

## *Ryan Day Defends Justin Fields During Pre-Draft Process*

By ANDREW LIND  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Despite his seemingly flawless performance passing the football during Ohio State's pro day on March 30, quarterback Justin Fields' pre-draft detractors only got louder in the days thereafter.

The biggest disseminator of the criticism against Fields, at least of late, has been former NFL quarterback and current ESPN football analyst Dan Orlovsky, who said during an appearance on "The Pat McAfee Show" on March 31 that he's heard questions from NFL personnel about Fields' work ethic.

"I have heard that he is a last-guy-in, first-guy-out type of quarterback," Orlovsky said. "Like, not the manic work ethic. I've even heard it compared to (former Oregon and current Los Angeles Chargers quarterback) Justin Herbert. When he showed up, he was like a psychopath when it came to working and get ready for the draft. Or even at school, like, 'Give me more, I want to work nonstop.' And I've heard that there are issues with Justin Fields' work ethic."

"The second thing is, where is his desire to go be a great quarterback? I think that there's a desire to be a big-time athlete, from what is expressed to me, but where is his desire to be a great quarterback? And to be great, you have to be willing to find the things that you are not good at and just freaking grind on them."

Orlovsky's comments created a firestorm on social media, which led him to defend himself the following day, at which time he reiterated those were not his opinions, but rather views shared with him by others.

"That forced me to do even more digging over the past 24 hours," Orlovsky said on April 1. "I've had two conversations that I want to put out there and clarify the situation. One conversation I had is with an offensive coach at Ohio State, and he said, 'Tell them that is absolutely not true, that Justin Fields' work ethic is spectacular. That he is a guy that has a great football IQ and is always studying tape.'"

"The second conversation that I had is with (former BYU and NFL quarterback) John Beck, who has trained Justin as he headed into his pro day, and John's had a really positive experience, saying, 'This guy's always working incredibly hard on the field, and even after we're done with our field drills,



PHOTO COURTESY PAUL VERNON/ASSOCIATED PRESS VIA THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**BACKING HIS QUARTERBACK** – With people questioning quarterback Justin Fields' desire and work ethic following his pro day on March 31, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day made a passionate speech to the contrary.

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## **BSB's 2021 Spring Football Preview**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin's spring preview issue features several in-depth stories about Ohio State's positional battles, as well as features, news and updates on all of OSU athletics, including:

- A breakdown of the running back battle, where incumbent Master Teague looks to hold off five-star recruit TreVeyon Henderson and others;
- A look at who will replace Tuf Borland, Pete Werner, Baron Browning and Justin Hilliard at the linebacker position;
- A rundown of which players face a crucial month of spring practice;
- A feature on returning senior left tackle Thayer Munford, who aims to become the first person in his family to graduate from college;
- A thorough analysis of all of the newfangled terms in college football;
- A deep dive on the evolution of sports bars and the demise of Damon's;
- Reports on the men's and women's basketball and men's soccer programs;
- Plus all of BSB's regular briefs, columns and features.

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## From The Message Board

***With spring football practices under way for Ohio State, we asked the readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum, as well as members of the staff, which players they think are facing a make-or-break spring and why. Here are some of the responses:***

"Tyreke Johnson, he's been passed up a billion times. If not this year then it's probably transfer portal time."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"K'Vaughan Pope has seen alarmingly little time on the field and he's a player many thought would start three years."

– Terrier Buck

"I don't think anyone will break during the spring. The quarterback battle is most important for starting position. The runners-up will not be cast out, but if you want to start, you have to have a 'make' spring season."

– PeyoteBuck

"Master Teague. If he doesn't win the starting position now, the young guys will pass him and he will never start again."

– Mcarr

"Zach Harrison. Not to put pressure on him, but is he the next Bosa/Chase Young or not? Tough acts to follow but if you don't like those expectations, go to Rutgers."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I agree with Tiffin, especially with Sevy Banks sidelined and Cam Brown limited this spring. Johnson has a chance to prove he deserves play time but could very easily be passed over by some of the younger players."

– Andrew Lind, BSB

"I will go with Craig Young. Young might have the most pure athletic ability of anyone in that linebacker room, and this is a huge chance for him to get some serious in-game action and prove that he can turn all that potential into something on the field. With such a deep room full of talent, but not a ton of game experience, this offseason is a massive one for someone like Young."

– Wyatt Crosher, BSB

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Women Deserve Better

Well, here we go again. No Big Ten team in the Final Four for women's basketball. Here's a question: In the last 15 years, how many times has a Big Ten team finished in the top three nationally in women's basketball? The answer is zero. That's right, not once.

In the last 15 years, how many times has a Big Ten team finished in the top four nationally in women's basketball? The answer is twice. Maryland finished fourth in 2015 and again last season.

Why? To be blunt, it's because the Big Ten presidents and the Big Ten athletic directors don't care.

There is value in doing something right, in striving for excellence. It's never right to be a mediocre dad, a mediocre mom, a mediocre doctor, a mediocre teacher, a mediocre coach.

When it comes to the flagship men's program, football, the Big Ten cares. It should. Quality matters.

When it comes to the flagship women's program, basketball, the Big Ten does not care. Striving for excellence in women's basketball requires two factors: talent and coaching.

In fewer than two hours, any Big Ten athletic director can do all the research needed to determine if their coach is bringing in enough elite quality recruits and enough talent. In less than half a day, any Big Ten athletic director can do all the research needed to determine if their coach is fulfilling the ingredients and components needed for excellence.

The Big Ten sets high standards for the flagship men's sport of football. One wonders if the Big Ten is setting any standards at all for the flagship women's sport of basketball. Every women's basketball coach sets high standards for his/her girls. Meet those standards or you don't play. Every athletic director should set high standards for the women's basketball program. Meet those standards or we make a change.

It's time we stop shortchanging women's sports. Big Ten presidents and Big Ten athletic directors should be leaders in this quest.

**Richard Rhoad**  
Westerville, Ohio

## No Place For Hate

Mark Rea's opinion piece in the March 27 edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin shows great courage and insight in tackling the subject of hate directed by some fans towards athletes, in this case E.J. Liddell for a missed free throw in the loss to Oral Roberts. While this kind of behavior is nothing new in American sports (and other aspects of our "culture"), this kind of inexcusable behavior has been taken to the next level, something that may have been unimaginable four years ago.

Basketball is only a game, as is football, but this almost maniacal need to always win on the part of many fans has no place in a civilized society. Is ours?

Thanks, Mark, for an important and crucial article that I will save and reread every time the hate-mongers take to the airwaves.

**Jim Breithaupt**  
Washougal, Wash.

## Buckeyes Need New Scheme

Our defensive woes to me were obvious in 2017, 2018 and 2020. Notice that I did not mention 2019 when we used the nickel back in Shaun Wade. Our defensive woes were about not matching up when teams use many fast pass catchers.

Our only loss in 2019 was to Clemson and when Wade was wrongfully ejected for targeting after a sack that would have given the Buckeyes the ball again leading 16-0. Lawrence ducked into Wade to get the helmet-to-helmet hit. It should have been a no-call.

The game changed with the Wade ejection, losing a top defensive back. The Buckeyes' defense still only gave up 259 yards passing to Clemson.

During the years of 2017, 2018 and 2020, our Buckeyes were continually torched with spread offenses running four or five fast pass catchers.

During these years, we did not match up well putting linebackers on fast pass catchers. This was so obvious when Tuf Borland was hopelessly chasing the fastest player on the field, a.k.a. Heisman winner DeVonta Smith, in the championship game for a huge catch and touchdown.

Smith ran many motion plays with linebacker trailing, only then to cut back wide open and then catch and run for 215 yards and three touchdowns in the first half alone.

All of our losses in those three years the Buckeyes gave up huge passing yards and touchdowns. Even against lesser talented teams and we won when not playing elite teams.

Thank god, The Team Up North did not watch much tape in 2017 and 2018!

Coach Kerry Coombs' defense needs to go back to the 2019 schemes and matching up defensive backs using a nickel back when teams run the spread with many fast pass catchers. When this happens, the Silver Bullets will do much better matching up against teams running spread offenses with many fast pass catchers.

**Jim Parker**  
Tampa, Fla.

## Loss Overshadows Progress

After taking a team picked in the preseason to finish seventh in the Big Ten conference to a No. 2 seed in the

NCAA Tournament, I cannot understand why some doubt that Chris Holtmann can be successful at Ohio State.

This was a team with no surefire future pros and no real height. Add chronic injuries and the distractions of a pandemic and a 12-4 conference record in February and a run to the B1G conference tournament championship game, and I would expect few to question whether Holtmann should continue as OSU coach.

John Wooden was at UCLA from 1948 until 1963-64, when UCLA won its first NCAA championship. Fifteen years! During those first 14 years before the first championship, Wooden lost a total of 54 games in the era when teams played 12 conference games.

It was a different era, but still, patience is sometimes rewarded. Ten championships in 12 years was the reward.

**Steven K. Brown**  
Port Charlotte, Fla.

## Didn't Miss The Letters

Well, that didn't take long!

We already have to read a letter with a political slant in a sports-related publication. As usual the writer showed his obvious political party lean. I and I'm sure many did not miss having the letters to the editor for this exact reason.

I purchase and read this publication to keep up with Ohio State news and only that, not to read of some idiot's rants and searched out facts to support their warped opinions. Luckily, I can really end this by not renewing my subscription if this nonsense continues. It is your fault for publishing these letters and continuing to publish the same people every week.

**Bernie Faldowski**  
Ravenna, Ohio

## Ready For Football

Cannot wait for this year of Buckeye football.

I have always enjoyed the turnover of players and looking for the next stars to replace them, and this year is really exciting with a new quarterback and seeing the new running backs, linebackers, offensive and defensive linemen, cornerbacks and safeties. Also, another Australian punter.

**Ken Seeds**  
Boardman, 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.*

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The 2021 Buckeye Sports Bulletin schedule is subject to change.

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# Three-Man Race To Take Over QB Position

Beginning with J.T. Barrett (plus a sprinkling of Cardale Jones) on through Dwayne Haskins and Justin Fields, the case can be made that Ohio State football has since 2014 experienced the greatest run of quarterback play in the history of the program's 131-year existence.

Here's a stat to blow your mind. Over the past seven seasons, Barrett, Jones, Haskins and Fields combined to throw for 22,523 yards (that's nearly 13 miles) and 236 touchdowns. During the entire 28-year reign of Woody Hayes, the Buckeyes threw for 23,639 yards and 161 scores.

Apples to oranges? Probably, but contrary to popular belief, there was a time when Woody tailored his offense to throwing the ball. In each of Hayes' first three seasons in Columbus, his teams totaled more than 1,000 yards through the air with John Borton throwing for 1,555 yards in 1952. But just three years later, after visiting with legendary Oklahoma head coach Bud Wilkinson and learning the finer points of the powerful T-formation, the OSU coach had turned decisively to a ground attack. As recently as 1976, Ohio State threw only one touchdown pass the entire season – and that was a fluky 59-yard score from QB Jim Pacentia to wingback Jim Harrell during a 47-7 win at Indiana in the eighth game that year.

I realize that comparing the passing game of the last few seasons to the Hayes era is a fool's errand. Nevertheless, it almost goes without saying these days that Ohio State has morphed from a run-first mentality into a team that can run and throw the ball with equal success.

That is the reason why fans are waiting with the anticipation of a child on Christmas Eve to find out who the next great Buckeye gunslinger will be. After all, this is believed to be the first season since 1971 that no Ohio State quarterback on the roster has attempted a single pass as a college player.

C.J. Stroud, Jack Miller and Kyle McCord each have the high school credentials that would lead fans to believe they are the next big thing at quarterback in Columbus.

Many observers believe Stroud is running on the inside track, which seems odd because following his junior year at Rancho Cucamonga (Calif.) High School, he wasn't even ranked among the top 500 prospects in the recruiting class of 2020. Then he went to the Elite 11 camp, outperformed the 20 other quarterbacks in attendance (including Miller) and earned the camp's coveted MVP trophy.

In two seasons as the starter for the Cougars, Stroud connected on 445 of 702 attempts (63.4 percent) for 6,221 yards and 66 touchdowns against only 15 interceptions. He apparently possesses a strong enough arm to hit tight windows and enough accuracy to deliver the ball where it needs to be. Couple that with plenty of mobility – he's the guy who left Michigan State defenders in the dust on a 48-yard touchdown romp in early December – and you have a whole wagonload of star potential.

Miller seems to be dismissed in some circles because once the 2020 recruiting season ended, he slipped outside the top 300 overall prospects while Stroud and McCord were each top-50 overall players in their respective classes. But as we have witnessed time and again, recruiting is not and never has been an exact science. Miller was the first quarterback targeted by Ohio State in his recruiting class, and there was a reason for that.

For those with short memories, Miller was a top-50 prospect before injuries plagued him during his final two seasons at Chaparral High School in Arizona. A torn MCL as a junior and a shoulder separation as a senior limited him to just 15 games over his final two prep seasons, but the totality of his four-year career – which began at Scottsdale Christian Academy before he transferred to Chapparral – included 9,440 yards and 115 touchdown passes. He added 1,397 yards

and 14 TDs on the ground, proving his 21-yard carry in last season's opener against Nebraska and his subsequent 2-yard touchdown run were no fluke.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

And then there's McCord, perhaps the most ballyhooed freshman quarterback at Ohio State since Terrelle Pryor in 2008. Like Pryor before him, McCord is something of a Pennsylvania schoolboy legend after leading Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep to three straight state championships. He established new city league career records with 6,887 yards and 88 touchdowns – not bad since his junior season was cut short by injury and his team played only six games last year because of COVID-19. Still, those half-dozen performances were good enough to lead the National High School Coaches Association to name McCord its national player of the year.

Scouts have practically salivated while watching McCord, who reportedly uses textbook mechanics to make accurate throws to every part of the field. He is more of a pocket passer than either Stroud or Miller, but like every elite quarterback, he has shown the capacity to keep plays alive and make accurate throws on the run.

Because of last year's shortened season, and the fact that Fields rarely came out of a game, the experience gap between McCord and the second-year quarterbacks is a narrow one. Miller played a total of 10 snaps, while Stroud took only eight. Still, McCord not only has competition on the field, but he is also running up against history as he tries to accomplish something only Pryor, Braxton Miller and Art Schlichter have before him – start at quarterback for the Buckeyes as a true freshman.

## Lucky Number Seven

It might be a good omen for Stroud that he's wearing No. 7.

That particular number – worn by the likes of Cornelius Green, Joe Germaine and Haskins – has been worth 14,114 yards and 127 touchdowns in Ohio State quarterbacking history. Count such backups as Greg Castignola (1977-79), Brent Offenbecher (1982-83) and Antonio Henton (2006-07) and the totals jump to 14,830 yards and 134 TDs.

The fact of the matter is the No. 7 has been worn by a whole passel of OSU greats, including five players who were first-round NFL draft picks – cornerback Vinnie Clark (1991), receiver Joey Galloway (1995), cornerback Chris Gamble (2004), receiver/kick returner Ted Ginn Jr. (2007) and Haskins (2019).

Four others – defensive back Sonny Gordon (1987), Germaine (1999), cornerback Derek Ross (2002) and defensive back Jermale Hines (2011) – were selected among the top six rounds of the draft.

There is no doubt the No. 7 jersey has been a prominent one through the years for the Buckeyes, worn by players whose last names run the gamut from A (for Antenucci) to Z (for Zuene).

Frank Antenucci was a fullback and defensive back for Ohio State from 1934-36, with his signature moment coming during the 1935 game against Notre Dame.

He intercepted a pass and lateraled the ball to teammate Frank Boucher for the first touchdown of the game, a contest the Buckeyes were winning 13-0 in the fourth quarter before the

Fighting Irish rallied for an 18-13 victory.

At least Antenucci had a signature moment during his OSU career. About the only thing noteworthy about the career of Roger Zuene was that, as a 152-pound junior defensive back from Watkins Memorial High School in Pataskala, Ohio, he was the smallest player on the 1971 team.

Zuene played two years for Woody Hayes, spending most of his time on the practice squad before dropping out of OSU.

But, as much as we sometimes like to deny otherwise, there are things in life other than football. Zuene went on to a successful career in aviation that included serving as a pilot for Eastern Airlines as well as piloting a charter service for such professional teams as the Colorado Rockies and Chicago Bulls.

## Passages Of Time

Anyone who has read this column over the years knows that my first real memories of Ohio State football began with the 1968 national championship team.

I was 10 years old, and my dad and I would listen to Saturday afternoon radio broadcasts featuring the velvety voices of Bert Charles and Marv Homan.

Over the years, it has been my distinct pleasure to get to know several members of that 1968 team, which makes it a little more disheartening whenever the news comes of a passing of one of those players.

Mike Sensibaugh was the latest on March 31, succumbing at the age of 72 to a massive heart attack after years of battling dementia, something that no doubt was the result of his years playing football at every level from peewee leagues to the NFL.

In many ways, Sensibaugh was the unsung hero of those teams from 1968 through 1970. He was the team's free safety, often drawing coverage of the opponent's best receiver despite many times giving away a size advantage. Hoping to capitalize on that, opponents often threw the ball in Sensibaugh's direction, something they soon regretted. No one in program history has gotten closer than five to his 22 career interceptions.

Sensibaugh was also the team's primary punter in 1968 and '69, an ultra-important position in Woody Hayes' field-position approach. He could pooch punt, direct kick into the coffin corner, and boom them when needed as evidenced by a 45.6-yard average on seven attempts during the 1969 Rose Bowl victory against USC.

By my count, Sensibaugh's passing means that seven are now gone from the starting 22 players on that 1968 team.

Defensive tackle Brad Nielsen died at the age of 32 in 1980 from injuries sustained in an automobile accident. Ten years later, offensive tackle Rufus Mayes contracted bacterial meningitis and was gone at the age of 42.

In 1997, linebacker Doug Adams was riding his bicycle when he was struck and killed by a driver who had fallen asleep. Adams was 47. In 2005, halfback Larry Zelina suffered a massive heart attack while at work and died at the age of 55. Five years after that, cornerback/linebacker Jack Tatum suffered a fatal heart attack, the result of complications from a long battle against diabetes. He was 61.

Middle guard Jim Stillwagon died in 2018 at the age of 68 from undisclosed causes, and now Sensibaugh is the latest casualty from that great team.

On the field, in the glory of their youth, Sensibaugh, Stillwagon, Tatum, Zelina, Adams, Mayes, Nielsen and their teammates knew few equals. I can say the same for my dad, that proud 1940 Ohio State alum who first introduced me to Buckeye football. I've never met a better man in my life, and I don't expect to.





