room there," Day said. "We have some really good talent, and we need to up that talent. That's a huge area that we've got to focus on here because you're going to have a young quarterback. Those young receivers have got to really step up now, so Chris can really take over that leadership role and take some pride in how they're going to practice and develop over the next few months."

"He is going to really have a huge impact in that room, and I think it gives him an opportunity to step up as a leader and start to have more of a voice. Then obviously on the field, he's been great."

Returning seniors Jaylen Harris (6-5, 215) and Elijah Gardiner (6-3, 200), as well as junior Kamryn Babb (6-0, 197) are also hoping to crack the rotation, though Babb was the only one to see the field last fall, making three appearances at wide receiver and five appearances on special teams.

Tight End

Senior tight end Jeremy Ruckert finished third on the team last season with 13 catches for 151 yards and five touchdowns. And now that he won't have to split time with the departed Luke Farrell, he could be in line for an even bigger role in 2021 – that is, if the Buckeyes actually choose to make the tight end a focal point of the offense.

"One of the reasons he came back was to take his game to an even better level," offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson said on Feb. 3. "We can do a better job of helping him be a better route-runner and featuring the ball to him better than we have. Hopefully that transpires, but time will tell."

It's far more likely, based on the plethora of wide receivers, that the tight end position is used more in the blocking aspect of the passing game. And while that's also a place where Ruckert (6-5, 253) excels, the other tight ends don't have much experience.

Jake Hausmann also graduated, which leaves returning senior walk-on Mitch Rossi (6-0, 245), sophomore and converted defensive end Cade Stover (6-4, 255) and sophomore Joe Royer (6-5, 240) to fill the void, particularly in 12 Personnel sets, which put two tight ends on the field at once.

Rossi saw the most playing time out of that group, appearing in all eight games as a tight end or on special teams, whereas Stover played in seven contests. Royer has not yet made his college debut.

Offensive Line

While Olave's decision to return for his senior season garnered most of the attention, senior left tackle Thayer Munford opting for the extra year of eligibility was just as much of a surprise.

Ohio State will now have a four-year starter at the position, which will help ease con-

cerns about the backside of whomever is lining up behind center in the fall. According to Pro Football Focus, Munford (6-6, 315) posted a 91.8 grade in pass and run blocking last season, which was the fourth-best mark in the entire Football Bowl Subdivision and the highest mark among returning offensive tackles. He'll likely be backed up by junior Dawand Jones (6-8, 360).

"I think it's unbelievable," Day said on Jan. 22. "For those guys (like Munford) who decided to come back, what a great opportunity for them. It just goes to show the maturity. They still have unfinished business here at Ohio State. They want to maximize themselves as players here in college but then also in the NFL."

"I think that's what a lot of them understood was that it's one thing to go be able to play in the NFL, it's another thing to be ready when you get there. There are so many people that just want to run to the NFL and go start making money, and that's great. But at the end of the day, you have to perform, and you have to produce."

Munford and junior right tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere (6-5, 310) might make up the best tackle tandem in college football next season, with the latter ranking first among all Power Five tackles in pass-blocking and allowing just one quarterback pressure all of last season, according to PFF. Junior Max Wray (6-7, 308) proved his worth as the backup when he started the win over Michigan State after Petit-Frere tested positive for COVID-19.

With Josh Myers off to the NFL, junior left guard Harry Miller (6-4, 315) is expected to move over to center, just as he did against the Spartans when Myers was sidelined with the virus. And though he struggled with his snaps that afternoon, Miller should correct those issues with a full offseason.

That leaves the two guard spots vacated by Davis and Miller up for grabs.

Junior Matthew Jones (6-4, 310) is likely to take one of those spots – though it's unclear which side of the ball – after starting three games, including Michigan State and both College Football Playoff games against Clemson and Alabama. Sophomore Paris Johnson (6-6, 305), meanwhile, is the heir apparent at left tackle when Munford moves on, but he saw time at guard in both playoff games and may simply be too talented to not be in the starting lineup.

Sophomores Luke Wypler (6-3, 295) and Enokk Vimahi (6-4, 305) will likely be the backups on the interior offensive line, with the former having enough versatility to move over to center if need be.

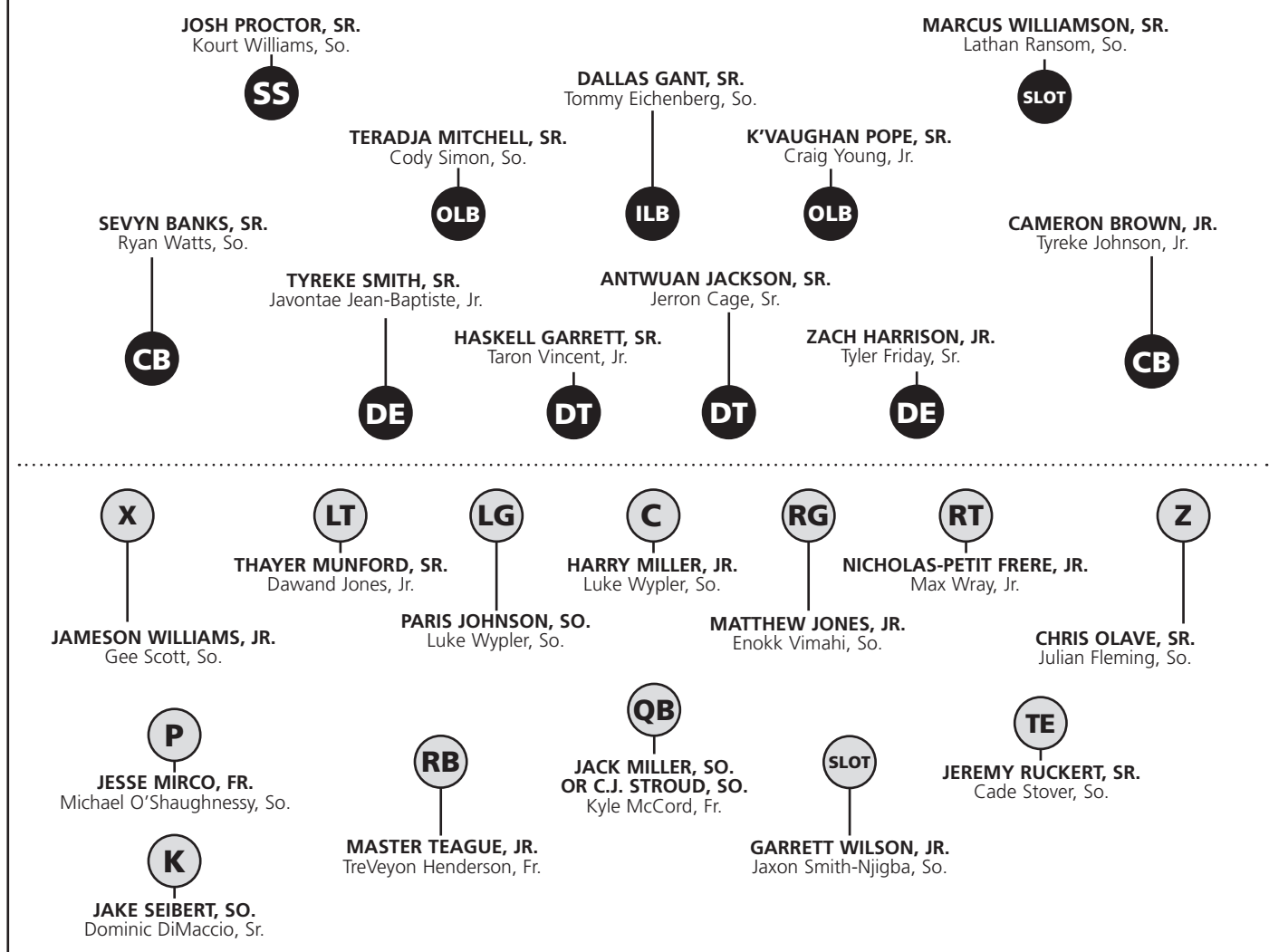
Defensive Line

While Ohio State loses team captain Jonathon Cooper, who finished the season with a team-leading 3 ½ sacks, defensive end might be the deepest position for the Buckeyes in 2021. The Buckeyes return seniors Tyreke Smith (6-4, 267) and Tyler Friday (6-3, 265) and juniors Zach Harrison (6-6, 265) and Javontae Jean-Baptiste (6-5, 250), who were all part of the rotation last season.

Smith's numbers don't jump off the page. He recorded eight tackles and a sack in seven games. But his coronavirus-related absence was noticeable in the loss to Alabama after he had his best game of the season against Clemson, when he was constantly in the face of Tigers quarterback Trevor Lawrence.

Harrison had a bit of an underwhelming year based on the lofty expectations that come with being a former five-star prospect,

PROJECTED 2021 SPRING TWO-DEEP DEPTH CHART



recording 14 tackles and two sacks, but he should take his game to the next level as the primary starter opposite of Smith.

Sophomores Noah Potter (6-6, 271), Cormontae Hamilton (6-2, 265) and Darrion Henry-Young (6-4, 275) all figure to see playing time again this fall, while early enrollee Jack Sawyer (6-5, 248), as the nation's fourth-best recruit in the class of 2021, has a chance to crack the two-deep as a true freshman. The same would go for Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimolou if he chooses to play for the Buckeyes in the coming months.

The interior defensive line is equally stout despite the unexpected departure of Tommy Togiai. He finished the second on the team with three sacks and proved to be an excellent run-stopper, something the Buckeyes were missing due to his absence in the national championship game.

That loss became easier to swallow, though, when Haskell Garrett (6-2, 299) announced his decision to return for an extra year of eligibility. He notably suffered a gunshot wound to the face during the offseason but rebounded to be named a first-team All-American after he recorded 20 tackles, four tackles for loss, two sacks and an interception that he returned for a touchdown in the win over Michigan State.

Former five-star prospect Taron Vincent (6-2, 295) is primed for a breakout season and should complement Garrett well at the three-technique after being buried on the depth chart and dealing with a shoulder injury in the past.

Similarly, Antwuan Jackson (6-2, 295) will be back for an extra season and will likely start opposite of Garrett. He quietly played the third-most snaps of any interior lineman and managed 11 tackles and one sack last season. He'll compete with senior Jerron Cage (6-2, 299), who started the national championship game in Togiai's absence, while early enrollee Tyleik Williams (6-3, 330) has an opportunity to make an early impact, as well.

"We wish Tommy nothing but the best," Day said on Jan. 22. "We wish we had him back, but we are really excited that Haskell and Antwuan will be back. Haskell took the next step. I still think Haskell has a lot of area to grow. He came on the scene quickly this year. With another whole season of preparation, I think he can be one of the better defensive tackles in the country."

"Antwuan played much better this year, too. Our defensive tackles played strong. We will have some good depth there. Some of the younger guys need to come on. They will need to step up. We will have a couple young guys coming in this summer who can hopefully battle for some time."

Other players who could see time at defensive tackle include sophomores Jacolbe Cowan (6-4, 275), Ty Hamilton (6-3, 278) and Jaden McKenzie (6-2, 290), as well as incoming freshman Michael Hall (6-3, 290). Cormontae Hamilton and Henry-Young also offer a bit of versatility and could slide inside if needed.

Linebacker

If there's one position on Ohio State's roster that's going to look much different in 2021, it's at linebacker, where the Buckeyes must replace all three starters in middle linebacker Tuf Borland outside linebackers Baron Browning and Pete Werner, as well as a key contributor in Justin Hilliard.

The fourth-year trio of Teradja Mitchell (6-2, 240), Dallas Gant (6-3, 232) and K'Vaughan Pope (6-1, 231) have been waiting their turn and have flashed their potential on special teams and in mop-up duty over the

last few seasons. Mitchell has long loomed as a game-changing player, while Gant seems ready to make a significant contribution after racking up 17 tackles in seven games off the bench last fall.

"Dallas Gant is a skilled inside 'backer," linebackers coach Al Washington said in October. "He has position flexibility. He can play (middle) and (outside) for us. His value for us is obviously to contribute meaningful minutes, but to help us in different types of ways. Teradja Mitchell is an explosive player. We've all seen that. A very passionate player. So those types of guys, we can find ways to get them closer to the ball and attack the football and get them to play to their strengths. K'Vaughan Pope is very athletic, very athletic in space. Very instinctive. There are ways to utilize him. Just knowing their attributes, we have to do a good job of putting them in position to play to their strengths."

Of those three, Pope's position is the most likely to be up for grabs. He'll be challenged by junior Craig Young (6-3, 228), who actually played more snaps than him last fall (39 to 17), as well as sophomore Cody Simon (6-1, 225), who was a regular contributor on special teams in 2020. Others who should see playing time include sophomores Tommy Eichenberg (6-2, 238) and Mitchell Melton (6-3, 243) and early enrollee Reid Carrico (6-3, 225).

Defensive Back

The secondary is difficult to project given the unit's struggles last season. But it would be a surprise if senior Sevn Banks (6-1, 200) wasn't Ohio State's No. 1 cornerback in 2021, after his seven pass break ups last season were almost twice as many as anyone else on the roster, including Wade, who didn't quite live up to expectations after moving outside from the slot. If Banks is able to take his game to another level this fall, he could

develop into the Buckeyes' next first-round cornerback.

Junior Cameron Brown (6-0, 192) should be the front-runner to start opposite Banks, provided he's recovered from a torn Achilles he suffered two games into the season. That turned out to be a bigger loss than many realized at the time, especially since defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs likes to rotate his cornerbacks when the depth allows.

"It's very costly," Day said in November. "Cam came with experience this season in a position where we couldn't afford to lose anyone. So, to lose Cam, that's a significant hit."

Former five-star prospect Tyreke Johnson (6-1, 195) should be in the mix for a starting role entering his junior year, but his playing time was sporadic this past fall. He saw a season-high 50 snaps against Rutgers, but that dropped to just three defensive plays and special teams duty in the final three games.

Johnson's inability to lock down consistent playing time opens the door for sophomores Ryan Watts (6-3, 195) and Lejond Cavazos (6-0, 195) to have bigger roles, while also giving freshmen Jordan Hancock (6-1, 170) and Jakailin Johnson (6-1, 175) an opportunity to make an early impact.

If Ohio State continues to deploy a single-high safety look, returning senior Marcus Williamson (5-10, 186) will get the first look. But he'll also be pushed by sophomore Lathan Ransom (6-1, 198), who's impressed while playing in the nickel package late in the season, and Ronnie Hickman (6-1, 205), who showed potential in the same role against Michigan State but suffered an undisclosed injury that kept him out of the final three games.

Sophomore Cameron Martinez (5-10, 188) could also throw his hat into the ring with a strong spring and fall camp.

The Buckeyes were clearly missing the leadership from two-time team captain Jordan

Fuller on the back end, but Josh Proctor (6-2, 202) has shown the potential to be a true eraser at safety. A big hitter with a nose for the ball, he offers something that Marcus Hooker (5-11, 200), who started the first five games of last season, simply doesn't. Hooker will also have to fend off sophomore Kourt Williams (6-1, 221), who garnered all kinds of praise from the coaching staff before he tore his ACL in fall camp.

If the Buckeyes break away from the single-high safety and play two safeties, like they did in the playoff, Williams could find himself in a battle with the likes of Williamson, Ransom, Hickman and sophomore Bryson Shaw (6-1, 195) for the free safety spot. His ability to play a hybrid linebacker/safety role would make him an attractive option in both the run game and pass coverage, as well.

Special Teams

With three-year starter Blake Haubeil now pursuing a career at the next level, sophomore Jake Seibert (6-1, 200) will be the only scholarship kicker on Ohio State's roster next season. He should take over field goal and extra point duties after filling in for Haubeil when he was either injured or sidelined by COVID-19 last season, while senior walk-on Dominic DiMaccio (5-8, 192) could continue to handle kickoff duties after doing so in six of the Buckeyes' eight games this past fall.

Early enrollee punter Jesse Mirco (6-3, 200), meanwhile, will be the only scholarship punter on the roster with four-year starter Drue Chrisman also heading to the NFL and is expected to start as a true freshman as a result. He'll compete with sophomore walk-on Michael O'Shaughnessy (6-3, 200), who is the only other punter on the roster.

Senior long snapper Bradley Robinson (6-1, 230) will be back for an extra season of eligibility, with Roen McCullough (6-1, 230) returning as his backup.

Herman Never A Fit With Texas Longhorns

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Tom Herman wasn't an especially popular choice among analysts attempting to evaluate Urban Meyer's first offensive coordinator hire when he arrived at Ohio State following the tumultuous 2011 season. A former wide receiver at Cal Lutheran University, Herman had worked his way up the coaching ranks after graduating in 1997, serving as a wide receivers coach at his alma mater, a graduate assistant at Texas and an assistant all over the offensive side of the field at Sam Houston State, Texas State and Rice from 2001 to 2008.

His performance as a play caller at his latter two stops earned him the offensive coordinator job at Iowa State under first-year head coach Paul Rhoads in 2009.

In Ames, Herman's offenses never set the Big 12 ablaze, but they did see steady improvement, putting up 20.5 points per game in his first year, 21.7 in his second and 22.7 in 2011, Herman's third and final year with the Cyclones. While his groups were never lighting up the scoreboard, Herman's style and approach to the game caught the eye of then-Oregon head coach Chip Kelly, one of college football's best offensive minds who was always keeping an eye out for rising talent. Kelly wasn't looking for an offensive coordinator in the winter of 2011, but his close friend, Meyer, was.

"It started with Chip Kelly and then some other very close friends who said, 'Look at this guy,'" Meyer told reporters before Ohio State's Sugar Bowl matchup with Alabama in 2014, Herman's final season in Columbus. "I got the question, 'Who is Tom Herman? You're bringing Iowa State's offense to Ohio State?'"

Meyer made the move. Herman was announced as the next offensive coordinator at Ohio State on Dec. 8, and with it came a flurry of compliments from his new boss, who called Herman one of the brightest minds in college football and compared his style to the approach that Meyer had used to make his name at Bowling Green, Utah and Florida.

"Tom Herman has one of the bright young minds in college football," said Meyer. "His philosophies are very similar to those of my own."

It wasn't a decision met with immense excitement in the Ohio State world. Herman was a relatively unknown figure in college football, and those Iowa State stats left a lot to be desired when contrasting them with the usual expectations that came with a Meyer offense. Despite that, when Meyer landed on Herman at the end of his search, he called it a no-brainer. He claimed that he "wanted to have a guy that's going to not have an ego, has a good understanding of our offense and be extremely intelligent to learn what we do and adapt it to what he does."

Meyer was very clear that he felt Herman fit that bill. Herman agreed with him.

"It wouldn't matter if (Meyer) called every play on Saturday or if I called every play on Saturday," Herman said. "This is the Ohio State University, and this is an opportunity for me to learn from him and coach under him and be a part of his staff at this university. I'm like a pig in slop right now. It's been awesome."

"What we're going to do offensively is time-tested, it's proven, it's what they've been successful doing at many different stops for Coach Meyer."

It wasn't always smooth sailing for the Meyer and Herman partnership, including the infamous instance of Meyer referring to the passing attack that Herman – along with former

wide receivers coach Zach Smith – directed as a "clown show" and "ineffective" in 2012. His issues with the group came, in part, from the growing pains felt by quarterback Braxton Miller and a receiving corps led by Corey Brown and Devin Smith that seemed to lack the kind of ability needed to win one-on-one battles.

The Buckeye rushing attack was strong in Meyer's first year, but Ohio State averaged just 181.5 yards per game in the air, with Miller completing 58.3 percent of his passes. Brown, the team's leading receiver, averaged just 11.2 yards per catch, as most dropbacks saw Miller fire to a receiver much closer to the line of scrimmage than Meyer would have liked. Herman came to Ohio State as the coach tasked with fixing the passing attack, and in year one, it simply wasn't fixed.

