

Buckeyes Stumble Down The Stretch

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Before hosting Michigan for a Feb. 21 match-up, the Ohio State men's basketball team ranked fourth in the nation with an 18-4 overall record and 12-4 ledger in the Big Ten. The Buckeyes seemingly controlled their own destiny amid competition to secure a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

However, head coach Chris Holtmann's squad dropped its showdown with the rival Wolverines, who won the conference's regular-season title, in heartbreaking fashion.

With games against top-10 teams in Iowa and Illinois looming, Ohio State tried to get back on track against Michigan State on Feb. 25. The Buckeyes had to play without starting senior forward Kyle Young, who had suffered a concussion near the end of the Michigan game. Without Young, Ohio State fell to the Spartans 71-67 in a game where Holtmann was ejected for arguing questionable calls and no-calls with officials.

"We have to take a look at areas that we have to own and improve on," Holtmann said. "At the same time, we all I think recognize that, sure, we've built a really quality season up to this point, but we've got to play better. Obviously, there's been plenty of good times. This is the first time where we've really hit significant struggles. We've got to respond here in this closing stretch."

Just three days later, the Buckeyes welcomed then-No. 9 Iowa to Columbus for a top-10 showdown. National Player of the Year candidate Luka Garza dominated Ohio State to the tune of 24 points and 11 rebounds on 10-of-16 shooting in a 73-57 game that got out of hand late.

"We clearly did not have the emotional juice that we've typically had," Holtmann said.

Playing with high levels of energy and effort was a large part of what helped Ohio State enjoy one of the better starts.

It is no secret that Ohio State lacks size in its frontcourt, with Young and freshman forward Zed Key standing at 6-8 and sophomore forward E.J. Liddell at 6-7. For the most part, the Buckeye bigs have made up for their lack of height in the paint with relentless energy and effort, which was not apparent



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

GONE COLD – Ohio State and point guard C.J. Walker have lost four straight games heading into the Big Ten tournament, including a 73-68 defeat to Illinois on Senior Day on March 6.

against Iowa.

"The energy, we need to pick it back up and refocus on what's important," Young said. "Our energy just needs to be picked up, paying attention to details. Obviously, defensively, we need to get better, making people miss and making it tougher for the other team, just to give ourselves more breathing room on offense and things like that, moving the ball. And just a lot of little things that we need to pay attention to and refocus on, and I feel like we'll be fine. I don't think there are any major issues for us to not figure out as a team, and I feel like we'll be fine."

A three-game losing streak is not a good sign in late February, but the Buckeyes did not hit the panic button due to a few tough losses. Instead, they turned to the fundamental principles that had helped them win seven games in a row and 10 of 11 from Jan. 9-Feb. 18 – energy and togetherness.

There was no reason to rewrite the playbooks or make any drastic changes in Columbus. After all, Ohio State boasted wins over tough Big Ten teams in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Maryland, Indiana and Michigan State, as well as a pair of victories over both Rutgers and Penn State. The Buckeyes also went 6-0 in nonconference play, beating Notre Dame and UCLA along the way.

"We just want to focus on today, just getting better today," fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker said after the loss to the Hawkeyes. "Obviously, we watched film, learned from it, things that we need to do better, especially throughout this three-game stretch that we have had. We're playing against really good teams that are playing really well right now. So we've just

got to figure out a way to finish games, play harder for the whole 40 minutes.

"There are high highs and really low lows. We just have to figure out our even keel, just being balanced and getting back to what we were doing when we won seven in a row. We have to figure out what we need to do to get back to that, just going out there each and every day trying to get better, figure out what we need to do today and be where our feet are and just get better."

Staying levelheaded amid a streak is easier said than done, with the pressures of the upcoming conference and national tournaments mounting and a difficult late-season slate. While Holtmann is aware that the losing streak has coincided with a slew of tough opponents, he knows his team needs to focus on its own improvements to eradicate its losing ways.

"Certainly, this is unlike any stretch I've ever been a part of, but what I'm hoping is it gets us better," Holtmann said. "It will certainly be a measure of our ability to handle disappointment and adversity and challenges. This is certainly the first time this season where we've had a stretch like this. And even though you look at it and you can anticipate struggle, it's certainly challenging in the moment.

"The balance between recognizing that we're playing a ridiculously hard closing stretch and then owning areas that we have to get better as coaches and players is the challenge for us moving forward. It's a balance because you don't want to excuse poor play by just sheer quality of competition, even though we recognize the quality of competition that we're playing. We have

Ohio State's Seniors Eye Postseason Run

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Two Buckeyes were honored as seniors prior to Ohio State's 73-68 loss to Illinois at Value City Arena on March 6 – Kyle Young and C.J. Walker.

Young may not be the most heralded player or the most well-known at a national level, but Ohio State basketball is not the same without the senior forward. Young is the ultimate glue-guy who is willing to do whatever it takes to help the team win.

"He's meant so much for our program," head coach Chris Holtmann said of Young. "I can't overstate how meaningful he is as a person and as a player and what he's meant for our program. And I hope his time's not finished, but I'll support him either way. He's just been a phenomenal competitor. He's dealt with some really challenging things with some injuries that we've managed a little bit better this year, outside of his concussion that was obviously outside of our control.

"He's just one of those guys that (understands) everything that you think about and you talk about in terms of playing for the team on the front of your jersey and really embracing this opportunity to play at Ohio State. It really matters to him; it just does. That has been evident for anybody who's watched him in these four years."

Young was not always set to don scarlet and gray, however, initially committing to play for Holtmann at Butler as a standout at Massillon (Ohio) Jackson, where he scored 1,582 points and earned All-Ohio honors three times. When Holtmann accepted the Ohio State job, bringing Young with him was essential to building the foundation of his program in Columbus. For Young, the opportunity to represent the Buckeyes has been a blessing.

"Just growing up being an Ohio kid, what Ohio State means to everyone in the state of Ohio, my family growing up being Ohio State fans, and even just the fact that playing college basketball at this high of a level in the Big Ten these past four years has been incredible," Young said. "It's been a dream of mine. I've been living that dream for the past four years. It's been incredible. I'm just very grateful to be in the position I am."

How much Young cares about his teammates, coaches and the Ohio State community is apparent when watching him play. The Canton, Ohio, native refuses to back down from any challenge, giving his best effort on a consistent basis. His toughness, physicality and selflessness have helped Holtmann and the Buckeyes secure many victories in his four seasons, which is sometimes even more apparent in his absence.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Just Wasn't The Same

All right, Frank, I accept your challenge. First, I entirely agree with you about the 2020 football season. With no fans, reduced schedules, canceled games and many players out with COVID, it was a phony season. Nothing should count in the record books, and Alabama should have a great big asterisk beside its national championship. I would say the same thing even if Ohio State had won it.

Second, I have a Gary Gerken story. Back in the early '90s, I wrote BSB a few letters of my own that were more than a little critical of John Cooper. I certainly didn't have Gary's in-depth knowledge of football, and my letters were more along the line of I just didn't like what I was seeing, rather than being the cogent analysis that Gary provided. Anyway, one Sunday fall afternoon, we had some family at our house for dinner when the phone rang. It was Gary calling from Iowa to tell me that he had seen my latest letter in BSB. He said he

agreed with me completely and went on to provide more of his own very vivid comments about Cooper and his coaching until, finally, I had to break off our conversation and get back to our guests. I never had any contact with Gary other than that, but it has stuck with me over the years. We will miss him.

Third, you don't have to worry about losing me, Frank. I'm not going anywhere.

**Terry Walrath
Hinckley, Ohio**

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

BUCKEYE SPORTS .COM

From The Message Board

With the Big Ten and NCAA tournaments right around the corner, we asked the readers on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff members, which player on Ohio State's basketball roster is most important to the Buckeyes having success in the postseason. Here are some of the responses:

"Duane Washington because when he's on, he's on and when he's not, Ohio State tends to struggle."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I'll say Kyle Young because he is some sort of glue for the team which is hard to articulate. He's like black matter in the universe, you don't know what it is but it's there, doing things we can't describe. But it's important."

– PeyoteBuck

"Right now, it seems like the answer might be Justin Ahrens. The Buckeyes desperately need that second elite three-point shooter to pair with Washington, and when Ahrens is off (as he has been during this skid), the offense has a tendency to rely very heavily on

Washington and Liddell making a whole lot of tricky shots. Sometimes that will work just fine, like it did against Michigan, but other times you'll get that Iowa game. Ohio State needs Ahrens to be shooting and hitting at a high rate."

– Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

"I agree with Patrick. The Buckeyes are hard to beat when Ahrens is knocking down his outside shots, and as we've seen time and time again, either tournament can be won by a team with the hot shooter."

– Andrew Lind, BSB

"Justice Sueing. He is more of a wild card than Washington and E.J. Liddell."

– Frank Moskowitz, BSB

From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

Ohio State was just entering the search to replace Eldon Miller as the men's basketball head coach after Miller had abruptly resigned from the position in February and accepted the same job at Northern Iowa less than a month later. Although athletic director Rick Bay wasn't saying much about the hunt for a new coach, he did mention prior to Ohio State's Feb. 26 game against Iowa that the Buckeyes hoped to have their man "by March 15, maybe sooner."

If the Buckeyes had a favorite, very few knew about it. The public list of coaches that Ohio state could or should consider was lengthy, featuring up-and-coming coaches such as Ohio University's Danny Nee, Dave Bliss of SMU and Bob Donewald of Illinois State; established major names like Tennessee's Don DeVoe or Indiana's Bob Knight (both former Buckeye players) and Purdue's Gene Keady; or even former Buckeye star John Havlicek, who said he had no interest in coaching.

Assistant coach Jim Clemons said that he was interviewed for the job as well but didn't appear to be the favorite, though he did say that he was actively pursuing a head coaching job, even if it wasn't at Ohio State.

30 Years Ago – 1991

Head coach Randy Ayers admitted he was initially surprised when his men's basketball Buckeyes were installed as the No. 1 seed in the Midwest Region of the NCAA Tournament after they lost twice in the last week of the season to back into a Big Ten co-championship with Indiana.

That isn't to say that the Buckeye head man wasn't pleased, with his team drawing a round-one matchup with Towson State.

"We're very happy," Ayers said. "I think the committee rewarded us for having a good year, and we have had a good year."

The Hoosiers received a No. 2 seed in the Southeast behind No. 1 Arkansas.

"I think the committee recognized we had two solid wins over a very good ballclub," Ayers said, referring to Indiana.

25 Years Ago – 1996

Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger said Ayers' job was safe despite a third consecutive losing season.

He preached the importance of patience in a very young roster, with seven freshmen accounting for half of the team's roster in a 10-17 campaign with a 3-15 showing in Big Ten play.

"I want to change where we are, but I am also committed to rebuilding," Geiger said. "This team is comprised almost entirely of freshmen, and I don't think jerking the

coach out of it would be a very smart thing to do."

Ayers said he believed the pieces were in place for a bright future with the likes of Shaun Stonerook, Jamie Bosley, Neshawn Coleman, Scott Gradney, Jason Singleton, Damon Stringer and Jermaine Tate all scheduled to be back as sophomores the following season.

20 Years Ago – 2001

Ohio State men's basketball coach Jim O'Brien was selected by the media as the Big Ten Coach of the Year on March 5 after Ohio State put together a 20-9 record overall with an 11-5 mark in league play.

The selection came not just because of Ohio State's success on the floor, but because of whom O'Brien had to replace. After losing standouts Scoonie Penn and Michael Redd, Ohio State was picked near the bottom of most pre-season projections but managed to rally around a young roster to build a gritty, hard-nosed team. While he was selected for the honor, O'Brien didn't seem to agree with the sentiment. When asked if coaches have good seasons just like players, O'Brien said, "Yes, and I'm still waiting for my good year."

15 Years Ago – 2006

The Ohio State women's basketball team claimed its second straight Big Ten title after toppling Purdue 67-58 on Feb. 23 and its first outright title of the Jim Foster era after it shared the previous title with Michigan State. To beat the Boilermakers specifically for the title stood out to the Buckeyes, who had taken their lone conference loss to Purdue on Jan. 1, 61-59.

"It was pretty great to play Purdue for the title," senior forward Debbie Merrill said. "They were the team that gave us our loss, so to come back and win against them, I wouldn't have it any other way."

10 Years Ago – 2011

Although it found in an internal investigation that Jim Tressel had violated his contract by failing to report that some of his players had potentially committed NCAA violations, Ohio State stood by the head coach of its football team.

Tressel was suspended for two games and fined \$250,000 but kept his job, a decision that shocked many given the results of the investigation.

In fact, when asked if he had considered firing Tressel, university president E. Gordon Gee cracked, "Let me just be very clear: I'm just hopeful the coach doesn't dismiss me."

Five Years Ago – 2016

With Ohio State's season winding down, the Buckeyes didn't want to talk about their most likely postseason fate.

Their final three regular-season games, all of which came against ranked opponents, weren't looked at as potential résumé builders, the team said, but simply as their next opponents.

When the Buckeyes went 1-2 in those contests and remained absent from every reputable NCAA Tournament projection, they insisted that they didn't listen to that stuff, that they were too focused on the day-to-day.

When the Buckeyes were bounced from the conference tournament by Michigan State on March 11, their third loss to the Spartans in just over three weeks, they were finally willing to acknowledge what had been becoming more and more obvious as the season unfolded. For the first time in eight years, Ohio State was not worthy of inclusion in the 68-team field at 20-13 overall.

"Honestly, no," point guard JaQuan Lyle said when asked if the Buckeyes deserved a spot in the NCAA Tournament. "We had those losses at the beginning of the season, and they came back and bit us. It's just how it goes, and you have to learn from it."

"It hurts, but I mean, at the beginning of the year no one expected us to even get 20 wins. So I wouldn't trade this season for anything. I just wish that we would have learned from our mistakes early in the year and had a better outcome."

One Year Ago – 2020

Every sport at Ohio State came skidding to a halt as a result of the coronavirus pandemic sweeping the nation. After just three spring practices, the football team was sent home when the Big Ten suspended all team activities through at least April 6. The Buckeyes canceled their annual spring game set for April 11.

It was an even tougher fate for the basketball programs. The men's team had its season cut short prior to the Big Ten tournament with the cancellation of both that and the NCAA Tournament. The women's team managed to get the conference tournament in but would not have the opportunity to compete for a title after its national tournament was also canceled. Men's and women's hockey, men's volleyball and wrestling all met similar fates. Every spring Olympic team shuttered its season as well.

While the Buckeyes struggled with taking in the new normal, men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann had his mind on other teams as well.

"You think about the schools that are in it the first time or the first time in a while, Rutgers in our league was going to be in the tournament for the first time in a while," Holtmann said. "You think about all the small schools, whether it's a Robert Morris that clinched their berth. You'd love to be able to see those teams play in what I think is the most suspenseful, greatest sporting event around."

Same Problems Plaguing OSU Down Stretch

decision in the national semifinals to Kansas.

The 2012 squad led by Matta featured a starting lineup eerily similar to the one Chris Holtmann puts on the court in 2021. There was point guard Aaron Craft, shooting guards William Buford and Lenzelle Smith Jr., and power forwards Deshaun Thomas and Jared Sullinger, a cohesive bunch who could score with anyone. But it was also a team that suffered long dry spells with its shooting, and with the exception of the 6-9, 265-pound Sullinger, there was no power threat under the basket.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Kansas exploited both of those weaknesses to erase what had been a 34-21 deficit with 42 seconds left in the first half. The Jayhawks used a pair of 13-4 runs in the second half to gain the advantage, using 7-0 center Jeff Withey to help neutralize Sullinger and the 6-7 Thomas. The OSU duo combined for 22 points but collectively connected on only 8 of 33 shots (24.2 percent) from the field.

Could Ohio State have beaten Kentucky in the championship final, a game the Wildcats won by a 67-59 decision against Kansas? That's anyone's guess, but Kentucky did have a 6-10 guy by the name of Anthony Davis, so ...

Dearth Of Big Men

Over the last decade and a half, the Buckeyes have signed only six players who stood 6-10 or taller, and it would be something of a stretch (no pun intended) to say any of those six were among the best players in program history. Suffice it to say there wasn't a single Wilt, Kareem or Shaq in the bunch.

Greg Oden was undoubtedly the best of the lot, although the 7-foot, 250-pounder came to Columbus as somewhat damaged goods and left after only one season. Despite missing the first seven games of the 2006-07 season with a wrist injury, Oden led the team in scoring during the 2006-07 season – something no big man had done for the Buckeyes since Lawrence Funderburke in 1993-94 – and he also led the team with 9.6 rebounds per game.

During the team's run to the NCAA Tournament title game, Oden was especially effective. He blocked a potential game-winning shot against Tennessee to preserve OSU's 85-84 victory in the Sweet 16 and then totaled 25 points, 12 rebounds and four blocks in the championship final against Florida.

But as soon as Oden was here, he was gone – off to the NBA where a litany of injuries conspired to make him one of the biggest draft busts in league history.

Two more 7-footers immediately followed Oden to Ohio State, but neither Kosta Koufos nor B.J. Mullens was the quintessential center. Both seemed more interested in showcasing their outside shooting skills than establishing any kind of post presence, and only Koufos ever led the team in rebounding – and that was with a modest average of 6.7 per game in 2007-08. Like Oden before them, each was off to the NBA after only one season.

Ohio State didn't sign another player at least 6-10 or taller until Daniel Giddens in 2015. He averaged 3.8 points and 3.6 rebounds in 33 games during his freshman season before beginning a transfer journey that went through Alabama before winding up at Vermont. Giddens was followed to Columbus in 2016

by 6-10 Micah Potter, who averaged 4.1 points and 2.8 rebounds in two seasons as a Buckeye before transferring to Wisconsin. He has averaged 12.9 points and 5.9 rebounds for the Badgers so far this season.

The most recent big man signed by the Buckeyes is Ibrahima Diallo, a 6-10 native of Senegal who, over the past two seasons, has averaged a meager 0.9 points and 1.5 rebounds in only 12 games. To be fair, Diallo's season this year has been derailed first by a concussion and more recently by a knee injury. But when Diallo signed in 2019, Holtmann confessed, "As with most freshmen, especially bigs, we understand there will be a process to his development." The flip side of that warning, of course, is that it apparently doesn't hold true for all freshman bigs (e.g. Dickinson at Michigan).

With sincerest apologies to 7-footer Luke Witte, who was never the same after being stomped to within an inch of his life during the infamous brawl at Minnesota in January 1972, and fellow 7-footer Brad Sellers, who transferred to Ohio State after beginning his career at Wisconsin and was much more scoring forward than paint presence, the Buckeyes have only enjoyed the extended services of an honest-to-goodness big man when Herb Williams made life miserable for opponents from 1978-81.

You could make the case, based upon his 2,011 career points (second only to Dennis Hopson's 2,096) and his 1,111 rebounds (second only to Jerry Lucas' total of 1,411) that the 6-10, 242-pound Williams is the best big man Ohio State has ever had. Honorable mention to Ken Johnson, a 6-10 shot-blocking machine who owns the program record with 444 blocks. Williams is second on that list, too, with 328.

And before you think I've forgotten about Lucas, remember that he was 6-8 and 230 pounds when he played at Ohio State, and most of his rebounds came as a result of finesse rather than power.

Some Final Thoughts

- I'm not entirely sure why college basketball fans have to continue to be subjected to what passes for analysis from Dick Vitale, whose shtick went stale about the time the sport went from peach baskets to iron rims. Yet there he was on the call March 6 for the OSU-Illinois game, providing about as much insight as my grandmother, who wouldn't know a point guard from a needlepoint.

Vitale somehow got into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame as well as the College Basketball Hall of Fame on the basis of uttering such catchphrases as "Awesome, baby!" while referring to freshmen as "diaper dandies," tropes and bromides that have worn as thin as the now 81-year-old's gravelly voice that makes the listener strain to hear it – provided the listener actually wanted to hear it.

- If you have been paying attention to college basketball this year, you know that perennial power Duke is in danger of having a sub-.500 season for the first time since 1994-95. Following a 91-73 beating administered March 6 by archrival North Carolina, the unranked Blue Devils had a decidedly pedestrian 11-11 record.

That '94-95 season was the one in which head coach Mike Krzyzewski left the team after 12 games to deal with a back injury and exhaustion. Interim coach Pete Gaudet took over when the team had a 9-3 record, and the Blue Devils immediately tanked. They went 4-15 after Gaudet took over to finish 13-18 overall. Coach K hasn't presided over a losing season in its entirety since an 11-17 campaign in 1982-83. That was his third season at Duke, a tenure that has now reached 41 seasons that include five NCAA Tournament championships.

Anyone experiencing amusement park rides such as "Corkscrew" at Cedar Point or "The Beast" at Kings Island can likely relate to the twists and turns of the Ohio State men's basketball season.

After appearing in the preseason hinterlands of the top 25, the Buckeyes had fallen out of the rankings by week seven only to make a meteoric rise over the next month and a half, riding a seven-game winning streak all the way to the No. 4 spot in the nation. It was an impressive streak that included victories over a couple of top-10 opponents and had nearly every so-called bracketology expert affording Ohio State a No. 1 seed in the upcoming NCAA Tournament.

Then, almost as suddenly as their stock had risen, the sun suddenly set as the Buckeyes finished their regular season with four straight losses. That particular streak began with a 92-87 home loss to Michigan – the nation's No. 3-ranked team at the time – a very entertaining, ebb-and-flow game that featured 12 lead changes in the second half alone.

But as thrilling as that game was, it underscored the glaring weaknesses that the team's subsequent opponents have successfully exploited. Ohio State is susceptible to streaky shooting, lazy lapses in defense and a strange hesitation to keep everyone in a relatively deep playing rotation involved. But perhaps the most lethal kryptonite of all is seemingly no answer for any type of physical presence from an opponent's big man.

Case in point: The final regular season game March 6 against Illinois, a game tied at 68 with 1:31 remaining before the Fighting Illini eventually claimed a 73-68 victory.

After E.J. Liddell canned a three-pointer to give the Buckeyes a 68-64 lead at the 3:48 mark, Ohio State never scored again. The team missed its final 10 shots from the field, including a Duane Washington layup and a Liddell fadeaway in the paint, both shots altered by Illinois center Kofi Cockburn. The 7-0, 285-pound Cockburn scored 12 points, grabbed six rebounds (including three off the offensive glass) and featured a paint presence for which OSU simply had no answer.

Against Iowa at Value City Arena on Feb. 28, the Buckeyes played perhaps their worst game in two months. The ugly 73-57 loss featured a particularly cold first half of shooting on OSU's part – 38.7 percent (12 for 31) – as well as a 24-point, 11-rebound performance from hulking Hawkeye center Luka Garza, a 6-11, 265-pound enforcer who exerted his will time after time against the Buckeyes.

The losing streak began with the loss to Michigan, a game in which 7-1, 255-pound freshman Hunter Dickinson had his way with the Buckeyes to the tune of 22 points and nine rebounds.

There are two disparate thoughts about this year's Ohio State basketball team. The first is that it has overachieved, offering such a pleasant surprise that any headway it can make in the postseason will simply be icing on the top of an already pretty tasty cake. The other is that if the Buckeyes are truly worthy of a top-10 ranking during a season that apparently features no super team, why not go for the brass ring while it's there for the taking?

Unfortunately, what has bitten Ohio State down the stretch of the regular season will undoubtedly bite the Buckeyes again throughout whatever postseason run they can make.

You might be forgiven a little déjà vu if you think back to the 2012 season – Thad Matta's last best chance at a national title – when the Buckeyes squandered five separate first-half leads of 13 points and bowed out of the NCAA Tournament, dropping a heart-rending 64-62



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Ohio State To Open Spring Practice On March 19

Ohio State announced on Feb. 23 that it will be opening spring practice on March 19, with a tentative plan for 15 practices, including the annual spring game, which is scheduled for April 17.

That spring game date is not yet official,

but head coach Ryan Day said in February that the plan is to play it on April 17 at Ohio Stadium. The Buckeyes did not have a spring game last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The spring game will likely look quite a bit different in 2021 than it has in past years, because as athletic director Gene Smith told media, he doesn't have a set plan for what the stands will look like that afternoon.

"As of right now, we're just on hold for the spring game," Smith said. "If we're allowed to have fans, we will not have a ticketed event. It will not be one where we'll charge. My hope is that we'll have an opportunity to develop a strategy to recognize our front-line people, (like) our nurses, our doctors, our custodians, our bus drivers and all those people who have made so many sacrifices for us for a long time now."

"That would be my hope that we could come up with a strategy to recognize them and invite them to the spring game and, of course, the parents of our student-athletes. That's kind of my thinking right now, but we've got a way to go before we get to that point."

Follow Spring Football And Tournament Action

Spring football and basketball tournament time are here, 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 23, 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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Ohio State wouldn't be violating any state rules by allowing at least some fans into Ohio Stadium for the spring game. Governor Mike DeWine announced on Feb. 25 that starting in April, sports teams will be allowed to host 25 percent capacity indoors and 30 percent outdoors. At Ohio Stadium, that would be a little over 30,000 people.

"Sporting and entertainment events will be able to reopen with 25 percent maximum indoor capacity and 30 percent maximum outdoor capacity provided they follow established precautions," DeWine tweeted. "This is a start. If the situation improves in spring/summer, this could be expanded."

That change is not without additional required precautions, however.

"Some required precautions will include mandatory mask wearing for employees/customers; spectator pathways that allow for social distancing; seating in pods of no more than six people, recommended to be of the same household. Seating pods must be separated by at least six feet," DeWine said.

In talking about professional baseball within the state, DeWine said that he's eyeing July 4 as when he would like to see stadiums back at full capacity, but only with increased vaccination rates.

"I've described Opening Day in Cleveland - Indians at 30 percent capacity, but we could be moving away from that by May 1," DeWine said. "I would hope by the time we get to July 4 we might be full capacity. It depends on how many people get vaccinated."

"We're getting back to where we need to go, but we have to continue to stay focused. As this goes on, we have to continue to wear the masks. We have to make sure that everyone who wants it has the opportunity to get the vaccine."

With the spring game capacity still very much up in the air, Ohio State has also not determined how many fans could be allowed to attend games in the fall. Attendance last season was limited to just socially distanced family of student-athletes and staff members, as well as media. As DeWine indicated, it will depend on the current vaccine rollout, if the virus positivity rates continue to decrease and if variants become more prevalent in the state.

"I'm like everybody else," Smith said. "I'm curious. I'm hopeful that what we're experiencing now from a low positivity rate and number of people in the hospitals and the vaccine and herd immunity and all those things continue, and that we have

some new normal, whatever that will be, in the fall.

"My assumption is we'll still have to do a number of different things around certain protocols, like wear masks and things of that nature, but I can't begin to share what I think capacity allowance will be. I was really pleased to hear our governor say that his goal is to hopefully provide 30 percent capacity after April 1 for arenas and things of that nature, so I'm optimistic, but I was optimistic early last year."

Ohio State held just two spring practices last year before the Big Ten suspended and eventually canceled all spring activities, including the spring game, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Buckeyes Still Plan To Play Oregon

Although Ohio State's trip to Oregon was canceled last season due to the coronavirus pandemic, Smith told reporters on Feb. 24 that the Buckeyes will still host the Ducks this fall. There had been rumors previously that the home-and-home setup would not rotate without the initial trip to Eugene.

The game is currently scheduled to be played on Sept. 11 in Ohio Stadium, but Smith noted the two schools are still working through details with the hopes of having things finalized by the third week of March.

"Both of us want to compete and want to play," Smith said. "Neither of us want to change the game. It would cost us more to change the game. If we don't play, we have to buy somebody else in. And so you're paying whatever we'll have to pay, and that game probably won't be as attractive as us playing each other. Our biggest challenge is the return game. We're working through that right now. We will play this fall. We just have to work through some details on it."

The terms of the original contract stipulated that each school would pay the other \$300,000 for the visit, but if a return trip to Oregon cannot be scheduled, the game in Columbus could be replaced by a neutral-site game, similar to Ohio State's matchup with TCU at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, in 2018.

That game was also set originally as a home-and-home series but shifted to the neutral site to increase the payout for both universities. Ohio State could also increase its payout to Oregon for the home game this fall.

Complicating matters further, the Buckeyes have at least one marquee non-

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2021 Ohio State Football Schedule

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

* 2020 bowl team

** at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)

conference opponent on their future schedule through 2028. The Ducks, meanwhile, have at least one marquee nonconference game scheduled for every season through 2030.

Ohio State is set to play Notre Dame in 2022 and 2023, Washington in 2024 and 2025, Texas in 2025 and 2026, Alabama in 2027 and 2028, and Georgia in 2030 and 2031.

On Oregon's side, the Ducks will face Georgia in 2022, Texas Tech in 2023 and 2024, Oklahoma State in 2025 and 2026, Baylor in 2027 and 2028, and Michigan State in 2029 and 2030.

Assuming the teams don't want to play two Power Five nonconference opponents in one season, as Ohio State will in 2025 when it hosts both Texas and Washington, the earliest the two teams could reschedule a game at Oregon would be in 2032.

Future schedules have been flexible in the past – Ohio State shifted a series with Boston College back to the "early 2030s" in 2020 – so those future matchups could be moved around if Ohio State and Oregon want to make up for the lost game.

Ohio State is currently scheduled to play seven games at home in 2021, including Oregon, Tulsa and Akron as part of the nonconference slate and Big Ten games against Maryland, Penn State, Purdue and Michigan State. The Buckeyes are 9-0 all-time against the Ducks, including a 42-20 victory in the 2015 College Football Playoff national championship.

They've faced off six times in the regular season, most recently a 24-14 Ohio State victory in Columbus in 1987. The last meeting in Oregon came in 1967 on the first leg of a home-and-home, a 30-0 win for the Buckeyes. Ohio State won the return game the following season 21-6 as the second game of its undefeated, national title campaign.

Ohio State Announces Ticketing Changes

The Ohio State department of athletics

announced its new approach to handling ticketing operations on Feb. 25, with the changes officially taking hold prior to the 2022 football season.

The biggest change includes the division of season and individual tickets into six zones, up from two previously. Season tickets will be \$710 in the cheapest zone (Zone 6) to \$1,287 in the most expensive zone (Zone 1), with required per-seat contributions (PSC) to the Buckeye Club of \$1,500 in Zone 1 to no required contribution in Zone 6. Notably, this will be the first time in decades that fans can purchase season tickets without an additional donation to the university.

Student seating prices remain unchanged at \$34 per game and will not require any additional contributions.

Zone 1, the most expensive seats, consists of the 2,578 total seats near midfield on the lower deck of Ohio Stadium. Those will require a \$1,500 PSC, which, with the projected season ticket price of \$1,287, will mean that the seat will run up a total of \$2,787.

The PSC price drops from there in each zone – from \$1,000 to \$500 to \$250 to \$100 – until you get to Zone 6, which are the upper deck seats surrounding most of the stadium. In Zone 6, there is no PSC, with those season tickets costing that projected \$710.

"Zone 6 and also Zone 5 if you look at it, where there's \$0 or a very low per-seat contribution, it's now way more affordable to be a season-ticket holder," said Ohio State associate athletic director of ticketing Brett Scarbrough.

These totals go down for faculty and staff (20 percent reduction), Varsity O Football members (50 percent), and recent graduates (50 percent in Zones 4-6) to varying degrees.

Smith indicated that Ohio State was hoping to institute this new plan in 2021 but had to delay because of the questions about potential stadium capacity under

Podcast Looks At Players On Spring Spot

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

On the most recent episode released on March 5, we looked ahead to the upcoming start of spring football and shared our picks for the Buckeyes who have the most to gain (or lose) this spring. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin Podcast is currently on its schedule of one weekly episode, released on Friday mornings.

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, as well as 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.

the clouds of the pandemic.

"The modernization of the Buckeye Club benefits our current season ticket holders by providing more affordable price options, greater selection in seat locations and no restriction on the number of tickets purchased," Smith said in a statement. "For the first time in decades, season tickets will be available to fans with no annual contribution so that more fans can share in the pageantry of Ohio State football and experience the thrill of Ohio Stadium."

With this move to PSCs, Ohio State is not increasing the base level of ticket prices, though some ticket prices may increase because of the contributions required.

Just over 52 percent of the seats will require an annual contribution of \$250 or less, while nearly a third of season-ticket holders will play less for the seats they have than before, according to an Ohio State statement.

Continued On Page 6

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Continued From Page 5

"The new Buckeye Club model provides a more cost-effective approach for our donors to purchase season tickets, offers more enhanced benefits while allowing them to continue their support of the university," Michael Eicher, senior vice president for advancement, said in a statement.

Because Ohio State has eight scheduled home games in 2022, the figures for season ticket prices will be at their highest in the inaugural year of the next system. The six-game 2023 slate is projected at \$2,382 at the top zone and \$487 at the lowest, while the seven-game schedule in 2024 will be \$2,545 in Zone 1 and \$577 in Zone 6.