## Big Ten To Allow Some Fans At Spring Events

The Big Ten announced in a statement March 24 that it will be allowing attendance at sporting events in the spring as long as they “follow local health guidelines and restrictions.” The decision includes spring football events, like the Ohio State spring game, still tentatively scheduled for April 17.

The conference’s protocols had previously taken precedence over local health guidelines, but this move officially shifts the responsibility to the states. This is the latest move in a string of decisions designed to allow more fans in to Big Ten events with the proliferation of the COVID-19 vaccine.

“This decision follows the announcements by the conference on March 4, 2021, to allow a limited number of fans to attend the 2021 Big Ten Men’s and Women’s Basketball Tournaments and on March 9, 2021, to follow local health guidelines and restrictions for all remaining 2020-21 Big Ten Conference championships and tournaments,” the statement said. “The goal is to transition from a conference-wide approach to local decision-making in consultation with public health departments and university medical experts.”

Ohio State, which has yet to release ticketing information for that upcoming spring game, issued the following the statement shortly after.

“The Ohio State Department of Athletics will work internally and with Columbus Public Health to formalize appropriate attendance figures, mapping and social distancing within our athletics venues and facilities. Once we have determined the attendance in our venues, beyond the current protocols of only family members of student-athletes and coaches, we will share that information. We do not anticipate any changes in our attendance policies before this weekend’s (the weekend of March 27-28) athletic events on campus.”

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said in February that if Ohio State can host fans for the spring game, it will be a free event.

“If we’re allowed to have fans, we will not have a ticketed event,” Smith said at the time. “It will not be one where we’ll charge. My hope is that we’ll have an opportunity to develop a strategy to recognize our front-line people: our nurses, our doctors, our custodians, our bus drivers and all those people who have made so many sacrifices for us for a long time now. That would be my hope, is that we could come up with a strategy to recognize them and invite them to the spring game and, of course, obviously the parents of our student-athletes.”

Right now, Ohio is allowing 30 percent capacity at outdoor sporting events, meaning that Ohio State could welcome just over 30,000 fans to the Horseshoe this spring if it decides to open its doors to fans for the first time since 2019.

## Quarterback Battle Remains At Standstill

Spring practice continues to move forward, but head coach Ryan Day is still not ready to make any answers on who is leading the race to become the Ohio State starting quarterback.

The big thing, according to Day, is the amount of inexperience that is in the room and how much that makes it a longer process when developing the likes of Kyle McCord, Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud.

“They’re still doing some things for the first time, and we’re still on first and second down,” Day said on March 29. “We start installing third down on Wednesday (March 31), and then we can start getting into move-its and situational things. They all throw the ball well. The ball comes out of their hands well. They still need to work on consistency in those areas and the different things fundamentally and technique-wise throwing it that makes them more consistent.

“They certainly all throw it good enough. Now, decision-making, timing, consistency, vision, anticipation – those are all the things that come into play. And then in the end, who takes care of the ball. The guys who turn the ball over aren’t going to last very long as a quarterback at Ohio State.

“Those are the things we’ll have to figure out. When you just watch them go out there and throw the ball on air, they all look the part and they all throw it really well. But now who’s going to run the offense and be a leader? Because in the end, that’s what a quarterback’s No. 1 job is – being a leader.”

In the portion of the April 5 practice shown to the media, Stroud appeared to be currently at the front of the order for the room, but Day said that the trio of quarterbacks are being interchanged for the time being.

“We’re just rotating the quarterback,” he said. “It changes every day, and we’re splitting up the reps the best we can. I think they’ve done a decent job of learning each day, so I think that’s been a positive. I think their lack of reps, it’s hard. They need so many reps of everything, and the good news is they’re very eager to learn. They’re taking good notes. They are all getting better in their own way, so that’s all been a positive. I wish we had 18 months to get them ready, but we don’t. So the rush is on, but so far, so good.”

There is still plenty of time for McCord, Miller or Stroud to prove worthy of becoming the week-one starter, even without any true collegiate experience. Day knows this, and he also knows that the development for these players does not end once the Buckeyes take the field against Minnesota to open their season.

“I think the more practices we have, the more times we can put them in game situations, the better feel we’ll have,” Day said on March 29. “But you never stop learning. You see some of these guys who maybe go on to play in the NFL. Sometimes it takes five years. Sometimes it takes one year. Sometimes it takes two years. You just don’t really know. As long as they continue to get better and keep growing, then we’re going to keep working with them and try to figure it out.

“I’d love to sit here and tell you that I think we’ll have a great feel for it in two weeks or three weeks or the fifth practice of preseason, but I don’t think so. I do think the more we’re around them, the more we get a feel for it, the more it kind of shakes out. Even going into that first game, you’ll still be learning and trying to evaluate it all.”

## McCall, Scott See Position Changes

Ohio State wide receiver/halfback Demario McCall and wide receiver Gee Scott are on the move this spring, though their changes in scenery have nothing to do with the transfer portal.

Day announced on April 2 that both players have been exploring position changes

## Follow The Ohio State Spring Football Action

Spring football – and the accompanying position battles that come with it – is 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 20, but the BSB staff posts daily reports and stories at our BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all subscribers.

The BSB staff also provides electronic recruiting coverage at BuckeyeSports.com, as well as presenting reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Additionally, staff members man the BuckeyeSports.com Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day.

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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.”

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this spring, with McCall moving over to the other side of the ball and lining up as a cornerback, while Scott is kicking inside to the tight end room.

Both moves were initiated by the player, according to Day, who stressed the importance of that comfort.

“If they’re not comfortable playing a position, we won’t do it,” Day said. “It wasn’t like I told Demario McCall, ‘You have to go to defense,’ or Gee Scott, ‘You have to move to tight end.’ If their heart’s not into it, it’s not going to work. My whole conversation was, ‘We don’t want to

do this if you’re not totally into it.’ At the end, it’s up to them. If they’re not into it, we’re not going to do it.”

For McCall, the move could mark the end of a frustrating five-year run through the offensive skill position rooms for the former four-star from North Ridgeville, Ohio.

After coming to Ohio State as a member of the 2016 recruiting class, McCall matriculated into the H-back room for his first two seasons, finding playing time as a backup for Curtis Samuel, K.J. Hill and Parris Campbell. He carried the ball 49 times for 270 yards and three



## 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)

touchdowns while hauling in four receptions for 84 yards and another score as a freshman, but he saw his opportunities dwindle in the following years. He's carried just 41 times for 295 yards and three touchdowns along with nabbing 16 receptions for 216 yards and a score in his four seasons since as he bounced back and forth between the running backs and receivers rooms. He made much of his impact on special teams as a returner.

Now a sixth-year "super senior" taking advantage of the COVID eligibility year, McCall is hoping to live up to his recruiting hype on the

opposite side of the football, and he's impressing the coaching staff in the process.

"The defensive guys have been really excited about him," Day said. "He's really shown up in practice. It's something that he kind of brought up. It's so cool when they bring it to you. It started off early on, the guys on defense saw him do a few drills and he kind of caught their eye right off the bat. He's been building. It takes time to change positions like that. He's done some different things for us on offense, but this is a huge opportunity for him."

Day mentioned the youth in the cornerback

room as part of the opportunity for McCall and for his fellow cornerbacks, with McCall taking his snaps in the slot cornerback spot that is projected to belong to incumbent starter Marcus Williamson.

"We have some young guys who are showing up," Day said. "I'm very pleased with their development. This is a great opportunity to step up. That's the best way to do it. As opposed to sitting back with the twos and the threes, they're getting reps with the ones against Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Jameson Williams and those guys. This is great work for them. We'll get Sevyn (Banks) and Cam (Brown) back for the preseason and get them going. This is building our depth. Those guys are getting better because they're practicing, and they haven't practiced a lot."

As for Scott, the move to tight end is a play both for more playing time and to better fit his body type.

At 6-3, 215 pounds, Scott was beginning to outgrow the receiver position and found himself sitting in a room suddenly packed to the brim with fellow blue-chippers. The tight end room isn't quite as cramped for Scott with starter Jeremy Ruckert serving as the only established member of the group.

"He was doing everything he could to stay at 215," Day said. "He said he was fighting every

day to be at 215 – if he had a few Big Macs, he could get to 225 in a heartbeat. We think his growth potential fits at tight end."

The head coach praised his maturity in making the move.

"He's a very mature young man who sees a future in that for him," Day said. "Whether we go full time with it or not, we'll see. But he's got the right idea on this thing. He's got the right frame. He's very, very athletic. He thinks (offensive coordinator) Kevin Wilson can really teach him how to block. We think it's a huge opportunity for him, and we're excited about where it's going to go."

### Babb, Banks, Gant, Garrett, Miller All Missing Spring

Ohio State will be without five projected contributors through at least the spring, as Banks, wide receiver Kamryn Babb, center Harry Miller, linebacker Dallas Gant and defensive tackle Haskell Garrett are all out with injuries through spring practice.

Babb, a fourth-year receiver from St. Louis, has seen his Ohio State career derailed by injuries. He injured his leg twice during his time at Christian Brothers High School and has suffered a pair of ACL tears during his time with the

**Continued On Page 6**

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 35 Years Ago – 1986

Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce headed into spring practice with just six starters to replace in his lineup, but finding the players to fill those space was proving more difficult than expected. With eight players held out of spring practice because of injuries, Bruce had to modify Ohio State's spring practice plans to accommodate a depleted roster while still balancing the searches for those new starters.

"First off," Bruce said, "we've got to replace the personnel we lost, work hard at that."

"Normally we'd be spending the first week on conditioning and not have the pads on. But out of necessity, we've decided to practice and try to complete it by April 26. We're going to take it easy and we're going to be doing a lot of teaching, a lot of individual attention on each one of the players to make them better."

"We're emphasizing not any contact but a lot of movement and a lot of agility and a lot of teaching of blocking and tackling and running plays and execution. We're just going to teach the first two weeks so everybody gets eight practices in without any injury."

### 30 Years Ago – 1991

New offensive coordinator Elliot Uzelac wasn't planning to make huge changes to the Buckeye offense but did expect Ohio State to be a much more potent offensive threat than it had been a year prior when it slipped to fifth in the Big Ten in total offense from first in 1989.

Because of that, he was replacing the playbook of former offensive coordinator Jim Colletto with his own that he called "complex, but not complicated."

He'd have to install that new offense with some new faces after losing three-year starting quarterback Greg Frey, wide receivers Jeff Graham and Bobby Olive and center Dan Beatty. Thankfully for the Buckeyes, 1990 Big Ten Freshman of the Year tailback Robert Smith was back, as was fullback Scottie Graham and a host of young offensive linemen.

"We want to be much tougher," Uzelac said. "We want to get tougher mentally and physically. I don't think people really understand that offensively Ohio State has done a lot of really good things the last few years. So it's not like we're saying what we did in the past is not right."

"People shouldn't think this is something we're doing strictly because there's a new coordinator. This is something that is done every year no matter who you are."

### 25 Years Ago – 1996

The newly founded Columbus Crew of Major League Soccer were scheduled to open their inaugural season on April 13 at Ohio Stadium.

The Crew were set to play 18 home games at the stadium throughout the summer.

OSU football coach John Cooper dispelled the notion that having the Crew at the stadium would disrupt his team's spring practice schedule. In years past, the Buckeyes had held spring scrimmages in the Horseshoe.

"I don't have a problem with it," Cooper said. "At Tulsa we had a pro soccer team that used our field. At Arizona State now they have a pro team using the stadium. We've got plenty of places to practice."

### 20 Years Ago – 2001

Jim Tressel brought in longtime college and pro assistant Jim Bollman and University of Cincinnati offensive coordinator Joe Daniels as his offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, respectively, for his first season as the head coach in Columbus. Because of the experience both had in deploying offenses that revolved more around the pass than Tressel was traditionally known for, questions arose about whether Ohio State planned to hop on the spread offense revolution that was sweeping through football.

"I've never been much of a revolutionary guy," Tressel said. "There are certain fundamentals that are long-standing that have stood the test of time."

"Your offense has got to be in concert with your defense and special teams. It cannot be an entity in and of itself."

"Certainly we have to run the football. The guys told me a statistic the other day. In the last 10 years or so, if we run the ball for 200 yards or more, we've won 97 percent of the time. I like those odds. But in this day and age if you don't throw the ball well, you're not going to run it. You can forget about those 200 yards. If you're not a good passing team, there will be a hundred guys up there in the box."

### 15 Years Ago – 2006

Ohio State, which opened its spring football practice on March 30, looked to return one of the strongest offenses in the country. It was a group that would need to lead the Buckeyes with nine defensive contributors departing, including star linebackers A.J. Hawk and Bobby Carpenter and defensive back Ashton Youboty. Despite those losses, some in the national press were so high on the Buckeye offense that they projected Ohio State as a title favorite entering the 2006 season, praise that fell on deaf ears in Columbus if the Buckeyes were to be believed.

"You can't give much attention to that kind of stuff, especially this early in the year," said OSU senior receiver Roy Hall. "It's nice to hear and be thought of that way, but we know that if we don't work hard and stay focused, they'll be talking about somebody else when it matters."

"And all of that hard work we have to do – it starts right now."

### 10 Years Ago – 2011

Ohio State spent the spring practicing with its best lineup

despite the fact that five players were looking at five-game suspensions because of previously announced NCAA violations.

Wide receiver DeVier Posey, running back Daniel "Boom" Herron, offensive tackle Mike Adams and defensive end Solomon Thomas were all taking reps – quarterback Terrelle Pryor was out with a foot injury – even though they weren't going to be on the field for almost half of the regular season.

"It is what it is, I guess," center Michael Brewster said. "At this point, we know it's five games. It's not going to go down and it's not going to go up. Other guys are going to have to make plays, but at Ohio State we count on guys stepping up. We lose big-name players every year, but you've got to have someone backing them up."

With Pryor out due to injury, the Buckeyes were enjoying a chance to audition players to replace him over the five-game suspension. Joe Bauserman had the inside track for that spot.

### Five Years Ago – 2016

Following a car accident around 11:30 p.m. on April 9, former Ohio State All-American and New Orleans Saints star defensive end Will Smith was shot and killed in the Lower Garden District in New Orleans. Smith, 34, died on the scene, and the shooter remained on the scene and was arrested by New Orleans police.

Smith has been out to dinner with his wife, Racquel, former NOPD officer Billy Ceravolo, former Saints teammate Pierre Thomas and a sports agent. Shortly after leaving the restaurant, Smith's car was rear-ended by a Hummer driven by Cardell Hayes. According to the police report, Hayes, 28, and Smith "exchanged words" before Hayes fatally shot Smith in the back and right torso while he sat in the driver's seat. Racquel Smith, 33, was shot in the right leg. She was hospitalized and recovering from surgery to repair the gunshot wounds.

Hayes never left the scene and was booked on second-degree murder charges the next morning with bond set at \$1 million.

### One Year Ago – 2020

Freshman guard D.J. Carton, freshman forward Alonzo Gaffney and sophomore guard Luther Muhammad entered their names in the transfer portal after the 2019-20 season abruptly ended March 12, when NCAA athletics were stopped due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

The Buckeyes compensated for the three transfers out by bringing in three transfer players of their own. The latest came April 11 when Utah State graduate Abel Porter said he would become a Buckeye. With one season of eligibility remaining, he was expected to back up point guard C.J. Walker.

Also entering the program via transfers were junior guard Jimmy Sotos from Bucknell and forward Seth Towns, a Columbus Northland product and Harvard graduate who had two seasons of eligibility remaining.





Continued From Page 5

Buckeyes, which have kept the one-time four-star receiver almost completely off the field for Ohio State. He has yet to record a catch at the collegiate level. He was expected to fight for playing time in a loaded receivers room this spring.

Banks, meanwhile, was expected to move into the No. 1 cornerback role this season to take over for Shaun Wade, who has departed for the 2021 NFL draft. He served as the No. 2 cornerback last season, his first year as a full-time starter at Ohio State after contributing off the bench in 2019 and 2018, his first two seasons in the program. He had 23 total tackles and six passes defended in 2020. Fellow projected starter Cameron Brown has been rehabbing a torn Achilles that he suffered early in the 2020 season.

Miller, Ohio State's projected starting center in 2021, is reportedly dealing with a labrum issue but will be healthy and ready to go for fall camp. Day talked about his backups in a media availability.

"Repping right now at center are Matt Jones, Luke Wypler and Jakob James," Day said. "But when Harry gets back, he could easily move into center. We've had some other guys taking snaps along the way that can do it as well. We'll look for the best five guys and make it work from there."

"So far, I have to give Matt credit. He has done a nice job in there. He has done a really good job, and he hasn't done a whole bunch of that leading into the season. Luke's had a pretty good offseason. He's gotten stronger. That's been great because he's another guy who really

needs a spring. And then I have to give Jakob credit. Jakob did a really great job this offseason growing up and getting stronger. Still a long way to go for a lot of these guys, but steps in the right direction, and that's what spring ball is all about."

Gant told media on March 25 that he's dealing with a foot injury and will not be able to participate this spring, though he said that he'll be back for the summer and is working to get plenty of mental reps.

"I have a foot issue at the moment, so I am not participating in spring ball," Gant said. "I'll be back by the summer with a full recovery."

The senior linebacker is expected to take over the middle linebacker spot this season. He had 17 tackles in 2020, along with one-half of a TFL and a forced fumble. He has 44 tackles on his career, largely accumulated on mop-up duty late in games or on special teams.

Lastly, there is Garrett, who starred for the Buckeyes at defensive tackle in 2020 and surprised many by taking advantage of his extra season of eligibility rather than departing for the NFL draft.

Though he's still expected to lead the Buckeyes up front, he's missing spring camp with a right leg injury and was seen in a walking boot.

### Former Buckeyes Shine At Annual Pro Day

Ohio State had 15 of its former players – linebacker Tuf Borland, linebacker Baron Browning, punter Drue Chrisman, defensive end Jonathon Cooper, guard Wyatt Davis, tight end Luke Farrell, quarterback Justin Fields, kicker Blake Haubeil, tight end Jake Hausmann, linebacker Justin Hilliard, center Josh Myers, wide receiver C.J. Saunders, running back Trey Sermon, defensive tackle Tommy Togiai and linebacker Pete Werner – take the field on March 30 at the school's annual pro day event.

In the wake of the usual NFL combine, which was canceled this year, all 15 players looked to impress NFL scouts in a variety of drills. Current free agents Johnnie Dixon, Robert Landers and Dante Booker were also in attendance.

Fields was the star of the day (see cover story), but Browning and Werner impressed as well, as did Togiai with his 40 reps of 225 pounds on the bench press, the highest of any participant.

The event drew 11 general managers and five head coaches, including former Buckeye head man Urban Meyer, now with the Jacksonville Jaguars.

