

March Sadness

Ohio State Stunned By Oral Roberts



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

UNPRECEDENTED UPSET – Ohio State's C.J. Walker (13), E.J. Liddell (32) and Duane Washington stand with their hands on their hips as the final second ticks away on No. 15 seed Oral Roberts' overtime win in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Ohio State Focused On Fundamentals Heading Into Spring Practice

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Ohio State head coach Ryan Day met with the media on National Signing Day on Feb. 3, he noted the importance of simulating game reps this spring in an attempt to make up for those lost amid the coronavirus pandemic, when the Buckeyes had most of spring practice, three non-conference games and three Big Ten games canceled.

But after having discussions with other coaches and assessing the makeup of the roster, which includes 15 early enrollees and five returning scholarship seniors, Day now believes it's important for his team to focus on fundamentals before holding game-like scrimmages this spring.

"The first knee-jerk reaction coming off this season was that we just have to start getting game reps because I was so nervous about not playing many games (last season)," Day during a press conference on March 17. "But the more I talked to our staff, we can't just jump into that. We missed a lot of fundamental work and we have to make sure that we're fundamentally sound and that our foundation is right before we just jump into those types of things."

"I think it's going to be a combination of really making sure fundamentally we're where we need to be, but then at the same time, we do need to try to get some team and game reps going in those situations, especially for the quarterbacks, because these guys don't have any game reps. Very few, anyways. So it's a combination of those two things, and it is a little bit different than years past. But, at the end of the day, the goal is still going to be the same."

As Day indicated, this spring is particularly important for sophomore quarterbacks Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud and true freshman Kyle McCord, who will all compete to replace presumed first-round NFL draft pick Justin Fields. Miller and Stroud played just 18 combined snaps last season and did not attempt a single pass, while McCord – a five-star recruit – enrolled for classes in January.

"We're going to try to get them as equal a number of reps as we can and

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

To many, the 2020-21 Ohio State men's basketball season will be remembered as a disappointment because of the Buckeyes' first-round exit in the NCAA Tournament. The No. 2-seeded Buckeyes dropped an overtime game to No. 15-seeded Oral Roberts on March 19, ending their season far short of their goal.

"Anytime you're a two-seed, that kind of speaks for itself," Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said following the 75-72 loss to the Golden Eagles. "I thought our guys had a terrific season. This is obviously a really, really bitter, bitter end to a terrific season, but we'll own that and accept it, and we'll move forward."

Ohio State was a 16-point favorite against Oral Roberts, making its overtime loss sting even more. The coaches and players will carry the pain of the defeat throughout the offseason, but the reality is that they still exceeded expectations on the overall season.

Holtmann's squad entered the NCAA Tournament as the No. 7 team in the country, according to The Associated Press top-25 poll, blowing its preseason projections out of the water. His team was projected to finish seventh in the Big Ten in an unofficial preseason poll of the 28 writers covering the conference's 14 teams

administered by The Columbus Dispatch and The Athletic.

The Buckeyes did not always appear to be on track for a 21-10 season, during which they finished 12-8 in the Big Ten. After a 27-point blowout of overmatched Illinois State, they found themselves down 50-45 with 11:21 left against UMass Lowell in their second game of the season on Nov. 29.

Ohio State came back to beat the River Hawks, 74-64, but they were a team that ended up No. 211 in the NET rankings. If the Buckeyes were going to succeed in a deep Big Ten, they were going to have to improve drastically and quickly.

Bouncing back strong with wins over Morehead State, Notre Dame and Cleveland State was a good start, but Ohio State had not yet faced a Big Ten foe.

In their first Big Ten matchup, the Buckeyes fell 67-60 at Purdue on Dec. 16 for their first loss, and they had underwhelmed to that point despite the nonconference victories.

Ohio State responded with consecutive wins over talented UCLA and Rutgers squads, appearing to be on the right track with 18 league games yet to play. However, the Buckeyes folded at Northwestern in a 71-70 loss on Dec. 26, giving them a bleak outlook for the rest of the season.

After taking out their frustration on Nebraska

Continued On Page 18

Continued On Page 8

Your Mailing Label Goes Here
Call (614) 486-2202
Today To Subscribe



From The Message Board

No. 2-seeded Ohio State was upset 75-72 by No. 15-seeded Oral Roberts in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. We asked readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum what they thought were the reasons for Ohio State's letdown in the NCAA Tourney. Here are some of the responses:

"If these two teams play 10 times, Buckeyes win eight. On this day, turnovers and free throws killed them."

– R1TDBITL

"I'll just say I am physically sick right now at the result of that game but not at all surprised – I had Oral Roberts. I have NO confidence whatsoever in this team or this coach."

– bstu9

"Totally uninspired play, OSU didn't even look upset they were losing. Horrible rebounding and unbelievable poor free-throw shooting."

– BILL RADLER

"This game shouldn't have even been close. We should have run away with it. We were playing the 278th ranked defense in the country, and yet we barely eclipsed 70 points. Chris Holtmann yet again failed to make adjustments in the second half of the game. We were down three at the half, had a size advantage (E.J. Liddell was scoring at will WHEN we would go to him – he should have had 40), and yet we refused to drive the ball to the rim or think about posting up Duane Washington and make No. 3 work on D. Instead we kept

firing up threes.

"It's time a discussion is had about Holtmann's preparation and in-game coaching. He is now 2-3 in the NCAA Tournament and has never made it out of the second round. He just lost to a 15-seed after clearly having the more talented team. In the last nine games of the season, we blew leads late in the game – most within the last four minutes when a good in-game coach is separated from a great in-game coach. Case in point: Illinois' 9-0 run to close out last regular-season game.

"This is the most disappointed I've ever been after an Ohio State basketball game. We blew it at the free-throw line, shooting just 9/18 from the line. That matters when you lose 75-72. Make one of those free throws early on and this game doesn't even go to OT.

"Washington hit his first four shots and then finished three of his last 17. He was abysmal all game long and it cost us – maybe at some point it was time to say hey, 'QUIT raining bricks and get to the basket!' Sure, it hurt not to have Kyle Young. Even so, this is a game we should have won by double-digits, and it's embarrassing that we didn't. At some point, results need to come in the postseason. Bottom line: It's an embarrassing end to what was once a promising season."

– Kenneth Wright

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Questions Value Of Continuity

I had to read "Continuity the Key in OSU's Coaching Staff" (BSB, Feb. 13) several times before I wrote these comments.

OSU last year had the sixth-worst pass defense in the nation and sixth-best rush defense. In order to keep continuity, Ryan Day promotes the coach responsible for the sixth-worst pass defense to defensive coordinator based upon the job he did in coaching pass defense. Does anyone have a clue as to why Kerry Coombs spoke highly of Day for promoting from within the present staff?

But the continuity gets even better. Matt Barnes, who has to be an improvement in pass defense but has no defensive background, is promoted to defensive secondary coach based upon his secondary defense coaching of two years, which included the sixth-worst secondary in college football in 2020. I honestly hope Barnes is great and I have to eat this letter, but I am afraid he will still be operating under Coombs' secondary theories of defense.

Finally and most importantly, I was pissed when I read Coombs saying, "Obviously we didn't play our best game," against Alabama. "The kids played hard and were let down by a massive coaching blunder on defense," Coombs should have said, "I let the kids down by coming up with a four-linebacker defense that we had never played before. It led to such things as Tuf Borland trying to cover the best wide receiver the country, an impossible task. I apologize to the players and Buckeye Nation."

Like every Buckeye fan, I hope the "continuity" experiment works. However, I am afraid we are liable to finish "improved" at seventh-worst pass defense in the nation.

Duke Thomas
Naples, Fla.

Enjoyed Gerken's Letters

I am taking Frank Moskowitz up on his letter-writing request. Thank you for the write-up on Gary Gerken, may he rest in peace. As a longtime BSB reader, I would often look first for the mail from Gary and I think a fellow from Newark. I had to admire their passion for the Buckeyes, and I had wondered what happened to Gary when the letters stopped. Thank you for the many years of reading pleasure.

Kyle Stoner
Indianapolis

Reflecting On OSU Hoops

You asked for letters from readers, so I would like to comment on the story concerning the Ohio State-Indiana rivalry and Mark Rea's Editor's Notebook in the March 13 issue.

• Dick Furry was more than a member of the 1960 championship team; he was a returning starter and co-captain. John Havlicek beat him out in 1960, something which happened

many times to many people over the next 18 years, but Dick persevered, became an invaluable sixth man and has remained a respected leader.

• Fred Taylor was a volunteer basketball coach at OSU while he played professional baseball until he was asked to be freshman coach and take charge of recruiting, which he did for five years until the team petitioned that he be named varsity coach. He recruited true student-athletes and broke the color barrier with two freshmen immediately. In 1954, Cleo Vaughn from Lima became the first black varsity letterman in OSU history. Several stars followed, plus some who had academic issues and one who played major league baseball.

• The thought that Jerry Lucas might not be the best "big man" in OSU history is misguided. I once wrote a story based on interviews with about three dozen Buckeye lettermen, all old enough to have seen Lucas at Ohio State. He was the unanimous first-team selection at center, the only position he played in college. By the way, Wes Unseld was only 6-6 and seriously considered becoming a Buckeye, another big man.

• Interesting story from the 1960 Olympic team: The team had three future NBA centers because the expectation was that Lucas would move to forward. In the words of Pete Newell, "We never really clicked until we moved him to center." Lucas was the MVP of the team, which included Oscar Robertson and Jerry West.

• I was in the audience when Chris Holtmann said he did not recruit players he signed at Butler when he came to Ohio State, so Kyle Young was not "essential." When Young asked to come, Coach Holtmann explained he did not believe it was fair to Butler. Young said he was not going to Butler any longer. With that understanding, he was welcomed.

Lee Caryer
Columbus

Urban Meyer And Today's Society

I want to thank Joseph H. Huber for perfectly setting forth the politically correct critique of Urban Meyer and what Mr. Huber considers to be Coach Meyer's lack of character (BSB Letters, Feb. 27). First, he offers the sorry episode of Zach Smith, in which Meyer was shamefully hung out to dry by both athletic director Gene Smith and president Michael Drake. Let's recall the facts of the case: Meyer was disciplined by the university because he didn't fire Zach Smith as a result of Smith's legal private conduct unrelated to his work and when the veracity of the allegations against Smith was highly questionable. A new standard was imposed on Meyer, in which a supervisor was held responsible for a subordinate's legal, private conduct. Does that sound fair? Any shame

brought upon the university in that incident was brought on by Gene Smith and Drake.

Second, Mr. Huber piles on with regard to Meyer's hiring of Chris Doyle with the Jaguars. Doyle left Iowa amid allegations of racist remarks and bullying and belittling football players. (At this point, I have to ask: Has Mr. Huber ever been to a football practice? What does he think happens there? Is he familiar with Woody Hayes?) How many times in recent years have we seen lives and careers ruined by allegations? How would Mr. Huber feel if his life was one of those ruined by allegations?

Third, Mr. Huber repeats the popular meme of praising Black Lives Matter and rooting out racial injustice. These are hardly controversial or courageous positions today. A full analysis of Mr. Huber's statements is not possible here, so I will just say this: If Mr. Huber is going to opine on these matters, he ought to familiarize himself with some basic facts. If he is not acquainted with Peter Kirsanow, he should be. Mr. Kirsanow is a prominent black attorney in Cleveland who has been a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights for about two decades. In that position, he has available to him a vast wealth of facts, figures and statistics related to racism, discrimination, affirmative action and inclusion in America. He undoubtedly knows more about these subjects than Mr. Huber will ever know. Many times, Mr. Kirsanow has said, "There is no systemic or institutional racism in the United States. To say there is would be a lie. America is not a racist country." Nonetheless, Mr. Huber and others like him seek to damage this country by embracing and perpetuating that lie. To repeat it to our young people is especially damaging and shameful.

Lastly, Mr. Huber asked what Coach Meyer was thinking when he hired Doyle. I don't know. Maybe he was thinking that, even in today's intolerant, vengeful cancel culture, it might still be possible to find some degree of acceptance for the concepts of due process, presumption of innocence, redemption and forgiveness. Mr. Huber, however, has proven that Coach Meyer would be wrong if he thought that.

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

Columbus Sports Publications
 1350 W. Fifth Ave., Suite 30
 P.O. Box 12453
 Columbus, Ohio 43212
 (614) 486-2202
 bsb@buckeyesports.com

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$99.95/year.

PUBLISHER
 Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
 Becky Roberts

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
 Mark Rea

PRINT PRODUCT COORDINATOR
 Andrew Lind

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
 Karen Wachsmann 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
 Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
 Kevin Dye Josh Winslow
 Andrew Lind

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

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
 Jan Jager Dave Tebay
 Ron Friedman

2020-21 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 40)

No. 13	Jan. 23	No. 19	April 10
No. 14	Jan. 30	No. 20	April 24
No. 15	Feb. 13	No. 21	May
No. 16	Feb. 27	No. 22	June
No. 17	March 13	No. 23	July
No. 18	March 27	No. 24	August

The 2021 Buckeye Sports Bulletin schedule is subject to change.

The next issue (April 10 cover date) will be mailed on April 6.

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

Wachsmann Elite Donor:



BSB is a charter member of the College Sports Publishers Association.

Liddell Subjected To Darker Side Of Fandom

Over the past year, while a pandemic has ravaged every nook and cranny of this third rock from the sun that we all call home, I have devoted more than a few words in this space to the relative meaninglessness of trying to play sports in a virus-ravaged environment.

Whether or not COVID-19 has invaded your particular world, it's affected many others – nearly 3 million dead worldwide with more than 540,000 of those deaths occurring in the United States. As I wrote in this space last July, I have steadfastly avoided any political discussion/debate/argument when it comes to the pandemic, and I don't plan to start now. But the aforementioned numbers are unavoidable. That's the life-and-death real world, not the manufactured society of one basketball game that doesn't amount to squat when compared to the massive scale of suffering felt and souls lost over this past year.

Yet there remain among us a brain-dead few (thankfully) who insist upon projecting upon others the misery that must exist in their own lives. Case in point: the vile, racially tainted, profanity-laced epithets hurled via Instagram by nameless, faceless, gutless individuals toward Ohio State basketball player E.J. Liddell following the Buckeyes' 75-72 upset loss to Oral Roberts in the opening round of the NCAA Tournament.

Never mind that Liddell was one of the primary reasons Ohio State was a No. 2 seed in the tournament in the first place. Never mind that the sophomore was the team's second-leading scorer and top rebounder for the season. Never mind that he had a team-high 23 points and 14 rebounds in the overtime loss.

Liddell, who made better than 75 percent of his free throws over the course of the season, missed the front end of a crucial one-and-one with the Buckeyes holding a 64-62 lead and just 35 seconds remaining in regulation. Had the sophomore made both free throws, it would have been a two-possession game and very likely never reached overtime. But Liddell missed – part of a most uncharacteristic 9-for-18 performance by OSU from the stripe – and Oral Roberts went on to score the upset victory.

How big was the upset? Oddsmakers had installed the Buckeyes as much as 16-point favorites against the Golden Eagles, and Oral Roberts became the first No. 15 seed since 2016 and only the ninth in tournament history to win a first-round game. It was kind of a big deal. But it was the kind of upset that puts the anything-can-happen madness in March Madness.

It was also the kind of outcome that brings out the absolute worst in fanatics such as the ones who trained their social media fire on Liddell. Most of the insults hurled his way were unrepeatable among polite society (if there is such a thing anymore). Among the ones printable in a family newspaper were, "Don't ever show your face at Ohio State. We hate you." That was followed by, "I hope you die. I really do."

Obviously, these are the ramblings of unhinged individuals who would likely soil themselves if ever confronted in person by the 6-7, 240-pound Liddell. And to his credit, the 20-year-old showed maturity beyond his detractors when he responded, "Comments don't get to me but I just wanna know why. I've never done anything to anyone in my life to be approached like this."

Unfortunately, Liddell isn't the first athlete blindsided by the dark side of fandom. Behind the anonymity of today's social media, anyone with a keyboard and internet connection can foist their particular viewpoint on any subject at any time. But this kind of behavior didn't happen with the advent of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

A quarter-century ago, John Cooper waxed

philosophical on his eight-year roller-coaster ride as head coach at Ohio State in terms of his relationship with Buckeye fans.

"I'll tell you the difference in Ohio State and Tulsa football," Cooper told reporters in 1996. "At Tulsa, I felt the fans were with us win, lose or draw. Here, the people are with you win or tie, and they tell you not to tie too many."

Thirteen years later, Jim Tressel – who didn't come within 500 miles of Cooper's frankness with the media – nevertheless had a moment of uncharacteristic clarity regarding the same subject in the wake of his team's 18-15 loss to USC in September 2009.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

"Honestly, the thing is," the coach said, "I feel terrible for (the fans) because there's no way they're happy. They've got to be some of the most unhappy people in the world, and I feel bad because we just made them less happy."

Tressel, who later had to issue an apology of sorts, was responding to criticism of how his team squandered a 15-10 lead down the stretch by allowing the Trojans to march 86 yards and score the winning points with just 1:05 remaining in the game. At the time, it was the coach's sixth consecutive loss against top-five opponents, and to intimidate the natives were restless was a gross understatement.

But Tressel might also have been thinking back to a game played four years earlier, a 25-22 loss to eventual national champion Texas in September 2005 at Ohio Stadium. The Buckeyes held a 19-16 lead during the latter stages of the third quarter when tight end Ryan Hamby dropped a sure touchdown pass in the end zone. OSU had to settle for a field goal and then watched as the Longhorns tallied nine points in the final 2:37 to earn the victory.

In the wake of the outcome, Hamby received death threats via email from so-called Buckeye fans, something that undoubtedly affected the remainder of his season. The fifth-year senior from Cincinnati Moeller, who had 38 career receptions for 408 yards and five touchdowns to that point, caught only seven more balls for 74 yards and no scores in the final 10 games of the 2005 season.

The 6-5, 255-pound Hamby had brief NFL tryouts with the Cincinnati Bengals and New England Patriots, but the closest he ever came to playing football again after college was as an extra in the "The Express," the 2008 film about former Syracuse running back Ernie Davis, who in 1961 became the first black recipient of the Heisman Trophy. Davis died of leukemia at the age of 23.

At the time, when asked about the content of the hate mail, Hamby replied, "I'm not going to talk about them, but they're just dumb things. You almost want to say, 'You know, in the scheme of life, there are things going on around the world. It's just a game.'"

I have no recollection if Tressel or athletic director Andy Geiger tried to find the source of the hate mail directed at Hamby. Current AD Gene Smith issued a Tweet of his own in the wake of the despicable diatribes hurled Liddell's way, saying in part, "Hate and derision have no place in Buckeye Nation or in civil society. If you cross the line and threaten our players, you will be hearing from the authorities. That I promise you."

Not that there is much power Smith can put behind such an implication when social

media identities can be camouflaged in so many simple ways.

It's just sad that after a year during which society seemed under siege from everything from hate and division to the upheaval of our very lives due to the pandemic, apparently there is no desire to rally together under any circumstances. Sports was one of the last bastions standing that could be used to bring us together, but in the wake of this latest incident involving Liddell, I fear even that has been lost.

Honeymoon Over?

There is little doubt Ohio State was a smoldering dumpster fire when Chris Holtmann took over the program following the 2016-17 season. As Thad Matta's health deteriorated, so did his team, which fell all the way from a Final Four appearance in 2012 to a tie for 10th place in the Big Ten standings just five years later.

Holtmann immediately turned the Buckeyes back into winners, producing a 25-9 record during his first season that included a 15-3 conference mark and a No. 2 seed in the Big Ten tournament. That season ended in disappointment, however, when OSU lost a 69-68 decision to Penn State in the conference tourney semifinals and a 90-84 loss to Gonzaga in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Since then, Holtmann and his program have been treading water. There have been at least 20 victories in each of the coach's last three seasons in Columbus, but there have also been at least 10 losses. This year was perhaps the most excruciating as the Buckeyes rose as high as No. 4 in the national rankings only to run out of gas down the stretch, devolving into a one-dimensional offense that featured only Liddell and Duane Washington, which only exacerbated the team's penchant for running really, really hot or really, really cold.

Four seasons under Holtmann have produced an 87-43 record, but the team has been a postseason underachiever. There were no Big Ten or NCAA tournaments last year, of course, but in three seasons when there have been postseason tournament games, the Buckeyes have a combined 6-6 record – 4-3 in the Big Ten Tournament and 2-3 in the Big Dance.

Next year's team, provided Liddell and Washington don't do anything rash, should be able to improve upon this season if for no other reason than experience. And if senior Kyle Young returns – as he can and as he should – all the better.

If, however, the Buckeyes do not show marked improvement in several areas that were exposed by opponents during the stretch run, Holtmann may discover five seasons is the honeymoon limit in Columbus.

A Little Housekeeping

A couple of issues back, while noting the passing of former Ohio State All-America lineman Aurelius Thomas, I mistakenly wrote that Thomas was a graduate of Columbus East High School.

With such luminaries as Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Bill Willis, football player/actor Bernie Casey, humorist James Thurber and the legendary Chic Harley, East certainly has enough notable alumni without including Thomas, who was a proud product of crosstown rival West High School, an institution whose illustrious list of former students includes former Ohio State and NBA star Michael Redd, former MLB catcher Johnny Edwards, three-time Grammy winning singer Nancy Wilson and Apollo 7 astronaut Donn Eisele.

Thomas did, however, have an important tie to East High School. He coached the Tigers to a 9-0 record in 1964 and earned Central Ohio Coach of the Year honors in the process.



Hooker Charged With OVI, Suspended

Ohio State junior safety Marcus Hooker was charged with operating a vehicle under the influence early in the morning of March 13 and has been suspended from the team. According to court records, police cited Hooker at Delashmut Avenue and West 5th Avenue near Grandview at 1:45 a.m.

Hooker was found asleep at the wheel of his car in a McDonald's drive-through after a worker at the restaurant called the police. His doors were locked and the windows were rolled up. He was unresponsive to police efforts to wake him until officers broke his back-seat passenger window. According to the report, he fell asleep with his foot on the brake pedal and the car in drive. He refused a breathalyzer test at the scene.

This is the second such issue for Hooker, the younger brother of former Ohio State safety Malik Hooker. He was charged for

driving under the influence in Pennsylvania back in 2018, prior to his freshman season at Ohio State. He was also charged with careless driving, disregarding traffic lanes, no rear lights and the purchase of an alcoholic beverage by a minor in that first case.

Hooker's arraignment was on March 19, the same day Ohio State began its spring practices.

Although Hooker is suspended indefinitely, Ohio State doesn't plan to move forward with a set punishment until it has the full scope of details on the incident. He was suspended for the season opener in 2018 and could see a similar punishment in 2021.

"We're very disappointed, and we take what happened very seriously," head coach Ryan Day said on March 17. "We're going to let the process play out. He is suspended right now, indefinitely, and as things move forward, we'll make the decisions as we go. We want to get all the information first before we (do anything else)."

Hooker played in seven games for the Buckeyes at safety in 2020, racking up 15 tackles and one interception. He opened the season as a starter but was usurped by Lathan Ransom and Ronnie Hickman entering the final stretch of games and saw limited playing time in postseason action.

Buckeyes Back To Practice After Pause

Ohio State spent just three days away from winter workouts after a jump in COVID cases caused the team to announce a pause on March 9. It was the team's first pause since November, when it experienced a similar rise in cases. Athletic director Gene Smith issued a statement explaining the decision.

"Our decisions on the welfare of our student-athletes, staff members and those

Follow The Ohio State Spring Football Action

Spring football is finally 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 April 6, 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.

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

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

Readers who have been experiencing postal delivery problems can also read the complete edition of each issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin online at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion. Your copy of the paper will still arrive in your mailbox at the usual time.

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

coming to our campus, and our determination as to when we will reopen and resume activities, will continue to be guided by our medical staff," Smith said. "We have been successful in safely hosting nearly 100 athletic events on campus this year with limited disruptions, but this pandemic is not over. We will continue to stress the safety measures of wearing masks, consistent and thorough hand-washing and physical distancing, and we will remain vigilant in those areas."

Although the pause was originally intended to last a full week, Ohio State felt comfortable returning to workouts on March 12, though not with the full group of players. Only "players who've tested negative multiple times this week (were allowed) to return to small group workouts and individual workouts" on the 12th according to a school spokesman.

The pause put a scare in the Buckeye coaching staff, but Day said that he's starting to feel more confident that Ohio State is approaching the end of pandemic concerns.

"I'm getting there," Day said. "It was like taking a punch last week when we had to shut down for a little while because we were starting to get more cases, and it was like:

Oh, my gosh, here we go again.

"But we got back in here this week. We're starting to get going again. We got practice on (March 19) and good news about the vaccines here by the end of the month. Because of that we are starting to see the end of the light of the tunnel and getting some excitement again. Our guys have been into it, and I think they've had a really good seven weeks of training. The attitudes have been excellent. Nothing is perfect. We have a great group, great culture, and there are still things we need to work on, mistakes that people make. But we're in a good place right now, and it's exciting moving into the future."

OSU Excited For Vaccine Eligibility

Ohio State doesn't plan to require all of its players or coaches to get the COVID vaccine when eligible, though Day told media that he anticipates that the program will have a great plan in place for those interested in the vaccination. He also mentioned that he's on board for the shot and was set to receive his first dose on March 19.

"They certainly won't be required, but we're going to have a plan in place," Day said. "All that information came out recently and it was exciting for everybody. I'm excited that I'm available to get it real soon here. I think this really is a huge step here for us moving forward so we're really fired up, and we're going to have a great plan here for that. It's all happening fast, but I know our medical people are working on it. I'm getting a bunch of texts about how we're going to get this organized."

Vaccine eligibility, as Day alluded to, is expanding rapidly in Ohio. Governor Mike DeWine announced March 18 that he expects the state to receive 500,000 more doses during the week of March 29 and that all Ohioans above the age of 16 would be eligible for the vaccine beginning on the 29th. Ohioans over 40 – the vast majority of the Buckeye staff – became eligible on March 19.

Although the vaccination presents a light at the end of the tunnel for Ohio State and many Americans, DeWine warned against assuming that everything is ready to return to normal.

"The virus is still very, very much out there," DeWine said. "This is a race. It's a moral imperative that we move as quickly as we can to vaccinate all Ohioans who wish to be vaccinated. The consensus from talking to the health departments was that we need to open up vaccinations even further."

Boston Scientific
Advancing science for life™

Erectile Dysfunction?

Looking for a treatment option with high satisfaction?

Erectile dysfunction may affect your confidence and intimacy.⁷

Join us to get the facts about the latest treatment options.

Attend a FREE Men's Health Webinar:
Presented by: Dr. Greg Lowe, OhioHealth Physicians Group Urology Columbus

Saturday, April 10, 2021
Webinar: 9:00am
Register Today!
Scan QR code or go to:
<https://rebrand.ly/LoweCure>

Partners and guests welcome.

SCAN ME

7. DiMeo PJ. Psychosocial and relationship issues in men with erectile dysfunction. Urol Nurs. 2008 Dec; 26(6): 442-453.

Boston Scientific Corporation co-sponsors this patient seminar and accompanying educational materials. Caution: U.S. Federal law restricts this device to sale by or on the order of a physician.

©2021 Boston Scientific Corporation or its affiliates. All rights reserved. M6-20700-046 SEP 2019

Help BSB Grow

Loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers frequently ask us what they can do to help keep BSB vibrant in this increasingly electronic age. One of the things readers can do is introduce BSB to new readers who might find our Ohio State sports content interesting.

In order to help you do that, we are offering an opportunity to send four free trial issues to potential subscribers. We will then offer your potential subscriber a very special offer to get them to join the fold of loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers.

We are also offering a special \$19.95 subscription rate for gifts for our service men and women. It's nice to send a little bit of home to those all over the world who are protecting us. Don't forget to include an APO address when applicable and remember, any subscription includes electronic access to BSB, so our Buckeyes in uniform will be able to enjoy their BSB immediately, wherever they are.

This four free trial issue offer is not good for current subscribers. This offer is to introduce readers to BSB. You can conveniently email your names and addresses to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com or mail them to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212.

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)

For Ohio State, the race to vaccination will also likely determine the number of fans allowed into Ohio Stadium this fall. Day doesn't yet know if fans or media will be welcomed to the April 17 spring game, saying that Ohio State is "trying to figure out when we can get into the Horseshoe and if we can invite anyone in." However, with a state nearing full vaccination rates by August, a full capacity stadium may not be out of the realm of possibility.

Day Impressed By New Analysts, Fleming

Ohio State welcomed two new analysts – Todd Fitch and Paul Rhoads – to its coaching staff this spring and promoted another to its full-time group – special teams coordinator Parker Fleming – to replace retired linebackers coach Greg Mattison. Through winter workouts and team meetings, Day couldn't be happier with the moves. He raved about the experience that Fitch and Rhoads bring to the staff, with a combined 67 years of coaching between the two of them.

"We looked hard at that analyst position, and for whatever reason at those positions we were a little bit younger," Day said. "We had Brian Hartline, Corey Dennis there, we had some younger guys in there and I felt like it may help to have a little more experience in those roles as we head into this season. I think every year (we) look at it and figure out what (we) need, and these are two guys that I have a tremendous amount of respect for. The first thing that we looked for is the fit."

He found fit with both new additions. Day worked with Fitch at Boston College and knows him well, calling him a really good coach and a strong personality fit in Columbus.

"Todd Fitch is somebody that I've worked with before," Day said. "He has a tremendous amount of experience, he's a really good coach. I worked with him at Boston College. He's been around some great offenses. He has the right personality for this situation. He's going to really help us on offense."

Day wasn't familiar with Rhoads before bringing him on board this offseason, but the former Iowa State head coach came highly recommended from three coaches whom Day has worked with closely: UCLA's Chip Kelly, Boston College's Jeff Hafley and former Pittsburgh head coach Dave Wannstedt.

"Paul Rhoads, while I didn't know him, I talked with several people that have worked with him – Chip Kelly being one, Jeff Hafley being another, Dave Wannstedt – there were a lot of guys that couldn't say enough great things about him as a person and then obviously his background," Day said. "His experience is critical. I will say that the early returns on (these two) has been a home run. A-plus. They have a great

feel for what we need, great feel for what a room needs on offense and defense, and they (have a great) impact on our guys. It's another (coach) that's been around that can put their arm around (the players) and talk to them, so I'm very excited about those additions."

Fleming has impressed Day as well during his short time on the full-time staff. Originally an offensive quality control coach, Fleming has been involved with standardizing Ohio State's terminology across all three major units this offseason to make transitions easier for players.

"It started really when Parker got here," Day said. "I saw somebody who was really sharp, a really good teacher, a problem solver, and then in the last couple years of him working with Matt Barnes on special teams, I've just seen somebody that was a self-starter, communicated well and was, again, a really good teacher. That was the evaluation going into this, and the big thing for us was that there was continuity with special teams."

"We've done a really good job of taking the terminology that we use in special teams and carrying that over to the offense and the defense, so that when someone steps into a special teams meeting, they're hearing the same sound bites that they would hear when they're in their position meetings. There's carryover in all three phases. I thought that was really well done. Now as we head into spring, head into meetings, we'll see how everything goes, but I'm excited about how things are going so far."

Wilson Thinks Ruckert Can Be Top TE

Ohio State offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson hasn't been shy about his affinity for getting the tight end involved in Ohio State's offense.

The former Indiana head coach has served as a proponent for the big boys since his arrival at Ohio State in 2017 and continues to push for personnel groupings that include one or two tight ends as a core part of the Buckeye offense.

In 2021, there's at least one tight end who Wilson is very confident can contribute to the Ohio State offense as a blocker and a pass catcher.

Senior Jeremy Ruckert, who surprised some analysts in announcing his return to Columbus after Ohio State's national title loss to Alabama, drew praise from his position coach on March 19 as a player who has developed well and is primed for a big season.

"I do think Jeremy has a strong skill set and that we'll – even though we have all those receivers back – hopefully be able to find him more in the progressions, to get him more touches," Wilson said. "I think he can maybe be as complete a tight end as there is in college this year, because I think his range in catching the ball – there might

Podcast Takes Shot At Filling Out Bracket

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

On the most recent episode released on March 19, we took a look at the NCAA Tournament field and fired off our picks for every game, filling out a bracket that was almost immediately busted by the wild weekend of upsets. 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, 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.

be a couple guys that are more raw, faster. But his combination of blocking, route running, catching – I think he's setting it up to have a great year."

The New York native may have a bit of a different look this season as well. Wilson mentioned that he's worked hard to cut weight and improve his quickness to improve his ability as a route runner.

"He's leaned up," Wilson said of Ruckert, who was listed at 6-5, 253 pounds last season. "He's about 248 pounds so he's trimmed up a little bit. When you're young sometimes you think you need to gain weight to be a better blocker, but I think his strength level has gotten good enough. I think he's getting enough confidence and his strength level with Coach Mickey (Marotti) has improved. I think he's trying to be a little leaner to help him be a little quicker in and out of breaks to create some separation, and hopefully we can get him more involved in the passing game."

"I think he's set up to have a great year. I think that's a huge piece of a good offense because I think it connects the running game and the passing game protection. Basically, he's playing left tackle and wide receiver. He has to play two different positions, so it's a lot of development. He's an

elite player that came in, he's been a great developer and I think he's developing himself to have a great year."

For the Buckeyes, finding that quality production at tight end is a big storyline entering spring practice. With Luke Farrell and Jake Hausmann departing from Ohio State, Ruckert will need to step up as both a blocker and a receiver. Wilson said that he doesn't think "people value how good Luke was" and mentioned that he's "had several pro scouts say they think he's as good a blocking tight end as there is coming out in the draft."

Ruckert can't fill that vacancy alone, but for more on the battle for the backup tight end spot, be sure to check out BSB's deep dive into the position battles on page 10.

Sabau Departing From Ohio State For Big Ten

The Big Ten announced on March 15 that it has hired Diana Sabau as its new deputy commissioner and chief sports officer, effective May 1, 2021. She's the first person to fill the role, which was created specifically for her. She will work directly with conference commissioner Kevin Warren and

Continued On Page 6




Both locations open for lunch & dinner daily!

1505 W. 5th Ave
Near Grandview Ave
614-817-1198

Monday - Saturday:
11 AM - 10:30 PM

Sunday:
NOON - 10:30 PM
KITCHEN UNTIL 10 PM NIGHTLY

741 N. High St
In the Short North
614-298-1014

Monday - Saturday:
11:30 AM - 12 AM

Sunday:
NOON - 12 AM
KITCHEN UNTIL 11:30 PM NIGHTLY

presscolumbus.com



Continued From Page 5

is set to lead “administration of all 28 Big Ten Conference sponsored sports, which includes managing affiliate memberships, competition, scheduling, championships, sportsmanship, officiating, and awards” according to a conference statement.

“I am thrilled to hire a deputy commissioner and chief sports officer who has over 27 years of collegiate athletics experience, knowledge and relationships,” said Warren in a statement. “Diana is a proven leader with integrity and creativity. Her reputation as a hard worker, collaborator, and trusted counsel are critical elements to serving our members and growing the conference.”

Sabau has been a crucial part of the Ohio State athletic department since April of 2017, when she took over as the senior deputy athletic director. She served as athletic director Smith’s top assistant and was responsible for budgeting, scheduling, negotiating contracts and compliance for the football team and coordination of the overall athletics brand messaging. She was also the deputy director for women’s hockey, pistol and rifle and took the lead on the hiring of women’s hockey coach Nadine Muzerall, who has taken a formerly moribund program to three NCAA tournaments in five seasons, including a semifinals berth in her second season.

“During Diana’s tenure at The Ohio State University, she evolved into an excellent administrator with unique talents and skills that cannot be replaced,” Smith said.

“She enjoyed a diversity of experiences that afforded her the ability to be exceptional in so many areas. Her service at OSU was more than as a steward. Her passion and commitment to excellence were stellar.”

Chief among her accomplishments in Columbus was a long-term deal signed with Nike, along with the upcoming 2027-28 home-and-home series with Alabama.

“Ohio State has been my lifeblood,” Sabau told The Columbus Dispatch. “Ohio State makes my heart sing. Ohio State student-athletes is all I’ve done for a long time. So I didn’t have to leave Ohio State. I chose to leave, not only to grow myself professionally, but to be involved with something I’m very passionate about, and that’s the Big Ten conference. This is an opportunity that helps me build and protect and transform the future of the Big Ten conference.”

Ohio State traditionally promotes from within in the athletic department, including with Sabau, who replaced Martin Jarmond when he departed for Boston College’s athletic director position in 2017. Pittsburgh athletic director Heather Lyke and Washington State athletic director Pat Chun filled similar roles with Ohio State before departing for AD jobs, making Sabau a bit of an anomaly, as she was expected to make a similar move – though she also appeared to be a potential heir apparent to Smith. Instead, she’s headed to the conference level.

If Smith looks to promote from within once again, executive director of administration and chief of staff Kim Heaton, deputy director of athletics Janine Oman or executive associate athletic director for development Dan Cloran could be next in line.