However, Ohio State was not without progress to be excited about moving forward. Miller had his two best games in terms of quarterback rating in the month of November, putting up a 187.9 rating against Illinois on Nov. 3 and a 184.3 score in a close win over Michigan on Nov. 24. The young quarterback seemed to be taking steps forward under Herman's tutelage.

"We are at least pleased with the progress," Herman said in an interview with Big Ten Network shortly after the end of the 2012 season. "Satisfied isn't the right word, but we are pleased with the progress. When you take a step back, I would say we are on a very good trajectory. Would we like to be at the pinnacle? Absolutely, but we understand Rome wasn't built in a day. We are going to accelerate the process as much as we can, but we like the trajectory."

Two years later, Herman and Meyer had constructed Rome – or the college football offense version of it at least. The 2014 Buckeye offense – led by a brand-new starter at quarterback in J.T. Barrett after Miller's season-ending preseason injury – dominated the Big Ten in the air and on the ground. The zone rushing attack paired with a healthy dose of quarterback keepers terrorized opposing fronts, while Barrett quickly found his comfort in the passing game and put up one of the best seasons from a freshman signal caller in school history, racking up 2,834 yards through the air with 34 touchdowns and a 64.6 completion rate.

That it managed to kick into another gear entirely in the postseason with third-string quarterback Cardale Jones at the helm on the way to a national title was just a cherry on top. Herman had accomplished exactly what Meyer had asked him to when he hired him, while showing the nation what Meyer had seen three years prior – that he was one of the brightest young minds in football. Not wanting to miss out on the opportunity to cash in on his newfound popularity, Herman signed on to be the next head coach at Houston on Dec. 15, 2014, considered to be one of the top jobs at the Group of Five level.

It was a move that earned Meyer's blessing, which mattered quite a bit to Herman. The two had grown very close, and Herman respected Meyer's opinion on just about everything when it came to football coaching.

"A great person, a great family man, a guy that understands football," Meyer said of Herman in 2015. "Very smart. He came to us with a tough situation. We asked him to learn our offense and help coordinate it, and he did a wonderful job."

"I think he matured and was really ready to take on his own program. I'm glad he went to Houston because of all the great players. He was looking at some other jobs previous to that, and I kept discouraging him because it's all about can you go get good players in your program."

Herman respected the Meyer blueprint so

much that he openly embraced it as his own. He conducted interviews confirming that he wanted to be like his former boss, that he wanted to build his program as Meyer built Ohio State or Florida. The prevailing thought on Herman in the summer of 2015 was that while Houston couldn't get Meyer, it could get the next best thing: Meyer's clone.

His openness about his inspirations and intentions in Houston sparked a Wall Street Journal story headlined "If you can't hire Urban Meyer, can you clone him?" entering Herman's first year with the Cougars, featuring a direct mention of the comparisons from the man himself.

"People can say that I'm just copying Urban Meyer," Herman told the Journal. "You're damn right I'm copying Urban Meyer!"

Former Meyer players and people covering the team took notice as well. As soon as Herman stepped on campus, the Houston Cougars became his team. They would do things his way on the practice field, he would get after it on the recruiting trail, and he would demand respect while doing it, all directly pulled from the Meyer playbook.

"You can tell he's trying to be like Coach Meyer," said former Meyer player Dallas Baker in an interview with ESPN in 2016. "He talks and it's like, 'That's something Coach Meyer would say.' It helps recruit and get the most out of guys. Coach Meyer makes you feel like you could run through a wall, and Herman does the same."

That wasn't lost on those covering Herman either.

"One of the things that stuck out to me in Herman's two years at Houston, and especially that first year, was that his program very much mirrored the stuff that I read and knew about Ohio State," Sam Khan, who covered Herman at Houston for ESPN, told BSB. "It very much was a program built in the image that Urban Meyer's Ohio State program was built. And to that point, I almost did a story about that."

"We ended up not doing it, but I'd considered doing it, something about just how they were trying to turn Houston into Ohio State South. That's what struck me. The core values and the way he talks, the words he used – there were all types of parallels you could draw from how that program was run to how Ohio State's program is."

"And to his credit, it succeeded. He went 22-4 in Houston in two seasons. They recruited their butts off. And obviously they did have very intense practices and they were very much on the aggressive end of physicality, and it worked to their benefit. As a football team, they were very successful. They were really successful as an underdog against highly-ranked teams in his time there. And he did a lot to change Houston football and to push the program forward from a team that was constantly trying to knock on the New Year's Six door to actually one that was known that could do it and had the reputation of one that could do it on a regular basis."

As Khan alluded to, it did succeed. Herman won immediately, and he won often in Houston. The Cougars, led by dual-threat quarterback Greg Ward, rattled off 10 straight wins to open the Herman era, knocking off Power Five foes in Louisville and Vanderbilt along with top-25 opponent Memphis on the way to the No. 13 spot in the AP poll. A loss to UConn on Nov. 21 broke Houston's heart and ended its chances of truly competing for a College Football Playoff spot, but Herman's group responded, much like Meyer's did after a tough loss, with a trio of huge victories. The Cougars finished the year with a blowout 52-31 victory over No. 16 Navy, a 24-13 win over No. 20 Temple in the American

Athletic Conference title game and a 14-point toppling of No. 9 Florida State in the Peach Bowl, 38-24.

Under its new head coach, Houston played with a 75-pound chip on its shoulder and the confidence of a top-five program. The Cougars took the direction of their head coach and carried themselves like national champions, which played tremendously well with the Houston fan and booster base.

"Because Houston is an underdog," Khan said on why Houston fans took to Herman so quickly. "And that outward confidence, the Houston fans fed off of that. Because they love nothing more, Houston alumni, Houston fans, to stick it to the Texas, the Texas A&Ms of the world. And this was a guy that they thought, 'Hey, he's a really good coach.' And then clearly, after his first year, he proves he can win. And then the thought is, 'This is a guy that other people are going to want, and this is our guy. And despite the fact that we have fewer resources, despite the fact that we don't have a roster full of five-star recruits, we are still going to take this guy and we're going to beat you.'"

"And Houston fans feed off of a guy who can take the insecurity that comes with being a have-not in the college football world and allow them to still beat the teams that are the haves. They absolutely fed off his personality, his confidence. The #HTownTakeover thing, that became a huge deal. It was all over the program. You would go around the building and there was #HTownTakeover all over the walls. It was all over social media. It was catching on with the recruits. The fans wore a T-shirt with it. And that confidence that he had and the bravado that he brought was something that people really, really took to."

For Herman, Houston provided the perfect opportunity to stick closely to the Meyer blueprint for success. He was allowed and encouraged to be cocky, to make himself the face of the program and to serve as both the head coach and as an almost Don King-like marketer of his team. Houston wanted to play fast, win big and then celebrate in its opponent's face, which it did immediately to kick off the 2016 season in a 33-23 win over then-No. 3 Oklahoma. Houston didn't just indulge Herman's personality, it embraced it fully.

"He had carte blanche to do things how he wanted to do them," Khan explained. "There was not going to be very much interference with how Tom wanted to do it. If Tom wanted this or that, they either tried to do it for him or if they couldn't do it for him, Tom did it himself."

"There was a time where Tom kept asking the athletic administration for some new flooring going into the locker room because they were trying to improve facilities. Houston's facilities were a little bit outdated. And the administration kept saying, 'Well, the budget's not there for it. The budget's not there for it. We can't do that,' and that's a common answer at Houston. Well, guess what? He took Yancy McKnight, his strength coach, and a few other guys, and they went down there and took sledgehammers and they tore up the floor themselves. They're like, 'Well, can we now get a new floor?'"

"Tom did that. And Tom had the freedom to do that at Houston. Because with his reputation, his pedigree coming from Ohio State and his history as coordinator, they very much thought he was a guy that could take them to another level. And so he had carte blanche to do stuff like that. And he took advantage of it. He renovated facilities. They did, I think it was a million-dollar locker room renovation. It's not a lot at a Power Five program that wins a lot, but at Houston, that's a lot of money to spend on the locker room."

“They started funding for an indoor practice facility that has since been completed. It’s one of the better indoor practice facilities you’ll find in the country. I think it was completed after he left, though. But those things, he was very aggressive about fundraising, very aggressive about facilities, very aggressive about recruiting.”

Though Herman fell off a bit in year two with Houston, putting up a 9-3 record with close losses to Navy and Memphis (and a 38-16 stunner against a bad SMU team), it did little to affect his ascent to the very top of just about every Power Five coaching search in America. There couldn’t have been more than 10 schools in America that didn’t want a piece of the next coming of Urban Meyer, an offense-first, recruiting maniac who wanted to win every game by 100 points. Leading the pack were Texas and LSU, the former of which had just let go of another former Meyer assistant – Charlie Strong – while the latter was moving on from longtime head coach Les Miles and looking for someone to modernize an offense that had become stale.

As Sports Illustrated’s Ross Dellenger uncovered in a 2019 story, Herman nearly landed with the Tigers. He had paperwork lined up and ready to go and was set to be the replacement for Miles in 2017 and moving forward. However, with LSU interim head coach and native son Ed Orgeron impressing after taking over early in the season, LSU found itself with chilly feet and wanted to be sure it was making the right decision. Meanwhile, Herman found himself in the same boat. Texas, which had given him one of his first shots in coaching, wanted him just as badly as LSU did.

After a bidding war orchestrated by Herman’s agent, Trace Armstrong, LSU backed out and went instead with Orgeron, while Texas celebrated its coup, bringing Ohio State’s former Texas state recruiting ace and the Houston hotshot who had managed to bring five-star defensive tackle Ed Oliver to the G5. It seemed like the perfect fit, one that Texas fans believed would bring the Longhorns back to the heights they had reached under longtime head coach Mack Brown.

At one of the biggest jobs in America, Herman had the fanbase on his side, and shortly after his first season, a 7-6 campaign, he earned a new fan in former TCU and new Texas athletic director Chris Del Conte, who was hired in December of 2017. Despite a slower-than-expected first season, the energy and excitement were high in Austin.

“I think a lot of it certainly was the newness factor that Herman had going for him,” The Daily Texan associate sports editor Stephen Wagner told BSB. “Texas (had) also (hired) a new athletic director. I think the hire of Chris Del Conte as the new AD definitely helped a lot, because Del Conte was a really big Herman guy and Del Conte really got the entire fan base behind Herman and behind the team. It really gave Texas an energy and a life that had, frankly, just been absent during the Charlie Strong era and during the last few of the Mack Brown days.”

After that slow start, the hype around Herman seemed to be realized in 2018.

Texas landed a top recruiting class in Herman’s first full cycle (No. 3 in 2018) and was on the precipice of another in the class of 2019, while it grew toward its ultimate goal of contention on the field as well. An early loss to Maryland stung, but quarterback Sam Ehlinger settled into the Herman offense as Texas rattled off six straight wins, rising to No. 6 in the AP rankings. A pair of close losses, one at Oklahoma State (38-35) and one against No. 12 West Virginia (42-41) again halted momentum, but it looked as though a switch had flipped in Austin. Herman was the guy, Ehlinger was the quarterback of the future, and Texas had found its own Meyer, even if it couldn’t get the real

thing – though not for a lack of trying.

“In 2018, I think what we saw was just that Texas finally started winning those close games that they were losing in 2017,” Wagner explained. “You look at the Texas Tech game (in 2017), Texas was up by a field goal with less than four minutes to go. Then Sam (Ehlinger) threw two interceptions on back-to-back drives. Texas Tech scores the game winning touchdown, and Texas misses out on an eight-win season in Herman’s first year.

“And you look at the USC game where Sam Ehlinger fumbled on the 1-yard line in overtime. In 2018, we finally saw Texas start to pull out those close wins. And I really do think that was a mixture of both luck, development and just a few other things too.”

All of that came to a head in Texas’ final game of the 2018 season. While it entered at just 9-4, the Longhorns earned a nod to the Big 12’s New Year’s Six game tie-in and were slated to take on No. 6 Georgia, which had come up just short of a national title the year prior. A win over the Bulldogs would further legitimize the Longhorn rise to prominence and set the tone moving into 2019 and beyond. Despite a late Georgia comeback effort, Texas did pull off the win, capped by Ehlinger exclaiming, “We’re back,” in reference to the running joke among college football acolytes that Texas is always on the precipice of returning to power but can never quite reach that peak. Herman, always the showman, went right along with his star quarterback, as it matched the ethos of the program he wanted to build. It was confident to the point of cockiness, and it painted Texas as the title contender that Herman promised he would build.

“He was a guy who constantly talked about the national championship,” Wagner said of Herman. “Picturing getting back into the national championship. Picturing bringing Texas back. After that 2018 season, when Texas won the Sugar Bowl and Sam Ehlinger had that kind of famous ‘we’re back’ moment, Herman just kind of smiled and chuckled. He didn’t exactly shoot it down. And I think that was his way of sort of saying, ‘Yeah, we have arrived. Yeah, this is my program. And yeah, this is the new direction that we’re going in and nothing’s going to stop us.’ But obviously something did.”

Despite improvements in roster talent from two straight years of elite recruiting and another year of development for Ehlinger, Texas didn’t take another step forward in 2019. In fact, it regressed, putting up an 8-5 mark that saw more close losses, this time to No. 6 LSU, No. 6 Oklahoma and No. 13 Baylor, along with dropped games against unranked foes TCU and Iowa State. Suddenly, Herman’s big personality and confidence were no longer being considered a positive or as a crucial part of his program. It was an inhibitor, and it took on a new name – ego. The story was no longer about Texas returning to form, it was about a supremely confident coach with very little to show for himself after three years of hype about bringing elite football back to Texas, or about making it the Ohio State of the South.

Herman’s antics began to wear thin with the media as well. His former employer Meyer was consistently and openly combative with those who hoped to cover him, but he had never lost enough games to merit any significant pushback to that. Meyer won games, and when a coach wins games, it’s difficult to question their approach. Herman was no longer winning games, at least not on that level, and he had alienated a significant portion of the Texas media base from day one.

“I think that was one of the things that ultimately kind of put him in a bad place with some media,” Wagner said. “Certainly not all media, but Herman definitely tried to be the intimidator with the media. Shortly after he was hired, I think this would have been in 2017, he held sort

of a meet-and-greet pizza party with some of the local press. And basically, he tried to use scare tactics to, for lack of better term, try to pressure some of the local media into writing more favorable stories of Texas.

“And he did that by saying that he’s really going to run a super tight program. He’s not going to have moles. He’s not going to have rats on the inside. He’s not going to have people leaking information about injuries. He’s not going to have people getting away with that stuff. And if you try to do a slam piece or you try to expose Texas, the response to that is going to be that the amount of coverage that you’re allowed to give is going to be limited or affected in some way. And I think that was an early tactic that Herman used that really sort of put him in bad faith or that at least got him off on the wrong foot with local media.”

For Herman, the issues off the field weren’t just sparked by his own actions and tack with the media. His team’s struggles matched his own. Texas found itself oscillating wildly between excellent and terrible, buoyed by title-caliber highs and marred by losses so bad that they’d make a winless coach blush.

“A lot of what we saw was just a ton of inconsistency,” Wagner said. “You saw Herman coach truly incredible games. You look at 2018, the win over OU in the Red River Rivalry. Herman really called an A-plus game. The Sugar Bowl that year as well, again, Herman just coached an all-around perfect game. LSU (in 2019), even though, it was a loss. From a coaching standpoint, I don’t know if there was anything more that Tom Herman could have done to win that game. He pulled out all the stops, trick plays, going for it on fourth down, being ultra-aggressive.

“Then you look at other games, like the Iowa State loss in Ames in 2019, where Texas has the ball, there’s about four minutes left, it’s a grind-out-the-clock situation. And Herman runs straight up the middle twice for a gain of a yard each and then a jail screen gets deflected to the turf and Iowa State runs out the clock, kicks a game-winning field goal.”

Entering 2020, it was clear that Herman would need positive momentum to silence a rapidly growing contingency of Texas fans and powerbrokers who were weary of his antics and wanted him out. It was the first time that he found himself without the support of a majority of the fan base in his short career as a head coach, the first time that his Meyer carbon-copy schtick didn’t immediately yield wins. It was that personality, or, as Wagner defines it, that ego that ultimately led to Herman’s downfall and eventual ouster at Texas in January of 2021, shortly after the end of a 7-3 campaign.

“I think the newness really didn’t wear off until this past season,” Wagner said. “Herman was very publicly on the hot seat, and Texas was actively courting Urban Meyer (along with) Dan Mullen and James Franklin at Florida and Penn State. Where things really fell off is, quite frankly, I think a lot of it was just Tom Herman’s ego. This was a guy who was touted to be the next Urban Meyer, both when he won the Broyles Award at Ohio State back in 2014 and when he had all that success in Houston. He was a guy who was touted as being the next big thing.

“He was the new big name. He was the hot, young name in coaching that everybody was hungry to get their hands on. LSU really, really wanted Tom Herman too. Everybody thought this guy definitely is the next Urban Meyer.

“From what we saw at Houston, he really did look like he was going to be the guy to turn Texas around. I think Herman let that get to his head a little bit. And I think at times he thought that he was a better coach than he actually was. I think he also thought that his tactics and his strategy was a little bit more superior than it actually turned out to be.”

By the time Herman’s final season at Texas rolled around, however, even his former employer – with whom Herman’s relationship had soured – had completed a full flip on his outlook of the Longhorn head coach.

“Let’s talk about the why. Here is the why,” Meyer said of Texas’ struggles on FOX’s “Big Noon Kickoff” in October of 2020. “There’s two reasons – No. 1, evaluation. You have to really, thoroughly go back and say, ‘Are we evaluating the right way in our program?’ But here’s where I want to spend a second talking about development. Once they get on your campus, you have to develop them. And when I say development, it’s weight room, it’s training room, it’s nutritionists – it might even be a sports psychologist – and then, of course, it’s going to be the assistant coaches.

“So the what is, ‘Yeah, they haven’t had many players drafted.’ That’s fine. The average viewer can say, ‘OK, that’s the what.’ But let’s dig deep, lift up the hood and say why – it’s evaluation process and it’s development of the player. If the NFL draft doesn’t start showing more Texas Longhorn players every spring, it’s going to be the same old story.”

The obvious question is one that Herman might be asking himself for a long time: Why didn’t it work? How did Herman’s approach work so well in Houston but fail so spectacularly with the Longhorns? The answer, as Khan puts it, comes back to expectations and environment.

“Houston was a place where there’s not as much pressure,” Khan explained. “Texas has a lot of external pressure from big money boosters, and it is the flagship program in the state of Texas. There is a certain pressure that comes with that. Houston has been on the outside looking in on Power Five conferences since the Southwest Conference broke up in 1996. The Texas and the Ohio States of the world are the haves. Houston is one of the have-nots, so to speak.

“There is obviously expectation there, but the fan support is not as rabid. They’re not going to sell out their 40,000-seat stadium on a week-to-week basis. They’re just not. It’s just not what Houston is. And so the pressure is not there.”

For Herman, that lack of pressure – or the willingness of a program to give him the reins – may be the key to all of this. Meyer’s approach to coaching explicitly calls for him to become the face of a program, the man in charge of everything that happens within the football wing of his university. He requires full autonomy.

If Herman’s tenure in Houston is any indication, he can pull off that style. However, if his time spent in Texas is just as instructive, a school like Houston – one that lacks the kind of booster involvement and pressure of a school like Texas or Ohio State – may be the best place for Herman to do that. The best Herman, as Wagner explained, is an involved Herman, just as the best Meyer is an involved Meyer. At Texas, Herman just wasn’t as involved as the job required.