## Podcast Talks OSU's Ceiling, Floor In 2021

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

On the most recent episode released on April 2, we broke down some spring storylines and dived into a discussion on Ohio State's ceiling – or floor – in 2021. 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.

### Cowan First Buckeye To Shed Black Stripe

It came a year later than expected, but second-year defensive tackle Jacob Cowan is the latest member of the 2020 class to shed his black stripe, and the first Buckeye this spring to earn the honor.

Cowan, a four-star in the previous class, missed almost all of Ohio State's 2020 campaign with an undisclosed injury and was unable to work his way out of the black stripe on the practice field.

"In life, you're going to face obstacles," Cowan said in a video posted of the announcement. "I had already faced a lot of obstacles. I just know it's all about how you persevere through those obstacles."

The 6-4, 280-pound defensive tackle is the final member of his class to lose his stripe and will now shift his focus to finding his way onto the field for the Buckeyes this fall as a member of the defensive line rotation. He's listed as an interior lineman but was touted for his versatility coming out of high school and could look to compete as a run-stuffing end as well.

### Lattimore Arrested In Cleveland

Former Ohio State and current New Orleans Saints cornerback Marshon Lattimore was arrested March 25 in Cleveland on suspicion of receiving stolen property.

Lattimore, who hails from Cleveland originally and attended Glenville High School, was booked into the Cuyahoga County Jail but has not been formally charged.

"Lattimore was a passenger in a vehicle that police stopped for multiple traffic violations at approximately 10:30 p.m. on Thursday," a report from ESPN's Mike Triplett states. "During the course of the stop, Lattimore was found to have a loaded handgun in his possession. He was arrested on charges of carrying a concealed weapon (failure to notify) and for receiving stolen property after the gun was later found to be entered as stolen out of the city of Euclid, Ohio."

The former Buckeye released a statement through his lawyer.

"Mr. Lattimore, a proud Cleveland native with no prior criminal record or history, is fully cooperating with law enforcement's investigation of this matter," Lattimore's attorney Marcus Sidoti said in a statement. "He was a passenger in a vehicle that was stopped by police and was arrested without incident and was not formally charged. We believe that this was a misunderstanding, and that this will become even clearer as new information becomes available and is shared with the authorities."

Lattimore has starred in his four seasons in the NFL, becoming a three-time Pro Bowler on the Saints, tallying 230 total tackles (190 solo), 55 passes defended and 10 interceptions in 57 games played. He was selected by New Orleans

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in the first round, No. 11 overall of the 2017 draft.

At Ohio State, he was a first-team All-Big Ten corner in the 2016 season, his only full season with the Buckeyes after dealing with hamstring injuries and playing only seven games in 2015.

### Former Buckeye Waiters Passes Away At 60

Former Ohio State men's basketball player Granville Waiters, who played for the Buckeyes from 1979-83, died at the age of 60 on March 23. No cause of death has been released publicly.

Waiters played in 103 games for Ohio State in four seasons, including 61 starts. He had a career average of 5.8 points per game, with a high of 10.4 points per contest in his senior year. Waiters was also a proficient rebounder, hauling in 7.5 boards per game in his final season with the program. On defense, Waiters averaged 1.9 blocks per game in 1981-82 before upping it to 2.2 per game the following season.

Waiters was drafted 39th overall by the Portland Trail Blazers, where he averaged 2.4 points, 2.2 rebounds and 0.7 blocks per game during 249 games played in five total seasons. Following his time in the NBA, Walters played overseas for the FC Barcelona and Caja Bilbao. In a 1989-90 season with Bilbao, his best season in Europe, he averaged 9.9 points, 8.2 rebounds and 1.1 blocks per contest.

After his playing career closed, Waiters served on the board of directors for After-School All-Stars in Ohio, which "provides programs and transformative opportunities that help students develop the skills, knowledge, and habits needed to succeed in life, school, and their future career," according to their website.

Those who were close to the former Buckeye have sung his praises as both a player and a man. Athletic director Smith said "What a great man! So sorry to hear of his passing." Former Buckeye Jared Sullinger called him a Columbus legend. Current head coach Chris Holtmann released a statement extending thoughts and prayers to his friends and family.

"The Ohio State men's basketball family extends its thoughts and prayers to the family, friends and teammates of Granville Waiters," Holtmann said in a statement. "We were all saddened to learn of his passing. I've been so impressed by the reverence and love his former teammates have expressed this week. It's clear Granville meant so much to so many. He will surely be missed."

Assistant coach Ryan Pedon echoed the sentiment on his Twitter account.

"Sad to hear of the passing of Buckeye great Granville Waiters," Pedon wrote. "A Columbus basketball legend and graduate of East High School. Thoughts and prayers are with all who knew/loved him."

### Former Walk-On Stephens Dead At 30

Former Ohio State walk-on defensive lineman Kharim Stephens was killed in a motorcycle accident in Columbus on March 27. He was 30 years old.

Stephens was reportedly driving northbound on his Suzuki when a southbound Toyota Scion turned left to go into a parking lot and struck his motorcycle. He was taken to OhioHealth Grant Medical Center, where he died from his injuries sustained in the accident.

A native of Queens Village, N.Y., Stephens played for the Buckeyes in 2012 but did not appear in any games. He graduated from Ohio State with a degree in public policy analysis and worked as a patient access coordinator at the university.

### Vannett Signs On With New Orleans

Just a day after being released by the Denver Broncos, former Ohio State tight end Nick Vannett signed with the New Orleans Saints on

March 25 for a three-year deal.

Vannett started 11 games for the Broncos in 2020 and contributed primarily as a blocker. He finished with just 14 receptions for 95 yards and one touchdown on the season.

Denver drafted a pair of tight ends in 2020 in first-rounder Noah Fant and fourth-rounder Albert Okwuegbunam, both of whom found time over Vannett by the end of the season.

In New Orleans, he will be pairing up with a trio of former Buckeyes: safety Malcolm Jenkins, Lattimore and wide receiver Michael Thomas, each of whom plays a major role for the team. He mentioned that specifically as an appealing part of the Saints to him.

"A lot of guys I played with in college are on the team – Mike Thomas, Marshon Lattimore just to name a couple," he said. "I've talked to

Mike Thomas a few times. It's not really so much what he would say. It's just kind of from the outside looking in, if you open up any social media, you'll see all the fun that the Saints have and that they have in the locker room after the game, after they win.

"It just looks like the camaraderie of the team is super special and that's very rare to find. It's very rare to find that in the NFL. When I started my career in Seattle, I think that was another place that had a very strong culture, a very strong camaraderie within the locker room. I just remember how much I enjoyed that and being a part of that.

"I'm a big guy (listed at 6-6, 261 pounds). I pride myself on energy. I pride myself on being energetic and feeding off of other people's energy. When you're part of a locker room that

provides that, who doesn't want to be around that? It makes it more fun, it helps with the camaraderie of the team and that helps win games on Sundays. You're going to want to do it for your brother next to you."

Vannett was drafted in the third round, No. 94 overall by the Seattle Seahawks in the 2016 NFL draft after a four-year career that included 55 receptions for 585 yards and six touchdowns with the Buckeyes.

### Cheremeta Was On The Mark For Icers

Ohio State sophomore forward Mark Cheremeta scored a goal, had three assists and was plus-four in the men's hockey team's 8-3 win against Arizona State on March 4 to become the Varsity Club Ice of the Month for March.

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# OSU Heads Into Spring With Loaded RB Room

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Immediately after the 2019 season, Ohio State faced a question mark in the running backs room. J.K. Dobbins took a program-record rushing season and turned it into a second-round pick in the NFL draft, leaving behind a void of 5,104 career yards from scrimmage and 43 total touchdowns.

The likely successor to Dobbins was Master Teague, but that plan also hit a snag when Teague tore his Achilles tendon during the first spring practice of 2020. That, paired with the ongoing recovery of Marcus Crowley from an ACL tear, left major question marks at the position as COVID-19 shut down the remainder of Ohio State's spring camp.

Eventually, those questions were resolved. Teague recovered from his injury in time to play in the Buckeyes' opener against Nebraska. Even if he hadn't, the team had a backup plan in Trey Sermon, who transferred to Ohio State from Oklahoma on March 22.

Teague started the season getting the bulk of the carries, but by the end of the season, Sermon had earned his spot as the primary tailback thanks to a historic 331 yards on the ground against Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game.

But just like last year, Ohio State's leading rusher – this time Sermon – is once again off to the NFL, and the Buckeyes will again be searching for the answer in the running backs room. Luckily for Ohio State, and for running backs coach Tony Alford, there is a lot of talent to choose from heading into 2021.

"It's a great room," Alford said. "The older guys are really taking to the young guys to help them out and teach them the ropes of how we do things here at Ohio State. It's a great group of kids. I mean phenomenal, unselfish, really good guys and highly competitive guys. All of them are here to compete, but at the same time they champion each other's effort."

The room is filled with six scholarship running backs – Steele Chambers, Marcus Crowley, TreVeyon Henderson, Evan Pryor, Teague and Miyan Williams. One received major time in 2020. Three more enter their second or third seasons looking to earn the job. The other two are true freshman early enrollees who are hoping to make an impact early.

Last year, the Buckeyes ran a two-back system for much of the year, with Sermon and Teague splitting drives up until either of the tailbacks was injured for specific games. While Sermon exploded once Teague left the game against the Wildcats due to an unspecified injury, Alford said he is not opposed to going back to a dual-running back offense, as long as he thinks it will lead to victories.

"I said it last year, I said it two years ago, I said it three years ago, I've said it my entire career and I'll say it again: We're going to do whatever we need to do to win games," Alford said. "Some people might say that using the two-back system hasn't worked. At the end of the day, we're here to win games. We've won a lot of games while I've been here, and we haven't won the big one like we want to in the past two years. Now is that attributed to because we played two backs or one

back? That's debatable, but we're going to do whatever we need to do to win games, and if it's one guy, then so be it. And if it's not, then it's not.

"I think right now, the biggest thing for us is to continue to grow as a football team, continue to grow as a unit, and obviously continue to grow individually with those players, and be the best version of themselves and the best players that they can be. And if that means that one or two of them emerge and kind of separate themselves from the pack, then that shall happen. And in some regards, that may happen. But time will tell. Right now, we're just trying to get better every day and go from there."

With so many talented backs battling it out for only so much available playing time, Alford said it may come down to components far past a player's ability when choosing who wins the job come Sept. 2.

"Every single detail matters," Alford said. "When we're sitting in a meeting and I ask a question, well how do you answer the question? Do you answer definitively? Are you right? Are you wrong? That's a rep. When we go out on the practice field and we run a drill, did you do it right? Did you do it as hard as we want you to do it? Our adage of 4 to 6, A to B, that's a drill. When the talent's equated – and there's a lot of talent in our room – the small things are going to tip the scales."

What follows is a look at each scholarship running back currently on Ohio State's roster. They are split up into three groups: the incumbent starter, the three other returning backs from 2020, and the pair of first-year players hunting for a veteran's snaps.

## The Incumbent

The clear leader in the running back clubhouse is Teague (5-11, 226), who comes back with significantly more in-game experience than any other back in the room.

Though Sermon ultimately took over against Northwestern and Clemson, Teague still had a productive season, rushing 104 times for 514 yards (4.9 yards per carry) and a team-high eight touchdowns.

He had two 100-yard performances in 2020, the first coming against Penn State, when he rushed 23 times for 110 yards and a score in the 38-25 win. The other came in Ohio State's 42-35 win over Indiana on Nov. 21. There, Teague had 26 rushes for a career-high 169 yards and two touchdowns.

One of those touchdowns came from 41 yards out and proved to Alford that Teague can show some impressive speed when given the opportunity.

"I think what was good for him was good for everybody, to see that he could break a long one and sustain that," Alford said. "That was good. I think moving forward, his ability to make plays in space will be important."

Those 2020 numbers come after the Achilles injury that Teague had suffered just over seven months before the start of the season. For most players, returning that quickly would be a remarkable accomplishment, and while it still was for Teague, Alford said it was less surprising

considering who the back is as a player.

"To come off that injury the way he did, a lot of guys couldn't pull that off," Alford said. "Now I do think that he's kind of a genetic freak in some regards, in a good way. But he's also an unbelievable worker, as far as his commitment to taking care of his body. His commitment to doing things the right way. His commitment to being regimented and having a routine. He's unbelievable that way, and so to say does it shock you that he got back the way he did? No, because that's just how that kid is built."

Teague says he wasn't fighting that injury much during the 2020 campaign and that he still feels strong and ready to go for spring practices heading into the new season.

"I feel good," Teague said. "I felt good throughout the season and feel good now, but of course, you keep on gaining strength in all areas of the body. So no issues there. I just feel great."

For Teague's first three seasons at Ohio State, there was always a clear veteran in the room. In year one, those vets were Dobbins and Mike Weber. Even when Weber left after 2018, Dobbins remained in 2019 to give the room experience, and in 2020, Sermon was there to be the veteran of the group.

Now that veteran is Teague, who has played in 27 games and rushed for 1,409 yards in his collegiate career.

"It's a little weird being the old guy now, being the veteran," Teague said. "It kind of went fast, but it was long at the same time. But it's rewarding, too. I get to pour into the guys things that I know. I can share with them, and really, we're just going to be the best unit in the building as much as we can."

Even though he is the most experienced of the group, Teague is not letting that turn into pressure to have to win the starting job for 2021. But he does admit that he would certainly love to be No. 1 running back for Ohio State when the Buckeyes travel to Minneapolis to play Minnesota in the first week of the season.

"Of course I want to be that guy," He admitted. "But like I said, we continue to make each other better, compete, and my role – whatever is going to be best for the team, that's going to be my role," Teague said. "We have a lot of depth, a lot of guys, and that helps us in practice and helps us stay prepared. I think it's good for the overall health of the unit and the team, too."

There is a lot of time for Teague to prove that experience is valuable enough to be the starter for the Buckeyes. But for now, he is in the pole position in the eyes of his position coach, primarily on the basis of how much he has seen the field through his first three seasons.

"If we started a game tomorrow, he would be the starter," Alford said. "He's the incumbent starter. He's played the most and had the most reps of anybody in the room, but there's other really good players here, too."

## The Returners

Behind Teague are a trio of running backs who have all seen in-game experience in bits and pieces since coming to Ohio State.

The one with the most production thus far in Columbus is Crowley (6-1, 213), who is entering his third year with the program, rushing 31 times for 251 yards and a touchdown in 11 games played.

Crowley did not see much action in 2020 as he continued to recover from the ACL tear he had suffered against Maryland on Nov. 9 the year prior. He earned just six carries for 14 yards, but it was when he got those carries that was notable.

All six rushes came in the national championship game against Alabama, and Alford said it was those carries that opened Crowley's eyes to where he was at in his recovery.

"We're playing the Alabama game and he has a couple carries and things happen and he gets tackled and comes to stand on the sidelines, and he looks up and he says 'Man, I apologize.' " Alford said. "This is the middle of the game. I say 'Marcus, what are you talking about?' and he goes, 'You've been saying I wasn't ready. I'm not.'"

"It took him playing, kind of getting knocked off balance because he wasn't strong enough, and things like that where he put it on himself and he was like 'Yeah, I see it. You're right.'"

Despite that realization mid-game, Crowley said he wasn't surprised he got his first opportunity of the season on the biggest stage imaginable. But he did agree with his running backs coach on lacking the ability he was used to having against Alabama.

"I really wasn't surprised because that was the ultimate goal, to get back on the field as soon as possible and try to make an impact," Crowley said. "At the end of last season, I still wasn't able to cut as sharply or as quickly as I can now, and that's just come with the extra rehab that I've been doing and the extra treatment that I've been doing, working with the trainers and everything."

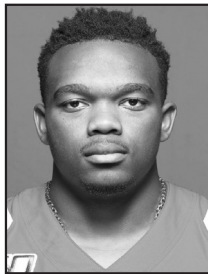
But a lot has changed in the three months since that 52-24 loss to the Crimson Tide. Crowley said he is now back at full strength after the various setbacks he went through recovering from that initial ACL tear.

"My health right now, I would say it's at 100 percent," Crowley said. "Last season, it was a long journey after the Maryland game tearing my ACL. And then with COVID, it was harder than what it should have been because of COVID, but I feel like everything went smoothly. I feel good for this upcoming season."

Trailing just behind Crowley in returning production is Chambers (6-1, 220), who also enters 2021 as a third-year sophomore and who also has a lot to prove this offseason. Chambers comes into this year with 28 carries for 226 yards and a touchdown, but he did more last season than Crowley, earning nine carries for 86 yards.

The vast majority of those yards came in two games: the opener against Nebraska (four rushes, 32 yards) and against Rutgers (four rushes, 46 yards), the latter of which included a fake punt that Chambers took 38 yards for a first down.