Pro Buckeyes Finding New Teams In Free Agency

Several former Buckeye standouts have found new NFL teams this spring through the free-agency market, led by center Corey Linsley. A former Green Bay Packers center who spent all seven years with the team since being drafted in the fifth round in the 2014 NFL draft, Linsley signed with the Los Angeles Chargers.

Linsley, who was named as a first-team All-Pro in 2020, signed for five years and \$62.5 million, which makes him the highest-paid center in the NFL. In Los Angeles, he will be joining a pair of former Buckeyes in defensive end Joey Bosa and wide receiver

Become A Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP

Now is the time for loyal Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers to show their support through our VIP subscription program as we all work through the coronavirus crisis.

As most of you know, the newspaper business these days is challenging in the best of times. BSB is now facing more challenges with recent events that have slowed the economy.

“We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program,” BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. “It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now and what we have done the previous 39 years.”

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

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

With the \$50 Brutus VIP upgrade, Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers will have their names and cities listed in two different issues annually as supporters of BSB.

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

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

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

Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman): Roosters Restaurants Foundation.

Elite Donors: Marshall Beck, Sarasota, Fla.; B2, Reston, Va.; Phillip Blue, Prior Lake, Minn.; Fredrick Bradshaw, Columbus; In memory of Norwin Brovitz, Oakmont, Pa.; Brian Bucher, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.; Richard Dunkelberger, Groveport, Ohio; Thomas E. Farish, Port St. Lucie, Fla.; Fred Fingerhut, Phoenix; Sander Flaum, New York; Chalk Fry DDS, Sarasota, Fla.; Laura Granich, Columbus; Paul E. Hackett, The Villages, Fla.; James Hamilton, Murrysville, Pa.; Curtis High, Beavercreek, Ohio; Carl R. Jeffery DDS, Van Wert, Ohio; Bill Judy, Dublin, Ohio; Frank Klaus, Pepper Pike, Ohio; Fred Krisch, Cleveland; Paul Lappert, Columbus; Larry Larson, Ladera Ranch, Calif.; Dan Laville, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Alan Lord, Reynoldsburg, Ohio; Dr. Jonathan Lucas, Portsmouth, Ohio; Col. George R. Nelson, New Albany, Ohio; OSU65Bob, Mishawaka, Ind.; Jim Reichler, Crestone, Colo.; The Russell Group United, Columbus; Charlie Shaffer, Edison, Ohio; Bill Short, Sparta, Ohio; Mark Skinner, Columbus; James Thomas, The Villages, Fla.; Chuck Underwood, Miamisburg, Ohio; Dan van Blaricom, Dublin, Ohio; Beth Wachsman, Columbus; Elliott S. Wettstein, Waverly, Ohio; David J. Young, Supply, N.C.; Anonymous, Council Bluffs, Iowa; Anonymous, Girard, Ohio; Anonymous, Lancaster, Ohio; Anonymous, Lewisburg, W.Va.

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.

er K.J. Hill. Bosa, like Linsley, is the highest paid player at his position. Linsley explained his decision in a radio interview.

“I had a conversation with (Chargers tackle) Bryan Bulaga, just getting his feel for the new staff and everybody there,” Linsley told Sirius XM on March 16. “He had only positive things to say about everything from his introduction to the schemes to the coaches in general. That meant a lot to me. His opinion matters a lot to me. For him to be able to vouch for everybody, not even working with them yet, but getting the first impression, meant a lot to me.

“He and I and our wives are good friends. It extends past the locker room and the field for us. In a situation like free agency, that’s new to a lot of guys, it’s always nice to have someone to bounce ideas or opinions or concerns off of.”

His new teammate was very excited to welcome him to the fold.

“I’m very happy that Corey chose to be a Charger and take his talents out west,” Bulaga said. “He is a consummate professional and will be a great fit in the locker room. My wife and I are very close with he and his wife, Anna, so we are looking forward to having them out there with us!”

Staying in the trenches, former Buckeye offensive lineman Pat Elflein agreed to a three-year, \$13.5 million contract with the Carolina Panthers.

The 26-year-old Elflein was selected in the third round of the 2017 NFL draft by the Minnesota Vikings. He started 43 games at center or one of the guard spots for the

Vikings but suffered a thumb injury in the 2020 season opener that landed him on injured reserve.

Elflein was waived on Nov. 14 after rookie Ezra Cleveland took over his starting role during that injury break. He signed with the New York Jets just two days later and started the final six games of the season when guard Alex Lewis was placed on the non-football injury list.

With this move, Elflein replaces wide receiver Curtis Samuel as the only former Ohio State player on Carolina’s roster.

Samuel announced his new home as well. He has signed a three-year, \$34.5 million deal with the Washington Football Team.

Samuel is entering his fifth season in the NFL. In 2020, he pulled in 77 receptions for 851 yards and three touchdowns. He also ran 41 times for 200 yards and a pair of scores.

The former Buckeye was drafted in the second round by the Panthers in the 2017 NFL draft. He will be joining a trio of former Buckeyes in Washington: tight end Marcus Baugh, wide receiver Terry McLaurin and defensive end Chase Young. McLaurin, who was in Ohio State’s receiver room with Samuel for three years and came to Columbus in the same recruiting class, took to Twitter to celebrate.

“Oh it’s lit,” McLaurin posted. “We really talked about this in the dorms freshman year.”

Samuel echoed those sentiments in his opening press conference with his new

Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

RULES AND RATES: 20 cents per word, 10 cents for more than one insertion. Minimum order of \$5. No agency discounts. Make checks payable to Buckeye Sports Bulletin. We accept Visa, MasterCard, Discover and American Express.

All ads are uniformly set with the first two words set in boldface capital letters at no charge. However, no other words may be set in boldface. Anyone planning a larger or more distinct ad may receive our ad rate card upon request.

We reserve the right to request additional information or merchandise be submitted from advertiser prior to acceptance of an ad, and we reserve the right to refuse advertisements considered objectionable.

Deadline is one week prior to publication date. Call (614) 486-2202 or write P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212 for info.

WANTED TO buy: OSU football memorabilia and equipment, programs, pennants, glasses, books, jerseys, helmets, ticket stubs. One item or a hundred. Will travel. Call George at (614) 506-1081.

WANTED TO buy: OSU basketball tickets/stubs from the 1960s, '70s, '80s, '90s & 2000s. Call Mike at (704) 995-0414.

FOR SALE! Woody Hayes glasses frames from 1963. The real ones. Call (513) 947-0120 or (937) 402-9765.

WANTED TO buy: OSU football memorabilia, programs, ticket stubs, pennants, championship rings, gold pants, helmets, autographs, game-used equipment, small or large collections. Call Chris at (419) 957-6789.

FOR SALE — OSU-MICHIGAN Game, 1975- original RADIO broadcast on CD! Woody’s last great team & Archie’s last UM game as Bucks go 11-0! Three-disk set runs 3½ hours! Listen in your car! \$25 + \$3 S & H. Call 1-630-527-8890!

BSB PUBLISHER Frank Moskowitz and other members of the BSB staff are available to speak at your business, social or alumni group meetings. Informative and fun. Call (614) 486-2202 for details.

From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

Ohio State officially introduced Gary Williams as its new basketball coach on March 15 after several days of rumors that he would be tabbed as Eldon Miller's replacement. Williams had spent the previous four years as the head man at Boston College, where he had accumulated a 76-45 record with a Big East title in 1982-83 and a pair of NCAA Tournament berths. He quickly let it be known that he was delighted to be in Columbus.

"I really appreciate the opportunity that President (Ed) Jennings, (athletic director) Rick Bay and the others who were instrumental in my being able to get the position at Ohio State University have given me," said Williams. "What they have given is a great opportunity to coach at a great institution that has all the weapons necessary to have a great program.

"I think with our style of play, we'll try to be as aggressive as anyone and we'll try to play an up-tempo game, which I think will make us competitive with the type of teams that we have to play against in the Big Ten."

30 Years Ago – 1991

Less than half an hour after Ohio State's dream season ended with a nightmarish 91-74 loss to St. John's, many members of the team were already talking about next season.

"We've had an excellent season," said junior point guard Mark Baker. "I'm really proud of what we've done, but I was always told you're only as good as your last game and this is something we'll have to think about for the rest of the spring and summer. I'd just like to say I know we'll be back next year."

Only Perry Carter and Treg Lee were set to depart from the 1990-91 Buckeyes as seniors, which meant a serious loss of rebounding ability but also meant that a glut of talent was slated to return. Leading the way was sophomore forward Jim Jackson, who also lamented the loss but was quick to look ahead.

"This loss hurts a great deal," Jackson said. "This was a very frustrating game, especially considering how hard we worked and how much we really wanted it.

"But it just serves to give us a taste of what it's like. Last year, we gave UNLV a good game until getting beat in the second round. That inspired us for this year. Now, we'll have to take what we've learned this year and apply it for next year."

25 Years Ago – 1996

For the first time in several seasons, a number of the most prominent positions on the Ohio State football team were up for grabs entering spring practice.

At the forefront of the talent search in the spring would be the competitions at four key spots on offense: the quarterback, tailback, tight end and flanker positions following the departures of Bobby Hoying, Eddie George, Rickey Dudley and Terry Glenn, respectively.

But as OSU coach John Cooper began his ninth spring practice with the Buckeyes, his staff was certain new faces would step up to fill those large shoes. The biggest question was at quarterback, where juniors Stanley Jackson, Tom Hoying and JUCO product Mark Garcia, along with sophomore JUCO transfer Joe Germaine, were set to battle

for the starting role.

"We are looking for a guy who is the best executor of the system, a guy who understands what we want to get done and gets it done," quarterbacks coach Walt Harris said. "We need a guy who can think, throw the ball accurately and keep it out of the hands of the opposition."

20 Years Ago – 2001

After Cooper's final years at Ohio State were marred by off-the-field issues, it appeared that his successor was not immune to similar problems. Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel met with media March 23 to share his reaction to the arrest and jailing of OSU junior defensive back Derek Ross on an assortment of charges in nearby Newark, Ohio.

According to reports, Ross was stopped for speeding (85 mph in a 65 mph zone) on I-70 in Licking County. In addition to speeding, he was ultimately charged with providing false information (a fake name) to an officer as well as driving without a license.

He subsequently pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 30 days in the Licking County jail. A compromise was reached that Ross would be able to delay the final 10 days of his service to June so that he could attend spring classes and participate in practice.

"In the time I've been here we've talked a lot about responsibilities and representing more than ourselves," Tressel said. "Obviously it is disappointing. Anytime negative things occur, it is disappointing for all of us.

"Hopefully we'll get the accurate details and move forward accordingly. All decisions have to be based on having accurate data. We'll handle it with the same compassion, fairness and firmness of any (incident) that will occur 10 years from now. We hope they don't happen, but they do."

Tressel said he would not rush to judgment or necessarily remove Ross from the team on the basis of the facts that he had at the time.

15 Years Ago – 2006

Both Ohio State basketball teams endured second-round upsets in the NCAA tournament. The second-seeded men were knocked out by No. 7 Georgetown as the Hoyas overwhelmed the Buckeyes with length and athleticism to the tune of a 70-52 rout.

The top-seeded women's team also suffered a double-digit loss, theirs to Boston College by a 79-69 final. Junior guard Brandie Hoskins suffered a torn right Achilles tendon in the final seconds of the game.

10 Years Ago – 2011

The men's basketball team saw a dream season end when the No. 1-seed Buckeyes were knocked off by fourth-seeded Kentucky in the Sweet 16. Head coach Thad Matta was devastated by the loss, which ended his team's season with a 34-3 record.

"He pretty much wouldn't say anything," freshman forward Jared Sullinger said. "He was in tears. It was touching."

The Buckeyes came up just short against the Wildcats, with guard William Buford missing a last-second shot attempt that would have given Ohio State the win. He went 2-of-16 shooting on the game, scoring just nine points.

Five Years Ago – 2016

When Urban Meyer met with the media in Columbus for the first time following the 2015 football season, the coach gave an uncharacteristically long opening statement.

Before taking a single question, Meyer reflected on his team's Fiesta Bowl win over Notre Dame and the early departure of nine underclassmen for the NFL draft. Before he wrapped up his seven-minute opening statement, however, Meyer made sure to touch on the challenges that loomed in spring practice and beyond.

The Buckeyes were set to replace all but six starters from the 2015 team, including its leading rusher, the top four receivers and four of the five leading tacklers.

Still, the Buckeye coach was able to find a positive in all the uncertainty. New stars would need to emerge in the wake of those departures, which was similar to the situation just two years previous, the coach said.

"I compare it, as I discussed with our staff, very similar to the 2014 team," Meyer said. "That was the team with development. That was the team where Eli Apple, Vonn Bell, Darron Lee, guys that we redshirted or didn't play much, didn't have a big input into that 2013 season – 2013 our leading receiver Corey Brown, leading rusher Carlos Hyde and then it turned out to be our leading player, Braxton Miller, did not play in 2014 – and you saw a steady improvement and it obviously culminated in a pretty good finish."

One Year Ago – 2020

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith believed it was still too early to speculate on whether there would be a college football season in the fall, with plenty of uncertainty surrounding the worldwide coronavirus outbreak that led to the postponement of several professional sports leagues and the cancellation of all spring college sports.

"We've been busy, frankly, trying to adjust to our new normal," Smith said during an interview with Columbus radio station 610 WTVN on April 10.

That same day, the NCAA established a working group to assess how much preseason conditioning would be needed before the season could begin, adding in a statement that it was still "premature to establish a timeline for when these scenarios may be put in place."

Meanwhile, Smith and the athletic directors at the 13 other Big Ten institutions had been discussing return-to-play protocols during their daily conference calls for a little over a week.

"We really have to understand that the players did not have their spring football, so that's physical activities lost," Smith said during a teleconference. "And remember, there is training that typically occurs in the summertime. At the end of the day, we need to develop a return-to-play model for those players that's frankly practice-oriented so that we avoid soft-tissue injuries that occur in muscles, tendons and ligaments and end up with sprains, strains and contusions.

"All of us are collaborating to determine what's the best return to play for the players, and then, ultimately, the conversation will shift to what the season will be."

squad on March 19.

"I'm like, 'Hold on, wait. I've got the opportunity to play with him?'" Samuel said. "Just being able to link back up and being able to play with each other is amazing.

"It's crazy, just because I was watching the draft when my boy Terry got drafted. We always talked about being teammates in the NFL, but that's far-fetched. You just never know what can happen."

Finally, running back Carlos Hyde made the move to Jacksonville, where he will reunite with former Buckeye head coach Urban Meyer for two years and \$6 million.

Hyde saw limited action in 2020 during his lone season with the Seattle Seahawks, where he rushed 81 times for 356 yards and four touchdowns. The season before that, Hyde broke 1,000 yards for the first time,

rushing for 1,070 yards and six scores for the Houston Texans.

Meyer will now have three former Buckeyes on the team, with Hyde joining defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton and offensive lineman Andrew Norwell.

OSU Graduation Set To Be Held In-Person

Ohio State announced on March 17 that it plans to return to an in-person graduation ceremony in 2021 after conducting all ceremonies digitally since March 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic took hold and sent students home for months. The university will hold modified in-person commencement ceremonies this spring.

"We are partnering with state and local health officials on a plan to provide our

students and their families with the opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments safely in person," said Ohio State President Kristina M. Johnson.

To make sure that physical distancing rules can be followed, Ohio State will be holding two separate events, with a maximum of 13,500 attendees allowed at each. A school statement revealed full plans to keep attendees safe.

"Two guests can accompany each graduate, and a livestream will be available for those who can't watch in person. Each pod of three, including the masked graduate, family and/or friends, will be separated by 6 feet from others," the statement says. "All ticketing will be digital to minimize close interaction, and seating and timed gate entry will be designated ahead of time. Six-

feet distance dots will be placed outside of each Ohio Stadium gate, and graduates and guests must enter together. Graduates will receive diplomas on their way into the stadium via assigned times. Spacing limitations mean a small number of graduates and their guests will be seated on the field along with college leaders."

Ohio State's last in-person commencement event was on Dec. 15, 2019.

"I'm especially excited for this opportunity for our first-generation graduates, who noted the special importance of commencement," Johnson said. "The health and safety of Buckeye Nation remain our top priority, and we will continue to work in partnership with health officials to make safe choices to celebrate our students' collegiate accomplishments."

Day Looking To Offset Last Season's Lost Reps

Continued From Page 1

try to rotate the guys the best we can," Day said. "We've kind of been through this before when we've had several guys in there and I think we do as good of a job as anybody in making sure that guys get reps and compete. That's going to happen. But they all have a lot of learning to do, and they haven't had a lot of snaps. To be fair, they need to spend some time in this offense learning and as we start to get them in game situations throughout the spring and fall, we'll have a better idea."

"Being a leader is the No. 1 job of a quarterback, so I'm looking for leadership and the ability to learn, day-in and day-out, and not making the same mistake twice. You don't just jump on a bike and start riding. You're going to make mistakes and fall. If you're making the same mistake for two or three days that's not a good sign for a quarterback."

Quarterback wasn't the only position where Ohio State wanted to get younger players valuable playing time last season but could not due to a lack of opportunities.

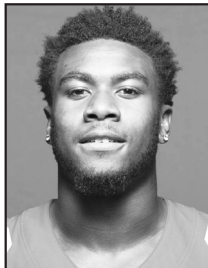
But Day is confident that the larger roster – which currently sits at 112 players due to the returning seniors, early

enrollees and walk-on players – will allow the team to hold multiple scrimmages simultaneously, therein creating more reps across the board.

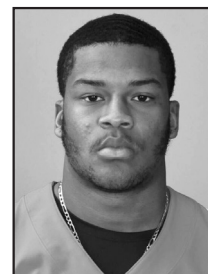
"There are a lot of times where we're going to be able to get three groups going because we're three-, four- and even five-deep at some positions right now," Day said. "The good news with that going into the spring is we're going to be able to get a lot of guys reps. If it was a normal spring and we were down at certain positions, you just wouldn't have as many reps in practice."

The Buckeyes are relatively healthy heading into the spring, though junior cornerback Cam Brown and sophomore safety Kourt Williams will be limited as they continue to recover from Achilles and ACL injuries, respectively. The hope is that they'll be able to participate in contract drills when fall camp opens in August.

"There's a list of guys that are coming off some surgeries that will be limited throughout the spring," Day said, "but I think, for the most part, everybody will be able to do something. Some guys might not be able to go full contact, some might not be able to do team stuff. But for the most part, guys will be able to participate in some way, shape or form."



Cam Brown



Kourt Williams

this before, so this is all really, really important," Day said. "It's great to just get back to work, though. That was the thing that I think hit our whole entire staff as we started talking about fundamentals and techniques, and we just found ourselves on both sides of the ball, going back to just basic hand placement, pad level, how we teach certain things on stance and start and just really starting at the base level."

"A lot of those things didn't happen last year through the spring with our young players, so we're really starting at Day 1 and then building this thing as we go. That's really exciting and I think our young guys really, really need that."

As mentioned, there will be important battles this spring at positions other than quarterback, including running back, interior offensive line, tight end, linebacker and defensive back, with more on those competitions on pages 10-11 of this edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. But Day's goal isn't to have any of those positions locked down at the end of the spring.

In fact, he's hoping the players at those positions continue to develop and compete at a high level well into the fall.

"We have to make sure we get 15 practices in. Let's start with that right there," Day said, noting the importance of avoiding injuries and another coronavirus outbreak in the program. "We need to keep guys healthy so they get these reps so that when we get done with the spring, we have 'X' number of reps on film so that we can coach them up off of film over the next couple of months heading into preseason."

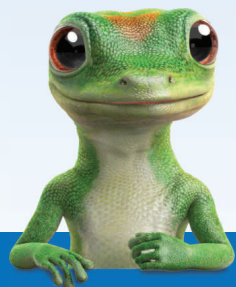
"If somebody gets hurt or somebody misses those reps or we lose a couple days because of COVID or whatever it is, that would be detrimental. But as long as we're out there practicing, getting those reps and guys are physically doing it, I'll feel great about it."

It's my mission to save you money.

614-336-4240

7370 Sawmill Road
Columbus

GEICO
Local Office®



Limitations apply. See geico.com for more details. GEICO & affiliates. Washington, DC 20076 © 2017 GEICO



SUGARBUSH
GOURMET GIFT BASKETS

Local Family Business
Since 1981



www.Sugarbushgourmetgiftbaskets.com

Nationwide and local delivery

614-262-1240



Harrison Not Chasing Legacies Of Other Players

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Junior Zach Harrison has been told since coming to Ohio State as a five-star recruit from Olentangy Orange in suburban Columbus that he could be the next great defensive end in line with Joey and Nick Bosa and Chase Young.

Harrison has played well but not spectacularly, so he's decided the best way to get to the level needed to be ranked among the recent greats is to be the first Zach Harrison.

"I've been giving my all this year, this training," he said on March 19. "I've seen changes in my body, the way I feel, the way I'm moving. I'm excited for this next step, to really make my own legacy."

Last season during the abbreviated schedule, he had 14 tackles (eight assisted), 4½ tackles for loss, two sacks, two pass breakups and a fumble recovery in seven games. Yet he was not satisfied with just being good.

"I made the decision at the end of last season going into this offseason that I'm going to give everything I've got to this program," Harrison said. "I will give everything I've got to every workout, every sprint, every drill, every rep. I think the coaches are seeing the results of that – just the mind-set change that I had going into the season."

"To be honest, I didn't have quite the year that I wanted to in year two, and that's why I changed my mind-set. That's why I changed my approach going into this offseason, and hopefully this fall you all can see the results of this hard work."

So far, so good for Harrison as he looks forward to the April 17 spring game.

"One guy that sticks out for sure, especially on defense, is Zach Harrison," OSU head coach Ryan Day said on March 17. "I think that the work he's put in during this offseason, his body's already changing. His work ethic is off the charts. He's leading, he's in front of things, and he just looks different. And you know, hats off to him for a great offseason. He just has a different look in his eye."

Harrison said he's fortunate to have role models such as Young and defensive tackle Tommy Togiai, who had a big junior season and

opted to declare for the 2021 NFL draft.

Togiai had 10 tackles – including two for losses – as a freshman, and as a sophomore in 2019 recorded 16 tackles, two tackles for loss and a pass breakup. His numbers were decent but not what was expected for a prospect who was wooed by the likes of Michigan, Oregon, Penn State and USC.

In seven games this past season he had 23 tackles, 4½ tackles for loss, three sacks, two pass breakups and a forced fumble.

Togiai's rise in numbers and stature got Harrison's attention and motivated him to seek a similar path.

"That's one of the things that helped me change my mind-set," Harrison said. "I saw Tommy do that last year. Coming back from my sophomore year, his junior year, he had goals and he wanted to reach them. You should see him every workout. He went hard, sprints every practice. He'd give 100 percent, and that's something that I took from Tommy that I try to incorporate."

To maximize his talents, Harrison has tried a different approach.

"You can't grow unless you are uncomfortable. You don't grow in your comfort zone," he said. "I try to put myself out of my comfort zone, whether it's to lift, going through my reps so my arms are tired."

"I'm putting myself in uncomfortable situations so when game time rolls around and it's the fourth quarter and I've got nothing left, I've been there before, I've done that, so I know what it feels like."

Defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs said March 19 that he likes what he's seen from the "new" Harrison.

"He had a phenomenal seven weeks in the weight room, not just taking care of his business and his body, but making sure that he's holding others accountable," Coombs said. "It's really important, especially for younger players, to see guys who are great athletes that are also great workers. When your best players are your hardest workers, you've got a chance to be good."

"We had some of those guys that aren't here anymore that were those type of players. And Zach stepped right in and filled that void and was very, very impressive with his leadership."

Harrison said he is doing what comes naturally.

"That's the thing for me. I'm not trying to be a leader. I'm just being myself," he said. "I feel like I've built a bond with the guys, and they trust me and I trust them and they know that Zach's going to do the right thing. So when I tell them, 'You've got to tighten up. You've got to do this, that and a third,' they listen and they have that trust in me and it goes both ways."

"They know that if I'm not on, if I'm not doing what I'm supposed to do, they can tell me, 'Zach, you've got to tighten up. You're not running to the ball,' or whatever the issue is. That's how I feel the best leadership is. That's my way of leadership – the give and go and the bond and that's how I've built up my voice for my teammates."

Harrison learned early in his time as a Buckeye to watch and learn from the best, including Young, who was the NFL's defensive rookie of the year in 2020 for the Washington Football Team after being a Heisman Trophy finalist in his final season at Ohio State.

"Practice habits – that's one thing I focused on when I was a freshman watching Chase," Harrison said. "He made plays in practice that you all never saw and that correlates to games. That's one thing I took to heart. You've got to show it in practice because it's not just going to show up on Saturday."

The key for Harrison is being that go-to player all the time.

"It's probably consistency," he said when asked where he needs improvement. "I still have flashes of my potential, and I've got to try to get to where I can get that every play on a

consistent basis, in and out, every down, every game where there's no falloff."

Another area he and the rest of the line need to do better is finishing at the quarterback. The Buckeyes got pressure, but that led to only 21 sacks in eight games (2.63 average).

"It is definitely something we talked about," Harrison said. "All the defensive linemen are getting there, but we've got to get home, and that's something that we've focused on going into the spring."

He said there will be plenty of film sessions to address the problems.

"It will be, 'OK, these are the things that we need to do to get that extra half a yard or extra three feet or that extra inch to get to the quarterback,'" he said.

Harrison was part of a plan that at times limited his snaps last season, but he has no problem with it.

"I trust Coach Day and I trust the rotation, and that's worked and that's what's best for our defensive line that keeps us fresh," Harrison said. "We always talk about who was fresh, who was fast? I've got 100 percent faith in all the coaches and what their decisions are. That's what I believe in."

Harrison knows if he has the type of season he envisions, there will be the inevitable comparisons to Young.

"We don't really like talking about it in-house. Most of that comes from outside so I don't really think about it often," Harrison said. "I'm not trying to follow anyone's footsteps. I've tried to be myself and I'm trying to build my own name and build my own image here, leave my own legacy at Ohio State."

The Ohio State University Alumni Association

GUIDE YOUR CAREER

3,200+

active employers working with Alumni Career Connection

4,500+

AlumniFire members ready to network

The Buckeye Network reaches **9,000+** active members on LinkedIn

BOND WITH FELLOW BUCKEYES

Join one of **121** Regional Clubs

Connect with one of **48** Societies supporting your interests



Attend special events – **168** hosted in FY16

PAY FORWARD



More than **150** volunteer projects done by Buckeyes in 2016

TRAVEL THE WORLD

Join one of **30+** trips with Alumni Tours



GET SOCIAL

Follow along to stay up to date with The Ohio State University Alumni Association



32,515 Likes



34,300 Followers



540,000+ alumni across the globe



YOU'RE A BUCKEYE FOR LIFE



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



**SIP, STROLL
& SEE
HISTORIC
GROVE CITY
DORA**

*Designated Outdoor
Refreshment Area*

Plank's
ON BROADWAY
*Grove City's
Original Tavern*

**4022 Broadway
614-875-7800**

Position Battles Dominate Both Sides Of Ball

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State football team began spring practices on the morning of March 19, and with that comes a crucial time for players at a variety of positions hoping to make an early mark. Some of those players are in positions that are highly contested heading into the 2021 season, and starting positions could start to be won in the spring before ultimately being solidified in the fall.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said in a Zoom call on March 17 that spring practices are one of his favorite parts of the offseason because of how much development can be achieved by his players.

"I love this time of year," Day said. "I love the ability to learn and to teach, for these young guys to get as many reps as possible without this big thought of the game right around the corner. The stress of the game, sometimes you let emotion get in the way. You can just worry about teaching, and I think, as a coach, that's the most fun you have and the things that you enjoy the most. It's what I enjoy the most."

This story is about the most important position battles, ranked in order of importance, and who the main candidates are to step up at the respective positions.

Quarterbacks

The clear main battle for Ohio State is at quarterback, where the Buckeyes are replacing two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year Justin Fields.

There are a trio of candidates to take over: second-year quarterbacks Jack Miller (6-3, 215) and C.J. Stroud (6-3, 205), as well as a true freshman in Kyle McCord (6-3, 215), who has enrolled early. Neither Miller nor Stroud threw a pass last season, and both saw very limited action on the field, with Miller's 10 snaps outpacing Stroud's eight.

"You'll know (the starter) when the time is right," Day said. "We'll know when the time is right like we have in the past here, but they all have a lot of learning to do. They haven't had a lot of snaps, and to be fair they need to spend some time in this offense learning and then as we start

to get them into some game situations through the spring and through the preseason, we'll have a better idea."

Offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson agreed with Day's sentiment, saying that patience will be important when trying to find the permanent answer at starting quarterback.

"I think we need a lot of time," Wilson said. "We had a really strong winter session even with that pause. We had some great workouts and leadership development and all that, but we're not allowed to be around them when they're throwing the ball."

The offense may look different without Fields in the lineup, with Wilson saying that it is more likely that Ohio State molds to the new talent that it has instead of trying to shape that talent into the mold that the team was previously using. He also said that answers on who may be leading the competition cannot be answered with so much more time left to see the players develop.

"I think we'll always play to their strengths," Wilson said. "I don't think the offense ever changes, but you play to what the offensive line can do and what the quarterback can do. I think in time we'll figure that out. They looked good through winter, (but) we've just had one practice with a few throws so to say the strengths of a guy or weaknesses – we know a little more about C.J. and Jack – but at the same time they missed last spring, they missed last preseason."

"They lost those reps. I think we have a lot of water to go over the dam, a lot of time. All three are talented, all three are working hard and they have a great supporting cast, so that's going to be fun."

Linebackers

There's no position Ohio State has to make more key replacements at than linebacker, where the Buckeyes lose all three starters as well as a fourth key member of the rotation.

Those three starters are Tuf Borland, Baron Browning and Pete Werner, all of whom were major contributors for the Buckeyes in each of the past three seasons. The top reserve, Justin Hilliard, was the most veteran member of the linebacker corps, and the sixth-year senior made a big impact in 2020, coming up with several big plays down the final stretch of the year.

Losing the four top members of a room pres-

ents a challenge for Day and linebackers coach Al Washington, and the Buckeyes' head coach sees it as one of the most important focal points heading into spring practice.

"There's a couple different positions, and they all have kind of a different story to them," Day said. "I think when you look at it, I think when you look at the linebackers, I mean we lost four guys there, so that's going to be interesting to see, in that room, who steps up. There's a lot of production in that room that needs to be accounted for, so that's going to be very, very important in the spring."

But even with four senior linebackers leaving, there are still plenty of veteran players at the position for Ohio State to choose from. A trio of seniors in Dallas Gant (6-3, 232), Teradja Mitchell (6-2, 242) and KVaughan Pope (6-1, 232) have been waiting in the wings for their opportunity to be major contributors, and 2021 appears to be that opportunity.

Gant was the most impactful of the three with 17 tackles, one-half tackle for loss, a pass breakup, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery last season, and he did it in fewer snaps (80) than Mitchell had (95). Mitchell, though, still made his presence felt with seven tackles, one-half TFL and a pass breakup.

Pope did not see much time, appearing on just 17 defensive snaps and earning just two tackles, though 1½ were for a loss.

The next group of starting linebackers is not locked in to these seniors though, with junior Craig Young bringing an extra jolt of athleticism to the room and sophomores Tommy Eichenberg (6-2, 238), Mitchell Melton (6-3, 243) and Cody Simon (6-1, 225) not yet being able to prove what they can bring to the table.

Washington may be inclined to use more of a rotation with the linebacker room than in the past. But there is still a handful of talented players in the room who are each looking to prove themselves as the next Borland, Browning or Werner who can play consistent snaps in every game next season.

Defensive Backs

Following a 2019 campaign when Ohio State ranked atop the Football Bowl Subdivision in pass defense (156.0 passing yards allowed per game), the Buckeyes regressed in 2020.

Last season, Ohio State allowed 304.0 passing yards per game, sixth worst in the FBS. Those struggles included allowing 464 yards and five touchdowns to Alabama quarterback Mac Jones in the 52-24 loss to the Crimson Tide in the national championship.

Those issues would be enough for Ohio State to look at its secondary heading into spring practices, but the Buckeyes are also losing a key member of that group from the year prior. Consensus All-American cornerback Shaun Wade announced he was declaring for the 2021 NFL draft, and with that, a spot on the outside opened up.

While Sevyn Banks (6-1, 200) returns in 2021 and is expected to man one of the outside corner positions, Day said that finding that replacement for Wade will be a big focus at the start of spring practices.

"Corner is a big position for us," Day said. "We have Sevyn coming back, which is great, but we also need to build some depth there. There's a lot of young faces in the back end, and I think we're off to a great start in terms of what we're doing."

On the inside, no major contributors leave with the return of slot cornerback Marcus Williamson (5-10, 186), who is using his free year of eligibility given by the NCAA. Williamson had the most snaps (414) of the interior defensive backs, followed by Josh Proctor (354) and Marcus Hooker (288).

Although Proctor (6-2, 202) is back, and Day said he liked what he saw at moments last season from the then-junior, a new player is likely to step up in Hooker's place after he was caught operating a vehicle while intoxicated. That led to Hooker (5-11, 200), the brother of former All-American Malik Hooker, being suspended indefinitely from the team.

Still, Day liked what he saw not only from Proctor, but also Lathan Ransom (6-1, 198), who earned 61 snaps in his true freshman season, including 37 in the College Football Playoff games.

"I think in the back end, there's some guys there who have done some really good things," Day said. "Lathan stepped up in a big way late, Proctor really flashed at times, and so there are some guys back there that have done some things. But they weren't as consistent or didn't play as much as some of the other guys during the season. So I really want to see how that back end starts to shake out as some new faces get in there."

Other names to look for in the secondary are Kourt Williams (6-1, 221) and Cam Brown (6-0, 192), both of whom suffered season-ending injuries in 2020. Williams, a true freshman last year, had his injury prior to the start of the season, while Brown was carted off in a win against Penn State on Oct. 31.

Williams is expected to play safety, according to Day, and Brown will look to compete for a spot on the outside. While both continue to recover, the Ohio State head coach is not expecting much from them as far as individual positional drills.

"We have a good place for Kourt and what we're doing. We have a really good spot for him in terms of a safety position," Day said. "He'll probably be able to do some individual toward the end of spring practice, and the same thing with Cam Brown. We'll probably get him going with some individual toward the end of spring, but it all kind of depends on how much they're able to handle over the next month. But they won't be in, in terms of contact drills, until we get into the preseason."

Running Back

This past season, Ohio State relied on a two-back system in senior Trey Sermon and soph-

The Forum at Knightsbridge

Independent Living
Assisted Living
Memory Care
Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation



Make Every Day a Five Star Day:

- Five Star dining, with signature recipes
- Resort-style living with activities, events, fitness programs and outings
- Choice of spacious 1 or 2 bedroom floor plan layouts
- Excellent rehabilitation outcomes

Call 614-451-6793 to schedule your personal tour today!



Certified by J.D. Power

OVER 150 BEST PRACTICES

The Forum at Knightsbridge, a Five Star Senior Living Community, has been certified by J.D. Power for providing "An Outstanding Senior Living Community Experience".

THE FORUM AT KNIGHTSBRIDGE

4590 Knightsbridge Blvd. • Columbus, OH 43214
614-451-6793 • www.TheForumAtKnightsbridge.com

©2021 Five Star Senior Living



omore Master Teague (5-11, 225). Early in the campaign, Teague took the bulk of the carries, earning equal or more rushes than Sermon in each of the first five games of the year.

But in that fifth game, Sermon made the most of his 10 rushes, exploding for 112 yards and a touchdown. In the following matchup against Northwestern, the Oklahoma transfer rushed for a program-record 331 yards before impressing once again with 193 yards in the playoff semifinal against Clemson.

Teague took over as the primary back when Sermon got hurt against Alabama, rushing 15 times for 65 yards and two scores, but it was clear by the end of the season that Sermon was the top guy to make the run game click in Ohio State's offense.

Heading into 2021, Sermon is off to the pros, and Teague is left to reclaim a position that he once held at the top of the depth chart. Returning backs attempting to make a claim for the top running back spot include Marcus Crowley (6-1, 205) and Miyan Williams (5-8, 227), who both made impressions late in the season for different reasons.

Crowley was recovering from an ACL injury suffered the year prior and played in only the national title game against Alabama, where he rushed six times for 14 yards. Williams, a true freshman at the time, worked his way to some big carries in the back half of the year, earning five carries for 28 yards against Michigan State and three rushes for 21 yards against Clemson.

"A lot of talent there, a lot of guys, and we're going to give them great opportunities," Day said of the running back room. "They're going to have opportunities this spring, but it's exciting to see those guys compete. And I don't really know, to be honest with you, how that room is going to shake out."

Also joining the fray is a pair of freshmen in TreVeyon Henderson (5-11, 195) and Evan Pryor (5-10, 190), both of whom enrolled early and will be active at spring practices. Henderson was a five-star prospect and the top-rated running back in the 2021 class, while Pryor was a top-100 prospect and the No. 2 all-purpose back in the class.

Both will have a chance to shine early on in practices, and Day said he's not locked into choosing just one back as his starter when it gets closer to the regular season.