Ohio State expects the new approach to increase annual giving to the Buckeye Club by about \$5 million, which goes directly to student-athlete scholarships.

OSU pulls in about \$14 million in donations per year right now and would like to move closer to the upper echelon around \$25-30 million.

"We need to grow our annual giving program," Smith said. "When you look at our peers across the country who have done this for a number of years now – the Texas' of the world, the Michigans of the world, the Oklahomas of the world, the Texas A&Ms of the world, the Tennessees of the world ... they're in the upper \$20 millions, so our goal would be somewhere between \$25-30 million in our annual giving program over time, and we're sitting just south of \$14 million."

Fields, Wade, 12 Others Earn Combine Invite

There may not be any physical, in-person NFL combine held in Indianapolis this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, but 14 former Ohio State players were invited to participate in virtual interviews and the psychological testing that typically take place alongside physical workouts for this year's all-virtual combine.

Headlining the list is quarterback Justin Fields, who has been projected by draft analysts as a likely top-10 pick and one of the first signal callers off the board, though his draft stock has differed wildly among those analysts.

ESPN's Mel Kiper and Todd McShay both took the chance to defend Fields, whom some draft experts have moved down their board after a shaky end to his junior season.

"I get that (Justin Fields is) a little polarizing," Kiper said. "I get the criticism because of those two games (against Northwestern and Alabama). But I think for No. 7, for that (San Francisco) 49ers offense – (if they) feel we can get an upgrade over Jimmy Garoppolo with Justin Fields, I think would be a move that maybe they make. I see Justin Fields going in this general area. That's why I was trying to figure out the team that would be interested in maybe moving up to that spot. I think the 49ers would be, with Kyle Shanahan, a nice fit for Justin Fields."

"Everyone's yelling at me about Justin Fields," McShay said. "I've got him at three overall, and I've got a team trading up from eight to give away a lot of picks to go get him. I think he's so physically gifted. I think he has really good football intelligence. The thing that's tough to figure out is when you look at this past season – when Indiana and Northwestern and Alabama threw different schemes at him, just trying to get off what that primary read was.

"Again, it's not about football intelligence. It's about what the scheme (was). He was trying to deal with it in his own scheme. And (third-year Buckeyes head coach) Ryan Day is one of the best quarterback coaches and offensive coaches in all of college football, and I think he has such precise decisions in terms of what his quarterback wants to do and where to go with the ball. So I think that's going to be the transition for him, but I think Justin

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

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

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

Fields is supremely talented – mentally and physically."

Elsewhere however, NBC's Chris Simms made clear that he's no fan of Fields as a prospect, slotting him outside of his top four quarterback prospects because of a lack of foot and hip movement in the pocket prior to passes.

"Nobody does that," Simms said, referring to Fields' motions. "Nobody in the NFL throws the ball... doing that consistently and making that work. That's not going to happen... You're not going to be able to piece it together all the time, so that scares me."

Joining Fields at the virtual combine are running back Trey Sermon, offensive guard Wyatt Davis, center Josh Myers, tight end Luke Farrell, defensive end Jonathon Cooper, defensive tackle Tommy Togiai, linebackers Tuf Borland, Baron Browning, Justin Hilliard and Pete Werner, cornerback Shaun Wade, kicker Blake Haubeil and punter Drue Chrisman.

With those 14 players, Ohio State tops the list of invites for a single college.

Along with the combine group, former wide receiver C.J. Saunders and tight end Jake Hausmann will also get the chance to work out in front of NFL scouts during Ohio State's Pro Day on March 30. The NFL draft, meanwhile, will be held in Cleveland on April 29-May 1.

Ohio State Hires Reilly Jeffers

According to a report from FOX Sports'

Bruce Feldman, Ohio State has hired former Kansas long snapper Reilly Jeffers as an offensive assistant.

Jeffers played for the Jayhawks from 2012-14 and spent last season as the tight ends coach at Lipscomb Academy in Nashville under head coach Trent Dilfer, a former NFL quarterback. Before that, he was a graduate assistant at Florida Atlantic, where he worked with the offensive line under head coach Lane Kiffin, now in charge at Ole Miss.

Jeffers joins former Vanderbilt interim head coach and offensive coordinator Todd Fitch and Arizona defensive coordinator Paul Rhoads on Ohio State's rapidly growing staff of offensive and defensive analysts, a relatively new addition to the program. Previously, Ohio State depended more on graduate assistants and quality control coaches, but the analyst model is closer to the approach that Nick Saban deploys at Alabama.

Ohio State also hired former safety C.J. Barnett as the program's new director of player development for external affairs, replacing Ryan Stamper, who joined former head coach Urban Meyer's staff with the Jacksonville Jaguars, and Erin Dunston as the new director of on-campus recruiting.

Former Buckeye Jackson Passes Away

Former Ohio State running back Jermon Jackson passed away at the age of 45 according to an announcement from his high school on Feb. 26.

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INSIDER

“RIP to one of the Greatest Fighting Tigers to ever play the game,” Ironton (Ohio) High School posted. “Jermon Jackson was a legend in Southeast Ohio. God Bless! #25”

Jackson was a two-time first-team all-state selection at Ironton before arriving at Ohio State as a member of the highly touted 1994 recruiting class. He set a freshman record by scoring three touchdowns in his first game with the Buckeyes.

Although he never caught on as a full-time starter, spelling Eddie George in 1994-95 and Pepe Pearson in 1996, he finished his career with 698 yards and seven touchdowns along with six receptions for 47 yards in 26 games at Ohio State from 1994-98.

Jackson earned his bachelor of arts degree at Ohio State and went on to earn his master of business administration degree from the University of Phoenix. He spent the last two years as the vice president at VOXX after previously working for JPMorgan Chase Bank and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

The cause of Jackson's death was unknown at the time of publication.

Women's Swim And Dive Wins Big Ten

Ohio State's women's swim and dive team won its second straight Big Ten championship on Feb. 27 after a tremendous week at the Jean K. Freeman Aquatic Center at the University of Minnesota. The Buckeyes took the lead at the event on day two and never relinquished it, taking the final victory with a team total of 1,584 points. Michigan finished second with 1,326.5 points, followed by Indiana,

Northwestern and Wisconsin with 1,066.5, 992 and 749.5 points, respectively.

Along with the team title, Ohio State led the league in All-Big Ten selections with nine: Hannah Bach, Emily Crane, Amy Fulmer, Taylor Petrak, Freya Rayner, Kristen Romano, Katie Trace, Sally Tafuto and Katherine Zenick.

Bach (200 medley relay, 400 medley relay, 100 breaststroke), Crane (200 medley relay, 400 medley relay, 200 free relay), Fulmer (200 free relay), Petrak (400 medley relay, 200 free relay), Rayner (200 medley relay), Romano (200 IM, 400 IM), Trace (400 medley relay), Tafuto (500 free) and Zenick (200 medley relay, 200 free relay) all won individual championships.

Former OC Herman Headed To Bears

The Chicago Bears announced on March 1 that they have hired former Ohio State offensive coordinator and Texas head coach Tom Herman as an offensive analyst and special projects coach.

The 45-year-old Herman went 32-18 with the Longhorns from 2017-20 but was fired and replaced by Steve Sarkisian in early January following a 7-3 campaign in 2020.

Prior to arriving at Texas, he served as the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Texas State (2005-06), Rice (2007-08), Iowa State (2009-11) and Ohio State (2012-14), helping the Buckeyes to a victory in the 2015 College Football Playoff national championship.

Herman, who won the Broyles Award that season as the nation's top assistant coach, was also the head coach at Houston from 2015-16, putting up a 22-4 record.

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Final Weeks Of Schedule Unkind To Ohio State

Continued From Page 1

to get better in areas. We have to use this to help us get better.”

When dealing with a losing streak like Ohio State's, one of the last teams a coach wants to see on the upcoming schedule is Illinois, a top-five team in the country by just about every metric. The Buckeyes had beaten the Illini in Champaign on Jan. 16, and they were looking for revenge on Ohio State's senior day on March 6.

Illinois defeated Ohio State 73-68 by closing the game on a 9-0 run during which the Buckeyes went 0 for 10 from the field. On one hand, Holtmann's unit had a chance to finish off a top-five team in the final minutes. On the other hand, the struggling Bucks let one slip away at home. Either way, Ohio State looked a lot more like the team that had won 10 of 11 games than the one that had just lost its fourth straight.

“The Big Ten is a tough conference,” Walker said. “Each and every game is different. We played with a lot more urgency. We played together. We moved the ball. We got shots that we wanted. That's what we

hadn't done the three previous games, which obviously wasn't our outcome. We did things better than what we'd been doing in previous games, so we're just trying to grow from that, keep learning, getting better each and every day in practice.

“We just have to figure it out going into March coming with that one-and-done mentality. We have to figure it out, have more sense of urgency, and we have to be better at finishing games.”

From the outside looking in, it may appear that Ohio State men's basketball is in disarray after losing four straight conference competitions to end the regular season. However, a closer look at the quality of opponents during the slump indicates that the Buckeyes may not be as out of sync as it seems.

Michigan, Illinois and Iowa rank third, fourth and sixth nationally in the NET rankings, representing three of the best teams in the entire country. And while Michigan State is No. 72 in the NET, the Spartans are led by Hall of Fame coach Tom Izzo and were coming off wins over Indiana and Iowa before beating the Buckeyes.

Holtmann, who is a finalist for national

Coach of the Year honors, discussed the unique challenges of the Buckeyes' back-loaded schedule that was altered due to COVID-19 concerns before the season. Not one for excuses, Holtmann focused on the opportunity for his team to sharpen up its areas of weakness that were exposed during the brutal losing stretch.

“You're trying to balance areas that you need to do better, not making excuses for areas that you have not played or performed in, and also recognizing the stretch here is unlike anything I've ever been a part of,” Holtmann said. “You're trying to own areas that I have to coach better and we have to play better – and also trying to have some perspective as well.

“But unbalanced schedules are a part of this 20-game schedule, so you end up playing some teams more than others, and it just so happens that the top of our league, with the exception of one team, we've played twice. And it just so happens that where the calendar fell, it came here at the end. Hopefully, we're tough enough to manage it, identify some areas where we're getting exposed, be better and prepare us here without it kicking us in

the teeth too much.”

Dropping four straight to conclude the regular-season campaign stymied Ohio State's momentum, but it may have been a blessing in disguise. Perhaps the Buckeyes became somewhat complacent while they were cruising through the conference slate. The four-game skid may have been the humbling experience that they needed to take the next step.

“We've been focusing a lot on getting back to where we were, and we don't think there's necessarily too much wrong,” Young said. “We just need to focus in more, continue to bring energy every day and continue to be good with our prep leading into these tournaments here. So that's just what we've been preaching in the locker room.

“Teams are playing well. In the Big Ten, you're going to get everyone's best shot just because the Big Ten's a tough conference. But we just need to focus back in, continue to bring our energy and get that edge back to us that we had earlier on in the season. I don't think it's anything too big. There are just some minor things we need to tweak and focus on getting back on track.”

Walker, Young Contribute Beyond Box Score

Continued From Page 1

“He's gotten better every year,” Holtmann said. “He's a better player than he was last year, and I think that's a really good thing. His competitiveness, his energy, his athleticism, his motor – this team misses that when he's out more than any team I've coached. It's apparent. We were rolling last year, part of it when he was out. We didn't miss it as much. We had other guys that provided some of what he provided. This team doesn't have that as much, and we do miss it when he's not his normal self.”

Young has been an important piece and continued to improve despite a slew of injuries suffered

during his collegiate career. From stress fractures to sprained ankles to his recent concussion, Young has run the gamut of physical challenges at Ohio State. Yet he has somehow come out better than before every time. He was asked if his injury history will linger in his memory as a major blemish on his career.

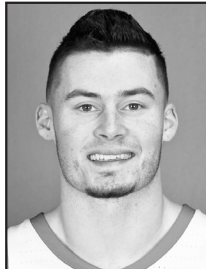
“That's something I try not to think too much about, just because I feel like it's something that I've just been able to battle through,” Young said. “There've been times with my legs and everything that it has set me back a little bit, but it's nothing that's ever discouraged me or put me down, because I just remind myself that it could be worse. There could be tougher things to go through. So for me just tough it out, keep playing and enjoy the game I enjoy to play. It's not something I'll think about too much. I'm going to think about all the good experiences I've had and how amazing it's been to play.”

Despite all his injuries, Young may be the most improved player on the Buckeye roster. That fact may be lost on some outside the program, but junior guard Duane Washington is well aware of his teammate's growth.

“Kyle Young is the hardest-working dude, hardest-playing player I've ever played with,” Washington said. “It's special. It goes unnoticed a lot.”

Part of the reason that Young's efforts may go unnoticed is that his impact extends far

beyond the box score. Entering his senior season, Young held career averages of just 5.1 points and 4.0 rebounds per game, while shooting 59.9 percent from the floor, 13.8 percent (4 of 29) from three and 61.0 percent (75 of 123) from the foul line.



Kyle Young

Through 25 games in 2020-21, Young averaged a career-high 8.4 points per game with 5.6 rebounds. He was shooting 54.3 percent from the field, 37.5 percent (9 of 24) from beyond the arc, and 83.7 percent (41 of 49) from the free-throw line on the season. The drastic improvements to his efficiency on three-pointers and foul shots epitomizes the tireless work ethic of Young. He went from being a liability as a shooter to becoming a reliable threat in one offseason.

His statistics have shown improvement, but Young's most valuable attribute is less tangible. He impacts winning, and that has made him a staple of Holtmann's squads since he arrived in Columbus.

“You see some of those guys that just, while they may not ever be a prolific scorer, they're elite in terms of what they can do to help your team win, and he's up there,” Holtmann said.

“Kyle is going to be the 12th player to qualify for four NCAA Tournaments, if you include last year's tournament, in the history of the program. He'd be the 12th player to do that in the history of our program, which is a significant accomplishment for him.”

Young's sights are set on helping his team make a push through the conference and national tournaments, an opportunity that was taken away by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

“We know we've got a special group,” Young said. “We don't want to get ahead of ourselves, but we know we need to work every day to continue to get better every day so we can try to make a run here at the end of March.”

The 6-8 forward has geared his laser-like focus on the Big Ten tourney and subsequent March Madness tournament. Prior to his arrival at Ohio State, the men's basketball team had missed two straight NCAA Tournaments. Now, largely thanks to Young, the Buckeyes are

poised to not only make it but to make a run once there.

“We came in and there was a culture that had been set in place, what we wanted it to be like, what coaches wanted it to be like, and I just came and did what I could to help the team win,” Young said. “After these past few years, hopefully fans and everybody can look and say some good things about my name and say that I did help the program. I've just been trying to do whatever I can to help the team win these past few years.”

Walking The Walk

Although Walker, a fifth-year senior, did not come to Columbus until his third-year sophomore season, the point guard will leave a lasting legacy within the Ohio State men's basketball program.

Walker went from a starter on an Elite Eight team at Florida State to sitting out the 2018-19 season due to NCAA transfer rules. He spent that year developing relationships with his teammates and furthering his connection with Holtmann, who had recruited him to Butler out of high school.

“C.J. Walker has been really about winning his entire career,” Holtmann said. “He as well, with two schools, will have qualified for every NCAA Tournament. He has led us in assists both years and been top two in steals both years.”

After averaging 8.7 points per game and 3.5 assists per game in 2019-20, Walker has boasted marks of 9.2 points and 4.2 assists per contest as a fifth-year senior. Last season he led the team with 107 assists and 40 steals as a fourth-year junior, and he ranks first in assists (89) and second in steals (17) in the 2020-21 campaign.

The fact that Walker has played at such a high level in what is presumed to be his final season is even more impressive when considering he tore ligaments in his wrist during a preseason scrimmage. The Indianapolis native played through the pain before missing four games in mid-January. Despite still recovering, Walker could not bear to stay away from

the action any longer and returned for the Buckeyes' 74-62 win at Wisconsin on Jan. 23, sparking their seven-game winning streak.

Though it was killing Walker to not be able to take the floor with his teammates during the four games he missed, he earned rave reviews for his helpfulness while acting as an assistant coach, particularly from Holtmann.

“My IQ of the game is really high,” Walker said. “I feel like I just know the game really well. And I feel like I relate to a lot of people. I feel like people depend on me, they can trust me. For example, my teammates on an each-and-every-day basis just believing in me, trusting in me, coming to me for advice on and off the court, just always being there as somebody they can depend on. People gravitate toward me. I just feel like as a coach that's really good to have people that gravitate toward you, that trust you,

that believe in you. And I feel like my IQ of the game will go hand in hand with having people gravitate to me.”

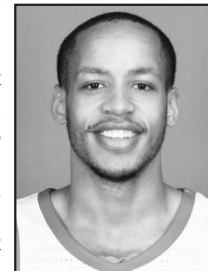
With his collegiate playing career likely nearing a conclusion, Walker was asked what he is most proud of through his five years.

“Just sticking with it, never giving up. Never quitting when things got hard. And sacrificing a lot for myself, for my teammates to be in the best situation to win,” he said. “There

were a lot of times when things were really low for me. Not giving up, pushing each and every day.”

How does the point guard hope he is remembered in Buckeye lore?

“I just hope people remember me as a leader,” he said. “I sacrificed myself for the team, for the coaching staff, for the university. And I take it seriously. Playing for Ohio State means a lot. I've met a lot of people since I've been here that helped me get to where I am today. I just want them to remember me playing hard, putting my team first, diving on the floor – all the little things people don't really mark in the box score and things like that. I just want to be remembered as that. Being that ultimate leader and a great overall point guard that wins and gets his job done each and every night.”



C.J. Walker

Carrico Brings Old-School Mentality To Bucks

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There's a reason Reid Carrico was the only linebacker Ohio State signed as part of the 2021 recruiting cycle, and it wasn't because the Buckeyes missed out elsewhere.

In fact, Carrico was the staff's top target at the position from the get-go thanks to his elite work ethic and all-around athletic ability, which translated into back-to-back state title appearances for the Ironton (Ohio) Fighting Tigers over the last two seasons.

"You talk about somebody who, when you look him in his eyes, he's going to get something done," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said during his early signing period teleconference on Dec. 16. "He's going to have a great career here just because of the way he takes care of himself in the classroom and on the field. He's one of the toughest guys I've seen on film, running from sideline to sideline."

The 6-3, 225-pound Carrico played on both sides of the ball at Ironton, where he started at both running back and linebacker. He rushed for 1,544 yards and 25 touchdowns while also contributing 56 tackles, 17 tackles for loss and four sacks as a senior, which is one reason that Ohio State director of player personnel Mark Pantoni mentioned him as someone he truly enjoyed watching on tape.

"There are certain guys that you really look forward to seeing on film, and Reid was always one of them," Pantoni also said on Dec. 16, noting how it was always a race between him and other staff members to get to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on Saturday mornings to be the one responsible for cutting up Carrico's highlight tape. "He's really fun to watch, just how hard he plays. He's just this old-school, throwback linebacker who has no regard for his body. He's making 20-25 tackles per game, and he's playing running back, making 80-yard runs. He was just a dominant high school player who wasn't into recruiting. He just loves ball."

"If you have stock, you're going to put it in that kid because he's just a grinder. He's a blue-collar kid who is going to have a great career here."

Luckily for the Buckeyes, Carrico wasn't one for the recruiting process. He landed an offer from Ohio State in April 2019, attended a one-day camp that June and then committed shortly after taking an unofficial visit for the 42-0 win over Cincinnati that September.

"Honestly, none of that is very shocking to me," Ironton head coach Trevon Pendleton told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "He's a very humble kid and not about the glitz and the glam. He knew very early on it felt like home and was very comfortable making that decision because of that strong feeling and the strong connection he had with the coaching staff at Ohio State."

Carrico took only a handful of visits elsewhere before he committed to the Buckeyes, and the strength of his pledge never wavered once he joined the fold, despite being rated the nation's fifth-best inside linebacker and holding offers from the likes of Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia Tech and Wisconsin, among others.

"No matter how big Ohio State's brand gets nationally, it's always important for the Buckeyes to keep the best talent home," Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler told BSB. "I thought this was the best in-state class in

Get To Know: Reid Carrico

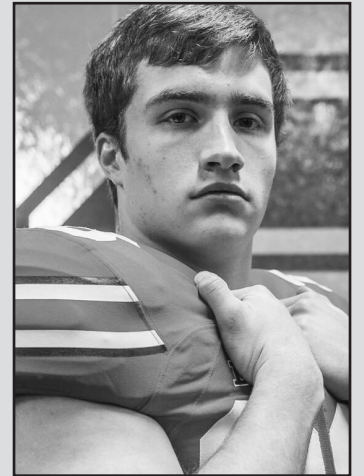
High School – Ironton, Ohio

Position – Linebacker

Height, Weight – 6-3, 225 pounds

Rankings – Was considered the third-best player in Ohio and the fifth-best inside linebacker in the class of 2021.

Player Evaluation – "The thing I like most about Reid is that he has the athleticism to play any of the three linebacker positions. He is probably best suited as more of a new-age middle linebacker who can be left on the field all three downs and you're not worried about him in obvious passing situations. He can run and tackle in space while also being sound against the run." – Marc Givler, Buckeye Scoop



quite a few years and Reid was one of one of the top guys in the class, so keeping him away from out-of-state programs was a big recruiting win."

A former Michigan State fullback who caught a touchdown pass in the Spartans' 17-14 upset of Ohio State in 2015, Pendleton knows what it takes to find success at the college level. He recognized those qualities early on in Carrico.

"You could tell right away that he was a special athlete," Pendleton said. "His work ethic jumped out immediately and it matched that athletic ability, and any time you put those two things together, good things are going to happen, and it did for Reid."

"He's just as good a kid off the field, too. He's well-mannered, well-respected and just an overall great kid. I tell people all the time that when I'm fortunate enough to have kids, I hope they grow up to be like Reid."

Ironton has been home to many great football players of the years, including Pro Football Hall of Fame halfback George McAfee and three-time Pro Bowl defensive lineman Coy Bacon. Former Ohio State running back Jermon Jackson, who recently passed away, offensive guard Ken Fritz, offensive tackle Walt Delong and linebacker Reggie Arden also played for the Fighting Tigers, whose home field – Tanks Memorial Stadium – once hosted a professional football team, the Ironton Tanks.

Pendleton believes Carrico could be the best player to ever come from the city, though.

"There's not (just) one thing that sticks out about him," Pendleton said. "It's really just about how he carries himself every single day on and off the field. He's a top-notch kid. He's a hard worker, he's a great student, he's a great community member, he's humble and, honestly, he's just a successful, middle-aged man trapped in a kid's body. He just has such a standard and such an expectation, and it really carries over into everything he does."

"He's so selfless and always puts others first. It just starts there. He's always thinking about the impact of his words and the impact of his actions. He's honestly the ideal role model. It's just a testament to his family and the way they raised him. It's also a testament to Ironton and the type of people that come from here and the values that they hold."

Carrico has a reserved demeanor off the field, but Pendleton noted he turns on the switch and is a very intense competitor once he's between the lines.

"We always tell them that off the field, we're going to be well-mannered and hold

ourselves to a high standard," Pendleton said. "But then on the field, we are going to let the animal out of the cage, and he definitely does that. He also doesn't take any plays off. You see a lot of highlight films where someone is making plays here and there, but you know the plays in between are very mediocre or even below average. But Reid is just so consistent. That's what makes him unique."

"Whether it's offense, defense, special teams, weight room or film study, he just does it at such a high level, time and time again. I don't know if I've ever seen, been around or even heard of anyone who played his amount of snaps in high school at the level he did and be as effective as he was. Anytime that you have someone who worked so hard to put himself in a position and is as talented as he is, putting those two things together can make for a dangerous combination."

Given his old-school, blue-collar mentality, it should come as no surprise, then, that Carrico's favorite football player – at least according to Pendleton – is former Washington Redskins fullback John Riggins, who was known for his powerful running style and was the Most Valuable Player of Super Bowl XVII.

"He's just a throwback kid in all phases,"

Pendleton said of Carrico. "When we first got here, he didn't really utilize social media and things like that, so we had to encourage him for recruiting purposes. But he's not really about things like that. He's a breath of fresh air and is a throwback kid who was born 20 years too late."

Nevertheless, Pendleton believes Carrico will be able to compete for a starting spot as a freshman and ultimately leave a lasting legacy at Ohio State.

"He's an Ironton kid through and through," Pendleton said. "He bled and fought tooth and nail for the Fighting Tigers. It's special when you get a kid that has as much pride in his school, his community, his family and his friends. He took it personally when anyone came to The Tank or was playing Ironton, even if it wasn't a game he was involved in."

"He's also someone who is not afraid to step out of his shell a little bit and ruffle some feathers when it's needed. All of that is a telltale sign of a great leader. He also does a great job of leading by example. He's the first one in and the last one to leave. He's never going to be outworked and is always going to find a way to get where he wants to be one way or another. We were fortunate to have him."

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Arizona Wide Receiver Grayes Commits To OSU

Ohio State landed a commitment on Feb. 28 from Chandler, Ariz., four-star wide receiver Kyion Grayes, who was in the middle of a three-day unofficial visit to Columbus.

The 6-1, 170-pound Grayes is considered the 17th-best wide receiver and No. 127 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He caught 28 passes for 556 yards and 10 touchdowns to lead the Wolves to the state championship last season.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

A one-time Arizona commit, Grayes was a relatively unknown prospect when he landed a scholarship offer from the Buckeyes in October. But since then, he's picked up offers from the likes of Auburn, LSU, Nebraska, Oregon, Penn State, Texas, USC and Utah.

Grayes has garnered numerous comparisons to current Ohio State wide receiver Chris Olave due to his rise through the recruiting rankings (from No. 521 overall at the time of his offer), as well as his overall frame and interest in the Buckeyes. Additionally, his relationship with head coach Ryan Day, wide receivers

coach Brian Hartline, director of player personnel Mark Pantoni and offensive quality control coach Keenan Bailey is why Ohio State immediately jumped to the forefront of his recruitment.

Grayes and his parents – who were themselves athletes at Arizona State – arrived in Columbus for their first visit on Feb. 26, and though they were unable to meet with the coaching staff due to the ongoing recruiting dead period, they conducted a self-guided tour of campus and stopped by Ohio Stadium. It was then that he publicly announced his pledge to the Buckeyes, though he has been silently committed since early December.

Grayes becomes the 11th member of Ohio State's 2022 recruiting class, joining Del Valle, Texas, five-star Caleb Burton at the wide receiver position. The Buckeyes hope to add one more wideout this cycle, with Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert four-star Kojo Antwi; Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star C.J. Williams; and Chicago St. Rita four-star Kaleb Brown among the other names to keep in mind.

Michigan Cornerback Commits To Wolverines

As expected, Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South five-star cornerback Will Johnson committed to Michigan on Feb. 28 over finalists Ohio State and USC.

The 6-3, 190-pound Johnson is considered the fifth-best cornerback and No. 11 prospect overall in the class of 2022, after he recorded 26 tackles, four pass break-



PHOTO COURTESY OF KYION GRAYES

OLAVE 2.0 – Chandler, Ariz., four-star wide receiver Kyion Grayes has earned numerous comparisons to Ohio State senior wideout Chris Olave throughout the recruiting process.

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ups, two interceptions and one tackle for loss to earn all-state honors this past season.

Johnson landed an offer from the Buckeyes during a virtual visit with 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 could not meet with the coaching staff because of the dead period.

Johnson, who is the son of former Michigan cornerback Deon Johnson (1991-94), began trending toward Ohio State after that visit. But the Wolverines quickly jumped back into the lead with the hiring of new co-defensive coordinator and defensive backs coach Maurice Linguist.

Linguist was previously the secondary coach for the Dallas Cowboys, with whom he coached former Michigan cornerback Jourdan Lewis, who had a pre-existing relationship with Johnson and offered an endorsement of his one-time position coach that helped seal the deal for the Wolverines.

Ohio State, meanwhile, holds a pair of commitments at cornerback in Jacksonville (Fla.) Robert E. Lee five-star Jaheim Singletary and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Jyaire Brown. The Buckeyes hope to add one more this cycle, with Mauldin, S.C., four-star Jeadyn Lukus; Denton (Texas) Ryan four-star Austin Jordan; St. Louis Lutheran North four-star Toriano Pride; and Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade Madonna Prep four-star Ryan Turner among the staff's top options.

West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star athlete Dillon Tatum is another possibili-

ty, but he's a former teammate of 2021 Michigan four-star running back signee Donovan Edwards and his former head coach, Ron Bellamy, was hired by the Wolverines as their new safeties coach this offseason.

Cornerback Down To Three Schools

Speaking of Jordan, he once again trimmed his list of scholarship offers on March 3, at which time he listed a final three of Ohio State, Oklahoma and Texas.

The 5-11, 185-pound Jordan – who announced his top 10 in early February – is considered the 21st-best cornerback and No. 173 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He recorded four forced fumbles, three interceptions and two fumble recoveries, one of which he returned for a touchdown to lead the Raiders to the state title last season. He's also a track star who last spring posted times of 10.98 and 22.08 seconds in the 100- and 200-meter dashes, respectively.

Jordan has been on the Buckeyes' radar for quite some time, having landed an offer from former co-defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley in 2019. He's never been to campus but has built a strong relationship over the last year with Day, Coombs and secondary coach Matt Barnes.

The Sooners are considered the favorite to land Jordan's pledge thanks to his relationship with Oklahoma four-star athlete signee Billy Bowman, a former teammate. But he does not have an announcement date or decision timeline, so there's still time for Ohio State to make a push in his recruitment.

Tuimoloau To Take Self-Guided Visits

While the recent extension of the

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
Kyion Grayes	WR	6-1	170	★★★★	Chandler, Ariz.
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

recruiting dead period through May 31 could have altered the decision timeline for Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau, he still plans to take unofficial visits to Alabama and Ohio State before announcing his school of choice in late April or early May.

"As we've said all along, there is no decision coming until we've had a chance to see the schools we need to see," Tuimoloau's father, Ponce Faletoi, told 247Sports national recruiting editor Brandon Huffman on Feb. 25. "We never had any plans to commit this week or next week or the week after. We're in this for the long haul, and each school is cool with that and understands that."

The 6-5, 277-pound Tuimoloau – who is considered the second-best strongside defensive end and No. 3 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – was hopeful that the NCAA would end the dead period on April 15, allowing him to take official visits with both the Buckeyes and Crimson Tide. But now that it's been extended again,

he'll have to make those trips at his own expense and won't be able to meet with either coaching staff while on campus.

Tuimoloau has never been to Columbus, though he has previously spent time on the campus of his four other finalists, including a summer camp at Alabama as a sophomore in high school and unofficial visits to Oregon, USC and Washington during his junior year. The Buckeyes are still considered the favorite in his recruitment, however, thanks to his relationship with Day, defensive line coach Larry Johnson and wide receivers Gee Scott and Emeka Egbuka, the former being a one-time teammate and the latter being a fellow Washington native.

"He really wants to see Ohio State (and) he really wants to see Alabama, and we'd like to get down with him so we can all see it together," Faletoi said. "He's in it for the long haul and he's prioritizing being with his teammates, playing his senior season for Eastside Catholic and

Continued On Page 12

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

Chris Boddie, a 6-3, 225-pound fullback/linebacker at York Memorial Collegiate Institute in Toronto, Canada, became the final member of the Ohio State class of 1986.

A three-year starter, he was set to enroll in time for spring practice.

"I think his biggest asset is going to be his coachability," said York head coach Les Dutrieue.

30 Years Ago – 1991

Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha head coach Bill McGregor called Ohio State signee Jason Louis one of the best of many Division I-A signees from his 1990 squad.

"He is one of those players who always places a team ahead of his own wishes," McGregor said of the 6-2, 185-pound defensive back. "We moved him around from position to position, from defense to offense, and he never complained. He has a lot of natural gifts, and I think he'll make a fine addition to the Ohio State team."

25 Years Ago – 1996

After two weeks of comparing the pros and cons of backing out of his verbal commitment to the Buckeyes, San Jose (Calif.) Bellarmine Prep wide receiver/defensive back Garrett Shea decided to stick with Ohio State.

His initial commitment came before his father, Terry, accepted the head coaching position at Rutgers, which suddenly jumped up his list of potential schools but was not alone in attempting to sway the prospect.

"For about two weeks, I was really torn," the younger Shea said. "I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but after I made my decision, I didn't have any regrets."

The 5-11, 175-pounder had offers from Arizona, Arizona State, Oregon and Washington, among others.

20 Years Ago – 2001

Piqua, Ohio, defensive lineman Quinn Pitcock took a visit

to Ohio State for its junior day, along with a number of other top prospects. He had been a top priority for former head coach John Cooper and drew the attention of new head coach Jim Tressel, who reaffirmed a scholarship offer to Pitcock from the Buckeyes.