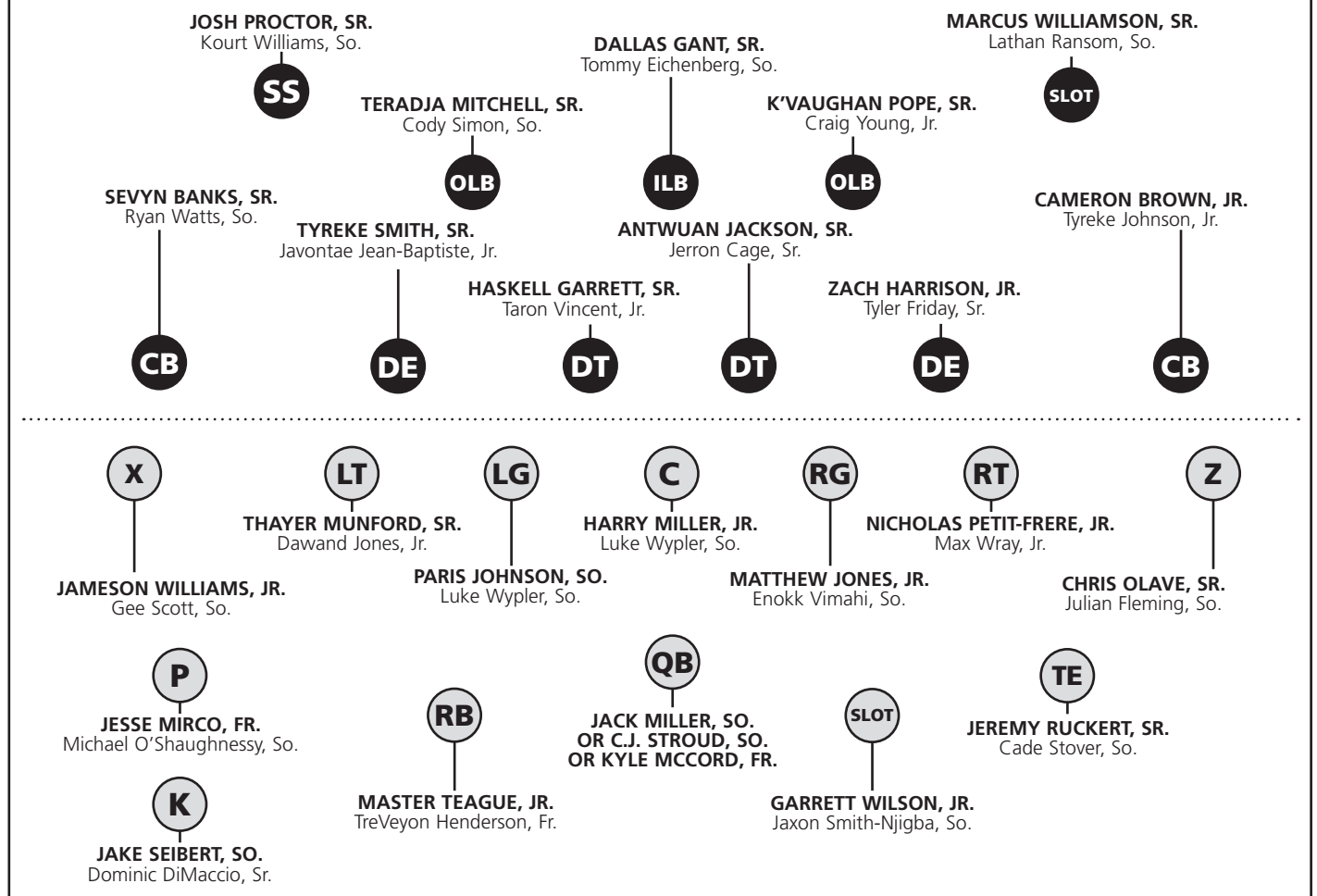
Chambers ran the ball just one time for 8 yards in the final five games of the season and saw just four snaps in those matchups compared to the 14 total snaps he saw against the Cornhuskers and



Master Teague



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But Alford has liked what he has seen from Chambers thus far in the offseason, though he is hoping to see a more self-assured version of Chambers heading into the 2021 campaign.

"He's looked really good," Alford said. "The biggest thing I want Steele to do is to exude confidence in his own self-confidence. Steele's a perfectionist by nature, and there are times that he can get down on himself if something doesn't go just as he planned exactly the way he had concocted the plan in his own mind. One of the things I can help him do is continue to remind him that if there's a bump in a road here, we're good, don't get flustered. Don't let one play affect the next. He's getting better at that, so I'm anxious to see. But he's had a good offseason."

One rumor with Chambers is that he will be moving to linebacker to help the defense next season. As a four-star prospect out of Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic, Chambers played both ways and has experience at the position, but according to Alford, that talk is simply a rumor and is not grounded in truth at this point.

"I've heard that speculation," Alford said. "I'm not sure where it came from. It didn't come out of this office. That's not something that I've had any conversations about with him, his family or with Coach (Ryan) Day. Steele Chambers is focused on being the best running back that he can be, and I'm focused on helping him become that – the best that he can be here, and we'll go from there."

Finally, there is Williams (5-8, 227), a former three-star running back whom many saw as a last resort in Ohio State's 2020 class after swinging and missing with other top-end talent.

Williams set out to prove those people wrong, and he got out to a strong start in his limited action. In 10 carries in four games, Williams rushed for 64 yards for a solid 6.4 yards per carry. Twenty-one of those yards came on three rushes against Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal, giving the Buckeyes some big-time yards to help continue an offensive drive.

And much like Crowley, Williams was not surprised to get the snaps he did on the big stage, mainly because it had been what he was getting ready for all year long.

"I really just stayed prepared," Williams said. "I practiced for it, so I'm already ready for it when my name is called in the game. Coach Alford told me to always be ready because you never know when your name could get called. Just getting in, it's a playoff game, it's exciting, got the blood rushing. I was just out there having fun with my teammates."

Williams brings a different build than the other running backs battling for the starting job. At just 5-8, he uses "a little bit of speed, a little bit of wiggle," according to Alford, to make defenders miss. He also said he's used the height difference as an advantage on the field.

"I can get low when I run, move around a lot," he explained. "A lot of people, they probably just lose me. In high school, I never really had a big O-line. We all were the same height, so I was just running, being seen. But since I've gotten to college, it's pretty hard to see me when I have the ball."

There was a certain energy that Williams brought when he saw the field, especially against the Tigers in a 49-28 win. Alford knows that, and it makes him excited to see what Williams can bring to

the table in year two.

"I'm really anxious to watch Miyan Williams," Alford said. "Here's a guy that had a smattering of carries, a very small sample size, but what he did have, he was very successful in those opportunities."

### The Freshmen

The last two scholarship running backs in the battle are Henderson and Pryor, a pair of top-100 prospects from the 2021 class who may bring more potential than any other back in the room.

Henderson (5-10, 210) was the top running back in the class and the No. 21 prospect overall. Charles Power of 247Sports sums up his talent well by saying that he "does not get tackled in a 10-minute highlight video" of his moments from Hopewell, Va.

Even without a senior season to make that highlight tape that much more impressive, Henderson feels ready for Ohio State's spring workouts thanks to the preparations he made off the field.

"I worked pretty hard during that time I didn't have a season," Henderson said. "I was training with my track coach at my high school, and he's been getting me mentally and physically prepared for this moment. I don't think it set me back or anything. We put the pads on (March 24), and all I need is that one good hit to wake me up and I'll be good."

Also on board is Pryor (5-10, 197), who was ranked the second-best all-purpose back and No. 82 overall prospect in the class.

While he also didn't get a senior season at Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough, Pryor said that his ability to have the burst required for long runs is what makes him a difference-maker in this running back room.

"Definitely to hit the home run," he said of his strength. "I feel like from anywhere on the field, I can go to the

end zone. I think, personally, my ability to make plays in space, my route running and my ability to make a difference in the open field. Then just being here with Coach Alford, too, him adding different things to my game to help improve me."

Alford knows that both Henderson and Pryor have been out of game action for longer than most high school prospects because of their canceled seasons. But despite that, he has liked what he has seen from the freshman duo early on, especially with their intangible as students of the game.

"They haven't played football in a long time," Alford said. "You think about the last time those guys played, they were juniors in high school. They haven't played with 22 guys on the field in a long time, and it's funny to hear (Henderson) say, 'I can't wait to get hit.' Well don't worry, buddy, it's coming. It'll be upon you here soon."

"But the thing that's probably impressed me the most is just their eagerness to learn. They're really hungry to learn and try to take it all in. They're both extremely, extremely coachable kids. They're always on a quest of giving more, giving more. When you start coaching them and you start correcting them, they don't take it personal. It's not a personal attack at them. They want to know what they can do better here."

Henderson and Pryor made their impression on the Ohio State running backs coach far before spring practices begun. Alford recalled a story that displayed to him the type of players he was going to be coaching.

Alford said that it was from a Sunday in late January or early February, and it was the duo simply wanting to get in some extra reps.

"I get a FaceTime call about 8 at night, and these two, they have somehow figured out how to get into the facility on a Sunday

night, and they're working on pass protection," Alford said. "They're having one of the other receivers with them holding up a camera and having me coach them through some drill stuff and pass protection drill stuff on a Sunday night in, what, late January, early February."

"They're just hungry. They're hungry to learn. They're great kids, they're coachable. They're good teammates, and everybody wanted to pit them against one another. That's the thing. A lot of people try to put each player against another player. They're just not. They're roommates. They want to help each other become better."

As Alford mentioned, Henderson and Pryor have been compared and contrasted since both committed to Ohio State 16 days apart – Pryor on March 11, 2020, and Henderson on March 27.

But the pair have become close throughout their recruitments and as early enrollees, which is something that has not been lost on other backs in the room.

"They're confident, and they're really close to each other, too," Teague said. "They have a friendship and a bond there that makes each other better. I haven't seen as much of that in the past, so I think they're going to be great players here."

For now, Pryor said that the whole room is having a healthy competition for the spot, which helps the group as a whole. He also said that he and Henderson have been battling a little extra at things past football, as all roommates do.

"Off the field, we're roommates, so every day, low-key we compete in everything," Pryor said. "If Trey cooks something, maybe I'll cook something, see what tastes better. But on the field as well, we're pushing each other. But that's not just us. That's all the guys in the room striving to be as good as we can be and fighting for a spot to play."



# New Buckeye Linebackers Ready To Lead Defense

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It would have been fitting for an Ohio State linebackers room that had already lost so much following the 2020 season to shed one more key piece, this time in the form of coach Al Washington, the coach of the position in Columbus. After three-year starters Pete Werner and Tuf Borland, along with multi-year contributors and 2020 starters Baron Browning and Justin Hilliard, all announced that they would be declining the extra year of eligibility extended to them and declaring for the 2021 NFL draft, Ohio State looked primed to lose Washington to Tennessee, which offered him its defensive coordinator position in February.

In fact, it was reported on Feb. 11 that Washington was on the verge of accepting that promotion and packing up for Knoxville after two seasons with the Buckeyes – public news that Washington would have greatly preferred to remain private.

“I was extremely disappointed and frustrated,” Washington said. “That was a private situation that was made public, and so that was very discouraging. It was my first time in that situation, and that was obviously something that irritated me.”

However, the Columbus native slept on the decision and came to the conclusion that he would be better suited to return to Ohio State for a third season, marking a major victory for a Buckeye defense that desperately needed some sort of continuity at linebacker after shedding those four starters.

Ultimately, Washington felt that – despite his aspirations to become a defensive coordinator and eventually a head coach – the timing wasn’t right for his run at Ohio State to come to a close.

“I do want to become a coordinator,” Washington said. “I do want to be a head coach, but I feel like timing is important. I’m fortunate to be able to use that as a factor in the equation. I don’t have to jump at anything. Tennessee is a great place – great program, great tradition – but I just felt for me that it was the best decision for me to be where I’m at. I feel confident that making that decision will put me in (a better) position when that time comes.”

He cited the people around him as his primary motivation for remaining with OSU.

“The term special, it always starts off with the people,” Washington said. “You could have a job on Mars, but if there’s good people, I think that makes it a good job. I think the people here are No. 1. I really enjoy the people I work with, starting with (head coach) Ryan Day. Ryan is a very influential person to me professionally, and I’ve known him personally for years. He’s a great leader. He’s an elite person to mold yourself after because of his habits and the way he lives his life.

“And then you go to the defensive side, and we have some great guys: (defensive coordinator) Kerry Coombs – an unbelievable leader, great person; (defensive line coach) Larry Johnson; I can go on and on. That’s why Ohio State is special, because of the people that you have the chance to work with. They make you better, because everything at a place like Ohio State is expected to be excellent, and so every day you wake up, you’re motivated to be your best because that’s the standard in every way.”

Washington’s return wasn’t just a big deal for his fellow coaches, specifically Day, who would have been tasked with finding yet another full-time defensive assistant after losing co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison to retirement earlier in the offseason. It stood out to his players as well, who praised his ability as a coach and as a developer of his players on and off the field.

“Coach Washington is an incredible coach,” 6-3, 235-pound senior linebacker Dallas Gant (17 tackles, 1/2 TFL in 2020) said. “He got offered a great job. As a player for him, you don’t want to see a coach like that leave, but it’s obviously a great opportunity for him to become a defensive coordinator. So whatever route he took I was in support of. He said firmly that he wants to stay with us. All the guys were excited to have him back. A guy like that, he’s capable of so much. You’re happy for him either way, but you love to have him.”

Another senior linebacker, Teradja Mitchell (seven tackles, 1/2 TFL in 2020) – who was recruited originally by former linebackers coach Bill Davis but has played primarily for Washington – called him the best linebackers coach in the country.

“It was very exciting,” Mitchell said. “I think he’s the best linebacker coach in the country without a doubt, and obviously those kinds of opportunities are going to arise at the end of the season. I’m glad he’s sticking around, glad to work with him. He’s definitely elevated our unit.

“He gets the best out of us. A lot of people from the outside, when you think of a football coach, you think he just helps with football. But Coach Washington is invested in our mental aspect as well, just developing the linebacker mentally, our thought process when we’re going into a game, a practice or everyday life. I think that’s what separates him from a lot of other coaches. He’s so passionate about this game and pouring into us, and it shows.”

Although Washington will have his work cut out for him in replacing Werner, Borland, Browning and Hilliard, he doesn’t find himself coaching a linebackers room that lacks experience. Gant, Mitchell and K’Vaughan Pope (two tackles, 1 1/2 TFL in 2020) have all seen plenty of playing time with the Buckeyes as they enter their fourth seasons in the program. Sophomore Craig Young (five tackles in 2020) has as well. Washington said that the opportunity to coach those guys again played a major role in his decision to remain in Columbus and that those who came before them did an excellent job of setting the blueprint for Buckeye linebackers to follow.

“The unit is looking very strong,” Washington said. “Their attitude has been great. The best thing we have is competition, and I think everybody is competing. When that happens, you get everyone’s best. We still have to improve every day, but you can see the growth every day, and our goal at the end of the 15 spring practices is to be better in every way leading into the fall. It’s been a good thing. It’s been a positive thing so far. They’ve come out with a great attitude.

“It is a great challenge in a lot of ways, but in the same breath, this is the evolution of football, especially in college. This is why they come to Ohio State. This is what it’s about, the next guys up. Take advantage of your opportunity, believe in yourself and compete and every day be able to identify the things you can improve on. That’s been our message. We have to be fully conscious every day, and we have to be really hard on ourselves. We have to be focused on how we can improve, and over time we’ll get better.

“I’m fortunate that the four guys that left did a great job of setting the example. When I got here, those four guys, they grew the past two years. I think the younger guys having the chance to witness that, being in a room with

those guys and seeing how they developed and grew helps. We don’t really talk much about it. Our standard is our standard – next guy’s up and we have to uphold that standard.”

Although Washington is bullish on his room, that departure of experience is difficult to overlook. The departing quartet played a combined 188 games in Columbus, 47 per player on average. The four returning linebackers with the most experience – Gant, Mitchell, Pope and Young – have played a combined 94 games, almost exclusively as reserves and special teamers biding their time behind the longtime Buckeye core of linebackers. There’s a glut of talent in the room, but linebacker is one of the greenest positions in the Buckeye depth chart, despite the years that the expected contributors have put into the program.

Still, when you add in what was somewhat of a lost year in 2020 due to the pandemic, Ohio State suddenly finds itself with a serious question mark around the entire second level of its defense. For a team expecting to contend for a national title yet again, that kind of uncertainty entering spring and eventually fall camp is always going to be a concern. In fact, as Ohio State sifts through its 15 allowable spring practices, Washington said he has no conception of his depth chart yet and doesn’t seem to be approaching a defined two-deep anytime soon.

“You put me in a situation where we have to play today, you guys could probably set the depth chart before I could,” Washington told reporters when asked what the depth chart would look like if the Buckeyes were playing a full game in the spring. “The guys have been working hard. I have a room full of guys that are working hard to prove (themselves).”

Though the man in charge is happy to play coy until the season draws near, there is obviously some sort of expected pecking order in Columbus, at least from the outside looking in. The Buckeyes have adhered closely to their most experienced linebackers in recent seasons, doling out the lion’s share of the snaps to Borland, Werner, Browning and Hilliard, even during times when fans and media called for younger players – including the new batch of veterans – to see increased playing time over their elders.

If Ohio State keeps with that approach in 2021, there’s a pretty easy case to be made that Mitchell and Pope will take over on the outside, surrounding Gant, who told media that he feels his classmates and Young are ready to step into the veteran roles, both as leaders and players – thanks in large part to those who came before them.

“It’s evident that me and (Mitchell, Young and Pope) are kind of the older guys now and we’ve been waiting for our time for a while,” Gant said. “It’s frustrating at times, but you know that you’re playing behind great players, Buckeye greats that will be remembered forever and that really set the tone for us. That really guided the way for us. Now we know how to act, how to do things. It’s our mind-set that it’s our time now to prove ourselves as that linebacker corps and to prove that there won’t be a drop-off from those older guys that have played the past three or four years. We’re proving ourselves. It’s our time to take over now so we’re just going through spring, trying to get better to take over that void.

“They were big leadership guys. Two of them were captains (Borland and Hilliard), and then two others played a really big part in leading this group and leading this team, and I think that role has been put upon me, Teradja and K’Vaughan, the older guys in the room, to be leaders and examples through this spring and through the rest of our time here – becoming leaders and stepping up into that role. Because



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## PLAYERS ON THE SPOT

as much as we need to step up with our production and playing and all that, we also need to step up as leaders.

"It's a big stride that you have to take. I think spring is a good time to do it. Winter workouts were a good time too to work on stepping into that role."

While Gant develops himself as a leader along with his battery-mates this offseason, he'll have to wait to develop himself on the field. He revealed that he's missing spring practice because of a foot injury that he didn't elaborate on further, leaving Ohio State without its expected starter at the middle linebacker spot and Gant without spring camp for the second time in as many seasons.

"It's hard," Gant said. "Spring is a time to develop your skill set. But things happen and you just have to find a different way. Whether it's watching more film, different types of lifting, focusing on things I can focus on, developing the ways that I can even though I can't practice with my teammates. It's tough not being able to practice, but being back by summer, I'll be able to develop myself pretty well. It will just be closer to the season."

Those lost reps add up, even if they don't ultimately impact Gant's standing on the depth chart. Had Borland or Werner missed a spring camp it would have stung, but ultimately, those two had been there before and knew what they were doing as starters. No one in this group is on that level or even approaching it in Washington's eyes, which makes Gant's absence that much more glaring, even if it may not be terribly damaging in the long term.

"I don't think anybody is at that level," Washington said. "Everybody, even the best of the best, needs reps, needs to participate, so it's not good that he's not able to. I do think he could have benefited from having these practices, just like he would have benefited from spring ball last year and preseason camp."

"But in the same breath, there are still ways to get better mentally, visualizing what you're doing and understanding what we're asking guys to do at a deeper level, leading. There are other things he can do to help. We wish Dallas would have the opportunity for sure, but I don't think it's damaging. It's just something that he has to overcome, and he has to find a way despite that."

"I have a lot of confidence in Dallas. I wish he would have been able to participate as much as everybody else in the spring, but he will definitely be in the mix."

Both Washington and Gant declined to break down personnel at the middle linebacker spot, saying that the Buckeyes pride themselves on being versatile at linebacker, though Gant did mention Tommy Eichenberg and freshman Reid Carrico as young players that he's working with from the sidelines.