“I think a lot of it just comes back to ego and the idea of, ‘Well my players are superior, we’re playing a team that we’re perceived to be better than. All I’m going to have to do is step aside and let the players win this game. Because if I get more involved, I’m just going to lose this game for the players.’ And in fact, that wasn’t the case at all,” Wagner said. “Whenever we really saw Texas at its best under Herman was whenever Herman was ultra-involved and he was ultra-aggressive, and a direct contributor to the play calling.

“But we didn’t always see that, and as a result, I think things kind of fell apart, at least from a consistency standpoint. Finishing three straight seasons with at least seven wins and finishing in the top 25 all three years – that’s really incredible for a lot of programs.

“But at Texas that’s nowhere near the standard.”

Scarlet And Gray Not Singing The Blues This Season

These are lofty times for the Ohio State men's basketball program, and its top-four ranking this season should not be taken for granted considering the downfall of many of the powerhouses in the sport.

COURT REPORT

Craig Merz

The shame of it is that fans have been unable to see the rise of Chris Holtmann's squad in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has limited attendance at home games to families and friends.

Can you imagine what cavernous Value City Arena would have felt and sounded like for the showdown between the No. 4 Buckeyes and third-ranked Michigan on Feb. 21?

Even the most ardent supporters had to settle for watching the rivalry play out on CBS. It was the marquee matchup of the weekend, maybe the season, and one not involving schools named Duke, Kansas, Kentucky or North Carolina.

Yes, while the Buckeyes (18-5, 12-5 Big Ten) are enjoying a banner season, the so-called blue bloods are nowhere to be found, especially in the polls.

It was big news when the Feb. 8 Associated Press rankings of 25 teams did not have a single member from the top 13 winningest programs in men's Division I history: 1. Kentucky; 2. Kansas; 3. North Carolina; 4. Duke; 5. Temple; 6. Syracuse; 7. UCLA; 8. Notre Dame; 9. St John's; 10. Indiana; 11. Cincinnati; 12. Utah; 13. Arizona.

In fact, that poll was the first since Dec. 18, 1961, to not include the "Big Four" of Duke, Kansas, Kentucky and North Carolina. Kansas saved a little face by slipping into the No. 23 spot on Feb. 15.

Looking deeper at that Feb. 8 poll, only two of 15 schools with multiple NCAA cham-

pionships (Oklahoma State and Villanova) were ranked. Among those on the outside were Indiana and Michigan State.

Meanwhile, Ohio State (29th all-time in wins at the start of this season) has already defeated UCLA, the Hoosiers and the Spartans this season.

There are several reasons offered for the plummet by the top schools with COVID-19-related issues among them. There have been pauses in activities for some like Michigan State, and certainly the lack of fans has erased homecourt advantages at places such as Duke's Cameron Indoor Stadium. Across D-I, home teams are winning about 58 percent of their games this season.

"Without fans in Rupp (Arena), we're just playing a basketball game on a court," Kentucky coach John Calipari said earlier this season. "It's not the same. The lift we get from 24,000 people when we need a stop, we don't have."

Of course, in theory winning should also be easier on the road for the talent-rich programs, but they've likely been doing that for years anyway.

Another possible explanation is that Duke, Kentucky and North Carolina happen to be rebuilding this season and are among the youngest programs nationally.

Add increased opportunities (re: money) to turn pro in the G-League out of high school plus the rise of the Gonzagas and Bayers of the world, and it's clear there is less separation in college basketball than football, where Alabama, Clemson and Ohio State dominate on the field and in the recruiting battles.

The "Big Four" likely won't be down long, except for Kansas, which faces possible NCAA sanctions and has suffered in recruiting.

Through games of Feb. 21, Duke is 10-8 overall and 8-6 in the ACC; Kansas sits at 17-7, 11-5 Big 12; Kentucky is 8-13, 7-7 in the SEC; and North Carolina is 14-7, 8-5 ACC. It's been an odd season all around with perennial Big Ten front-runner Michigan State 11-9 overall and 5-9 in the Big Ten. They host the Buckeyes on Feb. 25.

Holtmann is in the unique spot of rooting, sort of, for the return to prominence of Kentucky, North Carolina and UCLA since the Buckeyes play them on a rotating basis in the annual CBS Sports Classic.

"You're really playing three basketball blue bloods in the event, so it's unique in that sense," Holtmann said in December. "Everybody understands our football pedigree, but I think it's a great event for us to be aligned with."

Michigan Memories

The gold pants earned by Ohio State football players for a victory over Michigan has spawned a similar reward for the basketball team.

Holtmann has instituted the "gold jersey" keepsake for a season sweep of the Wolverines. It was an idea he had been pondering since coming to Columbus to replace Thad Matta as coach in June 2017. Holtmann saw the hype and hysteria surrounding the OSU-Michigan football game that fall and fully embraced the rivalry on the hard court.

Thus, a tradition was born, albeit with a caveat.

It's one thing to beat U-M once a season in football. It's another to have to sometimes face the Wolverines twice in the regular season with the possibilities of meeting again in

the Big Ten and NCAA tournaments.

"I wouldn't be thrilled to get a jersey if I went 1-2 against Michigan," director of basketball operations David Egelhoff told The Columbus Dispatch. "I go, 'Fellas, we've got to sweep 'em. You can't have a loss against Michigan and get a gold jersey.'"

Using that criteria, if the tradition had been seized by other programs on campus, the 2017-18 men's hockey team would be the gold standard, pun intended. Maybe they would have received "gold sweater" trinkets for beating U-M all five times, including in a Big Ten semifinal. A chance for a sixth victory in the Frozen Four championship game fizzled when each team lost in the national semifinals.

As for the basketball Buckeyes, last season was the first time under Holtmann that they went undefeated vs. the Wolverines. The 2-0 record earned the gold jersey mementos that were handed out to the players from that team at the Christmas party hosted by Holtmann in December.

"It's a special moment, especially for that team we had last year, winning two big games against Michigan," fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker said to the Dispatch. "The rivalry's been going on for a long time. We just want to represent Ohio State the best way possible."

The pendant is a basketball jersey that on the front has "Ohio" above and "State" below a Block O. The back has the year and scores of the victories.

U-M and the Buckeyes split two games during Holtmann's first season, and the Wolverines won the only meeting in 2018-19.

The Buckeyes lost a chance for the gold jerseys this season after their 92-87 loss to U-M on Feb. 21 in the only regular-season game, with a possible rematch in the post-season looming.

Holtmann has emphasized that the gold jerseys are not a dig at Michigan.

"I learned here pretty early from Urban (Meyer) that the best way to respect the rivalry is to get your team ready to play in that moment and in those games," he said. "We have great respect for all of our opponents and in particular this one, given the history among the schools."

Back Home In Indiana

Tournament time has become clearer since BSB last went to press with the announcement that the conference tourney March 10-14 has been moved to Indianapolis from Chicago.

That's also where the bulk of the NCAA Tournament games will be played with others being held elsewhere in the Hoosier state. With that the NCAA said Feb. 19 it will allow a limited number of fans to all rounds of the men's tournament and later rounds of the women's tourney in San Antonio.

Of course, all these actions are due to the pandemic and trying to get through the 2021 postseason in the safest manner possible with the fewest disruptions. This comes after nearly all conference tournaments and the entire NCAA Tournament were wiped out when the sports world was shut down by the coronavirus on March 12, 2020.

The NCAA is permitting 25 percent capacity at the men's venues to allow for social distancing. That figure includes all participants, staff and family members of players and coaches. The women's tourney will allow a maximum of 17 percent capacity from the Sweet 16 to the Final Four.

The men's tournament begins March 18

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2020-21 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

18-5 Overall (12-5 Big Ten)
Statistics through games of Feb. 21

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.						
E.J. Liddell	21-21	581-27.7	111-220	.505	18-49	.367	93-122	.762	36-106	142-6.8	64-1	28	31	26	15	333-15.9
Duane Washington	23-23	711-30.9	114-285	.400	66-170	.388	64-72	.889	2-63	65-2.8	35-0	66	49	0	11	358-15.6
Justice Sueing	23-23	621-27.0	80-162	.494	14-45	.311	62-82	.756	36-94	130-5.7	47-0	41	44	3	24	236-10.3
C.J. Walker	19-10	563-29.7	49-136	.360	9-34	.265	65-68	.956	7-44	51-2.7	47-1	80	38	2	15	172-9.1
Kyle Young	23-22	611-26.6	75-136	.551	8-23	.348	41-49	.837	43-87	130-5.7	62-1	29	8	11	10	199-8.7
Justin Ahrens	23-12	427-18.5	51-110	.464	49-107	.458	7-10	.700	4-41	45-2.0	31-1	8	11	2	8	158-6.9
Zed Key	23-1	285-12.4	49-78	.628	0-0	.000	36-60	.600	40-45	85-3.7	45-0	8	17	19	2	134-5.8
Seth Towns	17-0	168-9.9	26-54	.481	11-31	.355	9-10	.900	5-24	29-1.7	20-0	5	4	1	3	72-4.2
Musa Jallow	18-1	249-13.9	23-47	.489	1-17	.059	12-21	.571	8-28	36-2.0	31-0	10	10	6	7	59-3.3
Jimmy Sotos	12-2	115-9.6	6-18	.333	5-15	.333	3-4	.750	3-6	9-0.8	15-1	13	6	1	3	20-1.7
Meechie Johnson	12-0	77-6.4	7-15	.467	6-10	.600	0-2	.000	0-3	3-0.3	3-0	3	5	1	3	20-1.7
Eugene Brown	23-0	162-7.1	13-37	.351	7-25	.280	2-4	.500	9-26	35-1.5	10-0	6	3	4	2	35-1.5
Jansen Davidson	2-0	07-3.6	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	3-4	.750	0-1	1-0.5	0-0	0	1	0	0	3-1.5
Harrison Hookfin	4-0	13-3.2	3-6	.500	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	2-2	4-1.0	4-0	0	1	0	0	6-1.5
Ibrahima Diallo	3-0	10-3.2	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	1-4	.250	2-1	3-1.0	0-0	0	0	1	0	1-0.3
TEAM									32-41	73					9	
Ohio State	23	4600	607-1307	.464	194-527	.368	398-512	.777	229-612	841-36.6	414-5	297	237	77	103	1806-78.5
Opponents	23	4600	558-1327	.420	177-516	.343	308-435	.708	222-528	750-32.6	447-7	298	243	53	107	1601-69.6

with the First Four and goes through April 5. The women's is March 21 to April 4.

Most of the 67 men's tournament games will be in Indianapolis, and some venues will not be large enough to handle the 25 percent edict, NCAA senior vice president of basketball Dan Gavitt said Feb. 18 during an appearance on the Greater Columbus Sports Commission's Virtual Sports Report.

"Based on the size of the six different venues we're using in Indianapolis, in many cases we won't even come close to 25 percent by keeping that six feet of physical distancing needed in each of the venues," he said. "But maybe by the time we get to Lucas Oil Stadium, a much larger venue, we may have slightly closer to 20-25 percent capacity."

Games are scheduled for Lucas Oil Stadium, Bankers Life Fieldhouse, Hinkle Fieldhouse and Indiana Farmers Coliseum in Indianapolis; Assembly Hall in Bloomington; and Mackey Arena in West Lafayette. Arenas at Ball State in Muncie and Indiana State in Terre Haute are backups.

Gavitt is confident protocols are in place to ensure the NCAA's can be completed. Teams must have seven consecutive days of negative COVID-19 tests before arriving in Indianapolis, and once there daily testing is required.

"We feel confident we have medical protocols that are appropriate to have NCAA championships and have them be successful," Gavitt said. "Fundamental to it all is the availability of testing. Without (it) you couldn't have competition safely. Because it's available and we have access to it, we have confidence before any team takes the court or the field that they're safe."

As for teams being forced to drop out during the tournament because of positive tests, Gavitt said the NCAA has a model it may follow.

"One of the last pieces we haven't made a final decision on yet is the unfortunate circumstance of a team not being able to participate in championships, whether we have a replacement team," Gavitt said. "We saw that in Columbus with The Basketball Tournament (last summer) and how they managed that with teams on standby."

"We have a plan the men's basketball committee has approved and think we have a good solution there. We hope it won't have to be activated."

"We know from what we've seen in the regular season, disruption is part of this for everyone's health and safety through contact tracing, and if it results in a team not being able to play, we'll have a plan in place for a replacement," he continued. "Really,

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

there's not an opportunity to introduce a replacement team once the tournaments are under way, for competitive equity reasons, but we do hope to start both championships with full fields."

With the announcement in January that the men's tournament was essentially going into a bubble based in Indianapolis, it was only a matter of time before the Big Ten did likewise. The news came Feb. 9 that its tourney would be played in Lucas Oil Stadium, home of the NFL's Indianapolis Colts.

"The decision to relocate the tournament to Indianapolis was based on multiple factors," the release said. "First and foremost was the health and safety of student-athletes, coaches, officials and conference constituents. Hosting both the men's and women's basketball tournaments in the same city allows for cohesive testing and medical protocols for both events, as well as centralized accommodations surrounding the competition venues."

The men's tournament will return to Chicago in 2023.

Making A Point

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith was also a guest of the Virtual Sports Report and was asked how the regular-season conference race will be decided in basketball because of a possible inequity in the number of games played due to pauses in programs.

Michigan postponed five games and as of Feb. 21 had played 12 of 20 Big Ten games compared to 17 for the Buckeyes, so it may come down to winning percentages when the season ends March 7.

Smith did not address it directly but said a solution is coming soon.

"You think about teams that haven't had that the opportunity to play for a long period of time, that doesn't mean it's not a

good basketball team," Smith said. "Even if we had designed balanced schedules it would've been unbalanced. I'm just glad all of our kids at all of our schools have a chance to play. We may have to make different decisions about tiebreakers and such decisions."

Arch Support

Ohio State's 2021 recruits – Malaki Branham from Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary and Convoy (Ohio) Crestview's Kalen Etzler – were named to the nominees list for McDonald's All-American Game.

Guard Meechie Johnson of Garfield Heights, Ohio, would likely have been on it as well, but he enrolled at OSU in December and is playing for the Buckeyes.

The list of 320 players will be pared to the final 48 later this month, but unfortunately there will not be a boys or girls game played this year due to the pandemic.

Branham (6-4, 175) is a four-star who is rated the best player in Ohio, sixth nationally at shooting guard and 29th overall in his class, according to the 247Sports composite. He is averaging 23.3 points this season.

Etzler (6-8, 195) is a three-star power forward ranked 24th at his position, third best in the state and 143rd overall. He is averaging nearly 18 points and nine rebounds a game.

Still Climbing

Holtmann on Feb. 19 was one of 15 coaches named to the late-season watch for the 2021 Werner Ladder Naismith Men's Coach of the Year, the Atlanta Tipoff Club announced.

OSU's Kevin McGuff was named to the women's equivalent list, meaning Ohio State, Michigan and West Virginia are the only schools to have a representative from each program.

BIG Men's Basketball

	Conf.			Overall		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Michigan	11	1	.917	16	1	.941
Illinois	12	3	.800	16	5	.762
Ohio State	12	5	.706	18	5	.783
Iowa	11	5	.688	17	6	.739
Purdue	10	6	.625	15	8	.652
Wisconsin	10	7	.588	16	8	.667
Maryland	8	9	.471	14	10	.583
Rutgers	8	9	.471	12	9	.571
Indiana	7	8	.467	12	10	.545
Minnesota	6	10	.375	13	10	.565
Michigan State	5	9	.357	11	9	.550
Penn State	4	11	.267	7	12	.368
Northwestern	3	13	.188	6	14	.300
Nebraska	1	12	.077	5	15	.250

Feb. 8 Scores

Minnesota 79, Nebraska 61

Ohio State 73, Maryland 65

Feb. 9 Score

Michigan State 60, Penn State 58

Feb. 10 Scores

Indiana 79, Northwestern 76 (2OT)

Iowa 79, Rutgers 66

Wisconsin 61, Nebraska 48

Feb. 11 Scores

Minnesota 71, Purdue 68

Illinois vs. Michigan, Postponed

Feb. 12 Score

Illinois 77, Nebraska 72 (OT)

Feb. 13 Scores

Ohio State 78, Indiana 59

Iowa 88, Michigan 58

Rutgers 64, Northwestern 50

Feb. 14 Scores

Michigan 67, Wisconsin 59

Nebraska 62, Penn State 61

Maryland 72, Minnesota 59

Feb. 16 Scores

Maryland 64, Nebraska 50

Purdue 75, Michigan State 65

Illinois 73, Northwestern 66

Feb. 17 Scores

Maryland 79, Nebraska 71

Indiana 82, Minnesota 72

Feb. 18 Scores

Ohio State 92, Penn State 82

Iowa 77, Wisconsin 62

Michigan 71, Rutgers 64

Feb. 20 Scores

Michigan State 78, Indiana 71

Illinois 94, Minnesota 63

Purdue 75, Nebraska 58

Feb. 21 Scores

Michigan 92, Ohio State 87

Maryland 68, Rutgers 59

Iowa 74, Penn State 68

Wisconsin 68, Northwestern 51

Feb. 23 Games

Illinois at Michigan State, 7 p.m.

Penn State at Nebraska, 8 p.m.

Feb. 24 Game

Indiana at Rutgers, 8 p.m.

Feb. 25 Games

Nebraska at Illinois, 7 p.m.

Iowa at Michigan, 7 p.m.

Northwestern at Minnesota, 9 p.m.

Ohio State at Michigan State, 9 p.m.

Feb. 26 Game

Purdue at Penn State, 7 p.m.

Feb. 27 Games

Michigan at Indiana, 12 p.m.

Illinois at Wisconsin, 2 p.m.

Minnesota at Nebraska, 7 p.m.

Feb. 28 Games

Iowa at Ohio State, 4 p.m.

Michigan State at Maryland, 2 p.m.

March 1 Game

Rutgers at Nebraska, 7 p.m.

March 2 Games

Illinois at Michigan, 7 p.m.

Indiana at Michigan State, 8 p.m.

Wisconsin at Purdue, 9 p.m.

March 3 Games

Minnesota at Penn State, 7 p.m.

Maryland at Northwestern, 9 p.m.

March 4 Games

Michigan State at Michigan, TBA

Nebraska at Iowa, TBA

Ohio State Surges Through Tough B1G Slate

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, the No. 4 Ohio State men's basketball team continued its winning ways with victories over Maryland, Indiana and Penn State before falling to No. 3 Michigan.

The Buckeyes beat a tough Maryland team 73-65 in College Park, Md., behind a pair of 18-point outings from junior guard Duane Washington and senior forward Kyle Young on Feb. 8.

Then they defeated Indiana 78-59 at home Feb. 13 in a dominant showing where sophomore forward E.J. Liddell led the way with 19 points.

Next, Ohio State traveled to University Park, Pa., to take on Penn State and came away with its seventh straight win, 92-82, after overcoming an eight-point deficit early in the second half Feb. 18. Liddell led the Buckeyes with 23 points, and Washington scored 21 in the 10-point win.

After riding their hot streak to their 10th win in 11 games at Penn State, head coach Chris Holtmann's squad faced a quick turnaround with a home matchup against third-ranked Michigan Feb. 21. Washington poured in a career-high 30 points, and Liddell added 23 points and 10 rebounds, but the Wolverines outplayed the Buckeyes down the stretch in a 92-87 loss for Ohio State.