"It was pretty cool," Pitcock said. "The facilities there are pretty nice, and everything was good."

Despite his stature as a tackle, Pitcock impressed with his athleticism as well.

"The biggest thing that stands out for me is his speed," Piqua head coach Bill Nees said. "We timed him a week ago, and he went in 4.81 seconds in the 40."

15 Years Ago – 2006

Ohio State was set to battle with Notre Dame for the signature of Cincinnati La Salle defensive lineman Ben Martin, as most recruiting services estimated that his recruitment would be a rematch of the Fiesta Bowl following the 2005 season.

That game was hard enough for Martin.

"A lot of people at school assumed I was going to root for Notre Dame, but it was hard," Martin said. "There were some plays where I was rooting for Notre Dame, and then the next series I'd be liking what Ohio State did. It wasn't easy to sit through, I know that."

Still, as he entered the spring, Martin's mind was hardly on recruiting. He focused instead on basketball season.

"I think in March or April, after basketball season is over, I'll start thinking about it again."

10 Years Ago – 2011

Ohio State commitment Kyle Kalis claimed he was misquoted by a Michigan recruiting writer in an article regarding his scholarship offer from the Wolverines. He said he was offered by Michigan but told head coach Brady Hoke, "Thanks but no thanks."

When asked if he thought about playing in college with two other teammates who had been offered by Michigan, Kalis

said he mentioned that they joke about it sometimes.

"Somehow out of that he got this huge article about how I'm going to visit Michigan and stuff like that," Kalis said.

Kalis reaffirmed his Ohio State commitment and said he had no plans to visit Michigan.

Five Years Ago – 2016

Ohio State continued to build an outstanding recruiting class for its 2017 group. The Buckeyes followed a commitment from Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star defensive tackle Haskell Garrett by landing Ann Arbor (Mich.) Pioneer four-star outside linebacker Antjuan Simmons and La Grange, Texas, four-star athlete J.K. Dobbins, the latter of whom was projected as a running back.

Those two commitments pushed Ohio State up to 13 commitments for the class of 2017, giving the Buckeyes a stranglehold on the No. 1 spot in the team recruiting rankings. The March 1 commitment from Simmons – who attended school across the street from Michigan Stadium – came at a time when the Wolverines and head coach Jim Harbaugh were down in Florida for spring practice.

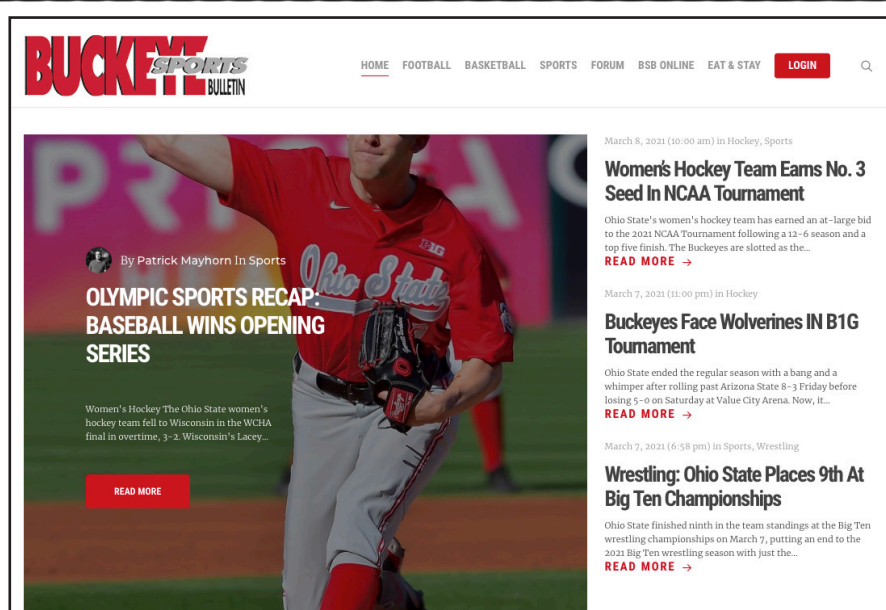
One Year Ago – 2020

In an effort to help prevent the spread of coronavirus, the NCAA on March 13 suspended on- and off-campus recruiting activities for all Division I sports through April 15. Contact between coaches and prospective student-athletes was still permitted through phone calls, text messages and written correspondence, however.

The football recruiting calendar was previously in a quiet period, which meant that prospects could take unofficial visits but coaches could not make any contact off campus.

If the suspension were to be lifted on April 15, the football recruiting calendar would go into an evaluation period as planned, when coaches could travel off campus to conduct in-person evaluations and schools could once again host official and unofficial visits.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

In-State LB To Walk On

Continued From Page 11

having as much of a memorable season as he can.”

The final game of the Crusaders’ spring season is April 1, though the state playoffs are scheduled for the following two weekends, so don’t expect Tuimolou and his parents to begin conducting visits before that.

Commit To Play In Polynesian Bowl

Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star linebacker C.J. Hicks announced on Feb. 24 that he has accepted an invitation to play the Polynesian Bowl, which will be held in Honolulu in January 2022.

The 6-4, 218-pound Hicks, who is considered the third-best outside linebacker and No. 41 prospect overall in the class of 2022, committed to Ohio State last May. He’s taken on a leadership role in his recruiting class and has even earned the nickname “Captain Buckeye” as a result of his efforts.

Hicks is also set to play in the Under Armour All-America Game at Camping World Stadium in Orlando, Fla., just a few weeks prior.

The Polynesian Bowl, meanwhile, has quickly become one of the nation’s premier high school all-star games since its inception in 2017. After all, it includes an all-expenses paid trip to Hawaii and the chance to compete against some of the nation’s best players. It also gives prospects from all corners of the country the opportunity to learn about Polynesian culture.

Ohio State has been well-represented at the Polynesian Bowl over the years. Tight end Jeremy Ruckert, defensive tackle Tommy Togiati, running back Brian Snead and wide receiver L’Christian “Blue” Smith played in the 2018 contest. Running back Steele Chambers, wide receiver Jameson Williams and offensive guard Enokk Vimahi appeared in 2019, and offensive tackle Paris Johnson, tight end Joe Royer and kicker Jake Seibert made their way to Hawaii in 2020.

The 2021 Polynesian Bowl was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic, though Egbuka had planned to play in the game. Tuimolou, the Buckeyes’ lone remaining target for the class of 2021, was also selected as an ambassador for the game due to his Samoan ancestry.

Buckeyes Tab New On-Campus Recruiter

Ohio State has hired Erin Dunston as its new director of on-campus recruiting, she announced on Twitter on Feb. 26.

Dunston has spent the last two seasons in the same position at Kansas and replaces Tori Magers, who recently left the program for a job outside of sports. Dunston’s primary duties will include coordinating all of the Buckeyes’ on-campus recruiting efforts, particularly official and unofficial visits, summer camps, junior days and other special events.

“I am forever grateful to Coach (Les) Miles for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the Kansas football program,” Dunston said. “With that being said, I am excited to join the Ohio State football program.”

Prior to her time at Kansas, Dunston was an athletics administration associate

at Purdue and a football operations graduate assistant at LSU. She earned her bachelor’s degree in exercise science from Delaware in 2015 and a master’s degree in kinesiology with a concentration in pedagogy and psychological science from LSU in 2017.

In-State Linebacker Commits As PWO

West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West linebacker Jackson Kuwatch announced on Feb. 25 that he has accepted a preferred walk-on opportunity from Ohio State.

The 6-5, 220-pound Kuwatch was named first-team all-state after he recorded 53 tackles and two sacks to lead the Firebirds to the Division I regional finals last fall. He’s not ranked by any recruiting sites but holds scholarship offers from Eastern Illinois, Findlay, Lake Erie College and Tiffin.

Kuwatch is the former teammate of 2022 Ohio State four-star cornerback commit Jyaire Brown and four-star offensive tackle pledge Tegra Tshabola, who called him “the toughest, most hardworking player” he’s ever met. He’s also the fifth player from the class of 2021 to accept a preferred walk-on offer from the Buckeyes, joining Nashville Montgomery Bell Academy tight end Zak Herbstreit; Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy center Toby Wilson; Northville, Mich., running back/defensive back Cayden Saunders; Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day long snapper Mason Arnold; and Morrow (Ohio) Little Miami wide receiver Reis Stocksdale.

Linebacker Sets Announcement Date

Salisbury, N.C., four-star linebacker Jalon Walker announced on March 1 that he will make his college decision among Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Georgia, North Carolina and Ohio State on March 28.

The 6-2, 220-pound Walker is considered the fourth-best outside linebacker and No. 50 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He recorded 121 tackles, eight tackles for loss, six pass breakups, three forced fumbles, two sacks, two interceptions and one defensive touchdown to lead the Hornets – who did not play last season due to the pandemic – to an appearance in the state championship game in 2019.

Walker landed an offer from Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington last May but has been unable to visit campus due to the ongoing recruiting dead period. That makes it very unlikely he’ll pick the Buckeyes later this month.

The Tigers are considered the odds-on favorite to land Walker’s pledge given his relationship with Clemson junior defensive end K.J. Henry, a childhood friend whose father coached them when they were younger.

Ohio State has already landed commitments from three of the nation’s top-rated linebackers in the class of 2022 in the previously mentioned Hicks; Marysville, Ohio, four-star Gabe Powers; and Bloomington (Ind.) South four-star Dasan McCullough. The Buckeyes could add one or two more, though, with Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed five-star Shawn Murphy and Manvel, Texas, three-star Justin Medlock among those holding an offer from the staff.

ASK AN ANALYST

With Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler

Medina, Ohio, four-star quarterback Drew Allar committed to Penn State on March 8 over recent offers from Kentucky, Michigan, Notre Dame, Tennessee, Texas A&M and Washington. Did Ohio State consider getting involved in his recruitment with hopes of adding a second quarterback in the class alongside 2022 Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star pledge Quinn Ewers?

"Ohio State and Allar were never really a match. He has the opportunity to be the main guy at numerous top-25 programs, so entering into a class with Ewers probably didn't make much sense for him. I think Ohio State is more likely to search the portal for another Gunnar Hoak or Chris Chugunov to fill out the room."

With two of the nation's best wide receivers already in the fold in Del Valle, Texas, five-star Caleb Burton and Chandler, Ariz., four-star Kyion Grayes, Ohio State can be selective as it chases a third player at the position for

the class of 2022. How do you see that race unfolding in the coming months?

"While Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert four-star Kojo Antwi recently said Alabama, Georgia and Texas A&M are leading his recruitment, I think Ohio State will keep working on that one. The Buckeyes are also putting a lot of focus on Chicago St. Rita four-star Kaleb Brown and Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star C.J. Williams. This summer could unearth a new target or two, as well, but those are the guys that Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline has zeroed in on for now."

Charlestown, Ind., four-star offensive tackle Kiyunta Goodwin is undoubtedly one of Ohio State's biggest targets for the class of 2022, both from a positional standpoint and his physical stature. What has to happen for the Buckeyes to land his pledge, and which schools pose the biggest threat?

"Ohio State needs to first get Goodwin on campus and get him around some of the linemen

like Paris Johnson, Harry Miller, etc. Kiyunta is big on relationships, so offensive line coach Greg Studrawa must continue to put in the time and effort and get Kiyunta comfortable with some of the guys in the room. The 2022 commits are doing a great job on that front, and I think the Buckeyes are in a good position. I have Alabama and Kentucky as the biggest contenders right now, but the recent offer from Clemson could be intriguing for Goodwin as well."

Of the three in-state players from the class of 2023 who hold offers from Ohio State, which can the Buckeyes not afford to miss - Findlay offensive tackle Luke Montgomery, Mentor defensive end Brenan Vernon or Pickerington Central safety Sonny Styles?

"Can I say all of them? All three are fantastic players. I think Styles is the best prospect of the group, but Montgomery and Vernon play premium positions and are extremely talented in their own right. The Buckeyes simply need to land all three of these kids."

Offensive Tackle Names Top Schools

Charlestown, Ind., four-star offensive tackle Kiyunta Goodwin included Ohio State in his top 13 on Feb. 27 along with Alabama, Arizona State, Clemson, Florida State, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisville, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Oregon and USC.

The 6-7, 300-pound Goodwin is considered the fifth-best offensive tackle and No. 47 prospect overall in the class of 2022, though he continues to see his stock rise after shedding more than 125 pounds over the last year and he now holds 63 scholarship offers.

Goodwin has been in contact with offensive line coach Greg Studrawa for almost three years now, dating back to when he attended a spring practice in April 2018. He finally landed an offer from the Buckeyes last August, and there's an overriding belief that he'll eventually commit to the program whenever he's able to return to campus for an official or unofficial visit.

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

The Buckeyes already hold a pledge from linebacker McCullough, who is listed as the state's second-best player behind only Goodwin, and are also considered the favorite to land Greenwood Center Grove four-star defensive tackle Caden Curry, the third-best player in the state.

As for the offensive tackle position, Ohio State already holds a commitment from Tshabola but hopes to add one or two more this cycle from a group that includes Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian five-star Zach Rice; Daleville (Va.) Lord Botetourt five-star Gunner Givens; Humble (Texas) Atascocita four-star Kam Dewberry; Fond Du Lac (Wis.) St. Mary's Springs four-star Billy Schrauth; Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Aamil Wagner; and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star Aliou Bah.

Carolina Defender Chooses Tar Heels

Shelby, N.C., four-star linebacker

Malaki Hamrick committed to North Carolina on Feb. 26 over finalists Appalachian State, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Penn State.

The 6-4, 205-pound Hamrick is considered the 12th-best outside linebacker and No. 150 prospect overall in the class of 2022, though the Buckeyes were recruiting him to play defensive end at the next level following a strong sophomore season in 2019 in which he recorded 129 tackles, 39 tackles for loss and 19 sacks. Like Walker above, he didn't get to play in 2020 after the state of North Carolina postponed the fall season to the spring due to the pandemic.

Hamrick landed an offer from Johnson last August, and the two sides were in constant contact. He's never been to campus, though, and Johnson won't accept a commitment from a prospect without the chance to evaluate him in person.

On the other hand, Hamrick was able to conduct several unofficial visits with the home-state Tar Heels before the pandemic put a halt to in-person recruiting activities, so his decision to play for North Carolina should come as no surprise.

The Buckeyes, meanwhile, are still looking for their first commitment along the defensive line for the 2022 recruiting cycle but are in the running for a number of top players in the trenches. The list includes Cordova (Tenn.) St. Benedict at Auburndale five-star tackle Walter Nolen; Philadelphia Imhotep Charter five-star end Enai White; Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star end Marvin Jones; Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson five-star end Jeremiah Alexander; the previously mentioned Curry; Duncanville, Texas, four-star end Omari Abor; Columbus (Ga.) Hardaway four-star tackle Mykel Williams; Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star tackle Christen Miller; and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star end Jihaad Campbell, among others.

Defensive End Trims Offer Sheet

Speaking of Campbell, he listed Ohio State in his top eight on March 2 along with Clemson, Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma, Penn State, Rutgers and Texas A&M.

The 6-4, 220-pound Campbell is considered the 20th-best weakside defensive

end and No. 388 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He transferred to IMG Academy in December from Sicklerville (N.J.) Timber Creek, where he recorded 45 tackles and seven sacks for the Chargers this past fall.

Campbell picked up an offer from the Buckeyes in November and has maintained contact with Johnson and Washington.

His versatility makes him an intriguing option for the staff, which views him as someone who could potentially play with his hand in the dirt or drop back in coverage.

Like so many others, Campbell has never been to campus because of the pandemic. He hopes to make his first trip when the dead period comes to an end, though.

Other Notes From Around The Country

• Katy, Texas, four-star cornerback Bobby Taylor committed to Texas A&M on Feb. 24. He did not hold an offer from

Ohio State but had been in contact with Coombs and Barnes as part of their evaluations for the class of 2022.

• Ohio State has extended several new scholarship offers in recent weeks, including those to 2023 Lakeland (Fla.) Lake Gibson cornerback Corman McClain on Feb. 22; 2023 Miami Gardens (Fla.) TRU Prep Academy wide receiver Brandon Inniss, 2023 Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson four-star cornerback Tony Mitchell and 2023 Longview, Texas, wide receiver Jalen Hale on Feb. 23; 2023 Ashburn (Va.) Broad Run four-star offensive tackle Alex Birchmeier on Feb. 24; 2023 St. Louis De Smet Jesuit four-star tight end Mac Markway on March 1; and 2023 Phoenix Pinnacle four-star tight end Duce Robinson and 2023 Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star defensive tackle James Smith on March 2.

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




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Five Youngsters To Watch In Spring Practice

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With the coronavirus pandemic canceling spring practice and limiting Ohio State to just five regular-season games last year, the Buckeyes were unable to get younger players the repetitions that are often crucial to their development.

That lack of playing time is most noticeable at quarterback, where the Buckeyes are now looking to replace one-time Heisman Trophy finalist Justin Fields with sophomores Jack Miller or C.J. Stroud or early enrollee Kyle McCord, who have a combined 18 snaps of collegiate experience.

Head coach Ryan Day is hopeful they'll be able to have a somewhat normal spring this year, though, with practice starting on March 19 and culminating with the annual spring game on April 17.

"We'll just have to do a great job of trying to simulate some games this spring, not just for the quarterbacks but the other guys on the team who didn't get a chance to get in the game and get those snaps that they typically would have in a normal season," Day said during his National Signing Day teleconference on Feb. 3. "We're going to try to figure out ways without taking them to the ground to simulate as many games as possible."

There are other positions in flux, as well, which will make the 15 spring practices all the more important for underclassmen looking to make their marks on the program.

With that said, the staff of Buckeye Sports Bulletin has identified five players beyond the quarterbacks from the 2020 and 2021 recruiting class who could find themselves in a starting spot by the time the season opener at Minnesota rolls around on Sept. 2.

Kourt Williams Sophomore Safety

The 6-1, 221-pound Williams appeared to be on track for significant playing time as a true freshman when he became the second player in his recruiting class to shed his black stripe, following the lead of wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba. However, he suffered a torn ACL in fall camp that sidelined him for the entire season.

How quickly Williams recovers from that injury will be key. But if he's back to full speed this spring, he could develop into a difference maker at free safety or outside linebacker, manning the Bullet position for the Buckeyes.

"(Williams is a) young guy who I think has a chance to be a really, really good player," Day said in September. "His approach has been excellent. He's versatile and he can do a lot of things. That's someone to keep an eye on."

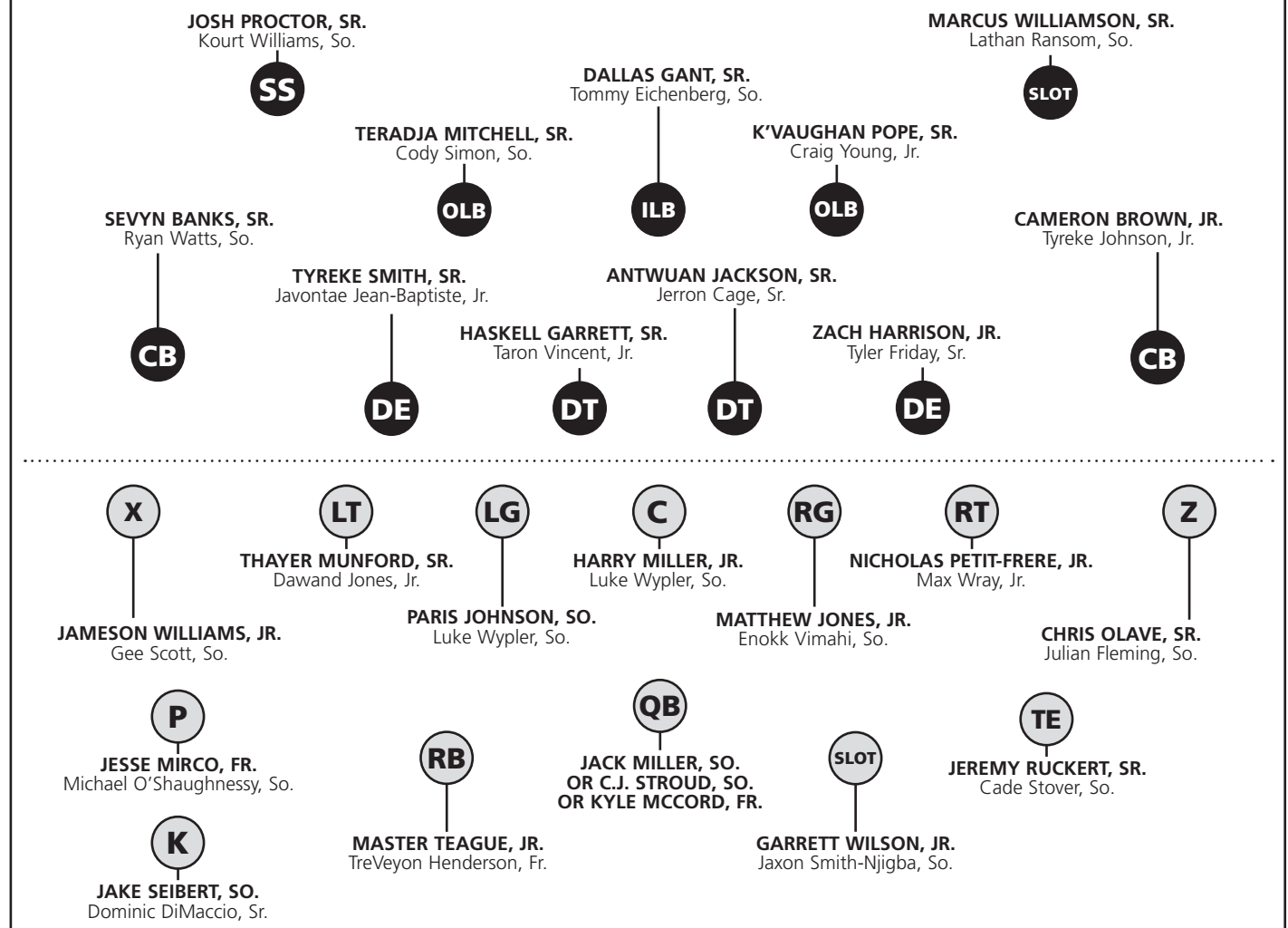
Ohio State traditionally likes to play with a single-high safety, and Williams might challenge senior K'Vaughan Pope or junior Craig Young for playing time. But if the Buckeyes break away from that look and deploy two safeties next season, he could find himself in a battle with fellow sophomores Lathan Ransom, Ronnie Hickman and Bryson Shaw for playing time opposite senior Josh Proctor.

Lathan Ransom Sophomore Safety

Perhaps no rising sophomore enters spring practice with more momentum than Ransom.

After playing just 24 total snaps in the first six games of Ohio State's season as the third-string safety behind Proctor and junior Marcus Williamson, Ransom saw 37 total plays as the fifth defensive back in the Buckeyes' nickel package against Clemson and Alabama.

PROJECTED 2021 SPRING TWO-DEEP DEPTH CHART



"He's just continued to improve every day," said Ohio State defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs. "Those are the kids who have suffered the most from how the summer went and the shorter season and not having the opportunity to get those kids in games early in the year to help them develop. We all felt like he was doing really well in practice, but as you know, that's a lot different than the game. But he showed up really big when we needed him, and he continues to improve and develop and we're excited for his future."

Since Ransom's snaps last season came as a slot cornerback, he figures to compete with Marcus Williamson for the starting role – that is, unless the Buckeyes move to a two-safety scheme. Either way, it would be a surprise if Ransom doesn't play a significant role in the secondary next season.

Paris Johnson Sophomore Offensive Lineman

Though Johnson is the heir apparent to returning senior Thayer Munford at left tackle, he's far too talented to keep off the field for another season. He'll compete with juniors Dawand Jones and Matthew Jones and fellow sophomores Luke Wypler and Enokk Vimahi for one of the two open guard spots this season.

The 6-6, 305-pound Johnson appeared in seven games last season on special teams and saw 22 offensive snaps, including a combined 15 offensive snaps at left guard against the Tigers and Crimson Tide. His play in those situations impressed former center Josh Myers, who thinks he could become the program's next Outland Trophy winner.

"Paris is an extremely talented football player and offensive lineman," Myers said in January. "He has the right skill set. He has what God has given him, and God has given him a

lot. And he also has the mind-set. I don't know if I should say this or not because it's pretty early on in Paris' career, but in my personal opinion, if Paris isn't an Outland Trophy winner before he leaves here, then he's screwed something up because he should be by the time he leaves, in my opinion. He's that talented."

Only four Buckeyes have ever won the Outland Trophy, including guard Jim Parker in 1956, nose tackle Jim Stillwagon in 1970, offensive tackle John Hicks in 1973 and offensive tackle Orlando Pace in 1996.

TreVeyon Henderson Freshman Running Back

Outside of quarterback, the position battle that should garner the most attention this spring is at running back, where junior Master Teague will look to hold off Henderson, who is perhaps the most-anticipated running back recruit since Chris "Beanie" Wells in 2006.

The 5-11, 195-pound Henderson did not play his senior season after the Commonwealth of Virginia postponed fall sports to the spring, but he rushed for 2,424 yards and 45 touchdowns to lead his high school to the state championship and earn himself Gatorade Player of the Year honors in 2019.

While Teague, junior Marcus Crowley and sophomores Steele Chambers and Miyan Williams all have varying levels of experience, none of them has the explosiveness or overall athleticism that Henderson does. That gives him a chance to compete for the starting job right away.

"There's a lot of depth and certainly a lot of talent," Day said of the running backs in January. "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 four-star running back signee Evan 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."

Even if he isn't the full-time starter from day one like former running backs Maurice Claret in 2002 and J.K. Dobbins in 2017, Henderson should have a role in the offense as a freshman.

Jesse Mirco Freshman Punter

As the only scholarship punter on the roster, the 23-year-old Mirco seemingly locked down the starting spot before he stepped on campus. Replacing Drue Chrisman will be no easy task, though, given his career mark of 44.0 yards per punt over the last four seasons.

A native Australian who hails from the same program as former Ohio State punter Cameron Johnston, Mirco is still relatively new to the position after previously playing Australian rules football. If he's unable to cut it, the Buckeyes will have to call on walk-on Michael O'Shaughnessy, who is the only other punter on the roster.

Day has no worries about his new punter or the other early enrollees, for that matter.

"The maturity of these guys is off the chart," Day said on signing day. "They really have a chance to come in here over the next 6½ weeks and get after it, get stronger, understand our culture and then compete in the spring to play. I'm really, really excited about this group."

Ticket Policy Comes With Opportunity, Price

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The new policy for Ohio State football games beginning in 2022 will make more tickets available to the public, but it doesn't necessarily mean that watching the Buckeyes in Ohio Stadium will be a bargain.

That's the consensus of Columbus area ticket brokers following the Feb. 25 announcement by OSU that included a new category so fans can purchase some tickets without additional contributions to the university.

Main Event president/owner Ryan Forgacs, Tickets Galore owner Matt Colahan and Dream Seats president Jamie Kaufman spoke to BSB in separate phone interviews and all also expressed hope that fans in large numbers, maybe even full capacity, will return to the 'Shoe this fall and help revitalize their businesses that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the university's updated policy, there will be an increase to six from two ticket zones that require per-seat contributions (PSC) ranging from \$0 to \$1,500. (Students will continue to pay \$34 per game.)

Zone 1 with 2,578 seats near midfield on the lower deck will impose a \$1,500 PSC annually. With a projected season ticket at \$1,287 for eight games in 2022, the cost to watch OSU will be \$2,787 per seat.

For a more in-depth breakdown of the new policy see page 5.

Seat\$ Available

On the other hand, more than 14,000 seats in upper-level C deck and B deck south end zone do not require contributions, and a season ticket purchased by fans for 2022 goes for a projected \$710 (\$88.75 per game).

"The average fan is going to have to spend a little more money if they want a good seat to the game," Forgacs said.

"For the first time in decades, season tickets will be available to fans with no annual contribution so that more fans can share in the pageantry of Ohio State football and experience the thrill of Ohio Stadium," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said in a statement.

"I hear people give it different spins," Colahan said. "In a way I feel like the average person, the truly average, depending on your definition of average, it's giving them possibly a new opportunity, but the cost is still going to be prohibitive. The tickets aren't getting any cheaper. To me, for the average person that's the hurdle.

"Just to go to a game, forget season tickets, it's pretty much going to run you and your wife and your two kids about \$600 to \$800 by the time you're talking about tickets and parking and hot dogs.

"But in a way it's knocking down some of the problems of the past when you had to have an affiliation. If you weren't a graduate, if you didn't work there, if you didn't donate thousands of dollars, you couldn't get in. Supposedly it's opening it up a little bit, albeit at a price."

Kaufman had similar thoughts on the pluses and minuses of the new policy.

"You can look at it two ways. How much is seeing a game in person worth it to the average fan?" he said. "If cost isn't the biggest factor to them and access is, that they hadn't had it before, then they have an advantage now.

"But if that's not the case and that advantage is a factor and cost definitely is as well, then I think it hurts the average fan."

He is getting calls from clients who donated to Ohio State for years who wonder what's next for them.

"Unfortunately, they're almost thrown in the pool with everybody now, and everybody's based on what they're willing to pay per seat," Kaufman said. "It will help a fan that's not had access before because he can just step up and pay and they'll have an access, although if the people who are at the different levels continue to buy their seats, they'll have priority seating based on where their level of points is.

"They'll have priority there, but they'll be forced to pay that extra fee there. It's almost like a seat license because you're paying for it every year if you want to keep it."

Change doesn't come without controversy, but some of the complaints might be muted because of the 2022 schedule, which not only has eight home games for the first time since 2012 but also features Notre Dame, Wisconsin and Michigan.

"There will be pushback – there already is – but looking at the schedule in 2022, it's the best we've seen that I can remember," Kaufman said. "If it looks like what we've had in recent years, that's not good and I can see a lot of people that might elect to not buy into it. I think it will be schedule-dependent a lot."

OSU hosts seven games this fall with Oregon and Penn State the marquee opponents. In 2023, the Buckeyes have only six games at Ohio Stadium with Penn State and Michigan State among the Big Ten schools and nonconference foes San Jose State and Western Kentucky.

What it will likely create is an a la carte approach among some donors, who will opt to buy individual games as opposed to season tickets.

"Why buy for seven games and pay that extra premium, especially if someone is a donor and they can continue their points level?" Kaufman said. "That's not going to go away. They'll still have a level there and they can always jump back in the next year. There will be some of that for sure."

The Bottom Line

The new ticket policy will have ramifications for the secondary market.

"Ohio State is basically trying to suck all the profit out of the ticket that it can," Main Events' Forgacs said. "It doesn't want anyone to make any money except Ohio State. They know the value of an Iowa ticket, that it's a good seat. If that value is \$400, they want \$400 going in their pockets. They don't want it going anywhere else.

"It's going to cut the number of tickets we sell. We're going to sell less tickets because there's going to be less buying and selling because that person that was selling that Iowa ticket to make a couple of extra dollars, there's no money in it for him. It's not worth his time now, so there's going to be fewer tickets on the market."

Ticket Galore's Colahan is waiting to see how it plays out but has a theory.

"I feel like in some respects good seats may become more difficult to get because they've become more expensive. The donation rate is higher there with their little sliding scale," he said. "The area that I see – that 30- to 50-yard line A deck – because of what it's going to cost to buy those tickets from the university, could affect what we see on the secondary market. Fewer seats, higher prices.

"That's not going to affect necessarily that average person we're talking about because they're probably not in the market to buy those \$500-plus tickets."

Kaufman agrees.

"The cost of our product is going to go up tremendously in many cases just because of the additional fees it will take to get the same

	Per Seat Contribution	# of Games	Season Ticket Cost (Projected)	Total Cost Per Seat (Projected)	Total Cost for Two Season Tickets (Projected)
Zone 1	\$1,500	8 (2022 Season)	\$1,287	\$2,787	\$5,574
		6 (2023 Season)	\$882	\$2,382	\$4,764
		7 (2024 Season)	\$1,045	\$2,545	\$5,090
Zone 2	\$1,000	8	\$1,151	\$2,151	\$4,302
		6	\$792	\$1,792	\$3,584
		7	\$936	\$1,936	\$3,872
Zone 3	\$500	8	\$1,022	\$1,522	\$3,044
		6	\$702	\$1,202	\$2,404
		7	\$830	\$1,330	\$2,660
Zone 4	\$250	8	\$885	\$1,135	\$2,270
		6	\$608	\$858	\$1,716
		7	\$719	\$969	\$1,938
Zone 5	\$100	8	\$799	\$899	\$1,798
		6	\$549	\$649	\$1,298
		7	\$649	\$749	\$1,498
Zone 6	\$0	8	\$710	\$710	\$1,420
		6	\$487	\$487	\$974
		7	\$577	\$577	\$1,154

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

TIERED SEATING – Ohio State has introduced a new approach to handling tickets at football games, which involves breaking up single-game and season tickets into zones that will range from \$710 to \$1,287 in 2022.

thing as before," the Dream Seats president said about the per-seat contributions. "If we have a big donor that maybe had two sets of four, he's not coming to us to get his donation back but he's coming to us based on the value of the seats at that time.