"As a linebacker corps, we preach being versatile in different areas, so one day K'Vaughan might play Sam, Will and Mike," Gant explained. "Spring is a time where we can focus on concept teaching and building a better understanding of the defense, which helps you play better. So people play different positions a lot."

On the outside, Ohio State is dealing with no such injury issues. Mitchell told media that he's "playing the Will," which was filled last season by Werner and belonged to current Baltimore Raven Malik Harrison in 2019. He described himself as a "very aggressive linebacker, contact-seeker," which he's shown just about every time he's seen the field, putting several high-light-caliber hits on unsuspecting wide receivers and halfbacks who encroached on his region of the field. The Virginia native couldn't hide his excitement about finally stepping into a bigger role this season.

"I look forward to playing football," Mitchell said. "That's my favorite thing to do. It's always been the same approach. Obviously, now that

• **Senior linebacker Teradja Mitchell** – Perhaps no player is more on the spot than Mitchell, who came to Columbus as the No. 2 inside linebacker in the country in 2018. Fans have long been calling for the hard-hitting Mitchell, who is nicknamed "Bobby Boucher" after Adam Sandler's character in "The Waterboy," to get more playing time. Mitchell (6-2, 235) has stood out on special teams but saw limited snaps on defense with former 'backers Tuf Borland, Baron Browning, Justin Hilliard and Pete Werner holding down each position for three-plus years along with 2019 senior Malik Harrison. More playing time could allow Mitchell to show the pop that made him a highly touted prospect.

• **Sixth-year senior cornerback Demario McCall** – It has been a long journey for the nation's No. 2 all-purpose back in 2016 from North Ridgeville, Ohio. McCall spent his first five seasons bouncing back and forth between tailback and slot receiver, while flashing at times as a returner. Now in presumably his last season in scarlet and gray, McCall (5-9, 195) has transitioned to nickel cornerback, and the defensive guys have been really excited about him, according to head coach Ryan Day.

• **Junior cornerback Tyreke Johnson** – Shaun Wade is gone, and Ohio State must replace him at outside corner. Fellow fourth-year junior Cameron Brown has been ahead of Johnson on the depth chart, but he suffered an Achilles injury against Penn State in the second game and missed the rest of the 2020 season. With a trio of true freshmen in Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock and Jakailin Johnson, and a pair of redshirt freshmen in Ryan Watts and Lejond Cavazos hungry to prove themselves, Tyreke Johnson has a lot to prove himself. Senior Sevn Banks is the returning starter, having played opposite Wade, but with him out for the spring due to injury, there is even more opportunity for Johnson (6-1, 190) to show why he was the No. 21 overall prospect nationally as a five-star recruit in 2018.

• **Fifth-year senior wide receiver Jaylen Harris** – Ohio State is loaded at wide receiver with the highly touted trio of Emeka Egbuka, Jayden Ballard and Marvin Harrison joining the core five from 2020 in Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson, Jameson Williams, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Julian Fleming. The Buckeyes' receiver depth is elite, and it will be tough to crack the rotation, but Harris (6-5, 213) deserves credit for sticking it out in the age of the transfer portal. As a four-star prospect out of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, Harris was the No. 28 wide receiver nationally in 2017. He has only five catches for 54 yards to his name, but you can't reach 6-5.

• **Senior linebacker Dallas Gant** – Like Mitchell, Gant was in the logjam of the linebacker depth chart behind such veterans as Borland,

Browning, Harrison, Hilliard and Werner for the past 3-4 years. This is the year for the No. 10 outside linebacker in the 2018 class out of Toledo St. John's to take control of the defense. More than any of the other reserves in the unit, Gant has made the most of his limited opportunities at Ohio State. Gant (6-3, 235) leads all Ohio State defensive returners in tackles (44) and forced fumbles (two), but there are a litany of talented linebackers champing at the bit. Senior K'Vaughan Pope is in the same boat as Gant and Mitchell, while sophomores Craig Young, Tommy Eichenberg and Cody Simon, as well as redshirt freshman Mitchell Melton and true freshman Reid Carrico, are eager to make their marks.

• **Senior linebacker K'Vaughan Pope** – Having not seen significant playing time due to the veterans in front of him, Pope has not been able to showcase his abilities consistently. He was highly touted out of Dinwiddie County, Va., as the ninth-ranked inside linebacker in the 2018 class, but he has tallied just 16 tackles and 1½ tackles for loss. Pope (6-1, 225) has shown good instincts in pass coverage, however, and his two interceptions are tied with Banks and safety Josh Proctor for the most among returners on defense.

• **Sophomore running back Steele Chambers** – After sitting behind J.K. Dobbins, Chambers backed up junior Master Teague and NFL-bound Trey Sermon in 2020. The 6-1, 220-pound tailback has totaled 221 rushing yards and one touchdown on 28 carries for a 7.9 yards-per-carry average. Chambers was a two-way standout for Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic, ranking as the No. 11 athlete in the 2019 class. A superb athlete with excellent size, Chambers is productive as both a runner and a blocker. However, Teague returned along with sophomore Marcus Crowley and redshirt freshman Miyan Williams, and the Buckeyes added five-star standout TreVeyon Henderson and four-star all-purpose back Evan Pryor in the 2021 class.

• **Sophomore running back Marcus Crowley** – During his freshman season in 2019, Crowley was coming along as a complement to Dobbins and Teague, but he suffered a torn ACL against Maryland. The talented tailback from Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy admitted that he never returned to form during the COVID-shortened 2020 campaign, rushing only six times for 14 yards in the national title loss to Alabama. In the seven games prior to his injury in 2019, he rushed for 237 yards and one score on 25 carries (9.5 yards per carry) and added one reception for a 7-yard touchdown. Crowley (6-1, 213), who was the No. 26 tailback in the 2019 class, will be pushed by Chambers, Williams, Henderson and Pryor.

– Joe Dempsey

I'm the older guy, I'm a leader in the unit. I was definitely looking forward to this camp. It's a blessing to be here, and I'm happy to be in this situation. The wait helped me to develop as a player mentally and physically and now that I'm here I'm ready to showcase, ready to ball."

If all goes according to plan, Ohio State will see a bit of a new-look Mitchell this season. After bulking up to as much as 255 pounds, the 6-2 popoutside linebacker has dropped 20 pounds and hopes to play at 235 this season, thanks to a new diet, very similar to the one that quarterback Justin Fields adopted last season. It was Fields' change, along with the modernization of the linebacker position that calls for more speed, that inspired Mitchell's change.

"I'm playing at a lighter weight," Mitchell said. "Naturally I'm a big guy. I've been as heavy as 255, but during the season I switched to a vegan diet so that helped me drop. I just added fish back into my diet, so I'm now pescatarian. It's definitely dropped weight. It makes me feel a lot better. When I wake up in the morning, I feel great. Even when I'm out on the field I'm really into it. I feel so much better. I feel faster. I feel quicker. I have a lot more energy than I've had previously. It makes me feel good."

"Justin is my guy. I saw him doing it, but I've always heard bad things about the vegan diet and being a football player doing it, especially me playing linebacker. But I saw how it thinned him out," Mitchell said. "(And I thought), 'Well, I'm a big guy so let's see what it does for me.' I just went with it. I went cold turkey. I just stopped and stuck with it because I started feeling good. When I felt the difference, I just thought, 'Man, I don't even want to eat (beef and chicken) anymore.' I've craved seafood, but like I said, I've just recently added fish back into my diet."

Mitchell is preparing himself for a starting role mentally as well.

"Yes it has," Mitchell said when asked if his preparation has changed. "I've been watching film more than I've watched film at any other time. I find myself just pulling out my iPad, going on and watching film. This is the best I've mentally prepared for the game."

On the other side of the field at the Sam position, the 6-1, 225-pound Pope seems to be the leader in the clubhouse, though there's much more of a battle at this spot than there is at the other two positions, which have younger players such as Eichenberg, Carrico, Kourt Williams, Cody Simon and Mitchell Melton battling more for playing time than for starting roles.

That's thanks to the presence of Young (6-3, 228 pounds), who hasn't seen a ton of playing time for the Buckeyes as he enters his third year in the program but always seems to flash when he does find his way onto the field. He drew praise from Day earlier in the offseason and was described as clay that Ohio State was still molding last spring by Washington. If he puts it all together, he's thought of as one of the most versatile players on the entire team, not just within the linebackers room.

"Craig is the one that can do a couple different things," Day said.

Whoever does win that starting job, presumably opposite Mitchell and next to Gant, will see the definition of their position change around them according to Washington. Ohio State has used the Sam position and Mattison's "bullet" spot interchangeably in recent seasons and looks to be doing the same again in 2021.

"That guy first year was Pete Werner," Washington said. "Pete was a guy that had some coverage skill and was really able to impact

the defense in that way. Then you have Baron, he was a really dynamic rusher this past year. That position is about (playing to) whatever skill set that guy has. That's one that we can mold around the player, and as things go into the spring, we'll have a better idea of that."

The man in charge echoed that, calling out the increasingly nebulous position by name.

"As we head into this offseason, looking at our personnel and who we have and then some of the offenses that we're going to face and how we need to adapt, we're going to continue to talk about that and figure out how the bullet plays into this this season," Day said.

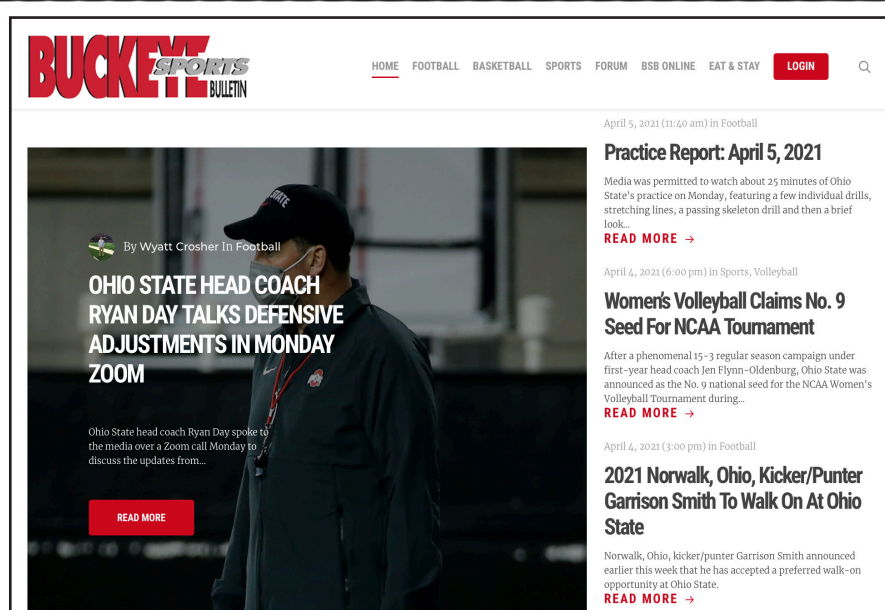
Regardless of what Ohio State finds at bullet and how all of these players – specifically the four upperclassmen – fit into the defensive depth chart in 2021, they know the standard at Ohio State, as does Washington. They saw it for years under the four who came before them, and they know that the tradition of the Silver Bullets goes far beyond even that group.

"My father was a Buckeye linebacker," Washington said. "The standard for Ohio State linebackers, it goes well beyond, years back. I constantly talk about that. We're aware of that. You may have some nicks and bruises, may feel tired, but the standard is the standard. That's nonnegotiable, and that's something that as we do our day-to-day business is in the back of our mind. The guys that are in the room now, they've worked really hard. They've taken advantage of their time to earn that position, that standard, being a linebacker. They have to continue to do it. It's a day-to-day thing. They have to do it tomorrow. We have to see better every day."

"They do have work to do. They do have to continue to take advantage of the time to get better and uphold that standard."



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## COVER STORY

# 'Unmatched' Dedication

Continued From Page 1

he's the guy that wants to stay after and work on different footwork and different throws.' "

Had Orlovsky reached out to sources inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center before going on a nationally syndicated radio show, perhaps his comments – whether they were his personal opinion or not – wouldn't have received such backlash. But that's not what happened, which is why Ohio State head coach Ryan Day passionately defended Fields during an appearance on 97.1 The Fan's "Morning Juice" on April 2 and again during a teleconference with local reporters later that afternoon.

"I read some of the things that were said in the last few days, and I take umbrage with that," Day said on the radio show. "I don't understand where any of that's coming from. This is a guy who, after that Clemson loss (in the 2019 Fiesta Bowl), took that personally. Coming off of that field the last game, ending with an interception, and all he did for the next year was work toward getting back to that game. When the (pandemic) hit and we were in quarantine, (strength and conditioning coach) Mickey Marotti would tell you, he was one of our hardest workers. (Marotti) told me the other day that (Fields) inspired Mick every day during that time. He changed his diet and he really inspired our team. I could honestly say that.

"Then we get back here in the preseason and the season gets canceled. This is a guy who could have easily at that point opted out, been in the draft like so many other guys. I don't hear people talking about them. What did he do? He just kept working, petitioned, went on national TV and fought to have football. You don't do that if you don't absolutely love football and are an unbelievable competitor."

Throughout his two years with the Buckeyes, Fields constantly received praise from his coaches and teammates regarding his work ethic, leadership and love of the game. That was never more evident than when he took a shot to the ribs from Clemson linebacker James Skalski in the 2021 Sugar Bowl then missed just one snap and ended up throwing for 385 yards and six touchdowns in a 49-28 victory.

"He comes into the season, competes really well and gets all the way back to that same game that he lost the year before, gets nailed in the back and very easily could have come out," Day said. "He didn't, threw six touchdowns and wins that game. If you're talking about a body of work over one year of unbelievable work ethic and competitive toughness, I'm not sure that there's someone better out there in the country, and that's what you're getting if you're drafting Justin Fields."

Fields' junior year wasn't perfect. He threw a combined five interceptions in victories over Indiana on Nov. 21 and Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 19. And while those two games are often used against him by draft analysts, Day believes they reveal another one of his strengths.

"To me, if everything just goes smoothly, that's a red flag because you've never gone through adversity before," Day, who was the quarterbacks coach for the Philadelphia Eagles and San Francisco

49ers before joining Ohio State's staff as the offensive coordinator in 2017, said during his teleconference. "He has been through adversity. He had to go through the transfer at Georgia. He had to come in and earn his way here. That game with Indiana was tough, and the Northwestern game was kind of clunky. Then he comes back in that (Sugar Bowl) and throws six touchdown passes after getting drilled in his back. Most people would have begged out at that point. He didn't. He comes back in a play later and throws a touchdown pass and goes on to complete the goal of what he set the year before to beat Clemson."

Though former Tigers quarterback Trevor Lawrence is widely expected to go to the Jacksonville Jaguars – and former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer – with the No. 1 overall pick in the April 29-May 1 draft, Fields is projected anywhere from the New York Jets at No. 2 overall to the New England Patriots at No. 15.

"All I know about Justin Fields is that he's been one of the hardest-working guys and one of the most competitively tough guys (I've met)," Day said. "When he sets his mind to something, he gets it done. There's been a lot of talk out there. I guess maybe they think they know him better than I do. But I know whoever drafts Justin Fields is going to get a great player and a great person. When he sets his mind to something, he gets it done. I think the world of him, and I'm just upset that some people would say that about him.

"The crazy thing about Justin is that it doesn't bother him. When I talked to him about it, he said, 'Let the people talk.' He knows eventually somebody is going to draft him and he'll have to go play. All the talk goes away and you just go prove it on the field. That's all I have to say about that."

Fields, who ran a 4.43-second 40-yard dash and put his accuracy and arm strength on display during his pro day, is looking to be the seventh Ohio State quarterback to hear his name called during the NFL draft since 2000, joining Steve Bellisari to the St. Louis Rams in 2002 (6th round), Craig Krenzel to the Chicago Bears in 2004 (5th), Troy Smith to the Baltimore Ravens in 2007 (5th), Terrelle Pryor to the Oakland Raiders in 2011 (3rd, supplemental), Cardale Jones to the Buffalo Bills in 2016 (4th) and Dwayne Haskins to the Washington Redskins in 2019 (1st).

That does not include last year's No. 1 overall pick of the Cincinnati Bengals, Joe Burrow, who transferred to LSU after three seasons with the Buckeyes.

Those six signal-callers combined for just 36 career starts, with Haskins being the only one who remains in the league. That's seemingly another knock against Fields, though, who said he doesn't pay attention to what his critics have to say and noted the only similarity between him and those players is where he went to college.

"I don't know those guys personally," Fields said on March 30. "I don't know their work ethic. I don't know what they were taught. I know Dwayne got taught a little bit similar to what Coach Day was teaching. But in all honesty, I think I'm different than those guys. I know my work ethic is unmatched. Just my dedication to my passion, to wanting to be great, is just another level."



# Ruckert Returns To Lead Growing TE Group

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For the past couple of seasons, the Ohio State tight end unit has been one of the deepest and most experienced position groups on the team. After losing a trio of fifth-year seniors in Rashod Berry, Luke Farrell and Jake Hausmann over the past two years, however, only Jeremy Ruckert remains from the veteran core.

Ruckert could have been one of the top tight end prospects in the 2021 NFL draft, but he returned for his senior season with a chip on his shoulder after the loss the Alabama in the national title game.

"The main factor was that I knew I had more to give," Ruckert said March 31. "I wanted to just give everything I had, and I didn't want to just leave on that note. I had opportunities past this, but I definitely wanted to make the most of it here and let everybody know that I've got more to give to this place. And I'm just going to do everything I can for this year."

During the COVID-riddled, eight-game 2020 campaign, Ruckert reeled in 13 receptions for 151 yards and five touchdowns, the latter of which trailed only receivers Chris Olave (seven) and Garrett Wilson (six).

Given the sparse usage of tight ends as pass catchers in the past decade at Ohio State, Ruckert was asked if he talked with the staff about getting more targets before deciding to come back for his senior season.

"That was definitely a discussion, but I'm not one to just come back and say, 'I'm only going to come back if this happens.' It's a two-way street," Ruckert said. "If I wanted more catches to come my way, then I needed to put more work in in the offseason, trying to enhance that part of my game. Early in my career, I really needed to learn how to put weight on and block really well and get physical. And now that we're kind of there, I'm just trying to enhance all different aspects and make the little things the bigger things."

"I knew I had more to give to this team and this university, so I definitely wanted to come back. And I think the decision to come back is only going to help me, the team and everybody else."

It is no surprise that the Lindenhurst, N.Y., native put the onus on himself to put his head down and work to become a better weapon in the passing game. Ruckert (6-5, 252) has been the epitome of a grinder since coming to Columbus as a lanky 18-year-old who had played wide receiver in high school. When team activities were shut down due to the pandemic, Ruckert and his dad built a makeshift workout area to help him continue to progress.