"There's some really good players there," the coach said. "If there's some things that we look at, and then maybe there's two running backs that deserve to be in the game at the same time, we'll do that," Day said. "A lot of them have different skill sets, so we'll shake that out. But that's the fun part that I'm looking forward to going and building as we go through the spring."

Interior Offensive Line

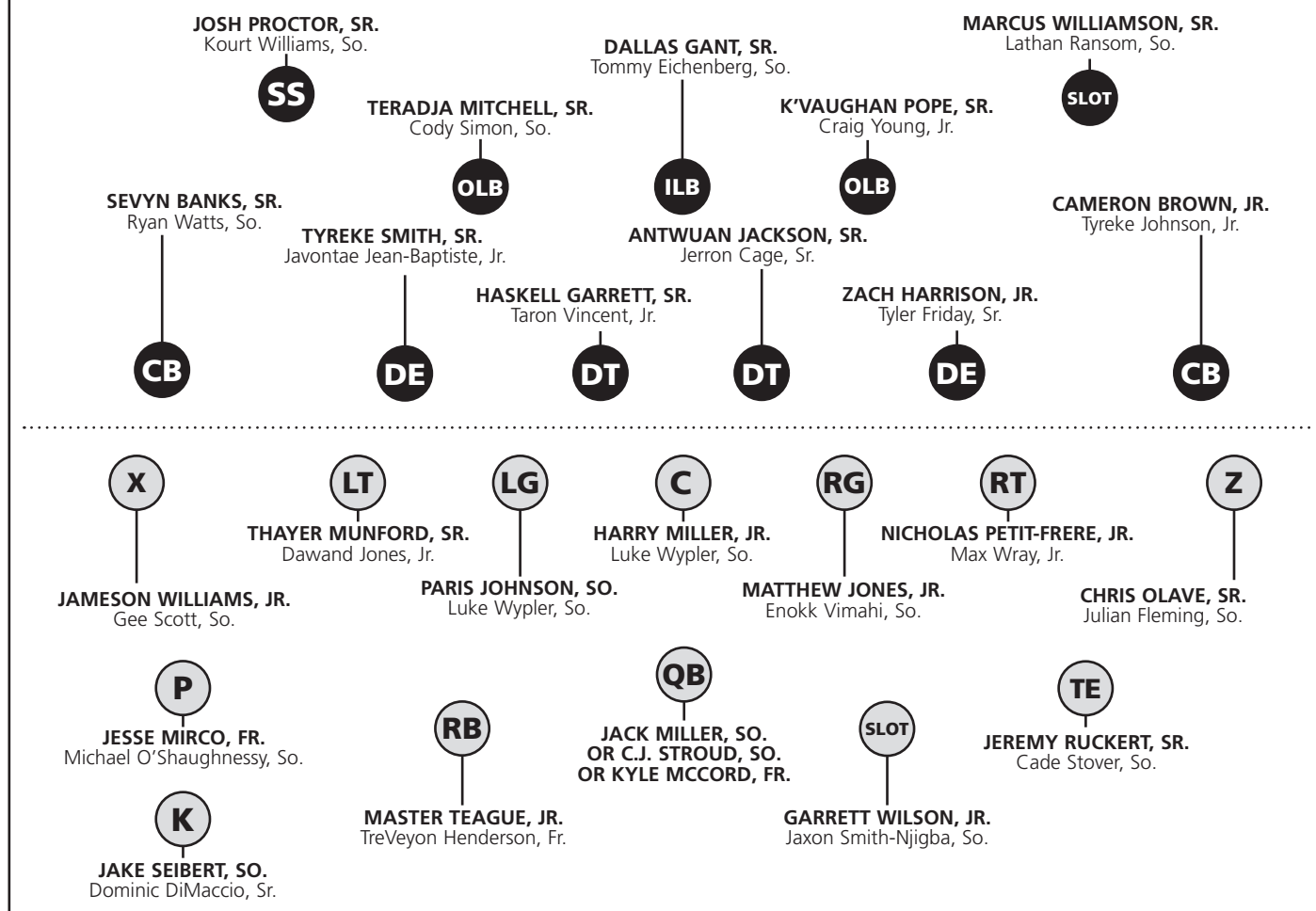
Ohio State received a big boost to its offense for 2021 with the announcements that starting offensive tackles Thayer Munford (6-6, 315) and Nicholas Petit-Frere (6-5, 305) would both be returning for another season. Munford used the free year of eligibility, while Petit-Frere will be a fourth-year junior.

But the Buckeyes still had some big losses on the offensive line, specifically on the inside with All-America guard Wyatt Davis and center Josh Myers both entering the NFL draft. That battle to replace a pair of two-year starters will be a big one for Day to find answers to as spring practices begin.

"In the offensive line, kind of an interesting situation there where we lose Josh and we lose Wyatt," Day said. "Those are two big losses inside, so that battle will be fun to watch."

Junior Harry Miller (6-4, 315) is expected to move over from guard to center to fill Myers' spot, and junior Matthew Jones (6-4, 310) gained crucial experience late in the season when taking over for Miller at guard late in the season. Against Michigan State Miller moved to

PROJECTED 2021 SPRING TWO-DEEP DEPTH CHART



center for Myers' absence, bringing Jones in, and against Clemson, Miller tested positive for COVID-19. Against Alabama, Jones won the starting spot after impressing in the win over the Tigers.

While those replacements are not set in stone, even if they were, that would still leave one more opening on the starting offensive line. A likely candidate for that spot is Paris Johnson (6-6, 305), who was recruited as a five-star tackle but played at guard when the Buckeyes needed him during his first year with the team.

"He has some position flexibility," Day said of Johnson. "He's so talented, and really our tackles and guards are kind of interchangeable when you look at them. They can kind of do both, which really helps. He's going to probably start at guard this spring, but he can easily move to tackle quickly. We'll try to find that right combination, but the idea always on the offensive line is how do you find the right five? You want to make sure that you have your best five linemen in the game and then go from there, and somebody like Paris who has some position flexibility is that much more valuable."

Another option for Ohio State would be keeping Johnson at his natural position of tackle and moving either Munford or Petit-Frere inside to fill the void at guard. Day said there are pros and cons to either of those possibilities but having offensive linemen capable of moving inside or outside is always a benefit in these types of situations.

"Having flexibility for those guys is good for them," Day said. "It's healthy for their future as well, so we're going to look at all those combinations and see what gives us the best chance. The more we can do that of teaching guys both guard and tackle, the better off we're going to be, and the more combinations that we can get into. But we're not going to just get locked into one thought process for sure. We're going to look at them all and figure out what's best and then find the right chemistry with those guys. We'll look at everything."

"We're going to start with Paris inside and see how that goes. He did some really good

things for us last year at guard, even in the short body of work he had, but he's still young and there's still a lot to learn as an offensive lineman. Not very many guys in their first and second year have played a lot of football here on the offensive line, so that's unique. And it's a developmental position. It's going to take time, but we'll see how it goes, and I'll have a better idea as we get through the spring."

Other names to look for as replacements inside include junior Dawand Jones (6-8, 360) and sophomore Enokk Vimahi (6-4, 305), who have each seen limited time throughout their collegiate careers thus far.

Backup Tight End

For the past three years, the Buckeyes have been incredibly deep at the tight end position. This allowed the offense to switch up its formations at a moment's notice to bring an extra tight end onto the field.

This current room took its first hit with the departure of Rashod Berry after the 2019 season, but even then, they returned Luke Farrell, Jake Hausmann and Jeremy Ruckert.

Farrell (377 snaps) and Ruckert (351) took the bulk of the plays in 2020. Ruckert finished third on the team with 13 receptions, hauling them in for 151 yards and five touchdowns. Farrell finished with five catches for 37 yards and another score, but both of their impacts went far past those numbers.

The duo was a major factor in the offense, making plays as receivers while also acting as key blockers for the rushing attack.

Ruckert (6-5, 253) announced that he will be returning for his senior season in 2021, but both Farrell and Hausmann depart, leaving a void that Day said will need to be filled if Ohio State wants to run its normal set of plays.

"One position that, to me, is very, very important is at tight end," Day said. "Ruck is coming back and he's going to do some great things for us – excited about that – but losing Luke Farrell, he was probably one of the more underappreciated guys in his time here. He did a lot of things for us, and so that second tight end in the game

is going to be important for us, and finding out who that is and letting that competition play out will be critical."

Sophomore Cade Stover (6-4, 255) may be next in line after transitioning over from the defensive side of the ball to tight end between the 2019 and 2020 seasons. But Stover also took only five offensive snaps last year, leaving the door wide open for competition.

That competition should come from Joe Royer (6-5, 240), who did not see action in his first year with the program but now has had a year under his belt to prove himself worthy. True freshman Sam Hart (6-5, 225) could also get a chance in 2021 because he enrolled at Ohio State early and will have an added opportunity to prove himself during spring practices.



Train to be the *BEST* you can be!

Designing fitness programs to meet your personal needs.

Personal Training

Group Fitness Training

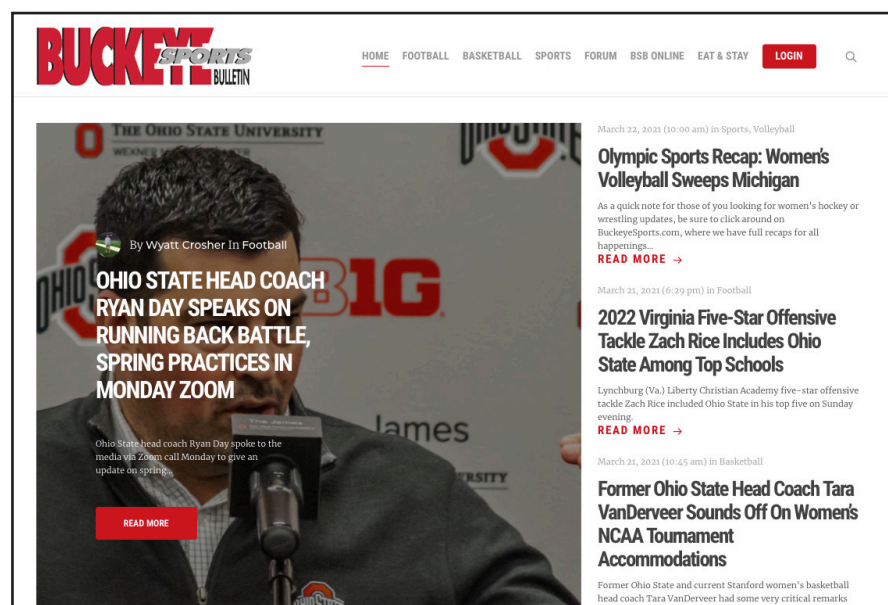
Sports Specific Training

Owned and Operated By:

Brent Johnson
614-570-9918
B-fit.training@hotmail.com

Located at 2378 East Main Street in Bexley, Ohio

SEE WHAT YOU'VE BEEN MISSING ON BUCKEYESPORTS.COM Free To Print Subscribers



Buckeye Sports Bulletin has expanded its online presence to a full-service website to complement the 24 annual print editions. Access to BuckeyeSports.com is free to all print subscribers and includes numerous great features like:

- Daily features, analysis and breaking news stories
- A fan forum where readers can interact with the BSB staff and other subscribers while catching up on the latest Buckeye news
- Rosters, scholarship charts, schedules and commit lists for the football team to keep up to date with the Buckeyes
- Electronic versions of the BSB print editions
- The BSB Quickly archive

To sign up for this free service send an email to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com and we will send you easy-to-follow instructions on how to enjoy reading Buckeye Sports Bulletin online

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Coombs Eyes Rebound

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Speaking with the media for the first time since Ohio State surrendered 621 yards of total offense in a 52-24 loss to Alabama in the College Football Playoff national championship on Jan. 11, defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs accepted responsibility for his unit's struggles last season.

"I feel very responsible that we didn't play our best in that environment," Coombs said on March 19, the same day the Buckeyes opened spring practice. "And I want to make sure I say when we didn't play our best, that's on me. That's my job. It was very painful. It was awful. And that hasn't happened to us very much here. It just doesn't."

"You work so hard and you pour everything you have into it. You want to be at your best, and we obviously weren't, so that was very hard. Anybody who says it wasn't hard doesn't care. It makes you rethink how you do things. There's no question that this entire offseason has been a great process of exactly that. Rethinking how we do things and how we're going to do things in the future."

To say Coombs' first year in his current role was unusual would be an understatement, as he was tasked with replacing eight starters on defense, including three first-round picks, and the Buckeyes conducted just two spring practices before the players were sent home for three months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The season was also shortened, postponed and reinstated, and it featured three cancellations, which prevented the team from getting any kind of rhythm or making adjustments defensively.

However, the good news is that Coombs should have a full offseason, including 15 spring practices, to fully implement the new coverages and schemes that he wasn't able to last year.

"I've done this Zoom, and I love the fact that we're able to do it," Coombs said. "It was a great answer for the situation, but the reality is that it's not real teaching. It's very hard to teach in the manner which we do, with direct communication and back-and-forth feedback from the players."

"For me, being able to look them in the eye and then do it on the field, that's the thing you miss. I think those opportunities, in addition to having Coach (Mickey) Marotti be able to work with guys throughout the offseason, makes significant difference in their bodies. So it's not just the scheme, but it's also their conditioning level and their ability to be in shape when they

hit the field in the fall. This opportunity for us to install what we want to install, practice it and find out what we can do and what we can't do in the package is important. It's critical."

Coombs didn't share any specific details of the changes he'd like to make on defense, though the most obvious deficiency was in the secondary, where Ohio State allowed 304.0 passing yards per game to rank 122nd nationally last season.

"Really, why would I?" he said with a smile.

However, Coombs did reiterate that the Buckeyes' cornerbacks will continue to play press man-to-man coverage, just as they did in his first stint with the program from 2012-17. The key, though, is doing it well.

"I think that our first pitch, if we're standing on the mound, we're throwing man-to-man," Coombs said. "Now we have to be able to play it effectively. That's our fastball, and everything else kind of bleeds off of that. How much three-deep (zone), how much split safety, how much of anything else we play kind of has to bleed off our ability to play man-to-man. If we can't, then we have to change what we do, but I think we've got the guys that can do it, and I like our chances."

Still, Coombs doesn't think last year should be defined by the result of the national championship game, especially since the Buckeyes won every regular-season game on the schedule, their fourth consecutive Big Ten championship and the Sugar Bowl against a high-powered Clemson offense while dealing with the ever-present pandemic.

"The journey that our kids were on to get to that game was phenomenal," Coombs said. "To reflect on that, you had Thanksgiving dinner and Christmas Day in the (Woody Hayes Athletic Center) and you showed up every day not being sure who was going to be able to practice or coach. Everything was being shuffled all the time, and games were getting canceled – all the uncertainty. The season was canceled, then it was on. Guys opt out, then guys opt back in. So just the entirety of the season and being able to get to that last game was truly remarkable."

At the same time, though, Coombs knows the defense will have to be better in 2021 than it was in 2020 if Ohio State is going to make another appearance in the College Football Playoff or even win the whole thing.

"There were a lot of things that we did well. We just have to do other things better," Coombs said. "To me, I think having a practice with the whole team here is really the biggest thing. If we can get to that point consistently, then I'll really like this team."

CHERRY BBQ SAUCE

Famous Kream Mustard

TAILGATING'S FINEST

Upgrade your snacks!

BBQ Sauces • Mustards • Salsas
Pie Fillings • Fruit Spreads

Find us in select Kroger, Hills, Weiland's and other grocery/specialty stores across the region.
Can't find us? Ask your store to order us.
Crafted with pride in Athens, Ohio

BrownwoodFarms.com • (866) 589-6456

Burrow, Bell Lead Bengals-Buckeyes Connection

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Cincinnati Bengals have had a distinct interest in keeping their eyes on Columbus for several years now. Under the guidance of head coach Zac Taylor, Cincinnati has plucked several players from Ohio State both in free agency and the draft, but the Cincinnati infatuation with Buckeye products goes back much further than the Taylor era, which began in 2019 and enters its third season this fall.

Longtime Bengals owner and general manager Mike Brown has kept tabs on the university two hours up I-71 since taking over the job in 1991, snagging several players with strong Buckeye ties during his lengthy tenure in the Queen City. No school has sent more players to Cincinnati than Ohio State has.

He reached up to Columbus early in his reign, drafting linebacker Steve Tovar in the third round in 1993, following that up with a pair of Buckeye draftees in tackle Dan Wilkinson and halfback Jeff Cothran the next year. There was a significant lull between the mid-'90s and the uptick in Buckeyes sent to Cincinnati during the Urban Meyer era, but Cincinnati's love affair with Ohio State is firmly back in vogue as the Bengals enter their 2021 campaign.

Guard Billy Price, defensive end Sam Hubbard, guard Michael Jordan and former OSU quarterback Joe Burrow have all joined the Bengals in the draft since 2018, giving Cincinnati 21 former Buckeyes drafted in its history, the most of any NFL team. Paul Brown's association with Ohio State when he founded the Bengals certainly affected those numbers, but the total is what it is – Cincinnati has a thing for the Buckeyes, even under the guidance of the next in line in the Brown family.

It's certainly true of the Bengals roster as it's currently crafted. Cincinnati has five players who spent their entire college careers in Columbus and a sixth with Buckeye ties in its franchise quarterback, Burrow, who ultimately transferred to LSU. Price, Hubbard, Jordan and Burrow have remained on the team as former Cincinnati draft picks, while offensive tackle Isaiah Prince was claimed on waivers in December 2019 and safety Vonn Bell joined the team as free agent in 2020.

Despite the volume of Ohio State products on the roster, players who once donned the scarlet and gray have been surprisingly quiet for Cincinnati in the Taylor era, though not for a lack of effort on Cincinnati's part. Price and Jordan have struggled to catch on as consistent starters on the offense line, while Prince continues to battle to hold onto a roster spot entering 2021 after opting out of the 2020 season, citing COVID concerns.

"I believe he is on the roster bubble," Tyler Dragon, the lead Bengals beat writer for The Cincinnati Enquirer, said of Prince in a phone interview with BSB. "They do like his upside. He is still growing as an offensive lineman, and I think he's going into this offseason period and into training camps on the roster bubble."

The pair of one-time Buckeye offensive linemen who join him on this roster aren't quite in straits that dire, but Price and Jordan do find themselves in difficult positions this offseason. A former first-round pick, Price was largely overlooked in 2020 and spent the vast majority of the season on the bench. After starting 18 games at three different positions in his first two seasons with the Bengals, Price played in 16 games in last season but started just one, filling in on a makeshift offensive line in a win against Tennessee. Dragon expects to see him fill a similar role in 2021, and while it isn't living

up to those lofty first-round expectations, it is a niche that Price seems comfortable filling. In fact, if starting center Trey Hopkins isn't healthy to start the season, Price may be the first man off the bench to fill in.

"Trey Hopkins could start this season on IR because of a torn ACL," Dragon said. "He is on pace to return, but if he doesn't, I can see Billy Price being that starting center until Trey Hopkins comes back. The Bengals view Billy Price as a utility lineman. They don't view him as a starting offensive lineman for their team, but I do see him possibly filling in in the starting lineup in the interior if there's a guard or center that is mixed up with an injury. Despite being demoted last season, he still has a good attitude about it and the Bengals do respect his work ethic and his professionalism."

If he does get that shot, Price is hoping to make good on the faith that former offensive line coach Frank Pollack had in him when Cincinnati selected him back in 2018.

"I have to do the corresponding work," Price told Dan Hoard on the Bengals Booth Podcast. "The foundation may be laid, but it's time to go walk the path now. It's time to go and do those things and be the consistent piece, and that's how you attack this going forward. To be the anchor that I was drafted to be and be the person, the consistent piece."

Jordan saw much more playing time than Price did in 2020, starting in 10 games and seeing slight improvement from his rough rookie campaign in 2019, though not enough to lock himself in as a sure starter entering his third season in the NFL. Cincinnati has made a point of improving up front at guard specifically, which may leave Jordan as the odd man out following the draft and free agency.

"Michael Jordan is a hard worker, but I don't believe he's going to enter the season starting as a guard," Dragon said. "The Bengals want to improve the position. They have made that known. It was pretty obvious that guard was a sore spot for them last year. As far as Jordan, I believe he needs to work on his technique and get stronger. He struggles sometimes with bull rushes and with fundamentally sound and athletic defensive tackles and even defensive ends when they run stunts and match up against him. I do expect Jordan to have a role on the 2021 Bengals, (just not as a starter)."

If Jordan doesn't get another shot as a full-time starter with Cincinnati, he may leave Bengals fans with a bad taste in their mouths. It was Jordan who was beaten badly by a bull rush against the Washington Football Team, which knocked him backwards and into Burrow, tearing the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and the medial collateral ligament (MCL) in the rookie quarterback's left knee, ending his season. While the injury wasn't exclusively to blame, Jordan started just one more game after Burrow went down after taking the field as the top dog at right guard in nine of Cincinnati's first 10 games.

He's working with NFL legend Willie Anderson this offseason to improve, but Jordan finds himself on the outside of the starting lineup and looking in just like Price entering 2021.

The man behind Price and Jordan who hopes to be ready by week one to take the snaps for the Bengals is one of the few former Buckeyes who had an encouraging 2020 campaign, at least prior to the injury. Burrow looked every bit like the player deserving of the No. 1 overall pick in his first season as a pro, completing 65.3 percent of his passes for 2,688 yards, 13 touchdowns and just five interceptions before being lost for the season. Burrow is the face of the franchise for Cincinnati and is looking to be fully done with his rehab and ready to perform

by the time the 2021 season rolls around.

"At this point he is on track to be ready to go at the beginning of the season," Dragon said of Burrow. "I stopped short of saying week one. I know that's what he is targeting. He said that in January. I have spoken to sources and that is still his goal, to play week one, but there's still a long road to go. He had surgery on Dec. 2, so we're approaching the four-month mark. It's a nine-month injury at earliest. It usually takes 9-12 months for that type of a knee injury to fully recover."

"But the nine-month mark puts him in the ballpark of returning week one, and that's what he's aiming to do. He is working out at Black Sheep performance in Blue Ash, which is a suburb of Cincinnati. I've spoken to his trainer as well, and he says he's doing well. Head coach Zac Taylor is pleased with his progress. It's going to be interesting to see these next couple of weeks. However, I do not expect him to participate much at training camp. He will not be full-speed."

While Burrow looks to rehab, Cincinnati is hoping to avoid a repeat of that disastrous injury. Much of the talk from the coaching staff this offseason has been about building around Burrow and improving his supporting cast, both up front and in the skill rooms. Cincinnati signed former Saints offensive tackle Riley Reiff on March 19 to beef up its offensive line and has eyed similar moves elsewhere, but to this point, the improvement of that supporting cast has looked more like a marketing scheme and less like a true plan for the Bengals.

"Honestly, they have not (surrounded Burrow with talent)," said Dragon. "And that's much to the fans' dismay. I see it all the time on social media. They have made calls to some of the top-tier offensive linemen and even the middle-tier offensive linemen in free agency, but they have struck out on all of them (save for Reiff), primarily at guard."

"I do expect them to draft Oregon tackle Penei Sewell with the No. 5 pick in the upcoming draft. That will certainly address a need. But at this point in the offseason, they have not addressed the offensive line."

Although Cincinnati has seemed almost stuck in the mud in free agency so far on the offensive side of the ball, the Bengals have been very active about improving on what was a fairly encouraging defensive unit in 2020, thanks in part to Bell, who was named a captain in his first year with the Bengals. Bell wasn't quite as productive as fellow safety Jessie Bates, but he served as a leader for the team and made his bones as an enforcer, making highlight-reel tackles on a frequent basis, including a de-cleating of Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster that made headlines.

"The big things that he brought were leadership and accountability," Dragon said. "He was one of the first guys in the facility every day last year for workouts. He's a reliable player, a good run stopper at strong safety, and he and Jesse Bates really formed one of the best safety tandems in the NFL. Last year, the strength of the Bengals defense was that safety tandem. I expect him again to be a captain and a leader again in his second season in Cincinnati."

Bell's production was not matched by his former teammate with the Buckeyes on the defensive line. Hubbard – who entered the year as a strong contender for a breakout season after impressing in his rookie and sophomore seasons – took a serious step back in 2021. He dropped from 8½ sacks in 2019 to just two in 2020. Sacks don't tell the whole story, but it was a disappointing showing from someone who Cincinnati fans thought could be an impact player up front.

"Sam Hubbard's rookie season, I believe he had six sacks," Dragon said. "His sophomore season, 8½ sacks and last year he only had two. Now that doesn't tell the entire story. I know a lot of people just look at sack numbers to judge if somebody is having a good season or not, but he really didn't have a huge impact defensively in 2020. He is a solid player up front, but they did expect him to have more of an impact and progress from that 2019 season, and he really took a step back."

"However, I will say the entire Bengals defensive line struggled last season outside of Carl Lawson. So it is going to be interesting to see how Hubbard performs on the opposite side of new acquisition Trey Hendrickson."

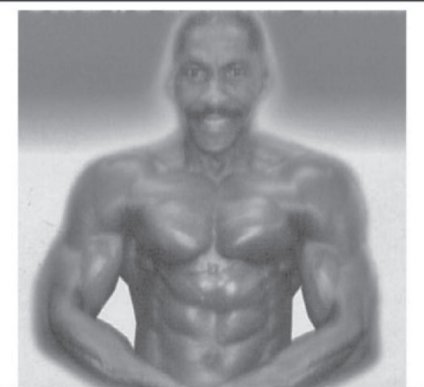
"The Bengals are impressed with Sam Hubbard though. They know that he had a couple of good years prior to that down year in 2020, and he's another one of those guys that is a good locker-room guy. His teammates like him and the coaching staff likes his work ethic, but they do want more production out of him."

Despite his step back, Hubbard may still be in for a lengthy tenure with the Bengals.

"Even if he does have another down year, I can still see the Bengals re-signing him because he does little things well," Dragon said. "He just hasn't been the impact player that some fans and the coaches certainly want him to be."

Those two will be joined on the Bengals defense in 2021 by defensive end Trey Hendrickson, who name-dropped three separate former Buckeyes as big parts in his decision, thanks to the culture that they are building in Cincinnati. Perhaps that's where Brown's re-emerging affinity for Buckeyes gets its motivation, and perhaps it can be where those Buckeyes shine brightest for a Cincinnati team looking to enter a new era.

"Truthfully I feel like I can help this organization. I think there's a lot of potential here with the quarterback in Joe Burrow," Hendrickson said. "The defense is one or two pieces away from really locking down opposing quarterbacks, and if we can hit these guys in the backfield and get them off their spot, I can't wait to add to this pass rush. They got Vonn Bell out there, Sam Hubbard, a bunch of guys that have been in a culture of winning, and that's where it starts."



TIM SWANSON
Certified Personal Trainer

Flat Stomach • Weight Loss • Strength Training
• Cardio Kick-Boxing •
Boot Camp

614-886-9331
foreverfitswan@yahoo.com

Ohio State Offers In-State Offensive Lineman

Looking to address its top positional need in the 2022 recruiting cycle, Ohio State offered Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star offensive tackle Aamil Wagner on March 8.

The 6-6, 260-pound Wagner – who is considered the 13th-best offensive tackle and No. 134 prospect overall in his class – has been in contact with offensive line coach Greg Studrawa for quite some time, but there were concerns about his ability to gain weight, which is why the Buckeyes didn't offer earlier in the process.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

Those questions still remain to an extent, especially since Ohio State has not been able to evaluate him in person due to the ongoing recruiting dead period, but his frame and potential are considered by the program to be worth the risk.

The Buckeyes are looking to take three or four more offensive linemen this cycle alongside West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Tegra Tshabola, so bringing on a developmen-

tal prospect or two is likely in such a large haul.

Tackles such as Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian five-star Zach Rice, Daleville (Va.) Lord Botetourt five-star Gunner Givens and Humble (Texas) Atascocita four-star Kam Dewberry are all players who could make an immediate impact, while Fond Du Lac (Wis.) St. Mary's Springs four-star Billy Schrauth and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star Aliou Bah fall into the same developmental category as Wagner, whose older brother, Ahmad, played basketball at Iowa and wide receiver at Kentucky.

Wagner followed up his offer by announcing a top six on March 19 of Auburn, Kentucky, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Penn State and Stanford. If he ultimately chooses the Buckeyes, he'll become the eighth player from Huber Heights Wayne to sign with Ohio State this century, joining safety Will Allen and wide receiver John Hollins in 2000, linebacker Marcus Freeman in 2004, cornerback Donnie Evege in 2007, quarterback Braxton Miller in 2011, defensive tackle Robert Landers in 2015 and wide receiver L'Christian "Blue" Smith in 2018.

Another Legacy Accepts Preferred Walk-On Offer

St. Louis Mary Institute and Country Day School linebacker Jalen Pace, the son of former Ohio State and Pro Football Hall of Fame offensive tackle Orlando Pace, announced on March

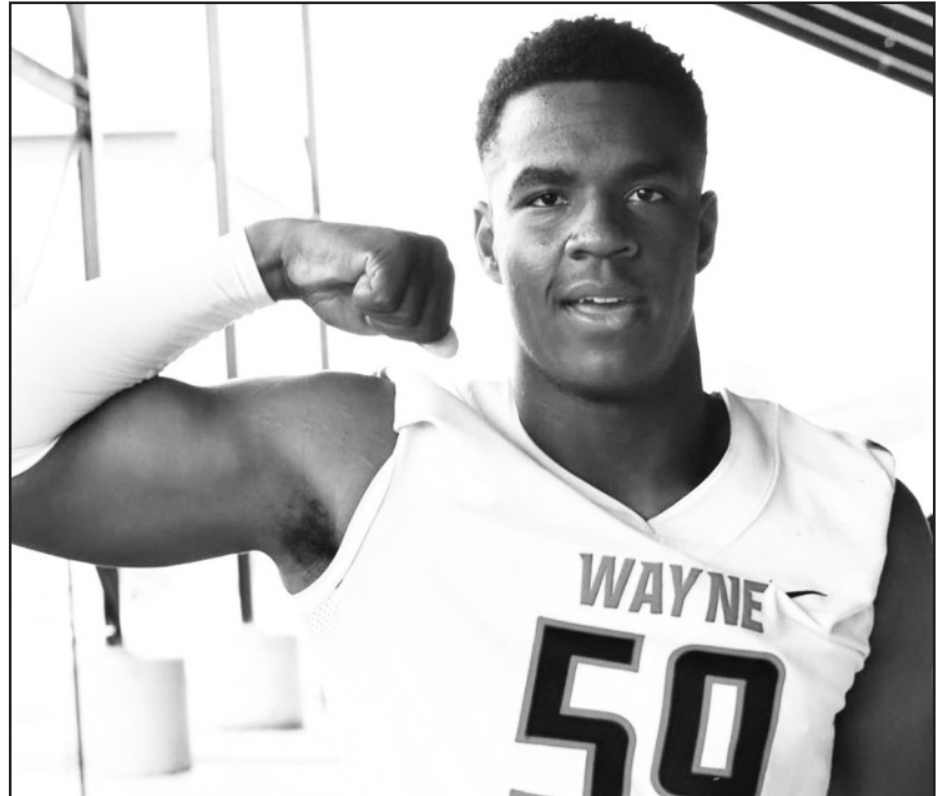


PHOTO COURTESY OF AAMIL WAGNER

ONLY A MATTER OF TIME? – Ohio State extended a scholarship offer to Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star offensive tackle Aamil Wagner on March 8.

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

Massillon (Ohio) Washington head coach John Moranto told BSB that new Ohio State signee Wes Siegenthaler had the same intensity as former Tiger and current Buckeye Chris Spielman.

"I've coached a couple of other great players intensively in 17 years (including) Steve Phillips now with the New York Mets organization and Jerry McCabe at Holy Cross. They're the only ones who can compare to Wes," Moranto said of the wide receiver.

30 Years Ago – 1991

Ohio State head coach John Cooper told BSB that prep All-America defensive lineman Chuck Jones of Chillicothe, Ohio, had exhausted his last chance to be a Buckeye.

"Chuck Jones is history," Cooper said of the 6-5, 280-pound defensive lineman with 4.5 speed. "He wouldn't do what we asked him to do. He wouldn't go to class, wouldn't go to study hall and was a grade problem."

After failing to graduate on time from high school, Jones was trying to qualify as a Proposition 48 student.

25 Years Ago – 1996

Vaness Provitt only vaguely resembled the high school senior out of Warren, Ohio, whom Ohio State had recruited during the 1994 season by the time he was set to arrive on campus in 1996.

After spending a full academic year at Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy, the new and improved Provitt was bigger, stronger and faster than the two-sport athlete he had been at Warren Harding High School when he had originally drawn Ohio State's attention.

While at Harding, the 6-3, 175-pound Provitt led the football Raiders to an 8-2 record as a senior, catching 23 passes for 400 yards and six touchdowns. On the hardwood, the versatile athlete led the basketball team to a 16-4 mark and a regional finals berth.

However, Provitt was unable to secure the required ACT score to enroll at Ohio State, so he took the prep school route and was ready to enroll at Ohio State as a 6-4, 200-pounder who had seen growth on the field and in the weight room, hauling in 32 receptions for 12 touchdowns.

"He's probably better athletically because of his size. His strength has gone up, too," said Fork Union head

coach John Shuman. "His shoulders and arms are a lot fuller than what we started with."

20 Years Ago – 2001

Dayton Dunbar defensive end NaShan Goddard told BSB he was still waiting for a qualifying test score that would persuade Ohio State to send him a letter of intent.

"Every kid in Ohio wants to go to school and play there," said the 6-6, 255-pounder who hoped to be a Buckeye.

Goddard said he had a 17 on the ACT and a 2.7 GPA but planned to take the standardized test one more time to remove any doubt about his eligibility.

15 Years Ago – 2006

The offensive line seemed to be the strongest position in the batch of recruiting talent to come through the state of Ohio for the class of 2006, but none of the big boys were quite living up to that standard in 2007. However, one of the names atop the lineman list within the Buckeye state was Nick Schepis, a 6-3, 271-pound prospect out of Cuyahoga Falls Walsh Jesuit, the same school that sent former Buckeyes Mike Vrabel and Darik Warnke to Ohio State in the 1990s.

The Buckeyes were quite aware of the latest well-regarded Warrior.

"A little while ago, (offensive coordinator Jim Bollman) called my coach, asking about me," Schepis told BSB. "I get letters from them also."

OSU was joined by programs that spanned the United States, including Boston College, Duke, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Purdue, Stanford, Syracuse, Virginia and West Virginia, among others.

10 Years Ago – 2011

Br'onte Dunn, a four-star Ohio State running back commit out of Canton (Ohio) GlenOak, insisted he was still solid to the Buckeyes but planned to visit Michigan after Wolverines head coach Brady Hoke extended a scholarship offer.

"I've still got my eyes open," Dunn said. "I'm going to go visit. I'm not sure when. I've got to talk to my mom and dad about it."

He offered a measure of reassurance to OSU fans, saying he was just taking the trip as a precautionary measure.

"It's still solid," he said. "I'm still looking around, though. You never know. Anything could happen. I'm keeping my eyes open."

Five Years Ago – 2016

Ohio State hosted a number of prospects at different points over the week of March 21-27. At the forefront of that list was 2017 five-star quarterback Tate Martell, a teammate of commit Haskell Garrett at Las Vegas Bishop Gorman, who was considered the No. 1 quarterback and No. 12 overall prospect in the class of 2017.

Although he was just 5-10 and 203 pounds, the Texas A&M commitment was at the top of recruiting boards because of his athleticism and ability to make plays – much like a former Aggie player who measured under 6-0 but took the college football world by storm in Johnny Manziel.

"Initially the first thing people scoff at is his size because he's 5-10 and when you're looking at a college quarterback you usually want those 6-2, 6-3 guys," Scout.com recruiting analyst Brandon Huffman said. "He misses those specific physical attributes, but he changes games with his feet and changes games with his arm. He's one of the most fun players I've watched at the quarterback position in the West."

One Year Ago – 2020

After missing out on several top-rated running backs in the previous recruiting cycle, Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford had rebounded in a big way in 2020 by securing commitments from two of the nation's top six players at the position in Hopewell, Va., five-star TreVeyon Henderson and Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star Evan Pryor.

Henderson, who announced his pledge to the Buckeyes on March 27. The 5-11, 195-pound Henderson was considered the second-best running back and No. 17 prospect overall in the class of 2021, rushing for 2,424 yards and 45 touchdowns to lead the Blue Devils to the state championship in 2019. He picked Ohio State over finalists Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Penn State, Texas, Virginia and Virginia Tech.

Henderson – the commonwealth's Gatorade Player of the Year – committed to the Buckeyes without ever stepping foot on campus.

9 that he has accepted a preferred walk-on opportunity at Ohio State.

"I would like to thank my family, friends and coaches who have helped me become the man I am today," Pace shared in a statement posted to Twitter. "I am very excited to announce that I am following my dreams and will continue my academic and athletic journey at The Ohio State University."

The 6-3, 195-pound Pace, who is not ranked by any major recruiting site, recorded 46 tackles, four interceptions, three tackles for loss, three sacks and three pass breakups to lead the Rams to the state championship game last fall. He turned down scholarship offers from Dayton, Lindenwood and Quincy and walk-on opportunities from Ball State, Miami (Ohio) and Nevada to walk on for the Buckeyes.