"Now, it's going to be that value plus the additional amount he must pay for them, so that's gone up quite a bit, which is not good at all. We either would have to buy them and pay that price or elect not to buy them because the cost is too high for us. It just depends."

Big Bucks

The policy seems to allow the possibility that somebody or some conglomerate could buy enough seats to corner the market.

"Ohio State's said there's no limit if someone wants to buy hundreds and hundreds of seats," Colahan said. "You never know if someone would come in with a bunch of money and try to do something like that. It's possible."

Possible but not probable.

"There's too many tickets to an Ohio State football game to corner the market," Forgacs said. "There's always tickets available.

"Even in 2006 when it was Ohio State-Michigan, No. 1 vs. No. 2, the ticket price went through the roof but I never said sold out. I always had tickets, so with over 100,000 tickets in this town, that's a lot of tickets."

The "conspiracy theory" raises a question for Colahan: "Who's at the front of the line?"

"Are they still going to use their priority system to decide who gets to choose first? Because if so, there's a limited number of seats with the pricing they've put out there. That may price some people out, but they're still going to be others who are looking for those midfield seats and there's only so many of them.

"Does the old point process still work where I'm a professor there for 30 years and do I get to go before the guy that has no affiliation? I don't know. I don't think they've answered that question yet."

Full House?

The recent news that fans will be allowed to attend the Big Ten men's and women's basketball tournaments in Indianapolis this month is welcomed by the brokers as are the ramped-up efforts to vaccinate as many Americans as possible. All signs lead to their being spectators for football games in this fall, unlike the 2020 season.

For companies that survive or die on the sale

of tickets, the past year has been hell because it's not just sporting events that were canceled.

"In terms of concerts, which is a huge part of our business, the big national acts came around every single day until this pandemic last year," Kaufman said. "Those acts can't tour. It's just not financially feasible unless they're playing to a 100 percent house.

"The numbers aren't even close. They can't do it to 50 (percent). They can't do it to 25 percent. The top 100 touring acts, they need to be at 100 percent."

That's not the case for many sports league and colleges which are open for business at limited capacity with an eye on filling their arenas and stadiums sooner rather than later.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine has for now set the capacity limits at 30 percent for outdoor venues and 25 percent indoor.

"I hope we get back to a normal Ohio State football season," Forgacs said. "I saw that Alabama football announced that they are going to be full capacity. I take that as a good sign we're going to be back to normal."

Colahan is hopeful that fans will be allowed at Ohio Stadium come September, but he is wary of one person: Big Ten boss Kevin Warren.

"One of the biggest hurdles I feel right now with the track record over the last 12 months is what's the Big Ten commissioner going to do?" Colahan said. "He's the one that flat-out said no fans in the stadiums and arenas this fall and this past winter for sports.

"I hope that's not where the bottleneck is. The city signs off, the state signs off but the Big Ten says no, or the Big Ten says 20 percent when the state says 50."

Kaufman said the demand for tickets will be great because people are eager to attend events after a year-long shutdown.

"What we hear from customers the last couple of months is they can't wait to go to anything again," he said. "A lot of people are telling us they want to go to everything."

With people becoming more comfortable attending large gatherings in the coming months, even an Ohio Stadium at 60 percent capacity could be good for business, Forgacs said.

"It's the old adage of supply and demand," he said. "The supply is less and the demand is still the same or at least similar, so that's going to drive the value up.

"I can see that argument that people are scared to go to games, but they're more hungry than they are scared. They need that outlet."

Indiana-Ohio State Rivalry Thrived With Knight

By WYATT CROSER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With the recent 30th anniversary of Ohio State's 97-95 double-overtime win over Indiana on Feb. 17, 1991, BSB looked back at the importance of that game, as well as the connection it has to the long-lasting basketball rivalry between the Buckeyes and Hoosiers.

In football, there is no doubt who Ohio State's main rival is.

That, of course, is Michigan, which the Buckeyes have faced at the end of their regular-season schedule for decades in a matchup so important to both programs that it can simply be labeled The Game.

But in men's basketball, Ohio State's main foe can be more complicated to define. And yet, one opponent still seemed to be the primary target for many Buckeye teams in the back half of the 20th century.

That team was Indiana, a program with the 10th-most wins in college basketball history and one that has five national championships that came between 1940 and 1987.

The Hoosiers and Buckeyes were consistently caught in battles for conference dominance and served as a much larger rival than the Wolverines by Dick Furry, an Ohio State forward from 1957-60 who was a member of Ohio State's lone national championship squad.

"I think they were our biggest rivals," Furry told BSB of Indiana. "I always get a kick out of the fact that everybody thinks Michigan is the biggest rivalry. When we were there it was clearly Indiana, and I'm not even real sure who I'd put second."

Furry is not alone in that sentiment. Joining him is Tom Brandewie, an Ohio State forward from 1990-93 who may have played 30 years after Furry but still held on to the same lasting grudge toward Indiana basketball.

"My oldest son was a quarterback at (Columbus) Bishop Hartley, and he was getting looks here and there, and one of the places that had him visit was Indiana," Brandewie said. "You go there, you're excited and he was excited and he's like 'I want to get a sweatshirt.' And I said, 'You can wear it. Even if you come here, I will never wear the crimson and cream.' I will wear a Michigan shirt over that."

The two programs have played each other 133 times, more than either Ohio State or Indiana has played any other team. The Hoosiers lead that series 75-58, but the point differential across all the games remains at just 2.4, signifying just how close these two teams have battled over the years.

The level of distaste between Ohio State and Indiana grew during Furry's time with the program. The Buckeyes moved on from Floyd Stahl after a 9-13 season in 1957-58, replacing him with Fred Taylor, a former Ohio State player who also had a brief baseball career with the Washington Senators.

Taylor took over after one season as an assistant coach and did so at the age of 34. All of these characteristics, according to Ohio State basketball historian Lee Caryer, allowed Indiana head coach

Branch McCracken to look down on the hire due to Taylor's inexperience at the position.

Caryer told BSB that he believes there "was quite a bit" of animosity between Ohio State and Indiana in this era, and that was fueled by McCracken's viewpoint of the Taylor hiring.

"Fred's first year was the 1959 season, and Branch McCracken had been at Indiana for 12 years and won a national championship there," Caryer said. "Branch had the healthiest self-esteem, and he thought that Fred was a freshman coach who had gotten a job as a head coach."

McCracken's disposition was not lost on Furry, who played against the Indiana head coach six times, winning three of the matchups.

"He was a good coach at one time, but he became a pain in the rear," Furry said. "He just wasn't a particularly friendly guy. He was kind of grumpy."

Taylor's first season at Ohio State was seemingly uneventful for both programs, with Ohio State and Indiana each finishing with 11-11 records, including a 1-1 split between the two teams in the head-to-head matchups.

Ohio State's first experience with the Hoosiers under Taylor came on Feb. 2, 1959. There, Indiana crushed Ohio State, piling on 122 points in a 30-point win. It was the only time the Buckeyes allowed more than 100 points all season, and Caryer said that was no accident.

"They won big, and there was suspicion among the Buckeyes and the Buckeye coaches that Branch McCracken had piled it on," Caryer said.

The Buckeyes used that as fuel and took down the Hoosiers on the road 92-83 three weeks later. But, as Caryer said, "the real pinnacle" of the Taylor-McCracken battles came the following year, when Ohio State would win the national championship in just Taylor's second season at the helm.

Even during a national title run, the Buckeyes could only split the series with the Hoosiers, defeating Indiana 96-95 on Jan. 9, 1960, in St. John Arena, but falling to the Hoosiers 99-83 for their only in-conference loss of the season.

That 16-point defeat may have been at least somewhat due to some unfortunate circumstances regarding Taylor's family, according to Caryer.

"A couple days before this game, Fred Taylor's brother-in-law and sister-in-law were killed in a car crash. He and his wife had gone to Zanesville to be with the family, and he joined the team in Bloomington just before the opening tip," Caryer said. "He said to me, 'I didn't do the kids any good that game.' I can't imagine why."

"Indiana won that game, and after the game, McCracken said 'You're lucky. We should be in the NCAA Tournament.' And that meant, 'We're better than you are.'"

Ohio State did go on to finish the season 25-3, defeating California 75-55 in its home state for the crown. But Caryer said what really mattered was that the Buckeyes won the Big Ten outright, something that was much more of the main priority heading into the season.

"It was completely different then

than it is now," Caryer said. "The Big Ten title was everything and the NCAA Tournament was really icing on the cake."

This was proven the following season, when the Buckeyes went 27-1 and swept the Hoosiers, including a 100-65 rout on Feb. 6, 1961, in the first matchup between the teams since Indiana's win the year prior.

"Fred was asked after the game if it was important to him, and he said 'Well, it's more important than the game was in California,'" Caryer said. "You could tell, comparing an in-season game to the national championship victory, it was pretty important."

Though he wasn't making the largest impact on the floor, there was a player on those Ohio State teams who would later become the most important catalyst in heating up this rivalry. That player was Bob Knight, who played with the Buckeyes from 1959-62 and would eventually spend 29 seasons as Indiana's head coach, winning three national championships.

As a player on the Buckeyes, Knight did not stand out, averaging a high of 4.4 points and 2.8 rebounds per game in 1960-61 while being a career 39.8-percent shooter.

"He played a fair amount," Furry said. "He scored, but he was always going to score because we always teased him somewhat about how much he shot."

Despite Knight being more of a role player, it was clear that he had a coach's mentality, even if it was sometimes to the detriment of those around him.

"(Jerry) Lucas described it to me as it came across as borderline obsessive," Caryer said. "After the games, the players would talk about what happened in the games. But after the practices, Knight would talk about what happened in the practices. And that was too much for the players. These were guys that wanted to win, they wanted everything, but they didn't want to talk about practice all the time. But Knight was really involved in that."

Furry said that Knight learned a lot from Taylor and stood out as someone who would look at the game with a different eye from those around him.

"He always talked with Fred about things and why were we doing them in his learning stages," Furry said. "He was very analytical about it. Even then, he was very analytical and watching what was going on and such."

Knight became the head coach at Army in 1965 and compiled a 102-50 record in six seasons, including four NIT appearances. That success was enough to land him the Indiana job after Lou Watson stepped down in 1971.

Taylor faced off against his former player for five seasons, and though there was still a clear desire for both Ohio State and Indiana to beat one another, it was not from a place of anger for the two head coaches.

"The two men very much respected each other as people and as coaches by now. Knight had been in touch with Fred very, very, very often when he was at Army," Caryer said. "Knight was very accomplished for a rookie coach. He was very astute, and their respect for each

other was at a high level. So there was no animosity there. But they were both very skilled coaches and very competitive."

Taylor retired from coaching after a 6-20 season in 1975-76. On the other side of the rivalry, Knight led Indiana to an undefeated season, ending with a national championship. With the success he had coaching the Hoosiers and a vacancy at his alma mater, there was definite interest from Knight to take over for Taylor as the Ohio State head coach.

But the interest was not reciprocated, according to Caryer, by Ohio State athletic director Ed Weaver, who did not attend Knight's interview for the job. This lack of interest to bring in Knight – a national title-winning coach who played for the university – led to Knight's added desire to beat Ohio State year in and year out until his tenure with the Hoosiers ended in 2000.

"The story that I heard is that the administration of Ohio State contacted Knight and asked him to meet at a neutral place, and they met in Kentucky instead of Bloomington or Columbus," Caryer said. "Rather than going down to talk to Knight, athletic director Ed Weaver sent a couple of people from his staff and a couple people from the search committee. He didn't even bother to show up."

"So Knight walks in and the first question they ask was from somebody who didn't know very much about basketball. The first question was, 'What makes you think that you could be qualified to coach Ohio State basketball?' Just try to imagine Knight holding himself back and trying to be a gentleman, and he's just won the national championship. I mean it killed the whole deal right there. For better or for worse, Knight might have been a coach at Ohio State if they wanted him, but Ed Weaver was not going to hire anybody with Ohio State ties or with Fred Taylor ties.

"Knight got very excited about playing Ohio State, and when he walked in and was booed, that just set the fires even more."

Knight had won his second and third national championships at Indiana heading into the 1990-91 season. Ohio State, on the other hand, was on its third new head coach since Taylor and had not finished better than 12-6 in the Big Ten since his departure.

Randy Ayers had become the Ohio State head coach for the 1989-90 season, replacing Gary Williams. His first team went just 17-13, but his first win against a ranked opponent came in a 69-67 victory over the No. 9 Hoosiers on Jan. 4.

Brandewie, who was a freshman on that 89-90 team, said Indiana was a team that opened his eyes to just how difficult Big Ten play could be as a high school player.

"I was on a recruiting visit in the spring of '89 when Indiana came with Nick Anderson and Kendall Gill and all those guys and they destroyed Ohio State, and I'm like, 'Wow, this is what I have to play against,'" Brandewie told BSB. "We had very little expectation my freshman year. It was Randy's first year, and we were all kind of learning as we go, and we were young. The coach's message was really about establishing ourselves as a program."

Lawrence Funderburke was a part of



Bob Knight

that rivalry in the 1989-90 season but on the Indiana side before he transferred to Ohio State and sat out the 1990-91 campaign.

Funderburke told BSB that Indiana was not a good fit for him at the time but that he does not hold any lingering ill will toward Knight and the program.

"Your first year is your hardest year, trying to find who you are, and particularly when you go to a program like that – what your niche is going to be in that system, and how you're going to navigate through it. So that was certainly a difficult moment," Funderburke said. "I don't really say anything negative about Coach Knight, because there's really not any reason to. I wasn't there long enough. I know he said a lot of negative comments about me through the years, but I don't have any ax to grind. It just didn't work out.

"Coach Knight, he's the only coach I've ever played for who could tell you everything you did right and wrong throughout the course of the game. His basketball mind is a computer, and he's also the only coach that I played for who wanted to win more than the players. And oftentimes, I felt you found yourself appeasing him through performance more so than you wanting to do it on your own accord."

The next season, Ohio State was done with the growing pains. The Buckeyes won their first 17 games, including a 93-85 win over No. 3 Indiana at Assembly Hall behind 29 points from Jamaal Brown.

When the two teams met again, this time at St. John Arena on Feb. 17, 1991, the Buckeyes were 21-1 and the Hoosiers were 20-1, and they were ranked No. 2 and No. 4 in the country, respectively.

"You had a lot of great Big Ten programs and really high-level teams then, and Ohio State and Indiana were probably the top two," said Steve Helwagen, who covered the 1990-91 team for BSB. "They had beaten pretty much everybody else, both of them had. It was pretty clear that the Big Ten championship was on the line when they played."

The matchup at St. John had an attendance of 13,276, and Brandewie and Funderburke noted that on that day it was one of the loudest arenas they were ever in.

Brandewie compared it to the noise levels of a game from the season prior, when Ohio State knocked off No. 10 Louisville 91-88 on Feb. 4, 1990.

"All the players, we didn't think that it could be any louder than what it was for the Louisville game, and it was," Brandewie said. "Just the sustainability of it for, I wouldn't say the whole game, but it was probably the last 20-25 minutes. Just the emotions and the noise level, and it's almost like, how did the roof stay on?"

Funderburke agreed, saying that he "remembers it like yesterday."

"It was electric. Literally it was so loud in there that everybody was actually on the edge of their seats," Funderburke said. "If you've been in St. John Arena before, it's not the most comfortable place to actually watch a game, but it's certainly the most electric."

In a game that featured 21 lead changes and 22 ties, it was Indiana that had a 42-40 lead at halftime. That two-point advantage was the same one the Hoosiers held with seven seconds left to go in regulation.

It was at that point that Ohio State relied on star sophomore Jim Jackson, who dribbled down the floor and hit a



FILE PHOTO

IN THE CLUTCH – Sophomore forward Jim Jackson (22) hit a game-tying layup in the final seconds of regulation in Ohio State's 97-95 double-overtime victory over Indiana on Feb. 17, 1991.

game-tying layup to force overtime.

"That play is called 'Wide Right,' " Ayers said after the game. "We put everybody on the baseline so no one can help on Jimmy. Of course, Jimmy has great strength and he just went up over everybody and got it to go down."

In overtime, Ohio State again had to make a big basket late, and this time it came from Treg Lee, who tied the game at 87 with 45 seconds to go. Chris Reynolds missed a shot as time expired for the Hoosiers, and the teams went to a second extra frame.

Brown tied the game at 95 with just over a minute remaining in double overtime, and after a miss on the other end by Eric Anderson, Jackson again had the ball late with a chance to make history. Jackson again went to the rim on the "Wide Right" play. But this time, he found Lee open on the inside. Lee hit on the open look, giving the Buckeyes the 97-95 lead with just a few seconds remaining.

Pat Graham had a look for the Hoosiers from three for the win, but it was no good, and Ohio State secured a sweep over Indiana for just the second time since Knight had taken over as head coach.

Past the game itself, which put Ohio State in the driver's seat to win the Big Ten, Helwagen said it was a game that ultimately helped lead to the creation of the Schottenstein Center.

"That game in '91 is probably, in the modern era of Ohio State basketball which I take as everything from 1970 on, I would say that's probably the most important home game that they've ever had," Helwagen said. "I mean it was pretty much stuck that from that moment on after that game that they were going to build a new basketball arena. And they made the comment of 'we could have

had 20,000 people here today and turned people away.'

"It was a game played at such a high level, double-overtime game, took almost three hours to play the game, and it was on national TV on ABC with Keith Jackson and Dick Vitale, and they really did a great job with it. And it was just a really vintage-type game. I mean it was two teams that just stood there and threw punches at each other.

"I think there were 13,000 people who were there and 40-50,000 people who claim they were there because it was that kind of game."

The Buckeyes ended up sharing the Big Ten title with Indiana after losing games to Purdue and Iowa at the end of the regular season. The following year, Ohio State won the regular-season crown outright but was swept by Indiana, losing 91-83 and 86-80.

These matchups were fierce for both teams but especially so for Funderburke, who had faced criticism for his transfer out of the Indiana program.

"I know for a fact that they made it personal to want to beat us because they considered me basically a traitor," Funderburke said. "I was once a part of them and then obviously leaving, but certainly one of the unbelievable rivalries in college basketball at that time, you know, Indiana and Ohio State.

"The rivalry, the buildup was intense, obviously a lot of butterflies for me, because I knew I got booed tremendously every time I went back. But it was great. That's what college basketball is about."

Ayers' teams struggled after the 1991-92 season, going 15-13 the following year and then never finished above .500 before his firing in 1997. Ohio State had Jim O'Brien as head coach for Knight's final

three seasons at Indiana, but as the Hall of Fame head coach moved on from the Hoosiers, the rivalry started to go with it.

Helwagen said that the teams simply weren't at the top of the conference after the early '90s, and that Indiana always had other major rivals to look at when the battles against the Buckeyes weren't at their peak.

"Basically, from about '94 on, there's never been a point where both programs have been at the top of the Big Ten," Helwagen said. "They've been at or near the top, but very few years where their games meant the world like they did in '91 and '92. And, of course, Knight isn't there anymore. It's just kind of the ebbs and flows, and Indiana has got bigger fish to fry with Purdue. I mean that's a rivalry for them. They put everything into the Purdue game. Michigan's a big deal for them, Illinois – you know, they've got other big rivals."

Funderburke agreed that, in the years following Knight's departure, the Ohio State-Indiana matchups haven't lived up to the heated matchups during his time with both teams.

"I think some of the mystique was gone in terms of when Coach Knight started fading out," Funderburke said. "I think you lose a lot of that mystique. It's kind of gone. I don't think it's ever been really revived with Indiana because really the thing about Indiana basketball, you only think about one person, and that's The General."

Caryer said there was something special about Ohio State's matchups with Knight's Indiana teams. With all the history and the animosity built up, both from Knight's history with the Buckeyes and with Ohio State fans' history against Knight teams, it was a perfect storm for a major rivalry.

"Bob Knight left. I think that's the vast majority of it," Caryer said of the reason the rivalry has slowed down. "He was someone you could love to hate. You could admire and still hate. You could boo, you could clap for if you're a serious fan.

"At least that's the way I felt. But he was all Indiana and he really didn't like Ohio State. And for him and his players, you had to be on top of your game twice as much as usual, which was a whole lot anyway, when Ohio State was coming up. Because if Knight lost the game to Ohio State, he was going to be tough to live with."

Maybe there is a chance for the rivalry to heat up again.

Currently, Ohio State has won six of the last seven matchups against Indiana, including a double-overtime win in Assembly Hall on a game-winning three by C.J. Jackson on Feb. 23, 2018.

Helwagen was at that game, and based on what he heard from a fan that day, there is still some hostility boiling under the surface between these two programs.

"I'm sitting in the upper deck there where the media sit now. And those Indiana people, they get their brains beat out by Ohio State in football, but Indiana expects to beat Ohio State in basketball. It's nowhere near the same level program in their mind," Helwagen said. "I heard one fan off in the distance, he goes, 'Oh I f---ing hate Ohio State.'

"When you get your brains beat in so many times, it just builds that hatred. I think that's what Ohio State fans had with Indiana and Bob Knight. It just went on and on and on."

To Stay Or Go? Thoughts Clash For OSU Seniors

In the year since COVID-19 engulfed the world there have been innumerable changes to the sporting world with the worlds "bubble" and "protocol" becoming part of the daily lexicon.

COURT REPORT Craig Merz

A less significant and unnoticed result has been the rephrasing of questions to college athletes as to their future endeavors.

Remember, it was just 12 months ago that Ohio State men's basketball player Kaleb Wesson was asked if he was going to turn pro after his junior season. It seemed it was a foregone conclusion, and eventually he did. Wesson is playing for the Santa Cruz (Calif.) Warriors of the NBA G League.

It had become an annual ritual, especially for college basketball and football players, to be asked if they were leaving early.

But with the NCAA one-time edict – due to the pandemic – that this season doesn't count toward a player's eligibility, the question has been flipped.

That was the case March 4 when seniors C.J. Walker and Kyle Young were queried if they were staying in school for the 2021-22 season for a second senior year.

"It's always a possibility with the free year for COVID," Walker said. "That's obviously an option for me. That's something the coaching staff and my parents and I will talk about frequently. As of right now that's not a decision that I've made 100 percent."

Young took the same approach.

"I haven't made a decision yet," Young said. "I'm waiting until after the season, weighing out my options and go from there."

Each senior must weigh the pros and cons while also understanding the dynamics of the program for next season.

Walker is a fifth-year senior who transferred from Florida State after playing two seasons there. He sat out a transfer season and is in his second season playing for the Buckeyes.

He will be 24 on March 24, and he and his girlfriend have a 1-year-old daughter. Walker is expected to pursue a pro career.

"I've been in college for a very, very long time," he said. "Not to say coming back wouldn't hurt anything or make me better, but obviously it's an option but there's nothing 100 percent. I haven't made a clear decision yet on what I'm doing. We'll have to see after March, after trying to win Big Ten and national championships. We'll see after that."

Young turned 23 in January and is in his fourth year with the program, although his original college plan was to be a Bulldog, not a Buckeye. He committed to Butler and coach Chris Holtmann, but when Holtmann was named the Ohio State coach to replace Thad Matta in June 2017, Young followed him to Columbus.

"I came a long way just from being a



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

FAREWELL, SENIORS – Guard C.J. Walker and forward Kyle Young were presented commemorative jerseys as part of Ohio State's Senior Day festivities on March 6.

freshman, getting on campus, just not really knowing exactly what I wanted to do," Young said. "This whole four years, I built a lot of great relationships. I've had a lot of great experiences, a lot of great teammates. And there's just going to be a lot of good emotion reflecting back on it, what this means to me, playing in a Buckeye uniform, all that good stuff."

Young is known for his hustle and using his 6-8, 225-pound frame to his full advantage. In his OSU career he's had an ankle sprain, a stress fracture in his leg, an appendectomy and general soreness in his legs that has limited his practice time.

Most recently the forward sustained a concussion that caused him to miss the Feb. 25 game at Michigan State.

He returned to play Feb. 28 vs. Iowa, but his game was off.

"His competitiveness, his energy, his athleticism, his motor – this team misses that when he's out more than any team I've coached. It's apparent," Holtmann said. "We were rolling last year, and part of it, when he was out, we didn't miss it as much. I just think we had other guys that provided some of what he provided. This team doesn't have that as much. We do miss it when he's not his normal self."

The dilemma for Young is can he stand the rigors of pro basketball or should he attempt another season with the Buckeyes if he wants to keep playing?

"Everything with my body, even this year I've been feeling pretty good compared to last year or even the year before with my legs," he said. "We've been doing a good job managing everything with rehab. I really haven't had too many

problems. It's going to have to be a lot of conversations and view a lot of different things."

He is not swayed either way by the numerous injury setbacks, although the argument can be made that if he does get injured it would be better to do so while earning a paycheck.

"That's something I try not to think too much about, just because I feel like it's something that I've just been able to battle through," Young said. "There's been times with my legs and everything that it has set me back a little bit, but it's nothing that's ever discouraged me or put me down because I just remind myself that it could be worse. There could be tougher things to go through."

"So for me, it's just tough it out, keep playing and enjoying the game you enjoy to play. I'm going to think about all the good experiences I've had and how amazing it's been to play."

Young is averaging 8.2 points and 5.6 rebounds this season.

"You see some of those guys that just, while they may not ever be a prolific scorer, they're elite in terms of what they can do to help your team win, and he's up there," Holtmann said.

Walker missed four games with a hand injury and is averaging 9.1 points, 4.2 assists and 2.8 rebounds while making 95.7 percent of his free throws.

"I do the little things that other people don't do in order to help me win games," Walker said. "Those are the things that do separate me from others that help me get to where I want to be in life."

"I think about everything going on for

the three years I've been here. Playing college basketball was always a dream come true for me."

The other side of the equation is how returning seniors would fit into the program next season. The freshman class has four-star guard Malaki Branham from Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary and three-star power forward Kalen Etzler from Convoy (Ohio) Crestview, and the current freshmen – guards Eugene Brown and Meechie Johnson and forward Zed Key – will be vying for expanded roles.

Relaxed transfer rules by the NCAA mean there could be movement in and out of the program as well.

Decisions like Young's and Walker's must be made across the collegiate landscape, and one already has been decided close to home.

Ohio State women's basketball senior guard Braxtin Miller said she will take advantage of the extra year of eligibility and return for the 2021-22 season.

Of course, the reality is there are fewer opportunities to play pro basketball and make a living either here or overseas for women.

Doing Fine

One player Holtmann hopes will be back next season is sophomore forward E.J. Liddell, who on March 6 was one of 15 players named to the national ballot for the 2021 John R. Wooden Award.

Being on the list makes players eligible for the Wooden All-American Team and Wooden Award Trophy, given to the most outstanding player.

The Wooden Award finalists will be

2020-21 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

18-8 Overall (12-8 Big Ten)
Statistics through games of March 6

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	24-24	675-28.1	130-261	.498	21-58	.362	104-141	.738	39-118	157-6.5	71-1	31	35	26	16	385-16.0
Duane Washington	26-26	805-31.0	130-329	.395	70-190	.368	67-75	.893	4-69	73-2.8	39-0	76	56	0	12	397-15.3
Justice Sueing	26-26	709-27.3	91-183	.497	18-53	.340	73-95	.768	40-102	142-5.5	57-1	42	50	4	27	273-10.5
C.J. Walker	22-12	646-29.4	61-162	.377	12-42	.286	67-70	.957	11-50	61-2.8	56-1	92	43	2	19	201-9.1
Kyle Young	25-24	664-26.5	77-145	.531	9-25	.360	41-49	.837	45-94	139-5.6	67-1	31	10	14	10	204-8.2
Justin Ahrens	26-13	486-18.7	54-120	.450	52-116	.448	7-10	.700	4-44	48-1.8	35-1	10	11	4	12	167-6.4
Zed Key	26-1	316-12.2	55-85	.647	0-0	.000	36-63	.571	43-50	93-3.6	50-0	8	19	21	2	146-5.6
Seth Towns	20-0	189-9.5	27-59	.458	11-34	.324	11-12	.917	5-28	33-1.7	23-0	5	6	1	5	76-3.8
Musa Jallow	21-2	305-14.5	25-51	.490	1-17	.059	12-21	.571	10-38	48-2.3	38-0	12	12	7	8	63-3.0
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
Jansen Davidson	2-0	7-3.6	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
Meechie Johnson	14-0	86-6.1	7-16	.438	6-11	.545	1-4	.250	0-5	5-0.4	5-0	3	5	1	3	21-1.5
Eugene Brown	25-0	174-7.0	13-37	.351	7-25	.280	2-4	.500	9-28	37-1.5	10-0	6	3	4	2	35-1.4
Ibrahima Diallo	4-0	10-2.4	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	1-4	.250	2-1	3-0.8	0-0	0	0	1	0	1-0.3
Team									36-45	81			13			
Total	26	5200	679-1475	.460	212-587	.361	428-556	.770	253-681	934-35.9	470-6	329	271	86	119	1998-76.8
Opponents	26	5200	638-1491	.428	195-567	.344	347-493	.704	247-608	855-32.9	495-7	351	274	60	120	1818-69.9

BIG Men's Basketball

	Conf.			Overall		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Michigan	14	3	.824	19	3	.864
Illinois	16	4	.800	20	6	.769
Iowa	14	6	.700	20	7	.741
Purdue	13	6	.684	18	8	.692
Ohio State	12	8	.600	18	8	.692
Wisconsin	10	10	.500	16	11	.593
Rutgers	10	10	.500	14	10	.583
Michigan State	9	11	.450	15	11	.577
Maryland	9	11	.450	15	12	.556
Indiana	7	12	.368	12	14	.462
Penn State	7	12	.368	10	13	.435
Northwestern	6	13	.316	9	14	.391
Minnesota	6	14	.300	13	14	.481
Nebraska	3	16	.158	7	19	.269

Feb. 23 Scores

Michigan State 81, Illinois 72
Penn State 86, Nebraska 83

Feb. 24 Score

Rutgers 74, Indiana 63

Feb. 25 Scores

Illinois 86, Nebraska 70
Michigan 79, Iowa 57
Northwestern 67, Minnesota 59

Michigan State 71, Ohio State 67

Feb. 26 Score

Purdue 73, Penn State 52

Feb. 27 Scores

Michigan 73, Indiana 57
Illinois 74, Wisconsin 69
Nebraska 78, Minnesota 74

Feb. 28 Scores

Maryland 73, Michigan State 55

Iowa 73, Ohio State 57

March 1 Score

Nebraska 72, Rutgers 51

March 2 Scores

Illinois 76, Michigan 53
Michigan State 64, Indiana 58
Purdue 73, Wisconsin 69

March 3 Scores

Penn State 84, Minnesota 65
Northwestern 60, Maryland 55

March 4 Scores

Michigan 69, Michigan State 50
Iowa 102, Nebraska 64

March 6 Scores

Rutgers 77, Minnesota 70 (OT)
Purdue 67, Indiana 58

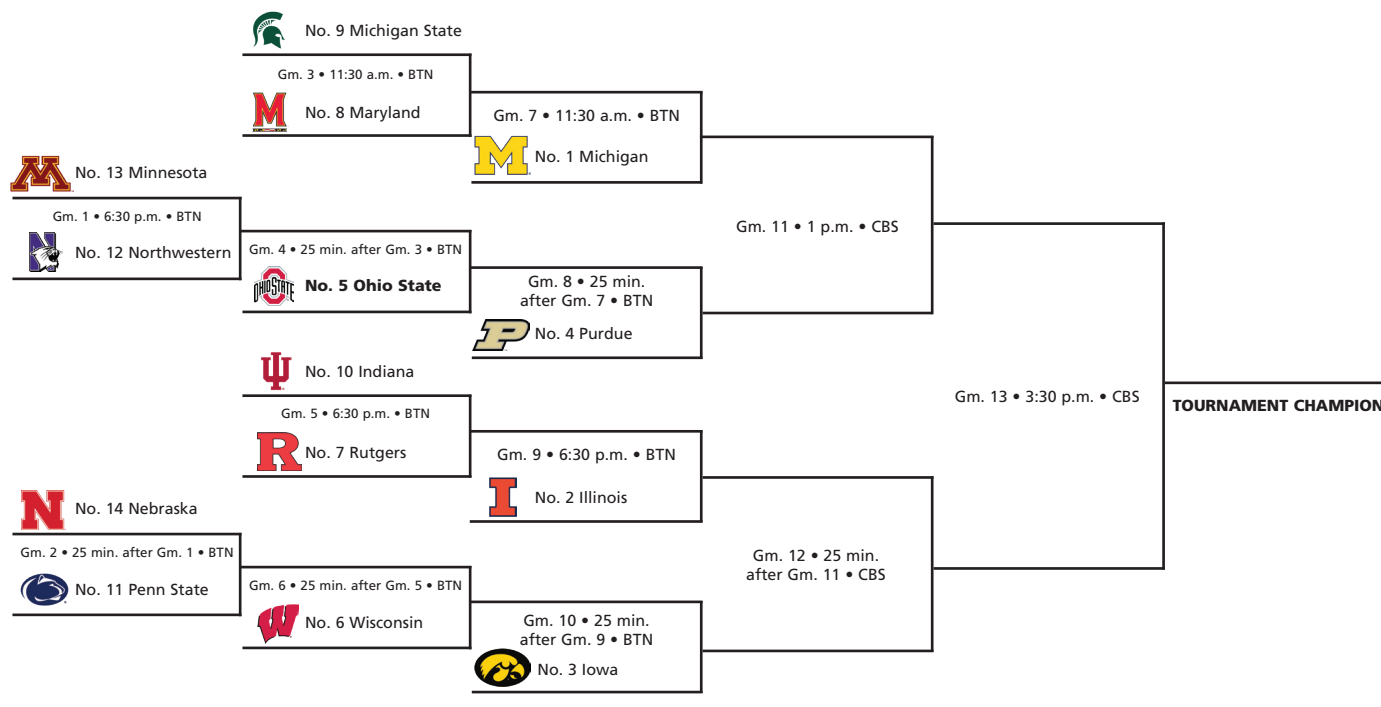
Illinois 73, Ohio State 68

March 7 Scores

Iowa 77, Wisconsin 73
Northwestern 79, Nebraska 78
Michigan State 70, Michigan 64
Penn State 66, Maryland 61

BIG Men's Basketball Tournament
March 10-14, 2020 • Lucas Oil Stadium • Indianapolis

MARCH 10 MARCH 11 MARCH 12 MARCH 13 MARCH 14 All Times ET



announced March 26.