Joe Royer, a redshirt freshman tight end, has seen the relentless work ethic of Ruckert firsthand, and it goes beyond the white lines.

"How he performs out on the field, that speaks for itself," Royer said. "But seeing him in practice every day, he's always trying to get better. If there's a problem on the play or an issue, he always comes back and talks to Coach (Kevin) Wilson to figure it out. And all the little things – he's always in the training room getting his body right, eating right and just trying to stay healthy. He's just a good guy all around."

Wilson, who is the offensive coordinator and also coaches tight ends, has always been known for pushing his players to get the most out of them. The old-school coach with nearly 40 years of collegiate coaching experience has been thrilled with the development of Ruckert, indicating that he could be the best all-around player at the position in the nation.

"In my world, losing Jake (Hausmann) and Luke (Farrell) – I think people really undervalued

how good Luke is – he was a three-year starter at tight end. I've had several pro scouts say they think he might be as good a blocking tight end as there is coming out in the draft. Jeremy has developed that way," Wilson said March 19. "And I do think Jeremy has a strong skill set that will hopefully – even though we've got all those receivers back – we can maybe look to find him more in the progression to get more touches."

"He can be as complete a tight end as there is in college this year, because of his range of catching the ball. There might be a couple of guys that are maybe rawer, faster tight ends, but the combination of blocking, route running, catching – he's setting it up to have a super year. He is an elite player that came in and has been a great developer, and I think he's developing himself to have a great year."

Though Farrell and Hausmann have moved on, Ruckert remains as the staple of the tight end room, which features a few less-familiar faces. Now the most experienced in the unit, Ruckert sets the standard for the expectations at the position. Southern Methodist transfer Corey Rau, who walked on after playing on scholarship at SMU, has been thoroughly impressed with Ruckert since arriving in January 2020.

"He's a leader," Rau said. "He's one of the best that's ever come through here, and we're trying to get him the ball a whole lot more. He can do a lot of great things when the ball is in his hands, so we are trying to get more throws to him, trying to open up his route tree more for him."

Beyond Ruckert, Ohio State needs to solidify depth at tight end, and there are numerous players pushing to define their roles within the system. Like Hausmann before him, Rau (6-4, 250) is hoping to carve out a role as a blocking specialist.

"I would probably say goal-line stuff, goal-line and run-blocking stuff," Rau said of what he brings. "I'm more of a Y tight end and not necessarily an H. We've got faster, lighter guys than me that get out there and move better. I'm more of a hand-down tight end."

Like Rau, senior walk-on Mitch Rossi (6-0, 245) specializes as a powerful blocker. A former high school teammate of junior tackle Max Wray, Rossi turned some heads within the program with devastating blocks in 2020.

"The thing we value the most, more than catches or touchdowns, is knockdown blocks," Rossi said of the tight ends. "That's the stat we like to keep track of the most, so anytime we can put somebody on their back and move a grown man, that's really what we enjoy. That's what we pride ourselves on."

While it's clear Rau and Rossi are blocking specialists, Cade Stover (6-4, 255) has excellent upside as an all-around tight end. The third-year sophomore from Lexington, Ohio, came to Columbus as the seventh-best outside linebacker prospect in the country after winning Ohio's Mr. Football and Gatorade Player of the Year in 2018.

Stover initially transitioned to defensive end before finding his home at tight end, which is a great fit for his versatility as an athlete. Stover led Lexington to the OHSAA Final Four in basketball as an All-Ohio player who holds his school's all-time scoring record. On the gridiron, he rushed for 1,477 yards and 17 touchdowns in addition to earning Division III Defensive Player of the Year honors in 2018, which has helped him transition to tight end.

"It was tough at first I guess, but coming from the offensive side of the ball in high school helped me out a lot," Stover said. "Once I got the ball back in my hands and got through the mental part of it, it went pretty smoothly."

Learning a new position at such a high level provides many challenges, but Stover has thor-

oughly impressed his teammates in his rapid development.

"I just like the way that kid plays," Rossi said. "I like his attitude. He's kind of an old-school football player. I enjoy the energy that he brings. He's a very athletic guy. He played offense and defense in high school. He's really made the transition well. He's got great hands, great ball skills and everything, so he's been a big help for us."

Royer (6-5, 240) has also been steadily developing since his arrival in Columbus in June 2020. He was a standout at Cincinnati Elder, hauling in 70 catches for 1,258 yards and 15 touchdowns while leading his team to the state championship game as a senior. But like Ruckert before him, he needs more experience in the trenches.

"The biggest thing I've developed in and improved on is blocking," Royer said. "Coming out of high school, I didn't really do much in-line blocking. I pretty much played receiver. I was flexed out all the time, so definitely blocking, and I have to get better at that still and continue to grow in that aspect."

The need to improve as a blocker became apparent to the former three-star prospect very quickly in his first practice as a Buckeye.

"The very first practice, I was trying to cut off Zach Harrison, and he probably pushed me back 10 yards into the backfield," Royer recalled. "And that's when I kind of realized I had to get my weight up, get stronger and get better in the blocking aspect. Coach Wilson just kind of looked at me, gave me a face and was just telling me, 'This is how it is.'"

Royer has already tacked on 15-plus pounds of muscle since joining Ohio State, and his background as a receiver has drawn comparisons to Ruckert, who has taken him under his wing.

"Jeremy is technically my big brother, and I look up to him in a lot of ways," Royer said of Ruckert. "He always helps me through things, and he's given me different ideas to help me gain weight and get stronger in the weight room, telling me what his meal plan is, what he prepares. And that's definitely helped. I look up to him, and he's been helping me through that."

Ruckert is the clear No. 1 tight end, while Rau and Rossi specialize as blockers and Stover and Royer appear ready to take the next step in their development. With opportunities behind Ruckert still up for grabs, sophomore wide receiver Gee Scott (6-3, 215) entered his name into the conversation.

"Gee came to us and thought about having a conversation about possibly doing some tight end stuff," head coach Ryan Day said April 2. "And we thought that it was a great idea. He's a very mature young man who sees a future in that for him. Whether we go full time with it or not, we'll see."

"But he's got the right idea on this thing. He's got the right frame. He's very, very athletic. He thinks that Kevin Wilson can really teach him how to block, and he wants to do it. So we're very, very excited about it. We think it's a huge opportunity for him, and we're excited about where it's going to go."

Scott came to Columbus from Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic as a highly touted receiver in the Buckeyes' loaded 2020 class as the No. 10 wideout and No. 66 overall recruit nationally. While classmates Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Julian Fleming carved out roles on offense in 2020, however, he primarily played on special teams. Ohio State added another trio of standout receivers in the 2021 class in Emeka Egbuka, Jayden Ballard and Marvin Harrison, so there should be more opportunity at tight end.

Day was encouraged by the fact that Scott sought out the opportunity to change positions on his own, showing his willingness to put his ego aside while striving to see the field. Playing

tight end requires much more weight than receiver, however, so Scott's large frame also played a part in the move.

"We look at the way they're built and certainly their knee size," Day said. "And the size of their legs is usually a pretty good indication of how much weight they can put on and how much they can handle. He was doing everything he could to stay at 215. He actually said, 'I'm fighting every day to be at 215. If I just have a few Big Macs, I can get to 225 in a heartbeat.' We think that his growth potential fits that of a tight end."

It takes a rare type of athlete to play tight end, especially at a program such as Ohio State, where competing for national championships is the expectation. The Buckeyes have continued to transition many players to that position in search of those who have the right combination of intelligence, physicality, size, athleticism and ball skills. For Wilson, that versatility is what makes tight ends, who are also stalwarts on special teams, so essential to success.

"The tight end is a huge piece to a good offense, because it connects the run game and the pass-game protection," Wilson said. "Basically, we're playing left tackle and wide receiver. And then we lose about 30 minutes a day because we've got to go to kicking meetings and kicking practice. We do all the kicking stuff and we've got to play two real positions, so it's a lot of development."

Characterizing versatility and development the best is Ruckert, who went from only catching passes in high school to making big blocks for one of the nation's best teams and becoming a top-tier NFL prospect.

With the loss of Farrell and Hausmann, he was asked if he was excited to be the clear-cut No. 1 guy at the position. In typical Ruckert fashion, he put the team first and expressed confidence in his unit.

"Like years before, I'm just going to try to do anything I can," he said. "And if this year it's putting myself in more of a bigger role, then I'm definitely excited about that and willing to do anything they ask. We have a lot of young guys stepping up and really proving themselves and developing still, so I don't think the tight end position is as much of a worry as it seems in the media. I know that we're going to come out and do our best, and I'm just going to do everything I can to help us win."



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# OSU's Munford Focused On Life After Football

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

Thayer Munford had a choice to make after Ohio State lost the national championship game to Alabama, one not typically offered to players in his position.

A senior in 2020, with three seasons of starting experience at left tackle for the Buckeyes, he had the option to either declare for the NFL draft or, unlike in a traditional year, he could return to Columbus, thanks to the extra year of eligibility granted by the NCAA to all student-athletes amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The decision wasn't difficult for the 6-6, 321-pound Munford.

Although he certainly does not have anything left to prove on the field after a season in which he was not dinged for a single penalty and was not once beaten for a sack in 512 snaps, he made a promise to his mother during his senior year of high school that he

would become the first member of his family to graduate from college.

"I really didn't feel that comfortable leaving, because I knew I needed to get my degree before I had to move on," Munford said during his media availability following Ohio State's first spring practice on March 19. "That's what I promised my mom and anybody that was around me throughout my whole senior year of high school. I'm going to be the first generation in my family to graduate college or (to even) go to college. I'm honored to actually be that first generation, so I can tell it to my kids and my grandkids and they can tell it to their kids. I'm grateful to be in this position that I am in right now."

Munford was raised by a single mother, MeLisa Thompson, and struggled with his grades and other basic necessities during his early high school years at Cincinnati La Salle.

His head coach at the time, Nate Moore, took a special interest in Munford, and shortly after Moore took the same job at Massillon (Ohio) Washington, he – along with his wife,

Becca – became Munford's legal guardians.

It was Thompson's idea. She felt that the Moore family could help Munford dig out of a significant academic hole and qualify for college. It paid off. Now out of the hole and set to graduate with his bachelor's degree in sport industry in August, Munford wants to follow in their footsteps and become an athletic director and football coach when his playing days are over.

"There's more people like myself in worse situations than I was in, and I want to help them out so that they won't be a statistic," Munford said. "That's my main goal for everybody. If the kid that wants to come to me to actually go to college or be better at football, I want to help them out as best I can."

Grades weren't Munford's only issue coming out of high school. During the recruiting process in the class of 2017, he was more than 50 pounds overweight and had to shed those pounds before Ohio State even considered offering him a scholarship, despite his play on the field. It wasn't until January that Munford reached the goals Ohio State set for him and earned his offer. As the third-lowest ranked commit in his class, few expected him to make an impact for the Buckeyes.

Yet Munford became one of the first members of his class to see significant and meaningful playing time. He briefly entered the 2017 win over Michigan when right tackle Isaiah Prince went down with an injury and then became Ohio State's starting left tackle as a sophomore in 2018.

Now, Munford is poised to become the Buckeyes' first four-year starter at left tackle since Tyson Walter in 1997-2001. He's also considered by head coach Ryan Day to be one of the leaders on offense, which means he's likely in line to be named a team captain in 2021.

"His leadership has really stepped up in the last few months," Day said on March 17. "He understands, being from the state of Ohio, what the Buckeyes mean in the

state, what the brotherhood is all about here. He's kind of the elder statesman now in that offensive line room. I think he appreciates the guys that have come before him and he wants to uphold that standard. I've been very, very impressed with him over the last few months."

Munford's return is especially important for a unit that loses two All-Big Ten caliber players in guard Wyatt Davis and center Josh Myers, both of whom are expected to be selected in the early rounds of the upcoming NFL draft.

The line does still return two starters alongside Munford in right tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere and left guard Harry Miller, who is expected to move over and start at center, but Munford's stable presence is crucial. However, he feels there's still room for him to improve this season.

"Everything," Munford said when asked specifically where he can improve. "It's not just one thing, it's everything that I need to work on. I have to improve from last season. I'm not the person to be like, 'Oh, I'm complacent where I'm at.' That's not me. That's nobody on this team. Everybody wants to get better, and I just don't see myself at that level yet."

Though his words certainly ring true for him, those looking in at Munford are far less critical. Munford is expected to be one of the first offensive tackles off the board in the 2022 NFL draft. Regardless of draft stock and potential improvement, Day is thankful to have him back for another season because of the example he's setting for others on the team.

"He's a mature young man who understands the value of the education and what that means for the rest of his life after football," Day said. "He certainly is going to have a lot of options and opportunity after he's done at Ohio State and the NFL. He's very, very talented. He can do a lot of different things."



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**HAS HIS PRIORITIES STRAIGHT** – Left tackle Thayer Munford opted to return to Ohio State for his extra year of eligibility in order to become the first person in his family to graduate from college.

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## 2021 OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown/Previous School							
2	Chris Olave	WR	6-1	189	Sr.	San Ysidro, Calif./Mission Hills	43	Ryan Batsch	SAF	6-2	228	Sr.	Loveland, Ohio
2	Kourt Williams II	SAF	6-1	215	Rs.-Fr.	Harbor City, Calif./St. John Bosco	43	Robert Cope	RB	5-9	198	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Jerome
3	Demario McCall	WR	5-9	195	Sr.	North Ridgeville, Ohio	46	Cade Kacherski	LB	6-2	225	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Jerome
3	Teradja Mitchell	LB	6-2	235	Sr.	Virginia Beach, Va./Bishop Sullivan	49	Patrick Gurd	TE	6-4	241	So.	New Albany, Ohio
4	Lejond Cavazos	CB	6-0	195	Rs.-Fr.	San Antonio, Texas/IMG Academy	50	Quinton Burke	OL	6-4	310	Fr.	Lancaster, Ohio
4	Julian Fleming	WR	6-2	205	So.	Catawissa, Pa./Southern Columbia	52	Antwuan Jackson	DT	6-2	300	Gr.	Ellenwood, Ga/Blinn College
5	Garrett Wilson	WR	6-0	188	Jr.	Austin, Texas/Lake Travis	53	Luke Wypler	OL	6-3	300	Rs.-Fr.	Montvale, N.J./St. Joseph Regional
6	Jameson Williams	WR	6-2	189	Jr.	St. Louis, Mo./Cardinal Ritter College Prep	54	Tyler Friday	DE	6-3	260	Sr.	Ramsey, N.J./Don Bosco Prep
6	Taron Vincent	DT	6-2	300	Jr.	Baltimore, Md./IMG Academy	55	Matthew Jones	OL	6-4	316	Jr.	Brooklyn, N.Y./Erasmus Hall
7	Sevyn Banks	CB	6-1	200	Sr.	Orlando, Fla./Jones	56	Aaron Cox	DE	6-3	255	Sr.	Mantua, Ohio/Crestwood
7	C.J. Stroud	QB	6-3	215	Rs.-Fr.	Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.	58	Ty Hamilton	DT	6-3	290	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Central
8	Kamryn Babb	WR	6-0	197	Jr.	St. Louis, Mo./Christian Brothers College	59	Darrion Henry-Young	DL	6-4	265	Rs.-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Princeton
8	Javontae Jean-Baptiste	DE	6-5	253	Jr.	Spring Valley, N.Y./Bergen Catholic	59	Zach Stevenson	OL	6-1	285	Jr.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy Orange
9	Zach Harrison	DE	6-6	268	Jr.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy Orange	60	Ryan Smith	OL	6-1	285	Jr.	Valley City, Ohio/Buckeye
9	Jack Miller III	QB	6-3	215	Rs.-Fr.	Scottsdale, Ariz./Chaparral	61	Jack Forsman	OL	6-6	296	Fr.	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
10	Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	192	Fr.	Massillon, Ohio/Washington	62	Chris Kuhn	OL	6-4	305	Sr.	Sandusky, Ohio/St. Mary Central Catholic
10	Cameron Martinez	DB	5-10	192	Rs.-Fr.	Muskegon, Mich.	63	Kyle Moore	OL	6-5	305	Fr.	Youngstown, Ohio/Austintown Fitch
11	Tyreke Smith	DE	6-3	260	Sr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Cleveland Heights	64	Jack Jamieson	OL	6-1	290	Sr.	Lakewood, Ohio/St. Ignatius
11	Jaxon Smith-Njigba	WR	6-0	197	So.	Rockwall, Texas	65	Zen Michalski	OL	6-9	295	Fr.	Floyds Knobs, Ind./Floyd Central
12	Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-1	203	Fr.	Steilacoom, Wash.	66	Enokk Vimahi	OL	6-4	298	So.	Kahuku, Hawaii/Kahuku
12	Lathan Ransom	SAF	6-1	200	So.	Tucson, Ariz./Salpointe Catholic	67	Jakob James	OL	6-4	295	Rs.-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Elder
13	Tyreke Johnson	CB	6-1	190	Jr.	Jacksonville, Fla./Trinity Christian Academy	68	Ryan Jacoby	OL	6-4	305	So.	Mentor, Ohio
13	Gee Scott	WR	6-3	210	So.	Seattle, Wash./Eastside Catholic	69	Trey Leroux	OL	6-7	310	Rs.-Fr.	Norwalk, Ohio
14	Ronnie Hickman	SAF	6-1	205	So.	Wayne, N.J./DePaul Catholic	70	Josh Fryar	OL	6-6	315	Rs.-Fr.	Beech Grove, Ind.
14	Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	210	Fr.	Philadelphia, Pa./St. Joseph's Prep	71	Ben Christman	OL	6-6	312	Fr.	Richfield, Ohio/Revere
15	Jaylen Harris	WR	6-5	213	Sr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Cleveland Heights	73	Grant Toutant	OL	6-6	315	Rs.-Fr.	Warren, Mich./De La Salle
15	Craig Young	LB	6-3	228	So.	Fort Wayne, Ind./Wayne	74	Max Wray	OL	6-7	308	Jr.	Franklin, Tenn.
16	Cade Stover	TE	6-4	255	So.	Mansfield, Ohio/Lexington	75	Thayer Munford	OL	6-6	321	Sr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Massillon Washington
16	Ryan Watts	CB	6-3	203	Rs.-Fr.	Little Elm, Texas	76	Harry Miller	OL	6-4	315	Jr.	Buford, Ga./Buford
17	Bryson Shaw	SAF	6-0	195	So.	Eldersburg, Md./Bullis School	77	Paris Johnson	OL	6-6	315	So.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Princeton
18	J.P. Andrade	QB	6-2	210	Jr.	La Verne, Calif./Bonita	78	Nicholas Petit-Frere	OT	6-5	315	Jr.	Tampa, Fla./Berkeley Prep
18	Marvin Harrison	WR	6-3	202	Fr.	Philadelphia, Pa./St. Joseph's Prep	79	Dawand Jones	OL	6-8	360	Jr.	Indianapolis, Ind./Ben Davis
19	Dallas Gant	LB	6-3	235	Sr.	Toledo, Ohio/St. John's Jesuit	80	Corey Rau	TE	6-4	250	Gr.	Katy, Texas/SMU
19	Jagger LaRoe	QB	6-3	225	Sr.	Colleyville, Texas/Texas A&M	81	Sam Hart	TE	6-5	240	Fr.	Aurora, Colo./Cherokee Trail
20	Mitchell Melton	LB	6-3	242	Rs.-Fr.	Silver Spring, Md./Good Counsel	82	Sam Wglusz	WR	5-11	188	Sr.	Brecksville, Ohio/Brecksville-Broadview Heights
21	Evan Pryor	RB	5-10	197	Fr.	Cornelius, N.C./William Amos Hough	83	Cormontae Hamilton	DL	6-2	265	So.	Memphis, Tenn./Whitehaven
21	Marcus Williamson	CB	5-10	186	Gr.	Westerville, Ohio/IMG Academy	84	Joe Royer	TE	6-5	240	Rs.-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Elder
22	Steele Chambers	RB	6-1	220	So.	Roswell, Ga./Blessed Trinity Catholic	85	Austin Kutscher	WR	6-0	198	Sr.	Massillon, Ohio/Washington
23	Marcus Hooker	SAF	5-11	200	Jr.	New Castle, Pa.	86	Chris Booker	WR	6-3	192	Sr.	St. Louis/Dayton
24	Marcus Crowley	RB	6-1	213	So.	Jacksonville, Fla./Trinity Christian Academy	86	Jerron Cage	DT	6-4	310	Sr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Winton Woods
24	Jantzen Dunn	SAF	6-1	188	Fr.	Bowling Green, Ky./South Warren	87	Elijah Gardiner	WR	6-3	195	Jr.	Kemp, Texas
25	Xavier Johnson	WR	6-2	220	Jr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Summit Country Day	88	Jeremy Ruckert	TE	6-5	252	Sr.	Lindenhurst, N.Y./Lindenhurst
26	Cameron Brown	CB	6-0	190	Jr.	St. Louis, Mo./Christian Brothers College	90	Jaden McKenzie	DT	6-2	290	So.	Wake Forest, N.C.
28	Dominic DiMaccio	K	5-8	195	Sr.	Powell, Ohio/DeSales	91	Tyleik Williams	DT	6-3	330	Fr.	Manassas, Va./Unity Reed
28	Miyon Williams	RB	5-8	227	Rs.-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Winton Woods	92	Haskell Garrett	DT	6-2	300	Gr.	Las Vegas, Nev./Bishop Gorman
28	Reid Carrico	LB	6-2	228	Fr.	Ironton, Ohio	93	Jacolbe Cowan	DT	6-4	280	Rs.-Fr.	Charlotte, N.C./Providence Day School
29	Denzel Burke	CB	6-0	189	Fr.	Scottsdale, Ariz./Saguaro	94	Roan McCullough	LS	6-1	225	Jr.	Columbus, Ohio/Worthington Kilbourne
29	Jesse Mirco	P	6-4	210	Fr.	Fremantle, Australia	95	Jack Deneher	P	6-2	210	Jr.	Dover, Ohio
30	Cody Simon	LB	6-2	232	So.	Jersey City, N.J./St. Peter's Prep	96	Michael O'Shaughnessy	P	6-3	200	Jr.	New Albany, Ohio
32	TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-10	210	Fr.	Hopewell, Va./Hopewell	97	Noah Potter	DE	6-6	270	So.	Mentor, Ohio
33	Jack Sawyer	DE	6-4	240	Fr.	Pickerington, Ohio/North	98	Jake Seibert	K	6-1	200	Rs.-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/La Salle
33	Master Teague III	RB	5-11	226	Jr.	Murfreesboro, Tenn./Blackman							
34	Mitch Rossi	TE	6-0	245	Sr.	Franklin, Tenn.							
35	Tommy Eichenberg	LB	6-2	235	So.	Cleveland, Ohio/St. Ignatius							
36	K'Vaughan Pope	LB	6-1	225	Sr.	Dinwiddie, Va.							
38	Marvin Davies	WR	5-11	195	So.	Cleveland, Ohio/Orange							
38	Cameron Kittle	DB	6-0	183	So.	Glouster, Ohio/Trimble							
39	Andrew Moore	DB	5-11	185	Fr.	Cleveland/Cleveland Heights							
41	Josh Proctor	SAF	6-2	195	Sr.	Owasso, Okla.							
42	Lloyd McFarquhar	CB	5-9	180	Sr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Brush							
42	Bradley Robinson	LS	6-1	230	Sr.	Troy, Mich./Athens							