Pace becomes the third son of a former Ohio State player in this cycle to announce his commitment to walk on to the program, joining Nashville Montgomery Bell Academy tight end Zak Herbstreit (quarterback Kirk Herbstreit) and Northville, Mich., running back/defensive back Cayden Saunders (tight end Cedric Saunders). They're also joined by four other preferred walk-ons, including Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy center Toby Wilson, the son of offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson; Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day long snapper Mason Arnold; West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West line-backer Jackson Kuwatch; and Morrow (Ohio) Little Miami wide receiver Reis Stocksdaile.

"I'm so proud of all the work that he's put in, because the process is a lot tougher than most people think," Orlando Pace told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Georgia Receiver Trims List Of Offers

Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert four-star wide

receiver Kojo Antwi included Ohio State in his top five on March 11 along with Alabama, Georgia, Texas A&M and USC. He also announced he'll make his college decision on July 5, which is his mother's birthday.

The 6-1, 185-pound Antwi is considered the 13th-best wide receiver and No. 94 prospect overall in the class of 2022, after he hauled in 44 catches for 795 yards and nine touchdowns for the Longhorns last fall.

The Buckeyes offered a scholarship to Antwi back in November, and he quickly built a strong relationship with head coach Ryan Day, wide receivers coach Brian Hartline and line-backers coach/area recruiter Al Washington. He's never been to campus but plans to take an official visit to Columbus in June, provided the NCAA-mandated recruiting dead period is brought to an end by then.

Ohio State is aiming to bring on one more wide receiver in the current cycle to join Del Valle, Texas, five-star Caleb Burton and Chandler, Ariz., four-star Kyion Grayes, and Antwi is at the top of that list. But if he chooses the home-state Bulldogs or the Aggies, who benefit from Antwi having family near campus, the Buckeyes' other options include Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star C.J. Williams and Chicago St. Rita four-star Kaleb Brown.

Running Back Takes Matters Into Own Hands

Hoping to make his college decision before the start of his senior season, Memphis (Tenn.) Christian Brothers four-star running back Dallan Hayden took a self-guided visit to Ohio State on March 17.

The 5-11, 195-pound Hayden – who is considered the 22nd-best running back and No. 208 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – made the trip with his father, Aaron, a former Tennessee

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	206	★★★★★	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

running back who played professionally for the then-San Diego Chargers, Green Bay Packers and Philadelphia Eagles. They were unable to meet with coaches or check out the Woody Hayes Athletic Center due to the dead period but did stop at Ohio Stadium and the Ohio Union and roamed around campus.

It was also a homecoming of sorts for Hayden, who lived in Columbus as a small child but hadn't been back since. He then followed that up with a trip to Notre Dame on March 18. The Buckeyes and Fighting Irish are two of his three finalists, with the home-state Volunteers also in the race to land his services.

Hayden has built a strong bond over the last few months with Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford, who also serves as the area recruiter for the state and has a track record of landing prospects from Tennessee, including running backs Master Teague and Mitch Rossi, offensive tackle Max Wray and defensive lineman Cormontae Hamilton. But the Buckeyes plan to take just one running

back this cycle, and Alford has similar relationships with Reading (Pa.) Governor Mifflin four-star Nicholas Singleton, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Kaytron Allen and Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star Damari Alston.

It could simply be a matter of who jumps at the chance to commit first.

Tailback Trims List Of Scholarship Offers

Speaking of Singleton, he included Ohio State in his top nine on March 9. Also on the list are Alabama, Auburn, Michigan, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Penn State, Texas A&M and Wisconsin.

The 6-0, 210-pound Singleton is considered the fifth-best running back and No. 98 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He rushed for 1,303 yards and 24 touchdowns in just eight games for the Mustangs last fall.

The Buckeyes have long been one of the

Continued On Page 16

REDS HALL OF FAME MEMBERSHIP KNOCKS IT OUT OF THE PARK

Join today to get these exclusive membership benefits and MORE!

- Unlimited admission to the Reds Hall of Fame
- Collectible gifts
- 2021 Reds publication
- Early access and special discounts for many HOF events
- Discount in the Hall Shop—now 15%
- And new for 2021—a member-exclusive commemorative pennant!

@REDSMUSEUM REDS MUSEUM @REDSMUSEUM

For more information, call the Hall of Fame Box Office at (513) 765-7923 or visit

REDSMUSEUM.ORG





*Best Taco
Al Pastor
in the City!*



MONDAY SPECIAL
Buy One Taco El Pastor
GET ONE FREE

WEDNESDAY SPECIAL
Gringas El Pastor
Only \$2 EACH

MULTIPLE TV'S TO WATCH THE GAMES

DUBLIN • 7370 Sawmill Rd.
614-726-9185

Serving Alcohol with Full Bar
Sun-Thurs | 11am-12am • Fri & Sat | 11am-1am

Columbus • 5221 Godown Rd.
614-538-0211

Sun - Thur | 11am - 12am • Fri & Sat | 11am - 1am

Gahanna • 1376 Cherry Bottom Rd.
614-471-4717

*New
Store!*

Mon-Sun | 11am - 11pm

Columbus • 1121 S. Hamilton Rd.
614-852-3000

Mon-Sun | 11am - 11pm

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

Tailback Visits Columbus

Continued From Page 15

favorites in Singleton's recruitment thanks to his above-mentioned relationship with Alford, who extended an offer clear back in January 2020. He's never been to campus in an official recruiting capacity due to the ongoing dead period, but he made a trip to Columbus with his parents last October for a self-guided tour.

Many believe Singleton will ultimately choose between Ohio State and Penn State, whereas Hayden is likely to pick between the Buckeyes and Fighting Irish. That leaves Alston, who has yet to trim his list of more than 50 scholarship offers.

St. Louis Cornerback Reveals Top Choices

St. Louis Lutheran North four-star cornerback Toriano Pride also revealed his top schools on March 5, listing Ohio State along with Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Georgia, Missouri and Oregon in his top seven.

The 5-11, 172-pound Pride is considered the 14th-best cornerback and No. 124 prospect in the class of 2022. He recorded 22 tackles, one interception and one fumble recovery to lead the Crusaders to the state quarterfinals last fall. He also added 567 all-purpose yards and eight touchdowns on offense.

Pride landed an offer from the Buckeyes following a strong performance at the Under Armour Elite Underclassmen Camp in Obetz, Ohio, last summer, and he's maintained contact with Day and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs ever since. He's been to Columbus on numerous occasions, including the 2015 spring game to watch family friend and former Ohio State running back Ezekiel Elliott, but hopes to return when the dead period comes to an end.

Pride doesn't plan to make a decision until he can conduct official visits because he wants the opportunity to meet with coaches in person, and of his top schools, the only coaches he's met are the ones at Missouri.

With Jacksonville (Fla.) Robert E. Lee five-star Jaheim Singletary and West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Jyaire Brown already in the fold, Ohio State hopes to bring on just one more cornerback this cycle. Pride is at the top of the list, but other names to keep in mind include Mauldin, S.C., four-star Jeadyn Lukus; Denton (Texas) Ryan four-star Austin Jordan; and Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star Ryan Turner.

Interestingly, most prognosticators believe it's a two-way battle between Clemson and Ohio State for both Pride and Turner, with one likely to end up with the Tigers and the other to choose the Buckeyes. Only time will tell which one goes where, though.

Four-Star DT Names Top Schools

Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive tackle Dominick James included Ohio State in his top 12 over the weekend, joining Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Oregon, Penn State, South Carolina, Texas A&M, UCF, USC and Wisconsin.

The 6-2, 270-pound James is considered the 14th-best defensive tackle and No. 201 prospect overall in the class of 2022, after he recorded 30 tackles, 11 tackles for loss, five quarterback hurries, one sack and one interception that he returned for a touchdown for the Ascenders last fall.

James landed an offer from the Buckeyes and defensive line coach Larry Johnson last May, shortly after he transferred to IMG from Prattville, Ala. He's never been to campus but

has conducted a virtual visit and regularly FaceTimes with Johnson and Day.

James is also coached by former Ohio State linebacker Thomas "Pepper" Johnson, who is IMG Academy's defensive coordinator, which certainly helps the Buckeyes' chances of extending the pipeline that produced four-star offensive guard Tyler Gerald and four-star defensive tackle Malik Barrow in 2016, four-star cornerback Marcus Williamson and four-star safety Isaiah Pryor in 2017, five-star defensive tackle Taron Vincent in 2018 and four-star cornerback Lejond Cavazos in 2020.

Like most, James is hopeful that the NCAA ends the ongoing recruiting dead period on May 31 so that he can start taking official and unofficial visits and make his college decision before the start of his senior season. So far, the only school in his top 12 that he's seen in person is Alabama. He took an unofficial visit for the Crimson Tide's 35-13 win over Tennessee in October 2019.

Ohio State, meanwhile, is still searching for its first commitment along the defensive line but finds itself in a good position with a number of the top tackles, including Cordova (Tenn.) St. Benedict at Auburndale five-star Walter Nolen, Greensboro (N.C.) Grimsley five-star Travis Shaw, Columbus (Ga.) Hardaway four-star Mykel Williams, Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star Caden Curry and Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star Christen Miller as the staff looks to take two or three players at the position this cycle.

Defensive Tackle Pushes Decision Date

Though he originally planned to make his college decision on April 4, Miller shared on March 8 that he has decided to hold off on an announcement.

That's certainly good news for Ohio State, which offered a scholarship to the 6-5, 285-pound Miller only in early February. It was clear that was an offer he coveted, though and he immediately included the Buckeyes in his top five along with Florida, Georgia, Georgia Tech and Indiana.

Miller, who hails from the same high school that produced Ohio State senior defensive tackle Antwan Jackson, visited Columbus for the first and only time last October for the season opener against Nebraska, though the recruiting dead period prevented him from attending the game or meeting with the coaching staff. He also conducted a virtual visit with Johnson on March 11.

The home-state Bulldogs very much remain the team to beat in Miller's recruitment, but his decision to delay his commitment certainly gives Johnson more time to make a move. It also helps in Ohio State's pursuit of his teammate, 2022 four-star defensive end Joshua White, who listed the Buckeyes in his top six in February. Also mentioned were Arkansas, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Mississippi State and Nebraska.

The two made the trip to Columbus together last fall and hope to play together in college.

California OG Reveals Top Options

Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star offensive guard Earnest Greene trimmed his list of two dozen scholarship offers to 10 schools on March 17, at which time he listed Ohio State with Alabama, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

The 6-5, 330-pound Greene, who is considered the second-best offensive guard and No. 52 prospect overall in the class of 2022, hails

ASK AN ANALYST

With Lettermen Row's Jeremy Birmingham

Ohio State extended a scholarship offer to Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star offensive tackle Aamil Wagner on March 8. Given his status as a developmental prospect, why did they offer now and not after they have a chance to evaluate him better in person?

"The reason for the offer now is simple: Some things weren't going to change. Wagner has ideal tackle length, and he's putting on weight over the last few years at a consistent clip. He's up to 260 pounds, and his junior film showed marked improvement from the year before. Without the likelihood of summer camps this June, there was no real reason for Ohio State to wait any longer for an offer because doing so may have put the Buckeyes on the outside looking in. It's not the ideal situation for offensive line recruiting, but it's 2021 and nothing is ideal at this point."

Although Ohio State already 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 Jyair Brown, the staff is looking to bring on a third player at the position for the class of 2022. Who are some other players to keep in mind for that spot, and how do you feel about the

Buckeyes' chances with each?

"The Buckeyes have had their cornerback search kind of narrowed down for them in the last few months, with Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star Domani Jackson and Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South five-star Will Johnson both committing to their hometown schools of USC and Michigan. Ohio State also decided to stop pursuing Houston North Shore five-star Denver Harris in lieu of other prospects that were better program fits. That's brought St. Louis Lutheran North four-star Toriano Pride and Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna four-star Ryan Turner into the spotlight as the 'next up' targets. There are other players like Denton (Texas) Ryan four-star Austin Jordan and Mission Hills (Calif.) Bishop Alemany four-star Ephesians Prysock who are still very much in the mix and being evaluated, but there's no hurry by Ohio State to bring anyone else into the fold immediately. The Buckeyes would love more time to evaluate."

Though Ohio State has long been viewed as the favorite to land Charlestown, Ind., four-star offensive tackle Kiyaunta Goodwin, do you think Alabama, Clemson or any other school in particular has a chance to change his mind?

"The thing about recruiting against Alabama and

Clemson is that you can do everything right and still lose out. That's just the nature of the beast when it comes to recruiting at the top of the sport. Ohio State has a few advantages, but the battle will definitely come down to relationships and trust, and the Buckeyes have a long-term relationship with Goodwin that they will have to continue relying on. The ultimate tale of his commitment will come down to summertime official visits."

While Ohio State brings on several preferred walk-on prospects each cycle, this year's haul feels different from usual given their familial ties to the program. Do you think the staff is making it a point to bring on players who grew up in or around the program?

"It's one thing to promote a 'family feel' in a college football program, and it's another to live it. Ohio State is trying to live it and the culture within the program is obvious to everyone, but understandably few understand that better than the men who've helped build it. Ohio State wants young men who love the Buckeyes, and in players like Zak Herbstreit, Jalen Pace, Cayden Saunders and Toby Wilson, they've got built-in leaders that will simply love wearing the scarlet and gray, scholarship or not."

from the same high school as former Buckeye offensive guard Wyatt Davis and current safety Kourt Williams. He actually landed an offer from Studrawa while on an unofficial visit with Williams in March 2019, though he didn't report it publicly until the following April.

Since that time, Greene has maintained contact with Studrawa and offensive graduate assistant Kennedy Cook, who view him as a versatile offensive lineman who could play either guard or tackle at the next level. He also regularly chats with Davis and Williams about what it's like to play for Ohio State.

Greene plans to return to campus when the recruiting dead period comes to a close, as well as visit a few other schools he's never been to, before narrowing his list further or making his college decision.

Offensive guard isn't a significant need for the Buckeyes, who have offered only three players at the position this cycle in Greene; Allen, Texas, four-star Neto Umeozulu; and Fort Wayne (Ind.) Snider four-star Demon Moore. But his versatility, coupled with the staff's desire to sign four or five offensive linemen this cycle, makes him someone worth keeping an eye on.

Young Defensive Tackle Narrows List Of Offers

Though it's still relatively early in the recruiting process, Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola defensive tackle John Walker listed Ohio State in his top 12 on March 17 along with Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Notre Dame, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and USC.

The 6-4, 260-pound Walker is not yet rated by any recruiting services but figures to be one of the top-rated prospects in the class of 2023 once the rankings are unveiled after a strong sophomore season in which he recorded 65 tackles, 15 sacks and 14 tackles for loss to lead the Kowboys to an appearance in the state championship game.

The Buckeyes extended an offer to Walker and his teammate, 2023 defensive end Derrick LeBlanc, in November, and they've both stayed in contact with Day, Johnson and Alford ever since.

LeBlanc listed Ohio State in his own top 10 on Jan. 24, which is notable given the two plan to play together in college and hope to make their first trip to Columbus when the dead period comes to a close.

It's still too early to project how many players the Buckeyes will look to take along the defensive line for the class of 2023, though, especially since Johnson hasn't accepted any commitments for the current recruiting cycle. Other players in LeBlanc and Walker's class with an offer include Mentor, Ohio, four-star end Brenan Vernon; Albany (Ga.) Dougherty four-star end Stantavious Smith; and Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star tackle James Smith.

Other Notes From Around The Country

• Oregon offered a basketball scholarship on March 9 to 2021 Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau, who also has the chance to play both sports at Washington. His other finalists

– Alabama, Ohio State and USC – have not offered a similar opportunity.

• Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson four-star cornerback Tony Mitchell, who is considered the top-rated player at his position for the class of 2023, listed Ohio State in his top 12 on March 6 along with Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Oregon, Texas and USC.

• West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star athlete Dillon Tatum unexpectedly left Ohio State out of his top schools on March 7, instead listing Baylor, Michigan, Michigan State and Notre Dame as his final four. It's worth noting, though, he's a former teammate of 2021 Wolverines four-star running back signee Donovan Edwards and his former head coach, Ron Bellamy, is Michigan's new safeties coach.

• Mission Hills (Calif.) Bishop Alemany four-star cornerback Ephesians Prysock named a top 10 on March 9 of Arizona State, Colorado, LSU, Notre Dame, Ohio State,

Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, UCLA and USC. The 6-3, 170-pounder is considered the 25th-best cornerback and No. 200 prospect overall in the class of 2022.

• Ohio State has handed out several new offers in recent weeks, including to 2023 Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star defensive end Matayo Uiagalelei, brother of Clemson quarterback D.J. Uiagalelei, on March 15; 2023 Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage safety Daemon Fagan, 2022 Clayton (N.C.) Cleveland four-star running back Omarion Hampton and 2023 Bixby, Okla., tight end Luke Hasz on March 16; 2023 Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star cornerback Malik Muhammad on March 17; and 2023 Warner Robins, Ga., four-star defensive end Vic Burley on March 19.

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

2021 Buckeye Road Trips

OSU at Rutgers with New York City Tour
September 30-October 3

OSU at Indiana plus Beautiful Brown County & Columbus, IN
October 22-23

BOOK YOUR TRAVEL NOW FOR 2021

- Family & Small Group Private Tours
- "Close to Home" Tours including: Ohio, Pennsylvania, and That State Up North
- 2 Cruises: Hawaii & France Riverboat
- Ireland, Scotland & Italy

Prime
Tours

www.GoPrimeTours.com
614-766-5553

Doing Buckeye road trips
since 1996!



Minelli's Pizza
A West Side Tradition
Since 1967
1189 N. Wilson Rd.
(614) 279-3344
& Next Door Tavern
Catch all the Ohio State action
Big Ten Network • NFL Sunday Ticket
14 TVs • OSU Memorabilia



Inconsistent Play Caught Up With Ohio State

Continued From Page 1

in a 90-54 blowout victory, the Buckeyes suffered a brutal 77-60 defeat at Minnesota on Jan. 3. Ohio State sat at 2-3 in Big Ten play, and anyone talking about the team making tournament runs at that point would have been dismissed immediately.

The resolve of the men's basketball team proved to be strong, responding to the 17-point loss to the Gophers with wins over the Scarlet Knights, Wildcats and Illini to improve to 5-3 in conference play.

The Buckeyes' opportunity for revenge against the Boilermakers came up short 67-65 on Jan. 19, but they ripped off seven straight wins against Wisconsin, Penn State, Michigan State, Iowa, Maryland, Indiana and the Nittany Lions again to give them 10 wins in 11 games.

The run lifted Ohio State into competition for the regular-season conference crown and earned the No. 4 ranking in the country.

However, the Buckeyes dropped their last four regular-season contests to Michigan, Michigan State, Iowa and Illinois.

A path to the Big Ten tournament championship game presented a tough challenge, with the only three opponents Ohio State had not beaten standing in its way in Minnesota, Purdue and Michigan. However, the Buckeyes avenged their earlier losses to top all three and reach the conference title game against Illinois.

Although they fell 91-88 in an over-

time loss to the Illini on March 14, the strong run through the tourney gave the Buckeyes momentum entering the national tournament. The up-and-down nature of Ohio State caught up with the team against Oral Roberts in the first round, however, and it lost by three in overtime.

Despite being such heavy favorites, Holtmann said his team was prepared for a tough matchup in the first round against the Golden Eagles.

"We had no illusions that this was going to be – by any stretch, anything other than a really challenging game, and it obviously was that from the very jump," Holtmann said. "Ultimately, there were too many missed shots, too many missed free throws. But give them credit for making the plays."

Following the season-ending loss, Holtmann was asked what his message was to his team after such a disappointing loss to end an otherwise solid season.

"As much as anything, you're trying to bring some perspective to the season, which is hard to do in this moment," Holtmann said. "We all have to be responsible for not quite getting it done, and it begins with me first and foremost."

"Obviously, you're a two-seed for a reason. That means you put in great work throughout the season. You had a body of work that was really good, and there were some tremendous moments this season. By and large it was a special year with a conclusion that is one that we've got to lean into. It's incredibly disappointing. I

think it's hard to give too much perspective, but that's what we tried to do."

Even though the season ended far before they wanted, there were many bright spots for the Buckeyes during the 2020-21 campaign. A large portion of the players made substantial improvements to their games, and in many ways, the team overperformed.

Sophomore forward E.J. Liddell blossomed into a star in Columbus, earning first-team All-Big Ten honors with averages of 16.2 points, a team-high 6.7 rebounds and a team-high 1.1 blocks per game.

"I'm proud of E.J., proud of the sophomore year he had, proud of the kid he is," Holtmann said. "He had a tremendous sophomore year."

Though inconsistent at times, junior guard Duane Washington emerged as a prolific scorer for Ohio State, leading the team with 16.4 points per game and shooting 37.4 percent from beyond the arc (89 of 238) to earn third-team all-conference accolades.

After sitting out last season due to NCAA transfer rules following his arrival from Cal, fourth-year junior wing Justice Sueing provided the Buckeyes with versatility and a solid third scoring option. He averaged 10.7 points and 5.5 boards per contest, along with a team-high 0.9 steals per game, while serving as an extra ball-handler and important defender.

Another bright spot for the Buckeyes was fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker, who played through torn ligaments in his hand after suffering the injury in a pre-season scrimmage. Walker was an important leader on and off the floor. Despite playing through pain, Walker averaged a career-high 9.5 points per game and a team-high 4.4 assists. His 24 steals ranked second on the squad, and he excelled at taking care of the ball with 118 helpers to 55 turnovers on the year (2.1 assist-to-turnover ratio).

Following the crushing loss to Oral Roberts, Walker shouldered much of the blame when speaking to members of the media. Even in the wake of defeat, a visibly upset Walker made it clear that his team should be remembered for much more than a tough loss in the tourney.

"This is my last time putting on an Ohio State jersey and playing in this moment, in this atmosphere, so it really hurts a lot," Walker said. "I'm not going to let this define me or the Ohio State program in itself and the future to come."

Walker is expected to move on from his collegiate playing career, even though the NCAA has granted a free year of eligibility due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fellow senior Kyle Young, a forward who was another vital piece to the 2020-21 Buckeyes, had not yet made a decision when BSB went to press.

Young, who missed the final three games with a concussion, enjoyed an excellent season prior to the injury. The quintessential glue guy, Young averaged 8.6 points and 5.5 rebounds per game with extreme efficiency, shooting 54.3 percent from the field, 43.3 percent from three, and 84.6 percent from the foul line. In addition to playing stellar defense, Young took care of the basketball on offense with 34 assists to 13 turnovers to lead the team with a 2.6 assist-to-turnover ratio.

After the early exit in the NCAA tourney, Holtmann praised his seniors, emphasizing the importance they have had on

strengthening the culture within the program.

"They've been phenomenal people, players, advocates of what we want our program to be about – tremendous leaders, great competitors," Holtmann said. "Obviously, we're hoping Kyle gets back healthy in a timely fashion, but I know he's hurting for his teammates. I know he would have loved to have been out there, but certainly it was the right decision to hold him out."

"C.J.'s a tremendous kid. He's a tremendous kid, tremendous leader. They're everything we want our seniors to be about."

Overall, Ohio State had an impressive season that came to an abrupt conclusion, and while there are many positives to pull from the COVID-riddled campaign, the program must take the next step.

The Buckeyes competed with some of the best teams in the country, beating such top-tier opponents as Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Purdue and Wisconsin, but they also struggled in matchups with lesser foes such as UMass Lowell and Oral Roberts, falling to the latter.

For Holtmann and Ohio State, making it to the Big Ten tournament championship game and earning a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament are steps in the right direction, but not nearly enough.

"Once we have some time to reflect, there were a lot of important strides this year and a lot of really good moments," Holtmann said. "This is incredibly disappointing. There's no other way to look at it. But it certainly doesn't discount what our guys have done throughout the bulk of the season."

"You're playing in a win-or-go-home environment, and we've got to own that. We'll have time to reflect on some of the positive steps we took here as a program this year. But right now, we've got to lean into this disappointment and embrace it for what it is and figure out how we can grow moving forward."

Holtmann and Co. made the tournament his first two seasons at the helm and were in position to make a run last year before the coronavirus pandemic canceled the campaign early.

In his first season with Ohio State, Holtmann's Buckeyes defeated South Dakota State in the first round before falling to Gonzaga in the second round of the 2018 tourney. The following year, the No. 11-seeded Buckeyes upset No. 6-seeded Iowa State in the first round before being eliminated by Houston in round two.

The loss to Oral Roberts marked the first time a Holtmann squad did not make it out of the first round at Ohio State and the third time it did not reach the Sweet 16.

"Obviously, that's the next step for us," Holtmann said. "There's no question it's finding a way to get to the second weekend. And I think in the previous couple years, we were beaten by teams that were higher seeded than us, and we were able to upset a team there two years ago. So this has not happened to us in our four years together, but that doesn't discount the fact that I understand that's where we need to be moving forward."

"We certainly thought we had a great chance last year. We certainly thought we had a great chance this year."

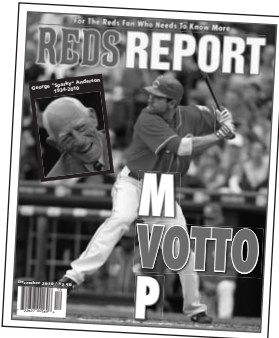
"We didn't get it done."

REDS FANS!

Follow The Reds Year-Round In Reds Report

Reds Report is must reading for every Reds fan. Each information-filled issue includes player features; historical articles; extensive minor-league coverage with features on top prospects, complete statistics and farm club updates; box scores and game summaries for every Reds game; complete team and individual statistics; a Reds memorabilia section and much more.

1 Year (12 issues) — \$44.95



Send to: Reds Report • P.O. Box 12453 • Columbus, Ohio 43212

☐ Please send me a one-year (12 issues) subscription to **Reds Report** for \$44.95.

☐ My check or money order is enclosed. Check # _____

☐ Charge to my: ☐ Discover ☐ MC ☐ Visa ☐ AMEX

Exp. Date _____

Card No. _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

For Faster Service On Credit Card Orders Call

1-800-760-2862

Beat Expected Final Four Run For Ohio State

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After a difficult end to the regular season, losing four straight matchups to Michigan, Michigan State, Iowa and Illinois, the Ohio State men's basketball team bounced back in a big way during the Big Ten tournament. There, the Buckeyes took down Minnesota, Purdue and the Wolverines before once again falling to the Illini, this time in overtime of the championship game.

With that momentum fresh in the minds of many, Buckeye Sports Bulletin reached out in the days before the NCAA Tournament began to the beat writers who cover Ohio State. BSB asked them what they were expecting from the Buckeyes as a No. 2 seed, their highest-seeded position since the 2012-13 season.

These questions were asked in the days prior to Ohio State's stunning defeat to No. 15 seed Oral Roberts in the first round.

BSB included answers from Jack Emerson (The Lantern), Tony Gerdeman (Buckeye Scoop), Colin Hass-Hill (Eleven Warriors), Steve Helwagen (247Sports), Spencer Holbrook (Letterman Row), Bill Landis (The Athletic), Keaton Maisano (The Lantern), Stephen Means (Cleveland.com), Patrick Murphy (247Sports), Kevin Noon (Rivals) and Griffin Strom (Rivals). Responses from BSB's own Wyatt Crosher, Joe Dempsey, Andrew Lind and Patrick Mayhorn were also included.

How Far Will Ohio State Go?

The majority of those asked how far they expected Ohio State to make it in the NCAA tournament answered that the Buckeyes would outperform their seed and make a run to the Final Four.

Eight out of 15 participants answered with Ohio State making it out of its region, likely having to defeat top-seeded Baylor along the way. Other foes along the way in the region included No. 3 seed Arkansas, No. 4 Oklahoma State, No. 5 Tennessee and No. 6 Texas Tech.

While 8 of 15 picked a Final Four run, the next most likely outcome came with a much earlier exit in the Sweet 16. Four beat writers came to that outcome, including three BSB writers in Crosher, Lind and Mayhorn. The other writer to make that prediction was Gerdeman.

Past that, three out of 15 writers thought that Ohio State would make it to the Elite Eight, faltering in the regional final at the doorstep of making the program's first Final Four since 2011-12.

Murphy was one of those who made that prediction, though he was more so in the place of not knowing where to slot the Buckeyes after what had been an up-and-down end to the year.

"I certainly see Ohio State making a deep run in this NCAA Tournament but also wouldn't be surprised if the Buckeyes slipped up at some point unexpectedly as well," Murphy said. "Nothing about this team surprises me anymore after watching them the last few weeks. Looking at the bracket, it won't be easy, but I think Ohio State makes it to the Elite Eight this year."

If Ohio State were to have made it to the Sweet 16, it would have been the first time in the Chris Holtmann era and the first time since 2014-15. Along with it

being the last time the Buckeyes were a No. 2 seed, it was the last time that they made the Elite Eight.

No one predicted the Buckeyes' defeat to the Golden Eagles in the Round of 64.

Who Wins The National Championship?

Much like the question of who would take down Ohio State, the majority of the answers for this question ended up with Big Ten champion Illinois, which was a No. 1 seed in the Midwest Region.

Ten out of 15 responders picked the Illini to win the national title for the first time in program history.

Led by All-Americans Ayo Dosunmu and Kofi Cockburn, Illinois boasted a 23-6 record and ended the season on a seven game-winning streak, and the Illini were winners of 14 of their last 15 games.

These writers, however, were also incorrect, as the Illini went down to Loyola Chicago in the Round of 32.

Four other writers selected Gonzaga as the champion. The Bulldogs were the No. 1 overall seed and held an undefeated 27-0 record heading into tournament play. The lone other vote went to No. 2 seed Alabama, which won the SEC tournament narrowly over LSU.

The Crimson Tide entered the tournament with a 24-6 record and on a six-game winning streak in head coach Nate Oats' second season with the program.

Alabama has improved mightily in two years under Oats, finishing the regular season with the program's highest winning percentage (80.0 percent) since 1986-87.

Whom Will Ohio State Lose To?

Though there was nothing that said that those involved in the poll all had to make the same selections for whom the Buckeyes would fall to in the respective rounds, every writer was in agreement with the opponent that would take out Ohio State in either the Sweet 16, Elite Eight or Final Four.

The eight votes for the Final Four all said that the Buckeyes would lose to Illinois for the third straight time. Helwagen went so far as to say that Ohio State and Illinois would up their effort from the conference title game, stating that "the Buckeyes will lose to Illinois 101-98 in double overtime in a national semifinal game."

The trio of Elite Eight votes said Ohio State would falter at the hands of Baylor, the top seed in the South Region.

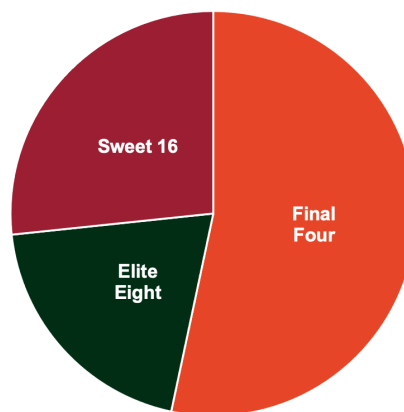
"In the NCAA Tournament, games often come down to ball-handling guards that can take over and either get a team points or set their teammates up," Murphy said. "The Bears have three very good guards that can all score, and I think that's the difference."

"Like the Buckeyes, Baylor can put points on the board with the best in the country but defend better than the Scarlet and Gray. It will probably be another close one – as these games with Ohio State seem to be – but this is where Chris Holtmann's team's run comes to an end."

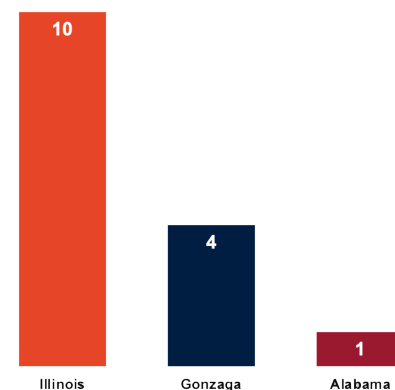
The other four who had Ohio State making it only to the Sweet 16 had the Buckeyes losing to Arkansas. Once again, as with the question prior, there was no writer who had Oral Roberts taking down Ohio State.

BREAKING DOWN THE BEAT'S PICKS

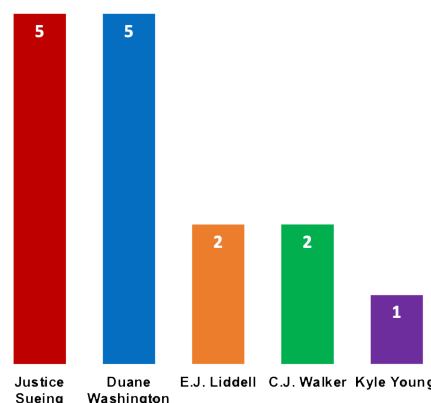
How Far Will Ohio State Make It?



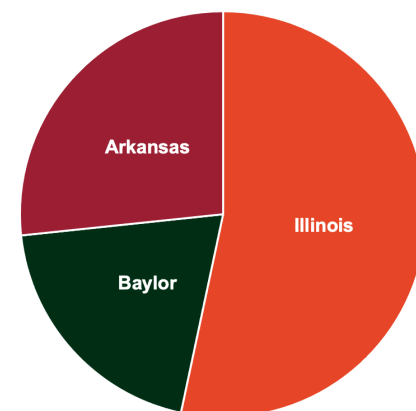
Who Wins The National Championship?



Who Is the X Factor?



Who Will Beat Ohio State?



Who Is The X Factor For A Deep Run?

Consistent with Ohio State's season of regularly relying on a wide variety of players, the Ohio State beat selected a handful of members on the Buckeyes' roster to be the "X factor" if Ohio State were to have made a deep run in the tournament.

The two most common names were a pair of juniors in forward Justice Sueing and guard Duane Washington, who each received five votes.

Sueing was third on the team heading into the tournament with 10.9 points per game, shooting 49.5 percent from the field and 37.3 percent from deep. He also added 5.6 rebounds per contest, second most on the team.

The Cal transfer came up big in the Big Ten championship game, finishing with 22 points and four rebounds while making all nine attempts from the free-throw line, including a make on an and-one to force overtime in the first place.

"I think Justice Sueing is the X factor," Holbrook said. "He's been inconsistent at points this season, but his 22 points against Illinois in the B1G title game prove that he can help carry the offensive load for this team."

Washington, following a career-high 32 points against the Illini, led the team with 16.3 points per game before NCAA play while shooting 41.4 percent overall and 38.1 percent from deep. The third-year guard is a volume shooter, and if he can get hot at the right time, Ohio State can beat anyone.

The next two players chosen were sophomore forward E.J. Liddell and fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker, who received

two votes each. Liddell, a first-team All-Big Ten selection, was second on Ohio State with 15.9 points per contest following the Big Ten tournament and led with 6.4 rebounds per game. But Liddell struggled mightily against the Illini, shooting 3 of 16 for 12 points in the 91-88 overtime loss.

But Means thought that Liddell might be able to break out when he was not consistently having to face battles inside a conference known for grueling interior presences.

"What happens now that E.J. Liddell isn't fighting with Big Ten post players anymore?" Means asked. "He shot 46 percent during the season but just 31 percent in the tournament. Can he be a more efficient scorer outside Big Ten play?"

As for Walker, he finished the Big Ten title game with 16 points and six assists in 33 minutes off the bench. His ability as a playmaker, as well as his prior experience on an Elite Eight team with Florida State, could have proved invaluable to an Ohio State roster that might have faced uncharted territory deeper into the tournament.

Against Oral Roberts, it was Liddell who shone, finishing with 23 points, 14 rebounds and five assists on 10-of-15 shooting. Washington tallied 18 points but shot 7 of 21 overall and 3 of 12 from three.

Walker also made an impact, finishing with 12 points, six rebounds and three assists off the bench. Sueing was more absent, hitting on 3 of 8 attempts for seven points in 34 minutes.

One vote also went to senior forward Kyle Young, whose status was uncertain heading into tournament play due to a concussion. He ended up missing Ohio State's lone tournament game.

Tournament Loss Will Be Hard To Forget For OSU

So much for planning. This edition of Court Report was going to step away from Ohio State's run in the NCAA Tournament and leave the stellar coverage to our own basketball guru Joe Dempsey for the most part.

COURT REPORT

Craig Merz

The idea was that the next issue of BSB would be the place to dissect where the Buckeyes stood in their quest for a first national championship since 1960.

Instead, this spot was held for a thought-provoking series done by CBS Sports' Matt Norlander in November where he rated the best men's basketball programs of all time since the first tournament in 1939.

The goal here was to present it with updates on how those schools fared this season. It's relevant when you consider that powerhouses Duke and Kentucky did not make the NCAA Tournament this season. Yes, they were high on Norlander's list.

Presenting his picks would have made for good conversation and debate while awaiting the Buckeyes' Sweet 16 game, or at the very least a diversion from discussions on how Chris Holtmann's squad surprisingly bowed out in the second round.

Oops. Some guy named Max and a school that hadn't won an NCAA Tournament game since Richard Nixon was barely holding onto his presidency in the spring of 1974 somehow messed everything up.