The award recognizes candidates who exhibit strength and character on and off the court and who are progressing toward a degree.

Liddell, from Belleville, Ill., leads the Buckeyes in scoring (16.0) and rebounding (6.5).

"This is another tremendous honor for him, and he has earned it," Holtmann said in the university release. "I know he is hungry to continue to grow as a player and leader on our team and finish our season strong. E.J. is a special young man who has been an absolute joy to coach. We are excited about his continued growth as a player and person here."

Star Gazing

Former Buckeye guard Mike Conley of the Utah Jazz was named to his first NBA All-Star Game in his 14th pro season.

He replaced injured Devin Booker of the Phoenix Suns, who replaced injured Los Angeles Lakers forward Anthony Davis for the March 7 game in Atlanta. Conley was selected to play on Team (Kevin) Durant for the All-Star Game,

joining Brooklyn Nets stars James Harden and Kyrie Irving, among others.

Conley, 33, was the No. 4 pick in the 2007 NBA draft by the Memphis Grizzlies after one season at Ohio State in which he helped the Buckeyes reach the national title game before losing to Florida.

He is averaging 16.1 points, 5.7 assists and 3.5 rebounds for the Jazz, which has the league's best record at 27-9.

Conley scored three points in 12 minutes in Team Durant's 170-150 loss to Team LeBron.

No Sympathy Here

Illinois coach Brad Underwood wasn't happy his program was affected by COVID-19 pauses at other schools that created an imbalance in the number of games each Big Ten school played.

Prior to playing at regular-season champion Michigan on March 2, he let his feelings be known to the News-Gazette in Champaign, Ill. The Wolverines played three fewer conference games than Illinois.

"If I have any frustration, we were perfectly healthy and sat for 10 days in the middle of the season," he said. "I know

it goes beyond us, but my whole deal is I know how hard I have preached and how committed our players have been to doing everything perfect with COVID. These guys have not done one thing outside of the 30 people that are every day testing.

"It's unfortunate because we've done everything COVID correctly to this point. It's unfortunate we lost three road games. It's unfortunate we sat for 10 days. It's unfortunate we sat another period for six days and didn't play. Now we end the season with all these road games crammed in here."

Those three road games were against No. 23 Wisconsin, the second-ranked Wolverines and No. 7 Ohio State. The No. 4 Illini (20-6, 16-4 Big Ten) won them all.

"It would be very easy to say, 'Hey, we're the (fourth-ranked) team in the country, and we're not going to play them.' I think there are a lot of life lessons in this that go beyond this game, the next game, whatever," Underwood said. "Certain programs do what they do. I don't care about that. The Big Ten scheduled these games, we're a member of the Big Ten and we're going to show

up and play."

The Illini's 73-68 win over the Buckeyes (18-8, 12-8) on March 6 likely gave them a No. 1 seed for the NCAA Tournament.

Illinois has won four straight, the first three without national Player of the Year candidate Ayo Dosunmu, who sustained facial injuries and a possible concussion against Michigan State on Feb. 23.

"I don't think there's a silver lining in losing the best player in college basketball," Underwood said, "but the one thing it's done is change some roles. Guys have gotten a lot of minutes. Guys have been put in some different spots. I gained some confidence in some guys in different areas."

Dosunmu returned to score 19 points against the Buckeyes, including the final five points of the game to break a 68-68 tie.

Next

The Buckeyes' loss to Illinois was their fourth straight and dropped them to the No. 5 seed for the Big Ten tournament.

They will play the No. 12-13 winner between Minnesota and Northwestern in the second round at 2 p.m. on March 11.

Buckeyes Bumble Through Brutal Big Ten Slate

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since the last edition of BSB, the Ohio State men's basketball team has struggled immensely, dropping from the No. 4 team in the country to No. 9.

Following a heartbreaking loss to Michigan Feb. 21, the Buckeyes dropped consecutive contests to Michigan State, Iowa and Illinois to close out the regular season.

The poise and clutch play during crunch time that helped Ohio State start the season 18-4 overall and 12-4 in the Big Ten was absent during the losing skid.

Though the outcomes were all negative, the Buckeyes battled to have a chance in the second half of each contest, with an opportunity to win in the final minutes against the Wolverines, Spartans and Illini.

Despite the team's struggles against top-tier opponents, individual players had standout performances, with sophomore forward E.J. Liddell averaging 17.3 points and 5.0 rebounds per game in the three losses.

Junior guard Duane Washington averaged 13.0 points and 3.3 assists in that span, but he shot only 36.4 percent from the field and 20.0 percent on threes.

Fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker scored 9.7 points and dished 4.0 assists per game in those contests, while junior

wing Justice Sueing added per-game averages of 12.3 points and 4.0 rebounds on 52.4 percent shooting.

Bucks Blow Second-Half Lead At Michigan State

The No. 4 Buckeyes blew a nine-point second-half lead to fall 71-67 to Michigan State at the Breslin Center in East Lansing, Mich., Feb. 25.

Ohio State (18-6, 12-6) fell to the Spartans (13-9, 7-9) despite 18 points and eight rebounds from Liddell, 17 points from Washington, and 12 points and five assists from Walker.

"We were not playing as aggressive, getting to the rim and finishing through contact," Walker said. "Michigan State was really physical under the rim, in the paint. They didn't give up too many wide-open threes and made it more difficult than usual. We just didn't finish through contact as we usually do. We weren't playing with as much force as we usually do."

Despite trailing for the majority of the second half, the Spartans clawed their way back to tie the game at 55 with 6:42 to play. Ohio State's top two scorers stepped up, with Liddell scoring four in the paint and Washington knocking down a midrange jumper that made it 61-57 with 4:46 left.

Sharpshooting forward Joey Hauser answered with a triple for the Spartans to cut the deficit to 61-60 with 4:25 remaining. Walker drew a foul and knocked

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

down a pair of free throws to push Ohio State's edge to 63-60 with 3:16 left.

Michigan State took control of the game with a 6-0 spurt on four foul shots and a tough pull-up jumper by junior wing Aaron Henry to take a 66-63 lead with 1:08 left.

Liddell drew a foul and knocked down both of his free throws to cut the lead to 66-65 with 48 seconds left, but Spartan guard Joshua Langford nailed a clutch midrange jumper to go up 68-65 with 30 seconds left.

Washington and Walker missed two difficult three-point tries, but Liddell drew a foul on the rebound attempt to keep Ohio State alive. He calmly hit both foul shots to cut the lead to 68-67 with 14 seconds left.

Hauser made only 1 of 2 free throws to go up 69-67 with 12 seconds on the clock, leaving the Buckeyes with another chance. Washington missed a tough layup with four seconds left through a lot of contact.

Langford split the pair for the Spartans to push their lead to 70-67, and Walker attempted a full-court heave to Liddell, but it was incomplete when Liddell was held up with a lot of contact. Holtmann picked up his second technical following the play, ending his night with one second still on the clock.

"They just made a few more shots, and we had trouble finishing around the basket and missed a couple clean looks," Holtmann said.

Before the closing stretch, the Green and White erased Ohio State's five-point halftime lead with a 7-2 start to the second half through the first 3:15. Sophomore guard Rocket Watts scored five points, and Langford knocked down a pair of free throws after Holtmann was called for a technical after arguing that Liddell was hit on a missed shot.

"In that moment, honestly, I just thought that plays that were normally called fouls in most of every Big Ten game were not being called fouls," Holtmann explained. "And I thought that was an obvious one and expressed that. Certainly, you want to fight for your guys. E.J. is a really good player. He also has to own the fact that he's got to play with more force. This is how the game is going to be called. We've got to prepare him for that better."

The Buckeyes bounced back with a 9-0 run in the next 3:18, with Walker making two layups in transition to lead 49-40 with 13:27 left. The Spartans responded with an 8-2 spurt, cutting the deficit to 51-48 with 9:21 left on a tough hook shot by forward Julius Marble.

Liddell ended the stretch with a strong finish after sealing his man under the bucket and finishing on a feed from junior wing Musa Jallow to push the lead to 53-48 with 9:04 on the clock.

In the first half, Michigan State had led 15-13 before Ohio State tied the game with a strong finish by freshman forward Zed Key with 12:51 until halftime, sparking a 9-2 spurt for the visitors.

Walker followed Key's bucket with a triple before forward Marcus Bingham made a layup for the Spartans. Sueing and Key both finished in the lane to push the lead to 22-17 with 10:23 until the midway point.

Tom Izzo's squad answered with a 7-2 spurt, starting with a rebound putback by Bingham and capped by five points from guard Gabe Brown to even the score at 24 with 7:25 on the clock.

The Buckeyes pushed their first-half lead to 35-29 on a three-pointer by Walker, who froze the defense with a pass fake following a kick-out pass from Liddell with 4:50 until the break.

Ohio State led 38-33 at halftime, outshooting Michigan State from the floor, 56.0 percent (14 of 25) to 46.4 percent (13 of 28) and from beyond the arc 44.4 percent (4 of 9) to 22.2 percent (2 of 9).

Overall, the Buckeyes shot 44.2 percent (23 of 52) from the field, 28.6 percent (4 of 14) from deep and 73.9 percent (17 of 23) from the foul line. The Spartans made 48.0 percent (24 of 50) of their shots, 26.7 percent (4 of 15) of their threes, and 76.0 percent (19 of 25) of their foul shots.

Senior forward Kyle Young missed the game due to concussion protocols.

OSU Folds Down The Stretch vs. Iowa

No. 4 Ohio State dropped a 73-57 contest to No. 9 Iowa at Value City Arena on Feb. 28 for its third straight loss.

"They really played well," Holtmann said. "They clearly outplayed us, outperformed us, out-coached us. We've got to get back to work and get some guys rested up and healed up and get moving forward."

Liddell paced the Buckeyes (18-7, 12-7) with 15 points, Sueing had 12 points and Walker scored 10 points with four assists, but it was not enough.

Senior center Luka Garza, a national Player of the Year candidate, throttled Ohio State with 24 points and 11 rebounds for Iowa (18-7, 12-6), while junior wing Joe Wieskamp poured in 19 points.

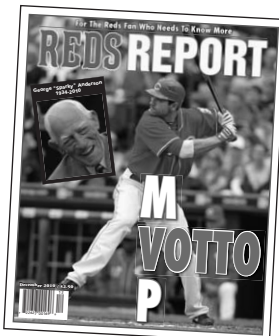
"We couldn't do much, honestly," Holtmann said of the struggles with

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Garza. "We weren't able to take away some of his strengths when we were playing him one on one. I didn't think we had enough detail, and some of that is we've got some young guys playing him. But that's my fault. We've obviously got to guard him better. They had a good attack with some of our double teams, and they made shots."

The Buckeyes and Hawkeyes battled back and forth early, and Walker drilled a pull-up jumper to cut the OSU deficit to 10-8 just 4:15 into the game. However, Ohio State went cold, failing to make a field goal in the next 4:49 before Liddell scored to cut it to 15-11 with 10:56 until halftime.

Iowa answered with a 7-0 spurt sparked by a Garza triple and capped by four points from redshirt freshman wing Patrick McCaffery to push the lead to 22-11 with 8:03 until the midway point.

Holtmann's squad showed life when Washington hit back-to-back shots, including a step-back three-pointer to cut the deficit to 32-25 with 3:29 until intermission.

However, the Hawkeyes responded with a 9-0 run, ending the half with a 42-28 lead following a 10-3 overall stretch where the Buckeyes' only points came on an old-fashioned three-point play by Liddell.

Ohio State opened the second half with a 14-2 run on two three-pointers by Sueing, six points from Walker and two from Washington to make it 44-42 with 16:49 on the clock.

Iowa weathered the storm and ripped off a 7-0 run in the next 2:54 with a triple by Wieskamp sandwiched between two Garza finishes to push the lead to 51-42 with 13:55 to play.

The Buckeyes did not go down without a fight, scoring five straight on a strong finish by Liddell through a foul and a three-pointer by junior wing Justin Ahrens to trail 51-47 with 13:07 left.

Later, Iowa had a 9-2 stretch and the Hawkeyes took a 66-53 lead with 5:57 remaining.

They would never trail by fewer than 11 points again.

Overall, Iowa played extremely efficient basketball and Ohio State lacked its typical firepower. The Buckeyes shot 45.1 percent (23 of 51) from the field and 29.4 percent (5 of 17) from deep with eight assists to 13 turnovers.

On the other end, the Hawkeyes hit 46.8 percent (29 of 62) of their field goals and 41.7 percent (10 of 24) of their three-pointers with 22 assists to five turnovers.

"I didn't think the ball moved very well today," Holtmann said. "I just didn't think it moved in, and Iowa's activity had something to do with that. I just did not think it moved very well today, so we've got to take a look at it. The ball has got to move. We've got to take a higher quality of shot than what we took here today. And we were really, really sloppy with the ball, as sloppy as we've been all year."

Ohio State players were not made available to members of the media after the game because Holtmann wanted to shoulder the blame himself.

"I wanted to be the one to kind of face the music here," Holtmann said. "They've battled all season. They'll be available all week. It's not like they're not available. I just think in this moment it's important for me to come out here and face the music."

Michigan State 71, Ohio State 67

Feb. 25, 2021			
Breslin Events Center • East Lansing, Mich.			
	1	2	F
Ohio State (18-6, 12-6)	38	29	67
Michigan State (13-9, 7-9)	33	38	71
Ohio State	Total FG FT	Reb.	
	Min. M-A M-A O-D A	PF Pts.	
Ahrens	20 0-1 0-0	0-0 2 2	0
Sueing	34 3-7 3-4	2-1 1 3	10
Liddell	28 4-13 10-12	2-6 2 3	18
Jallow	32 0-0 0-0	0-5 2 4	0
Washington	30 7-16 2-2	0-2 2 3	17
Brown	7 0-0 0-0	0-1 0 0	0
Walker	28 4-8 2-2	1-2 5 2	12
Key	12 4-4 0-3	2-2 0 0	8
Towns	7 1-3 0-0	0-0 0 1	2
Johnson	2 0-0 0-0	0-0 0 1	0
Diallo	0+ 0-0 0-0	0-0 0 0	0
Totals	200 23-52 17-23	7-20 14 21	67

Percentages: FG: 44.2%. FT: 73.9%. Three-point field goals: 4-14 (Walker 2-3, Sueing 1-2, Washington 1-7, Liddell 0-1, Towns 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 2 (Ahrens, Sueing). Turnovers: 12 (Sueing 3, TEAM 3, Key 2, Jallow, Washington, Walker, Towns). Steals: 9 (Ahrens 2, Sueing 2, Liddell, Jallow, Washington, Walker, Towns). Technical fouls: 2 (Coach).

Michigan State			
Total FG FT	Reb.		
Min. M-A M-A O-D A	PF Pts.		
Henry	33 7-11 3-5	0-4 4 3	18
Marble	16 2-2 0-0	0-0 0 4	4
Brown	32 4-6 2-2	1-4 1 2	11
Langford	29 2-7 4-6	0-4 5 3	8
Watts	23 1-10 2-2	1-0 1 0	5
Hoggard	21 1-4 4-4	0-3 6 0	6
Sissoko	0+ 0-0 0-0	0-0 0 2	0
Kithier	5 0-0 0-0	3-0 0 2	0
Hauser	18 3-5 1-2	0-3 0 3	8
Bingham	16 4-5 0-0	1-4 1 1	8
Hall	7 0-0 3-4	0-2 1 1	3
Totals	200 24-50 19-25	9-26 19 21	71

Percentages: FG: 48.0%. FT: 76.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-15 (Brown 1-2, Henry 1-3, Hauser 1-3, Watts 1-4, Hoggard 0-1, Langford 0-2). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 5 (Henry 3, Langford, Bingham). Turnovers: 15 (Henry 4, Marble 2, Langford 2, Hauser 2, Hall 2, Watts, Hoggard, Sissoko). Steals: 4 (Henry 2, Hoggard, Bingham). Officials: Kueneman, Walton, Wells. Attendance: N/A.

OSU Falls To Illini On Senior Day

The No. 7 Buckeyes fell 73-68 to No. 4 Illinois for their fourth straight loss despite a late surge on a 19-point performance by Liddell on senior day at Value City Arena on March 6.

Sueing scored 15 points and grabbed a game-high eight rebounds, and Washington added 15 points and six assists for the struggling Buckeyes (18-8, 12-8).

"They made a few more plays down the stretch," Holtmann said. "It was a hard-fought game, but give Illinois credit. We defended better in the second half, certainly, than the first half but just didn't make enough plays there late."

Illinois (20-6, 16-4) went up 56-54 with 8:01 left on a nifty spin move by freshman guard Andre Curbelo for a layup, but the Buckeyes came alive at home.

Sueing hit a pair of foul shots for Ohio State before back-to-back buckets by Liddell put the Buckeyes up 60-56 with 6:48 to play.

The Illini connected on 3 of 4 free throws to cut the deficit to 60-59 with 5:51 on the clock, and Liddell answered with a three-pointer. Curbelo hit a pair of foul shots before a Washington layup, and then senior guard Trent Frazier drilled a three-pointer to cut Illinois' deficit to 65-64 with 4:11 left.

Then Liddell hit a big shot for the Buckeyes. The sophomore nailed a three-pointer on a dish from Washington to push Ohio State's advantage to 68-64 with 3:48 left.

However, Ohio State went ice cold down the stretch, and Illinois capitalized on the road.

After junior guard Ayo Dosunmu split a pair of foul shots, senior guard Da'Monte Williams nailed a three-pointer to tie the game at 68 with 1:31 left. Then Dosunmu converted an and-one with 44

Iowa 73, Ohio State 57

Feb. 28, 2021			
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio			
	1	2	F
Iowa (18-7, 12-6)	42	31	73
Ohio State (18-7, 12-7)	28	29	57
Iowa	Total FG FT	Reb.	
	Min. M-A M-A O-D A	PF Pts.	
Bohannon	26 3-8 0-0	0-4 5 1	8
Fredrick	29 2-6 0-0	0-2 0 0	5
Wieskamp	35 7-13 0-2	0-6 2 1	19
C. McCaffery	23 1-4 0-0	0-1 5 4	2
Garza	38 10-16 2-3	3-8 1 3	24
Toussaint	14 1-3 1-2	1-1 7 1	3
Murray	21 4-8 0-0	1-4 0 3	8
P. McCaffery	13 1-4 2-2	0-0 2 0	4
Totals	200 29-62 5-9	6-28 22 13	73

Percentages: FG: 46.8%. FT: 55.6%. Three-point field goals: 10-24 (Wieskamp 5-9, Garza 2-3, Bohannon 2-5, Fredrick 1-3, C. McCaffery 0-1, P. McCaffery 0-1, Murray 0-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (Murray). Turnovers: 5 (Bohannon, Fredrick, C. McCaffery, Garza, Toussaint). Steals: 5 (Murray 2, Wieskamp, Toussaint, P. McCaffery).

Ohio State			
Total FG FT	Reb.		
Min. M-A M-A O-D A	PF Pts.		
Washington	29 3-10 0-0	1-2 2 0	7
Walker	27 5-9 0-0	1-0 4 3	10
Sueing	20 4-8 2-2	0-1 0 2	12
Young	25 1-4 0-0	0-5 1 2	3
Liddell	25 7-11 1-4	0-3 1 1	15
Johnson	6 0-1 1-2	0-2 0 1	1
Jallow	17 2-3 0-0	0-5 0 2	4
Brown	5 0-0 0-0	0-1 0 0	0
Ahrens	18 1-2 0-0	0-2 0 0	3
Key	12 0-1 0-0	0-3 0 2	0
Towns	9 0-2 2-2	0-2 0 0	2
Totals	200 23-51 6-10	2-29 8 13	57

Percentages: FG: 45.1%. FT: 60.0%. Three-point field goals: 5-17 (Sueing 2-4, Young 1-1, Ahrens 1-2, Washington 1-5, Walker 0-1, Liddell 0-1, Johnson 0-1, Towns 0-2). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 2 (Young, Jallow). Turnovers: 13 (Washington 4, Walker 4, Liddell 2, Sueing, Towns, TEAM). Steals: 3 (Walker, Ahrens, Towns). Officials: Boroski, Green, Pfeifer. Attendance: N/A.

seconds left to take a 71-68 lead, and the Illini held on for a 73-68 win. The Buckeyes missed their final 10 shots following Liddell's triple.

"We were in the game the whole time," Walker said. "We've just got to figure out a way to finish, make baskets, get the stops that we need."

Overall, Holtmann saw improvement in his team's offense following its previous three losses, noting that Ohio State might have beaten an elite team if another shot or two had fallen.

"We had really good decision making from like the 10-minute mark to the three-minute mark," Holtmann said. "And then we had some good decisions there late. We had some good, clean looks."

"We played against a good defense, and we just have to be more committed to getting the ball where we need to get to. But we're probably having a different conversation if Duane makes that three coming to his left. That was a pretty clean look."

Illinois started strong in Columbus with a 6-0 lead through the opening two minutes, but Ohio State answered with an 11-0 run to take an 11-6 lead with 16:10 until halftime.

Sueing and Washington knocked down three-pointers with a Walker layup in between before Sueing converted an and-one to cap the stretch. Frazier picked up his second foul on Sueing's old-fashioned three-point play, heading to the bench for Curbelo.

"He was active, active on the glass," Holtmann said of Sueing. "He did some really good things today. His effort on the glass was really good."

Curbelo came up big off the bench for the Illini, scoring or assisting on 11 of their next 13 points to help the visitors take a 19-17 lead with 12:20 until intermission.

Consecutive buckets by Dosunmu pushed Illinois' lead to 23-17 and capped a 9-0 spurt with 8:56 until half-

Illinois 73, Ohio State 68

March 6, 2021			
Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio			
	1	2	F
Illinois (20-6, 16-4)	41	32	73
Ohio State (18-8, 12-8)	37	31	68
Illinois	Total FG FT	Reb.	
	Min. M-A M-A O-D A	PF Pts.	
Frazier	26 1-5 0-0	0-1 2 2	3
Grandison	20 4-7 1-1	1-3 1 1	9
Dosunmu	36 7-10 5-6	0-4 3 1	19
Cockburn	25 6-11 0-5	3-3 0 4	12
Miller	24 1-6 0-0	0-4 0 1	2
Curbelo	28 6-8 6-7	0-5 6 1	19
Bezhaniashvili	15 0-0 2-3	3-1 0 1	2
Williams	26 2-5 1-2	3-3 0 3	7
Totals	200 27-52 15-24	11-26 12 14	73

Percentages: FG: 51.9%. FT: 62.5%. Three-point field goals: 4-12 (Williams 2-3, Curbelo 1-1, Frazier 1-4, Grandison 0-1, Miller 0-3). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (Bezhaniashvili). Turnovers: 11 (Cockburn 3, Curbelo 2, TEAM 2, Dosunmu, Miller, Bezhaniashvili, Williams). Steals: 4 (Cockburn, Curbelo, Bezhaniashvili, Williams).

Ohio State			
Total FG FT	Reb.		
Min. M-A M-A O-D A	PF Pts.		
Washington	35 6-18 1-1	1-2 6 1	15
Walker	28 3-9 0-0	2-4 3 4	7
Sueing	34 4-6 6-7	2-6 0 5	15
Young	28 1-5 0-0	2-2 1 3	2
Liddell	35 8-17 0-3	1-3 0 3	19
Jallow	6 0-1 0-0	2-0 0 1	0
Ahrens	22 2-7 0-0	0-1 0 2	6
Key	7 2-2 0-0	1-0 0 3	4
Towns	5 0-0 0-0	0-2 0 2	0
Totals	200 26-65 7-11	15-20 10 24	68

Percentages: FG: 40.0%. FT: 63.6%. Three-point field goals: 9-29 (Liddell 3-7, Ahrens 2-7, Washington 2-8, Sueing 1-2, Walker 1-4, Young 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 5 (Young 2, Key 2, Ahrens). Turnovers: 9 (Washington 2, Sueing, Young 2, Liddell 2, Jallow). Steals: 4 (Walker 2, Sueing, Ahrens). Officials: Szcel, Sciroto, Riley. Attendance: N/A.

time. Illinois rode its momentum to hold a 36-26 edge with 4:25 until the midway point with sophomore center Kofi Cockburn, Dosunmu and Curbelo leading the charge.

Ohio State answered with back-to-back triples by Liddell and Ahrens to cut the deficit to 36-32 with 3:40 left before the break. A Curbelo layup and a converted and-one by Dosunmu pushed Illinois' edge to 41-32 with just 1:09 until halftime, but the Buckeyes bounced back with a three by Ahrens and a rebound putback by Liddell to cut the halftime deficit to 41-37.

The Buckeyes trailed by only four at halftime despite shooting just 42.4 percent (14 of 33) from the floor and allowing Illinois to shoot 62.1 percent (18 of 29) from the field. The Illini - led by the 7-1, 285-pound Cockburn, who had 10 first-half points - scored 30 points in the paint to 16 for Ohio State.

"We came into halftime and we saw what they were shooting percentage-wise, so that was something we had to focus on and an area we had to take pride in," Young said. "We just tried to come out and play harder. They were getting way too many easy layups in the first half, whether that was just from throwing it in the post or easier drives to the rim. We just knew we had to step it up defensively and bring more intensity."

Ohio State opened the second half with a 6-0 spurt to take a 43-41 lead just 2:25 into the frame. Walker gave the Buckeyes the edge on a coast-to-coast play, stripping the ball from Cockburn and taking it all the way for a fastbreak layup.

With Ohio State leading 45-43 with 16:27 left, Illinois ripped off a 7-0 streak sparked by an alley-oop finish by Cockburn to take a 50-45 lead with 13:19 remaining. The Buckeyes tied the game at 50 with 10:52 to play on a three-pointer by Walker off the dribble following a Liddell jump hook, setting up the hard-fought finish.

The Illini were led by 19 points apiece from Dosunmu and Curbelo, who had six assists, while Cockburn contributed 12 points and six boards.

Buckeyes Battle To End Of Postseason-Less Year

When it was announced on Dec. 22 that Ohio State women's basketball would not have postseason play this year due to a self-imposed ban, there was plenty of reason for the team to pack it in and just wait until next year. Even without the ban, the Buckeyes faced a handful of cancellations and postponements due to COVID-19 struggles both outside and within their program.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

Still, throughout all of that, Ohio State finished its season, and did so with a respectable 13-7 record. It was a record that was worsened with a four-game losing streak that took the team from bordering on top 10 to hanging on the fringes of the top 25 in the country.

Following the team's final game of the season, a 71-63 loss to Rutgers, head coach Kevin McGuff was nothing but happy about the effort his team showed throughout what could have been a completely lost season of basketball.

"We faced a lot this year with COVID and the postseason ban, so I'm very proud of the team for them really fighting through," McGuff said. "There were a lot of times throughout the year they could have mailed it in, but they didn't. They kept fighting, they kept playing really hard."

"We showed how good we can be. Now we just have to figure out what are the steps that can allow us to be that team consistently and head into next year with the chance to be really special."

Even in that eight-point loss to the Scarlet Knights, the Buckeyes showed that same fight. With no aspirations to battle for, against a team that had won eight straight and was fighting for a higher seed in the NCAA tournament, Ohio State battled back from multiple double-digit deficits to make it interesting down the stretch.

Down 15 with 4:54 to go in the game, the Buckeyes cut the deficit to nine in a span of 1:29. Then, back down 13 with 2:20 left in the fourth, Ohio State brought it back down to an eight-point

margin with 62 seconds remaining.

It was all for naught in the end, but that level of effort was not lost on McGuff. He said he appreciated the fight his team showed all the way until the very end of this difficult season.

"It's a competitive group with good leadership, and they care about each other," McGuff said. "I think they really like to play for each other, and it says a lot about their competitive character that they were continuing to fight and play really hard with really nothing on the line."

Playing for each other has been a mantra repeated by multiple Ohio State players throughout the season once the postseason ban was in play. One of those players was senior guard Braxtin Miller, who said after the Rutgers loss that the desire to win came down to the amount of team chemistry shown throughout the roster.

"I think that it's really obvious that we really like each other, we enjoy each other. It's what's gotten us through the season and fighting even though the circumstances," Miller said. "It's shown in all of our games, win or lose, that we enjoy playing together and we're doing it for each other."

Though it was the last game of the year for Ohio State, Miller said that the locker room following the game wasn't "anything too crazy" since the team has known this would be the end since late December.

"We've been preparing for it since we've known that this was going to happen for so long," Miller said. "We just said that we had great fight, a good season, and we'll just work to come back and be better next year."

It was a year that felt lost before it really got started once the postseason was taken away from Ohio State. But the Buckeyes won seven of their next eight games after receiving that news, and even finished above .500 in conference play with no trophy to play for.

Now, Ohio State heads into a longer-than-usual offseason before entering 2021-22 with lofty expectations and no ban holding the team back. According to McGuff, there's plenty to take from this year, even without a Big Ten or NCAA tournament to work with.

"We had some incredible moments," McGuff said. "We had stretches where we played extremely well, and we showed how good we can be. The way that we were playing there for a

while, there wasn't a team in the country I don't think that we couldn't have competed with and have had a chance to win."

"We also had some ups and downs and some of the players coming and going, and it hurt our continuity and our rhythm. But overall, I thought our kids handled a lot of adversity this year as well as they possibly could."

Miller Announces Return For 2021-22

Miller announced in a Zoom call following an 87-75 loss to Indiana that she will be returning to the Buckeyes next season, utilizing her free year of eligibility given by the NCAA for the 2020-21 campaign.

"I just think that it's best for me, especially with the climate of the world right now with everything that's going on," Miller said. "I don't see a reason to rush out of here with how much of a struggle everything is at the moment anyway. I love my team, my teammates, coaches. I love the university, so I just didn't see really any cons of coming back."

Miller, a transfer from Oklahoma State, played and started in 19 games this season, leading the team with 34.4 minutes per game. She averaged 11.5 points, 3.7 rebounds and 3.1 assists per game while shooting 38.6 percent from the field and 38.5 percent from three.

She was also second on the team in steals (31) and assist-to-turnover ratio (2.19), trailing only Jacy Sheldon (35) and Madison Greene (2.32) in those respective categories.

"It's significant because she's obviously got great experience and leadership, and that will carry over to next year," McGuff said on Miller's decision to return. "I think she could really help us have a great offseason as well."

With her announcement, Ohio State has only one player, Tanaya Beacham, who would be set to depart from the team as a fifth-year senior, though she is also eligible to return with the added year by the NCAA. Neither Beacham nor Miller was honored at Ohio State's senior day against the Hoosiers.

Greene Out At End Of Season

After McGuff had previously stated Greene would return for Ohio State in its finale against

Rutgers, that appeared to have been confirmed after Greene was removed from the team's unavailable list ahead of the matchup.

But then, less than an hour before game time, Ohio State said that Greene was actually unavailable and would not play in the matchup.