**Coaching staff** – Ryan Day, head coach; Larry Johnson, associate head coach/defensive line; Kerry Coombs, defensive coordinator; Al Washington, linebackers; Tony Alford, assistant head coach for offense/running backs; Kevin Wilson, offensive coordinator/tight ends; Brian Hartline, wide receivers; Greg Studrawa, offensive line; Corey Dennis, quarterbacks coach; Matt Barnes, secondary; Parker Fleming, special teams. **Graduate assistants** – Billy Fessler, offense; Kennedy Cook, offense; Lorenzo Jackson, defense. **Quality control** – Keenan Bailey, offense; Joe Bolden, defense.

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# OSU Makes Cut For Top-Rated Offensive Tackle

Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy five-star offensive tackle Zach Rice trimmed his list of scholarship offers down to Alabama, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Virginia on March 21. He also announced those schools will receive an official visit before he makes his college decision.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

The 6-6, 282-pound Rice – who is considered the top-rated offensive tackle and No. 21 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – landed an offer from the Buckeyes last April. He's never been to campus but chats regularly with head coach Ryan Day, offensive line coach Greg Studrawa and offensive graduate assistant Kennedy Cook.

Offensive tackle continues to be Ohio State's top priority for the current recruiting cycle, with the staff hoping to land three or four more players at the posi-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ZACH RICE

**TOP PLAYER AT PRIORITY POSITION** – On March 21, Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy five-star offensive tackle Zach Rice included Ohio State in his top five and announced he'll take an official visit with the Buckeyes.

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

### 35 Years Ago – 1986

Jim Peel, according to his high school coach, possessed a trait that might vault him right into the picture when he joined the Ohio State football team in the summer as a true freshman after signing with the Buckeyes in the class of 1986.

Peel, a 5-11, 185-pounder from Blackhawk High School in Beaver Falls, Pa., would be given a chance to make his presence felt by returning kickoffs and punts.

"He's an outstanding return specialist," said Blackhawk head coach Joe Hamilton of Peel. "He just has that knack of returning punts and kickoffs, finding the seam that opens for him or creating his own route."

Peel projected as a defensive back for the Buckeyes after playing both ways in high school and earning all-state honorable mention.

### 30 Years Ago – 1991

The newest addition to the Ohio State football coaching staff was a very familiar face for the Buckeyes.

Bill Conley, who had coached inside linebackers for the Buckeyes under former head coach Earle Bruce from 1984-87, was named recruiting coordinator to replace Steve Pederson, who had resigned to take over a similar role at Tennessee.

Ohio State head coach John Cooper said he was happy for the chance to bring someone into the job with vast experience in the state of Ohio.

"Bill knows all of the things we're looking for in high school players," Cooper said. "He loves Ohio State and knows a lot about high school athletes, so I think he's a natural fit for the position."

### 25 Years Ago – 1996

Rumors swirled that Cincinnati Elder linebacker Jason Ott, one of the nation's best in the class of 1997, was nearing a decision on his college choice and that Ohio State was at the top of his list. It was believed that Ott was a silent verbal commitment to Ohio State, a rumor that Ott didn't shoot down in speaking to BSB, though he did say that he was still considering Michigan and Notre Dame as well.

"I definitely know that I am probably leaning toward Ohio State," Ott said. "I truly think that's where I belong."

Ott was believed to be Ohio State's No. 1 recruiting target in the class. The prevailing thought was that the Buckeyes

wanted to build their class around him, similar to what had happened with All-America linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer the year prior.

### 20 Years Ago – 2001

Two of Ohio's top high school juniors attended Ohio State practice sessions during the first week of spring football drills – Macedonia Nordon offensive lineman Rob Sims and Massillon Washington quarterback Justin Zwick. Zwick was impressed by Ohio State's practice tempo.

"It was a good practice with a high tempo," Zwick said. "The players were always moving around. They appeared to be using some four- and five-wide receiver sets. They threw the ball around and looked pretty good. I was watching what they were doing with the quarterbacks. The younger receivers seem to be coming along. You know they will always have good receivers there."

Sims was impressed as well, saying that he "got to look at the depth chart on the offensive line" and that it "got him excited." He said that Ohio State stopped short of offering him a scholarship during his trip, but that he would love to be a Buckeye.

### 15 Years Ago – 2006

Orchard Lake (Mich.) St. Mary's defensive back Dionte Allen told BSB he had received a scholarship offer from Ohio State and that the Buckeyes had a jump on some of his other suitors – including USC, Texas, Notre Dame, Florida State and Michigan – because they had signed his cousin and former teammate Aaron Gant the previous February.

"Since my cousin's going down there, I'll be there a couple of times," he told BSB.

Elsewhere, top Ohio halfback Brandon Saine from Piqua picked up an offer from Michigan shortly after Ohio State extended its offer. Saine told The Wolverine that he grew up a Michigan fan and was planning a trip to Ann Arbor after the track season ended.

### 10 Years Ago – 2011

Toledo Whitmer defensive end Chris Wormley grew up rooting for Michigan but said he was trying to keep an open mind as both the Buckeyes and Wolverines chased after him.

Residents of the battleground territory were doing their part to try to sway him to their side of the famous rivalry.

"You've got to take it professionally," he said. "I'll be

walking through the store and somebody will walk by and say, 'Ohio State or Michigan?' You just have to laugh it off."

The constant barrage of attention was slowly taking its toll on him. The 6-5, 250-pounder said that he was doing his best to keep his recruitment as minimal as possible.

"Sometimes I don't even answer my phone," he said. "I'll be at work or something and you've just got to ignore it."

### Five Years Ago – 2016

Akron Hoban 2017 Ohio State quarterback commit Danny Clark wasn't concerned about Ohio State potentially adding a second quarterback into its 2017 class, even as Las Vegas Bishop Gorman signal caller Tate Martell visited Columbus.

Clark, who was offered by head coach Urban Meyer as a freshman in December 2013 and committed on the spot, said nothing would change his commitment to his home-state school.

The four-star quarterback said he had a talk with the Ohio State staff and knew the Buckeyes would be bringing in the talented Las Vegas Bishop Gorman quarterback for an unofficial visit.

"Urban explained it to me," Clark said April 2 at an Unrivaled Athlete Consulting camp in Akron. "It's a business, you know what I mean? It's a business. They have to be balanced on all points of the game, and I am not worried about competition. Honestly, I don't care who they bring in. I'm going to win."

### One Year Ago – 2020

Savannah (Tenn.) Hardin County four-star tight end Hudson Wolfe included Ohio State in his top five on March 28 alongside Alabama, Georgia, Ole Miss and Tennessee. The 6-6, 245-pound Wolfe was considered the ninth-best tight end and No. 214 prospect overall in the class of 2021.

Wolfe landed an offer from the Buckeyes in September of 2019 and made his first and only visit to campus a few weeks later for Ohio State's 34-10 win over Michigan State. He had been in constant contact with head coach Ryan Day and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson ever since, with both coaches stopping by his school on numerous occasions during the January contact period.

Though Wolfe had to cancel his planned trip to Ohio State on March 25 due to the spread of coronavirus, the Buckeyes notably picked up a crystal ball prediction from 247Sports director of recruiting Steve Wiltfong.



tion in addition to West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Tegra Tshabola. Other players to keep in mind include Charlestown, Ind., four-star Kiyaunta Goodwin; Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Aamil Wagner; Norcross (Ga.) Greater Atlanta Christian School four-star offensive tackle Addison Nichols; Humble (Texas) Atascocita four-star Kam Dewberry; and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Tyler Booker.

### QB Pledge Commits To All-American Bowl

Ohio State five-star quarterback commit Quinn Ewers announced on March 28 that he has accepted an invitation to play in the 2022 All-American Bowl.

The 6-3, 206-pound Ewers – who is considered the No. 1 overall prospect in the class of 2022 – threw for 2,442 yards and 28 touchdowns to lead Southlake (Texas) Carroll to an appearance in the state championship game last season.

Ewers committed to the Buckeyes in November, shortly after backing off his pledge to the home-state Longhorns. He'll be joined at the nation's premier high school showcase by a pair of fellow Ohio State commitments in Del Valle, Texas, five-star wide receiver Caleb Burton and Chandler, Ariz., four-star wide receiver Kyion Grayes.

The 2022 All-American Bowl will take place at the Alamodome in San Antonio on Jan. 8 and be broadcast live on NBC at 12 p.m.

### Defensive Tackle Names Top Schools

Cordova (Tenn.) St. Benedict at Auburndale five-star defensive tackle Walter Nolen once again trimmed his list of scholarship offers on April 2, at which time he named a top eight of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Ohio State, Oregon and USC.

The 6-4, 300-pound Nolen, who is considered the top-rated defensive tackle and No. 2 prospect overall in the class of 2022, picked up an offer from the Buckeyes during a virtual visit with Day and defensive line coach Larry Johnson. Their growing relationship is a big reason that Ohio State made the cut.

Nolen has never been to Columbus but is considering taking an official visit sometime this summer or during the fall. He plans to announce his college decision at the Under Armour All-America Game in January.

If he ultimately chooses the Buckeyes, Nolen and Ewers would give Ohio State a commitment from the top-rated offensive and defensive players in the country.

That's happened just four times in the Internet recruiting era, with Texas signing quarterback Vince Young and defensive tackle Rodrique Wright in 2002, Ole Miss signing offensive tackle Laremy Tunsil and defensive end Robert Nkemdiche in 2013, and Clemson signing quarterback Trevor Lawrence and defensive end Xavier Thomas in 2018.

No team has ever secured pledges from the top two players overall.

The Buckeyes have not yet landed any commitments along the defensive line for the class of 2022 but find themselves in a good position with several of their top targets at tackle, including 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.

### Buckeyes Add Another PWO

Norwalk, Ohio, kicker/punter Garrison Smith announced on April 1 that he has accepted a preferred walk-on opportunity at Ohio State.

The 5-8, 175-pound Smith is considered the 10th-best kicker and No. 12 punter in the country, according to Kornblue Kicking, finishing his high school career with 32 field goals, including a 57-yarder. He was previously committed to Michigan State, choosing the Spartans in January over a walk-on opportunity at Cincinnati and scholarship offers from Fordham, Old Dominion, South Dakota and Tiffin.

Smith has been on the Buckeyes' radar for a few years now. He was invited to attend the victory over Maryland in November 2019 along with his teammate and current Ohio State redshirt freshman

## 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	★★★★	Bloomington (Ind.) South
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

offensive tackle Trey Leroux.

He becomes the eighth player to commit to the Buckeyes as a preferred walk-on this offseason, joining St. Louis Mary Institute and Country Day School linebacker Jalen Pace; Nashville Montgomery Bell Academy tight end Zak Herbstreit; Northville, Mich., running back/defensive back Cayden Saunders; Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy center Toby Wilson; Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day long snapper Mason Arnold; West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West linebacker Jackson Kuwatch; and Morrow (Ohio) Little Miami wide receiver Reis Stocksdaile.

### Wide Receiver Sets Official Visit

Assuming the dead period is over by then, Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert four-star

wide receiver Kojo Antwi plans to take an official visit to Ohio State over the weekend of June 18-20.

The 6-1, 185-pound Antwi, who is considered the 13th-best wide receiver and No. 94 prospect overall in the class of 2022, recently announced a top five of Alabama, Georgia, Ohio State, Texas and USC. He will announce his decision among those schools on July 5, which is his mother's birthday.

Antwi is also set to take official visits with the Bulldogs on June 4-6 and Aggies on June 11-13. It's unclear if he will schedule official visits with the Crimson Tide or Trojans, but the expectation is that he will whenever the NCAA announces its decision on the resump-

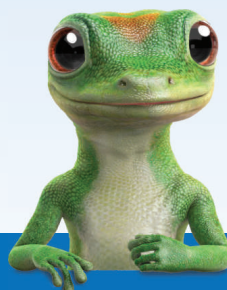
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# June Shaping Up To Be Big Recruiting Month

Continued From Page 17

tion of recruiting activities.

Like so many others, this will be the first time in Columbus for Antwi, who picked up an offer from Day, wide receivers coach Brian Hartline and linebackers coach/area recruiter Al Washington in November.

Ohio State already holds a pair of commitments at wide receiver from Del Valle, Texas, five-star Caleb Burton and Chandler, Ariz., four-star Kyion Grayes but hopes to add one more player at the position this cycle. In addition to Antwi, other targets include Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star C.J. Williams and Chicago St. Rita four-star Kaleb Brown.

## Cornerback Visits On Own Dime

Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star cornerback Ryan Turner conducted a four-day visit to Ohio State on March 25-28.

The 6-0, 180-pound Turner – who is considered the 33rd-best cornerback and No. 336 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – was unable to meet with defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs or secondary coach Matt Barnes or check out the football facilities due to the ongoing recruiting dead period. But it was an important visit, nonetheless, since he'd never been to campus and is hoping to make his college decision sometime this summer.

Turner, who landed an offer from the

Buckeyes in early February, also plans to take self-guided visits to Boston College and Clemson in the coming weeks.

Ohio State, meanwhile, 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 Jyaire Brown and plan to add just one more player at the position this cycle.

In addition to Turner, St. Louis Lutheran North four-star Toriano Pride; Mauldin, S.C., four-star Jeadyn Lukus; and Denton (Texas) Ryan four-star Austin Jordan are among the staff's top options for that final spot.

## Ohio State Offers In-State Offensive Guard

Ohio State extended a scholarship offer on March 22 to Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star offensive guard Joshua Padilla.

The 6-4 and 265-pound Padilla is considered the sixth-best offensive guard and No. 161 prospect overall in the class of 2023. He joins Mentor five-star defensive end Brenan Vernon, Findlay four-star offensive tackle Luke Montgomery and Pickerington Central five-star safety Sonny Styles as the only in-state players in his class with an offer from the Buckeyes.