So Norlander's rankings will have to wait (spoiler alert: Ohio State is 12th) and attention turns to Oral Roberts' stunning 75-72 overtime win in the South Regional on March 19, marking only the ninth time a No. 15 seed had knocked off a No. 2 seed.

Here are some observations on the game and sordid aftermath.

Cavalier Attitude

If there's an example to follow for the Buckeyes, it's Virginia. No, not this season's version that lost in the opening round to Ohio. The 2018-19 Virginia team recovered from a humiliating setback the year before to become NCAA champions.

Virginia in 2018 was the first top seed to lose to a No. 16 when the University of Maryland, Baltimore County embarrassed the Cavaliers 74-54. Coach Tony Bennett and his players had to live with the scorn for 12 months until the Cavaliers defeated Texas Tech 85-77 in the title game.

This is not to say Chris Holtmann's Buckeyes are ready to make that leap from a

2020-21 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

21-10 Overall (12-8 Big Ten) Statistics through final game on March 19

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.						
Duane Washington	31-31	995-32.1	171-417	.410	89-238	.374	76-91	.835	5-100	105-3.4	51-0	90	67	1	13	507-16.4
E.J. Liddell	29-29	850-29.3	158-333	.474	27-80	.338	126-169	.746	51-142	193-6.7	86-2	52	47	31	19	469-16.2
Justice Sueing	31-31	876-28.3	109-222	.491	22-61	.361	93-124	.750	48-122	170-5.5	75-3	46	56	6	29	333-10.7
C.J. Walker	27-12	811-30.0	82-200	.410	13-49	.265	79-84	.940	11-75	86-3.2	69-1	118	55	3	24	256-9.5
Kyle Young	27-26	711-26.3	88-162	.543	13-30	.433	44-52	.846	48-101	149-5.5	72-1	34	13	15	12	233-8.6
Justin Ahrens	31-18	564-18.2	58-134	.433	54-127	.425	7-10	.700	6-53	59-1.9	38-1	11	11	7	16	177-5.7
Zed Key	31-1	364-11.7	61-99	.616	0-0	.000	38-69	.551	47-58	105-3.4	60-0	9	24	22	3	160-5.2
Seth Towns	25-0	274-11.0	32-76	.421	15-44	.341	16-20	.800	11-43	54-2.2	30-0	7	8	5	5	95-3.8
Musa Jallow	26-5	407-15.6	31-61	.508	1-18	.056	13-23	.565	15-41	56-2.2	55-0	17	16	11	10	76-2.9
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	17-0	100-5.9	7-18	.389	6-12	.500	1-6	.167	1-6	7-0.4	6-0	3	5	1	3	21-1.2
Eugene Brown	29-0	178-6.1	13-37	.351	7-25	.280	2-4	.500	9-28	37-1.3	10-0	6	4	4	3	35-1.2
Ibrahima Diallo	5-0	10-2.1	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	1-4	.250	3-1	4-0.8	0-0	0	0	1	0	1-0.2
Team									45-51	96		15				
Total	31	6275	819-1786	.459	252-700	.360	502-664	.756	305-830	1135-36.6	571-9	406	329	108	140	2392-77.2
Opponents	31	6275	767-1821	.421	238-700	.340	432-610	.708	307-735	1042-33.6	588-9	424	312	82	149	2204-71.1

punchline to a victory parade in April 2022, but losing to the Summit League champion must be motivation for the players and staff as they prepare for next season.

The last No. 2 seed to fall to a No. 15 before OSU was Middle Tennessee beating Michigan State in 2016. The Spartans the next season received a No. 9 seed and made it to the second round before losing to top seed Kansas.

A defeat like the Buckeyes just incurred can define the program for years or be the catalyst to better days. Unfortunately for Holtmann, Oral Roberts will be his albatross until he does something about it.

Does he have to win a national championship, as Bennett did, to erase the stink of this final game of the 2020-21 season? Obviously that would do it, but aside from winning it all, if Holtmann can push the program consistently into the Elite Eight and make the Final Four occasionally, he'll have a long and mostly pleasurable stay at Ohio State.

Winning cures a lot of things in the eyes of fickle fans. Remember how Boston Red Sox devotees forgave Billy Buckner for his error in game 6 of the 1986 World Series vs. the New York Mets once the Red Sox won the Fall Classic?

Also, think what the football Buckeyes' victory over Clemson in the recent College Football Playoff did to assuage the hurt from four previous setbacks to the Tigers.

How long will the loss to Oral Roberts linger?

On the morning of the game, former Buckeye great Jim Jackson was a guest on "The Dan Patrick Show," and the talk turned to Jackson facing Michigan's Fab Five in 1992.

The Buckeyes had a pair of double-digit wins (68-58, 77-66) over the Wolverines in the regular season, but U-M got revenge when it counted, 78-75 in overtime in the Southeast

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

Regional final with a trip to the Final Four at stake.

Jackson referenced the definition of insanity is repeating the same act and anticipating a different outcome. He said whenever he sees replays of the game, he can't turn away but he always expects that somehow the Buckeyes will prevail. Almost 30 years later his Michigan memories are still vivid.

A decade or two from now, will Buckeye fans still see Max Abmas (the nation's leading scorer at 24.2 per game) popping in 29 points, his teammate Kevin Obanor pouring in 30 and the Buckeyes missing chance after chance to avoid the upset?

Clamping Down

One of the telling stats from the game was Oral Roberts committing only six turnovers in 65 minutes after averaging 11.5 for the season. Golden Eagles coach Paul Mills said afterward that he was not surprised.

"We're top 25 in the country at not turning it over, and Ohio State is 336th in the country at causing turnovers (10.1), so we knew that

we were coming into a game where there wasn't going to be a whole lot of pressure," he said. "We do a good job taking care of the ball. That's not their strength. They do a number of things really, really well, obviously, but their strength isn't that they're going to pressure you.

"So I thought any turnovers that we had were going to be self-inflicted, and fortunately, I mean how teams kind of play through the course of the year – us taking care of the ball, them not necessarily generating them – we were fortunate that it played out as the year played out for both teams."

Ohio State's loss can't be completely blamed on a lack of pressure, but that was part of the Buckeyes' downfall, especially in clutch time late in the season when they dropped four in a row heading into the Big Ten tournament.

In fairness, the Buckeyes held Oral Roberts to six points below their season average, and players not named Abmas or Obanor were 6 of 25 from the floor and 1 of 13 from three-point range.

www.theredbricktapandgrill.com

292 E. Gates St. Columbus

(614) 444-2742

HAPPY HOUR 3-8pm Mon-Fri
Half off all 30 drafts • Half off select appetizers
Craft bottle specials all day

100 Craft Beers!

New Food & Cocktail Menu

Newly Renovated Patio with Fire Pit

Handmade Pizzas & In-House Smoked Meats



You Can Count On These Services From

THE QUICKPRINT CENTRE

1350 W. 5th Ave., Suite 14, Columbus, OH 43212
614-488-2683 • FAX 614-488-0059 • qpoh@aol.com

Offset-Printing	Digital Color Copies	Digital B&W Copies
Typesetting	Ship UPS	Rubber Stamps
NCR Forms	Fax Service	Business Cards
Laminating	Announcements	Binding
Brochures	Wedding Invitations	Labels

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

"Our guys have had a great readiness to play all year," Holtmann said. "For whatever reason, us being slower to loose balls, I'll put that on me. I did not think that we had the necessary juice there early for whatever reason. But also, give them credit for beating us to those loose balls."

Defense still matters, and Holtmann will need to address the issue. Just ask Rutgers after the Scarlet Knights held off Clemson, 60-56, in the first round of the Midwest Region on March 19 for their first NCAA Tournament win since 1983.

"I feel like our defense won it for us, getting stops on the defensive end," Rutgers guard Caleb McConnell said. "It was a great game, a great team effort on both ends. We just toughed it out tonight."

"We just wanted to stick to Rutgers basketball and do what we do: get stops, play with each other and finish out tough games like that."

Senseless

On March 17, Ohio State sophomore forward E.J. Liddell was in a playful mood on Twitter, answering a question about his top five Disney movies.

He responded: Toy Stories, Cars, Finding Nemo, Monsters Inc., and Princess and the Frog.

At 12:50 a.m. on March 20, the next post on his timeline was:

"Honestly, what did I do to deserve this? I'm human."

Two minutes later: "Comments don't get to me but I just wanna know why. I've never done anything to anyone in my life to be approached like this."

By now, everyone has heard or seen the racist vile comments directed toward him after he missed a late throw in the Oral Roberts game yet led the Buckeyes with 23 points while making 10 of 15 from the floor.

"Goofy a n—"

"I swear to god I wanna kill ya f—t a—"

"I hope somebody shoot you in ya face fr bruh you is a f— bum"

There were more, but you get the picture.

Ohio State and the sports community rallied around Liddell, who is Black, and a police investigation is ongoing.

Liddell in a later tweet was thankful for the support. Among them was a Twitter note by Jared Sullinger Sr., father of former OSU players Jared Jr. and J.J.:

"I guess basketball players aren't human.... I guess basketball players don't have feelings. I guess basketball players are supposed to accept verbal abuse from any and everybody for their performance... it's sickening how we treat (people)..."

Liddell did not blame the so-called Buckeye Nation. Neither did athletic director Gene Smith or Holtmann in their statements of March 20.

"To the few of you who have chosen to inappropriately rail against our players on social media, stop," Smith said. "Hate and derision have no place in Buckeye Nation or in civil society."

Holtmann said: "Recent social media comments to E.J. Liddell, while not from or representative of Ohio State fans, are vile, dangerous and reflect the worst of humanity."

There you go. Rest easy, Buckeye fans. It wasn't you. Nothing to see here.

Bull hockey. Everybody should be offended by the comments, and it should not be overlooked that as far as we know, Holtmann, who is white, did not receive threats. This despite a few sentences from The Columbus Dispatch columnist Rob Oller after the game.

"Ohio State performed so pitifully in so many areas, including coaching, that finding positives proves difficult. ... Every player not

named E.J. Liddell and C.J. Walker performed in a fog, while the coaching was borderline confusing. OK, again, no borderline about it."

Every fan and armchair analyst has a right to question what the Holy Buckeye went wrong. I disliked the final shot in regulation to win the game by Duane Washington. He went Hollywood, in my opinion, for a step-back jumper to make a long shot even more difficult. I'm sure there are thousands who would agree, but how many immediately called Washington a racial slur to show their disgust?

I venture to say more than are willing to admit.

It would be nice if people took the advice of Holtmann following a win against Minnesota in the opening round of the Big Ten tournament. The Buckeyes almost squandered a 12-point lead with less than two minutes to play but were able to break a four-game skid.

"I want them to enjoy this," he said. "They're college basketball players, and it's not life or death."

Quotables

When you win, the postgame press conference can be your kingdom, especially for

Mills as a coach at a mid-major that receives little publicity.

He had some thoughts about Oral Roberts having to refocus after taking down the mighty Buckeyes and preparing for Florida two days later with a berth in the Sweet 16 at stake. He cited his previous stops in coaching.

"If you spend all your time looking back at your marriage-day videos, you're probably not going to have a very good marriage," he said. "So, there's other things to get done. Obviously, you want your players to have this experience and enjoy it. But the reality is I can tell you, I've been to four Sweet 16s and that's a better feeling, so your attention turns pretty quickly."

He also gave some insight into what made Abmas and Obanor (18.2 points) the highest-scoring duo in the country this season.

"If your best players are your hardest workers, you have a chance," Mills said. "I say this all the time, but when our players get to campus, we ask them to make 20,000 shots, make not take, and they've got a six-week period to do it."

"Kevin Obanor did it in six days, making about 3,500 shots (a day). Obviously, going 7 for 7 from the free-throw line down the stretch in this environment kind of speaks to his level of work ethic."

The Golden Eagles led the nation in free-throw percentage (82.4). They made 14 of 18 (77.9 percent) vs. the Buckeyes while OSU was 9 for 18 (50.0 percent).

The Right Call

Florida advanced to play Oral Roberts with a 75-70 overtime win vs. Virginia Tech on March 19 despite the absence of reserve forward Omar Payne after he was ejected from the SEC tournament quarterfinals for a flagrant-2 foul on Tennessee's John Fulkerson, who sustained a concussion and facial fracture.

While the SEC did not suspend Payne, Florida coach Mike White did for one game.

"It wasn't an overly difficult decision," White said. "It's difficult that he can't play obviously, but it was the right thing to do. That's it. Omar handled it like a champ. Omar's very remorseful. We all make mistakes."

PANEL TOWN & FLOORS

Established in 1967

FLOORS FOR THE WAY YOU LIVE





Free Cleaning System with Purchase of a Floor

1063 Dublin Rd., Columbus, OH 43215

614-488-0334

24 Month Financing

HARDWOOD FLOORING

\$1.99

sq. ft. & up

LVP VINYL PLANKS

\$1.49

sq. ft. & up

2021 Spring Renovation Sale • Save Up to \$1,000

THE RECLAIMED BARN





SHIPLAP

\$2.99

sq. ft. & up

RECLAIMED WALLS

\$6.99

sq. ft. & up

BARN DOOR HARDWARE

\$99.99

& up

1080 Ridge St. Columbus, OH 43215 • 614-524-5934 • reclaimedbarn.com

SEE STORE FOR DETAILS. LIMIT ONE DISCOUNT PER CUSTOMER. PURCHASE MUST BE MADE BY 4/3/2021

Bucks Make Run To B1G Tournament Title Game

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

The Ohio State men's basketball team went as far as it could go without winning the 2021 Big Ten basketball tournament, taking Illinois to overtime before falling, 91-88, in the title game.

To earn the right to face the Illini, the Buckeyes defeated Minnesota, Purdue in overtime, and top-seeded Michigan.

The following are recaps of Ohio State's four games in their quest for the Big Ten tournament championship.

Bucks Best Gophers With Stifling Defense

Fifth-seeded Ohio State defeated No. 13-seed Minnesota 79-75 in the second round of the 2021 Big Ten tournament at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on March 11, ending a four-game losing streak.

The Buckeyes were led by 16-point efforts from junior guard Duane Washington and junior wing Justice Sueing, while sophomore forward E.J. Liddell scored 14 points and fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker added 10 points, six rebounds and six assists.

"It's March, so you know you've got to survive and advance," Walker said. "You have to do what you have to do. Minnesota got going at the end, made some tough shots, got some turnovers. We missed some free throws toward the end, and some momentum plays that they had brought them back into the game.

"But we stay connected – that's something I mentioned while we were going through our losing streak, staying connected – so I feel like that's what we did toward the end."

The Gophers (14-15), who had trailed by as many as 13 points early in the second half, cut the lead to 53-49 with 7:38 left on a strong second-half surge, but the Buckeyes bounced back with a game-changing 9-1 run across the next 2:08 to push their lead to 62-50, highlighted by a converted and-one by Walker.

Ohio State (19-8) pushed its lead to 70-56 with 3:24 left on back-to-back buckets from Walker and Washington, but Minnesota refused to quit. The Gophers ripped off an 18-5 run, cutting the lead to 75-74 on a Marcus Carr three-pointer with 13 seconds remaining.

With eight seconds left, Liddell knocked down a pair of foul shots to push the Buckeye lead to 77-74.

"I'm proud of E.J. knocking those free throws down late," head coach Chris Holtmann said. "You're going to miss some free throws. We missed a couple of critical ones, but I feel good about being able to survive and advance and move forward."

Ohio State then fouled Carr, and he split a pair of free throws with six seconds left. Minnesota fouled Washington, and he put the game away with two foul shots to make it the final 79-75 with two seconds to play.

The Buckeyes jumped on the Gophers early, playing aggressive offensively and locked in defensively on their way to a 13-0 start by the 14:37 mark with Washington and senior forward Kyle Young leading the way.

After the Buckeyes led 39-27 at half-time, Minnesota opened the second half with back-to-back layups to cut the lead to 39-31 with 18:38 to play, but the Buckeyes

bounced back. Ohio State used a 7-2 spurt to push its lead to 46-33 on a Washington triple with 15:52 left.

The Gophers outscored the Buckeyes 16-7 in the next 8:14, cutting their deficit to four points on four threes and a pair of layups.

Young stood out inside for Ohio State, scoring 11 points and grabbing six boards. Junior wing Musa Jallow came up big for the Buckeyes off the bench, scoring eight points on 4-of-4 shooting and adding two steals and two blocks in 12 minutes.

Carr paced Minnesota with 24 points on 7-of-24 shooting, while freshman guard Jamal Mashburn added 18 points on 8-of-22 shooting.

"Minnesota is a really good team," Walker said. "They fight to the end. They played physical, played aggressive. That's what they did when they came back in that time frame. But we stuck together, made some tough plays at the end and finished them."

OSU Survives To Beat Boilermakers In OT

The Buckeyes defeated No. 4 seed Purdue 87-78 in overtime in the Big Ten tournament quarterfinals at Lucas Oil Stadium on March 12.

"Players win games, and our players won this game," Holtmann said. "They made great plays down the stretch, stayed with it. We had great execution in overtime. Purdue's a phenomenal team. They're tough. They're really good, really well-coached, physical. And to do this under some unique circumstances and unique lineups is a great testament to our players."

The Buckeyes (20-8) were led by 20 points from Washington, with Young scoring 18 points in 19 minutes before exiting with a concussion.

"In overtime offensively, guys made plays and Duane made some phenomenal reads," Holtmann said. "We ran a similar action most of overtime, and Duane made some phenomenal reads. It was a tough one without Kyle, because he was unbelievable in the first half."

Liddell scored 17 points, while forward Seth Towns added 11 critical points off the bench and Walker scored 10 points, dished seven assists and posted four steals.

Freshman forward Zed Key split a pair of foul shots to open overtime for Ohio State before Walker used a euro step for a layup to put his team up 75-72 with 3:41 to play.

Purdue (18-9) standout junior forward Trevion Williams made a hook shot in the lane to cut the deficit to 75-74 with 3:18 left before Towns drilled a three-pointer to push the lead to 78-74 with 2:54 on the clock.

Williams drew Liddell's fifth foul on the ensuing possession, and the 51.0-percent free-throw shooter hit both of his foul shots to cut the deficit to 78-76 with 2:25 left.

Towns rose to the occasion again, catching the ball beyond the arc, using a shot fake to trick the defense and connecting on a pull-up midrange bank shot to push the edge to 80-76 with 2:07 on the clock.

"Seth is always under control and calm, honestly," Liddell said. "I feel like Seth is always the levelheaded one. He doesn't ever get too high or too low, and he came out there and made some big plays, big

shots, and it shows what Seth can really do."

Key shut the door on Purdue 7-foot-4 freshman center Zach Edey for a big defensive stop before setting up Washington for a three-pointer on a dribble handoff to make it 83-76 with 1:16 left.

After Purdue split a pair of foul shots, Washington knocked down a pair of free throws to push the lead to 85-77 with 39 seconds left. The Boilermakers split another pair of foul shots before Walker grabbed the miss and took it coast to coast for a layup with 27 seconds left, securing the nine-point victory.

Young led both teams with 18 points in the first half, while Washington scored 13 and Walker and Liddell added five assists apiece to give Ohio State a 49-31 edge at the break. Edey led Purdue with eight points at halftime.

The Boilermakers opened the second half with six straight points to cut the Buckeye lead to 49-37 with 17:43 left, but Ohio State answered with a floater from Washington and an emphatic two-handed slam by Liddell on a nice feed by Young to extend its lead to 53-37 with 16:30 to play.

Purdue freshman guard Jaden Ivey, who had hit a game-winning three to beat the Buckeyes Jan. 19, responded with a trio of triples for the Boilermakers in three possessions, cutting the lead to 56-46 with 14:55 remaining with a 9-3 solo streak. Ohio State weathered Ivey's rally, but another 6-0 spurt by Purdue later cut its lead to 61-54 with 10:04 left.

Overall, the Buckeyes survived a second-half slump where they did not make a field goal for an 8:20 stretch from 15:20-7:00, ending the cold stretch and extending their lead to 66-58 on a bucket by Jallow.

"Purdue's a good team – give them credit," Holtmann said. "We had trouble guarding Trevion; we were in foul trouble. There was no shell shock. They were on to the next play. They've done this. They've been around this. This group is an experienced group."

After Liddell pushed the lead to 70-61 with a hook shot on a find by Walker with 5:23 left, Purdue scored three straight points on foul shots by redshirt freshman forward Mason Gillis following offensive rebounds on consecutive possessions to trim the deficit to 70-64 with 4:07 on the clock.

Then Edey went off the glass for a bucket, and Williams scored on a smooth right-handed hook after a shimmy fake to cut the lead to 70-68 with 1:48 left.

Following a stop by the Boilermakers, they went back to Williams on the block, who scored on another hook with his right hand to tie the game at 70 with 47 seconds left.

"They made some very tough shots," Washington said. "Trevion Williams had a great game, played really well today. He's a very good low-post scorer. He got going late. (Ivey) got going late as well later in the second half, bringing them back."

The Buckeyes' offense went ice cold down the stretch, failing to score for a five-minute stretch from 5:23-0:23, but Sueing came up big with a pair of foul shots to take a 72-70 lead with 23 seconds left.

Williams answered the bell for the Boilermakers, scoring in the paint again to

tie the game at 72 with nine seconds to play. Ohio State failed to get up a game-winning shot attempt to end regulation when Walker turned the ball over in the final seconds.

Williams led Purdue with 26 points, 14 rebounds and five assists, while Ivey added 19, along with 11 from Edey.

Bucks Scrap Out 1-Point Win Over Michigan

Ohio State knocked off top-seeded Michigan, 68-67, in the semifinals at Lucas Oil Stadium March 13, advancing to the title game.

Washington led the way with 24 points, including 19 in the second half, six rebounds and four assists, while Liddell added 18 points, including 13 in the second half.

"Any day I feel like Duane brings the same energy every single time," Liddell said. "And today, I mean we needed him huge. And he came out there and produced. That's why he's a big-time player."

A Washington layup put Ohio State up 67-56 with 3:18 left, and the game appeared to be in hand, but Michigan (20-4) never relented. The Wolverines responded with an 11-1 run, cutting the lead to 68-67 on a three-pointer by senior guard Chaundee Brown with 48 seconds to play.

Following a Walker turnover to give the Wolverines the ball with 28 seconds left, Ohio State forced graduate guard Mike Smith into a tough step-back jumper with great defense by Liddell on a switch on the final possession to survive and advance.

"In that last huddle we had before we actually turned the ball over for them to get another shot up on the rim, Coach said, 'Hey, forget about everything else. We have one job, we've got to score and get a stop,' " Washington said. "And we didn't score, and I looked at our guys and said, 'Hey, this is it, this is the one. This is the last 30 seconds working out with (strength coach Quadrian Banks), this is it. Finish.' And we pulled it out."

Earlier in the second half, Walker attacked the basket, drawing multiple defenders before finding Washington for a three-pointer to make it 42-38 with 12:55 on the clock.

Michigan fired off five straight points to take a 43-42 lead with 11:40 left, but the Buckeyes bounced back in a big way with an 11-0 run. Washington knocked down a three-pointer, Key made a tough hook shot, and Liddell and Walker both converted and-one plays, giving them a 53-43 lead with 9:06 to play.

After a triple by Brooks cut the Buckeye lead to 56-50 with 6:36 on the clock, Washington hit the Wolverines with one of the best plays of the game. He used a hesitation move then shook Wagner with a fake spin and drove to the hoop for an and-one layup, knocking down the foul shot for a 59-50 edge with 6:09 left.

The Buckeyes built their lead to a game-high 13 points on a rebound putback by Sueing and a pair of free throws from Liddell to make it 63-50 with 4:19 to play before Michigan went on its final run.

Sueing scored nine points, while Towns blocked four shots and grabbed five rebounds in 21 minutes off the bench. Walker pitched in seven points, four rebounds and four assists.

Dickinson led Michigan with 21 points and eight rebounds, while Brooks added 12 points. Wagner fouled out with 5:17 left with eight points, six boards, four assists, three



Kyle Young

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio State 79, Minnesota 75

March 11, 2021												
Lucas Oil Stadium • Indianapolis, Ind.												
				1	2							F
Minnesota (14-15)				27	48							75
Ohio State (19-8)				39	40							79
Minnesota	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Williams	29	5-13	0-0	1-7	0	3	11					
Mashburn	32	8-22	0-0	1-1	3	2	18					
Carr	38	7-24	6-8	0-4	4	4	24					
Johnson	23	1-2	5-8	4-4	0	4	7					
Curry	15	0-2	0-0	1-1	2	3	0					
Gach	22	4-6	0-1	0-3	2	2	9					
Freeman	15	1-2	0-0	2-4	0	1	2					
Ihnen	25	2-6	0-0	3-2	4	4	4					
Totals	200	28-77	11-17	16-26	15	23	75					
Percentages: FG: 36.4%. FT: 64.7%. Three-point field goals: 8-32 (Carr 4-12, Mashburn 2-7, Gach 1-3, Williams 1-4, Ihnen 0-4, Johnson 0-1, Curry 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 7 (Johnson 2, Curry 2, Ihnen 2, Williams). Turnovers: 11 (Williams 3, Carr 2, Johnson 2, Curry 2, Freeman 2). Steals: 7 (Carr 2, Johnson 2, Curry 2, Mashburn). Technical fouls: 1 (Williams).												
Ohio State	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Washington	36	6-9	2-3	0-3	4	4	16					
Ahrens	18	1-2	0-0	0-3	0	0	2					
Sueing	30	4-9	7-11	1-6	2	1	16					
Young	28	4-7	3-3	2-4	2	3	11					
Liddell	35	5-14	3-4	1-4	4	1	14					
Jallow	12	4-4	0-0	0-1	1	2	8					
Brown	2	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	2	0					
Walker	30	3-6	4-5	0-6	6	4	10					
Key	7	1-4	0-2	2-1	0	2	2					
Towns	2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Totals	200	28-56	19-28	6-31	19	17	79					
Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 67.9%. Three-point field goals: 4-12 (Washington 2-5, Sueing 1-2, Liddell 1-3, Ahrens 0-1, Walker 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 4 (Jallow 2, Young, Walker). Turnovers: 15 (Washington 4, Young 3, Walker 3, Liddell 2, Sueing, Brown, Key). Steals: 6 (Ahrens 2, Jallow 2, Sueing, Young). Technical fouls: 0. Officials: Carstensen, Pfeifer, Young. Attendance: 6,206.												

blocks and two steals.

Holtmann was pleased with the improved effort of his squad on defense, where it struggled mightily in a 92-87 loss to the Wolverines on Feb. 21.

“We executed this defensive game plan, maybe as well as any that I’ve coached,” Holtmann said. “They just were really locked in, and our guys were physical. They were tough outside of a couple fouls. They were phenomenal.”

The Buckeyes were without Young because of his concussion. Michigan did not have senior wing Isaiah Livers, who entered the game as the Wolverines’ second-leading scorer at 13.1 points per game.

OSU Drops B1G Tourney Title Game To Illini In OT

Fifth-seeded Ohio State fell 91-88 to second-seeded Illinois (23-6) in overtime in the Big Ten tournament championship game at Lucas Oil Stadium on March 14.

Washington was stellar in the loss for the Buckeyes, scoring a career-high 32 points on 12-of-21 shooting with eight rebounds. Sueing added 22 points in the defeat.

“I’m most definitely proud of my team,” said Walker, who finished with 16 points and six assists. “Most definitely I’m hurt because we lost. I wanted to win a Big Ten title. That was a dream for us at the beginning of the season. That was a big goal for us.”

After the teams ended regulation tied at 77, Illinois freshman guard Andre Curbelo opened overtime with a pull-up jumper to take a 79-77 lead with 4:36 left, and Walker tied it up 29 seconds later with a pair of foul shots.

After Illinois junior guard Ayo Dosunmu split a pair of free throws, Washington came up with one of the best plays of the game. Washington blew past Dosunmu and lifted a left-handed layup above the outstretched arms of 7-1 sophomore center Kofi Cockburn for an 81-80 Ohio State lead with 2:50 to play.

Cockburn, who began the contest 3 of 9 from the foul line, hit a pair of clutch free

Ohio State 87, Purdue 78 (OT)

March 12, 2021												
Lucas Oil Stadium • Indianapolis, Ind.												
			1	2	OT							F
Ohio State (20-8)			49	23	15							87
Purdue (18-9)			31	41	6							78
Ohio State	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Washington	40	7-17	2-2	0-5	3	1	20					
Ahrens	11	0-5	0-0	0-1	0	0	0					
Sueing	30	2-4	2-2	2-8	1	5	6					
Young	19	7-10	0-0	1-3	1	2	18					
Liddell	33	5-13	6-7	2-3	5	5	17					
Johnson	5	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	1	0					
Jallow	18	1-1	0-0	2-0	0	4	2					
Walker	35	5-8	0-0	0-5	7	1	10					
Key	13	0-0	3-4	1-0	1	2	3					
Towns	21	3-7	3-3	1-2	1	1	11					
Totals	200	30-56	16-18	13-28	19	22	87					
Percentages: FG: 45.5%. FT: 88.9%. Three-point field goals: 11-31 (Young 4-5, Washington 4-11, Towns 2-5, Liddell 1-5, Ahrens 0-4, Walker 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 2 (Liddell, Jallow). Turnovers: 10 (Walker 4, Washington, Sueing, Liddell, Jallow, Key, TEAM). Steals: 6 (Walker 4, Young, Key).												
Purdue	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Gillis	23	0-2	5-6	3-2	0	0	5					
Hunter	32	1-5	1-2	0-1	3	0	4					
Ivey	43	6-13	3-5	1-1	3	2	19					
Williams	30	12-23	2-5	8-6	5	3	26					
Stefanovic	33	0-4	0-0	0-2	3	3	0					
Wheeler	22	1-2	1-3	0-2	0	3	4					
Newman	14	2-4	0-0	0-2	0	1	6					
Thompson	13	1-2	0-0	0-0	1	2	3					
Edey	16	4-7	3-6	1-2	1	1	11					
Totals	200	27-62	15-27	13-22	16	15	78					
Percentages: FG: 43.5%. FT: 55.6%. Three-point field goals: 9-26 (Ivey 4-8, Newman 2-4, Wheeler 1-2, Thompson 1-2, Hunter 1-4, Stefanovic 0-4, Gillis 0-2). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 7 (Hunter 2, Williams 2, Ivey, Stefanovic, Edey). Turnovers: 9 (Ivey 3, Hunter 2, Newman 2, Williams, Thompson). Steals: 4 (Ivey, Williams, Stefanovic, Wheeler).												
Officials: Boroski, Green, Kueneman.												
Attendance: 7,634.												

throws with 1:39 left to regain an 82-81 lead for the Illini.

Liddell lost the ball on a drive for an untimely turnover with 1:10 on the clock, and Curbelo capitalized with a pull-up jumper to push the lead to 84-81 with 50 seconds left. Following another turnover on an errant pass by Sueing with 39 seconds left, Curbelo knocked down two free throws to go up 86-81 with 33 seconds left.

After getting poked in the eye on his crossover, Washington fired a tough shot and missed before the Buckeyes were forced to foul Cockburn, who hit 1 of 2 to make it 87-81 with 26 seconds remaining.

Towns drilled a triple for Ohio State to cut it to 87-84 with 17 seconds left. Then, Dosunmu knocked a pair of foul shots down with 14 seconds left to push the Illini edge to 89-84.

Towns split a pair of foul shots before the Illini converted another pair at the line to put the game out of reach at 91-85 with three seconds left. Walker drained a three at the buzzer to make it 91-88, but it was not enough.

“It was a well-played, hard-fought game,” Holtmann said. “Give them credit on winning the tournament championship and an outstanding season. I thought our guys battled and really fought. Obviously, we’ve got a disappointed, emotional group, but we’d expect nothing less given what this group has been all year.

“We’re going to find a way to bounce back here and get our guys emotionally in a good place and physically in a good place, but it was a heck of a college basketball game.”

Illinois controlled the contest early on, roaring to a 27-10 start through the opening 10:15 with Cockburn and Dosunmu leading the way with nine and seven points, respectively. Meanwhile, the Buckeyes went 1 for 16 from the floor during that span.

“We settled a little bit too much offensively,” Holtmann said. “And then, we had to change our ball-screen coverage because we were getting picked apart. We thought it was the correct way. We just had to make some

Ohio State 68, Michigan 67

March 13, 2021												
Lucas Oil Stadium • Indianapolis, Ind.												
				1	2							F
Ohio State (21-8)				26	42							68
Michigan (20-4)				27	40							67
Ohio State	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Jallow	21	0-1	0-0	2-0	1	4	0					
Washington	32	9-20	1-3	0-6	4	2	24					
Ahrens	16	1-2	0-0	1-1	0	0	3					
Sueing	32	3-4	1-5	2-3	1	3	9					
Liddell	32	5-14	5-5	1-4	3	1	18					
Johnson	3	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0					
Brown	0+	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Walker	28	3-6	1-1	0-4	4	3	7					
Diallo	1	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	0	0					
Key	13	2-5	0-0	1-4	0	3	4					
Towns	21	1-4	0-0	1-4	0	3	3					
Totals	200	24-57	8-14	10-27	13	19	68					
Percentages: FG: 42.1%. FT: 57.1%. Three-point field goals: 12-22 (Washington 5-10, Liddell 3-4, Sueing 2-2, Ahrens 1-2, Towns 1-2, Johnson 0-1, Walker 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 7 (Towns 4, Sueing, Liddell). Turnovers: 9 (Liddell 2, Walker 2, Towns 2, Washington, Sueing, TEAM). Steals: 0.												
Michigan	Total FG FT			Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Dickinson	30	9-14	3-3	2-6	0	2	21					
Smith	33	1-11	7-8	0-1	4	2	10					
Wagner	29	2-10	2-2	0-6	4	5	8					
Johns	24	0-3	7-8	3-5	2	3	7					
Brooks	39	4-8	2-2	0-4	3	0	12					
Williams	12	0-1	0-0	0-4	0	2	0					
Brown	22	1-6	0-0	1-0	1	1	3					
Davis	10	3-4	0-0	1-0	0	1	6					
Totals	200	20-57	21-23	10-26	14	16	67					
Percentages: FG: 35.1%. FT: 91.3%. Three-point field goals: 6-19 (Brooks 2-4, Ivey 2-7, Brown 1-3, Smith 1-4, Johns 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 5 (Wagner 3, Dickinson, Williams). Turnovers: 2 (Dickinson, Johns). Steals: 3 (Wagner 2, Dickinson).												
Officials: Szelc, Green, Eppley. Attendance: 8,000.												

Ohio State Suffers Major Upset In NCAA Tourney

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The No. 2-seeded Ohio State men's basketball team fell 75-72 to No. 15-seeded Oral Roberts (17-10) in the first round of the NCAA Tournament at Mackey Arena in West Lafayette, Ind., on March 19.

"I want to first begin by giving Oral Roberts credit. They really played well, as we expected they would," said Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann. "Their two players, who obviously concerned us, were terrific."

Holtmann was referring to the nation's leading scorer (24.2), Max Abmas, who scored 29 points against the Buckeyes, and Kevin Obanor, who came in averaging 18.2 and tallied 30.

Despite coming up short, OSU sophomore forward E.J. Liddell stood out for the Buckeyes with 23 points, 14 rebounds and five assists on 10-of-15 shooting. Duane Washington added 18 points and 10 boards on 7-of-21 shooting in the three-point loss.

After the teams ended regulation tied at 64, Oral Roberts opened overtime with five straight points by Obanor, with a converted and-one putting his team up 69-64 with 3:26 to play in overtime. Ohio State (21-10) responded with a strong finish by Liddell inside to cut the deficit to 69-66 with 3:15 left, but Abmas rose to the occasion.

After splitting a pair of foul shots with 2:54 left, Abmas hit a stepback jumper to push the lead to 72-66 with 2:10 left following a Liddell turnover.

Washington missed a three, and Liddell grabbed the offensive rebound with 1:49 left, but sophomore guard Carlos Jürgens stripped it away from him. Washington then forced Obanor into a traveling turnover with 1:23 left, and 14 seconds later he converted an old-fashioned three-point play to cut the deficit to 72-69 with 1:09 to play.

The junior guard stayed on the attack, drawing a foul with 37 seconds left, but he missed both free throws. With 31 seconds left, Ohio State fouled sophomore wing Kareem Thompson, but he missed the front end of the one-and-one.

Taking the ball coast to coast, Washington missed a tough layup with 24 seconds left, and Ohio State fouled Thompson, who split the pair to make it 73-69 with 22 ticks left. Liddell drilled a clutch triple with 16 seconds left to cut it to 73-72 on a find by fifth-year senior guard C.J. Walker.

Obanor knocked down a pair of foul shots to push the lead to 75-72 with 14 seconds left.

On their final possession, junior wing Justin Ahrens missed a contested three-pointer for the Buckeyes, and graduate forward Seth Towns kicked the ball out to Washington on an offensive rebound. However, Washington missed an open look from deep with one second left, and Ohio State dropped a stunner overtime.

"They made some big-time plays in the second half and overtime, and we didn't," Walker said. "We didn't take advantage of turnovers and missed shots in transition, things that we usually take advantage of. It hurts."