The Buckeyes went 1-4 in Greene's five-game absence after starting the season 12-3 in the first 15 games of the season, all games Greene started in.

In Greene's first game out, Ohio State put up triple-digit points in an 100-85 win over Purdue. But after that, the Buckeyes felt her absence in a big way, dropping games to Michigan, Penn State and Indiana before again falling to the Scarlet Knights in the finale. Greene was on the bench for the Indiana and Rutgers games but did not play.

In her second season with the Buckeyes, Greene finished the season third on the team with 13.4 points per game while leading Ohio State with 4.3 assists per contest. She shot 42.7 percent from the field and 35.1 percent from three, as well as a team-high 85.7 percent from the free-throw line.

Trio Of Buckeyes On My All-Big Ten Ballot

The Big Ten will have announced its selections for the regular-season awards by the time this edition of BSB gets to your doorstep, but they were not announced by the time BSB went to press. What was locked in were my selections for each of the awards, and here is where I will go through my media ballot and you can see how different I end up being compared to the final results.

For player of the year, it was a battle between Iowa's Caitlin Clark and Michigan's Naz Hillmon. Clark finished the season leading the Big Ten with 27.4 points and 6.9 assists per game, while Hillmon was second in points (25.1 per game) and led the conference in rebounds (11.3 per game).

In the end, even though I watched Hillmon's 50-point eruption live, I went with Clark, as the true freshman has impressed me time and time again in the way she leads Iowa in aspects that go past her impressive shooting.

Both Clark and Hillmon lead my first-team All-Big Ten lineup, which also includes, in order of selection, Ashley Owusu (Maryland), Arella Guirantes (Rutgers), Veronica Burton (Northwestern), Grace Berger (Indiana), Monika Czinano (Iowa), Mackenzie Holmes (Indiana), Nia Clouden (Michigan State) and Diamond Johnson (Rutgers).

That's right, I did not have any Ohio State players on the first team despite the strong season from the Buckeyes, and that's more because of how even the distribution is on this Ohio State team, something proven even further by my three Ohio State selections on the second team.

Sheldon, Dorka Juhasz and Greene were my second-team selections for Ohio State, in that order, as I think Sheldon has become the primary contributor for the team despite Juhasz's 11.1 rebounds per game finishing second in the Big Ten. Greene is also a key piece of everything this team does on both sides of the floor, and her presence late in games is unmatched by anyone else on the roster.

My other selections for second-team All-Big Ten were Leigha Brown (Michigan), Lindsay Pulliam (Northwestern), Diamond Miller (Maryland), Makenna Marisa (Penn State), Tekia Mack (Rutgers), Imani Lewis (Wisconsin) and Sam Haihy (Nebraska).

I was close to picking McGuff for the conference's coach of the year after leading the Buckeyes to a very strong season despite all the circumstances surrounding the COVID out-

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2020-21 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

13-7 Overall (9-7 Big Ten)
Statistics through games of March 5

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	20-20	641-32.0	122-251	.486	33-96	.344	56-68	.824	14-59	73-3.7	49-1	52	44	6	35	333-16.7
Dorka Juhasz	17-17	513-30.2	103-214	.481	12-59	.203	30-70	.429	72-116	188-11.1	31-0	19	34	17	17	248-14.6
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
Braxtin Miller	19-19	653-34.4	76-197	.386	25-65	.385	42-59	.712	25-45	70-3.7	40-3	59	27	6	31	219-11.5
Aaliyah Patty	18-18	463-25.7	82-181	.453	14-37	.378	29-38	.763	24-81	105-5.8	54-2	15	25	21	13	207-11.5
Kateri Poole	20-5	364-18.2	39-109	.358	14-44	.318	40-56	.714	11-41	52-2.6	39-1	39	35	3	18	132-6.6
Tanaya Beacham	19-5	260-13.7	31-68	.456	2-7	.286	14-18	.778	22-49	71-3.7	41-1	8	15	5	11	78-4.1
Rebeka Mikulasikova	15-0	192-12.8	23-57	.404	4-22	.182	10-14	.714	3-34	37-2.5	30-2	9	16	2	2	60-4.0
Rikki Harris	18-1	190-10.6	21-47	.447	9-29	.310	11-19	.579	9-27	36-2.0	16-0	8	10	2	10	62-3.4
Gabby Hutcherson	18-0	212-11.8	20-51	.392	10-24	.417	5-8	.625	4-34	38-2.1	21-1	7	8	9	11	55-3.1
Hevynne 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									45-37	82				6		
Ohio State	20	4025	583-1335	.437	136-420	.324	302-427	.707	252-555	807-40.3	368-12	282	251	74	176	1604-80.2
Opponents	20	4025	513-1277	.402	96-386	.249	279-391	.714	255-558	813-40.7	352-11	254	327	89	101	1401-70.1

BIG Women's Basketball

	Conf.			Overall		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Maryland	17	1	.944	21	2	.913
Indiana	16	2	.889	18	4	.818
Rutgers	10	3	.769	14	3	.824
Michigan	9	4	.692	14	4	.778
Northwestern	11	7	.611	13	7	.650
Iowa	11	8	.579	15	8	.652
Ohio State	9	7	.563	13	7	.650
Michigan State	8	7	.533	13	7	.650
Nebraska	9	10	.474	11	11	.500
Minnesota	7	11	.389	8	12	.400
Penn State	6	13	.316	9	14	.391
Purdue	4	14	.222	7	15	.318
Illinois	2	16	.111	4	17	.190
Wisconsin	2	18	.100	5	18	.217

Feb. 23 Score
Maryland 111, Iowa 93

Feb. 24 Scores
Rutgers 63, Michigan State 53
Penn State 69, Ohio State 67
Indiana 77, Wisconsin 49
Minnesota 73, Nebraska 63
Northwestern 67, Illinois 61

Feb. 25 Scores
Maryland 88, Purdue 59
Iowa 89, Michigan 67

Feb. 27 Score
Indiana 87, Ohio State 75

Feb. 28 Scores
Rutgers 60, Penn State 55
Purdue 70, Illinois 66
Iowa 84, Wisconsin 70
Maryland 62, Northwestern 50

March 3 Score
Indiana 89, Iowa 80

March 4 Score
Maryland 88, Michigan 63

March 5 Scores
Illinois 72, Minnesota 64
Rutgers 71, Ohio State 63

March 6 Scores
Indiana 74, Purdue 59
Michigan 63, Northwestern 58
Maryland 88, Penn State 61
Iowa 83, Nebraska 75

break and the postseason ban. But I ended up putting McGuff at No. 2 behind Maryland's Brenda Frese, who rebuilt her championship team from a year ago with very few of the same pieces, relying on a load of new faces and still finished atop the conference.

Clark was the no-brainer of the century as Big Ten Freshman of the Year, while I had Penn State's Maddie Burke, another freshman, earning Sixth Player of the Year, narrowly edging out former Ohio State and current Michigan State guard Janai Crooms.

Finally, Burton earned my vote for Defensive Player of the Year for her outstanding 4.2 steals per game this season. I had Miller fifth on the defensive team, also behind Mack, Guirantes and Nebraska center Kate Cain, who led the Big Ten with 3.0 blocks per game.

Poole Goes Retro For Game Comparison

Kateri Poole was asked by Buckeye Sports Bulletin after whom she has molded her game in order to improve her dribble moves and play-making abilities.

The freshman guard said her main influence was point guard Jason Williams, who played in the NBA from 1998-2011 for the Sacramento Kings, Memphis Grizzlies, Miami Heat and Orlando Magic.

While Williams was never a true superstar in the league, never making an all-star game and never averaging more than 14.8 points per game in a season, his style of play, which included crafty, flashy passes and an impressive layup package, made him a fan favorite throughout much of his NBA career.

It also made an impact on Poole, who brings some of that flash and flair into her own play.

"I am definitely a huge fan of his game," Poole said. "He can score at will, and being able to find your teammates and make sure they make the right pass or the right plays is the main thing that I look forward to at the point guard position. Knowing that he does that and following his game and looking at highlights and stuff from his

era has helped me a lot."

When asked if she specifically tries to add some style to her passes in the same vein as Williams, Poole did not deny it but said that it is really something that just happens in the heat of the moment.

"If it happens it happens," Poole said. "I'm from New York, so our style of play is kind of different. But it's not like I come into the game like, 'Hey, I'm going to throw this no-look.' It's the momentum during the game."

Bucks Absence Forces B1G Format Change

Because Ohio State will not be in the Big Ten tournament, the women's basketball bracket will have a slight tweak to it.

The change comes in the opening round, which would usually have two games between the 11- and 14-seed teams and the 12 and 13 seeds. With only 13 teams in the tournament on the women's side, this set of games is down to just one between 12-seed Illinois and 13-seed Wisconsin. The winner plays 5-seeded Northwestern.

The 11 seed will no longer have to play in order to get to face the six seed. From there the women's bracket becomes the same as the men's: top-four seeds get the double byes and so on and so forth.

If eligible, Ohio State would have been a seven seed and would have faced the 10th-seeded Minnesota Golden Gophers, whom the Buckeyes crushed 83-59 in their only meeting this season on Feb. 7.

Juhasz A Double-Double Machine In February

It was a rough month of February for Ohio State, with the Buckeyes earning five of their seven losses on the season during the shortest month of the year.

The 3-5 record is by far the worst of any month this season, but Ohio State still had strong showings from a few of its players, mainly its two leading scorers in Juhasz and Sheldon.

Juhasz narrowly edged out Sheldon for the February installment of Plank's Lady Buck of the Month.

Juhasz finished with double-digit rebounds in all eight games, earning seven double-doubles while averaging 14.7 points and 11.4 boards per contest. The lone blemish on her resume for the month was a one-point, 12-rebound performance against Michigan where she shot 0 of 8 from the field.

Despite that, Juhasz was mostly efficient offensively, connecting on 49 of 99 attempts from the field (49.5 percent), and was greatly successful from inside the arc, hitting on 44 of 73 two-point shots (60.3 percent).

Juhasz also had some impressive defensive performances in the down month for the Buckeyes, averaging both 1.1 blocks and 1.1 steals in those eight games.

Sheldon averaged 17.0 points, 3.3 rebounds, 2.8 assists and 1.9 steals per game in February.

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Ohio State Ends Season On Four-Game Losing Streak

By WYATT CROSER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

While the Ohio State men's basketball team – as well as the 13 other women's basketball teams in the conference – prepares for the Big Ten tournament, the Ohio State women's basketball team's season is finished due to the self-imposed postseason ban that came down following the Patrick Klein investigation.

With no extra incentives to play for, the Buckeyes struggled down the stretch, losing four straight games, including an 0-3 slate since BSB last went to press. Two of the defeats came against ranked opponents in Indiana and Rutgers, while the other came on the road in a nail-biter against Penn State.

The losing streak leaves Ohio State with a 13-7 overall record, with its 9-7 conference record being a slight downgrade from the 11-7 record the Buckeyes finished with in 2019-20.

But Ohio State currently has the chance to return its entire roster thanks to the NCAA's free year of eligibility. From there, the team can come into 2021-22 with heightened expectations after another year of experience for a relatively young roster of players.

Buckeyes Lose Close One To Nittany Lions

Ohio State battled with Penn State from start to finish, with neither team leading by double digits after an early Buckeye lead.

Ultimately, it was the host Nittany Lions who held on for the upset, taking down the Buckeyes 69-67 at the Bryce Jordan Center in University Park on Feb. 24 to give Ohio State its first back-to-back losses of the season.

"Obviously on offense we had some great shots, and we had some great shots that missed," said junior forward Dorka Juhasz. "The main thing is that you have to compensate with defense whenever those shots are not falling, and we didn't do enough of that, and obviously that just ended up with us losing this game."

With Ohio State trailing by one heading into the second half, the two teams traded baskets before a three by freshman guard Kateri Poole sparked an Ohio State 7-2 run that gave the Buckeyes a 43-39 lead at 4:53 of the third period.

But that was the largest lead for either team in the frame, with the Buckeyes taking a 52-51 lead into the final quarter of play.

The teams traded five-point runs to

open the fourth quarter, and then it was sophomore guard Jacy Sheldon who began to heat up offensively. Sheldon, who missed her first five attempts from deep to start the game, hit a pair of threes within a 1:07 span to keep Ohio State in the lead, up 63-58 heading down the stretch.

But Penn State (9-11, 6-10) fought back, going on a 9-2 run following the Sheldon makes to take a 67-65 lead with 3:17 left on a three by guard Niya Beverley, who had a career-high 21 points on 9-of-11 shooting.

"We had chances where we made a few shots there and Jacy got hot from the three late," head coach Kevin McGuff said. "We just didn't string that together with stops."

Ohio State (13-5, 9-5) tied the game back up at 67 on a pair of free throws by Poole, who earned them after hitting an in-bounds pass off the back of Penn State forward Johnasia Cash and drawing a foul.

The Nittany Lions again countered, taking the lead back on a layup by guard Makenna Marisa with 1:01 to go. Ohio State had two more opportunities, one with 2.3 seconds remaining, but it could not get a shot off on either attempt to fall by two points on the road.

"We had a play where it could be Dorka or Jacy," McGuff said on the play call in the final seconds, "but they defended it pretty well."

Beverley, Marisa (17) and Cash (16) scored 54 of Penn State's points in the contest, shooting a combined 23 of 43 from the field. Marisa also added eight rebounds and eight assists.

Juhasz was coming off a career-worst one point-performance against Michigan where she missed all eight attempts from the field. Against the Nittany Lions, she bounced back in a big way, finishing with a double-double of 21 points and 11 rebounds while shooting 10 of 16 from the field.

"That game, I personally didn't play how I wanted to, and I didn't contribute enough to the team," Juhasz said of her performance against the Wolverines. "I just switched my mentality from that loss, and I just got some shots up and got my confidence back."

Ohio State opened the game on a 15-2 run in the first 4:05 of the first quarter, thanks in part to Juhasz, who had 10 of the team's first 17 points, hitting on all five of her opening field-goal attempts.

In that first quarter, where Juhasz shot 5 of 5, the rest of the Buckeyes shot a combined 3 of 13 (23.1 percent).

Penn State bounced back from that early deficit to go on a 22-5 run to take a 26-22 lead, with 4:14 to go before the



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

DOWNER – Ohio State and guard Jacy Sheldon finished the season 13-7 overall, which included losses to Michigan, Penn State, Indiana and Rutgers to close out the year.

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

break. The Nittany Lions held a 31-30 advantage at halftime after a buzzer-beater make by Sheldon was ruled no good after a lengthy review.

"I thought in the beginning we got out to a lead, then we had a lot of good shots in the first half," McGuff said. "We just didn't finish."

On the night, Ohio State shot 40.3 percent (25 of 62) from the field and 20.0 percent (4 of 20) from three. Penn State was marginally better in the contest, shooting 40.9 percent (27 of 66) overall and 26.1 percent (6 of 23) from deep.

For the third straight game, the Buckeyes were without sophomore guard Madison Greene, and again Poole earned the start. While she scored just seven points, she filled up the box score in other ways, adding five rebounds, seven assists and three steals.

Juhasz said she hoped the loss would light a spark in the team as Ohio State headed into the final stretch of the season.

"We have a couple games left. We just have to make sure everybody's on the same page with how we want to finish this season and everybody have the same mind-set," Juhasz said. "I think we'll be fine. We just have to make sure that next time we're going back at home and just practice and we're on the same page with

that and just keep working hard."

Losing Streak Continues With Defeat To Hoosiers

After coming in with a two-game losing streak and losing three of its last four, Ohio State seemed destined to snap the streak Feb. 27 against Indiana after taking a lead into the fourth quarter on the back of an 18-6 run.

Instead, the Hoosiers fought back in the fourth and took over late for an 87-75 win that snapped the Buckeyes' 15-game win streak over Indiana and gave Ohio State (13-6, 9-6) its first home loss of the season.

The Buckeyes led 56-51 to start the fourth quarter and held the lead at varying points. However, with 5:47 to go in the frame, Sheldon, Ohio State's leading scorer on the season, fouled out with the Buckeyes up 69-64. She finished with 11 points on 5-of-9 shooting and added three steals in 23 minutes.

"Jacy's an incredible player," senior guard Braxtin Miller said. "She brings so much to the team and to the court while we're out there, so I think that was definitely something that was hard on us."

That gave the Hoosiers some momentum, which they used to take a 72-70 lead with 3:47 to go on a jumper by junior

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Bucks Hope To Lean On Experienced Rotation

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

In 2020, the Ohio State baseball team didn't have a chance to defend its title as the Big Ten tournament champions. Those Buckeyes, like so many other teams in so many sports, had their season cut short in 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Ohio State played 14 games last season, the finale coming in a 9-5 loss against North Florida on March 11. The Buckeyes never got the chance to reach Big Ten play, to showcase a pitching rotation considered one of the nation's best or to lean on catcher Dillon Dingler's offense, which got him drafted by the Detroit Tigers in the second round shortly after Ohio State's season closed.

Considering the way that season started for OSU, there's a case to be made that time away wasn't the worst possible outcome. The 2019 group that tore through the Big Ten in tournament play on its way to a conference title was fueled by elite pitching and clutch offense, two things that its successor had yet to find, starting the season 6-8 before it was canceled. Although head coach Greg Beals isn't ready to go quite that far, with nearly every member of that team back for Ohio State in 2021, the Buckeyes have gone from fringe conference contender to a roster with national aspirations, led by a rotation that Ohio State hopes will live up to lofty expectations.

"We have a lot returning," Beals said. "With seniors being allowed to come back and the pitching staff all intact from last year, we have a lot back. There's a lot of depth on the pitching side. The rotation is all there with (Garrett) Burhenn, (Seth) Lonsway, (Griffan) Smith all back, (Will) Pfennig is back. The junior college transfer, Jack Neely, is going to fit into the rotation as well with these four-game series. Bayden Root, T.J. Brock developing like he has, Patrick Murphy has really come on strong.

"The depth of the pitching staff is certainly something that's strong, but more importantly this is a workman-like ballclub. These guys know how to go work. They've had something taken away from them. They have had to work themselves through this, and the diligence, the intent of how we go about our daily activity has certainly matured through this process. I'm not calling it a blessing in disguise because not getting the opportunity to play is not a blessing, but I think we've learned a lot and grown from it."

As Beals enters his 11th season as Ohio State's skipper, he's also entering uncharted territory. This is the most experienced group he's had during his time in Columbus, led by 21 upperclassmen who pepper both the lineup and the bullpen, but it's also the first time that Ohio State – or any team, for that matter – will play a Big Ten-only, 44-game season. Still, after almost a year away from the game, the opportunity to play is one that the Buckeyes and Beals can't help but express some excitement over.

"We're excited to play, and as far as the Big Ten-only schedule goes, that's what our conference has set out for us," Beals said. "They've done that across the board. I think our basketball teams got a couple (nonconference games), but pretty much everybody else has been conference only. It is what it is. We're really excited to get started."

Big Ten baseball isn't quite the gantlet that Big Ten football or basketball is and will likely feature only a handful of ranked teams in 2021, but to enter the conference season

without any buildup out of conference presents a unique challenge for a Buckeye team that will likely need some time to fine-tune its lineup and to settle on a fourth starter whom the coaching staff is comfortable with on the mound. Usually, that would happen during the early stretch of the season at nonconference tournaments in warmer states such as Florida.

The Buckeyes still opened their season in a warmer state this season with a four-game series against Illinois in Greenville, S.C., but the nature of the matchup with a conference foe and location just add to the strangeness of the season to which Ohio State will have to become accustomed.

"I would say it's better going to a place that's more around (Ohio) weather and not like Florida," said new captain and longtime first baseman Conner Pohl. "I don't want to say it's a shock to us when we go down there when it's so warm, but it kind of is. We go outside here and it's snowy, windy, cold, and then we go to Florida and we get off the bus and it's like, 'Man, this feels great.' I'm sweating immediately. I think it will be better for us going to someplace that's more mild temperature than Florida. It's more like home.

"It is really, really huge that we come out and start out hot, especially when we're not playing somebody down south in Florida, to get our gears going early."

In these early games, Ohio State is looking primarily for consistency and stability in execution. The lack of those early season tuneup games hurts for both team development and lineup adjustments, but it also presents potential anxiety about the immediate presence of high-stakes conference play.

"I want to see them settle in," Beals said of what he's watching from his team in early season play. "There's going to be some anxiety getting started. There's been a major buildup. I think the major buildup is not necessarily about the time off as much as it is the fact that they lost time. We need to settle in quickly to the season. That's really the thing I want to see more than anything.

"There's so much so new. We have seating assignments on the bus, we have different meal plans, different pregame meetings. Everything is changing, and it's going to be new to me. I'm used to having the guys in the conference room for pregame meal and we have a scouting report talk. That's what I've done for 27 years. It's going to be different for all of us. It's important that we help lead our guys through that and just learn this new stuff as quickly as we possibly can."

After that opening series, which saw the Buckeyes take games one and two in extra innings and game three 12-6 before an 8-0 loss in game four, they head back north for their next four games, taking on Nebraska and Iowa in Minneapolis from March 12-14 before starting the true home-and-road slate in Piscataway, N.J., against Rutgers on March 19. With the season just getting under way, it's time for the BSB team preview. It's also time, much to Beals' delight, to move on from the COVID-altered 2020 campaign.

"I'm done talking about last year," Beals said. "I hate talking about all the COVID stuff. These guys are (ready to do) what they love to do, being back in the scarlet and gray, playing the game they love, chasing their dreams and representing this great university. I'm really excited about that and I'm looking forward to seeing how we do. We're very talented. This is a very talented baseball team. I think you

get the sense of what these guys feel they're capable of in talking to those captains. Now it's a matter of keeping ourselves in the right spots, not getting too amped up. We need to execute at a high level."

Experienced Rotation Has Few Vacancies

Ohio State's ceiling in 2021 will likely be determined by the performance of its pitching staff. If the group can reach its full potential and become one of the best in college baseball, a trip to Omaha for the national tournament seems to be a distinct possibility for the Buckeyes. If nothing else, it's certainly the goal on the minds of the members of this pitching staff, including senior captain Griffan Smith.

"I want to make it to Omaha," Smith said. "I think we all feel the same way. Everyone on this team knows that we have the talent this year, the ability and the leadership, not just from a captain's standpoint but from the entire team. It starts with the coaches and it just trickles down to all the players, and I think that everyone on the team knows that we have the ability and the talent and the guys to get to Omaha.

That's the ultimate goal, especially with no Big Ten tournament. Obviously we want to win the Big Ten championship, but I think we're pushing to be one of those eight teams that makes it to Omaha this year."

Smith will be a crucial part of that equation. A lefthander from Cincinnati, this will be his fourth season as a staple in the Buckeye rotation after he pitched 26 times in 2018, 19 times in 2019 and four times before the season ended in 2020, accumulating a 4.59 ERA and a 9-8 record. He told media on March 2 that he spent much of the offseason improving himself both physically and mentally.

"I've grown a lot in terms of my physical ability," Smith said. "When I came in, I was a small freshman. I was a late bloomer. When I came in, my fastball wasn't very good. I was kind of slow. I wasn't that strong. Physically I've gotten a lot better, but I think my biggest area of growth has been the mental side of the game. Learning how to go out there and have full confidence in my ability and in my stuff, to go out there and pitch with conviction. As a pitcher that's been the biggest thing for me."

Although Smith has spent the last two years as a starter, his status in that role actually seems to be up in the air in 2021, at least entering the first series of the year. It was Burhenn, Lonsway, Neely and Pfennig who started the four-game series against Illinois. He didn't play at all during the series, which could mean he was unavailable and will return to the lineup soon.

Ohio State's opening day starter is the least talked-about member of the group, though it's not for a lack of production. Burhenn, a right-handed junior from Indianapolis, was rock-solid for the Buckeyes as a freshman in 2019. He started 15 games and registered 11 quality starts, putting up a 6-4 record with a 3.96 ERA. He lacks the national recognition of Lonsway or the eye-popping velocity of Neely, but Burhenn will likely serve as the game-one starter for the Buckeyes in each series moving forward.

Past him, Lonsway was given the nod on day two, marking a return to college baseball that seemed unlikely at this time last year. After starting 21 games and notching a 9-6 record with a 3.59 ERA in his first two seasons as a starter with the Buckeyes, the former top

recruit was considered a serious prospect for the MLB draft. However, because it was cut down to just five rounds for 2020, Lonsway went unpicked and returned to Columbus, where he's drawn a significant share of hype entering the season. He was named to the Golden Spikes Award (given to the best amateur baseball player) watch list and will likely be Ohio State's top prospect at the end of the season. Like Smith, Lonsway spent the offseason improving his game and looks to be a better form of himself in 2021.

"Lowering the walks, lowering the free passes," Lonsway said of his biggest place for improvement. He had surrendered 77 walks in 110 1/3 innings pitched prior to this season. "That's been something of mine that has been an issue in the past. On top of that, being efficient, getting deep into games, going six, seven innings in and keeping our team in the ballgame is something that I really pride myself on – giving us the opportunity to win a lot of games when I'm on the mound."

Rounding out the contenders for the starting rotation are Neely and Pfennig. Neely comes to Ohio State via Texas, where he originally signed on to play his college baseball and where he made eight appearances in 2019. At 6-8, 225 pounds and with a fastball nearing the triple digits, Neely is the most physically imposing pitcher on the roster.

"His fastball will jump on you," Beals said of Neely. "He's 6-8, 6-9. He's an imposing figure. He's a hardworking young man that came here for our player development. He came here for (assistant coach Dan DeLucia and director of pitching development Brad Goldberg) to help him become the very best he can be. It's been fun to see that evolve. In a short time, the fastball is going to get up to 98 miles an hour. It's real, and we're excited to see how Jack does."

Pfennig is a right-handed junior from Mason, Ohio. He's expected to see most of his work out of the bullpen but started game four against the Fighting Illini for the Buckeyes.

As for that bullpen, Ohio State is without a locked-in lineup right now. There's not an obvious pick for closer on the team, and Beals seems comfortable continuing a search for that role into the season. Pfennig; Murphy, a left-handed 2020 graduate transfer; junior righthanders Root and T.J. Brock; junior lefthander Mitch Milheim; sophomore righthanders Wyatt Loncar, Tyler Kean and Ethan Hammerberg; freshman lefthander Isaiah Coupet; and freshman righthander Nate Habertier are all expected to contribute from the bullpen.

"We haven't really defined our closer setup, and the reason for that – well, it's kind of a good thing – we have guys that can pitch and they're not necessarily specialists," Beals said. "We have guys we want to hand the ball to. We have identified guys that are game-winning, championship-type guys that are going to get the ball. It's Pfennig, it's Root, it's Murphy, it's Milheim, it's Brock, those type of guys that we've seen before.

"We have some young guys, sophomores and freshmen with Loncar and Kean and Hammerberg and two rookies Isaiah Coupet and Nate Habertier and guys that are all very capable of pitching the ball really well. But we have some veterans in that group that I mentioned early on that are the leading candidates to get the ball in big games."

Pohl, Erwin Man Corners Of Infield

Ohio State returns all of its star power on the mound but has a significant vacancy to fill



Greg Beals

both on its lineup card and in the second part of its battery after the departure of Dangler, the star catcher of the 2019 and 2020 groups. The rest of the infield is relatively experienced, but Ohio State is going to be breaking in some new faces in replacing Dangler – or at least in trying to.

The players to know are Brent Todys and Archer Brookman. Todys is a right-handed redshirt senior from Westerville, Ohio, while Brookman is a right-handed senior from Quebec. Neither player has seen a ton of time behind the plate for the Buckeyes – Todys manned two games in 2020 but played in 11 as a designated hitter – and they'll platoon in the role in 2021.

"Obviously you have a big loss when you lose Dillon Dangler," Beals said. "He was a captain, a leader and a superb player, so you're not just replacing his production. But we have a catching core with Brent Todys and Archer Brookman that can handle themselves very well behind the plate. We're going to man that position very well. We're not replacing Dillon Dangler, don't get me wrong, but those guys can do the job behind the plate. I'm very comfortable with where they're at and how their games have evolved now that they're in the lead spot. I see that being a tandem situation where they're going to combine in a lot of doubleheaders and four-game weekends that we're going to see several of. I see that being a situation where they're going to be a tandem at work to keep themselves fresh and strong. Those guys are doing well behind the plate."

The corners of the infield are the most established members of the group. Starting at first base, Pohl is a right-handed red-shirt senior from Arcanum, Ohio and one of the best hitters on the team. He's hitting .277/.378/.401 for his career entering the season and will look to improve upon that even further in 2021.

"The big fella is back at first base, Conner Pohl," Beals said. "Conner has been a staple in our lineup and is just a great defender at first base and middle of the lineup, power potential bat."

Across from Pohl in the infield at third base is right-handed junior Nick Erwin, a career .252/.297/.303 hitter who has made his name largely on defense.

"Nick Erwin is at third base," Beals said. "Nick is a ballplayer, and he's earned the respect of his teammates with how he goes about his daily work and how he competes. Great, great defender, and third base is probably the toughest position to play defensively in college baseball with the aluminum bats and the AstroTurf fields, and Nick can do it."

To finish off the infield, Ohio State will pair second baseman Colton Bauer with shortstop Zach Dezenzo. Bauer came on strong at second base in 2020, starting seven games and putting up a .294 batting average.

"At second base, Colton Bauer is winning the job there," Beals said. "He's a guy that's really come on offensively and is going to be a major contributor to our offense and can handle his glove at second base."

Dezenzo has started at Ohio State from nearly his first day on campus. He logged 41 starts at shortstop and 17 at third base as a freshman in 2019 then started all 14 games in 2020, splitting evenly between the two positions. He has a career .238/.308/.405 line. The right-handed junior will stick at shortstop this season full-time.

"Zach Dezenzo is going to anchor that infield at the shortstop position, and Zach is going to be in the middle of that lineup as well," Beals said. "He's really grown up. He's physically adjusted in this offseason, has really grown up physically, and he's in a great position to be an impact player for us."

It isn't an infield with a glut of batting pro-

duction in its history, but this is a group that Beals was very complimentary of and that he looks forward to seeing on the diamond.

"We feel good having that infield," Beals said. "I like our infield. If we can stay healthy and play the way we're capable of, it's going to be a really good infield."

Lonsway has been impressed with what he's seen from several infielders as well.

"It's been a few guys," Lonsway said of the offensive players standing out. "Colton Bauer has hit the ball pretty well. Archer Brookman has hit the ball pretty well. Throughout the lineup, there are guys during live ABs that are definitely not just rolling over, no guys to just forget about. Everybody puts up a good fight and a good at bat."

Buckeyes Searching For Versatility In Outfield

Ohio State's outfield is without much in the way of star power, though that may change quickly depending on the development of several young players searching to crack the lineup early. There's a decent batch of contributors with experience in the outfield for the Buckeyes, but no one who jumps out as a likely star, at least not entering the season.

The biggest name of the bunch is at center field in right-handed sophomore Nate Karaffa. Karaffa is an infielder by trade who came to Ohio State to play shortstop. But the presence of Dezenzo paired with Karaffa's athletic ability has shifted him into center field for another season, after he started 13 games there in 2020.

"To start in center field is Nate Karaffa, who played center field the majority of the time for us last year," Beals said. "He's originally an infielder that can move around. He's a great athlete, high-end potential guy with his athleticism, speed and some pop in his bat. Nate is going to get the nod in center field."

Left field will see several starters, but sophomore Nolan Clegg – a high school teammate of Karaffa – got the nod against Illinois on day one over expected starter Sam Wilson. Junior Marcus Ernst will contribute in left field as well, though none of the three has an extensive résumé at the position entering 2021. Ohio State will likely look to platoon based on pitching matchups to piece together passable hitting from left field.

"At left field we have Sam Wilson, a guy that got a lot of time last year, came to us from a junior college," Beals said. "This is his second year in the program. I see Sammy Wilson getting a lot of at bats. Marcus Ernst will get time in left field too, and Nolan Clegg. Marcus is a guy who played primarily infield, but his bat is really coming along so we're trying to find a spot for that bat to play. He's a good athlete, a three-sport athlete in high school, and he has the ability to go out and play in the outfield. Nolan Clegg has been in the outfield his whole time here. He brings experience and certainly ability in the outfield and the ability to possibly do some platooning with left and right situations. Nolan can also play in right field."