Despite losing for the first time since Jan. 19, the Scarlet and Gray sit at 18-5 overall and 12-5 in the Big Ten with a trip to Michigan State scheduled for Feb. 25 and home matchups with vaunted Iowa and Illinois teams to end the regular season.

OSU Rides 27-7 Run To Defeat Maryland

No. 4 Ohio State defeated Maryland 73-65 at the Xfinity Center in College Park on Feb. 8 for its fifth straight win and eighth in nine games.

The Buckeyes (16-4, 10-4 Big Ten) were led to victory over the Terrapins (10-10, 4-9) by the 18-point performances from Washington and Young.

"He's one of a kind," Washington said of Young. "Kyle Young is the hardest working player I've ever played with, and it's special. It goes unnoticed a lot, and tonight he got to get his career high. I'm so happy for him. I've just been giving him confidence, believing in him at the highest level and rewarding him as much as we can.

"I mean, it's hard to ask a guy to do that, and he's really bought into that role. And as you can see, it showed itself tonight, and it's going to show itself way more throughout the year."

After finishing the final 6:08 of the first half on a 16-5 run to lead 35-30 at the break, the Buckeyes opened the second half with an 11-2 stretch through the first 6:53, pushing their lead to 46-32 on a three-pointer by junior wing Justin Ahrens.

Ahrens' triple came after he stole the ball and gave it up to fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker, who drove all the way to the hoop to collapse the defense before kicking it out to the sharpshooting lefty from Versailles, Ohio.

"Our guys have done a good job finding (Ahrens)," Holtmann said. "C.J. Walker's play on the break to him was terrific."

Ohio State played strong in the paint throughout the game, highlighted by a

two-handed putback slam by Young to push the lead to 64-49 with 5:51 left.

Maryland answered with a 6-0 spurt in just 1:35 of action to cut the deficit to single digits at 64-55 on a dunk by senior guard Darryl Morsell with 3:58 to play.

After the Buckeyes and Terrapins exchanged a pair of foul shots, Walker finished strong following a Young steal and then Liddell threw down a ferocious slam on an alley-oop from Washington to push the lead to 70-57 with 69 seconds left.

The visitors ended the game on an 8-3 run to make the final score a respectable eight-point loss at 73-65, but Ohio State controlled the contest after its midgame run.

In the first half, Maryland jumped out to a 13-5 lead through the game's first 6:17, partially thanks to three turnovers by Washington. The Buckeyes bounced back with a 9-0 spurt sparked by two triples from Washington followed by one by forward Seth Towns to take a 14-13 lead with 12:35 until halftime.

"Seth gave us a huge lift, making a couple threes," Holtmann said. "We were struggling – he gave us a huge lift."

The Terrapins responded to the Buckeyes' sharpshooting, regaining the lead and pushing it to 25-19 with 6:25 until the midway point before Ohio State started on its run.

"We came out a little slow in the beginning, but we needed to turn that around really quick and play with more toughness, aggressiveness," Young said. "Once we started to do that, the game started to turn around a little bit."

Ahrens provided an offensive jolt with 11 points and three three-pointers in the game, while Walker added 11 points and three assists off the bench. Liddell scored seven points, grabbed a team-high six boards and blocked a game-high three shots.

Maryland junior guard Aaron Wiggins led the Terps with 17 points and six assists, while junior guard Eric Ayala added 13 points and a game-high seven rebounds.

"We're just really locked in and really trying to get better every single day," Washington said. "We're doing a really good job working hard and staying with each other, staying connected and trusting what we've got going on here, and it's paying off. We're going to keep grinding. We've got a great team (Indiana) coming to our house on (Feb. 13), so we're going to get back to work as soon as we get back and watch the film, analyze it, learn about it, forget about it and move on."

Bucks Beat Hoosiers For 6th Straight Win

The No. 4 Buckeyes beat Indiana 78-59 at Value City Arena on Feb. 13 for their sixth straight win.

Liddell led the way for the Buckeyes (17-4, 11-4) in their 19-point victory over the Hoosiers (11-9, 6-7) with his 19 points, and junior forward Justice Sueing added 16 points and a game-high 10 rebounds, including five offensive boards.

"He played with motor," Holtmann said of Sueing. "He's a talented kid. He's got to go to the glass, because that's how he can really impact the game. He did that. He attacked the rim. He was able to attack when he needed to, made good decisions, played with force. And defensively, he was pretty sound too."

The Hoosiers began the game with a 6-2 stretch through the opening 2:40, but

Ohio State 73, Maryland 65

Feb. 8, 2021

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the Buckeyes bounced back with a 19-0 run sparked by eight points from Liddell and seven from Washington and capped by strong finishes from Zed Key and Sueing to lead 21-6 with 10:50 until halftime.

"As we began to make the lead larger and larger, Coach continued to emphasize to keep playing and to really keep them on their heels, for real," Sueing said. "So that's what we did, and we got the outcome that we wanted."

Ohio State pushed its first-half lead to 16 points twice, including at 31-15 with 5:21 until halftime on a hook shot by Young from Walker.

Indiana ripped off an 11-0 run to cut the deficit to 31-26 capped by a powerful slam by Trayce Jackson-Davis with 2:16 until the midway point. Washington ended the Hoosier rally with a three-pointer on a dish from Liddell, sparking a 7-2 close to the final two minutes of the first half and a 38-28 Buckeye margin.

After Sueing opened the second half with a layup, Indiana scored six straight points to cut the lead to 40-34 just 2:45 into the frame. Sueing drilled a step-back three-pointer to end the mini spurt, and Ohio State pushed its lead back to 45-36 on a hook from Young with 15:13 to play off an offensive rebound by Key.

"In the second half when that happened, it was a big momentum swing, and the team felt it," Key said. "And we just kept going from there and never looked back."

Back-to-back finishes by Jackson-Davis at the rim brought the Hoosiers back within five points at 45-40 with 14:11 on the clock. The Buckeyes bounced back with a 9-0 run, highlighted by five points by Walker, to push their lead to 54-40 with 11:42 left.

Following a Jackson-Davis foul shot to make it 57-44 with 9:04 to play, the Scarlet and Gray went on an 10-0 run, featuring six free throws and highlighted by a converted and-one by Sueing.

On the game, Washington scored 12

Ohio State 78, Indiana 59

Feb. 13, 2021												
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio												
		1		2		F						
Indiana (11-9, 6-7)		28		31		59						
Ohio State (17-4, 11-4)		38		40		78						
Indiana	Total FG	FT	Reb.									
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Durham	30	2-8	2-4	0-3	3	2	7					
Franklin	27	1-4	0-0	0-1	1	4	3					
Phinisee	19	2-5	2-2	0-0	1	0	7					
Jackson-Davis	34	10-14	3-5	6-3	2	2	23					
Thompson	24	3-8	3-4	2-3	1	4	9					
Leal	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Lander	17	0-2	0-0	0-2	3	1	0					
Hunter	22	3-7	2-4	1-1	0	4	10					
Geronimo	7	0-1	0-3	2-1	0	1	0					
Galloway	12	0-1	0-0	0-0	2	2	0					
Totals	200	21-50	12-22	11-17	13	20	59					
Percentages: FG: 42.0%. FT: 54.5%. Three-point field goals: 5-15 (Hunter 2-4, Franklin 1-2, Durham 1-3, Phinisee 1-4, Thompson 0-1, Lander 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 0. Turnovers: 15 (Franklin 4, Lander 4, Durham 3, Hunter 2, Thompson, TEAM). Steals: 3 (Franklin, Jackson-Davis, Galloway). Technical fouls: 1 (Hunter).												
Ohio State	Total FG	FT	Reb.									
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Washington	30	4-8	2-2	0-3	0	3	12					
Ahrens	19	1-4	2-2	0-0	0	4	5					
Sueing	33	6-10	3-3	5-5	1	0	16					
Young	25	3-7	2-2	1-6	2	4	8					
Liddell	31	6-12	5-6	1-3	2	1	19					
Johnson	6	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Jallow	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0					
Brown	4	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	0					
Walker	26	3-6	3-4	0-1	4	0	10					
Key	13	3-5	0-0	5-3	1	3	6					
Towns	8	1-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	2					
Hookfin	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0					
Totals	200	27-56	17-19	12-24	10	20	78					
Percentages: FG: 48.2%. FT: 89.5%. Three-point field goals: 7-16 (Washington 2-4, Liddell 2-4, Sueing 1-1, Walker 1-2, Ahrens 1-4, Young 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 3 (Key 2, Liddell). Turnovers: 10 (Key 3, Washington 2, Sueing 2, Liddell 2, Johnson). Steals: 7 (Johnson 2, Walker 2, Ahrens, Young, Liddell). Officials: Not listed. Attendance: N/A.												

points, while Young added eight with seven rebounds. Walker added 10 points with a game-high four assists and two steals off the bench, while Key provided six points, eight boards including five on the offensive glass, and two blocks in just 13 minutes.

"For me, it's just to come off the bench and do what I do, which is go down there and make an impact," Key said. "Go down and seal, be around the rim, and also on the defensive end as well – block shots, rebound, alter shots. The team feeds off that.

Bristow Uses Free Eligibility Year To Advantage

Hevynne Bristow had no intention of seeing the court at any point during her first year with Ohio State.

Following a transfer to the Buckeyes from Providence after a freshman season in which she averaged 2.7 points and 2.2 rebounds in 29 games, Bristow came to Columbus with the intention of redshirting so that she could develop her game and prepare properly for the difficulties that the Big Ten Conference represents.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

"That was a strong reason why I came here, so I'm mentally prepared to just get better and work on skills that held me back from progressing last year," Bristow told BSB in November. "That's really why I came here. They were like, 'We want you to redshirt. If that's what you want, that's what we want,' and I was like, 'That's perfect,' so I can work on my game, get in shape physically to play in the Big Ten, which is way different conditioning I need."

That was the plan, at least, until the NCAA granted all winter sport student-athletes a free year of eligibility for the 2020-21 season because of the uncertainty of COVID-19.

"The pandemic will continue to impact winter sport seasons in ways we can't predict," M. Grace Calhoun, chairman of the Division I



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

EARLIER THAN EXPECTED – Hevynne Bristow transferred to Ohio State expecting to redshirt this season but has found time in four games thanks to a free year of eligibility granted to all student-athletes by the NCAA.

Council and athletic director at Pennsylvania, said in a statement. "Council members opted to provide for winter sport student-athletes the same flexibility given spring and fall sports previously. The actions today ensure the continuation of local decision-making in the best interest of each institution and its student-athletes."

With that on the table, Bristow changed her mentality for this season and has found time in four games for the Buckeyes, all against conference foes in what is now technically her sophomore campaign.

She made her debut against Penn State on Jan. 4, where she was held scoreless in a minute

of action, then scored her first points for Ohio State three days later against Illinois, finishing with two points, a rebound, an assist and a steal in nine minutes.

Bristow said on Feb. 9 that she did have to adjust her mentality once she decided to play this season but that she has felt ready to play when called upon.

"I felt pretty good," she said. "I've been practicing hard, working on my shape with our trainer Claire (Quebedeaux). So it just felt good to be back on the court. We just had a plan of not playing, redshirting, so the eligibility rule kind of threw us off of the game plan. I just had to go a

little harder, try to get more reps."

After playing in back-to-back games to open Big Ten play, Bristow did not see action on the floor for seven consecutive contests, but she made an impact in other ways.

When asked what her most important contribution to the team is, Bristow did not choose anything that has to do with her abilities as a basketball player.

"I would say it's definitely being our No. 1 fan," Bristow said.

The sophomore from Brooklyn, N.Y., said she takes pride in being a vocal presence from the bench, something that is especially important because of the lack of fans in arenas due to the pandemic.

"We had zero fans for the majority of this season, and I felt like I was the loudest in every arena I could have been," Bristow said. "People sometimes always focus on being on the court, but I feel like energy from the bench is always important. Just us struggling with our COVID thing, just always being there for the team has the same amount of importance and relevance."

Her efforts on the sidelines have not been lost on her teammates, specifically sophomore Jacy Sheldon, who emphasized the importance of having people like Bristow there to hype the team up in big moments.

"I think everybody notices her," Sheldon said. "Without fans it's silent, so she's definitely a huge factor. People underestimate how much that means, but she's awesome. She's the first one to her feet when something good happens and that's huge because we feed off that as well. She's awesome. That's been huge for us."

After that seven-game absence, Bristow had

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2020-21 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

13-4 Overall (9-4 Big Ten)
Feb. 21

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.						
Jacy Sheldon	17-17	539-31.7	107-213	.502	28-82	.341	46-56	.821	13-47	60-3.5	37-0	45	37	5	26	288-16.9
Dorka Juhasz	14-14	410-29.3	84-178	.472	12-52	.231	28-65	.431	60-97	157-11.2	30-0	17	26	13	12	208-14.9
Madison Greene	15-15	492-32.8	64-150	.427	13-37	.351	60-70	.857	21-32	53-3.5	36-1	65	28	2	26	201-13.4
Aaliyah Patty	15-15	370-24.7	70-152	.461	13-35	.371	27-34	.794	22-68	90-6.0	43-2	12	20	13	9	180-12.0
Braxtin Miller	16-16	538-33.6	61-153	.399	19-52	.365	31-43	.721	14-36	50-3.1	32-3	46	22	6	28	172-10.8
Kateri Poole	17-2	278-16.4	32-79	.405	11-33	.333	26-39	.667	8-32	40-2.4	29-0	28	21	3	14	101-5.9
Tanaya Beacham	16-5	220-13.8	29-62	.468	2-6	.333	12-16	.750	21-43	64-4.0	37-1	8	13	4	11	72-4.5
Rebeka Mikulasikova	14-0	191-13.6	23-57	.404	4-22	.182	10-14	.714	3-34	37-2.6	30-2	9	16	2	2	60-4.3
Rikki Harris	15-1	156-10.4	19-40	.475	9-25	.360	9-15	.600	6-23	29-1.9	13-0	7	8	2	9	56-3.7
Gabby Hutcherson	15-0	186-12.4	19-47	.404	9-23	.391	5-8	.625	4-31	35-2.3	16-0	7	6	8	11	52-3.5
Hevyne Bristow	4-0	15-3.8	1-4	.250	0-0	.000	3-4	.750	1-0	1-0.3	4-0	1	1	1	1	5-1.3
Anyssa Jones	7-0	30-4.3	1-6	.167	0-0	.000	2-3	.667	1-0	1-0.1	7-0	0	2	0	1	4-0.6
TEAM									36-31	67				4		
Ohio State	17	3425	510-1141	.447	120-367	.327	259-367	.706	210-474	684-40.2	314-9	245	204	59	150	1399-82.3
Opponents	17	3425	432-1085	.398	84-327	.257	226-320	.706	217-474	691-40.6	303-8	213	289	68	79	1174-69.1

another opportunity for in-game action, this time late in an 83-59 win over Minnesota on Feb. 7. Bristow played the final 2:32 of the contest, tallying three points after hitting 3 of 4 from the free-throw line.

Bristow was joined by freshman guard Anyssa Jones, who played eight minutes and was held scoreless, as two players who had seen limited action prior to the game against the Gophers. Head coach Kevin McGuff said it is important to get those players in the rotation moving forward, especially after having them miss out on minutes due to a stretch in the schedule including four straight ranked opponents.

"I was really happy to get some people some more playing time because they're good players and they just need experience," McGuff said. "We've been in such a tough stretch we've kind of relied on our experienced players, and these kids haven't gotten as much time. That was really important. As we kind of head down the back side of the season, we're going to need everybody, so hopefully those minutes will prove valuable for the whole team as we move on."

Bristow's season statistics – 1.3 points per game in 3.8 minutes per game – are not ones that stand out this year for Ohio State, but Bristow has seen 15 minutes of in-game action that all put her ahead of schedule after coming into the year expecting to redshirt.

Still, Bristow said it wasn't easy to shift her mentality after previously being set to sit out this season. Now, with a few games under her belt, she is just taking the opportunities as they come.

"When you have your mind set on something, it's hard to shift to a new mind-set, so it's always iffy," Bristow said. "I always keep a positive attitude when I don't (play). We're just here supporting (our team). If I get in, I'll try to be productive. If I don't, I'm still productive off the bench with the energy."

"It's good to get acclimated to this conference because I'm from the Big East, which is not as competitive as this conference. Any minute is good just to see how it is, the flow of the game, so I take it as it is."

Limited play time aside, Bristow has made an impact on Ohio State this season in a multitude of ways, and Sheldon loves what she has seen out of the sophomore guard in Bristow's first year with the Buckeyes.

"She didn't even expect to be able to play this year, so she's grown a ton as a player and as a person," Sheldon said. "She's definitely someone that we love having around. She gets on us. She's always the first one to be going crazy when something good happens. She's an amazing teammate and an even better player."

Northwestern Game Postponed
For Presumptive Positive Test

Ohio State's game against Northwestern, which was scheduled for 1 p.m. on Feb. 14, was

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

postponed "due to a presumptively positive test during the pregame testing window," according to a statement released by Ohio State.

"Sunday afternoon's women's basketball game between Ohio State and Northwestern has been postponed out of an abundance of caution for the health and safety of the participants from both teams," the statement said. "The decision to postpone was mutually agreed upon by the head team physicians from both institutions due to a presumptively positive test during the pregame testing window. The Big Ten Conference will work with both institutions to identify potential rescheduling options."

The statement did not mention which team received the positive test.

The matchup was supposed to be a chance at redemption for the Buckeyes, who fell to the Wildcats 69-57 on the road as one of their four losses on the season. Ohio State was also coming off a 75-70 defeat at the hands of Wisconsin.

It was the seventh postponement or cancellation on Ohio State's schedule. The Buckeyes' opener against Akron was canceled, as was a matchup against St. Mary's. They have also had games postponed against Iowa, Maryland, Michigan State and Rutgers. Only the matchup against the Hawkeyes, which was played on Feb. 4, has been rescheduled to this point.

Juhasz Makes Midseason
Naismith Watch List

Ohio State junior forward Dorka Juhasz was named one of 30 players on the Naismith Trophy midseason watch list. The award goes to the best player in college basketball.

This season, Juhasz is averaging a double-double with 14.9 points and 11.2 rebounds and is shooting 47.4 percent from the field while leading the team with 13 blocked shots. Her scoring is second on the team, while she leads the Buckeyes in rebounds by over four per contest. Juhasz's rebounding total is also second in the Big Ten.

"I think that's well deserved at this point in the season," McGuff said. "The big thing with her is she's just continued to get better each year. She's really developing into an extremely

versatile player that can play around the basket and around the perimeter."

McGuff also stressed Juhasz's importance for the team, not just in her scoring output, but in what she brings in multiple facets of the game.

"We need her to score around the basket and on the perimeter and really use her versatility offensively," the coach said. "Probably as much as anything though, we're going to really need her to rebound the ball. She's really emerged as our best rebounder, and then also lastly I'd say her defense has really come on this year."

The third-year forward out of Pecs, Hungary, is one of six players from the Big Ten to make the list. The others are Iowa guard Caitlin Clark, Rutgers forward Arella Guirantes, Michigan forward Naz Hillmon, Maryland guard Ashley Owusu and Northwestern guard Lindsay Pulliam.

McGuff Also Named To
Naismith Watch List

McGuff was one of 15 coaches named to the Werner Ladder Naismith's Coach of the Year late-season watch list. He is one of three coaches from the Big Ten named to the list, with Michigan's Kim Barnes Arico and Maryland's Brenda Frese being the others.

The other coaches on the list include UConn's Geno Auriemma, Arizona's Adia Barnes, Texas A&M's Gary Blair, West Virginia's Mike Carey, UCLA's Cori Close, South Florida's Jose Fernandez, Tennessee's Kellie Harper, South Dakota State's Aaron Johnston, NC State's Wes Moore, South Carolina's Dawn Staley, Stanford's Tara VanDerveer and Louisville's Jeff Walz.