Despite outshooting Oral Roberts from the field 43.3 percent (29 of 67) to 35.7 per-

Ohio State's First-Round Losses During Seeding Era

Year	Seed	Opponent	Score
1982	8	No. 9 James Madison	55-48
2001	5	No. 12 Utah State	77-68 (OT)
2009	8	No. 9 Siena	74-72 (2OT)
2014	6	No. 11 Dayton	60-59
2021	2	No. 15 Oral Roberts	75-72 (OT)

cent (25 of 70), Ohio State's turnovers and struggles from the foul line and three-point range were too much to overcome.

"It's most definitely mental over physical," Walker said. "We just took it for granted thinking we could come in and win the game, and in March, you can't do that. Oral Roberts just took advantage of that, and they made the right plays at the right time."

The Buckeyes committed 16 turnovers to just six by the Golden Eagles. And while Oral Roberts shot 31.4 percent (11 of 35) from deep and 77.8 percent (14 of 18) from the free-throw line, Ohio State shot 21.7 percent (5 of 23) from beyond the arc and 50.0 percent (9 of 18) from the charity stripe.

"They weren't guarding some guys, and we had some careless turnovers," Holtmann said. "But I think the biggest thing is they were not guarding a couple of our guys and really crowding things and making driving lanes and post-ups difficult. And then I think we missed some open looks that we've made. I think that combined with just a couple of our sloppy, careless turnovers contributed to a poor offensive half."

"We did a better job in the second half of playing through the post. The problem is we knew they would collapse and crowd the post and trap it. And we didn't always make great finishes or great decisions there in traffic. But I thought our guys did a really good job. I thought E.J. was terrific in the second half, playing through contact and playing through some physicality."

Holtmann felt comfortable at the start of the game.

"The vibe was really good," the coach said. "The preparation was really good. We just had too many missed opportunities, too many turnovers, too many empty possessions on offense. I did not think we had a great start. That's my fault. They were as ready as they had been all season."

Oral Roberts jumped out to a 7-0 start capped by a three-pointer by Abmas from near midcourt just 1:34 into the game.

Ohio State rallied back on a 10-0 run to take a 10-7 lead at the 16:27 mark, with eight points from Washington and a rebound putback by Liddell.

The Buckeyes battled back and forth with the Golden Eagles after surviving the opening surge, taking a 23-15 lead on two Walker fouls shots to end an 8-3 stretch with 9:17 until halftime.

Oral Roberts answered with a 19-4 run to take a 34-27 lead with 2:44 until halftime. The Golden Eagles' two leading scorers, Abmas and Obanor scored nine and 10 points, respectively, during the stretch.

Ohio State ended the half with a 6-2 spurt on a two-handed slam by Justice Sueing and two buckets in the lane by Liddell to cut the deficit to 36-33 entering the intermission.

The Buckeyes (41.9 percent) outshot

the Golden Eagles (38.9 percent) from the floor in the first half, but the three-point shooting from the Eagles helped guide them to the three-point halftime lead. Oral Roberts shot 41.2 percent (7 of 17) from deep, while Ohio State shot 25.0 percent (3 of 12) in the contest's first 20 minutes.

Liddell gave the Buckeyes a 37-36 lead on a strong move just 1:45 into the second half, but Obanor answered with a pair of three-pointers to give Oral Roberts a 42-37 lead with 17:20 to go in the frame.

Ahrens tied the game at 42 by using a shot fake and drilling a tough three-pointer. The Golden Eagles responded with a 7-0 spurt aided by a pair of Buckeye turnovers to take a 49-42 lead with 12:44 left.

Walker helped weather the run, converting an old-fashioned three-point play with 11:50 left to spark an 8-2 run for the Buckeyes. Liddell capped the stretch with an and-one layup of his own to make it 51-50 in favor of Oral Roberts with 8:35 on the clock.

With Ohio State trailing 56-54, junior wing Musa Jallow committed a turnover, but 10 seconds later he blocked Abmas with 5:59 left. The block led to a Walker layup, tying the game at 56 with 5:51 to play.

Liddell and Walker gave the Buckeyes a 60-58 lead with 4:41 to play on back-to-back buckets with a powerful block by Sueing on an Abmas shot in between.

Abmas tied the game back up at 60 with a burst into the lane for a basket with 4:28 left, and Jallow broke the tie for Ohio State by splitting a pair of foul shots with 4:03 on the clock.

With Ohio State leading 61-60, Washington drilled a midrange jumper on a feed from Liddell to push the lead to 63-60 with 3:13 left. Liddell split a pair of free throws with 2:34 on the clock to push the lead to 64-60.

Washington committed a turnover with 1:50 to play, but Liddell had his back, chasing down Abmas and swatting away his layup attempt four seconds later.

Obanor knocked down a pair of foul shots for Oral Roberts to cut the deficit to 64-62 with 1:07 left. Liddell grabbed a clutch offensive rebound with 39 seconds left and was fouled, but he missed the front end of the one-and-one free throws to give the Golden Eagles life.

Jallow fouled Obanor with 14 seconds left, and the sharpshooting forward knocked down both free throws to tie the game at 64 before Washington missed a stepback jumper with the game clock winding down in regulation.

"We were just trying to get in space and get downhill," Holtmann said of the final play in regulation. "We were supposed to get in space, get him to his left hand off a ghost action."

Walker had ample praise for Abmas. "He's a really great player," Walker said. "He's the No. 1 scorer in the country for a reason. He just displayed that tonight, made a lot of tough shots, made a lot of

ORU 75, Ohio State 72 (OT)

March 19, 2021												
Mackey Arena • West Lafayette, Ind.												
	1	2	OT	F								
Oral Roberts (17-10)	36	28	11	75								
Ohio State (21-10)	33	31	8	72								
Oral Roberts	Total	FG	FT	Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Obanor	45	9-21	7-7	4-7	0	3	30					
Thompson	44	1-5	1-3	1-3	2	2	3					
Abmas	45	10-24	4-6	1-4	3	1	29					
Jürgens	42	2-8	2-2	0-3	6	3	6					
Lacis	26	2-5	0-0	2-2	2	4	5					
Weaver	19	1-5	0-0	0-3	0	3	2					
Stevens	4	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Totals	200	25-70	14-18	8-24	13	16	75					
Percentages: FG: 35.7%. FT: 77.8%. Three-point field goals: 11-35 (Abmas 5-10, Obanor 5-12, Lacis 1-3, Stevens 0-1, Thompson 0-3, Jürgens 0-3, Weaver 0-3). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 1 (Weaver). Turnovers: 6 (Weaver). Steals: 10 (Jürgens 5, Abmas 2, Obanor, Thompson, Lacis).												
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Jallow	32	1-3	1-2	1-2	3	3	3					
Washington	43	7-21	1-3	1-9	3	3	18					
Ahrens	21	2-5	0-0	0-3	1	0	5					
Sueing	34	3-8	1-2	0-2	0	4	7					
Liddell	39	10-15	2-4	6-8	5	4	23					
Brown	0+	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Walker	38	4-8	4-5	0-6	3	2	12					
Key	6	2-4	0-2	0-0	0	1	4					
Towns	12	0-3	0-0	2-4	0	0	0					
Totals	200	29-67	9-18	13-36	15	17	72					
Percentages: FG: 43.3%. FT: 50.0%. Three-point field goals: 5-23 (Washington 3-12, Liddell 1-3, Ahrens 1-4, Walker 0-1, Towns 0-1, Sueing 0-2). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 5 (Ahrens 2, Jallow, Sueing, Liddell). Turnovers: 16 (Liddell 5, Jallow 3, Washington 3, Walker 3, Key 2). Steals: 2 (Ahrens 2).												
Officials: Anderson, Pollard, Lenox. Attendance: N/A.												

big-time baskets. We made it as hard as possible. He just made shots. That's obviously what he's done all season, and you've just got to tip your hat to him. He's a really good player, and he just had a really good night for him and his team."

Walker added 12 points and six boards for the Buckeyes, who were once again without starting senior forward Kyle Young, who was still suffering from a concussion.

• Entering the tournament, Oral Roberts, which put up 12 more three-pointers than Ohio State during the game, led Division I in three pointers made (11.3 per game), ranked eighth in three-point percentage (39.0 percent) and averaged 29.0 three-point attempts, to rank seventh nationally.

The Golden Eagles ranked No. 11 in the nation in scoring offense, tallying 81.8 points per game heading into the NCAA tourney.

• The upset offered the opportunity for Abmas to display his abilities before a national audience and schools that might have overlooked him.

"Definitely as a competitor, when you play against the big schools, it's like that's one of the schools that overlooked you," Abmas said before the game. "It's not just them, it's a lot of them. For me, it's proving them wrong but also just staying within our game plan, not going too far out of it, just focusing on what we need to do to get a win."

• When watching game video on Oral Roberts, Washington was impressed by the green light given to Abmas by head coach Paul Mills, recognizing that the same shots might find him a seat next to Holtmann.

"If Coach saw me shoot a shot like that, I'd just have to make it," Washington said. "If I didn't make it then he would probably make me run or take me out, especially in practice. In a game, he'd take me out and be like, 'What were you doing? What are you doing, Duane?'"

Abmas was 10 of 24 shooting against the Buckeyes, including 5 of 10 from distance.

Lady Bucks A Historic Night Away From Title

By WYATT CROSER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With the Ohio State women's basketball team out of the NCAA tournament due to a self-imposed postseason ban, Buckeye Sports Bulletin looked back to the 1992-93 season that nearly ended with a national title.

Ohio State was a power in the mid-1980s under Tara VanDerveer, winning the Big Ten three straight seasons from 1983-85.

The Buckeyes also had a run to the Elite Eight in the 1985 NCAA tournament but fell to Old Dominion 72-68 in what would end up being VanDerveer's last season with the program.

After 1985, VanDerveer left to coach at Stanford, where she still coaches to this day.

The Buckeyes replaced her with Nancy Darsch, an assistant at Tennessee under legendary coach Pat Summitt. Darsch picked up where VanDerveer left off, winning two more Big Ten titles to push it to five straight while also making an Elite Eight and three Sweet 16s in her first four seasons.

But Darsch hit a bit of a slump after that, not making it past the second round of the NCAA tournament in 1990 and not making it at all in either 1991 or 1992. The latter two teams combined for a 26-30 overall record.

Even after that, Mike Wachsman, BSB's women's basketball writer for the 1992-93 season, said that there was reason for hope in the years to come.

"People expected improvement," Wachsman recalled. "I think how much was a little bit up for debate because data has three straight years of just declining or diminishing returns. But they brought in what I think was the No. 1 class. I think people thought they'd be better just because of the folks, at least in Ohio, who knew Katie."

That Katie was Katie Smith, the top prospect in the 1992 recruiting class. Though she was from Logan, Ohio, Smith had the talent to play basketball anywhere in the country. Instead, she stayed home, joining a team coming off a paltry 15-13 record in 1991-92.

She also wasn't alone. Joining her was a class with Kelly Fergus, GiGi Jackson, Adrienne Johnson and Lisa Negri. They were coming into a group that, while not successful in recent years, had loads of experience.

The 1992-93 Ohio State team had four seniors – Audrey Burcy, Nikki Keyton, Averrill Roberts and Lisa Sebastian – as well as a pair of juniors in Stacie Howard and Lavona Turner.

For many teams, the veterans could have taken the vast majority of the minutes, but Smith and Co. played plenty as freshmen, and it was to the benefit of the team.

"Nancy knew that the freshman class could certainly have the potential to be special," Wachsman said. "Before the season even started, I think she was able to convince the seniors, 'Look, we've had some bumpy years over the last couple of seasons. I really think that these guys are going to be good. We need to accept them, challenge them, certainly, but we

need to accept them and check the egos at the door.'

"There was pretty solid leadership on that team. But if you look at their previous year's rosters, the year or two before that, I mean they had a couple of pretty nice players, but no real superstar that stood out. And so the freshmen were kind of the shot in the arm that they needed, because you can see that Katie had something about her that really screamed she's going to be a star, if not immediately, at some point in her career."

Having that much talent on the roster is where Darsch thrived, according to Kristin Watt, a former Ohio State basketball player and longtime radio commentator for the team.

"Nancy was the coach who could harness strong players," Watt told BSB. "If you came in and she had a team of good talent and good athleticism and smarts, that's where she excelled. She was a much better coach working with elite athletes than she was bringing along folks that needed more hand-holding."

The Buckeyes started with a home win over Bowling Green before blowout wins on the road over Boston College and Massachusetts. After another lopsided victory at home over Central Michigan, Ohio State had its first of what would be seven ranked opponents during the regular season.

"They weren't very good the year before (Smith) got there. They were expecting better, but then you saw the schedule," Wachsman said. "They're going to play Vanderbilt. They're going to play Virginia. They're going to play Georgia. And people are going OK, maybe early in the year they're going to stumble because are they going to have the chemistry? Are they going to have their legs about them? What's going to happen?"

The first challenge was against No. 20 Georgia, which Ohio State took down 89-72. Three games later, the Buckeyes battled Virginia, the No. 5 team in the country.

Ohio State won that game 91-84 behind a 35-point, seven-rebound performance by Smith. It was a game that was not as close as the score indicated thanks to a red-hot start from the Buckeyes, according to Watt.

"I remember the first three-four minutes of that game, and we were running them off the court," Watt said. "When we played Georgia, and we beat them by 17 that year, I was like, 'OK, we're good.' And then that Virginia game, I just remember it like, 'Holy hell, this team's going to go far.'"

Wachsman remembers something else about that game past the signature victory. He said he had a chance encounter with Basketball Hall of Fame broadcaster Dick Vitale during that game on Jan. 2, 1993.

"Dick Vitale had come to do a men's game, and he was walking by press row, and he stopped for a second, and Katie did something that was ridiculous," Wachsman said. "She hit some shot or made some pass I don't remember the moment, but Dick Vitale happened to just stop right behind me and he tapped me on the shoulder, and he said, 'Who is that?' and I said 'That's Katie Smith. She was the

best high school senior in the country last year.' He said, 'She's a freshman?' And he may have even mentioned her on the broadcast the next night, but even he was impressed by how they played, because he knew about Virginia."

The Buckeyes dropped their next game to Vanderbilt, the No. 1 team in the country, before bouncing back with five straight wins, including one over No. 12 Purdue. By the end of the regular season, Ohio State was 24-3, with all three losses coming on the road against top-six opponents (Vanderbilt, No. 3 Iowa, No. 6 Penn State).

Along with that, the Buckeyes lost to the Commodores by only three points and split the season series against the Hawkeyes and Nittany Lions, avenging both losses with victories later in the season.

Ohio State entered the NCAA tournament winners of 10 straight. That quickly became 11 and then 12 straight with a 31-point victory over Rutgers and a 13-point win against No.

13 Western Kentucky.

That set up a rematch with Virginia, and once again, the Buckeyes came out the victors, squeaking by with a 75-73 win to advance Ohio State to the Final Four. It was, and remains, the only trip to the Final Four in program history.

There, Ohio State would meet another familiar foe, this time in Iowa. At this point in time, the Buckeyes and Hawkeyes, led by head coach C. Vivian Stringer, were major rivals in the Big Ten, and it made for a true slugfest to get to the national championship.

In the end, it was Ohio State who survived with a 73-72 overtime win, led by 14 points and 13 rebounds from Keyton.

"Vivian and Nancy I think enjoyed going against each other," Wachsman said. "The Virginia game, OSU actually had a little more in control. The Iowa game really was back and forth. The teams knew each other so well. Iowa-OSU was the first real big women's rivalry in the Big Ten. And they were the two predominant programs for quite some time."

"You hear the horn go off and OSU just seemed more relieved than anything else because I really think that they thought that was their last barrier. That if they could beat Iowa, they could win the whole thing."

The result did not come without controversy. The public address (PA) announcer for the Final Four that season was Wendy Craver, who was also the PA announcer for Ohio State.

While Craver went on to work the Final Four in multiple years, the Ohio State-Iowa game was in her first season there, and Stringer thought it gave the Buckeyes an advantage.

"C. Vivian Stringer, the coach for Iowa, made a huge stink saying that it was a competitive advantage," Watt said. "That's the one thing that I remember about that game was all the stink about Wendy and Stringer saying you had an unfair competitive advantage because of the PA announcer."

Controversy aside, Ohio State was in the national championship for the first time ever, and it was up against Texas Tech.

The Red Raiders were coming off a 60-46 win against Vanderbilt, which was a much more lopsided tilt than the Buckeyes played to get to the final.

That is notable because in 1993, the Final Four and national title game were played on back-to-back days, meaning that Ohio State was immediately coming off a grueling overtime win instead of an easier 14-point win.

Regardless, the Buckeyes fought hard and, if it weren't for one Sheryl Swoopes, would have likely ended the year as champions.

"Sheryl Swoopes was just having one of those nights where she could close her eyes and the ball was going in," Watt said. "I mean obviously she had some good looks, but some of them were like, come on."

Swoopes finished the game with 47 points, an NCAA tournament finals record, men's or women's, and led Texas Tech to an 84-82 victory over the Buckeyes. It was a tight battle, but Wachsman said that the two-point margin was a bit closer than the outcome really was.

"They were down seven with about a minute left," Wachsman said. "I mean it was close, but it wasn't as close as you could go to a point when Texas Tech really sweated this out."

Smith finished with 28 points and 11 rebounds, and Keyton tallied 19 points and eight rebounds in the losing effort.

With all that young talent left on the roster, it was expected that Ohio State could eventually get back to the national championship and win it, especially with three more years of Smith.

Instead, the Buckeyes went just 14-14 the following season and missed out on the tournament, both then and in 1994-95, when they improved slightly to 17-13.

It took until 1995-96, Smith's senior year, for Ohio State to again reach the NCAA tournament. In the second round, Smith scored 29 points and added five rebounds, but Ohio State lost to Tennessee 97-65.

Looking back at that 1992-93 year, despite how important the freshmen were, it was the senior leadership of the team that helped steer Ohio State on the right path to a national title run.

"All that leadership left," Wachsman said. "Now the sophomores have to lead, Katie's class had to lead. And it's a little bit different when you're the leader rather than when you can acclimate to things. In hindsight, you almost have to say the veteran leadership of that team – while the freshman class is certainly important in getting them re-established – the seniors probably were the glue that held everything together. And the program never was really at that height again."

Ohio State went 12-16 the year after Smith's final year, and Darsch was gone the season after that. The Buckeyes have not made it past the Sweet 16 since that run to the title game.

"It's one of those shoulda woulda, coulda," Watt said. "You were right there, and if not for Sheryl Swoopes, that game would have been different. How do you not win that game with the talent we had?"

"That just goes to show you how hard it is to get to that position, and to be right there, and two points from a national championship."

"Kind of a heartbreaker."



Nancy Darsch

Difficult Year A Learning One For Ohio State

It was not an easy season for any athlete at any level due to the trials and tribulations of COVID-19, but it was an especially difficult year off the court for Ohio State women's basketball.

Along with the daily struggles involved with preventing the coronavirus, the Buckeyes were slapped with a self-imposed postseason ban right before Big Ten play began. The ban, which came as a result of the investigation into former assistant coach Patrick Klein, did not involve any current members of Ohio State's staff.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

The recruiting violations, which included "approximately \$740 in impermissible benefits," were not used on players still on the roster. According to the investigation findings, "none of the witnesses believed that head coach Kevin McGuff was aware of Klein's behavior toward student-athletes. None of the witnesses had reported the messages or Klein's behavior to McGuff."

Despite that, Ohio State played out a season that involved daily testing, had seven game cancellations or postponements, and did so while, at one time, competing for the top spot in the Big Ten.

"It was hard. The COVID stuff and the unknown, it was just hard to get consistency," McGuff told BSB. "It was difficult, but I'm thankful that we had a chance to play it. I really am, and I appreciate all that our players did with embracing all of the change and the uncertainty and coming away with a successful season."

A 13-7 record and 9-7 record in the Big Ten does not scream success for Ohio State in a typical year. But over half of those losses came at the hands of a four-game losing streak to end the year.

Those games, according to assistant coach Simon Harris, came down partially to not having the same level of energy that the team had earlier in the schedule.

"Results like that are never fun, but I don't think at any time it had to do with a lack of effort or anything," said Harris, who has taken a head coaching job at East Tennessee State after one season with the Buckeyes. "I think our young people fought in all those games. I just felt we were in the stage of not having that burst anymore to the level that we did have it before. A huge credit to our young people, they never quit or relinquished. They fought the entire time in every game we played this season."

Another factor in the late losing skid was the absence of sophomore guard Madison Greene. She missed the final five games of the year for undisclosed reasons, a span in which the team went 1-4 with the lone win coming against Purdue at home.

Greene told BSB that it was difficult not being able to finish out the season and that she was happy she was able to be on the bench for Ohio State's final two games against Indiana and Rutgers.

"It was definitely hard because I wanted to be out there with my team and help them win," Greene said. "I'm just proud of what they did do. They didn't play any easy teams, but I was just glad I was able to be out there those last few games and try to support them and just talk to them and give them advice and just show that I do care. I do want to be out there."

"It was definitely hard not being out there,

but that's just what we're going through right now. We have to accept it, and hopefully next season, things will be better.

But before Ohio State had a rough end to the season, it had a remarkable start.

The Buckeyes won their first seven games and 13 of their first 16 games while competing for a Big Ten title. The team opened the season with four nonconference games that were each decided by 33 points or more. The average margin of victory was 40.8 points per contest.

But it was after those games that Ohio State faced major adversity. First, there was a COVID outbreak within the team that forced the Buckeyes to shut down and postpone a trio of games against Big Ten opponents after a game with St. Mary's had already been canceled, creating a more than three-week layoff.

Then, during that same stretch of time, the postseason ban hit, and Ohio State was now playing out its season with no hopes of making a run in the Big Ten or NCAA tournaments.

"When we got shut down and then we got the news, I think that was just so much at that one time," junior forward Dorka Juhasz said. "Not only can we not play because we have COVID, but also just hearing about the postseason ban, that was just a very, very sad day and a very hard day I think for everyone, especially for the players and the coaches, and even our families were affected by that."

"It was just very unfortunate, and it's hard to get over that. You're not going to the Big Ten tournament, you're not going to the NCAA tournament, so I think that was really, really hard mentally to get over."

Juhasz said that she had debate on if this season would be worth playing after everything that the team went through in December. It was a month in which she was one of the players who tested positive for COVID-19. But even with that, Juhasz ultimately decided that there was too much value in sticking with this season to the end, especially because of the NCAA's decision to allow a free year of eligibility to all winter athletes.

"That day when they told us (about the postseason ban), that was a shock for all of us, and just having a conversation with my parents: What should I do? Is it worth it? Is it not worth playing? We only have probably like 15-16 games that I can play, and with COVID, everything changed, too," Juhasz said. "I ended up thinking, we're all going to get back that one year, too, and I love basketball. I think, for me, it would not be healthy if I would just sit out a whole year or not playing because of the consequences of this postseason ban and everything and just the circumstances that we are in."

"We had a conversation as a team, too. Should we opt out as a team for the season? But I feel like we have a lot of great kids that love to play basketball and even if we can't really achieve a big thing this year, just having games and playing together and just building that chemistry on the court and just playing because we love basketball. I think that was the main reason why we decided, 'I think we should do this' and 'I think we should try to be our best team.'"

It wasn't an easy decision for Juhasz, but McGuff said he was always strong on playing this season out, no matter what challenges the team had to face.

"My feeling was as long as we had an appropriate number of players we were going to play," McGuff said. "I'm thankful that we had kids who really wanted to embrace the opportunity to play this year, and it really speaks to their competitive character and who they are, and I was really happy. I wanted to play, and I wanted to help the kids who wanted to play and put them in position to be successful. I never had any thoughts of

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

opting out. That's just not what I would want to do personally, and I'm glad we had players that felt the same way."

Ohio State's first game after the extended break was a Jan. 4 home matchup against Penn State. The Nittany Lions were not a dominant team, coming into the matchup on a three-game losing streak, but the game was a big one for the Buckeyes anyway.

And they proved that early. Ohio State jumped out to a 31-12 lead and never looked back, taking down Penn State 82-69 to move to 5-0 and to earn its first win in 25 days.

"That was huge," Harris said. "That was a big one. That was a really big win and I think more so, not because of your opponent. It was just a win because you saw that the program was where it needed to be."

Greene led Ohio State with 24 points, 10 rebounds and five assists, connecting on 9 of 17 from the field in 39 minutes. She agreed that getting a win after that long absence was key in building momentum for the rest of the season.

"It was really important for us because we tried to continue to work on ourselves and on the team, even though we couldn't really be together," Greene said. "I think it proved that we are a really good team, and no matter what gets thrown at us, we can overcome it. I feel like that gave us a lot of momentum moving forward. I was just happy that we continued to win and get better after that."

Following road wins against Illinois and Iowa, the latter of which came in overtime after overcoming a 14-point deficit, the Buckeyes had their first stumble of the year against Nebraska. It was a 63-55 loss where Ohio State shot 27.2 percent from the field, but the team did not have time to overreact to what happened in Lincoln.

The Buckeyes went from that loss into a three-game stretch against Michigan, Maryland and Indiana. Those teams were each ranked in the top 15 at the time Ohio State played them, and the Buckeyes had to play them all within a week.

Ohio State won all three, first taking down the undefeated Wolverines 81-77, then the No. 7 Terrapins 88-86, before going on the road and beating No. 15 Indiana 78-70. That loss was Maryland's only defeat in Big Ten play all season. It was a highlight stretch that put the Buckeyes at No. 11 in the Associated Press top-25 poll, and it proved just how much potential their roster possessed.

"Those games were probably the most fun, most intense and meant the most to us," Greene said. "I'm just glad that we pulled through, because we continued to prove – not only to ourselves but to other people – that we're a really, really talented team and that we deserve to be ranked high or be mentioned as one of the top teams in the country."

"Those big wins definitely helped gain our confidence and motivated us to continue to get better throughout the season. We wanted to prove to everybody what we're capable of."

That would end up being the high point of the year for Ohio State, which dropped its next game to Northwestern, another ranked opponent, and lost again to last-place Wisconsin before the final stretch of the season.

Juhasz said that the team's focus was at its peak during that three-game stretch of victories and that the energy and motivation that Ohio State showed to beat those ranked opponents were lacking as the season reached its conclusion.

"We were just ready to play those great teams," Juhasz said. "Everybody knew that those are really important games, and I think we had so much drive and fuel just to win games, and just to show that even if we don't have a postseason, we're really, really dangerous and we can be really, really good. I think that kind of weakened a little bit as we came closer to the Big Ten tournament where we were not able to go. I think it just got really hard, and I think that was the main reason."

In Ohio State's three wins over the Wolverines, Terrapins and Hoosiers, the team averaged 82.3 points per game. In the Buckeyes' seven losses, they averaged 64.7 points per contest, well below their season average of 80.2 points per game.

For McGuff, the highs and lows of the season can be as simple as the offensive production his team had on any specific night.

"When you look at the games we won, we were really clicking on offense," McGuff said. "You look at the games we won and the games we lost, it really came down to our offensive efficiency a lot of times. During that stretch (of wins against ranked opponents), we were playing really fast, we were really moving the ball. We were playing extremely efficient on the offensive end of the floor, and I think that that really had a lot to do with our success during that stretch."

Ohio State finished the season toward the middle of the Big Ten but had flashes of brilliance that showed the heights that the team can reach in the near future. In a year with no postseason, the Buckeyes used the season as one that will help them continue to grow once the NCAA tournament is again a possibility in 2021-22.

Harris also said that a season with so many obstacles serves as a good life lesson that will help players on this team far past what is done on the basketball court.

"I just think you take all the lessons from it," Harris said. "The beautiful thing about life is that it gives you so many different opportunities to either grow from something or wallow in it. I think the major thing for us is to view all of the positives that we did have, with all of the negatives that were thrown against us – finding ways to navigate through the tough times and how did you find the strength to build the strength or create the strength in order to overcome those things."

But on the court, this season showed that Ohio State is ready to prove itself next season.

Juhasz said she was in attendance for the Big Ten tournament and that having to watch from the sidelines was a difficult experience for her.

"I think it has to be an extra motivation for every single person on the team and the staff, because it's just hard to see Selection Monday and us not being there," Juhasz said. "I went to the Big Ten tournament, for women's games, and I was there for men's games, too. It was just hard to be in that arena now, watching other teams play while Ohio State was not on the board in anything. It was very challenging."

The Buckeyes have now had two straight teams that were ready to make noise in the NCAA tournament but extenuating circumstances stopped them from having the chance after the postseason ended abruptly last year due to the pandemic. Next year, the door is open for Ohio State to get that opportunity, and Juhasz is ready to make that happen.

"That's just going to give us more motivation next year to really have a breakout year," Juhasz said. "Just show everyone that we're back, we don't have a postseason ban, and then just go from there."

Juhasz, Sheldon Earn All-Big Ten Honors

Speaking of Juhasz, she was named to the first-team All-Big Ten team by the coaches for the second straight season.

She finished her third year with the Buckeyes tops on the team in rebounds (11.1 per game) and second on the team in points (14.6 per game). Her rebounds were also second in the conference to Michigan junior forward Naz Hillmon, who won Big Ten Player of the Year.

The forward out of Pecs, Hungary, was also named to the second team by the media. She joined sophomore guard Jacy Sheldon, who was named to the second team by both the coaches and media.

Sheldon led Ohio State with 16.7 points per game, shooting a team-high 48.6 percent from the field with 33 three-point makes, which was also most on the roster.

Greene was listed as an honorable mention by both coaches and media. As mentioned, Greene missed the last five games of the season. In her 15 games played, Greene tallied 13.4 points, 3.5 rebounds and 4.3 assists per game, the latter of which was tops on the team.

When Greene was out of the lineup, she was replaced by Kateri Poole, who was selected by the coaches for the all-freshman team.

Poole finished her first year at Ohio State with 6.6 points, 2.6 rebounds and 2.0 assists per game. She was the Buckeyes' top scorer off the bench and found time in all 20 games this season.

As mentioned, Hillmon took home player of the year, while Iowa guard Caitlin Clark was named freshman of the year and was named to the All-Big Ten first team. Northwestern guard Veronica Burton, another first-team selection, was selected as defensive player of the year, and Maryland's Brenda Frese was chosen as coach of the year.

The other names selected to the All-Big Ten first team were Grace Berger (Indiana), Nia Clouden (Michigan State), Monika Czinano (Iowa), Arella Guirantes (Rutgers), Mackenzie Holmes (Indiana), Diamond Miller (Maryland) and Ashley Owusu (Maryland). Clark, Hillmon and Owusu were unanimous selections on both teams, while Guirantes was unanimous with the media.

Looking at how my ballot compared to the overall media picks, I had nine out of 10 the same on the first team, with the lone difference being Miller making the first team over Rutgers' Diamond Johnson.

I also chose Clark for player of the year over Hillmon and agreed with the selections of Burton for defensive player of the year, Clark as freshman of the year, Frese as coach of the year

and Penn State's Maddie Burke as sixth player of the year.

Harris Leaves For Head Coaching Gig

It took just one season in Columbus for Harris to move from an assistant coach to a head coach.

Harris, who joined Ohio State's staff ahead of the 2020-21 season, was announced as the new East Tennessee State head coach on March 19, the first head-coaching job in his career.

Prior to his time with N.C. State in the 2018-19 and 2019-20 seasons, Harris was at Dayton, first coaching with Archie Miller on the men's basketball team before moving over to the women's team, helping the Flyers to three NCAA tournament appearances in four seasons as an assistant, including one run to the Elite Eight in 2015.

"I was actually one of the rare people who actually wanted to coach women's basketball young," Harris told BSB ahead of this past season. "I was very fortunate to be around Coach (Kay) Yow at N.C. State growing up from the age of 9 really into my college career, and unfortunately she passed. When I was about 12 years old, she said something about me coaching, and that always resonated with me."

"When the job opened with Coach (Jim) Jabir (at Dayton in 2015), he kind of went like, 'Hey, would you ever consider coaching women's basketball?' I said, 'Absolutely. I will go grab my stuff and be right back.'"

McGuff said that Harris, who worked primarily with the forwards on the team as well as on the offensive scheme, was a big factor in his lone season with the Ohio State program.

"He's a great guy. I really enjoyed having him here. He did an excellent job with our players. He did a great job on the court. He's also a very, very good recruiter, so he had a really good year here," McGuff said. "Not to speak for him, but he came here just to get one more experience. He and I had been friends for a while, and he wanted to get one more different experience before he tried to become a head coach just to further ready himself, and he did a really good job this year."

Harris will be taking over an East Tennessee State team that struggled this past season, finishing the 2020-21 campaign with a 4-16 record, though the team did manage an upset victory over No. 1-seed Samford in the Southern Conference tournament.

"I would have loved to have kept him for longer, but at the same time, that's part of what I like to do is to try to help my staff get ready to be a head coach and help them move along," McGuff said. "I'm excited for him and this opportunity."

NCAA Tournament Facilities Spark Outrage

Former Ohio State and current Stanford women's basketball head coach Tara VanDerveer had some very critical remarks for the NCAA's treatment of the women's basketball tournament, which has received major national attention for its disparity in accommodations compared to that of the men's tournament.

VanDerveer spoke on what this situation – which included the women's tournament originally lacking a proper workout room, the players receiving less substantial gifts and eating worse food – meant in the broader scope of collegiate sports.

"A lot of what we've all seen this week is evidence of blatant sexism," VanDerveer wrote on Twitter. "This is purposeful and hurtful. I feel betrayed by the NCAA. I call on university presidents and conference commissioners to demand accountability. Who made these decisions and why?"

"Women athletes and coaches are done waiting, not just for upgrades of a weight room, but for equity in every facet of life. Seeing men's

health valued at a higher level than that of women, as evidenced by different testing protocols at both tournaments, is disheartening. This cannot continue to be business as usual. There are necessary changes that need to be made."

"With the obvious disparity between the women's and men's tournaments, the message that is being sent to our female athletes, and women across the world, is that you are not valued at the same level as your male counterparts. This is wrong and unacceptable. So much effort from so many people has gone into making this tournament happen. If it is worth doing at all, it is worth doing right. Let's fix this once and for all."

McGuff also spoke to BSB on the alleged different treatment the women's players have had compared to the men.

Though the Buckeyes are not in the tournament this year due to the postseason ban, McGuff said he hoped that the NCAA will make the changes that will allow players in San Antonio to enjoy their time at the tournament.

"Obviously we're not there, so I'm not experiencing that firsthand, but I certainly hope that we do everything we can to make sure those kids down there have a world-class experience," McGuff said. "I credit the NCAA for putting this together in a pandemic. But beyond that, hopefully they can make some adjustments down there to make sure these kids have a great experience."

VanDerveer coached at Ohio State from 1980-85, amassing a 110-37 record and winning four straight regular-season Big Ten titles. She also coached Ohio State to the Elite Eight in her final season with the program.

VanDerveer has coached at Stanford ever since, winning over 1,000 games in her coaching career, including two seasons that ended in national titles. She entered the Basketball Hall of Fame in 2011.

Bucks Stay In Final AP Poll

Ohio State stayed put in a week in which it did not play, remaining at No. 22 in the final Associated Press top-25 poll. The Buckeyes finish as the fifth-highest team in the Big Ten, though the conference as a whole took a dip in the polls following the conference's tournament.

Maryland remained at No. 7, while Indiana fell three spots to No. 12, Michigan dropped three to No. 16 and Rutgers fell two to No. 21.

Iowa, which made a run all the way to the championship game in the Big Ten tournament before falling to the Terrapins, received 43 votes but was the last team left out of the top 25. Northwestern also received nine votes and missed the cut.

Ohio State was the only one of these seven Big Ten teams to not be selected in the NCAA tournament due to the postseason ban, despite a résumé likely worthy of dancing. The team was ranked in the top 25 in every week this season.

FGCU Gets Bell Rung By Michigan

Former Ohio State guard Kierstan Bell has, simply put, been one of the best players in college basketball since her transfer to Florida Gulf Coast, and she finally had a chance to garner national attention with an NCAA tournament matchup against the sixth-seeded Wolverines.

Bell, the unanimous ASUN Conference Player of the Year, finished with 25 points in an 87-66 loss to Michigan. Prior to the tournament, Bell had already earned honorable mention on the Associated Press All-American list.

She averaged a team-high 24.3 points and 10.8 rebounds per game in 25 games for the Eagles, shooting 53.2 percent from the field and 36.6 percent from three. She also added 2.2 blocks and 1.8 steals per game.



SALES | RENTAL | SERVICE | PARTS

For all your
material
handling
needs!

Proudly Serving
Central Ohio
for Over 50 Years

1181 Refugee Road
Columbus, OH 43207
(614) 443-4651

www.harrs-forklift.com
Fax: (614) 443-4711





KOMATSU®

NOBLELIFT

IN THE CREASE

Craig Merz



Steve Rohlik



Join Us!