Finally, in right field, Ohio State may have uncovered a star in the very first series of the season. After debating between returning starter Mitchell Okuley and freshman Kade Kern for much of the offseason, the Buckeyes went with Kern on the lineup card for game one. One game isn't enough to make a player, but to say that Kern rewarded that decision would be an understatement. The Archbold, Ohio, product opened his college career with a 5-for-6 night at the plate and nearly hit for the cycle, recording three singles, a double and a triple along with a 13th-inning RBI that helped Ohio State secure the win. He couldn't keep that kind of pace for the rest

2021 Ohio State Baseball Roster

No.	Name	Position	Year	Height	Weight	B/T	Hometown
1	Joey Aden	OF	R-Fr.	6-1	195	R/R	Bentonville, Ark.
49	Tim Baird	RHP	Fr.	6-2	190	R/R	North Royalton, Ohio
8	Colton Bauer	INF	Sr.	6-1	200	R/R	Grove City, Ohio
17	T.J. Brock	RHP	Jr.	6-1	180	R/R	Cincinnati
29	Archer Brookman	C/1B	Sr.	6-1	195	R/R	Pointe-Claire, Quebec
7	Garrett Burhenn	RHP	Jr.	6-3	215	R/R	Indianapolis
20	Nolan Clegg	OF	So.	6-3	195	R/R	Toronto, Ohio
40	Andrew Clelland	P/1B	Fr.	6-6	190	R/R	Cadiz, Ohio
34	Isaiah Coupet	LHP	Fr.	6-0	165	L/L	Flossmoor, Ill.
4	Zach Dezenzo	INF	Jr.	6-4	205	R/R	Alliance, Ohio
25	Brady Emerson	OF	Fr.	5-10	165	L/L	Cambridge, Ohio
28	Marcus Ernst	INF	Jr.	6-1	195	L/R	Dublin, Ohio
5	Nick Erwin	INF	Jr.	6-0	175	R/R	Grove City, Ohio
42	Joe Gahm	RHP	R-Sr.	6-1	220	R/R	Richfield, Wis.
26	Nate Haberthier	RHP	Fr.	6-5	225	R/R	West Chester, Ohio
50	Ethan Hammerberg	RHP	So.	6-5	210	L/R	Upper Arlington, Ohio
32	Aaron Hughes	UTIL	Jr.	6-1	195	R/R	Tipp City, Ohio
48	Trent Jones	P/OF	Fr.	6-3	190	L/R	Massillon, Ohio
21	Caden Kaiser	OF/1B	R-Fr.	6-2	185	L/L	Lewis Center, Ohio
14	Nate Karaffa	INF	So.	6-0	175	R/R	Toronto, Ohio
15	Tyler Kean	RHP	So.	6-2	195	R/R	Springboro, Ohio
46	Kade Kern	OF	Fr.	6-0	195	R/R	Archbold, Ohio
52	Caden Kline	LHP	Fr.	6-4	190	L/L	Defiance, Ohio
16	Wyatt Loncar	RHP	So.	6-5	215	R/R	Pacific Palisades, Calif.
11	Seth Lonsway	LHP	Jr.	6-3	195	L/L	Celina, Ohio
44	Casey Maniglia	OF	So.	6-2	215	R/R	Solon, Ohio
36	Mitch Milheim	LHP	Jr.	5-11	190	L/L	Powell, Ohio
47	Jake Mills	INF	Fr.	5-11	160	R/R	West Palm Beach, Fla.
38	Patrick Murphy	LHP	Grad.	6-1	205	L/L	Canton, Ohio
10	Jack Neely	RHP	Jr.	6-8	225	R/R	San Antonio
24	Mitchell Okuley	OF	So.	6-1	185	L/R	Powell, Ohio
53	Garrett Peters	LHP	Fr.	5-11	185	R/L	Springfield, Ohio
31	Will Pfennig	RHP	Jr.	6-0	170	R/R	Mason, Ohio
39	Conner Pohl	INF	R-Sr.	6-5	235	L/R	Arcanum, Ohio
55	Blayne Robinson	1B	So.	6-4	215	L/L	Defiance, Ohio
6	Bayden Root	RHP	Jr.	6-3	215	R/R	Kokomo, Ind.
41	Scottie Seymour	UTIL	Grad.	5-11	205	R/R	Maumee, Ohio
45	Yianni Skeriotis	RHP	R-Fr.	6-4	195	R/R	Massillon, Ohio
37	Griffan Smith	LHP	Sr.	6-2	215	L/L	Cincinnati
12	Brent Todys	C	R-Sr.	5-10	180	R/R	Westerville, Ohio
43	Evan Ulrich	C	Fr.	5-11	170	R/R	Delaware, Ohio
3	Jake Vance	RHP	R-Sr.	6-3	195	R/R	Canton, Ohio
33	Sam Wilson	UTIL	Sr.	6-2	190	R/R	Dublin, Ohio

Head Coach – Greg Beals (Kent State). **Assistant Coach** – Matt Angle (Ohio State). **Assistant Coach** – Dan Delucia (Ohio State, 2008). **Director of Baseball Operations** – Blair Everhart (Ohio State, 2012). **Director of Pitching Development** – Brad Goldberg (Ohio State, 2013). **Strength and Conditioning Coach** – Dean Hansen (Mount Marty College, 2009). **Student Assistant Coach** – Matt Carpenter. **Student Manager** – Danny Matejczyk.

2021 Schedule

March 5 Illinois at Greenville, S.C., W 6-3 (13 innings); **6** Illinois at Greenville, S.C., W 6-5 (9 innings); **6** Illinois at Greenville, S.C., W 12-6; **7** Illinois at Greenville, S.C., L 8-0; **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, 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.

of the series, batting .444, but appears to be the starter in right field moving forward, with Okuley contributing when needed.

If Ohio State can rely on consistent production from Kern and several other freshmen, it will address one of Beals' bigger concerns entering the season. Without the summer to develop new players, Ohio State's freshmen spent several months flying solo that usually would have been used to initiate them into the program.

"It's been a challenge (for the freshmen) not having the summer to get sped up a little bit," Beals said. "Even our training here at times has been slowed down compared to a normal year. It is part of the equation. I think we've had some guys that have come along a little slower but are starting to gain ground at a little faster pace here in the last month or so.

On the offensive side, I see Kade Kern being ready to go as a true freshman to help us out in the outfield. I see Isaiah Coupet and Nate Haberthier being two of the freshman arms that are going to be ready to contribute right away, with a host of some other guys that are coming along as well."

For Ohio State in 2021, adjusting to whatever COVID, or anything else, for that matter, throws at it is going to be focus No. 1. As Beals puts it, the talent of this team is high – perhaps as high as it has ever been under his guidance – which means that success is going to be determined by mental fortitude and execution.

"Our talent level is very high. Now it's a matter of executing and executing on a consistent level," Beals said. "There's going to be as much mind as body on that."

Buckeyes Look To Avoid Being One-And-Done

A shortened season that seemed longer than many recent ones will come to an end sooner than expected unless the Ohio State men's hockey team can pull off its version of the Miracle On Ice.

The Buckeyes (7-18-1, 6-16-0-0-2 Big Ten) will need to win three straight single-elimination games to claim the conference tourney and the automatic berth to the NCAA tournament.

How difficult is that task?

Ohio State did not have a three-game winning streak this season. Furthermore, the Buckeyes won two straight only once.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

The Big Ten tournament will be held at Notre Dame from March 14-16. It was originally scheduled for March 18-20, but on Feb. 25 it was announced it would be moved up so the NCAA-bound teams would have more rest before the national tournament begins March 26.

"There's been so many things going with missed games (due to COVID-19) and whatnot," Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik said. "Ultimately we looked at playing three games in three nights in our tournament then turn around and play again four or five days later maybe isn't in our best interests."

"Our league thought this year, particularly how much our guys have gone through mentally, physically, everything, we should move it up and give everyone more of a chance."

Ohio State, the sixth seed, plays No. 3 Michigan (14-9-1, 11-9-0-1) in a quarterfinal game March 14 at 8:30 p.m.

The winner advances against either Minnesota (2) or Michigan State (7) on March 15 with the championship game the next day.

The other quarterfinal has Notre

Dame (4) and Penn State (5). Regular-season champion Wisconsin, which received a bye, plays that winner in a semifinal March 15.

OSU and the Wolverines will meet in a "rematch" of the 2020 semifinal that was never played.

The Buckeyes were to host the Wolverines on March 15, but the game – and the season – were canceled three days prior because of the burgeoning COVID-19 pandemic.

They did meet four times during the 2020-21 regular season. U-M won 4-2 and 5-0 at home on Jan. 15 and 16.

In the series in Columbus, OSU defeated the Wolverines 3-2 on Feb. 19 before being blanked 6-0 the next night.

Therein lies the hope and the distress for the Buckeyes. They've shown an ability to occasionally perform well as they did in beating the Wolverines. But that's been followed by clunkers such as taking Wisconsin to overtime before losing 2-1 in Madison on Feb. 26 then getting skated out of the rink the next game by the Badgers (7-0).

"We've proved that we can play with anybody," Rohlik said. "In the tournament a one-game shot is exactly what you want in our situation right now."

On five occasions this season the Buckeyes won the first game of the series but lost the second.

"Go to a tournament, one-game shots, and try to win three games," Rohlik said. "You've got to play that 'A' game that night. Our guys know we can. Obviously, we've been searching for consistency on back-to-back nights."

Saying Goodbye ...

The seniors – goalies Evan Moyses and Tommy Nappier; defenseman Grant Gabriele; and forwards Eugene Fadyyev, Collin Peters and Austin Pooley – were recognized before the final game on March 5 vs. Arizona State at Value City Arena.

They were part of two NCAA tournaments, including the 2018 Frozen Four, and an expected third last season before the world shutdown, preventing a program-record fourth straight appearance. The Buckeyes also won the 2019 Big Ten regular-season title.

All six seniors are expected to graduate this year.

The class endured more adversity and disappointment than any before them.

While the seniors last season were stunned when they were unable to compete for a national championship, at least they were given a proper senior send-off with family, friends and fans in attendance at the home finale before the postseason began.

This year's group had the pregame activities streamed live so people could follow since no one was allowed at the games this season.

"People see the wins and losses and all these kind of things and they forget where this whole thing started a year ago and walking away from playing in four straight national tournaments," Rohlik said. "For them to have that taken away and obviously what we've gone through this year, just to have a chance to get on the ice and play, the sacrifice these guys made has been unbelievable."

"Then to be recognized on Senior Night and not having fans and not being able to be out there with your family, that's tough."

Or Not?

With the NCAA permitting seniors a one-time offer to return for another season because of the pandemic, it's possible a player or two who had normally exhausted their eligibility might return for the 2021-22 season.

"I've communicated with them," Rohlik said. "That's going to be a discussion for each individual. Where are they academically? Where are they in life? How many will be on the roster next year?"

"There's so many dynamics that to go into it that it deserves a sit-down discussion. A premature conversation on that three months ago, five weeks ago, one month ago would be unfair to them and us."

"Let's concentrate on trying to get to a national tournament. Let's win some games here down the stretch, do well in the tournament then evaluate where each individual is at."

Big Time

Dakota Joshua, who had 100 points (41 goals, 59 assists) for the Buckeyes from 2015-19, scored in his NHL debut for the St. Louis Blues vs. the Anaheim Ducks on March 1.

The fourth-round pick of the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2014 had his struggles at OSU and was benched several times in his career.

Rohlik once said Joshua had to decide if he wanted to make \$400,000 or \$4 million a year playing pro hockey. He was that good and that baffling.

The tough love paid off.

"He said it in a couple of texts to me, 'I just can't believe how many times you preached it to me and I didn't understand

it and now I do,'" Rohlik said. "Who knows where this path leads for him or how long the journey goes, but to ultimately put a jersey on and call yourself an NHLer and score a goal, it's all worth it."

Joshua has played three more games for the Blues with no further points through March 6.

"I was so happy for him and his family," Rohlik said. "The road isn't always easy."

"To go from sitting in the office not sure if he could play at this level when he got here to the ups and downs with school and everything else, to me for an individual like that to graduate, get that piece of paper, sign a contract and get a chance to play in the NHL, it's why you coach."

Meyer On Fire

Another former Buckeye, Carson Meyer, had a sizzling debut for the Cleveland Monsters of the American Hockey League on Feb. 22.

He scored twice for the Columbus Blue Jackets' top affiliate against Rockford and ex-OSU goalie Matt Tomkins, who was recently called up to the Chicago Blackhawks' taxi squad.

Meyer followed with three assists vs. Rockford five days later. He scored four goals in a playoff game for the Buckeyes against Wisconsin last season.

Down The Stretch

The Buckeyes lost three of four since BSB last went to press – the two losses at Wisconsin and a split at home against Arizona State on March 4 and 5.

Against the Badgers, junior Gustaf Westlund tied it 1-1 late in the second period of the opener, but a power-play goal by Dylan Holloway 42 seconds into overtime was the difference.

Wisconsin star Cole Caufield's three goals paced the 7-0 win the next night. After that hat trick, he had 22 goals for the season while the entire OSU team had scored 45.

Back home against Arizona State, OSU won the first game 8-3 behind two goals and two assists from freshman Travis Treloar.

Sophomores Mark Cheremeta and Jaedon Leslie each had a goal and three assists.

Goals by sophomore C.J. Regula and Treloar as well as Pooley's short-handed tally gave the Buckeyes a 3-0 lead after the first period.

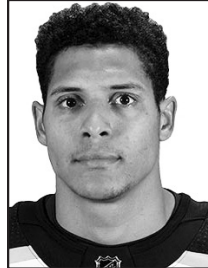
The Sun Devils responded the following game to spoil the night for the seniors, including Moyses, who made his second career start.

ASU scored three times in the first as the Buckeyes were shut out for the third time in five games and the seventh blanking on the season.

Gusto

Westlund is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for February. While it was a tough month for the Buckeyes, he scored in the win vs. Michigan and the OT loss vs. Wisconsin.

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



Dakota Joshua

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For February



Gustaf Westlund
Junior Forward
Stockholm, Sweden

OSU Wrestlers Falter At Big Ten Championships

It was not a good weekend for the Ohio State wrestling team at the annual Big Ten championships, hosted this season by Penn State at the Bryce Jordan Center in University Park, Pa., but it didn't start out that way. In fact, the first round could not have gone much better for the Buckeyes, who opened the tournament as a distant fifth behind Iowa, Penn State, Nebraska and Michigan in the expectations department after a 5-4 campaign. Such is life in a conference with seven top-15 teams, Ohio State being the last of that group at No. 14.

ON THE MAT Patrick Mayhorn

"The Big Ten is just a lot of great institutions to start with, heart of America, a couple of teams now in the Northeast, and these are great institutions that are well-funded," head coach Tom Ryan said. "They're committed to the sport. Every team in the Big Ten has 9.9 full scholarships. They care about their facilities; they take care of their staff. When you put all those things together, you typically have strong programs.

"You can be the No. 1 seed and in your quarterfinal bout against the No. 8 seed, he conceivably could be the eighth-ranked guy in the country. That's how competitive the conference is. Typically, the No. 1 seed is going to face a much lesser opponent, and in a lot of conferences across the country the No. 1 seed in the quarterfinals should, to some degree, not be tested. Not in the Big Ten, so seeding is incredibly important on one level because you know the better your season was the better chance you should have in the early rounds of moving forward. But we see over and over again in this conference No. 7 seeds beating No. 2 seeds, No. 6s beating No. 3s. Ultimately, you just have to wrestle. You have to be ready to wrestle."

In that first round, Ohio State had wins from all but two of its wrestlers – Jordan Decatur at 133 pounds, who was scratched prior to the start of his first match and forfeited and Rocky Jordan, who lost a 3-2 decision to No. 7 seed Max Lyon of Purdue.

"Jordan Decatur is, unfortunately, a scratch for the 2021 Big Ten championships and is hoping for a wild card selection to the NCAA tournament," Ohio State shared on social media just prior to the start of the weekend. "We will not be replacing Jordan with another Buckeye because doing so would make him ineligible for a wild card selection."

The Buckeyes claimed victories everywhere else, headlined by dominant performances by No. 3 seed Malik Heinselman at 125 pounds and No. 8 Tate Orndorff at heavyweight, along with upset victories for the ninth-seeded duo of Elijah Cleary at 157 pounds and Gavin Hoffman at 197 pounds. Given the circumstances, Ohio State would have been hard-pressed to draw up a better start. The struggles for Jordan served as a continuation of a rocky season in general, which was not lost on

the sophomore.

"For myself, I think I've kind of been up and down this year," Jordan said. "Definitely not the performances I've wanted to have. Overall, I would say that I'm not really upset with myself, just that I know I can do better. I know I can wrestle better. I don't think I've been wrestling my best."

Just as soon as the Buckeyes surged, they fell once again. In the second round, that momentum was rapidly halted with losses from No. 7 Dylan D'Emilio at 141 pounds, Cleary, No. 6 Kaleb Romero at 174 pounds, Hoffman and Orndorff. Heinselman, 149-pound top-seed Sammy Sasso and No. 3 Ethan Smith at 165 all advanced to the semifinals later that evening unscathed, but the damage was done. Trailing teams with championship contenders at nearly every weight such as Iowa (eight semifinalists) and others with solid opportunities in more spots than Ohio State such as Michigan (five) and Penn State (four), the Buckeyes were essentially eliminated from title contention before the first day of the event ended.

Day two didn't go much better for Ohio State. Heinselman suffered a 10-0 defeat against Purdue's Devin Schroder in the semifinals but bounced back to beat Penn State's Robert Howard in the consolation bracket before losing to Rayvon Foley of Michigan State in the third-place bout, sending the Buckeye home with a fourth-place finish. Smith won his semifinal bout against Nebraska's Peyton Robb but finished as the runner-up to Iowa's Alex Marinelli, one of four individual titles for the conference champions, along with Spencer Lee at 125 pounds, Jaydin Eierman at 141 pounds and Michael Kemerer at 174 pounds.

In the consolation bouts, Romero managed to work his way into a fifth-place finish with a victory over Indiana's Donnell Washington, but he was unable to avenge a pair of regular-season losses, falling to Carter Starocci of Penn State in the second round and Michigan's Logan Massa in the consolation semifinals.

Orndorff couldn't quite get the job done against Nebraska's Christian Lance in the heavyweight fifth-place bout, sending the Buckeye to sixth place, still good enough for an automatic qualification to the NCAA championships. Cleary and D'Emilio both took ninth place, and Jordan claimed 10th in his weight class.

The bright spot of the event came, as expected, from Sasso. After a dominant 9-0 campaign that never saw the Pennsylvania native truly challenged, Sasso ripped through the 149-pound weight class after his first-round bye, taking a 9-1 major decision over ninth-seeded Peyton Omania of Michigan State, a 5-0 decision over fifth-seeded Kanen Storr of Michigan and a 5-2 decision against seventh-seeded Ridge Lovett of Nebraska to claim his first Big Ten crown.

For Sasso, it was both an opportunity to win in his home state and a chance to make up for his finals loss to Iowa's Pat Lugo. "It feels good," Sasso said. "I'm just thankful for the opportunity to compete. It doesn't really matter where we're at. It's just the opportunity that we weren't positive we were going to have this year. Things didn't go my way in the finals last year. Now I get a redo, I'm gonna make

2021 Big Ten Wrestling Championships

Team Scores

1. Iowa	159½
2. Penn State	124
3. Nebraska	105½
4. Michigan	92
5. Minnesota	77½
6. Purdue	76
7. Northwestern	74
8. Michigan State	73½
9. Ohio State	69½
10. Rutgers	52
11. Illinois	32
12. Wisconsin	30½
13. Indiana	22
14. Maryland	2

Individual Champions

125 pounds:	(1) Spencer Lee, Iowa
133:	(1) Roman Bravo-Young, Penn State
141:	(1) Jaydin Eierman, Iowa
149:	(1) Sammy Sasso, Ohio State
157:	(1) Ryan Deakin, Northwestern
165:	(1) Alex Marinelli, Iowa
174:	(1) Michael Kemerer, Iowa
184:	(1) Aaron Brooks, Penn State
197:	(2) Myles Amine, Michigan
HWT:	(1) Gable Stevenson, Minnesota

the most of it."

After his victory, Sasso took the opportunity to shout out his teammates and to make a recruiting pitch for the Buckeyes.

"I love this program and I love everybody in it," said Sasso after his win. "I'm going to keep trying to do my best to start a new legacy here Ohio State. I want to start winning team titles, and I want to try and get young savages from high school to come be a part of this, because we have something special here at Ohio State."

Looking Ahead To NCAA Championships

Because the next print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin won't be published until after the NCAA championships, scheduled for March 18-20, now is a good time to take a look at whom Ohio State will expect to send to the Enterprise Center in St. Louis and a good time to mention that BuckeyeSports.com will have complete, up-to-date coverage of the NCAA championships available for all BSB subscribers.

Entering the Big Ten championships, Ryan told media that he expected his team to send 10 members to the NCAA championships, as it has become accustomed to in recent years.

"Practice has been going really well," Ryan said. "It's something that we continue to focus on. We're going to have our chances. The guys that finish their shots late are likely to move forward in the tournament. We like our spots. We like our draws. There's no reason – if Ohio State wrestling shows up and competes the way each guy can, I don't think anybody has to wrestle out of their mind – that all 10 shouldn't qualify for the national tournament. We're going to need all 10 guys if we're going to get a trophy this year."

Coming out of the conference tournament, sending a full roster to the NCAA championships looks extremely unlikely right now. At-large bids won't be announced until after BSB goes to print, which means that potential placement at 133, 141, 157, 184 and 197 is still up in the air for the Buckeyes without automatic qualification, but with five automatic qualifiers, it's not too difficult to prognosticate where Ohio State will likely be standing entering the final event of the season.

That 10-man dream of Ryan's all but came to an end when Decatur missed the Big Ten championships and Hoffman missed on a placement. Ohio State hasn't made clear what held Decatur out over the weekend, though he's struggled with making weight for much of the season, which could have played a role. An at-large bid is still a possibility for both as

top-10 seeds from the best conference in wrestling, but neither did themselves any favors with this performance.

To see D'Emilio, Cleary and Jordan all selected as at-large wrestlers wouldn't be a significant surprise, given that all three managed at least one win, but similar to Decatur and Hoffman, this wasn't the kind of Big Ten championship needed to make that determination any easier for the committee. To complicate matters further, Jordan was the only wrestler of the group who entered the weekend ranked, and he had the worst showing of the bunch. Ohio State can likely expect at least eight wrestlers to qualify nationally, but anything past that will take some judgments based heavily around strength of schedule above production.

As for those who have qualified automatically, Sasso will again lead the group. He entered the weekend as the No. 2 wrestler in the nation at 149 pounds behind North Carolina's Austin O'Connor, who won the ACC crown, but Sasso certainly has a claim to the top seed with his new title. Smith was No. 10 nationally and will see his stock rise after overperforming his seed, while Heinselman, who entered the weekend at No. 9, is expected to stay right around that range. The loss to Foley is tough, as the Spartan sat behind him in the polls at No. 16, as did Schroder at No. 17.

Orndorff has floated around the low teens at heavyweight all season and will check in at that same area in the national bracket, while Romero will likely be a bit under-seeded, thanks to late-season hang-ups with injury and COVID that slowed what had been an excellent start to his campaign.

"Kaleb has been really good, but he's been slowed by some injuries and by some COVID issues," Ryan said. "But I feel really good about him."

Without the chance to contend seriously for the national title, this season's NCAA championships may be more about growth and individual achievement for the Buckeyes. Deep runs for Smith, Heinselman and Romero along with a title for Sasso and positive performances from everyone else would give Ohio State momentum entering 2021-22, when it will finally have a fully healthy Carson Kharchla, add one of the nation's top recruiting classes and return just about every member of its roster. Cleary is the lone senior in the lineup.

"The end of the year is always a special time," Ryan said. "The ones that step up are the ones that, quite frankly, have remembered that."

Wolverines, Wildcats Honor George Jewett

Michigan and Northwestern will begin playing for the George Jewett Trophy, a new football rivalry trophy honoring the first Black player in Big Ten history. George Jewett competed for both teams in the 1890s.

The Jewett Trophy becomes the first rivalry trophy in the Football Bowl Subdivision named in honor of a Black player. Jewett played fullback and halfback at Michigan in 1890 and 1892 then played two more seasons for Northwestern while completing his medical degree. He was the Wolverines' leading scorer, rusher and kicker and starred on defense.

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

"This is a historic moment in major-college football history," Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel said. "We are proud to partner with our peer institution, Northwestern, to recognize and honor an African-American pioneer in George Jewett. George achieved at a high level as an athlete and doctor. His hard work and effort led to success not only for himself, but for those who would follow a similar path after him.

"His excellence at two Big Ten institutions as a student, athlete and citizen is something we want our current student-athletes to aspire to during their collegiate experience. The George Jewett Trophy will become a proud celebration of the importance of diversity on our teams, campuses, and in our society."

The first showdown for the Jewett Trophy will take place at Michigan Stadium on Oct. 23. The George Jewett Trophy represents the Big Ten's 16th rivalry game trophy, including the third for Michigan (Little Brown Jug with Minnesota, Paul Bunyan Trophy with Michigan State) and second for Northwestern (Land of Lincoln Trophy with Illinois). Overall, the Wolverines lead the all-time series with the Wildcats 58-15-2 and have won the past six meetings.

Several rivalry games featuring programs in the Football Championship Subdivision are named for Black players, and now the FBS has one.

"We are proud that the University of Michigan and Northwestern University will honor Dr. Jewett's extraordinary humanity, courage, intelligence, success and legacy with the first rivalry game trophy featuring an African-American football player in FBS and Big Ten history," Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren said. "Dr. Jewett's dedication and perseverance to achieve excellence in every area of his life are an inspiration to every man and woman and provide evidence that with hard work and passion there are no limitations to achieving your dreams. We must continue to work together to honor Dr. Jewett by eliminating racism and hate and creating equality in our society."

Jewett became a doctor in Chicago before returning to Ann Arbor, where he ran several businesses. The well-rounded doctor also coached briefly at both Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State

University) and Olivet College. He died suddenly at age 38 in 1908.

"George Jewett, to have this game, this trophy, I think it's a tremendous addition for his legacy, for the family's legacy, and also for the Big Ten, for college football, for Michigan, for Northwestern, for everybody," said Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh. "I'm extremely excited about it. I can't wait to see what the trophy looks like."

U-M Men, MD Women Clinch B1G Titles

The Michigan men's basketball team clinched the 2020-21 Big Ten men's basketball title with a 69-50 home win against Michigan State on March 4, marking the program's 15th Big Ten men's basketball title and its first since the 2013-2014 season.

Michigan ranks No. 2 in the Associated Press top-25 poll and the USA TODAY coaches poll ahead of the 2021 Big Ten Men's Basketball Tournament, which will be held March 10-14 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. The Wolverines ended the regular season with a 19-3 record, including a 14-3 ledger in Big Ten play, after losing a rematch to the Spartans on March 7.

On the women's side, Maryland clinched an outright 2020-21 Big Ten women's basketball title with its 88-61 victory over Penn State on March 6.

The Terrapins concluded the 2020-21 campaign with a 21-2 record, including an excellent 17-1 mark in a tough Big Ten. Their lone loss was an 88-86 defeat to Ohio State.

The Big Ten women's basketball title is Maryland's sixth in its seven years as a conference member, having earned at least a share of the crown each year but 2018. The Terrapins were outright champions in 2015, 2016 and 2019, with shared titles in 2017 and 2020.

The 2021 Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament will be held March 9-13 at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

B1G Tournaments To Allow Fans

The Big Ten announced it will allow a limited number of fans to attend both the men's and women's Big Ten basketball tournaments.

After approval by the Marion County Health Department, the decisions to allow a limited capacity of 8,000 attendees at the men's tournament and 2,500 at the women's tourney were made jointly by the Big Ten Conference Directors of Athletics and the Council of Presidents and Chancellors in consultation with the conference office.

Both tournaments will use mobile tickets only, and stadium gates will open one hour prior to each session of the tournament to accommodate early arriving fans.

Fans attending either tournament are encouraged to become familiar with health and safety procedures at either Lucas Oil Stadium or Bankers Life Fieldhouse. Both venues have instituted numerous health and safety procedures for all events, including requirements for fans and stadium employees on game days. These procedures were designed to meet local and CDC guidelines to help limit the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the health and safety of student-athletes, coaches, officials, fans and campus communities, according to the conference.

For more details on the health and safety protocols and additional details on ticket sales for the men's tournament, visit bigten.org/mbbt. And visit bigten.org/wbbt for the same info on the women's tourney.

Husker Leading Scorer Leaves Program

Teddy Allen, Nebraska's leading scorer, abruptly left the Husker men's basketball team. Allen, who set the Pinnacle Bank Arena scoring record less than a week before his exit, had been bothered by a wrist issue, according to head coach Fred Hoiberg.

"After a lot of thought over the last few days, I have made the decision to focus on getting fully healthy in preparation for the next step in my basketball journey," Allen said. "I will continue to stay at Nebraska for the spring semester and work toward graduation. I am looking forward to what the future holds, as I explore my options."

Allen began his collegiate career at West Virginia, where he played one season before transferring to Wichita State in 2018. He sat out the following season due to NCAA transfer rules and never played a game for the Shockers. He was kicked off the team in June 2019 after he was arrested in connection with a disturbance with his girlfriend.

Allen moved on to Western Nebraska Community College, where he was the junior college scoring leader nationally in 2019-20 before joining the Cornhuskers.

In his only season in Lincoln, Allen averaged 16.4 points per game to lead the Huskers. He also scored a Pinnacle Bank Arena-record 41 points in an 86-83 loss to Penn State on Feb. 23. Then Allen was held to seven points in 20 minutes in an 86-70 loss at Illinois on Feb. 25, and his coach mentioned the injury after the game.

He was held out of the starting lineup for the home game against Minnesota on Feb. 27 and was held scoreless in 10 minutes in the 78-74 win.

Allen starred as a high school player at Boys Town, the Omaha-area home for troubled youth, and his arrival in Lincoln was welcomed with open arms by Husker fans.

"I would like to thank Coach Hoiberg and his coaching staff for allowing me to come back to Nebraska and have the opportunity to play basketball in the best conference in the country," Allen said. "I appreciate the support I've received from everyone in the program. I am thankful for the love I have received from my teammates and the relationships we have built over the last year."

In his 22 games at Nebraska, Allen scored 20 or more points eight times.

"I enjoyed the opportunity to coach Teddy over the past year," Hoiberg said. "We will support him as he finishes the spring semester and wish him nothing but the best going forward."

U-M LB Transfers To Notre Dame

Former Michigan linebacker Adam Shibley announced his decision to transfer to Notre Dame. The former walk-on from Cleveland became a key member of the Michigan defense following an injury to starter Cam McGrone.

Shibley was expected to compete for a starting job with McGrone headed to the NFL, but he and fellow linebacker Ben

VanSumeran entered the transfer portal after the hiring of defensive coordinator Mike Macdonald, who runs a 3-4 defense. VanSumeran also joined a rival of the Wolverines in Michigan State.

Shibley, a three-time Big Ten All-Academic honoree, served primarily as a special teams performer prior to 2020. In his first opportunity with more snaps at linebacker, he posted seven tackles and one TFL against the Spartans. Later in the season, he recorded eight tackles (five solo) and two TFL at Rutgers before a six-tackle showing against Penn State.

The 6-1, 225-pound linebacker arrived in Ann Arbor as a walk-on in 2017 but eventually earned a scholarship. Shibley played at Cleveland St. Ignatius with Notre Dame All-America offensive tackle Liam Eichenberg, who is the older brother of Ohio State linebacker Tommy Eichenberg.

Former Husker QB Transfers To Louisville

Former Nebraska quarterback Luke McCaffrey announced he will transfer to Louisville after he started two games and played in seven for the Cornhuskers as a redshirt freshman in 2020.

McCaffrey split time with Adrian Martinez, throwing for 466 yards with one touchdown to six interceptions on 48-of-76 passing and rushing for 364 yards and three scores. He earned his first start against Penn State on Nov. 14, where he led the Huskers to a 30-23 win, passing for 152 yards and one score and rushing for 67 yards and a touchdown.

In his next start against Illinois, McCaffrey completed 15 of 26 passes for 134 yards with three interceptions, adding 122 rushing yards and two scores in a 41-23 loss. He served as Martinez's backup for the rest of the season, and he decided to enter the transfer portal Jan. 26.

"After struggling with this decision for weeks, I have decided to enter the transfer portal and explore my options," McCaffrey posted to Twitter. "I am thankful for the support Nebraska fans have shown me. I have so much love for my coaches and teammates from my time here. I am excited for the future."

McCaffrey was one of Nebraska's top prospects, coming out of Littleton (Colo.) Valor Christian School as the No. 13 athlete and No. 257 overall recruit nationally in the 2019 class.

He enters a crowded quarterback room at Louisville, where Malik Cunningham is expected to return as the starter. Evan Conley saw some time in 2020, and ex-Georgia Southern quarterback Shai Werts also joined the Cardinals as a transfer this offseason.

Bowman To Rejoin Badgers In June

Lorne Bowman is expected to return to the Wisconsin men's basketball team in June when it begins preseason workouts for the 2021-22 season.

Bowman, a freshman point guard, has been on an indefinite leave from the program since October to "tend to a personal family matter," according to a school statement.