Staley won the award in 2020, while Auriemma has won it eight times, most recently in 2017.

McGuff has led Ohio State to a 13-4 in his eighth season with the program, including ranked wins over Indiana, Maryland and Michigan. Prior to this season, McGuff amassed a 413-177 record over his head-coaching career, including nine seasons at Xavier and two seasons at Washington.

The winner of the award will be announced on April 3.

BIG Women's
Basketball

	Conf.			Overall		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Maryland	12	1	.923	16	2	.889
Indiana	12	2	.857	14	4	.778
Michigan	8	2	.800	13	2	.867
Ohio State	9	4	.692	13	4	.765
Northwestern	10	5	.667	12	5	.706
Rutgers	6	3	.667	10	3	.769
Iowa	8	6	.571	12	6	.667
Michigan State	7	6	.538	12	6	.667
Nebraska	9	8	.529	11	9	.550
Minnesota	6	10	.375	7	11	.389
Penn State	5	10	.333	8	11	.421
Purdue	3	12	.200	6	13	.316
Wisconsin	2	15	.118	5	15	.250
Illinois	1	14	.067	3	15	.167

Feb. 10 Scores

Indiana 90, Penn State 65

Wisconsin 75, Ohio State 70

Minnesota 83, Illinois 73

Feb. 11 Scores

Rutgers 70, Northwestern 54

Michigan 62, Purdue 49

Iowa 88, Nebraska 81

Feb. 13 Score

Michigan State 78, Penn State 65

Feb. 14 Scores

Northwestern at Ohio State, Postponed

Rutgers 75, Purdue 57

Minnesota 68, Wisconsin 63

Indiana 58, Illinois 50

Maryland 95, Nebraska 73

Feb. 16 Score

Michigan 86, Michigan State 82

Feb. 17 Scores

Maryland 103, Illinois 58

Nebraska 71, Northwestern 64

Rutgers 83, Minnesota 56

Feb. 18 Scores

Ohio State 100, Purdue 85

Iowa 96, Penn State 78

Indiana 70, Michigan 65

Feb. 20 Scores

Maryland 94, Minnesota 62

Rutgers 75, Illinois 46

Northwestern 67, Wisconsin 54

Feb. 21 Scores

Michigan State 76, Purdue 73

Michigan 75, Ohio State 66

Nebraska 87, Penn State 72

Feb. 23 Game

Iowa at Maryland, 1 p.m.

Feb. 24 Games

Rutgers at Michigan State, 3 p.m.

Ohio State at Penn State, 5 p.m.

Indiana at Wisconsin, 7 p.m.

Nebraska at Minnesota, 7 p.m.

Feb. 25 Games

Michigan at Iowa, 4:30 p.m.

Maryland at Purdue, 6 p.m.

Feb. 27 Games

Michigan State at Nebraska, 2 p.m.

Indiana at Ohio State, 3 p.m.

Feb. 28 Games

Rutgers at Penn State, 12:30 p.m.

Illinois at Purdue, 2 p.m.

Michigan at Minnesota, 2:30 p.m.

Iowa at Wisconsin, 3 p.m.

Maryland at Northwestern, 4 p.m.

March 3 Game

Iowa at Indiana, TBA

March 5 Games

Minnesota at Illinois, TBA

Penn State at Maryland, TBA

Purdue at Indiana, TBA

Ohio State at Rutgers, TBA

Northwestern at Michigan, TBA

Wisconsin at Michigan State, TBA

Nebraska at Iowa, TBA

Buckeyes Drop Pair Of Road Games To Fall To 13-4

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since Buckeye Sports Bulletin last went to press, the Ohio State women's basketball team played three games, having one match-up against Northwestern postponed due to a presumptively positive COVID-19 test.

In the games that were played, the Buckeyes went 1-2, taking down Purdue at home with their first 100-point performance of 2021 but dropping road games against Wisconsin and Michigan, the former of which is one of the worst teams in the Big Ten, and the latter of which is one of the best.

All this leaves Ohio State at 13-4 overall and 9-4 within the conference, likely eliminating any chance of a regular-season conference crown but still signifying an impressive year for the Buckeyes, especially considering the number of postponements and the lack of postseason to play for.

Because of Ohio State's self-imposed postseason ban, the last three games on the schedule against Penn State, Indiana and Rutgers will be the last that the team plays before the 2021-22 campaign, unless one of the various postponements gets rescheduled in the final weeks of the season.

Bucks Suffer Loss To Bottom-Feeding Badgers

Coming off a 24-point victory over Minnesota and with wins against three ranked teams, Ohio State seemed set to move to 13-2 on the season with a date against the Wisconsin Badgers, who were 4-13 overall and 1-13 in Big Ten play, next on the schedule. Instead, the Buckeyes fell to the Badgers, 75-70, for their third loss on the season on Feb. 10 at the Kohl Center.

The Buckeyes found themselves tied 18-18 after one quarter and down 41-37 at halftime, thanks in part to an 11-0 Wisconsin run in the middle of the second quarter to give the Badgers a 33-27 lead with 3:28 before the half. Ohio State never led the rest of the way.

"It was just disappointing," said Ohio

State head coach Kevin McGuff. "Give Wisconsin credit. I thought they played really hard and they really beat us up on the boards. We were just disappointed because we didn't feel like we gave our best effort tonight, and that starts with me on down. That's a tough team loss for all of us, and we have to coach better, we have to play better, and we just need to be better."

The Buckeyes cut the deficit by just one in the third quarter, trailing 57-54 after three thanks to poor shooting (38.7 percent), especially around the rim (12 of 28 on layups) in the first 30 minutes.

The fourth quarter started the same way much of the third went, with the teams trading baskets and neither being able to go on much of a run to extend or narrow the margin. Then, with Ohio State (12-3, 8-3 Big Ten) down five, junior forward Dorka Juhasz made a layup to cut the deficit to 64-61 with 5:43 to play.

On the next possession, senior guard Braxtin Miller forced a turnover and hit a three to make it a tie game for the first time in the second half, coming with 5:05 to go.

It still wasn't enough.

After Wisconsin (5-13, 2-13) regained the lead thanks to five free throws, forward Imani Lewis hit a big layup to extend the Badgers lead to 71-66 with 2:19 to go. Two makes at the charity stripe by freshman guard Kateri Poole cut the deficit to three with 57 seconds remaining.

But Ohio State never got closer than that, getting held without a field goal for a 4:05 span until a late layup by junior forward Aaliyah Patty to make it 73-70 before the Badgers put it away with free throws.

The Badgers relied on Lewis all game. She led all players in the first half with 16 points and seven rebounds while shooting 6 of 8 from the field. Lewis ended the game with 27 points and 14 rebounds.

"She played really well," McGuff said. "She's a great player and she made a bunch of shots from the perimeter, probably a little more efficient than she normally is, and then also had a bunch of huge rebounds."

Wisconsin dominated the glass all game, outrebounding Ohio State 49-34 on the

Wisconsin 75, Ohio State 70

Feb. 10, 2021												
Kohl Center • Madison, Wisc.												
	1	2	3	4	F							
Ohio State (12-3, 8-3)	18	19	17	16	70							
Wisconsin (5-13, 2-13)	18	23	16	18	75							
Ohio State	Total FG FT					Reb.						
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Juhasz	32	6-14	3-7	7-5	1	3	16					
Patty	22	4-12	1-2	2-4	0	2	9					
Greene	37	4-14	6-7	1-2	4	0	15					
Sheldon	34	3-8	0-0	0-1	4	2	7					
Miller	28	3-8	3-4	0-0	1	5	10					
Poole	16	1-4	2-2	2-1	0	1	4					
Mikulasikova	6	0-2	0-0	0-0	1	1	0					
Hutcherson	10	1-2	1-2	1-0	0	2	4					
Harris	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Beacham	10	2-3	1-2	2-1	1	3	5					
Totals	200	24-67	17-26	19-15	12	19	70					
Percentages: FG: 35.8%. FT: 65.4%. Three-point field goals: 5-23 (Hutcherson 1-1, Miller 1-4, Juhasz 1-5, Greene 1-5, Sheldon 1-6, Patty 0-1, Poole 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 2 (Patty, Hutcherson). Turnovers: 6 (Juhasz 2, Miller 2, Sheldon, Poole). Steals: 6 (Miller 3, Greene, Poole, Hutcherson).												
Wisconsin	Total FG FT					Reb.						
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Lewis	33	9-12	8-10	4-10	1	3	27					
Stapleton	31	6-15	1-1	6-4	1	4	13					
Moschkau	24	3-4	2-2	1-3	0	3	10					
Pospisilova	35	4-10	0-2	2-6	5	2	8					
Hilliard	37	4-12	5-7	1-1	7	1	13					
Stauffer	6	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	3	0					
Douglass	20	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	2	0					
Schramek	13	1-3	2-3	2-1	0	2	4					
Thompson	0+	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Totals	200	27-58	18-25	20-29	15	20	75					
Percentages: FG: 46.6%. FT: 72.0%. Three-point field goals: 3-7 (Moschkau 2-2, Lewis 1-1, Pospisilova 0-4). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 10 (Pospisilova 3, Stapleton 2, Schramek 2, Moschkau, Douglass, Thompson). Turnovers: 15 (Pospisilova 6, Lewis 3, Hilliard 3, Moschkau, Douglass, TEAM). Steals: 5 (Pospisilova 3, Moschkau, Hilliard).												
Officials: Zentz, Cross, Tobin. Attendance: N/A.												

Ohio State 100, Purdue 85

Feb. 18, 2021												
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio												
	1	2	3	4	F							
Purdue (6-12, 3-11)	23	13	27	22	85							
Ohio State (13-3, 9-3)	23	26	26	25	100							
Purdue	Total FG FT				Reb.							
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Diagne	24	10-15	1-1	5-2	2	2	21					
Moore	21	8-13	0-0	0-2	2	0	18					
Traylor	33	4-10	0-0	0-0	4	0	9					
Farquhar	37	0-2	0-0	1-4	1	2	0					
Layden	27	4-6	2-2	0-3	5	2	13					
Doumbia	25	5-10	0-0	3-4	4	1	10					
Kyle	14	4-7	0-0	0-3	0	1	8					
Grant	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	0	0					
Hardin	10	2-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	6					
Gony	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Stallings	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	1	0					
Totals	200	37-67	3-3	10-19	20	8	85					
Percentages: FG: 55.2%. FT: 100%. Three-point field goals: 8-17 (Layden 3-4, Hardin 2-2, Moore 2-6, Traylor 1-4, Doumbia 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 3 (Layden, Doumbia, Kyle). Turnovers: 14 (Doumbia 4, Farquhar 3, Traylor 2, Layden 2, Moore, Grant, TEAM). Steals: 5 (Traylor 2, Layden, Kyle, Grant).												
Ohio State	Total FG FT				Reb.							
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Juhasz	28	9-11	4-5	5-5	2	0	23					
Patty	19	5-8	0-0	1-2	0	2	12					
Sheldon	33	8-13	3-3	0-2	7	2	19					
Poole	32	3-10	0-0	0-3	7	0	9					
Miller	34	6-8	1-2	0-2	3	0	15					
Mikulasikova	16	3-8	1-2	0-1	0	0	7					
Harris	16	2-3	2-2	0-2	1	0	7					
Beacham	9	3-4	1-2	1-2	0	4	8					
Hutcherson	9	0-0	0-0	0-1	2	0	0					
Jones	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Bristow	2	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Totals	200	39-67	12-16	10-20	22	8	100					
Percentages: FG: 58.2%. FT: 75.0%. Three-point field goals: 10-19 (Poole 3-6, Miller 2-2, Patty 2-3, Juhasz 1-1, Beacham 1-1, Harris 1-2, Sheldon 0-2, Mikulasikova 0-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Patty, Poole). Turnovers: 8 (Juhasz 2, Sheldon 2, Miller 2, Poole, Jones). Steals: 6 (Poole 2, Patty, Mikulasikova, Harris, Beacham).												
Officials: McConnell, Cruse, Berger. Attendance: N/A.												

night, including a 29-15 advantage on defensive rebounds.

"We didn't have discipline in blocking them out, and we weren't very physical, either," McGuff said. "They were much more physical than we were around the basket, and they really made us pay."

Juhasz led the Buckeyes with 12 points and six boards in the opening half. She finished the game with her fifth straight double-double, tallying 16 points and 12 rebounds. Madison Greene added 15 points. Miller fouled out of the game with 3:08 to play, finishing with 10 points and three steals.

Sophomore forward Rebeka Mikulasikova was back in the lineup after missing the game against Minnesota with an illness. She finished with no points in six minutes of action, missing both her field-goal attempts.

On the game, Ohio State shot just 24 of 67 (35.8 percent) from the field and struggled even more from deep, hitting just 5 of 23 three-point attempts (21.7 percent). Wisconsin, on the other hand, hit on 27 of 58 (46.6 percent) overall and on 3 of 7 (42.9 percent) from behind the arc.

The Buckeyes fell to the Badgers despite forcing 15 turnovers while committing just six. Ohio State also capitalized on that margin, outscoring Wisconsin 23-9 on points off turnovers.

Buckeyes Bounce Back Against Boilermakers

After an up-and-down first quarter, Ohio State rode a 26-5 run in the second quarter and 58.2-percent shooting from the field for the game, all the way to a 100-85 win over visiting Purdue on Feb. 18.

The Buckeyes hit the 100-point threshold for the first time in Big Ten play this season and the first time since putting up 104 on Miami (Ohio) on Dec. 10.

"We knew we had to come out tonight and just put a full effort in and make sure that we really locked in to do what we needed to do to be able to get the win," Miller said.

Greene was unavailable for Ohio State for the first time this season. Poole replaced her in the starting lineup and finished with nine points and seven assists. She shot 3 of 6 from three in the contest.

Poole said she had some "freshman jitters" but that she was happy with how she played overall in her first collegiate start.

"Definitely knew I had a big role to step up and play for, so this game was for Madison and the rest of the team," Poole

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

said. "I think overall I did a solid job. There's always room for improvement no matter how good you do."

Without Greene, the Buckeyes relied on their other primary scorers, and they stepped up. Juhasz (23 points), sophomore guard Jacy Sheldon (19), Miller (15) and Patty (12), Ohio State's four leading scorers this season other than Greene, combined for 69 points and shot a combined 28 of 40 from the field in the 15-point win.

Juhasz also finished with a double-double for the sixth consecutive game by adding 10 rebounds in the contest. Sheldon added seven assists, which was tied with Poole for the team high.

"I thought on offense we did a great job," McGuff said. "Kateri really helped us move the ball and share the ball. She had some great passes and (redshirt freshman guard) Rikki (Harris) had some good minutes, and then Jacy and Braxtin were their normal selves. I thought the post players, when we got them the ball, were very efficient. You look at their numbers and the number of shots they took and the way they finished, they were really good."

"We probably missed Madison obviously more on the defensive end as much as anything."

Ohio State (13-3, 9-3) trailed Purdue 27-23 with 9:05 left in the second quarter after a make by junior guard Kayana Traylor. That would be the largest deficit the Buckeyes would face the rest of the game.

A jump shot by Miller started a run of 18 straight Ohio State points that gave the Buckeyes a 41-27 lead. That lead ballooned to 49-32 on what ended up being a 26-5 Ohio State run that spanned 6:03 of the second quarter.

Miller said it was the defense, which forced seven Purdue (6-12, 3-11) turnovers in the second quarter alone, that helped spark the major run.

"I think our offense was pretty much efficient the whole game," Miller said, "but being able to get some defense going and some stops and steals just really picked up on what we needed to get done and start making things move a little bit more in our favor."

In a portion of the run, starting with Miller's jumper and ending with a three by Poole to make it 44-30, the Buckeyes made eight consecutive field-goal attempts, including a pair of makes from deep.

That ended up not even being the longest stretch of made shots in the game. In the fourth quarter, Ohio State used a stretch of 10 straight makes to go up 99-74 and put the final nail in the coffin for Purdue's chances at a comeback.

Ohio State led 100-76 with three minutes to go before Purdue went on a late 9-0 run to cut the final deficit to 15, making a lopsided victory look a bit closer than it truly was.

On the strength of the second-quarter run, Ohio State led 49-36 at halftime, with Juhasz leading the team with 13 points and seven rebounds on a perfect 4-of-4 shooting. Sheldon also made major contributions with 11 points, two rebounds and two assists in the half.

Both teams had impressive performances shooting the ball, with Ohio State hitting 39 of 67 overall and 10 of 19 (52.6 percent) from three, and Purdue connecting on 37 of 67 (55.2 percent) attempts on the day, as well as 8 of 17 (47.1 percent) from behind the arc.

The Boilermakers were led offensively by fifth-year senior forward Fatou Diagne and junior guard Brooke Moore, who had 21 and 18 points, respectively.

"We were really good on offense," McGuff

said. "I thought we shared the ball. We had 22 assists and eight turnovers. I thought we really did a good job making the extra pass, sharing the ball, not settling until we got the shot we wanted. And then they were efficient on the other end."

"They did similar things, and we were not good defensively. I thought we really struggled on that end of the floor."

This was the first game for Ohio State in eight days after the Feb. 14 matchup against Northwestern was postponed due to a preemptive positive COVID-19 test.

The last time Ohio State scored 100 points in Big Ten play was on March 5, 2016, when the Buckeyes fell to Michigan State, 107-105, in triple overtime.

Bucks Fall To Michigan Despite Sheldon Performance

About an hour after Ohio State's 92-87 defeat to Michigan on the men's side, the Ohio State women's basketball team did not fare any better, falling to the Wolverines on the road 75-66.

The loss dropped Ohio State to 13-4 and 9-4 in the Big Ten, while the win moved Michigan to 13-2 and 8-2 in the conference.

"We fought really hard today, all of us," Sheldon said. "We played really hard, that was our main focus going into this game was give it our all 100 percent the whole game, and I think today they just played a better game than we did."

The Michigan lead was just four, 35-31, early in the third quarter after a three-point make by Sheldon, but a 10-0 run for the Wolverines pushed their advantage to 14, and it didn't fall into single digits until there was 2:14 to play.

"That definitely gave them some momentum, and that's on all of us, myself included," Sheldon said of the third-quarter Michigan run. "I think we had a couple possessions, a couple bad turnovers and some shots that normally fall for us, so I think that it definitely gave them momentum that third quarter, which we had trouble getting back from."

Sheldon was Ohio State's top performer all game, finishing with a team-high 26 points and shooting 9 of 14 from the field. She also added two blocks and four steals and scored 17 of the Buckeyes' 39 points in the second half.

"She's obviously a great player and she really had some really bright moments today offensively," McGuff said. "We need her. She's a great player, and we need her to be consistently good on that end of the floor."

The second-year guard hit a big three to make it an eight-point game off a Michigan turnover in the fourth quarter, and, following a Wolverine turnover, senior guard Tanaya Beacham made a layup to make it 67-61 with 1:49 to play as part of a 9-0 Ohio State run.

But Michigan junior forward Naz Hillmon came through for the opposition, making

a layup, earning a defensive rebound on the other end and then hitting a shot at the free-throw line to bring the lead back up to nine and ultimately seal the victory for the Wolverines.

"That's the mentality. I think we held onto that the whole game, and that's what you have to do in especially games like those," Sheldon said. "The game was never out of our reach in our eyes. We came up a little short. They played a better game today, but being out there, especially in the fourth quarter, you always have to have a positive mentality."