\$100/Year 614 326-3300
buckeyeboosters.com

***...as we support the Buckeyes
on the road and more!***

Kick-Off Dinner

**Travel to Away
Football Games**

**Annual Celebrity
Golf Outing**


**Meeting with Coaches,
at the Woody Hayes
Athletic Center**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____


Mail check to:
Buckeye Boosters, 921 Chatham Ln., #301F, Columbus, OH 43221




THE

CASE BOWEN

COMPANY



Robert Bowen



James Case

COMMERCIAL & ASSOCIATION
PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Brokerage Services | Sales | Leasing

www.CaseBowen.com | 614.799.9800
6255 Corporate Center Drive | Dublin, OH

Grapplers Close Disappointing Spring Campaign

It was a fitting end to a frustrating season for the Ohio State wrestling team: up and down, marred by an unbalanced lineup and problems with wrestling on bottom, fueled by flashes of brilliance but ultimately disappointing given the standards that head coach Tom Ryan has set during his nearly two decades in charge of the Buckeyes.

ON THE MAT Patrick Mayhorn

It's hard to create much of a stink about a top-10 finish, as Ohio State checked in at No. 9 in the final team scores at the NCAA championships, but given the teams that Ohio State measures itself against, it's even harder to consider this anything but a down season in Columbus.

Those teams – Iowa and Penn State – sat atop the NCAA world ... again. Conference foes Michigan (No. 5) and Minnesota (No. 7) checked in ahead of the Buckeyes as well, just as they did at the Big Ten championships to open March.

That's what makes the result – three All-Americans, one title finalist, no championships – a frustrating and fitting one for this season of Buckeye wrestling. The Buckeyes entered the season with hopes of returning to the top of the wrestling world and came up short.

Refinements of the small details, tiny modifications that could flip a bout, never came for this Ohio State team, even if it did see more coin flips land on the right side at the NCAA finals than it did in the conference finale.

"It's tough," assistant coach J Jagers said prior to the NCAA championships. "There are so many matches that are going to be decided where the margin for error is so slim. Then you have the Big Tens, and that was probably the worst performance we've had as a program in the last decade, finishing in ninth place, which none of us were happy about. But when you circle back to a couple matches, if you just flipped the outcome, just flip a position, one position in three or four matches, then we would have probably been fifth."

"So at the national tournament, the way it's set up, you can do more with less people just because of the point-scoring system and the format. If you don't place at the national tournament, you don't really score a lot of team points. For us, we have to punch as many guys through to become All-Americans. That's where you get your points, and then obviously putting guys into the finals. I'd like to have a handful of All-Americans, everybody scoring points would be nice. (We have to be) realistic. There's going to be a lot of points from Iowa, Penn State and some other schools, but I think if we wrestle our best, we can bring home a trophy, which is top four."

Ohio State didn't wrestle its best and didn't bring home a trophy. The Buckeyes looked good in stretches – Sammy Sasso, Ethan Smith and Tate Orndorff all lived up to the hype and in some cases exceeded it – but didn't have the juice needed to pose any real threat to the Hawkeyes or Nittany Lions, who have been dominant at every turn this season. Ultimately, these Buckeyes were what they were, and there wasn't any amount of tweaking or pre-title preparation that would change that. The staff knew that going in.

"If anything, you dial back a little bit," Jagers said of Ohio State's training entering

the final event of the year. "You're not trying to cram too much at the last second. They are who they're going to be, (that's not changing) in three days, so you just want to keep them sharp, concentrate on the areas that are going to show up in all the main, marquee matchups. Those, for the most part, boil down to the same things. Can you finish? How's your lead management in short time? Can you get out on bottom in short time? Can you hold the guy down, lift and return them in short time? If you just watch the tournament, that's where matches are won and lost. Those little, short-time situations and who can get to their stuff."

Ohio State's weekend in St. Louis couldn't have started much worse than it did. No. 10 seed Malik Heinselman fell to No. 21 Robert Howard of Penn State in the opening round at 125 pounds, his third match of the season against Howard and first loss after toppling him in both the regular season and Big Ten championships.

Heinselman, who entered the championships as a serious contender for an All-American (top-eight finisher) spot, bounced back with a win over No. 26 Jackson DiSario from Stanford but fell to No. 8 seed RayVon Foley of Michigan State for the second time this season to end his season – well short of a top-eight spot.

No. 30 Dylan D'Emilio at 141 pounds saw a longer run in the consolation bracket than Heinselman after an opening-round loss to No. 3 Sebastian Rivera of Rutgers but came up short of top-eight status by two rounds, falling in the third consolation round against No. 5 seed Dom Demas of Oklahoma. D'Emilio wasn't expected to seriously contend this season as a redshirt freshman after an up-and-down season, but he impressed with three consolation-round victories after that first loss.

The biggest name for Ohio State entering the tournament was No. 1 Sasso at 149 pounds, who came up just short of his first national title in a 3-2 loss to No. 2 Austin O'Connor in the finals. Sasso tore through his first four opponents, pinning No. 33 Cameron Hunsaker (Utah Valley) in round one, taking decisions over No. 17 Kyle Parco (Fresno State) 11-10 and No. 25 Yahya Thomas (Northwestern) 8-3 before pinning Oklahoma State's No. 4 Boo Lewallen in the semifinals.

Sasso's title bout with O'Connor came down to the final seconds and ended with a no-call that may haunt the Buckeyes through the summer. After escaping in just seven seconds to open the final frame, knotting the bout at 1-1, Sasso looked to be in tremendous shape. He held the riding time advantage and would take the victory unless O'Connor could claim more points.

The North Carolina native found those points. He claimed a takedown with about a minute left to wrestle, leaving Sasso without riding time and in need of a takedown to work himself back into a tie. With just seconds remaining, Sasso landed what certainly looked like a takedown, but the referees decided against tossing up the two signal both live and upon further review, giving O'Connor the victory and sending Sasso home as the runner-up.

Smith was one of those bright spots for the Buckeyes at this event. He entered as the No. 7 seed in the 165-pound class and left as an All-American, wrestling all the way to the semifinals before falling 4-2 to No. 3 Jake Wentzel (Pittsburgh) and No. 10 Travis Wittlake (Oklahoma State) in the consolation semifinals, sending him to the fifth-place match against No. 5 Zach Hartman from Bucknell, a 7-5 sudden victory decision in Smith's favor.

For Smith, who was nearly the odd man out

Sasso Title Run Sparked By Little Brother

There may not be a member of the Buckeye roster who took last season's COVID cancellation harder than Sammy Sasso, including the seniors, Kollin Moore and Luke Pletcher. After a late-season surge that moved him into serious contender status in both the Big Ten and national conversations, Sasso came up just short against the second-seeded Pat Lugo (Iowa) in the Big Ten finals. Hungry for revenge on the national level, Sasso never got his chance to return the favor to Lugo.

"Heartbroken," Sasso said of the COVID cancellation. "I was heartbroken when I got that news. It's wrestling, but when you're in the moment, wrestling can seem much bigger than it is. And in that moment, it was heartbreaking."

With Lugo departing from Iowa as well, the burn lasted longer for Sasso than it did for most. He returned home to Pennsylvania and struggled for weeks with moving on from the letdown and getting himself back on track. It wasn't until he realized that he had more than himself to work hard for that he got himself back into his usual routine.

"Coping with it wasn't easy," Sasso said. "I went through a rough patch in life, things weren't too good. I was back home, I was around my little brother, and I was around my family and just being depressed, not living the right life. Midway through March, near the end of March, I realized that I'm not setting a good example for my little brother. I went from working super hard, now I'm sleeping in, doing this and that now that wrestling is over."

"So we started training hard. I locked back in and found myself. I have to thank him because he was a big motivator and a big factor in me getting back on the right path."

That summer spent working out together reignited a love of the game for both Sasso brothers, the younger of whom, Sonny, is just a sophomore in high school.

"My little brother, Sonny, is 16. He's a sophomore at Nazareth High School. He just took seventh place out at the Pennsylvania state championships," the elder Sasso explained. "This summer when we got to train, I think he really found a love for this sport and he got a lot better."

Ohio State's star 149-pounder couldn't help but beam when talking about his brother, whom he described as a role model and someone he looks up to – both figuratively and literally, as Sonny has about five inches and 30 pounds on his older brother despite his age.

"He's a role model for me," Sasso continued. "He's someone that I look up to, despite how young he is. It's the way he carries himself. I think he's going to do big things in this sport, but he has a couple things that he has to do to make it happen."

Sonny isn't the only young wrestler whom Sasso is hoping to inspire and help develop in the coming years. He put out a passionate message to prospective recruits after claiming the Big Ten crown as covered in the most recent edition of On The Mat, and he backed up those words in speaking to media on March 15, explaining that he had been planning his recruiting pitch for several months, even going back to last season.

"I didn't get the opportunity last year to go on a big stage," Sasso said. "I missed out on my opportunity to reach out to young recruits and people across the country. When I got the opportunity this year, I made the most of it and I wanted to send that message. I want young kids to know that I'm going to be there for them. I don't plan on going anywhere. I'm going to do everything in my power to get the best guys here. Once they're here I'm going to do everything I can to make them the best. I want them here. I will do whatever it takes to get the best guys and then make them the best."

2021 NCAA Championships

Team Scores

1: Iowa	129.0
2: Penn State	113.5
3: Oklahoma State	99.5
4: Arizona State	74.0
5: Michigan	69.0
6: NC State	68.0
T-7: Minnesota	64.0
T-7: Missouri	64.0
9: Ohio State	46.5
10: Northwestern	45.0

Individual Champions

125 pounds:	(1) Spencer Lee, Iowa
133 pounds:	(2) Roman Bravo-Young, Penn St.
141 pounds:	(2) Nick Lee, Penn St.
149 pounds:	(2) Austin O'Connor, UNC
157 pounds:	(3) David Carr, Iowa St.
165 pounds:	(8) Shane Griffith, Stanford
174 pounds:	(3) Carter Starocci, Penn St.
184 pounds:	(1) Aaron Brooks, Penn St.
197 pounds:	(4) A.J. Ferrari, Oklahoma St.
Heavyweight:	(1) Gable Steveson, Minnesota

of Ohio State's lineup before Carson Kharchla suffered a season-ending injury, his run to All-America status was a result of belief and a change in mentality.

"Nine or 10," Smith said when asked to assess his 2021 campaign. "I think every time I've gone out there, I've given my best. Sometimes maybe I wasn't feeling my best or looking my best, but I definitely went out there every time and gave everything I had."

"It was just belief," Smith said. "I think the only difference between me last year at 165 and this year is that I have more confidence and more belief in myself, belief that I am capable of wrestling with these top guys and that I can actually try to win those matches vs. keeping it close or not getting beat by a whole bunch."

Though he entered with that same No. 7 seeding in the 174 class, Kaleb Romero didn't reach that same status that Smith and Sasso ended their seasons with. He won his first two matches but fell to No. 2 Demetrius Romero

(Utah Valley) in the quarterfinals and No. 5 Logan Massa (Michigan) in the consolation quarterfinals to come up short of that top-eight finish. It was a challenging end to the season for Romero as he dealt with a nagging leg injury, and he'll look to return to All-America form next season.

Like D'Emilio, Rocky Jordan entered the 184-pound weight class as a low seed (No. 24), fell in the first round to No. 9 Jeremiah Kent (Missouri) but made a decent run in the consolation rounds before falling to No. 5 Hunter Bolen (Virginia Tech) in the fourth round, short of placing but still much further than was expected when he entered the finals.

Orndorff rounded out Ohio State's All-Americans at heavyweight, where he vastly outperformed his No. 21 seeding with a run to the consolation quarterfinals before losses to No. 14 Trent Hillger (Wisconsin) and No. 9 Greg Kerkvliet (Penn State) ended his season in the No. 8 spot.

Buckeyes Searching For Groove Early In Season

The Ohio State baseball team has yet to find its rhythm early in the Big Ten season, falling to 6-5 after losing its series against Rutgers over the March 19 weekend, ending a rough stretch for the Buckeyes since the last dispatch of BSB.

FROM THE STRETCH

Patrick Mayhorn

After opening the season with a 3-1 series win over Illinois, Ohio State split a pair of two-game matchups with Iowa and Nebraska before dropping this most recent series to the Scarlet Knights.

The Buckeyes have not been without bright spots, including freshman outfielder Kade Kern and a pitching staff that has produced several strong performances, such as its one-hitter in a 2-0 loss to Rutgers on March 21. But they have been unable to deliver consistently. Finding that

consistency is a focal point moving forward for head coach Greg Beals.

"There's a lot to like, but there's also a lot to work on, which is great," Beals told BSB. "I think we're playing solid. We're off to a decent start and we have a lot of room to grow and improve as a ballclub, but I've seen great competitiveness. I've seen great resilience in our ballclub. Opening weekend, we win three out of four games, and a couple extra-inning games, we got into tough situations and our guys competed and executed really well in those situations.

"On the mound, we need to be a little bit cleaner. We know we have more walks than we'd like to have. We need to execute better, and that's a product of a long stretch of training without competition. And now putting that training and all that work that we've done into competitive form, where you're not just throwing your bullpens and working out.

"On the hitting side, it's just pitch recognition, giving ourselves a little bit stronger at bats, reducing some of our strikeouts and really solidifying our approaches. Those are the two things: the pitchers working on strike zone and the

hitters working on solidifying their approach offensively."

Neely Throwing Gas, Heating Up At OSU

Ohio State entered the season without a clear answer in its No. 4 starter spot. The Buckeyes had established names in Garrett Burhenn and Seth Lonsway at the top of the list and a consistent pick in Griffan Smith at No. 3, but a battle between Will Pfennig and Jack Neely boiled through the offseason and into the final week before the beginning of the season. The two are very different players, with Pfennig working primarily as a corners-painter while Neely prefers to overpower batters, but both appealed to Beals as a potential ace to round out the starting rotation.

"They have good stuff and they compete really well, but they're very different," Beals said of Pfennig and Neely. "Jack is 6-8 and a hard thrower, and Will's 6-0, maybe, and really commands the baseball. They are very different pitchers but very good in their own right. I think the critical thing in what those guys have done is that they know who they are. They learned their stuff and how to pitch with it."

Ultimately, in Ohio State's first series of the season, the Buckeyes deployed not one but both pitchers intertwined in the preseason competition. As Beals explained to BSB on March 17, a preseason injury to Smith's arm has slowed his debut in the starting rotation this season, as Ohio State doesn't want to aggravate anything unnecessarily. He mentioned that Smith could make an appearance in the starting lineup later in the season, but for now, he's serving primarily as a lightly used relief pitcher.

"Griffin had a minor setback with his arm, and we were protecting him. We slowed him down a little bit in the preseason to make sure he's healthy for the whole season. He got on the mound this weekend, and he'll get on the mound for a little bit more of this coming weekend," Beals said prior to Ohio State's series with Rutgers. "We hope to continue to grow him throughout the season. He's very capable of starting but it's hard to say when that's going to happen," Beals said. "We're going to send guys out to pitch and see how it evolves, but that possibility certainly exists."

Until Smith is fully healthy – or healthy enough for Ohio State to feel comfortable with an increased workload, Pfennig and Neely will continue to get the ball for the Buckeyes in the back half of their starting rotation. Early in the season, that hasn't presented much of a problem for Ohio State. It's a role that both players seem to be comfortable in, specifically Neely, who seems to thrive in longer appearances.

"I'm much more comfortable starting," Neely said when asked about his preferred role on the staff. "You know, I've always enjoyed the process of going multiple innings to give the team a shot to win, to try to pitch well enough to give our hitters a chance to be able to win a game for us. I like to compete and keep that focus."

A transfer from Texas making his debut with the Buckeyes this season, Neely has caught the attention of scouts and onlookers not just with his statistics, but with how he's accumulated them. He's by far the hardest throwing pitcher on the Ohio state roster, consistently checking in around 97 miles per hour on his fastball – easily his most common pitch. Although he's already making a name for himself as a big arm on the mound, Neely's answer for where his velocity comes from is as good as that of anyone watching him fire away.

"I would say, overall, my ability to overpower batters with my fastball (is my top trait)," Neely said. "I didn't used to throw this hard. It was something I really focused on. It's something that

I trained to do. To be honest, I don't really know how I do it. It just kind of happened, and I'm very glad that it happened. Sometimes it even kind of surprises me, because I go out there and I'm not really thinking about trying to hit those numbers but it happens, and let me tell you, I'm very happy that it does."

Ohio State is very happy with it too and works hard to nurture the kind of physical gifts that a pitcher like Neely brings to the table. The Buckeyes have invested heavily in pitch tracking technology in recent years, keeping an eye on everything from the standard ball and strike counts in bullpen workouts to full ball-tracking technology, which Neely says he's "very much interested in." From spin rate to pitch shaping to hand grips, the junior wants all of the information that he can get on his production on the mound – all in the pursuit of developing a better understanding of where that velocity comes from and how to continue increasing it as he progresses under the guidance of director of pitching development Brad Goldberg.

"We use a couple of different tools, two of them being Radsodo and TrackMan," Neely said, referencing the pitch-tracking applications sold primarily to baseball teams, both professional and amateur. "Essentially what they do is, they are tools to measure those metrics. Whether I'm going to (check grips) or even throwing live, we always have those going so we are able to keep up with how things are looking physically."

That technology and the staff in charge of it, along with the rest of Ohio State's staff and the culture of the program, drew Neely in when he decided to pack up for Columbus. He took a visit to Columbus and confirmed what he had heard about the program during his recruitment, which was enough to convince him that Ohio State was the right spot to finish his college career after a foray into the junior college world following his one year at Texas. He announced his commitment to Ohio State late in 2019.

"I haven't taken the most typical path here," Neely said. "When I was looking for a new home, I had a lot of emphasis on the quality of coaching and the quality of player, not just on the field, but off the field too. And when I came to visit Ohio State, I had already heard great things, and it was only backed up by the incredible coaches. I got along with the players really well too."

Once Neely arrived on campus and officially joined the fold, those players around him became a crucial part of the equation for his development. In an established pitching room like that of Ohio State, Neely has the chance to bounce ideas off his teammates frequently.

Specifically, he's worked with Lonsway on a common issue in the walks department. Both players have had problems with the free passes in the past and mentioned that as their primary focus for improvement this season, with Neely going to Lonsway specifically to work through the issue.

"Having guys like Garrett Burhenn, Seth Lonsway, Will Pfennig, Griffan Smith (is great), and the list just goes on," Neely said. "It's nice to have the guys around you that you can bounce ideas off. I'm able to better myself watching them and seeing how they compete in the game."

"I want to cut down on walks. The better I am on that, the deeper I can go into games to give our guys a chance to win. So if I can cut that down, it only helps. Seth and I have definitely talked about it, I approached him, with him being the caliber of player he is. It's more a mental thing I would say, at least for me. Seth and I go back and forth on that a lot."

For a recap of all the Buckeye on-field action, be sure to check out the electronic BuckeyeSports.com every Monday.

Ohio State Fans!



Weekly September through November
Five times from January through mid-March
Biweekly mid-March through mid-May
Monthly December, June through August

Some Ohio State sports fans need more information on the Buckeyes than they can find in their local newspaper. Buckeye Sports Bulletin is for those fans. By subscribing to Buckeye Sports Bulletin, they receive 24 issues a year featuring:



- In-depth coverage of all Ohio State sports
- The latest comments from coaches and players
- The latest in recruiting information
- Personality profiles
- Features on former Buckeye greats
- Rosters, schedules, statistics, photos
- Check us out on the Web at www.BuckeyeSports.com

- ☐ 1 Year, \$99.95 ☐ 1 Year, First Class Mail, \$159.95
☐ 2 Years, \$169.95 ☐ 2 Years, First Class Mail, \$279.95

I want to know more about Ohio State sports. I am enclosing \$_____

☐ Money Order ☐ Check ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ Discover ☐ Amer. Express

Credit Card # and Exp. Date _____

Credit Card Orders Accepted 24 Hours A Day
Call (614) 486-2202 or (800) 760-2862

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

Mail To: Buckeye Sports Bulletin
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
www.BuckeyeSports.com

OSU Women's Hockey Proves It Is Here To Stay

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Nadine Muzerall took over as head coach of Ohio State women's hockey in 2016, she was taking on a team that was in shambles.

The Buckeyes were coming off two straight head coaches who had failed for completely different reasons. The first was Nate Handrahan, who coached the team from 2011-15 before resigning after being investigated by the university for "inappropriate and unprofessional conduct." After that it was Jenny Potter, who went 10-25-1 in one season before she was fired for a handful of recruiting violations.

When Muzerall was interviewed for the job, players Lauren Spring and Jincy Dunne were involved in the search committee, and in an interview with the New York Times back in 2018, Muzerall remembers what they looked like after the struggles of the previous season.

"They looked sad, and they looked broken," Muzerall said. "I was like, this is ridiculous. If you're not having fun in college, when are you going to have fun? You have the rest of your life to be stressed out. You're supposed to enjoy college and enjoy your hockey. I'm going to come in and try to make you a better hockey player, but I also want to make you a better person."

Now in her fifth season with the program, Muzerall has made that past version of Ohio State women's hockey a distant memory. This season, the Buckeyes earned their third NCAA tournament appearance and second Frozen Four appearance in four years, and they are in a place now where they can continue to build the program going forward.

That started with this current class of seniors, according to Muzerall. The former Minnesota player and assistant coach did not achieve success overnight with the team, going 14-18-5 in 2016-17, but that next class played a big role in getting Ohio State to where it is today.

"This senior class is very special," Muzerall said. "They came in my second year when our program completely changed. Their freshman year they got to go to the Frozen Four, and when they signed up to go to Ohio State, there was never that opportunity. It's one thing for a coach to come in and try to change a program and talk philosophies and cultures, but it's the athletes that have to implement them and walk it and make it real life. This program, this senior class is particularly valuable because of their leadership, because of their experience that they've had, being on the national stage, and they are our culture."

"They are very much respected and appreciated and role models for these young players. They're living on the tradition, and they're going to prolong that tradition of excellence here at our program."

Ohio State has five seniors on its roster: defenseman Lisa Bruno, forward Emma Maltais, forward Liz Schepers, forward Tatum Skaggs and goalie Lynsey Wallace. None of them had yet seen the success that Muzerall had hoped to one day build. And yet they arrived and immediately made an impact, with Maltais (40 points) and Skaggs (37) leading the team in scoring during their first years with the program.

That group, as Muzerall mentioned, would finish the season 24-11-4 and make

the program's first NCAA tournament. The Buckeyes also made their first ever Frozen Four, where they fell to top-seeded Clarkson 1-0 in overtime.

That class was set for another shot at a national title in 2019-20, winning the WCHA for the first time in program history before COVID took away the team's chance. But the Buckeyes used that as fuel for this season, where they again impressed and again made it to the Frozen Four.

In 2020-21, Ohio State went 13-7, a record that is more impressive considering that the Buckeyes played games only in the WCHA, a difficult conference that produced three of the four Frozen Four teams. Just like in their freshman season, Skaggs (19 points) and Maltais (16) led the team in scoring.

"Coming into my freshman year, our program took a huge 360," junior forward Gabby Rosenthal said. "Give credit to our senior class. They've done so much to our program, and really our coaching staff. They've built that culture and built that family within us. I think that's what drives us and really gets us into these positions is our family, and I think that's what will carry us on for these years to follow. Set that bar and to continue to achieve that excellence and standard that we have built."

That family atmosphere was mentioned by Muzerall after Ohio State once again fell short in the Frozen Four, this time in a 4-2 defeat to Wisconsin. Muzerall cited that togetherness as a team as the reason that the Buckeyes have continued to compete with teams that have more talent on the roster.

"A lot of the other teams we've played in our conference have the big names, have the Under-18 (prospects) status, and we have a couple," Muzerall said. "But you have to ask yourself, why do we keep winning and being victorious over those teams that have that roster? It really comes down to our family. Everybody's hurting right now, but they're lucky they have each other to lean on to get over it."

In that loss to the Badgers, Ohio State trailed 3-0 with 11:39 to go in the second period. From that point on, the Buckeyes dominated the game, outshooting Wisconsin 29-13 in the final two periods and cutting the deficit to one with 12:05 to go.

Ultimately the Badgers held on, scoring an empty-net goal to seal the win and move on to the national title game, but Ohio State proved itself capable of being one of the best teams in the country.

"You can put your head between your legs and stop fighting or you stand tall and swing back, and that's what they did," Muzerall said. "They came back against a very good team and they scored those two big goals and then they kept pressing. Sometimes the better team doesn't always win. I thought we looked great today, and we outshot them. I think our offensive zone time was stronger, but when Wisconsin came down, they scored."

It wasn't the first time Ohio State had to attempt a comeback during the NCAA tournament. In the round prior, the Buckeyes trailed 1-0 to Boston College 9:15 into the game and went into the first intermission down one goal. The shots were even at 5-5 between the Buckeyes and Eagles.

The game was not even close from there

on out. Ohio State outshot Boston College 43-8 in the final 40 minutes and scored a trio of goals to bury the Eagles, 3-1, and move on to play the Badgers.

Maltais had an assist on the third Ohio State goal, which was scored by Rosenthal and ultimately sealed the game.

"It says a lot about our group," Maltais said on March 17 about the comeback win. "We're very relentless, we're very resilient and you see that in all our characters, and you see that in how we play. I think that there's nothing more representative of this year than how we play and the adversity we've overcome already."

Though the team was not able to earn a second straight comeback victory in the NCAA tournament, Maltais again mentioned the team chemistry as the reason the Buckeyes were able to make it so close against Wisconsin in the first place.

"I think that's what everyone struggles to explain," she said. "How do we keep winning? How do we keep battling back? We were down 3-0 tonight against the No. 2 team in the nation, and we came back and battled as hard as we could, and it all comes back to the same thing and it's family. We can sit here and say that over and over again, and it's hard to explain because no one can see it from the outside. It's just really within us and what we have as a group. Obviously, we have amazing talent and people that own their roles on every single level, but I think it just comes back to how much we love each other."

It wasn't an easy route for Ohio State to return to the Frozen Four. The Buckeyes did not play in the entire month of December due to COVID issues. After postponing four games there, the Buckeyes also lost a pair of matchups against St. Cloud State at the end of the regular season.

The coronavirus was just a portion of the difficulties that the Buckeyes dealt with, according to Muzerall. But the Ohio State head coach also said that the team always stayed together through it all.

"This team has gone through a lot of adversity, not just with COVID but with some personal things within our own family," Muzerall said. "They stuck together, and they really had a great, fantastic season. This game doesn't define us as people, and this loss doesn't define your whole entire season of what you've accomplished."

The loss to Wisconsin could be the final game for most of the seniors who helped bring the Buckeyes up from the pits they once sat in. It won't be, however, for Maltais, who has already announced she will be using the NCAA's extra year of eligibility to return for 2021-22.

Already fourth in program history in points (158) while holding the single-season points record (59), Maltais has nothing more to prove at Ohio State. Instead, she is coming back because of the team that she has helped Muzerall create from the ground up.

"I'm so proud of what we've built here and what we've done here," Maltais said. "I'm coming back to Ohio State with so many sisters and so many family members, and I can't thank Ohio State enough for that."

Ohio State didn't break new ground in 2020-21, making it only as far as it has previously in Muzerall's tenure, but the Buckeyes did continue to prove that this is the new norm for this team, not the exception.

A loss to Wisconsin doesn't change that, and Muzerall is just excited about everything this team, and this group of seniors, has done to help Ohio State women's hockey get to where it is now.

"Sometimes we get so fixated on this last game and your last game is miserable unless you win the whole thing," Muzerall said. "We sometimes forget about all that we've accomplished, especially this senior class. Two Frozen Fours in four years, and then last year we were going to the tournament and won the first conference title for Ohio State. They've accomplished so much, but right now they can't think like that, which I understand being a former athlete. But they will."



Nadine Muzerall

SCOOPING UP OHIO'S FAVORITES SINCE 1914



www.velveticecream.com

f @velveticecream

Indiana Coach Miller Fired After Four Seasons

Indiana coach Archie Miller was fired after four seasons and no NCAA Tournament appearances. Miller, who was hired in March of 2017, went 67-58 with the Hoosiers and 33-45 in the Big Ten.

Miller's best season at Indiana came in 2019-20 when Indiana finished 20-12, but the postseason was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Hoosiers concluded a disappointing 2020-21 campaign with a 12-15 record and missed the postseason. Miller also went 0-7 against archrival Purdue during his four seasons in Bloomington.

BIG TEN NOTES

Joe Dempsey

"As the Director of Athletics, I wanted to wait until the conclusion of the season before evaluating the leadership of our men's basketball program," said Indiana athletic director Scott Dolson. "In the days following the completion of our season in the Big Ten Men's Basketball Tournament, I have spent a great deal of time evaluating our recruiting, student-athlete development, leadership development, and playing philosophy and strategy. That review, combined with the on-court results, ultimately led me to conclude that a change in leadership of our program is warranted at this time. I shared my assessment with Indiana University President Michael McRobbie, and he accepted my recommendation."

Gophers Fire Pitino, Lands In New Mexico

Minnesota fired head coach Richard Pitino, but he was not out of work long, signing a six-year contract to become the head coach at New Mexico.

Pitino, whose deal is worth nearly \$5 million, will make \$775,000 in salary and compensation in his first year at New Mexico. The Gophers have yet to announce whether Pitino's new employment will save them the full amount of Pitino's \$1.75 million buyout on his Minnesota contract.

Minnesota athletic director Mark Coyle said his staff will discuss with New Mexico about how the buyout will be handled.

"We'll work closely with them on the buyout," Coyle said. "With him taking a new job, it triggers some different clauses in the contract."

Pitino, 38, had three years left on his contract at Minnesota, set to pay him \$2.46 million annually through the 2023-24 season. Pitino's contract stated buyout payments would stop once he found comparable employment, including a Division I job.

Pair Of Gopher Guards Enter Transfer Portal

Minnesota standout guard Marcus Carr entered the transfer portal after earning third-team All-Big Ten honors with averages of 19.4 points, 4.0 rebounds and 4.9 assists.

Carr announced his desire to transfer after the firing of Pitino, who had recruited Carr to Minnesota following his freshman season at Pittsburgh.

Minnesota guard Jamal Mashburn, who could have been seen as a potential

replacement for Carr, also entered the transfer portal. He averaged 8.2 points as a freshman in 2020-21.

PSU Hires Purdue Assistant Shrewsberry As Head Coach

Penn State hired Purdue assistant Micah Shrewsberry as its next men's basketball coach. Shrewsberry, 44, spent two seasons at Purdue after serving six seasons as an assistant with the Boston Celtics. He was previously an assistant at Purdue from 2011-13 and Butler from 2008-11.

"I'm extremely humbled and excited to be the next head coach at Penn State University," Shrewsberry said. "I want to thank Dr. (Eric) Barron, Sandy Barbour, Lynn Holleran and the rest of the search committee involved in this process. The values of this university and its commitment to excellence are the major reasons why this job was so appealing to me. I can't wait to arrive on campus to begin working with our tremendous student-athletes. My family and I are looking forward to becoming a part of the Nittany Lion family."

Former Penn State head coach Pat Chambers resigned in October following an internal investigation into his treatment of former players and staff. The Nittany Lions were led by interim coach Jim Ferry in 2020-21, finishing 11-14 overall and 7-12 in the Big Ten.

6 Penn State Players Enter Transfer Portal

Following the hiring of Shrewsberry, six Penn State men's basketball players entered the transfer portal.

Scoring wing Seth Lundy became the sixth player to announce his intent to transfer, following guard Myreon Jones (15.3 points per game), guard Izaiah Brockington (12.6), forward John Harrar (8.8), guard Jamari Wheeler (6.8) and forward Trent Buttrick (3.0) into the portal.

Lundy, a sophomore, averaged 10.1 points per game in 2020-21, but he struggled to find consistency. He showed elite potential as a scorer, pouring in 32 points against VCU in December and 31 points at Maryland in the regular season finale.

The Nittany Lions averaged 72.6 points per game last season, and the players who accounted for 56.6 of those points are currently in the transfer portal. The team's top four scorers and six of its top eight scorers overall have all announced their intentions to leave the program.

The cupboard appears to be bare for Shrewsberry, but Lundy left the possibility of a return up in the air.

"We got a new head coach and he said he was going to bring in a whole new coaching staff," Lundy said. "A lot of guys have already entered the portal from Penn State, so I just wanted to keep my options open and see what was best for me. I'm not officially transferring, but I just want to see all my options. There's definitely a possibility that I stay with the team."

"I would definitely like to see the rest of the coaching staff that he hires, because obviously that's a big part of it. Obviously, I love it here at Penn State, and if they do get a good coaching staff, there's definitely a possibility that I do stay. I just want to see everything first."

Maryland Tops Iowa In WBB B1G Tourney Title

Led by five players in double-figure scoring, Maryland mauled Iowa 104-84 in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament title game at Bankers Life Fieldhouse March 13.

"I love where this team is at right now," Maryland head coach Brenda Frese said. "I wouldn't want to play us."

Iowa had knocked off Purdue, Rutgers and Michigan State by double figures each of the previous three nights to reach the championship game but had no answer for Maryland. The Terrapins imposed their will inside, snagging 18 offensive rebounds and turning them into 26 points. They committed only six turnovers and led from the outset to claim their fifth tournament title in the last seven years.

"I can really see (Maryland) getting to the Final Four," Iowa head coach Lisa Bluder said. "They are such an offensive juggernaut."

Iowa cut a 15-point deficit to eight at 38-30, but Maryland responded with eight straight and the Terp lead grew to 55-37 at halftime.

Iowa junior forward Monika Czinano had 22 points and seven rebounds while freshman Caitlin Clark pitched in 21 points, pulled down eight rebounds and dished seven assists.

"I'm disappointed in the loss, and I do think we could have played better, but I'm not disappointed with the effort this week from our women," Bluder said. "We came here and made it to the championship. Nobody thought that was going to happen at the beginning of the year or even at the beginning of the week."

"Four games in four days is brutal, and every day the prep time and rest time got less and less. We would have loved to have won this game, but we're not going to hang our heads. I'm not going to allow them to do that because they've worked way too hard to get to this point."

Chloe Bibby led Maryland with 21 points. Diamond Miller, who was named the tournament's most outstanding player, scored 15 points and handed out seven helpers.

The well-rounded Terps also saw a big contribution from Mimi Collins, who had 17 points and six rebounds. Katie Benzan chipped in 14 points and six assists, and Ashley Owusu added 12 points and seven assists. Maryland finished with 29 assists on 41 field goals and scored 46 points in the paint.

"I know we're really excited about what lies ahead," Frese said.

Czinano set two Big Ten tournament records for the Hawkeyes with 107 points in four games and 48 made field goals. Clark broke the conference tournament mark with 37 assists in the four contests.

Northwestern Beats 7 B1G Teams For 4-Star WR Fleurima

Northwestern beat out seven Big Ten schools by securing a verbal commitment from Naperville (Ill.) Central four-star wide receiver Reggie Fleurima, marking the program's first piece of the 2022 class.

"I want to thank my family and friends for supporting me each step of the way with

this important decision," Fleurima wrote on Twitter. "With that being said, I would like to announce that I am committing to Northwestern University!"

Fleurima is a big get for the Wildcats, ranking as the No. 32 receiver and No. 234 overall prospect in the 2022 class. The 6-2, 200-pound wideout is the fourth-ranked recruit in Illinois.

The Naperville Central standout chose Northwestern over Big Ten foes Illinois, Iowa, Michigan State, Minnesota, Nebraska, Penn State and Purdue. Outside the conference, Fleurima received interest from Cincinnati, Missouri, Oregon State, Syracuse and Virginia Tech.

Even though he became the only prospect committed to Northwestern's 2022 class, Fleurima's commitment gave the Wildcats the No. 10-ranked class in the Big Ten.

Former Oregon DE Townsend Transfers To Wisconsin

Former Oregon defensive end Isaac Townsend committed to Wisconsin. The redshirt freshman had entered the transfer portal in January.

Townsend (6-5, 257) was a three-star prospect from Ralston Valley, Colo., before redshirting his first year on campus and then opting to enter the transfer portal in January following the 2020 campaign. With the COVID-19 exception for the 2020 year in place, it is expected that Townsend should have four years of eligibility left in Madison.

Townsend was sought after as a recruit with Power-Five offers from programs such as Iowa State, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington and Washington State prior to his commitment to the Ducks.

Illinois Hires Hawthorne As Director Of HS Personnel

Former Illini standout defensive back Terry Hawthorne was named director of high school personnel and Illini relations by new head coach Bret Bielema.

Hawthorne was a two-time All-Big Ten honorable mention at Illinois before being drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers. He then became the defensive backs coach at his alma mater, East St. Louis High School.

"I am very grateful and excited to be back at Illinois," Hawthorne said in a statement. "It is an amazing opportunity to join Coach Bielema and his staff. Ready to get going!"

Hawthorne will have an essential role in developing relationships with the Illini's high school recruits and high school coaches. The former Illini standout will evaluate high school student-athletes and assist in the transition of student-athletes from high school to college. He will also work alongside the Illinois Athletics Varsity "I" Association and fellow Illini football alum Kevin Mitchell to provide alumni outreach for the Fighting Illini football program.

"There is no greater example of what a student-athlete can accomplish here at the University of Illinois than Terry Hawthorne," Bielema said. "He will be able to use his past experiences as an Illinois football student-athlete, current experiences as a high school football coach, and knowledge he has gained in life to help recruit and develop relationships from coast to coast for our recruiting department. We couldn't be more excited to bring him in and help us continue to grow the University of Illinois football family."