Bowman's father, Lorne Bowman Sr., shared some positive news about his son while replying to a Twitter account that follows Wisconsin recruits.

"What's up guys! Thank you for all the

Long Offseason Leads To OSU's Dominant Start

By WYATT CROSER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It was all the way back on Jan. 17, 2020, that former Buckeye Jen Flynn Oldenburg was announced as the new head coach for Ohio State women's volleyball, taking over for Geoff Carlston, who had coached the Buckeyes for 12 seasons starting in 2008.

"I am honored and humbled to accept such an important role during such an exciting time for the program," Oldenburg said at the time. "With the overwhelming support I have felt from the administration from the second I returned to campus along with the love that has been shared from the alumni, I cannot wait to get started with this group of talented young women to lead them back to the national stage."

From that initial statement, there were two time frames that ended up being drastically different than anyone could have expected.

First, the amount of time it would take for Oldenburg "to get started with this group." On Jan. 17, 2020, that seemed to be around the corner with the women's volleyball team expected to play in the fall just like any other year.

Then COVID-19 happened, forcing the initial season to be canceled and forcing the team to get ready in the fall for a season that might not happen.

Eventually, the schedule was remade and set for the start of 2021, but that period of unknown made it a difficult experience for the entire group.

"The biggest challenge of this season was just preparing for it," Oldenburg said on Jan. 27. "The fall, they're ready for matches, and then the season gets canceled. How do you prepare each week and get their minds in a place that they're training for something? And now that it's here, I think a lot of things are different in terms of the schedule. Even though we had one in place, it's going to change every day. So I think the biggest message we're sending to the team is just being flexible and adaptable. Whether they're comfortable or not doing it, they're buying into it because it gives us an opportunity to play."

Oldenburg said that not being able to play in the fall was a challenge for her players, but it was a challenge made easier once the team was about to start practices, and it was made even easier than that once they were actually able to open their season on Jan. 22, a whopping 371 days after Oldenburg was hired.

"It's a big deal. I think the hardest part of the shutdown is just not being together and not really having a plan and knowing when we were going to be able to train again," Oldenburg said. "They're elite athletes that want to be playing their sport, and that goes across all sports on campus, and to get back

and start training again was awesome. I think the fall was good for us, but they're super competitive. They don't want to see the same faces across the net all the time, so to get back to playing matches and see other people and compete for things that matter like those match moments, it's a really big deal.

"I think that's a big reason why a lot of these schools, and especially ours, pushed for the opportunity to play and get some of these matches in. They know how much it means and how important it is to our student-athletes."

The second time frame that has surprised is Oldenburg's pace in "leading them back to the national stage."

Ohio State has played 12 times this season, the first 12 games in Oldenburg's head coaching career.

The Buckeyes were 12-0 in those games, including a pair of wins over Penn State, which was ranked No. 10 when Ohio State swept it 3-0 on March 3. It was the first time the Buckeyes had executed a series sweep over the Nittany Lions since 2001.

But coming into the season, the expectations were not at the level of play Ohio State is currently reaching. Sophomore outside hitter Jenaisya Moore said on Jan. 27 that she was simply hoping to finish as one of the better teams in the conference.

"I definitely want to be in the top half," Moore said. "I feel like for many years, we've been considered the underdogs, and I just want to prove everybody wrong. That's my biggest goal, just to finish top half."

Ohio State has certainly been the underdogs in recent seasons. After a run of eight straight years with a winning record from 2009-16, Carlston's last three teams went 15-16 in 2017, 12-20 in 2018 and 15-17 in 2019.

Even in Carlston's best seasons – a 13-7 conference record in 2012 and three 12-8 records in 2009, 2014 and 2015 – the best Ohio State ever finished in the extremely difficult Big Ten was fourth.

After the fast start, Ohio State sat atop the Big Ten and No. 19 in the AVCA coaches' poll with the 12-0 record. The undefeated record was even more impressive considering the whole schedule consists of in-conference opponents. Only Wisconsin (10-0), the No. 1 team in the country, also remained undefeated on the year in the Big Ten.

The 12-win start to the season would have been impressive for any Ohio State team to accomplish.

For Oldenburg to do it in year one, in a schedule against only Big Ten opponents, is something else entirely.

Moore believes that the 371 days between her hiring and the team's first game may have ultimately been to the benefit of this group.

"I definitely think this is a blessing in disguise for our team," Moore said. "Having a whole new coaching staff, I've never experienced something like that, and I think players in the past, we've never experienced something like that. For Jen and her staff to come in and just take charge, it doesn't feel any different."

"I feel great about our coaching staff and our connections that we have on and off the court. It's just the mentality to go after it every single day, and I love that about our team."

The undefeated stretch to begin the season seemed ready to end before it even started in Ohio State's first two matches of the year against Maryland at the Covelli Center.

In the season opener, the Buckeyes went down two sets to one before winning the final two sets 25-15 and 15-13 to sneak away with the victory.

In round two against the Terrapins the next day, Maryland opened with a 1-0 set lead, then Ohio State took the next two to take an advantage heading into the fourth set. But the Terrapins again battled back, taking that set 26-24 and forcing another five-set matchup, which the Buckeyes again won, this time 15-12.

"We're trying to figure it out, and Maryland certainly has had some good moments," Oldenburg said. "We had some great moments and then we had some moments that we were beating ourselves. But we just joked that we've been waiting so long for volleyball, we wanted to give more to the fans, and so why not just go five sets both nights because everybody has just been waiting a long time."

Matchups on the court are not the only battles Ohio State has faced this season.

Immediately after the wins over Maryland, the Buckeyes' next two scheduled games against Penn State on Jan. 26 and Jan. 31 were postponed and moved to Feb. 17 and March 3.

More recently, the March 5-6 games against No. 5 Minnesota were also postponed "due to COVID issues within the Minnesota program."

Despite the shifting in the schedule, Moore said the team is trying to keep a short-term memory and only deal with what it can control.

"Jen always says this, a lot. She says: 'Just live in the moment, focus on the now,'" Moore said. "I think when you focus too much on the future, you get yourself caught up in this circle, and it's like 'OK, what if this happens, what if this happens?' But nothing is determined unless it actually happens, so I'm just living in the moment, focusing on the now instead of the future."

As far as following the COVID protocols set by the Big Ten, Oldenburg is willing to do whatever it takes to play volleyball this season.

"To me, it's just following the rules," the coach said. "It seems I'm pretty square that I just follow the rules, but our administration tells us to do something, I'm going to do it because that gives us an opportunity to play. I think sometimes we look at these protocols and are like 'Wow, that doesn't make sense. I live with that person, why do I have to wear a mask around them when I'm in the gym?' Well, because we said so. Those are the rules, and so how we're managing it is just following what we're being told and then having the

opportunity to play is the advantage there.

"No one's ever played in a pandemic, so we're all figuring it out as we go, and I'm thankful for our leadership here on campus, and just following their lead is an easy thing to do."

Another "blessing in disguise," as Moore said about the extended offseason, is the bubbles that players are forced to live in to not have extra exposure to the coronavirus.

She said that has allowed her and her teammates to remain focused on the season without having to worry about potential outside distractions.

"Our circle is literally limited to our roommates," Moore said. "I think it's definitely different. I'm rooming with two gymnasts so they're in season too, and just bouncing our ideas and what we go through every single day off of each other, you get to know people more. You build stronger connections with people you didn't even think you would, and I definitely think it has helped just to keep everyone focused a little bit. You're not too distracted on your social life. You want to go out, you want to hang out with friends, but you want to lock in at the same time, and I think that's helped a lot with locking in and focusing on our actions outside. You have to stay safe."

With the season moved to the spring, there can be a future concern with fatigue now that there's the potential for two seasons in the same calendar year if women's volleyball goes back to its typical spot as a fall sport.

Oldenburg said this is not the time to worry about those concerns, following what she told her players by living in the moment and focusing on what is ahead for her team this spring.

"We're just going to grind and get through it because with the Big Ten being as strong as it is, you can't hold back, and so we have to go full force right now and see what we have," Oldenburg said. "It's exciting for them to get back on the court, and we're going to use May, June, July to recover and then get back to it. Honestly, we're taking it day by day, and we know each day's going to be a grind, so we're getting after it."

Ohio State still has games left on the schedule against Nebraska and Purdue, who rank No. 4 and 11 in the country, respectively, as well as the postponed series against the No. 5 Gophers that is likely to be rescheduled.

But nothing can take away from this undefeated opening stretch that Oldenburg and Co. have created with a roster that consists of mostly underclassmen and a leader who has returned to her alma mater without any experience as a head coach.

Oldenburg said that the key for her, starting back in the offseason, was to keep morale high by being a calming presence for the team she was attempting to build up after a string of difficult seasons.

"I think for us, it's just keeping things light and loose," Oldenburg said. "I laugh a lot, and I think that's going to be big for them. That's why my style, my philosophy is keeping it light. I crack jokes all the time. When they would ask me questions, especially during the shutdown over the summer, I'd pull out a Magic 8-Ball. I'm sure they hate it now when I pull that out, because we just don't know, and so they'd ask questions and I'm like, 'All right, let's ask the Magic 8-Ball.'"

Now, over a year but still only 12 games into Oldenburg's tenure, not even that Magic 8-Ball could have predicted this sort of dramatic turnaround this quickly for the Ohio State women's volleyball program.



Jen Flynn Oldenburg

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Television Filled Void Of Not Being In Stadium

Tell me you're with me on this one.

This past year would have been a lot worse without televised football, basketball and whatever other sport you like to follow.

Sure, it didn't replace going to the stadium, being part of a crowd, experiencing the emotions of tens of thousands of fans. But sitting down in front of the TV on game day or game night gave us something to look forward to during a time when so much was interrupted.

And kudos to the production crews. I wondered, like you probably did too, how this would all work out – televising games from empty or near-empty stadiums.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

The cardboard cutouts were a little hokey, but they worked – served their purpose to cover up the rows and rows of empty seats.

The fake crowd noise pumped into the broadcast usually served its purpose. Sometimes it was out of hand (I remember one Seattle Seahawks game in particular). But it usually worked OK because once you settled into the game, you didn't really notice it as a distraction.

The announcers did a good job, getting better at it as the football season moved along and into basketball season. But most of all, it worked because once a game got going, it was easy to

forget that the stands were empty. The focus was on the game, the players and the emotion they showed in carrying out their work.

For a fan, resuming college sports in the fall even if only by TV could not have been more welcome.

As the season went along, I cared less and less about not being able to go to the stadium, because I appreciated more and more that TV sports provided something to look forward to when so many other activities were out of the question.

On Saturdays it was Ohio State. On Sundays for me, it was the Browns. It didn't hurt that both were winners in 2020.

Absent was that pre- or postgame beer at a tailgate with my buddies. But for myself and a group of four old college roommates now spread out across three states, we bantered via group texts during every OSU game. Sometimes multiple text groups were at work with other friends and family. My guess is that a lot of people replaced the missing high-fives at the stadiums by getting through the football season with text messages after the big plays or the bonehead calls by the officials.

Then came basketball season. Basketball will never be like football at Ohio State. But when you have a coach like Chris Holtmann, and a deep and talented bunch of players like the current team, it's quite enjoyable to watch.

That was especially so this season, with little else to do in the way of live entertainment to get through the winter of COVID. If you're like me, you pretty much ran through your list of movies by the end of the year.

This team filled the gap by getting better as

the season moved along, sans a tough stretch near the end. Let's just hope this late-season stumble will right itself in the postseason. Michigan, Iowa and Illinois were all top-10 opponents. But in both the Michigan and Illinois games, OSU was right there – stumbling with a closing problem. I'm not sure why. This was out of character. Hopefully, Holtmann will find the right buttons to push and give us multiple weeks of NCAA Tournament action.

Just like football in the fall, basketball during the winter filled the entertainment gaps – even if it was just on TV. I've hardly missed an OSU basketball game. And, I've watched more Cleveland Cavaliers games than at any point since LeBron James left town for the second time.

I say all this now because the college basketball season is coming to a close. Once a huge baseball fan (when the games lasted closer to two hours), I just don't have the patience to sit down in front of the TV for three- and four-hour baseball games moving at a snail's pace. So it's with appreciation that I say thank you to all those great football and basketball games on TV. Now the weather is about to break to renew another golf season, the ultimate social-distancing sport if your group is like my regular crew – a lot of spray hitters who walk instead of ride.

And thank goodness, crossing my fingers here, it looks like we're going to get back to near-normal fairly soon. I'm optimistic we will be back in packed stadiums this fall. But again, thanks to two great seasons of sports on TV.

Buckeye Basketeers

Speaking of Buckeye basketball and the

pros, I was pleasantly surprised to see how well Buckeye rookie Jae'Sean Tate is doing with the Houston Rockets.

The NBA is a league where if you're not a top-10 pick, odds are you won't see much playing time early in your career. If you're a second-round pick, you probably won't make it.

But Tate, who wasn't even drafted, has been on the floor a lot lately, averaging 27 minutes a game heading into the all-star break, with a very nice stat line of 9.9 points, 5.3 rebounds and 1.7 assists a game. His set of numbers don't look like an accident. He's playing solid basketball for the Rockets.

Tate is one of four Buckeyes active in the league this season. The others are:

- Utah point guard Mike Conley, averaging 16.1 points and 5.7 assists a game in his second season at Utah after playing 12 seasons for Memphis. Conley has now played in 864 NBA games. One of the benefits of the one-and-done college careers like that of Conley is that he is in his 14th NBA season yet just 33 years old. He was the fourth player chosen in the 2007 draft.

- Guard D'Angelo Russell is averaging 19.3 points a game for Minnesota, his fourth team in a six-year NBA career. Russell spent two seasons with the Los Angeles Lakers and two with the Brooklyn Nets before splitting last season between Golden State and Minnesota. Russell was the second pick overall in the 2015 draft.

- Keita Bates-Diop has gotten on the floor for 13 games this season in San Antonio, averaging 2.6 points a game. A second-round pick by Minnesota in 2018, Bates-Diop has now played in 87 NBA games for Minnesota, Denver and San Antonio.

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Hardwood Brigade Limping To The Finish Line

It wasn't all that long ago – mid-February for you sticklers – that the Ohio State basketball team looked like it was ready to take its place among the best in the nation.

The Buckeyes had just beaten Penn State to move to 18-4, a seventh straight win and the third double-digit victory in the previous five games. Ohio State was making people stand up and take notice that it would be a dangerous team when the calendar changed to March.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Whatever goodwill was built up getting to that point seems to have evaporated in the face of four consecutive losses – three in heartbreaking fashion after OSU held a lead in the second half. When games have gotten down to crunch time, Ohio State has spit the bit. Noted philosopher Alec Baldwin once famously uttered “A-B-C, Always Be Closing. Always Be Closing. A-I-D-A. Attention, Interest, Decision, Action. A-I-D-A.”

The Buckeyes have been lacking in all those things lately.

OSU looked to be close to a lock for a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament, but the way things have gone recently it may be fortunate to hang on to a No. 2 seed. And it's all because of an inability to close games.

The Buckeyes missed their final 10 shots and didn't score a point in the final 3:48 of the contest against Illinois, falling 73-68 and dropping to 18-8 for the season. Three of the four losses have been to top-10 teams, so maybe there's a silver lining in that fact. OSU is playing well against the big boys, just not well enough.

That's not going to cut it in the one-and-done setting of the NCAA Tournament. Playing well but not well enough isn't an option because you'll be going home after a loss.

“I think we just have to focus on the task at hand, at growing,” OSU coach Chris Holtmann said on the mental challenge following the loss. “We're going to have a really big-time challenge in our first game in the Big Ten tournament. I think you just take some of the positives that came out of today – and as disappointed as these guys are, we did have some positives – and move forward.”

The Buckeyes decision making was better against Illinois than it was in a blowout loss to Iowa just about a week earlier, but the actions were just as fruitless.

As much as yours truly loves Duane Washington, it's maddening to see him not recognize that he can just as easily shoot his team out of a game as he can shoot them to victory.

Washington finished with 15 points, but he put up a timid floater in the lane in the final couple of sequences and couldn't drain an open three-pointer moments later.

On the occasions he did pass, he was late giving the ball up, allowing the Illini defense to recover and make a stop.

“Yeah, he forced a couple,” OSU coach Chris Holtmann said of Washington after the

loss. “I think he had a couple clean ones, but he's got to play with more poise in those situations, and he will. He will. I thought he played pretty poised throughout the game. We have to help him with that, and he's got to make better decisions late.”

Before you think this is an unjustified rain-storm on Washington or Ohio State's season, let it be known that what the Buckeyes have done is nothing short of remarkable.

OSU has won 18 games, a number of them against teams ranked among the nation's top 40 (according to the NET rankings), and Holtmann has shown once again that he can coach a team that lacks a true superstar to a big season. E.J. Liddell is probably the closest thing the Buckeyes have to a household name, but he disappeared for long stretches against the Illini, including a weak fallaway jumper in the closing moments that clanged harmlessly off the front of the rim.

Big-time stars make those plays.

The Buckeyes split with Illinois and Iowa, both ranked in the NET top 10, and beat Wisconsin (25), Maryland (32), Rutgers (37) and UCLA (41). Seven road wins in this day and age is nothing to sneeze at, and that season-long play should ultimately be what saves Ohio State from sinking like a stone on Selection Sunday. Sure, the now isn't great, but the not-too-distant past was very good. And if the committee is true to form, it will look at the entire body of work when seeding the Buckeyes.

Ohio State will have a chance at redemption in the league tournament as its quarterfinal game will be against the winner of Minnesota/Northwestern. The Buckeyes lost badly at Minnesota and split with the Wildcats, but having a chance to get the ship righted against teams that are supposed to be weak sisters is welcome. Should Ohio State win, it would face Purdue, a team it lost to twice by a total of nine points. But the beauty of the league tournament is that everyone starts at zero and has a chance to advance. So if Ohio State can get its late-game legs back and consistently make better decisions, it could be a surprise team.

In terms of the national landscape, it doesn't hurt that the Big Ten is far and away the toughest conference in America this season.

That statement sounds a bit strange when talking about something besides football, but this has been a stellar season for Big Ten hoops squads. Six of them rank in the NET top 25, and both Michigan and Illinois should hold No. 1 seeds when the NCAA Tournament bracket is unveiled on March 14.

Former Buck Setting Records

Given the inconsistency with the Buckeyes ground game in 2020, it wouldn't be surprising to find people wondering what could have been had Brian Snead stayed at Ohio State.

A touted prep performer from Florida, Snead arrived on campus with a lot of hype and a crowded backfield – netting just 37 yards on 11 carries in his 2018 freshman campaign. Many thought he could be next in line after Mike Weber and J.K. Dobbins, but he ran into some off-field problems and was dismissed from the team and, subsequently, the school.

He surfaced at Iowa Western Community College and signed with Austin Peay, an FCS school that plays in the Ohio Valley Conference. He was still a big name but an under-the-radar big name – at least until Feb. 28, when he put his name in the record book with his performance against Tennessee State. Snead scored three touchdowns on his first three carries as a Governor, all in the first quarter. His scoring runs covered 186 yards, and he finished the quarter with an FCS-record of 204 rushing yards. Only nine players in school history had eclipsed 200 yards in a game. Snead did it in 15 minutes.

Oh, Austin Peay won the game 27-20, which is important as it might have lessened the impact of Snead's performance.

Governors coach Scotty Walden had a feeling Snead might have a solid game after showing flashes in the team's opening win over Tennessee Tech on Feb. 21, but nowhere near as well as he ended up doing.

“When we looked at the film (of the first game) he missed so many opportunities,” Walden said. “I don't think I've seen a guy in a long time who came back the next week with the intention to correct those mistakes the way he did. It's not a surprise, what he did today. He bought into punching vertical, getting his shoulder pads downhill and being a one-cut guy. He bought into it and trusted it.”

Snead finished with 227 yards on 23 carries, an eye-popping 9.9 YPC. His first scoring run went 75 yards, a simple inside zone run off the right guard's shoulder. He made one juke and was gone. The second, a 67-yarder, appeared to be the same call, but the defense got penetration and forced Snead to bounce it outside. He did that, cut inside a diving linebacker and was gone up the sideline. Two carries, two scores.

The final touchdown had Snead run a stretch play to the left, which he cut upfield a little earlier than expected after the defense drifted to the sideline. There was a hole, he burst through it, and 44 yards later, he was in the end zone. Three scores, untouched.

“It means a lot,” Snead said after the game. “It took a lot to get me here. I'm grateful for the opportunity to show people what I can do on and off the field as a player and a person.”

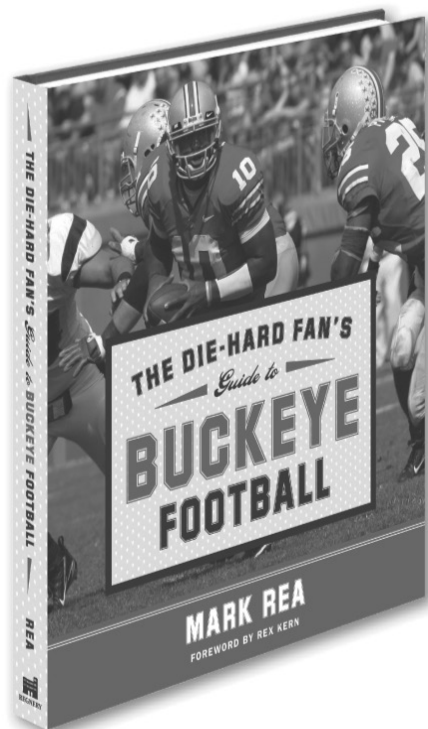
Snead isn't quite the violent cutback runner Trey Sermon showed himself to be in the final portion of the season for Ohio State, but his ability to turn the corner and make guys miss in space would have been a valuable weapon for the Buckeyes in 2020.

Whatever the rest of the season holds for Snead, it appears that he has indeed made the most of his second chance.

And that is quite often what sports is all about.

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No Offense, But Finding Starting QB Is Priority

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

It will take a long time for me to get over the vision of the Alabama offense cutting through the Ohio State defense like the proverbial warm knife through butter, especially the fleet Tide receivers slicing through the Buckeye secondary, with poor linebacker Tuf Borland chasing from behind (as I have said many times, not his fault). In fact, it occurred to me that I had become so obsessed with the defense and the modest coaching staff changes to help try to correct the deficiencies that I have kind of forgotten about the Buckeye offense, which has issues of its own.

For Buckeye fans to assume that Ohio State will have the type of prolific offense to which they have become accustomed – well, you know what they say happens when you “assume.” (As humorist and former U.S. Senator Al Franken would say, “You make an ass out of Uma Thurman.”)

Foremost, there is the matter of finding a quarterback. The pool to choose from is talented, but experience is woefully lacking.

Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud both have a season at Ohio State under their belts but saw minimal action in the COVID-shortened 2020 campaign. Neither has thrown a pass in college. In fact, they really aren’t that much ahead of the incoming and highly decorated Kyle McCord.

Going into battle with an untested quarterback is not unprecedented for Ohio State. In fact, the last time the Buckeyes opened the season with a freshman under center, they won the national championship. That was J.T. Barrett in 2014. But that was not by design. Defending two-time Silver Football winner Braxton Miller went down with a shoulder injury just days before the season opener.

It would have been nice if Stroud and Miller had seen a little more action in 2020. I don’t know how many times I found myself yelling at Ryan Day via the television, to get Justin Fields out of there and get his young pups in. At the time, I suspect Day figured he would have upcoming opportunities to get his freshmen in, with games against Maryland and Illinois on the slate, but those games were canceled. Still, there were opportunities in games with Nebraska, Rutgers and Michigan State, but Day seemed intent on leaving Fields in longer than necessary, not only denying his younger QBs desperately needed game experience but exposing Fields to unnecessary injury.

Very rarely have I been critical of Day, but getting his starting quarterback out of the game and the inexperienced guys in is one of the few things I quibble about, and that dates to the time when Urban Meyer was still head coach.

The problem with fielding an inexperienced quarterback in 2021 is exacerbated by the fact that the running back position is unsettled as well. It would be a lot easier to break in a new field general if he were lining up with an Eddie George or Ezekiel Elliott to ease the load. Think back to that first year with Barrett. He – and later the also inexperienced Cardale Jones – had the benefit of Elliott, who ran for 1,878 yards and a 6.9-yard per carry average to help ease the burden.

As with the QBs, there is plenty of talent in the running backs room.

However, Master Teague has yet to prove he can be the go-to back, and Marcus Crowley, Steele Chambers and Miyan Williams – who opened some eyes in his debut 2020 season – have even less of a track record than Teague. Add to the mix in an already crowded room two highly touted freshmen in TreVeyon Henderson and Evan Pryor, who are just that

– highly touted freshmen.

Is one of them the next Maurice Clarett or J.K. Dobbins, ready to rush for 1,000 yards as a freshman, or are they just two more players who will be fighting for reps as the backfield rebuilds in 2021?

You can look at the offensive line as either three-fifths full or two-fifths empty. The tackles are set with Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere back. Harry Miller will move over from guard to the center position, but there is no guarantee that he will man the position at the level of the departed Josh Myers, or Billy Price or Pat Elflein – who also moved from guard and each won the Rimington Award – before him. And while potential starters at the guard spots, including Paris Johnson and Matthew Jones, have some experience and are also highly touted – well, there is just no guarantee.

I’m not trying to be pessimistic. Not at all. I’m just suggesting that this may be Day’s biggest challenge as far as retooling an offense in his three years as head coach.

One thing Day and whoever winds up under center have going for them is an embarrassment of riches in the wide receivers room, along with Jeremy Ruckert at tight end. There will be no shortage of Buckeyes, led by Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, to throw the ball to.

I had to chuckle when I got to thinking about how far the Ohio State receivers have come since the “clown show” that Meyer inherited when he arrived in 2012. Much of that has to do with receivers coach Brian Hartline, who has proved to be outstanding in all aspects of his job. He has become a lot like Larry Johnson on the defensive line. The blue chips of the blue chips want to come and be tutored by Hartline on their hoped-for way to the NFL. Like Johnson, Hartline has not only recruited them but developed them.

With any luck, Day and the quarterback upon whom he settles can find a way to get the ball to all those outstanding receivers.

They say at Ohio State, “We don’t rebuild, we reload.” On both sides of the ball in 2021, let’s hope that is the case. To automatically pencil the Buckeyes into the playoffs might be a mistake. But if Ohio State makes it there for the third time in three years, that puts Day right up there with Urban, Dabo and Nick Saban.

Tressel Recruiting, Part II

In this space in our last issue, I recounted Jim Tressel’s hastily assembled first recruiting class from 20 years ago, back in 2001.

That class was made up of 17 recruits. Even given that he had less than three weeks to work with after being hired, Tressel could have, no doubt, landed more players in that first year. But the coach admitted that “we feel strongly about the talent pool in this next recruiting class,” and with a limited number of players set to graduate after the 2001 season, Tressel did not want to be left without enough scholarships to pass out.

I went on to list the prep stars within the Buckeye State alone, led by such names as Clarett, Justin Zwick, Bobby Carpenter, A.J. Hawk and the at-the-time less-heralded Troy Smith. My column was kind of like an old-fashioned movie serial cliff-hanger (think Buck Rogers or Flash Gordon) because you

had to wait until this issue to find out what happened with that 2002 bunch.

Tressel ended up with 25 recruits on signing day, assembling a class that was deemed second only to Mack Brown’s Texas haul, the unanimous No. 1 choice in BSB’s annual consensus recruiting poll.

In alphabetical order, here is whom the Buckeyes inked with their position at the time: Carpenter, linebacker; Clarett, running back; R.J. Coleman, tight end; Mike D’Andrea, linebacker; Doug Datish, offensive lineman; T.J. Downing, offensive lineman; Tyler Everett, defensive back; Roy Hall, wide receiver; Hawk, linebacker; Santonio Holmes, wide receiver; Mike Kudla, defensive end; Nick Mangold, offensive lineman; Brandon Mitchell, defensive back; Derek Morris, offensive lineman; Joel Penton, defensive end; Quinn Pitcock, defensive tackle; Jay Richardson, defensive end; Michael Roberts, defensive back; Nate Salley, defensive back; Tim Schafer, defensive end; Rob Sims, offensive lineman; Smith, quarterback/athlete; E.J. Underwood, defensive back; Stan White Jr., linebacker; and Zwick, quarterback.

I’m not sure that I recall a recruiting class that had that many eventual stars, starters and contributors. Interestingly, the biggest non-contributor was Morris, the 6-6, 350-pound lineman out of Huntersville, N.C., who was the highest rated member of the class, ranked No. 24 on the Rivals 100. Morris had problems meeting academic standards and eventually asked for a release and enrolled at N.C. State.

Other Ohio State recruits in the Rivals 100 – which was topped by quarterback Vince Young, who selected Texas – were D’Andrea at No. 29, Clarett at No. 37, Zwick at No. 40, Datish at No. 68 and Pitcock at No. 72.

The class included eight of the top 10 players in the state, according to Bill Kurelic’s Ohio Football Recruiting News. Those included D’Andrea (1), Clarett (2), Zwick (3), Datish (4), Pitcock (5), Hall (7), Schafer (8) and Carpenter 10. In case you are wondering, Smith was 13th, Mangold was 16th and Hawk 21st. The two top-10 players who got away were Reading running back DeShawn Wynn (6), who chose Florida, and Lima Senior linebacker Bryan Andrews (9), who ended up at Wake Forest.

In the BSB Recruiting Wrap-Up following Tressel’s first class, as mentioned, we had looked ahead to the 2002 class. The crop in Ohio was already being compared with the best of recent years. Previous Ohio classes mentioned included the 1994 class which featured Dee Miller, Orlando Pace, Damon Moore, Eric Gohlstein, John Lumpkin and Pepe Pearson for Ohio State and Curtis Enis for Penn State, as well as the 1998 class, which sent Andy Katzenmoyer, Jefferson Kelly, Nick Goings, Gary Berry and Tyson Walter to OSU.

“This is the best class in Ohio in at least 10 years, with all due respect to the Pace and Katzenmoyer classes,” Duane Long of Ohio Future Stars said in February of 2001, looking ahead to the 2002 class. “This is one of the most well-rounded classes to come out of this state. There maybe aren’t a lot of big-time defensive backs, but there are still a lot of great athletes who could go on and play those positions.

“It will be a great year for linebackers and running backs. I would go so far as to say I would be surprised if there aren’t five linebackers from the state of Ohio in the top 20 at that position nationally.

“This has the potential to be a monster class.”

I think that proved to be correct.

Fast-forward to January of 2003. In the two-deep published in BSB for the national championship game with Miami, there were 10 players from the 2002 class already listed, headlined obviously by starter Clarett, who would finish with 1,237 rushing yards that season. Also in the depth chart in a reserve role were offensive linemen Sims and Mangold; defensive end Kudla; linebackers Hawk, D’Andrea and Carpenter; and defensive backs Everett, Salley and Underwood.

This was a class that not only looked good on paper in February but paid immediate dividends as Ohio State won its first national championship in 34 years.

One That Got Away

When back in 2001, Long was looking ahead to the loaded Ohio senior class for 2002, there was another player he mentioned among the in-state standouts for the upcoming recruiting year – 6-0, 260-pound defensive lineman Al Washington, out of Columbus Watterson.

“I liken him to Warren Sapp a little bit,” Long said. “He’s by you with his first step and you have to find him again. He is strong and stays low. He is a very disruptive defensive lineman.”

The report on Washington also noted that he was the son of former Buckeye Alvin Washington and that the younger Washington was an MVP at the Boston College camp.

His performance at the camp must have paid dividends, both for the recruit and the Eagles. Washington would end up at B.C., where he was a three-year starter and four-year letter winner as a defensive tackle (2002-05), before starting a coaching career that ultimately landed him in Columbus in 2019.

Letter Challenge Continues

OK, you can’t stop me now. I am committed to bringing the “Letter to the Editor” back to prominence in BSB. Why is it that you guys and gals could find time to write letters in the past but are too busy to do so now? Things happen at Ohio State that make your blood boil or make you want to jump up and sing praises, and stories and columns are written in BSB that you strongly agree or disagree with. Tell the BSB world about it.

The thing I find interesting is that it is so much easier to write a Letter to the Editor now than it was when those letters were so prolific in BSB. Just bang it out on your computer. No need for a typewriter or writing the letter out in longhand. You don’t even need an envelope or stamp. Just email us at bsb@buckeyesports.com.

Some suggested topics? What are you looking for in spring football? Why did the men’s or women’s basketball team struggle down the stretch? Were you surprised that Urban Meyer took a job in the NFL, and how long do you think he will last there? But don’t let me set the guidelines. Tell all of us what is on your mind. Your opinion is as valid as anyone else’s.

If you want to correspond with us the traditional way, just send your letter to “BSB Letters to the Editor,” P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212.

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