The last time the two teams faced – an 81-77 Ohio State victory on Jan. 21 – the Buckeyes won despite giving up 50 points to Hillmon, the most by any player, men's or women's, in Michigan program history.

While she didn't match her last performance, Hillmon still made a huge impact, finishing with 27 points and eight rebounds on 11-of-16 shooting. She did it in 31 minutes and was out for a large portion of the second half after picking up her fourth foul with 2:34 to go in the third quarter.

McGuff said that Ohio State implemented more zone defenses in an effort to slow down Hillmon's production.

"She's a tremendous player and a really hard matchup," McGuff said. "That was part of the reason we played a little bit more zone. It's just to kind of crowd her around the basket. She was still very good today and obviously the last game was extraordinary point total, but still, she was very good."

Hillmon returned with 6:36 to go in the fourth quarter, and Ohio State outscored Michigan just 10-9 during the time without the third-year forward on the floor.

Juhasz did not have a strong performance for the Buckeyes, finishing the game with 12 rebounds, but only one point, her career low, after shooting 0 of 8 from the field. Juhasz and Miller, the No. 2 and No. 5 scorers for the Buckeyes this season, went a combined 0 of 13 in the contest.

"She's been so good lately and today wasn't her day," McGuff said on Juhasz. "They did a good job defensively on her and they were very physical with her, made her really score over them and through them, and she got some opportunities and some shots she normally makes. They just didn't go in today."

For the game, Ohio State shot 23 of 57 (40.4 percent) from the field and 9 of 26 (34.6 percent) from three, while Michigan shot 27 of 65 (41.5 percent) overall and 4 of 14 (28.6 percent) from deep.

Michigan led 30-27 at halftime, with neither team starting the game strong from the field. Both the Buckeyes (10 of 30) and Wolverines (12 of 36) shot 33.3 percent from the field in the first 20 minutes, and they combined to shoot just 4 of 22 from deep, with the home team just 1 of 8.

The Wolverines were led by junior guard

Michigan 75, Ohio State 66

Feb. 21, 2021											
Crisler Center • Ann Arbor, Mich.											
	1	2	3	4	F						
Ohio State (13-4, 9-4)	16	11	11	28	66						
Michigan (13-2, 8-2)	20	10	24	21	75						
Ohio State	Total FG	FT	Reb.								
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts					
Juhasz	37	0-8	1-4	4-8	1	3	1				
Patty	29	4-8	0-0	0-2	0	1	10				
Sheldon	37	9-14	2-2	0-3	0	2	26				
Poole	30	5-13	3-5	0-5	6	3	14				
Miller	39	0-5	3-4	1-0	3	5	3				
Beacham	11	4-6	0-0	2-2	0	5	8				
Harris	14	1-3	2-2	0-3	1	0	4				
Mikulashikova	3	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0				
Totals	200	23-57	11-17	7-27	11	19	66				
Percentages: FG: 40.4%. FT: 64.7%. Three-point field goals: 9-26 (Sheldon 6-10, Patty 2-5, Poole 1-5, Miller 0-1, Harris 0-2, Juhasz 0-3). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 5 (Sheldon 2, Patty, Miller, Beacham). Turnovers: 17 (Juhasz 3, Patty 3, Sheldon 3, Poole 2, Beacham 2, Harris 2, Miller, Mikulasikova). Steals: 9 (Sheldon 4, Miller 2, Juhasz, Poole, Harris).											
Michigan	Total FG	FT	Reb.								
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts					
Hillmon	31	11-16	5-7	5-3	0	4	27				
H. Brown	34	2-6	0-0	1-3	2	2	5				
Dilk	30	3-10	6-8	0-6	6	0	13				
Johnson	36	4-12	4-4	2-4	3	0	12				
L. Brown	35	4-13	2-4	2-5	2	2	11				
Nolan	17	1-6	0-0	1-2	1	3	3				
Kiser	15	2-2	0-0	0-1	0	2	4				
Rauch	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0				
Totals	200	27-65	17-23	14-27	14	14	75				
Percentages: FG: 41.5%. FT: 73.9%. Three-point field goals: 4-14 (H. Brown 1-2, L. Brown 1-3, Dilk 1-4, Nolan 1-4, Johnson 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 1 (H. Brown). Turnovers: 13 (L. Brown 4, H. Brown 3, Hillmon 2, TEAM 2, Dilk, Johnson). Steals: 7 (Dilk 3, Nolan 3, Kiser). Officials: Zentz, Enlund, Steratore. Attendance: 73.											

Amy Dilk and Hillmon in the first half, each scoring 10 points. Poole and Sheldon led Ohio State with nine points apiece.

Greene was unavailable for the Buckeyes for the second straight game, with Poole again stepping into the starting lineup. Poole finished with 14 points, five rebounds and six assists.

Next up, Ohio State was scheduled to travel to face Penn State on the road. That game will take place on Feb. 24 at 5 p.m. This defeat ends this season's Ohio State-Michigan season series at 1-1, with no chance at a rematch thanks to the postseason ban.

"It's unfortunate," Sheldon said on not potentially getting another chance against Michigan. "Every time we play the team up north it's a big game and a game you want to win. But I think for us, we're just going to focus on what we can get better at and focus on the next game because we have a good Penn State team coming up."



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Bucks Eyeing Strong Finish To Disappointing Season

Ohio State men's hockey coach Steve Rohlik's favorite words to the media go something like, "We just want to be better at the end of the season."

That goal remains the same now, but the emphasis is different than the past four seasons when the Buckeyes were positioned entering the Big Ten tournament to earn at least an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament with a good showing. That's what they would have done a program-record four consecutive years if not for the COVID-19 pandemic halting the 2020 conference tourney and everything after that for months.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

The 2020-21 season has been a departure for Rohlik, who will have his first losing season since going 14-18-4 in 2015-16.

Instead of gearing up for a long postseason like 2018 when OSU made its second Frozen Four appearance, the Buckeyes (6-15-1, 6-14-1 Big Ten) must win the conference tournament and the automatic bid to reach the NCAAs again.

That's their only hope, but a change in format due to, of course, the pandemic raises the question whether it improves

their chances for success.

The conference is returning to the one-site, single-elimination plan that was used from 2014-17. The top seed received a bye and the other six participants had to win three games (quarterfinal, semifinal, final) to claim the championship. The tourney was in either Detroit or St. Paul, Minn.

Under the format of the past three seasons, the games were played on campuses with the quarterfinals being best-of-three hosted by the higher seed, followed by single-elimination semifinals and final. Other than the top seed, a team needed four wins for the championship.

The 2021 tournament will be at Notre Dame from March 18-20 with all six games (three quarterfinals, two semifinals, final) at Compton Family Ice Arena.

One theory would have the Buckeyes better off with this season's format because they would need to win only three games instead of four as in the most recent years.

But considering the Buckeyes have won two games in a row only once this season, the old format might be more advantageous because OSU could lose a quarterfinal game and still advance with a pair of wins.

It won't matter unless the Buckeyes, as Rohlik preaches, are playing better by the time the tourney rolls around.

Signs Of Hope

The Buckeyes used an unexpected open weekend to hit the do-over button,

then offered a glimpse in their games against No. 7 Michigan on Feb. 19 and 20 of their potential to be a spoiler at the tournament.

Ohio State's series at Penn State on Feb. 12 and 13 was postponed because of COVID-19 issues in the Nittany Lions' program.

When a team is on a roll, it wants to keep playing. That was not the case for the Buckeyes, who were outscored 26-5 in losing five straight to Michigan State once and twice each to Minnesota and Notre Dame.

The Buckeyes responded with a strong showing in a 3-2 upset of the No. 7 Wolverines in the series opener at Value City Arena.

Tight defense, strong forechecking and excellent goaltending – the hallmarks of past Rohlik teams – reappeared for the first time in a while.

"As a coach nothing's perfect," Rohlik said. "But we worked extremely hard. (Michigan) had a huge push in the third. I know they're a top-10 team in the country for good reason. We kind of withstood that, but I think the consistency for us, start to finish, was probably as good as we've been."

He and the players said having extra practice because of the open weekend was the reason.

"I think maybe it was a blessing in disguise," said junior forward Gustaf Westlund, "maybe a little time for us to regroup and re-evaluate where we are as a team and just practice our systems."

Rohlik saw a team that was refreshed and refocused.

"A lot of times you get right back at it and play a game," he said. "We had some time to hit the reset button again."

"I can't say this enough. I give our guys so much credit. It would be easy to just show up and not give everything they've got at practice. That's the opposite of what these guys continue to do, and if we keep approaching every day like that, you're going to get some results."

The outcome was not what the Buckeyes had hoped for the following night when Michigan rolled to 6-0 victory, the fourth time in as many tries this season that OSU failed to earn a sweep after winning the opener.

The loss had a familiar ring as the opponent took advantage of a five-minute power play to change the course of the game.

It had happened in the previous home-stand vs. Minnesota and Notre Dame and again in the second period of game two when Michigan (12-8-0, 10-8-0-1-0) scored once on the power play for a 2-0 lead then used the momentum from that to score twice more in the period to seal the game and spoil a promising weekend for the Buckeyes.

Despite the score, OSU again had some positive play. The Buckeyes held the high-scoring Wolverines to five shots in the scoreless first period – although OSU had just two.

"First period, we might not have had a ton of shots but we limited them too," Rohlik said. "We're playing exactly the way we needed to do, and all of a sudden, they get one there on the five-minute major and get a third and it's starting to get away from us."

That can't happen in the Big Ten tour-

namment when any letdown is going to mean the end of the season.

"We've talked a lot about we want to play our best hockey at the end of the year. I've said this a lot," Rohlik said. "It hasn't looked good at times. We've lost some tough games, but you've got to learn from that. You've got to stick together, good times and the bad times, and anytime you step on the ice you've got to expect to win."

"That might sound silly for us right now, but you know what? That's our attitude. We've just got to continue to look at it and try to get better, and that's kind of been our attitude."

Good And Bad

The Buckeyes caught a break at the onset of the Michigan series for the quick 1-0 lead.

Westlund scored just 1:51 into it with a hustle play and an error by U-M goalie Erik Portillo. Westlund dumped the puck behind the goal and Portillo couldn't handle it. Westlund swooped in and scored on a wraparound into the empty net for his fourth goal with sophomore Mark Cheremeta getting the assist.

"I don't think you can plan a goal like that," Westlund said. "I was trying to turn it over, and luckily it ended up on my stick and I was right in front of it."

The quick score was what the Buckeyes needed coming off their break.

"It makes it easier but right from the opening draw you could feel it on the bench that everybody was fired up, especially when you play Michigan," Westlund said.

After Michigan tied it, sophomore Jaedon Leslie made it 2-1 for the Buckeyes at 12:05 of the first, and freshman Patrick Guzzo upped the count to 3-1 in the second.

U-M scored early in the third but could not get the equalizer thanks to senior Tommy Nappier, who made 12 of his 32 saves in the period.

"The defense did great clearing out the front, keeping them to the outside, letting me see every puck," Nappier said.

Said Rohlik: "We obviously played a really good hockey team, and we just stayed more consistent tonight than we have in a long time and I think that's really a key for us."

The rematch was close until the Wolverines broke through for four goals in the second period.

It was 1-0 when U-M's Dakota Raabe scored at 7:48 during a five-minute power play for a 2-0 lead. Jack Becker extended it to 3-0 at 12:11, and Thomas Bordeleau added a goal at 14:11 of the second when U-M had a 22-5 shot advantage.

Looking Ahead

OSU plays at Wisconsin on Feb. 26 and 27.

The regular season is scheduled to end March 4 and 5 with nonconference games vs. Arizona State at Value City Arena, but the Big Ten left the weekend of March 12 and 13 open for makeup games so the Buckeyes may play at Penn State prior to heading to the conference tournament.

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

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OSU Wrestlers Stumble Through The Finish Line

Ohio State's wrestling team didn't quite get the finish to its shortened 2021 regular season that it was likely hoping for. After falling to Iowa but knocking off Purdue in a Feb. 7 tri-meet, the Buckeyes entered their final two matches against Michigan and Penn State with the opportunity to claim a pair of top-five victories. While team résumé isn't especially important in wrestling, Big Ten and national individual seeding is, and a number of Buckeyes stood to bolster their stock significantly with big performances in either or both of those matchups.

ON THE MAT Patrick Mayhorn

Instead, Ohio State closed the season by dropping three of its final four duals. Against No. 2 Michigan on Feb. 12, the Buckeyes came up just short, falling 18-16 in a dual that truly came down to the final match. Leading 16-15 entering the bout at 157 pounds, Ohio State needed a win from senior stalwart No. 26 Elijah Cleary to claim victory in the dual, while also claiming quite a bit of national acclaim for Cleary if he could knock off No. 8 Will Lewan.

After two sudden victory periods and two tiebreakers, it was Lewan who came out on top, sending the Buckeyes home with a loss, while ending a four-dual winning streak in Ann Arbor and a seven-dual winning streak overall for head coach Tom Ryan's program against the Wolverines.

That's not to say that it was a match filled only with bad news for OSU. At 165 pounds, No. 7 Ethan Smith continued his run of form by knocking off No. 23 Cameron Amine 4-3 after earning praise from his coach in the week leading up to the bout.

"The guys that look really good right now – Ethan is attacking at a very high rate so we love his attack rate. That's a style that we believe progresses (a wrestler) and is one that we preach and one we want to see," Ryan said after the Iowa and Purdue tri-meet. "I thought Ethan had a really good weekend."

No. 17 Rocky Jordan secured a 13-0 major decision over Jelani Embree at 184 pounds, 125-pound No. 11 Malik Heinselman bounced back after a 1-0 loss against Purdue with victories over Michigan's Kurt McHenry and Penn State's Robert Howard and 141-pounder Dylan D'Emilio defeated No. 30 Drew Mattin by a 6-5 decision. It's been a tough season for Ohio State at 141 without a defined starter, and while that wears on the wrestlers, it doesn't change the approach according to D'Emilio.

"It really doesn't change too much, just because certain things are out of my control and then there are things that I can control," D'Emilio said of his battle at 141 pounds with Anthony Echemendia. "I just focus on the things that I can control, and I trust the coaches. They always want to do what's best for us. The goal doesn't change either way. It's just something you have to prepare for, be ready to go. It's a bit of a challenge, but the focus stays the same regardless."

For a Buckeye wrestler, the things that can be controlled revolve heavily around self-growth and preparation.

"I've been getting a lot better in a lot of positions, and the coaches have been really great to me," D'Emilio said. "We've been

putting in extra time, and we work a lot on some one-on-one stuff. It's just growing each day, getting better at my positions. It's been really helpful."

At 184 pounds with Jordan, the major decision served as more proof of potential improvement after a very slow start to the season. He suffered a 3-0 decision defeat against No. 8 Nelson Brands of Iowa but managed a victory over No. 18 Max Lyon of Purdue prior to his blowout of Embree. He wasn't able to pull out a victory against No. 2 Aaron Brooks of Penn State, but he seems to have found some momentum, which isn't lost on Ryan.

"Rocky had a great match," Ryan said of his match with Embree. "The big thing in that match is that early on there was a scramble. Now, Rocky is very systematic. When things go off script, he sometimes hasn't managed it that well. That match initially went off script, and he won a huge scramble, he came out on top, and he was basically on top the rest of the match. It was a great performance by Rock."

Ohio State's final dual of the season didn't see it fare much better. After Smith secured a pin of Joe Lee to knot the team score at 12, Penn State claimed the final four matches and took a 28-12 victory over the Buckeyes, ending Ohio State's regular-season campaign, which saw OSU notch a 5-4 record.

Romero, Echemendia Bouncing Back

Ohio State was without a pair of starters against Michigan on Feb. 12. Echemendia at 141 pounds and Kaleb Romero at 174 pounds both missed out on the dual because of injuries, or at least what were thought of as injuries prior to the matchup.

"He did not practice the week leading up to Iowa, which is never good for a man's mind, and he's hasn't practiced since Iowa, so we're assessing him," Ryan said of Romero.

"And then the same with Anthony. He's got an injury that we're assessing."

However, Ryan explained on Feb. 18 that the duo has been struggling with non-injury related problems. He heavily implied that Romero was impacted by COVID-19 restrictions and that while he was dealing with a nagging injury, that was not what held him out against Michigan.

"It wasn't his ankle that prohibited him from competing," Ryan said. "I don't know if I can say what it was, but it wasn't an injury. Competing and putting a team on the mat with some of the structure put in place by the Big Ten, from a COVID standpoint, is challenging. Kaleb has been training hard and he's ready to wrestle. The injury has not slowed him down at all."

Meanwhile, Echemendia did suffer an injury against Iowa that has impacted his availability, but Ryan also mentioned that he's been dealing with immigration paperwork in Arizona after moving to America from Cuba in 2019 to wrestle in the NCAA.

"He's healing, he will not be healed by the end of the year," Ryan said of Echemendia. "Right now, he is dealing with immigration issues that he's got to get squared away. That's taking place in Arizona. He had to go. That's the most important thing in his life, so he's out there right now. They wouldn't transfer his case this way, so he had to fly out there. He's out there now, getting that squared away."

However, he's expected back soon and will compete with D'Emilio for the spot at 141 pounds entering the Big Ten championships.

"Next week, Wednesday (Feb. 24), they'll wrestle off," Ryan said. "Anthony needs his

knee fixed, but we can't fix it, because if we try to fix it his season is over. You deal with what you have until the season is over, and we'll make a move then."

Romero returned against Penn State but suffered just his second loss of the season, this time in overtime against No. 7 Carter Starocci.

"Romero is wrestling with a lot of confidence," Ryan said on Feb. 18. "He's showing great leadership."

Although Romero did miss Ohio State's matchup with the Wolverines, Ryan wasn't willing to chalk the dual loss up to the bout at that weight class, taking time instead to rue missed opportunities at 133 and 157 pounds.

"We had several chances to win against Michigan without Romero," Ryan said. "We had several opportunities, matches (where) we had to execute late and we didn't. If we did it at 133 (Jordan Decatur) and we did it at 157 against Michigan, the match wouldn't have been as close as it was, but we didn't. Late in the matches we had chances but didn't capitalize. The only chance we have is to capitalize when we should. Now some of those positions in the Michigan match were – if you put a percentage on them – they would say that we had a 95 percent chance in that position, and we didn't capitalize. The guy was open in the end zone and the ball dinked off of our helmets. That can't happen."

Sasso Shining Down The Stretch

Ohio State may still have concerns around many parts of its lineup, but 149 pounds has no such issues. After a slow – relative to his own standards – start to the season, title contender Sammy Sasso has reached a new level in recent weeks.

Specifically, after a very close, 7-6 victory against Michigan State's Peyton Omania, Sasso has been on a rampage. He pinned Maryland's Hunter Baxter in 5:31 and Iowa's Max Murin in 6:53, before taking a tech fall victory over Purdue's Trey Kruse and an 8-1 decision against Michigan's Kanen Storr. He wasn't terribly dominant against Penn State, taking a 5-3 decision over unranked Beau Bartlett, but the trend is certainly positive for Sasso entering the Big Ten championships.

Where has this resurgence come from?

"It's the warmth of the sun, he's getting closer to it," Ryan said. "And the sun is the national tournament. As this guy nears the end of the year, there's a tunnel vision that this guy gets that I saw last year, which is why we believed he'd win the nationals last year as a freshman. There's just something about a true competitor – someone that's deeply, deeply competitive – and that's Sammy. He's deeply, deeply competitive, and as we near the end, something happens with those people."

For Sasso, this dominance isn't about effort, though. It's about focus and a reliance on his training.