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2021 FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 Minnesota; **11** OREGON; **18** TULSA; **25** AKRON.

Oct. 2 Rutgers; **9** MARYLAND; **23** Indiana; **30** PENN STATE.

Nov. 6 Nebraska; **13** PURDUE; **20** MICHIGAN STATE; **27** Michigan.

Dec. 4 Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (21-10, 12-8)

Nov. 25 ILLINOIS STATE, W 94-67; **29** UMASS LOWELL, 74-64.

Dec. 2 MOREHEAD STATE, W 77-44; **5** ALABAMA A&M, Canceled; **8** Notre Dame, W 90-85; **13** CLEVELAND STATE, W 67-61; **16** Purdue, L 67-60; **19** vs. UCLA at Cleveland, W 77-70; **23** RUTGERS, W 80-68; **26** Northwestern, L 71-70; **30** NEBRASKA, W 90-54.

Jan. 3 Minnesota, L 77-60; **9** Rutgers, W 79-68; **13** NORTHWESTERN, W 81-71; **16** Illinois, W 87-81; **19** PURDUE 67-65; **23** Wisconsin, 74-62; **27** PENN STATE, W 83-79; **31** MICHIGAN STATE, W 79-62.

Feb. 4 Iowa, W 89-85; **8** Maryland, W 73-65; **13** INDIANA, W 78-59; **18** Penn State, W 92-82; **21** MICHIGAN, L 92-87; **25** Michigan State, L 71-67; **28** IOWA, L 73-57.

March 6 ILLINOIS, L 73-68; **11** Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis vs Minnesota, W 79-75; **12** Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis vs Purdue, W 87-78 (OT); **13** Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis vs Michigan, W 68-67; **14** Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis vs Illinois, L 91-88 (OT); **19** NCAA Tournament at West Lafayette, Ind., vs Oral Roberts, L 75-72 (OT).

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (13-7, 9-7)

Nov. 25 AKRON, Canceled; **29** DUQUESNE, W 82-47.

Dec. 2 KENT STATE, W 103-47; **6** NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 96-63; **10** MIAMI (OHIO), W 104-65; **15** SAINT MARY'S, Canceled; **31** MICHIGAN STATE, Postponed.

Jan. 4 PENN STATE, W 82-69; **7** Illinois, W 78-55; **10** RUTGERS, Postponed; **13** Iowa, W 84-82 (OT); **16** Nebraska, L 63-55; **21** MICHIGAN, W 81-77; **25** MARYLAND, W 88-86; **28** Indiana, W 78-70.

Feb. 1 Northwestern, L 69-57; **4** IOWA, W 92-87; **7** MINNESOTA, W 83-59; **10** Wisconsin, L 75-70; **14** NORTHWESTERN, Postponed; **18** PURDUE, W 100-85; **21** Michigan, L 75-66; **24** Penn State, L 69-67; **27** INDIANA, L 87-75.

March 5 Rutgers, L 71-63.

BASEBALL (6-5)

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** Iowa at Minneapolis, Minn., L 4-0; **12** Nebraska at Minneapolis, Minn., L 10-4; **13** Iowa at Minneapolis, Minn., W 7-4; **14** Nebraska at Minneapolis, Minn., W 6-4; **20** Rutgers, L 6-5 (11 innings); **21** Rutgers, L 2-0; **22** Rutgers, W 4-1; **26-27** IOWA; **28-29** MARYLAND.

April 2 INDIANA, 3:05 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.

MEN'S GOLF

Feb. 5 Big Ten Match Play at Palm Coast, Fla., 1-1; **6** Big Ten Match Play at Palm Coast, Fla., 1-1; **14** Kiawah Classic at Kiawah Island Resort, S.C., Postponed; **15** Kiawah Classic at Kiawah Island Resort, S.C., 7/14; **16** Kiawah Classic at Kiawah Island Resort, S.C., 8/14.

March 8 Spartan Collegiate at Sea Island, Ga., 6/16; **9** Spartan Collegiate at Sea Island, Ga., 5/16; **15** Valspar Collegiate Invitational at Palm City, Fla., 4/11; **16** Valspar Collegiate Invitational at Palm City, Fla., 3/11.

April 10-11 Boilermaker Invitational at West Lafayette, Ind.; **16-17** ASU Thunderbird Invitational at Phoenix, Ariz.; **24-25** ROBERT KEPLER INTERCOLLEGIATE; **30** Big Ten Championship at Carmel, Ind.

May 1-2 Big Ten Championship at Carmel, Ind.; **17-19** NCAA Regional; **28-31** NCAA Championship at Scottsdale, Ariz.

June 1-2 NCAA Championship at Scottsdale, Ariz.

WOMEN'S GOLF (1-1)

Jan. 16 vs. Northwestern at Jupiter, Fla., L 4-1-1; **18** Florida Atlantic, W 301-300.

Feb. 8 FAU Paradise Invitational, 6/13; **9** FAU Paradise Invitational, 7/13; **21** Gators Invitational, 4/14; **22** Gators Invitational, 10/14; **23** Gators Invitational, 9/14; **26** Florida State Match Up, 4/14; **27** Florida State Match Up, 6/14; **28** Florida State Match Up, 5/14.

March 15 Briar's Creek Invitational at John's Island, S.C., T10/18; **16** Briar's Creek Invitational at John's Island, S.C., 4/18; **26-28** Clemson Invitational.

April 17-19 Indiana Invitational.

MEN'S GYMNASTICS (4-3)

Jan. 23 Illinois, L 402.550-396.250; **30** Navy, W 397.200-382.000; **31** Michigan, Postponed.

Feb. 7 MINNESOTA, W 401.050-387.250; **14** PENN STATE, W 405.500-403.900.

March 6 Nebraska, L 411.100-406.702; **13** IOWA, W 406.100-395.750; **17** Michigan, L 408.350-397.950; **21** William & Mary, Canceled.

April 3 Big Ten Championships; **16-17** NCAA Championships at Minneapolis, Minn.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS (8-4, 5-2)

Jan. 16 Michigan, L 197.225-196.000; **23** Iowa, L 196.550-193.800; **30** MICHIGAN, Postponed; **30** Michigan State, L 195.775-195.325.

Feb. 7 MICHIGAN STATE, W 196.375-194.500; **7** Illinois, W 196.375-196.075; **14** Rutgers, W 195.950-194.050; **21** Penn State, W 196.400-195.925; **21** Maryland, W 196.500-196.275; **26** Big Five Meet at College Park, Md., 4/5 195.275.

March 7 PENN STATE, MICHIGAN AND RUTGERS, 2/4 196.00; **12** MICHIGAN STATE, Canceled; **20** Big Ten Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 9/14 195.225.

April 1 NCAA Regionals; **16** NCAA Championships.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (7-19-1, 6-16)

Nov. 23 Minnesota, L 4-1; **24** Minnesota, L 2-0; **28** MICHIGAN STATE, L 3-2 (OT); **29** MICHIGAN STATE, W 4-2.

Dec. 3 WISCONSIN, W 4-2; **4** WISCONSIN, L 3-1; **12** Notre Dame, L 3-0; **13** Notre Dame, W 3-2; **17** ARIZONA STATE, T 4-4 (OT); **18** ARIZONA STATE, L 3-2.

Jan. 8 PENN STATE, W 6-3; **9** PENN STATE, L 5-2; **15** Michigan, L 4-2; **16** Michigan, L 5-0; **23** Michigan State, W 5-1; **24** Michigan State, L 2-0; **29** MINNESOTA, L 5-1; **30** MINNESOTA, L 5-2.

Feb. 5 NOTRE DAME, L 6-1; **6** NOTRE DAME, L 8-1; **12-13** Penn State, Postponed; **19** MICHIGAN, W 3-2; **20** MICHIGAN, L 6-0; **26** Wisconsin, L 2-1 (OT); **27** Wisconsin, L 7-0.

March 4 ARIZONA STATE, W 8-3; **5** ARIZONA STATE, L 5-0; **14** Big Ten Tournament at South Bend, Ind., vs. Michigan, L 4-0.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (13-7, 11-5)

Nov. 21 Minnesota, L 4-0; **22** Minnesota, W 2-1; **27** WISCONSIN, W 3-2; **28** WISCONSIN, L 5-0.

Dec. 11 MINNESOTA, Postponed, **12** MINNESOTA, Postponed; **18** Wisconsin, Postponed; **19** Wisconsin, Postponed.

Jan. 1 BEMIDJI STATE, W 4-1; **2** BEMIDJI STATE, 7-1; **8** Wisconsin, L 2-1; **9** Wisconsin, W 2-1 (OT); **15** Minnesota Duluth, L 2-0; **16** Minnesota Duluth, W 1-0; **22** MINNESOTA STATE, W 3-0; **23** MINNESOTA STATE, W 7-2; **29** MINNESOTA, L 7-4; **30** MINNESOTA, W 3-1.

Feb. 12 Minnesota, W 2-1; **13** Minnesota, W 3-2; **19** ST. CLOUD STATE, Canceled; **20** ST. CLOUD STATE, Canceled.

March 6 Minnesota Duluth, W 7-2; **7** Wisconsin, L 3-2; **16** NCAA Quarterfinals vs Boston College at Erie, Pa., W 3-1; **16** NCAA Semifinals vs Wisconsin at Erie, Pa., L 4-2.

MEN'S LACROSSE (2-3)

Feb. 20 Johns Hopkins, W 14-8; **27** RUTGERS, L 22-12.

March 6 Penn State, L 15-13; **14** MICHIGAN, W 13-10; **20** MARYLAND, L 16-8; **27** Michigan, 1 p.m.

April 3 Rutgers, 5 p.m.; **10** JOHNS HOPKINS, 12 p.m.; **18** Maryland, 5 p.m.; **24** PENN STATE, 4 p.m.

WOMEN'S LACROSSE (1-7)

Feb. 14 Northwestern, L 23-7; **21** MICHIGAN, W 15-12; **26** Rutgers, L 12-9; **27** Rutgers, L 10-9.

March 5 JOHNS HOPKINS, L 12-11; **7** JOHNS HOPKINS, L 10-9; **18** Maryland, L 14-9; **20** Maryland, L 11-5; **26** PENN STATE, 12 p.m.; **28** PENN STATE, 12 p.m.

April 10 NORTHWESTERN, 12 p.m.; **16** Michigan.

MEN'S SOCCER (3-2-1)

Feb. 23 INDIANA, L 3-0; **27** Maryland, W 1-0.

March 3 Michigan State, W 2-0; **7** NORTHWESTERN, W 4-2; **15** MICHIGAN, T 2-2; **19** Wisconsin, L 1-0; **23** Penn State; **27** RUTGERS; **31** Michigan.

April 4 MICHIGAN STATE; **10** Big Ten Tournament; **17** Big Ten Tournament Final.

May 14 NCAA Final Four; **16** NCAA National Championship.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (3-1-3)

Feb. 20 MICHIGAN, T 1-1; **25** WISCONSIN, W 3-1; **28** NEBRASKA, Postponed.

March 4 Maryland, W 3-1; **7** Rutgers, L 2-1; **13** PENN STATE, T 2-2; **18** Purdue, T 1-1; **21** Illinois, W 2-1; **25** INDIANA; **28** NORTHWESTERN.

April 3 Michigan State.

SOFTBALL (6-6)

Feb. 26 Iowa at Leesburg, Fla., W 3-2; **26** Iowa at Leesburg, Fla., L 4-3; **27** Minnesota at Leesburg, Fla., W 2-1 (11 innings); **27** Minnesota at Leesburg, Fla., L 8-0; **28** Nebraska at Leesburg, Fla., W 4-2; **28** Nebraska at Leesburg, Fla., L 2-1.

March 11 Wisconsin at Leesburg, Fla., W 7-5 (15 innings); **11** Wisconsin at Leesburg, Fla., L 10-1 (6 innings); **12** Wisconsin at Leesburg, Fla., W 3-2 (8 innings); **13** Northwestern at Leesburg, Fla., W 4-2; **13** Northwestern at Leesburg, Fla., L 9-0 (5 innings); **14** Northwestern at Leesburg, Fla., L 3-2; **26-28** MARYLAND.

April 2-4 Penn State; **9-11** MICHIGAN; **16-18** Indiana; **23-25** RUTGERS; **30** Purdue.

May 1-2 Purdue; **7-9** Illinois; **14-16** MICHIGAN STATE.

SWIMMING & DIVING

Jan. 16 PENN STATE/RUTGERS, Men W 163.5-134.5, Women W 157-141; **22-23** Indiana, Men L 185-115, Women L 166-134.

Feb. 6 Purdue, Men W 159-140, Women W 198-88; **Feb. 6** Rutgers, Women W 244-23; **23** Big Ten Women's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., T1/14; **24** Big Ten Women's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 1/14; **25** Big Ten Women's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 1/14; **26** Big Ten Women's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 1/14; **27** Big Ten Women's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 1/14; **25-27** Big Ten Diving Championships at West Lafayette, Ind., 1/14.

March 2 Big Ten Men's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 1/14; **3** Big Ten Men's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 1/14; **4** Big Ten Men's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 3/14; **5** Big Ten Men's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 3/14; **6** Big Ten Men's Championships at Minneapolis, Minn., 3/14; **17** Women's NCAA Championship at Greensboro, N.C., 7th; **18** Women's NCAA Championship at Greensboro, N.C., 5th; **19** Women's NCAA Championship at Greensboro,

N.C., 5th; **20** Women's NCAA Championship at Greensboro, N.C., 7th; **24-27** Men's NCAA Championship at Greensboro, N.C., NTS.

MEN'S TENNIS (11-2, 8-1)

Jan. 15-18 Ohio State Invitational; **22** MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE, W 4-0; **23** VIRGINIA, L 4-2.

Feb. 13 MICHIGAN STATE, W 7-0; **13** MICHIGAN STATE, W 4-0; **19** Northwestern, W 4-0; **21** Illinois, W 4-1; **27** PENN STATE, W 7-0.

March 5 PURDUE, W 7-0; **7** INDIANA, W 7-0; **12** Michigan State, W 7-0; **14** Michigan, L 4-3; **19** Minnesota, W 6-1; **21** Wisconsin, W 6-1; **26** NEBRASKA, 6 p.m.; **28** IOWA, 12 p.m.

April 4 Penn State, 12 p.m.; **9** Purdue, 2 p.m.; **11** Indiana, 12 p.m.; **16** MICHIGAN STATE, 6 p.m.; **18** MICHIGAN, 12 p.m.

WOMEN'S TENNIS (13-3, 10-1)

Jan. 16-18 Michigan Invitational at Ann Arbor, Mich., NTS; **23** SYRACUSE, W 4-0; **23** VIRGINIA, W 4-2.

Feb. 5 North Carolina (ITA Championships) at Stillwater, Okla., L 4-0; **6** Georgia Tech (ITA Championships), W 4-3; **7** Northwestern (ITA Championships), L 4-3; **13** PURDUE, W 6-1; **14** INDIANA, W 7-0; **20** Maryland, W 5-2; **21** Rutgers, W 7-0; **26** MICHIGAN STATE, W 6-1; **28** MICHIGAN, L 4-3.

March 6 Nebraska, W 5-2; **7** Iowa, W 5-2; **14** Penn State, W 6-1; **20** MARYLAND, W 6-1; **21** RUTGERS, W 7-0; **27** Michigan State, 6 p.m.; **28** Michigan, 12 p.m.

April 10 MINNESOTA, 12 p.m.; **11** WISCONSIN, 12 p.m.; **18** PENN STATE, 12 p.m.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (6-8, 5-5)

Jan. 22 PENN STATE, L 3-0; **23** PENN STATE, W 3-0; **29** Penn State, L 3-0; **30** Penn State, L 3-0.

Feb. 5 LEWIS, W 3-1; **6** LEWIS, L 3-1; **12** McKendree, L 3-1; **13** McKendree, L 3-1; **20** LOYOLA CHICAGO, W 3-2; **21** LOYOLA CHICAGO, W 3-0; **27** Ball State, W 3-2.

March 11 BALL STATE, L 3-2; **19** Purdue Fort Wayne, W 3-1; **20** Purdue Fort Wayne, L 3-1; **26** LINDENWOOD, 7 p.m.; **27** LINDENWOOD, 7 p.m.

April 2 Quincy, 8 p.m.; **3** Quincy, 8 p.m.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (15-1)

Jan. 22 MARYLAND, W 3-2; **23** MARYLAND, W 3-2; **26** Penn State, Postponed; **31** Michigan State, W 3-0.

Feb. 1 Michigan State, W 3-2; **6** Michigan State, W 3-2; **12** IOWA, W 3-0; **13** IOWA, W 3-0; **17** PENN STATE, W 3-2; **19** Illinois, W 3-1; **20** Illinois, W 3-2; **26** Rutgers, W 3-0; **27** Rutgers, W 3-2.

March 5 MINNESOTA, Postponed; **6** MINNESOTA, Postponed; **12** Nebraska, L 3-2; **13** Nebraska, W 3-2; **19** MICHIGAN, W 3-1; **20** MICHIGAN, W 3-0; **26** PURDUE, 2 p.m.; **27** PURDUE, 2 p.m.

April 2 Indiana, 4 p.m.; **3** Indiana, 4 p.m.

WRESTLING (5-4)

Jan. 17 Illinois, L 18-15; **17** vs. Wisconsin at Champaign, Ill., W 25-9; **24** RUTGERS, W 19-14; **29** MICHIGAN STATE, W 24-9; **31** Maryland, W 41-0.

Feb. 7 vs. Iowa at West Lafayette, Ind., L 33-14; **7** Purdue, W 23-12; **12** Michigan, L 18-16; **19** PENN STATE, L 28-12.

March 6-7 Big Ten Championships, 9/14; **18** NCAA Championships at St. Louis, 11th; **19** NCAA Championships at St. Louis, 9th; **20** NCAA Championships at St. Louis, 9th.

Let our friendly staff take care of you before, during & after the game.

Enjoy your favorite team on our many HD flat-screen TVs

Shade RESTAURANTS

Friends, Fun & Great Food!

NFL Ticket

NFL Ticket

Shade on the Canal
19 S. High St.
Canal Winchester
614-837-9873

Shade on 30th St.
850 S. 30th St.
Heath
740-788-9287

Shade on State St.
994 E State St.
Athens
740-566-1009

Ouster Shows Fickle Nature Of Hoops, Fans

I was having a conversation with a buddy shortly after Ohio State's shocking NCAA Tournament loss to Oral Roberts, and he said that there should never be a reason for a two seed to lose to a 15 (or a three to a 14 or a four to a 13 ... you get the picture, right?). I told him that's a part of sports and that if the better team won all the time there wouldn't be any need to play games out.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Besides, upsets are what make being a fan so exciting. It's just not nearly as much fun when your team is on the receiving end of that upset. Ohio State showed that its spirited run to the final of the Big Ten tournament was more mirage than reality, that the four-game losing streak at the end of the regular season was probably what fans should have put more weight on when talking about the Buckeyes' postseason fortunes. A couple of national basketball writers actually had Ohio State in the Final Four, so they felt that the maladies that had plagued the team during the late-season swoon were taken care of.

Apparently not.

OSU was outthrustled, outshot, outexecuted – out-everythinged – against the Golden Eagles, and now it is out, period.

It was pretty evident from the start that ORU had more juice. It raced out to a 7-0 lead as the Buckeyes loped up and down the court, giving half-hearted effort and allowing the ball to be taken away far too often – 16 times in all against a team that came into the game as one of the worst in the land at forcing turnovers.

A solemn Chris Holtmann put the blame where it belonged.

"We lost the game because they made more plays, and I thought they were quicker to loose balls throughout the course of the game."

ORU had the nation's leading scorer in

guard Max Abmas, but there were skeptics who felt he did most of his heavy lifting against the lesser lights of the Summit Conference. But when he swished a trey from the logo just over halfcourt to finish the opening run, it was evident that the kid was a baller. Ohio State didn't do nearly enough to keep the ball out of his hands – no traps, no switches to a bigger defender. Abmas got the ball in good position with too many clean looks and victimized the Buckeyes for 29 points. Running mate Kevin Obanor had 30, which means that duo combined for 59 of the Eagles' 75 points. And yet OSU allowed them to do their thing over and over and over again.

Why Holtmann didn't switch defenses or make it more difficult for those two to get the ball is a mystery. His in-game decisions weren't the best, but he's not the only one at fault here.

The Buckeyes were loose with the ball, hit just 5 of 23 from three-point land and sank just 50 percent from the foul line. OSU had been a good free-throw shooting team for the bulk of the year.

Missed foul shots and the turnovers – many out of sheer carelessness – were a huge reason the Buckeyes are spectators rather than participants in the Madness.

"We've got really good free-throw shooters; we're a really good free-throw shooting team," Holtmann said. "We just missed some critical ones. I think we had a couple possessions there that we just had rushed plays. I think the one in transition by Duane (Washington) was a really rushed play. That was a critical stretch."

For a few moments it looked as if the Buckeyes would avoid the ignominy of the upset, settling down to grab an eight point lead midway through the first half. ORU stayed resolute and went into halftime with a three-point margin. Buckeye Nation was no doubt thinking that after a little cool down, now in the flow of the game, Ohio State would come out with guns blazing and run the pesky upstarts off the court.

It never happened.

OSU got down by as many as seven points in the second half before showing some rare moments of heart and desire and grabbing a

64-60 lead with 2:34 left to play. The Buckeyes kept that margin until there was just over a minute remaining, and then the wheels fell off.

A missed layup by Washington, a missed front end of a 1-and-1 by E.J. Liddell and a jumper at the top of the circle by Washington with the game tied at 64 were among the opportunities Ohio State had to put the contest on ice. Regulation ended tied at 64, and when ORU started the extra five minutes on an 8-2 run, even the most diehard Buckeye had to feel that it was over.

There was one last gasp after Liddell swished a trey to cut the margin to 73-72 with 17 seconds to play. But ORU hit two free throws, and a couple of desperation heaves by Ohio State missed the mark.

Game, set, match, bus ride home.

"By and large, it was a special year with a conclusion that is one we've got to lean into," Holtmann said.

The conclusion is what people will remember, because your last image is the one that is etched indelibly into the minds of a fan base. Losing a CFP title game, even against a better opponent, hurts. Coaches get blamed, players get derided. So when you lose to a team that's inferior, that's magnified.

So magnified, in fact, that a couple of real Einsteins decided to troll Liddell on social media shortly after the game. They said a variety of disgusting things, none of which will be repeated here as they don't deserve the attention.

Suffice it to say that the country will think Ohio State's fan base is beyond help. It's pretty evident that these people weren't fans, but more likely gamblers or dudes who had their brackets busted by the Buckeyes' loss. And because they are so inadequate as people, they felt they had to call out a team's most visible player – a guy who almost single-handedly brought the Buckeyes back after being nonexistent in the first 20 minutes.

Ohio State has been through this before, with football players Ryan Hamby (whose huge offense was dropping a pass) and Tyler Durbin (who had the audacity to miss a field goal), so it isn't unique. It's just a sad commentary on the often too-large role sports plays in the lives of many. They call them "games" for a reason. It's not curing cancer nor rocket science. It's an athletic endeavor – albeit one that has big-time dollar signs attached to it. But a game, nonetheless. And the sooner people realize that, the better off everyone will be.

Incidentally, the Big Ten rolled into the tournament with nine teams, and many felt it was the top conference in the country. But after the first weekend, Ohio State and Purdue were upset by lower seeds, and Michigan State lost in one of the First Four games. It will be interesting to see how many Big Ten teams are left when the Sweet 16 is known.

It will also be interesting to see how Holtmann addresses Ohio State's shortcomings – lack of interior size, an inability to turn teams over defensively, and cooler heads in crunch time. He believes the season on balance was a good one, but it certainly lacked the desired conclusion.

"I thought there were a lot of important strides here this year and a lot of really good moments," he said. "This is incredibly disappointing, there's no other way to look at it. But it certainly doesn't discount what our guys have done throughout the bulk of the season. You're playing in a win-or-lose, win-or-go-home environment, and we've got to own that. But I don't by any stretch think it's – we'll have time to reflect on some of the positive steps we took as a program this year. But like I said, right now we've got to lean into this disappointment and embrace it for what it is and figure out how we can grow moving forward."

Getting out of the first weekend would be a good first step, and while there shouldn't be heat on Holtmann at this time – though you'd best believe there is, as a vocal faction on social media says he's in over his head and that this is the result Buckeyes fans should get used to – he is going to have to find a way to get his bunch over the hump. Otherwise, the calls will get louder, and will be deserved.

"I think obviously that's the next step for us, there's no question, is finding a way to get to the second weekend," Holtmann admitted. "I think in the previous couple years, we were beaten by teams that were higher-seeded than us. We were able to upset a team there two years ago, so this has not happened to us in our four years together. But again, that doesn't discount the fact that I understand that's where we need to be moving forward."

While some out there think that the Ohio State hoops gig is an elite one, others more grounded in reality understand that it's a good job, not a great one. Michigan State, Michigan, Illinois and Indiana are all better jobs, with more emphasis on their program and more fertile recruiting bases.

Don't mistake this as saying it's acceptable for the Buckeye program to languish in the middle of the pack, because it isn't. But it also shouldn't be expected to be a championship unit – Big Ten or national – on a yearly basis, because that's not what this program is. If you want that, root for Duke or Kentucky or some other blue blood.

Ohio State should be able to win 20 games a year, finish in the upper half of the standings most of the time and contend for a league crown every few years. Along with that it needs to win some postseason games. If that happens, fans should be more than happy.

But because there's a group out there that believes a better team should never lose, there will never be true happiness.

And that's a shame, because sports is, at its core, about joy and excitement.

The Strait & Lamp Group

Strait & Lamp Lumber
A Division of The Strait & Lamp Group

Dublin Millwork
A Division of The Strait & Lamp Group

Linworth Lumber
A Division of The Strait & Lamp Group

5th Ave. Lumber
A Division of The Strait & Lamp Group

Lumbercraft
A Division of The Strait & Lamp Group

NOW HIRING
at all locations
Please reach out on
our website

www.straitandlamp.com

chocolate café

FINE CHOCOLATES • COFFEES • DESSERTS • SPIRITS & PEOPLE

1855 Northwest Boulevard
(614) 485-CAFE
chocolatecafecolumbus.com

Parties • Corporate Catering
Weddings • Baby & Bridal Showers • Tailgates

I Looked Past Oral Roberts. Did The Buckeyes?

One of the guys in the office asked me if I was excited about the start of the NCAA basketball tournament. I'm kind of an Ohio State-centric guy, and I answered I would be more excited when the Buckeyes got to the second round and started playing better opponents.

Well, there is a reason they call it March Madness, and clearly I was caught up in who had the bigger name and who had the higher – in this case much higher – seed. My apologies to Oral Roberts for not giving them their proper respect. They more than earned the upset. But you still must put a lot of the blame on the Buckeyes.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I was holding down the office when the Buckeyes and Golden Eagles were playing, so I had to follow the sad but true tale through the call of Paul Keels and Ron Stokes, while simultaneously working on putting out the very BSB you are reading. Without seeing the game I'll leave the heavy-duty criticism to others.

But I can read a box score, and there are some telling numbers.

First and foremost is the fact that the Buckeyes, an outstanding free-throw shooting team throughout the season, hit just 9 of 18 from the charity stripe. Meanwhile, Oral Roberts, also an outstanding free-throw shooting team, was 14 of 18. Ohio State was guilty of 16 turnovers, while the Eagles gave up the ball just six times. And the Buckeyes knew who was going to score for Oral Roberts, yet they still allowed Kevin Obanor (30) and Max Abmas (29) to combine for 59 of ORU's 75 points.

These are little signs of a team not into the game mentally.

Were the Buckeyes, like me, looking past Oral Roberts?

Here's what C.J. Walker, who went all the way to the Elite Eight with Florida State in 2017-18, had to say about that:

"It's most definitely mental over physical. We just took it for granted thinking we could come in and win the game, and in March, you can't do that. Oral Roberts just took advantage of that, and they made the right plays at the right time."

I think that's pretty definitive from a guy who should know.

Again, having not actually seen the game, I'm going to leave it at that.

But I would remind the basketball Buckeyes of the plight of their gridiron brethren. The Ohio State football team took the sting of its controversial loss to Clemson in the playoffs following the 2019 season and carried it like a chip on its shoulder for an entire year before turning that chip into a gratifying demolition of the Tigers this past season.

The basketball Buckeyes need to do the same thing with the sting of their loss to Oral Roberts.

And by the way, hats off to the Golden Eagles. As Buckeye fans, we tend to look at what Ohio State did wrong rather than what the other team did right.

Oral Roberts did a lot of things right! And now they are in the Sweet 16, while the Buckeyes are left to wonder what could have been.

Two Must-Have Recruits

Regular readers of this column know that I love our "From the Pages of BSB" feature. There are so many things that I have forgotten about that are recalled, and there can be so much irony when you look back at things 10, 20, 30 years later. But in this issue, I was similarly struck by the comparable "A Look Back at Recruiting From the Pages of BSB."

This issue notes two "must-have" recruits who never fulfilled their potential at Ohio State – Chuck Jones and Tate Martell.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

It's hard to believe that it's been more than 30 years since the Buckeyes and John Cooper first recruited Jones out of Chillicothe, Ohio. I think BSB editor emeritus Mark Rea would agree with me. Few recruits in the history of BSB have attracted as much ongoing attention as Jones, partially because his recruitment extended over several years.

To understand the saga of Jones, you have to first understand that he was a blue chip of a blue-chip recruit.

"I think you would have to say he is one of the two or three best high school players in the nation this year," longtime recruiting expert Tom Lemming said during Jones' senior year of 1988. "He's a big kid who has the unusual blend of power and quickness. He has enough quickness to play fullback. On defense, he's quick, he's agile and he's aggressive. He's just real talented, and every college in the country is looking at him."

Added Bill Kurelic of The Ohio Football Recruiting News, "You don't see the blend of size quickness and agility that Jones possesses very often. He is a true blue-chip college prospect."

There was only one problem. As good as Jones was on the football field, he struggled that much in the classroom. He committed to the Buckeyes in 1989, but as the academic year wound down, it became apparent that he was going to fail a government class that he needed to graduate and to subsequently become eligible to enroll at Ohio State.

As news that Jones was not going to be eligible began to circulate, some of the big lineman's academic quirks began to circulate as well.

"Throughout most of the school year, Chillicothe head football coach John Sines came to Jones' house each morning to wake him and take him to school. But Jones admitted he was often still absent," Rea wrote in the June 1989 issue of BSB.

"I missed a lot of school," Jones said at the time. "I missed more this year than all my years of school. Some people say I'm lazy. I'm not lazy. I'm hard-headed in regards to school. It's not that I don't like school. It's just I like to sleep in the morning. I should have gotten up."

While it was too late for him to qualify to play for the Buckeyes in 1989, Jones completed the work he needed to graduate in summer school and finally enrolled at OSU for the summer quarter of 1990. However, under the Prop 48 guidelines that existed at the time, Jones was not eligible to play for the Buckeyes until 1991.

Which led to the note in this issue of BSB: "Chuck Jones is history," Cooper said of the 6-5, 280-pound defensive lineman with 4.5 speed in the spring of 1991. "He wouldn't do what we asked him to do. He wouldn't go to class, wouldn't go to study hall and was a grade problem."

He wasn't done at BSB, however. For several years afterward, readers would regularly call asking if there was any chance that Jones might still play at Ohio State. He was that highly coveted as a recruit.

In my quest to revive the "Letters to the Editor" feature in BSB, maybe one of our many readers in Ross County knows whatever happened to Jones. As recently as 2015, a story by Derrick Webb in the Chillicothe Gazette noting the 10 greatest football players from the Chillicothe area still listed Jones as the fourth best ever. Webb called Jones "a player who is

both the biggest football mystery in our area as well as a player who many believe is the best – at any position – to ever play the game locally."

I would have guessed, correctly, that Garin Veris, another player recruited by Ohio State but who ended up at Stanford, was the top player ever from the area. Veris was drafted by the New England Patriots in 1985, played with them in Super Bowl XX and was named to the Patriots' all-'80s team.

What I forgot was that Ohio State's 2002 national championship tight end, Ben Hartsock, is also from Ross County, prepping at Unioto. He, too, went on to the NFL, logging 10 years there for five different clubs. If you are wondering who No. 3 on the list was, it was Greg Cook, a quarterback out of Chillicothe who went on to the University of Cincinnati and was one of the early quarterbacks for the Cincinnati Bengals.

But I totally digress. Let's get back to Ohio State's must-have recruits, the second one mentioned being Tate Martell.

Martell is a recent enough Buckeye that I don't have to elaborate on his story to the degree that I did with Jones.

As noted on page 14 of this issue, it was only five years ago that Martell was visiting Ohio State.

"Although he was just 5-10 and 203 pounds, the Texas A&M commitment was at the top of recruiting boards because of his athleticism and ability to make plays – much like a former Aggie player who measured under 6-0 but took the college football world by storm in Johnny Manziel," our look-back says of the five-star who was at the time considered the No. 1 quarterback and the No. 12 overall prospect for 2017.

Scout.com recruiting analyst Brandon Huffman gave this report on Martell:

"Initially the first thing people scoff at is his size because he's 5-10, and when you're looking at a college quarterback you usually want those 6-2, 6-3 guys," Huffman said. "He misses those specific physical attributes, but he changes games with his feet and changes games with his arm. He's one of the most fun players I've watched at the quarterback position in the West."

I bring this up because Martell has become somewhat of a whipping boy on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum, with many of the posters insisting that they knew all along that Martell would be a bust. That is what my significant other would call "revisionist history."

Buckeye fans absolutely considered Martell a "must-have" at the time, and his stats during his brief stay in Columbus were fairly impressive, with 23 of 28 passing for an 82.1 completion percentage, 269 yards and a touchdown with no interceptions. He added another 128 yards on 22 carries for a 5.8-yard average and two scores.

And the quote from Huffman about Martell being "one of the most fun players I've watched at the quarterback position" still resonates for me.

But then came Ohio State's courting of Justin Fields to play quarterback and Martell's disastrous transfer to Miami (Fla.), where he got involved with model Kiki Passo and suddenly he is the butt of the joke for many Buckeye fans.

Personally, unlike with Jones, I don't believe the final chapter has been written for Tate Martell. He just needs the right situation, preferably away from Kiki, though far be it from me to

give advice on other people's love lives.

I do believe when Buckeye fans remember Jones, they will mostly remember his high school coach having to come get him out of bed. And they will always picture Martell up in the rafters of the Schottenstein Center while Urban Meyer and Dwayne Haskins were figuratively wining and dining Fields down near the court.

There was much more to each of their stories.

And In 10 Years

While the previous note was suggested by "A Look Back at Recruiting From the Pages of BSB," there was a tinge of irony in one of the notes in "From the Pages of BSB" in this issue.

Twenty years ago, Buckeye football coach Jim Tressel was dealing with the arrest and jailing of OSU junior defensive back Derek Ross on an assortment of charges in nearby Newark, Ohio, including speeding, as noted on page 7.

Ross pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 30 days in the Licking County jail. But there was still the matter of any team punishment that Tressel might dish out.

"Hopefully we'll get the accurate details and move forward accordingly. All decisions have to be based on having accurate data," Tressel said.

Here comes the ironic part.

"We'll handle it with the same compassion, fairness and firmness of any (incident) *that will occur 10 years from now* (my italics). We hope they don't happen, but they do."

Ten years later, in the spring of 2011, Tressel would be dealing with Tattoo-gate. His "compassion, fairness and firmness," if that's what it was, ultimately ended up costing him his job.

What It's All About

Since her very first season here, I have been impressed with Ohio State women's hockey coach Nadine Muzerall. Her record in Columbus speaks for itself, and her exploits are chronicled in a story on page 31 of this issue. In the story she recalls during the hiring process meeting with the search committee, which had input from players Lauren Spring and Jincy Dunne. A quote from Muzerall about meeting those two players really struck me. It says a lot about life – particularly college life – and may shed some light on why the program has been so successful under her tutelage.

"They looked sad, and they looked broken," Muzerall said of Spring and Dunne. "I was like, this is ridiculous. If you're not having fun in college, when are you going to have fun? You have the rest of your life to be stressed out. You're supposed to enjoy college and enjoy your hockey. I'm going to come in and try to make you a better hockey player, but I also want to make you a better person."

Words of true wisdom.

Keep Those Letters Coming

My quest to revive the art and practice of "Letters to the Editor" seems to be taking hold. Thanks to those of you who have already written, and if you haven't yet, don't be shy. Remember, there are no right or wrong opinions. They are just that – opinions.

There is an easy topic for those who are looking to jump in: What happened to the Buckeyes against Oral Roberts, and/or what do you think of the job coach Chris Holtmann has done so far?

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. 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.

Fort Lauderdale Marriott
Harbor Beach Resort & Spa
June 16 - 20, 2021



BUCKEYE CRUISE FOR CANCER



Heads for Land in 2021!

VISIT BUCKEYECRUISE.COM OR CALL 614-792-6204 FOR MORE INFORMATION!