"And of course, Sammy can rely on his training," Ryan said. "This isn't like, 'Hey it's the end of the year, I think I'm going to try harder now.' No. If you don't have the hours and hours and days of hard training, it doesn't matter how bad you want it. You probably lose the opportunity to get it. That's not Sammy. He trains hard all the time. But there's a focus about him."

Michigan Rivalry Not Huge For OSU

While the annual matchup on the gridiron between Ohio State and Michigan may be

an all-year-long focus in Columbus and Ann Arbor, the Buckeyes and Wolverines haven't quite felt that same heat on the mat in recent years. Until Michigan's victory on Feb. 12, the Buckeyes have generally gotten the best of the Wolverines under Ryan, both in duals and at the conference championship level.

In fact, for some Buckeyes, the rivalry pales in comparison to the series that the Buckeyes have with Penn State, which has been consistently atop the conference alongside Ohio State in recent years. Heinselman said prior to the match that he views the Nittany Lions as a bigger rival than Michigan.

That view may be shared by some of his teammates, but not by Ryan, who wants to see Michigan on the schedule more often.

"Coach (Sean) Bormet and I have discussed a home-and-away every year, which is what it should be in wrestling," Ryan said Feb. 11. "We wrestle at their place, we wrestle at our place, and it's a big-crowd event."

"Listen, I'm extremely serious about beating them in the dual meet, and the Big Ten (championships) and the nationals, and we've done that almost every year as long as I can remember – at least beating them at the Big Ten and the NCAA (championships)."

Heinselman's teammate, D'Emilio, can't shake his Buckeye state ties when thinking about the matchup.

"It's interesting, especially because a guy like Malik, he's out of state," D'Emilio said when asked if Michigan or Penn State is a bigger rival for the Buckeyes. "He was born in Colorado. I'm born in-state. I've been a Buckeye since day one, so Michigan's a bad word in Ohio. Personally, I think Michigan is that big rivalry, but for wrestling, the last five years, it's definitely been Penn State as our biggest rival. But it's hard to overlook the rivalry with Michigan, in my opinion."

With Michigan seemingly on the rise, Ohio State is anticipating a return to form for the rivalry – even if it can't quite compete with the importance of its counterpart on the football field.

"This rivalry will heat up," Ryan said. "We kind of ran away from them the last five or six years, but it's going to be a lot of fun."

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Michigan QB Milton Enters Transfer Portal

Michigan quarterback Joe Milton has entered the NCAA transfer portal. The Wolverine quarterback has three years of eligibility remaining as a grad transfer since the NCAA has granted an extra year of eligibility and Milton has not used his redshirt season yet.

Milton, a former four-star prospect from Orlando (Fla.) Olympia, was the No. 9 pro-style quarterback and No. 204 overall recruit nationally in the 2018 class.

In four games in 2019, Milton threw

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

for 59 yards and one touchdown while adding 16 rushing yards and a score. He was named the starting signal-caller to start the 2020 season and helped lead the Wolverines to victory over Minnesota in the first game, completing 15 of 22 passes for 225 yards and a touchdown along with 52 rushing yards and a score.

In the next game against Michigan State, Milton completed 32 of 51 passes for 300 yards and added 59 yards on the ground in a 27-24 loss. He followed that up with a 344-yard passing effort with three touchdowns and two interceptions in a loss at Indiana, completing 18 of 34 attempts.

He was eventually replaced by Cade McNamara, who started the final two games of the season for head coach Jim Harbaugh.

The Maize and Blue still have McNamara on the roster and added Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star quarterback J.J. McCarthy, who is the No. 2 pro-style quarterback and No. 24 overall prospect in the nation for the 2021 class.

U-M Linebackers Leaving Ann Arbor

Michigan linebacker Adam Shibley entered the transfer portal on Feb. 16, four days after fellow Wolverine linebacker Ben VanSumneren.

Shibley, a Cleveland St. Ignatius product, emerged as a starter at middle linebacker for the Maize and Blue in 2020 following an injury to Cam McGrone, who has since declared for the NFL draft.

Shibley (6-1, 225) played 174 snaps in five games, with most of his action coming against Michigan State, Rutgers and Penn State.

Tallying 23 tackles (six solo) and three tackles for loss, Shibley became an important player on Michigan's defense in 2020 after serving as a special teams standout the previous two seasons. The former walk-on earned a scholarship this past year.

Shibley has also made an impact off the field, founding The Uniform Funding Foundation (TUFF) which helped provide uniforms to underserved youth.

On Feb. 20, VanSumneren (6-2, 253) announced he is swapping sides in the in-state rivalry between Michigan and Michigan State, joining the Spartans.

VanSumneren, a former three-star prospect from Essexville (Mich.) Garber, entered the transfer portal just hours after his brother, Alex, decommitted from Michigan football. Alex is a four-star recruit, ranking as the No. 16 defensive tackle and No. 224 overall prospect nationally in 2022.

Prior to 2020, Ben VanSumneren primarily played fullback but also took snaps at running back and practiced at tight end. He transitioned to linebacker in 2020, playing 76 snaps in six games, and started two games against Indiana and Penn State.

VanSumneren announced on Feb. 20 he will continue his collegiate career at Michigan State.

The departures of Shibley and VanSumneren could be a result of the hiring of defensive coordinator Mike Macdonald and his presumed 3-4 defense.

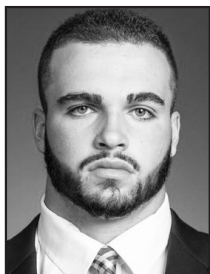
Maryland Announces Trio Of Coaching Hires

Maryland head coach Mike Locksley announced the hiring of Brian Stewart, Ron Zook and Zohn Burden to his coaching staff. Stewart has been named defensive coordinator and safeties coach, Zook will serve as associate head coach and will be the special teams coordinator and outside linebackers coach, while Burden will lead the wide receiver unit for the Terrapins.

"These additions to our coaching staff make us stronger as a program as each brings a solid mix of experience, on-field player development and recruiting prowess," Locksley said.

"Brian has experience as a defensive coordinator at both the college and NFL levels. We share many of the same coaching philosophies, and he has a great familiarity with our program and this area."

"I have a long-standing relationship with Coach Zook, who was integral in my development as a coach. He has a great special teams mind and adds a wealth of experience to our staff. Zohn comes highly recommended by numerous people that I respect in the coaching ranks. He's from the talent-rich Tidewater region and should be a tremendous asset for us recruiting that area, in addition to his ability to develop our talented wide receiver unit."



Ben VanSumneren

Stewart returns to Maryland after serving as defensive coordinator for the Terrapins from 2012-14, bringing more than 25 years of coaching experience at both the collegiate and professional ranks.

In 2020, Stewart served as the cornerbacks coach at Baylor, helping lead a Bears defense that finished second in the Big 12 in both passing yards allowed per game (203.0) and interceptions (12). He has coached 12 years in the NFL, including serving as the Dallas Cowboys' defensive coordinator from 2007-08.

"I'm thrilled to be back at Maryland, especially during this exciting time where Coach Locksley is building the program with his vision," Stewart said. "I have a lot of love for Coach and his family. He's a great coach and an even better man. I'm looking forward to working with the staff he's assembled and developing a roster that's filled with talented young players. This staff recruits extremely hard, and the DMV is a great talent base to recruit. I can't wait to get to work."

Zook, who boasts 43 seasons of coaching experience at both the collegiate and professional levels, has been a senior analyst for Maryland for the last two seasons. He previously served as the head coach at Florida and Illinois and held coordinator roles in the NFL for the Pittsburgh Steelers, New Orleans Saints and most recently as the special teams coordinator for the Green Bay Packers from 2015-18. Zook coached defensive backs at Ohio State under John Cooper from 1988-90.

Zook and Locksley formed a relationship when Locksley served as Zook's running backs coach and run game coordinator at Florida in 2003-04 and offensive coordinator at Illinois from 2005-08, including the Illini's 9-4 season in 2007 when they reached the Rose Bowl for the first time since 1983.

"I hold Coach Locksley in extremely high regard, and we've been together on some special staffs through the years," Zook said. "I've always told him I'd help him in any way that I could, and I'm excited to take on this new role on his staff. I've seen firsthand the work he's put in to build this program the right way, and I know the best is ahead for the Terps."

Burden, who hails from Virginia, has spent his entire career recruiting and coaching in the area, including his most recent stop at Virginia Tech. He coached Hokies for five seasons between 2015-19, serving as the wide receivers coach in 2015 and the running backs coach from

2016-19.

"I'm grateful to Coach Locksley for this opportunity and am excited for what I can add to and learn from the coaching staff he's assembled," Burden said. "The wide receiver room is full of talent, and I'm looking forward to helping continue their development. Maryland has really pushed the envelope in recruiting under Coach Locksley, and I'm hoping that my relationships can only continue to help us grow in that area. It's an exciting time to be a Terp."

Locksley also announced that second-year coach Brawley Evans will now coach inside linebackers, while tight ends coach Mike Miller will now also serve as passing game coordinator.

Tennessee Hires PSU's Banks As DC

Tennessee hired Penn State co-defensive coordinator Tim Banks as its new defensive coordinator.

Banks, 49, had spent the past five seasons at Penn State, where he also coached the Nittany Lions' safeties. Before that, he was the co-defensive coordinator at Illinois, the co-defensive coordinator at Cincinnati and the defensive coordinator at Central Michigan, which is his alma mater.

At Cincinnati in 2011, Banks was nominated for the Frank Broyles Award as the top assistant coach in college football.

Banks' hiring completes the search of Tennessee head coach Josh Heupel to find his defensive coordinator. The Volunteers were in extensive talks with Kansas City Chiefs linebackers coach Matt House, but House decided to stay in the NFL. Heupel also pushed hard for Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington and then Tampa Bay Buccaneers defensive line coach Kacy Rodgers. Heupel and Co. also reached out to USC defensive coordinator Todd Orlando and Louisville defensive coordinator Bryan Brown, among others.

"Tim brings great energy, passion and experience to the Tennessee football family," Heupel said in a statement. "His defenses are known for their aggressive style, as well as their multiple coverages and fronts. He's coached in big games and has a proven track record of success on the field and in recruiting. I know our student-athletes are going to enjoy playing for him. We are fortunate to have someone with Tim's experience and caliber leading our defense."

The Nittany Lions will need to replace Banks as a safeties coach, and though he will be missed in Happy Valley, head coach James Franklin expressed his pleasure in seeing his assistant receive a defensive coordinator job.

"This was a great opportunity for him to be the defensive play caller and DC at Tennessee," Franklin said. "I have spent seven seasons on staffs with Tim at Maryland and Penn State, and I have enjoyed watching him develop into the coach he is today."

Former MSU WR Morgan Transfers To Kentucky

Former Michigan State wide receiver Tre'Von Morgan announced he is transferring to Kentucky. A former three-star recruit from Massillon (Ohio) Washington, Morgan signed with

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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 (18-5, 12-5)

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, W 73-65; **13** INDIANA, W 78-59; **18** Penn State, W 92-82; **21** MICHIGAN, L 92-87; **25** Michigan State, 8 p.m.; **28** IOWA, 4 p.m.

March 6 ILLINOIS; **10-13** Big Ten Tournament at Chicago.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (13-4, 9-4)

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, L 75-70; **14** NORTHWESTERN, Postponed; **18** PURDUE, W 100-85; **21** Michigan, L 75-66; **24** Penn State; **27** INDIANA.

March 5 Rutgers.

BASEBALL

March 5 Illinois at Greenville, S.C., 3 p.m.; **6** Illinois at Greenville, S.C., 9 a.m.; **6** Illinois at Greenville, S.C.; **7** Illinois at Greenville, S.C., **10** a.m.; **12** Nebraska at Minneapolis, Minn., **12** p.m.; **13** Iowa at Minneapolis, Minn., 10 a.m.; **13** Nebraska at Minneapolis, Minn., 2 p.m.; **14** Iowa at Minneapolis, Minn., 11 a.m.; **19-21** Rutgers; **26-28** IOWA and MARYLAND.

April 2 INDIANA, 3:05 p.m.; **3** INDIANA, 1:05 p.m.; **3** INDIANA; **4** INDIANA, 1:05; **9-11** Michigan; **16-18** Maryland; **23** PENN STATE, 6:05 p.m.; **24** PENN STATE, 3:05 p.m.; **25** PENN STATE, 1:05 p.m.; **30** PURDUE, 6:05 p.m.

May 1 PURDUE, 3:05 p.m.; **2** PURDUE, 1:05 p.m.; **7** Minnesota, 2 p.m.; **8** Minnesota, 2 p.m.; **9** Minnesota, 2 p.m.; **14** MICHIGAN STATE, 6:05 p.m.; **15** MICHIGAN STATE, 3:05 p.m.; **16** MICHIGAN STATE, 1:05 p.m.; **21-23** Indiana and Nebraska at Bloomington, Ind.; **28** NORTHWESTERN, 6:05 p.m.; **29** NORTHWESTERN, 3:05 p.m.; **30** NORTHWESTERN, 1:05 p.m.

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., NTS

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 FAU Paradise Invitational, 6/13; **9** FAU Paradise Invitational, 7/13; **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 (3-1)

Jan. 23 Illinois, L 402.550-396.250; **30** Navy, W 397.200-382.000; **31** Michigan, Postponed.

Feb. 7 MINNESOTA, W 401.050-387.250; **14** PENN STATE, W 405.500-403.900; **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 (6-3, 5-2)

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, W 196.375-194.500; **7** Illinois, W 196.375-196.075; **14** Rutgers, W 195.950-194.050; **21** Penn State, W 196.400-195.925; **21** Maryland, W 196.500-196.275; **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 (6-15-1, 6-14)

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; **12-13** Penn State, Postponed; **19** MICHIGAN, W 3-2; **20** MICHIGAN, L 6-0; **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 (11-5, 11-5)

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, W 2-1; **13** Minnesota, W 3-2; **19** ST. CLOUD STATE, Canceled; **20** ST. CLOUD STATE, Canceled.

MEN'S LACROSSE (1-0)

Feb. 20 Johns Hopkins, W 14-8; **27** RUTGERS.

March 6 Penn State; **13** MICHIGAN; **20** MARYLAND.

WOMEN'S LACROSSE (1-1)

Feb. 14 Northwestern, L 23-7; **21** MICHIGAN, W 15-12; **26** Rutgers, 3 p.m.; **27** Rutgers, 12 p.m.

March 5 JOHNS HOPKINS; **7** JOHNS HOPKINS; **18** Maryland; **20** Maryland; **26** PENN STATE; **28** PENN STATE.

April 11 NORTHWESTERN; **16** Michigan.

MEN'S SOCCER

Feb. 23 INDIANA; **27** Maryland.

March 3 Michigan State; **7** NORTHWESTERN; **15** MICHIGAN; **19** Wisconsin; **23** Penn State; **27** RUTGERS; **31** Michigan.

April 4 MICHIGAN STATE; **10** Big Ten Tournament; **17** Big Ten Tournament Final.

May 14 NCAA Final Four; **16** NCAA National Championship.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (0-0-1)

Feb. 20 MICHIGAN, T 1-1; **25** WISCONSIN, 2 p.m.; **28** NEBRASKA, 12 p.m.

March 4 Maryland; **7** Rutgers; **13** PENN STATE; **18** Purdue; **21** Illinois; **25** INDIANA; **28** NORTHWESTERN.

April 3 Michigan State.

SOFTBALL

Feb. 26 Iowa at Leesburg, Fla., 4:15 p.m.; **26** Iowa at Leesburg, Fla., 6:45 p.m.; **27** Minnesota at Leesburg, Fla., 4:15 p.m.; **27** Minnesota at Leesburg, Fla., 7:00 p.m.; **28** Nebraska at Leesburg, Fla., 3:30 p.m.; **28** Nebraska at Leesburg, Fla., 6:15 p.m.

March 11 Wisconsin at Leesburg, Fla., 10 a.m.; **11** Wisconsin at Leesburg, Fla., 12:30 p.m.; **12** Wisconsin at Leesburg, Fla., 11 a.m.; **13** Northwestern at Leesburg, Fla., 10 a.m.; **13** Northwestern at Leesburg, Fla., 12:30 p.m.; **14** Northwestern at Leesburg, Fla., 9 a.m.; **26-28** MARYLAND.

April 2-4 Penn State; **9-11** MICHIGAN; **16-18** Indiana; **23-25** RUTGERS; **30** Purdue.

May 1-2 Purdue; **7-9** Illinois; **14-16** MICHIGAN STATE.

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 (5-1)

Jan. 15-18 Ohio State Invitational; **22** MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE, W 4-0; **23** VIRGINIA, L 4-2.

Feb. 13 MICHIGAN STATE, W 7-0; **13** MICHIGAN STATE, W 4-0; **19** Northwestern, W 4-0; **21** Illinois, W 4-1; **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 (7-2, 4-0)

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; **7** Northwestern (ITA Championships), L 4-3; **13** PURDUE, W 6-1; **14** INDIANA, W 7-0; **20** Maryland, W 5-2; **21** Rutgers, W 7-0; **27** MICHIGAN STATE, 10 a.m.; **28** MICHIGAN, 12 p.m..

March 6 Nebraska, 6 p.m.; **7** Iowa, 12 p.m.; **14** Penn State, 12 p.m.; **20** MARYLAND, 6 p.m.; **21** RUTGERS, 10 a.m.; **27** Michigan State, 6 p.m.; **28** Michigan, 12 p.m.

April 10 MINNESOTA, 12 p.m.; **11** WISCONSIN, 12 p.m.; **18** PENN STATE, 12 p.m.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (4-6, 2-3)

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, L 3-1; **13** McKendree, L 3-1; **20** LOYOLA CHICAGO, W 3-2; **21** LOYOLA CHICAGO, W 3-0; **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 (9-0, 9-0)

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, W 3-0; **13** IOWA, W 3-0; **17** PENN STATE, W 3-2; **19** Illinois, W 3-1; **20** Illinois, W 3-2; **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 (5-4, 5-4)

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, L 18-16; **19** PENN STATE, L 28-12.

March 6-7 Big Ten Championships; **18-20** NCAA Championships.

Michigan State's 2019 recruiting class as the No. 56 wide receiver and No. 477 overall prospect nationally.

Morgan (6-6, 218) did not play as a true freshman after having knee surgery. He appeared in four games as a redshirt freshman in 2020, recording his only receptions in the finale with two catches for 46 yards and a touchdown in a loss at Penn State. Morgan's 26-yard touchdown catch in the second quarter was his first career reception.

Morgan became the 16th Michigan State player to enter the portal since Nov. 16.

Illini Season Opener Moved From Dublin To Champaign

After extensive consultation with the Irish government, medical authorities and the administrative staff at both Illinois and Nebraska, the 2021 season opener between the two schools will not be played at Aviva Stadium in Dublin, Ireland, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Fighting Illini and Cornhuskers still plan to open the 2021 season on Aug. 28, but the game will instead be played at Memorial Stadium in Champaign, Ill.

"This is very disappointing for our athletic program, our team and for the fans

who were planning to attend the game in Dublin," Illinois athletic director Josh Whitman said. "For our players, staff and fans, this would have been a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We will work diligently with Irish American Events and the Big Ten conference to find a future opportunity for us to take Fighting Illini football to the Emerald Isle."

Neil Naughton, who is the chairman of the Aer Lingus College Football Classic, shared a similar sentiment as Whitman, and although he was disappointed with the inability to host the game this year, he expressed optimism that a return to

Ireland is imminent for the programs.

"It is desperately disappointing that it is necessary to cancel the 2021 Aer Lingus College Football Classic, but public health must take precedent," Naughton said. "These games offer huge publicity potential, practical economic benefits and a genuine expression of the close ties between Ireland and the United States. We have made great friends with the University of Illinois and the University of Nebraska, and I look forward to welcoming them back to Ireland in the not-too-distant future and giving their traveling fans the welcome Ireland is so famous for."

Ohio State Is More Than A Football Powerhouse

Who says Ohio State is a football school only? Sure, the Buckeyes have been the class of the Big Ten on the gridiron for most of the last decade, and it doesn't look like that will stop anytime soon. And football is what drives the bus in Columbus.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

But in case you haven't been paying attention, there's a pretty solid outfit playing at the Schottenstein Center, one that is challenging for national supremacy. The buzz surrounding the Buckeye basketball team is tangible and really hasn't been heard since Jared Sullinger was a freshman. But even that team, which fell in the national championship game to Florida, may not have been as beloved as the previous last time there was a really rabid hoops following in Columbus.

The early '90s saw the return to prominence of OSU as a basketball powerhouse, albeit just briefly. Randy Ayers took over for Gary Williams, who had laid the foundation for a rise before returning to coach Maryland, his alma mater. Ayers had a mostly veteran team during that 1990-91 season and had a wild card in sophomore Jimmy Jackson, who was one of the top players in the game and the real driving force behind Ohio State's basketball success.

That team was enjoyable to watch because everyone did a little bit of something, and though Jackson was the unquestioned star and best player, he wasn't afraid to get the ball to his teammates.

There's no better example of this than in the Buckeyes' classic 97-95 double-overtime win against visiting Indiana. OSU was ranked second, Indiana fourth, and the game was one of the few ultra-hyped contests that actually lived up to its billing. Neither team led by more than six points, there were standouts all over the place, and there was drama that even the best Hollywood scriptwriters couldn't create.

Jackson had scored 30 points, the last of them a hanging floater in the lane that sent the game into overtime, so when OSU got the ball with 35 seconds left and the game tied at 95, it was only natural to think Jackson would once again take the final shot.

But he didn't.

Instead, he started to drive the left side of the lane and, when he felt Indiana's defensive help, whipped a pass to Treg Lee, who had cut unimpeded along the baseline. Lee drained the 7-footer from the left side with four seconds left, the capacity crowd at St. John Arena erupted and the Buckeyes – after Indiana missed a desperation shot from just inside half court – had a signature victory. For that moment, and a few afterward, the Buckeyes were definitely in the discussion as a basketball powerhouse.

Then it slipped away.

Bad recruiting, a bad culture and very little player development meant that Ayers was out the door by the end of the 1996-97 campaign. He was replaced by Jim O'Brien, who man-

aged to take the Buckeyes to the Final Four (but don't tell the NCAA I told you that), but his grinding style wasn't consistent enough to stay in the upper half of the league. Giving a recruit money didn't help the situation, either, so Obie was gone. Enter Thad Matta, who got the program humming and had more sustained success than any coach in school history, save for maybe Fred Taylor. The Buckeyes routinely contended for the upper reaches of the Big Ten, put guys in the NBA and made basketball fun again. But then it got stale, and Matta ended up with health issues that kept him from attacking the game the way he had previously.

He was gone, probably a year too late, replaced by Chris Holtmann.

It's not difficult to recall the muted reaction to the hiring, which was seen as Ohio State settling for a second-tier guy. OSU fans seem to be under a notion that the basketball gig in Columbus is a premier job, when it really isn't. Oh, it's a good job, no doubt. But it's not Kansas or North Carolina or Duke or Kentucky, or any number of other blue-blood programs. So thinking that you're going to get a Bill Self or John Calipari or any other big name is a bit foolish.

OSU has long been a place where up-and-coming coaches are hired – some succeed, some don't. Holtmann walked along the same path as Matta, piloting Butler to 22 or more wins in each of his three seasons at the helm and guiding the Bulldogs to the Sweet 16 in his final season.

The Buckeyes have won at least 20 games in each of his first three seasons, and even the "down" year of 2018 saw OSU win a game in the NCAA Tournament. That was the rare misfire, when there were some player culture and chemistry issues, and Ohio State was just an average team.

But last year was when people began to take notice. The Buckeyes improved as the season went on, winning 21 games and getting excited for a run through the postseason – a postseason that never came as the NCAA Tournament was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not being able to play a postseason was a driving force toward the 2020-21 campaign, and Ohio State has looked the part of national title contender. Heading into their game with Michigan, the Buckeyes were ranked in the top five in the polls and top 10 in RPI, and they have wins over UCLA, Rutgers (twice), Illinois and Iowa, teams all ranked in the top 50 of the RPI rankings.

The latest game with Michigan was another that lived up to the hype, though the Buckeyes were on the wrong end of things. While it would have been nice for Ohio State to get the W, the loss isn't going to do much to the impression people have of the Buckeyes.

This is a very good team, one that is equipped for a postseason run. The Buckeyes have guys who can score – and, man, do I really like Duane Washington. He's fearless, can go inside or outside and isn't afraid of the moment. If teams pay too much attention to him, then E.J. Liddell will burn them. He has nice bulk and a midrange game, and he looks like a future NBA talent.

Until the final moments against Michigan, this game looked like it could be a mirror of that classic game with Indiana. Neither team led by more than six for most of the way. There were ebbs and flows and timely buckets. It was everything a fan could want from a game.

Now, all that said, there are a few things that are concerning for Ohio State. Big teams will cause problems as there is no consistent rebounding force. Michigan had a couple of sequences where it got multiple opportunities due to offensive rebounding.

The Buckeyes must get better at denying

the ball to opposing big men and in helping out off of interior screens. The latter can be fixed, the former not as much. You can either win the rebounding battle or you can't. People say it's about desire, and to a point that's true. But no amount of desire will allow a 6-7 guy to get the ball from a 7-1 guy. If OSU can get a long-armed 6-10 guy who can affect things inside, it will find the missing piece to the puzzle.

Ohio State also allows too many points for a championship unit. This was the fifth time this season the Buckeyes allowed 80 or more points, and though they are 4-1 in those contests, it's not an advisable long-term strategy.

OSU gets Iowa and Illinois again, both at home, to end the regular season, and closing out strong could lock up a No. 1 NCAA Tournament seed – something that hasn't happened since the 2010-11 Matta team that bowed out in the Sweet 16. Prior to that it was 2006-07, when the Buckeyes were national runners-up.

Holtmann has been recruiting lights-out, plus the team is still fairly young and looks like it will be intact for a while as there don't appear to be any surefire early-entry NBA guys on the roster. So this should be a fun final month and change to watch.

That in itself is a change as Ohio State basketball was often that time on the calendar that served as the marker for the end of football and the start of spring football. It's nice that the basketball Buckeyes can grab some much-deserved spotlight on their own.

It may never reach the point of basketball being king, but there's nothing wrong with having it at least taking up residence in the guest room of the castle.

Browning Impressing Scouts

There is a bit of a lull for the Ohio State football team, but that doesn't mean everyone is sitting around idle.

A solid contingent of guys are working hard to secure their NFL dreams, and depending on whom you listen to there could be as many as six players chosen in the first two days of the draft.

Most fans know about Justin Fields and Wyatt Davis, guys who have been on the radar of teams for a couple of years.

But one guy who has a chance to get drafted higher than his production would predict is linebacker Baron Browning. The Texas native played well at the Senior Bowl and should put up really good numbers during Ohio State's Pro Day. Talent says he should be a top-five linebacker, even though he didn't always play that way.

The first two years of his career had Browning flashing occasionally, but the consistency was missing. He seemed hesitant, like he was thinking instead of making plays.

But this year was a different story. A case can be made that he was the Buckeyes' best linebacker. He looked fast, tackled well and finally started to show the week-to-week impact many expected of him from the moment he stepped on campus.

Senior Bowl director Jim Nagy had some very positive words for Browning, stating that you "could make a strong case OSU's Baron Browning is the highest ceiling OLB in 2021 draft. Potential do-it-all 'backer stood out as edge-setter, rusher and dropper at Senior Bowl. NFL teams see him as Day One starting SAM."

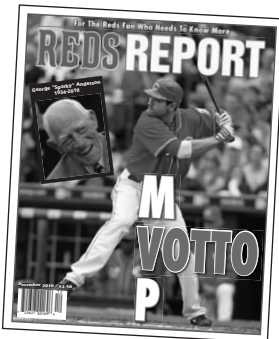
Browning is a good example of hard work paying off and of patience being a virtue. OSU fans let him know that they felt he was a bust early in his career, but he brushed that off and now looks like someone who could have a lengthy and productive professional career ahead.

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Tressel Recruited Hard From His First Day At OSU

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Twenty years ago, Jim Tressel had just put the finishing touches on his first recruiting class at Ohio State. In some ways it seems like a long time ago, yet in some ways not so long at all.

After letting John Cooper go, Ohio State did not settle on Tressel until Jan. 18, leaving the new coach and the staff he quickly assembled less than three weeks to put together a class that would ultimately be ranked 14th nationally in Buckeye Sports Bulletin's annual consensus recruiting poll.

The Buckeyes had 11 verbals when Tressel took over, but two of them – Canton (Ohio) GlenOak defensive back Dustin Fox and Dayton Chaminade-Julienne wide receiver Angelo Chattams – were wavering after the canning of Cooper. In the end, Tressel kept both uncertain recruits and added several of his own, cobbling together a 17-man class that included local star Maurice Hall, a running back out of Columbus Brookhaven who did not sign on the dotted line until the afternoon of signing day. Others who did not officially commit until signing day were Fox and Lydell Ross, a blue-chip running back out of Tampa, Fla.

Virtually everyone involved considered Tressel and crew's sprint to the finish a bit of a recruiting miracle, including the coach himself.

"I know in the first four or five days I was here I think I was hoping we would just reach double digits (in signees)," Tressel said at his signing day press conference. "I thought we would be lucky to do that."

"I was confident we would do the best we could do. How good that would be I didn't know. That's why I just put my head down and went."

"But to finish like this is a credit to everybody here."

One of the coaches Tressel held over from the Cooper regime was recruiting coordinator Bill Conley. Noted recruiting expert Tom Lemming called Conley's presence critical.

"Keeping Bill Conley was the key," Lemming said. "He was the glue that kept it all together. That was true not only in-state but also down in Florida, where they got their out-of-state guys. Those were Bill Conley's guys."

In addition to Ross, the Tressel/Conley team plucked wide receiver Chris Gamble out of Ft. Lauderdale, as well as his Dillard High School teammate, defensive lineman Quinton Thomas.

Ohio State also landed four of the top five prospects in Ohio as ranked by Bill Kurelic's Ohio Football Recruiting News. They included Redgie Arden (1), a linebacker out of Ironton; Fox (3); Hall (4); and defensive end Simon Fraser (5), from nearby Upper Arlington.

Tressel hit the ground running so hard upon his hiring that there were reports that he didn't eat for the first two days he was on the job.

"I just went everywhere they told me," he said of those first hours and days. "It wasn't until I started traveling with (running backs coach Tim) Spencer that I ate. You can tell he hasn't missed too many meals."

For all the efforts of Conley and the other coaches, Kurelic credited Tressel for leading the charge.

"It all starts at the top," Kurelic said at the time. "Jim Tressel was a tireless worker from the moment he got the job, and he hasn't stopped working yet. He's already working on juniors for next year."

And for good reason. Ohio's 2002 senior class was stacked. In fact, that factored into Tressel taking only 17 players in his first class.

"The problem that would have been created is if we had given out over 20," the coach explained. "We only have 12 seniors this coming year. We feel strongly about the talent pool

in this next recruiting class. We didn't want to be going out there with 14 of 15 scholarships. This helps our balance."

According to the Ohio Future Stars newsletter, the top 10 players in Ohio for 2002 were Drushaun Humphrey, running back/linebacker, Toledo Rogers; Maurice Claret, running back, Warren Harding; Bryan Andrews, defensive end/linebacker, Lima Senior; Mike D'Andrea, linebacker, Avon Lake; Quinn Pitcock, tight end/defensive tackle, Piqua; Justin Zwick, quarterback, Massillon Washington; DeShawn Wynn, running back, Reading; Roy Hall, wide receiver, Lyndhurst Brush; Bobby Carpenter, running back/linebacker, Lancaster; and Mike Kudla, linebacker/defensive end, Medina Highland.

Other Ohioans listed as potential targets for 2002 in the Feb. 17, 2001, issue of BSB were running back Tyler Everett of Canton McKinley; offensive linemen Doug Datish of Warren Howland and Rob Sims of Macedonia Nordon; defensive lineman Joel Penton of Van Wert; linebacker A.J. Hawk of Centerville; and defensive backs Troy Smith of Cleveland Glenville and E.J. Underwood of Hamilton.

"It should be a strong year," Conley noted.

The Buckeyes may have already had a leg up on the 2002 class with reported verbals from Humphrey and Claret.

"Humphrey's verbal is contingent on him qualifying academically, while Claret was reportedly waiting until after signing day to announce his verbal publicly," BSB said.

Humphrey tragically died from a heart ailment before he could ever attend Ohio State. Claret, of course, would help lead Ohio State to a national championship in his freshman season.

Florida State was the unanimous choice in the 2001 BSB consensus recruiting poll, followed by Michigan, LSU, Texas, Oklahoma, Washington, Miami (Fla.), Tennessee, UCLA and Nebraska.

One of the Seminoles' top signees was quarterback Joe Mauer out of St. Paul (Minn.) Cretin-Derham Hall. Mauer was the second-best quarterback in the Rivals 100 rankings, behind only Brodie Croyle (10th) of Rainbow City, Ala., who chose the home-state Crimson Tide. Mauer was ranked 28th overall.

Unfortunately for FSU, Mauer elected to play baseball and wound up starring for his hometown Minnesota Twins. The six-time all-star is the only catcher in Major League Baseball history to win three batting titles.

Other quarterbacks in the 2001 Rivals 100 included Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei's Matt Leinart (No. 55), who chose USC, and Kyle Orton (No. 75) out of Runnells (Iowa) Southeast Polk, who chose Purdue.

Allen Wallace of SuperPrep felt that despite Tressel's late start in 2001, the former Youngstown State coach's presence had helped the Ohio State recruiting effort.

"The coaching switch helped Ohio State," Wallace said. "From a national perspective, people viewed John Cooper as an excellent coach. But inside the state, which is where Ohio State focuses much of its attention, people wanted a change."

"They were sick and tired of losing to Michigan."

For Tressel, who had been at YSU for 15 years, recruiting was recruiting, though he admitted Ohio State certainly opened more

doors.

"It was fun," he said of his whirlwind first go-around with the Buckeyes. "I love competition. Wherever you are recruiting, you're recruiting like mad. It isn't any easier to recruit at Youngstown State than it is here. It's neat carrying around this flag. When you're carrying around the Ohio State banner, it is neat who you get to talk to."

Many stories on Tressel's first recruiting class and looking forward to the 2002 class were reprinted as part of Reprint Thursdays at BuckeyeSports.com on Feb. 11 and 18 and are archived for your enjoyment. If you are not already enjoying BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers, see the instructions on page 4.

OSU's Greatest Generation

Anyone who has been to BSB World Headquarters knows that I have piles of correspondence everywhere. It comes in faster than I can process it, let alone respond to it. Apologies to those whom I have been unable to respond to, particularly the many of you who reached out upon the death of my father, the incomparable Jack Moskowitz.

I found something in a pile recently that dated back to 2016. It was a letter and obituary from a relative of Paul Matus, who was a member of the 1942 Ohio State football team. The '42 squad, coached by the legendary Paul Brown, won OSU's first national championship.

That 1942 team was celebrated in the book, "Expanding Your Horizons: Collegiate Football's Greatest Team," by Dr. Donald Steinberg, himself a team member. You may recall that the book obtained some publicity when Tressel made it required reading for his 2002 national championship team.

Dr. Steinberg's book was more about the future success of the members of that Buckeye team than it was about its play on the field, and it was a team and time marked by participation in the country's war efforts.

"There were about 43 players on that team, and 36 enlisted in the military and fought in World War II," Tressel said during a speech in Fremont, Ohio, in 2019. "Can you imagine if we won the national championship and one of our players enlisted in the military?"

"They became the Greatest Generation. They dropped what they were doing and did what the country needed. The men went overseas to fight the war and the women went to work in the factories."

Can you imagine indeed.

Matus was not a Les Horvath or a Bill Willis or Dante Lavelli or Chuck Csuri. And he has been gone for almost five years now. But I bring him up now because he was a true example of the Greatest Generation.

Like so many of that generation, he was the first in his family to go to college, having hitchhiked to Columbus to attend OSU, where he enrolled in the Agricultural Engineering program. Once on campus, he saw a notice for football recruits and walked on and was able to make the team.

He later enlisted in the Air Force and, according to his obituary, his plane was shot down during the Battle of the Bulge.

"Severely wounded, he parachuted out of his plane, was captured and taken to a prisoner of war camp."

That camp was ultimately "liberated by Russian Cossacks, wielding swords and riding

in on horses."

Matus received a Purple Heart, the Distinguished Flying Cross, a Bronze Star, Silver Star and numerous other medals.

He was skilled with his hands, not only in agriculture, but in the building trades. Matus ultimately went to work for the Ridge Tool Company in Elyria, Ohio, staying there for 38 years. He started in the factory and retired in 1983 "from the data processing division, where he had helped to develop a system utilizing these new machines called computers."

Matus' diverse abilities and career would not have been a surprise to Dr. Steinberg, who wrote in a foreword to his book: "The 1942 team is looked upon as Ohio State's first national championship team, but more than that, we had the highest academic average of any group in the university aside from the various honor societies. As a group, one would have to look far and wide to equal the lifelong accomplishments of this team of players coached and nurtured by Paul Brown."

While it is not my intention, in any way, to diminish the remarkable accomplishments of the 1942 Ohio State football team, I would suggest that the members of that team are simply outstanding examples of the Greatest Generation, a term popularized by the 1998 book of the same name from former NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw. They were Americans who survived the depression, went on to defend our way of life in World War II and then, through frugality, hard work and "doing the right thing," advanced that way of life even more.

Sadly, these great Americans like Mr. Matus, my father, your father or even some of our longtime readers, are passing away. Their numbers dwindle.

But those of us who have benefited and prospered from their efforts and sacrifice would do well to remember lessons learned from them.

Belated thanks to John Matus, Mr. Matus' nephew, for forwarding this information five years ago.

The Passing Of Mrs. Brockway

Another member of that Greatest Generation whom we have lost is Donna Brockway, the matriarch of the Brockway family that has been providing photos for Buckeye Sports Bulletin, Ohio State and other outlets for decades. Mrs. Brockway passed away on Feb. 4 at the age of 97. BSB readers have enjoyed the photos from her husband, the late Chance Brockway Sr., as well as her sons Sonny and Scott Brockway. Sonny is still a regular contributor to BSB.

Mrs. Brockway had to have been a saint, putting up with the constant travel to sporting events of her family, as well as the clutter of photos and the media guides, programs and other memorabilia that they collected. Much of the clutter in my own office is stuff that I either bought from or was given to me by the Brockways, especially Chance, who loved to stop by the office and kibitz.

A true story. I had so much respect for Mrs. Brockway that until her recent passing, I had no idea her first name was Donna. I thought it was "Mrs."

The Brockways have been longtime residents of Buckeye Lake, near Newark, Ohio, and Chance was a noted expert on Buckeye Lake's history. The family has suggested that expressions of sympathy be made in the form of contributions to the Buckeye Lake Historical Society, 4729 Walnut Rd., Buckeye Lake, Ohio, 43008. I hope BSB readers who have enjoyed the photos from the Brockways, knew Mrs. Brockway or have enjoyed the pleasures of Buckeye Lake will contribute.



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