Padilla, who is the teammate of the previously mentioned Wagner, received the offer during a phone call with Studrawa and offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson. He's never been to campus but hopes to

visit for the first time when the ongoing recruiting dead period comes to an end.

If he ultimately chooses the Buckeyes, Padilla would be the eighth player from Huber Heights Wayne to play for Ohio State this century, joining quarterback Braxton Miller, wide receivers John Hollins and L'Christian "Blue" Smith, defensive tackle Robert Landers, linebacker Marcus Freeman, cornerback Donnie Egeve and safety Will Allen.

## Defensive End Sets Visit To OSU

Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola four-star defensive end Derrick LeBlanc announced he'll take an unofficial visit to Ohio State on June 6.

It will mark the first time on campus for the 6-4 and 235-pound LeBlanc, who is considered the sixth-best strongside defensive end and No. 54 prospect overall in the class of 2023 following a strong sophomore season in which he recorded 49 tackles, nine tackles for loss and eight sacks.

The Buckeyes extended an offer to LeBlanc and his teammate, 2023 four-star defensive tackle John Walker, following a conversation with Day, Johnson and running backs coach/area recruiter Tony Alford in November.

They then listed Ohio State among their top schools, which is notable since LeBlanc and Walker plan to play together in college. It's unclear if the latter plans to make the trip to Columbus in June, as well.

It's also far too early to project how many players the Buckeyes will take along the defensive line for the class of 2023, especially since Johnson is still awaiting word from 2021 Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star end J.T. Tuimoloau and hasn't accepted any commitments for the current recruiting cycle.

LeBlanc and Walker are among only a handful of defensive linemen in their class with an offer from the Buckeyes, a list that also includes Vernon, Montgomery (Ala.) Carver four-star tackle James Smith and Albany (Ga.) Dougherty end Stantavious Smith.

## Buckeyes Ready To Welcome Texas DE

That same weekend, Ohio State is set to welcome Duncanville, Texas, four-star defensive end Omari Abor to campus for an official visit.

The 6-4, 240-pound Abor – who is considered the second-best strongside defensive end and No. 37 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – has been in contact with Johnson since last summer and finally landed an offer from the Buckeyes in November. Their relationship is a big reason that the Buckeyes should make the cut when he begins to narrow down his list of scholarship offers, which includes the likes of Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Oklahoma, Stanford, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

As mentioned, Ohio State is still look-

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# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler

As the calendar turns to April, Ohio State will be patiently awaiting a visit from 2021 Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau. While we know he won't be able to meet with the coaching staff due to the dead period, do you think the self-guided visit will be enough to secure his pledge, and what is a realistic timeline for when we can expect his decision?

"Ohio State has recruited Tuimoloau the hardest for the longest and has an upper hand in the relationships battle, which is ultimately the most important thing here. Every school has been hurt by this extended dead period in terms of getting J.T. and his family on campus, so other than maybe Washington, who isn't getting him, there really isn't a school that he has been able to really familiarize himself that well. Given all of that, I like Ohio State's chances, regardless of what the landscape is because the Buckeyes have forged such good relationships with him over the past two years."

Speaking off the defensive line, assistant coach Larry Johnson is still looking for his first commitment for the 2022 recruiting cycle. Outside of Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star tackle Caden Curry, are there any

defensive linemen you feel confident will end up choosing the Buckeyes?

"Curry is definitely the one that I would feel most confident in Ohio State landing, but Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star defensive tackle Christen Miller and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive tackle Dominick James are two to keep an eye on and should be making official visits in June. Defensive end has the Buckeyes involved in a couple of huge national battles with Duncanville, Texas, four-star Omari Abor and Philadelphia Imhotep Institute five-star Enai White. Ohio State should get both on campus in June, as well. All of those guys are in play, but probably none are as safe of a bet as Curry."

The Buckeyes already hold commitments from three of the nation's top-rated linebackers for the class of 2022 in Marysville, Ohio, four-star Gabe Powers; Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star C.J. Hicks; and Bloomington (Ind.) South four-star Dasan McCullough but could add a fourth player at the position this cycle. With that said, what's the latest on Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed five-star Shawn Murphy and Manvel, Texas, three-star Justin Medlock?

"Both prospects are kind of in a holding pattern

with Ohio State wanting to continue to evaluate each guy. Unfortunately, there is still no word about camps or in-person evaluations and Murphy's spring football season was just canceled. Anything that can happen to make this a tougher evaluation process for Ohio State has happened. Ultimately, I believe they can land either player if they make the big push, but it is yet to be determined if they will."

Ohio State has extended scholarship offers to four of the top five players in the state for the class of 2023 in Mentor five-star defensive end Brenan Vernon, Pickerington Central five-star safety Sonny Styles, Findlay four-star offensive tackle Luke Montgomery and Huber Heights Wayne four-star offensive guard Joshua Padilla. What has to happen for Ironton four-star athlete Trevor Carter to land an offer, as well?

"I think the first thing to figure out with Carter is what position ultimately makes sense for him. He's a running back/safety at the high school level but likely has to kick down to outside linebacker in college. Being a bit of a tweener, Ohio State will almost certainly want to evaluate him in person, so getting a better idea of Carter's skill set and future position is a big hurdle right now."

ing for its first commitment at defensive end for the current recruiting cycle.

However, Johnson has put himself in a good spot with several of the nation's top-rated players, including Abor; Philadelphia Imhotep Charter five-star Enai White; Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna four-star Kenyatta Jackson; Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star Marvin Jones; and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star end Jihaad Campbell.

### Quite The Visitors List

As you may have noticed, June 4-6 is shaping up to be a big recruiting weekend for Ohio State – assuming the NCAA brings the recruiting dead period to an end on May 31 as widely expected.

The rush of official and unofficial visitors to Columbus is being dubbed Buckeye Bash 2.0 to pay homage to the get-together of commits and top targets from the class of 2021 for last year's season opener against Nebraska.

All 11 Ohio State commitments from the class of 2022 are set to be in attendance, as are 2022 Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star defensive tackle Caden Curry, 2022 Altoona (Iowa) Southeast Polk four-star safety Xavier Nwankpa and 2022 Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive tackle Dominick James.

Given the Buckeyes' standing with Curry and Nwankpa, specifically, it would not be a surprise to see them join the fold that weekend or shortly thereafter.

### Linebacker Target Comes Off The Board

Salisbury (N.C.) four-star linebacker Jalon Walker committed to Georgia on March 28 over finalists Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, North Carolina and Ohio State.

The 6-2, 220-pound Walker – who is considered the fourth-best outside linebacker and No. 50 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – landed an offer from the Buckeyes last May but was never able to make it to campus due to the pandemic.

Ohio State already holds commitments from three of the nation's best linebackers in Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star C.J. Hicks; Bloomington (Ind.) South four-star Dasan McCullough; and Marysville, Ohio, four-star Gabe Powers.

The Buckeyes could potentially add one more, though, with Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed five-star Shawn Murphy and Manvel, Texas, three-star Justin Medlock among those to keep an eye on.

### Offensive Lineman Drops The Buckeyes

Although he appeared on the verge of committing to Ohio State in early February, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy three-star offensive tackle Aliou Bah did not include the Buckeyes in his top six on March 28.

The 6-6, 325-pound Bah – who is con-

sidered the 53rd-best offensive tackle and No. 528 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – instead listed Florida, Florida State, Oklahoma, Penn State, Texas and Texas A&M as the schools he'll consider moving forward.

Bah's relationship with Studrawa and executive director for football relations Tim Hinton was a big reason that Ohio State was long considered the odds-on favorite in his recruitment, but the Buckeyes weren't quite ready to accept his pledge with several higher-rated offensive tackles still on the board.

### Other Notes From Around The Country

• Ohio State extended a handful of new scholarship offers since BSB's last publication, including those to 2023 Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic three-star cornerback

Jayden Bellamy on March 23; 2023 Phenix City (Ala.) Glenwood School five-star cornerback A.J. Harris on March 24; 2022 Kansas City (Mo.) North four-star defensive tackle Domonique Orange on March 31; and Owasso, Okla., three-star defensive tackle Chris McClellan on April 1.

• Findlay's Montgomery announced on March 29 that he has accepted an invitation to the 2023 All-American Bowl.

• Los Alamitos, Calif., five-star quarterback Malachi Nelson was bumped up to the No. 4 overall prospect in the country, according to the 247Sports composite. He's the only quarterback in the class of 2023 with an offer from the Buckeyes.

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

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# Explaining College Football's New Terminology

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It's easy to fall behind the curve when it comes to college football terminology, especially in the modern era of the sport. With the proliferation of online communication, the availability of game tape for just about anyone who wants it and the intense push for innovation on the offensive side of the football in recent years, college football is evolving faster than it ever has before. That means new ideas, new systems and, of course, new terminology that coaches and players are incorporating more and more into their analyses of the game.

For those players and coaches, picking up those new concepts is just a part of the job. Ohio State's football staff and athletes spend a significant portion of each week in position meetings to get a better grasp of the concepts the Buckeyes hope to utilize on Saturdays. The mental development of these players on the whiteboard is often just as critical as the physical development on the field.

The Buckeyes have plenty of time to spend on learning the newest trends, but followers of the team aren't frequently extended the same courtesy. For anyone who doesn't dedicate hours to studying game film and coaches' clinics in the offseason, much of that new terminology can sound completely foreign and inaccessible.

Even BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz – who knows as much about the Buckeyes as anyone – has found himself out of the loop when listening to Ohio State defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs break down the Buckeye defense or offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson fly through his expectations for blocking assignments. If you've followed the Buckeyes in recent years, you may have found yourself in the same boat.

If so, this is the article for you. As Ohio State kicks off another spring training camp, let's take a look at the latest and greatest in college football terminology to get a better understanding of some of the terms you'll likely hear from coaches and players throughout the spring and well into the 2021 college football season in Columbus.

## Run-Pass Options

A favorite of color commentators and television analysts for several years now, run-pass options – or RPOs, for short – have exploded onto the scene in college football at the end of the 2010s and into the early 2020s.

An evolution of the zone read, spread

option game made popular by former Ohio State coach Urban Meyer, former West Virginia coach Rich Rodriguez and current Ohio State offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, among others, RPOs have become a staple of just about every modern offense because they fit the ethos of the spread offense that Meyer rode to three national titles perfectly.

"I want a quick conversation about spread," Meyer said on Fox's college football pregame show in 2019. "Spread is near and dear to me, and I keep hearing different versions, different definitions. This is what the spread offense is. Spread is all about equating numbers in the run game. In the I-formation at times you would run the ball into unblocked defenders. You don't (want your tailback getting hit like that). You want to spread the field, create a numbers advantage on offense."

Meyer's offensive staple, the zone read, was designed entirely around equating numbers in the run game, specifically in the spread system. With four wide receivers, an offense would traditionally face a six-defender box, usually four defensive linemen and two linebackers, with three cornerbacks and two safeties accountable for the four receivers. Because the offense has just five offensive linemen, that six-man defensive box would have the advantage against that five-man front without some sort of misdirection, which Meyer accomplished through isolating and "reading" (hence the name) one of those six defenders, usually a defensive end. That means leaving one defensive lineman unblocked, giving the five-man offensive line just five defenders to block – equal numbers.

The read for the quarterback was simple. If the isolated defensive lineman – we'll say an end for this example – sells out to stop the inside handoff option to the halfback, the quarterback keeps the ball and runs outside of that isolated defensive end. There are variations of this play with different isolated defenders and blocking assignments, but the general concept is the same for all of them.

The RPOs accomplish the same thing; they just do it farther down the field with a passing threat as the second option rather than a quarterback keeper. The offense is still equating numbers, creating more room for the running back to run into on a handoff read. It's just doing it without sacrificing the quarterback as a runner, which is helpful for teams that either want to protect their quarterback (like Ohio State with Justin Fields) or teams that don't have a capable runner taking the snaps (like Ohio State with Dwayne Haskins).

Like the zone reads or the spread option game writ large, RPOs can take any

number of different forms depending on the design of the play, but generally speaking, there are two categories that RPOs fit into. First, there are pre-snap RPOs. These are much easier on a quarterback and a much more common part of Ohio State's offense than the latter category, which are known as post-snap RPOs.

Both are exactly what they sound like. The former has the quarterback read the defense before snapping the ball, either for numbers in the box or leverage to inform his decision to throw or hand off before the play starts. These reads are based on context, so if the quarterback has five offensive linemen and a tight end on the line of scrimmage, and the defense has just six defenders in the box, the numbers are already equated – that defensive end is still being isolated, giving the offense an advantage – and the read is simple: hand the ball off.

If the quarterback has six blockers up front and the defense has seven or more defenders in the box or if it hasn't dedicated enough defenders to the strong side of the formation (the side that has the majority of the receivers), the read is again simple: throw the ball, usually to a bubble screen or a quick stop-and-out route, something away from that loaded box of defenders that stresses the undermanned secondary.

Ohio State showed off a great example of one of these pre-snap RPOs against Penn State in 2018, a 27-26 victory for the Buckeyes. Facing a third down with 2:14 to play in the game and trailing by five, Ohio State dialed up a pre-snap RPO, with trips to the field (three receivers on the wide side of the field) and 11 personnel (one running back, one tight end). Penn State put just six defenders in the box which would usually indicate run, but it made a mistake in defending the trips to the field, assigning just two pressing cornerbacks and one safety to defend the field. Haskins read the numbers advantage and fired a quick pass to wide receiver K.J. Hill on a bubble screen, who just had to follow the blocks of his fellow receivers to give Ohio State the eventual game-winning touchdown.

"A lot of those passes are RPOs. Like when you see Parris (Campbell) in the flat or K.J. (Hill) on the hitch, those are all RPOs," Meyer said in 2018. "You're reading someone; you trigger; you throw the ball. I'd say there's at least 10 to 12 called runs (per game) that the ball is being thrown."

The post-snap RPO is a bit more taxing for the quarterback, but the read is much closer to what you'd see on one of those more traditional zone reads, with the main difference being that because he's decid-

ing between a handoff and a pass, the quarterback is going to read a second-level defender – a linebacker or safety who has moved into the box – rather than one of those first-level defensive linemen.

Because the offense is looking to manipulate a box defender specifically, post-snap RPOs are usually going to attack the defense with a passing route that goes directly into the middle of the field like a slant. Oklahoma quarterback Baker Mayfield famously diced up the Ohio State defense in 2017 with plays like that, designed to put a linebacker into conflict by forcing him to sell out to defend against either the run or the pass and then attacking him with the opposite of whatever he picks. Ohio State linebackers were taught to defend the run as their first priority, so Mayfield threw slant routes and other post-snap RPOs to fullback Dimitri Flowers, wide receiver Jeff Badet and tight end Mark Andrews to the tune of 14 receptions, 203 yards and one touchdown on the game. Had Ohio State focused more on defending the pass, Mayfield would have handed the ball off to halfback Trey Sermon against a suddenly weakened defensive box.

RPOs are, essentially, the next evolution of the triple option. It's hard to believe that they were created on accident, at least according to Meyer, who takes credit for the invention and proliferation of RPOs.

"It was a missed assignment by a wide receiver," Meyer said in 2019. "It's hard to believe it's been 18 years since Bowling Green when a group of coaches got together and (created the RPOs)."

## Slot, Nickel Corners

In a college football world defined by explosive passing attacks, defensive coordinators have been forced to modernize. Funny enough, the changes on offense have sparked just as much innovation on defense from coaches like Gary Patterson at TCU, Matt Campbell at Iowa State and other defensive minds on the cutting edge. In the spread era, modernizing means downsizing – taking linebackers and linemen off the field in exchange for more defensive backs who can work to neutralize these destructive passing attacks.

That's where defenses like the 4-2-5 and 3-3-5 come in, along with the more complex but similarly-minded 3-1-7 at Auburn or former Ohio State linebacker and new Notre Dame defensive coordinator Marcus Freeman's 3-2-2-4 that he rode at Cincinnati to the No. 8 scoring defense in the country in 2020. All look different on the field but hope to accomplish the same goal – stop the pass without completely opening up the field for the run.

All of those defenses have something

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else in common, too: the use of a “slot” or “nickel” corner in the backfield when adding defensive backs onto the field to account for passing attacks.

This is no longer a niche thing. Ohio State, Alabama and Clemson have all become very comfortable with these slimmer defensive sets as a base look, and coaches are referencing the slot or nickel spot as a fully-fledged position more each year. Head coach Ryan Day did it at the beginning of spring practice, saying that Ohio State is in the process of “finding that mix of the nickel/safety/strong safety/free safety,” saying that it’s “something that we’re excited to find out.”

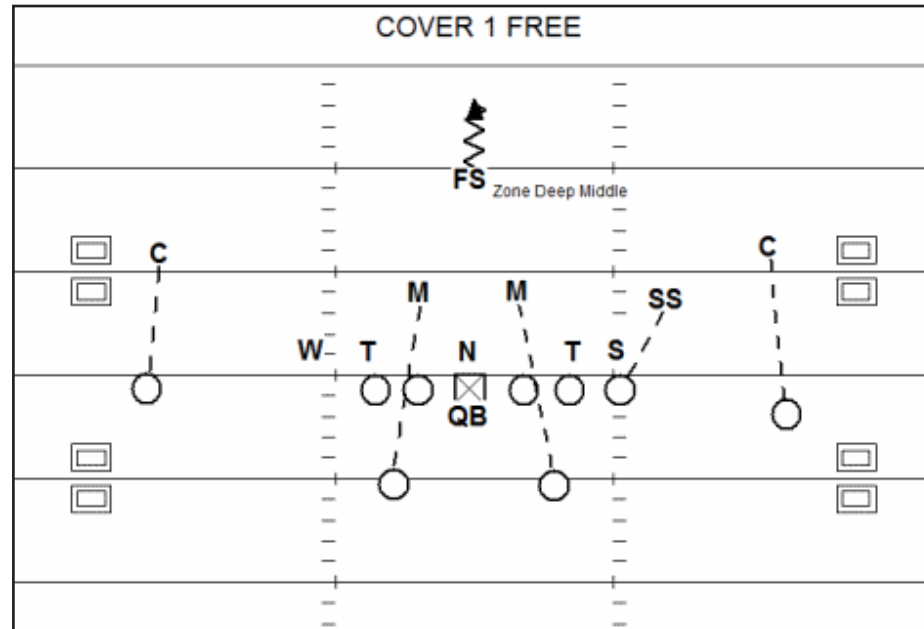
In some cases, the Buckeyes have referred to their extra defensive back – the Buckeyes rarely add more than one DB to the field at a time, opting to keep at least two linebackers on the field in most spots – as a bullet, a position that former DC Greg Mattison brought with him from Michigan and loosely defined as a bigger safety, before abandoning that and passing that spot to linebacker Pete Werner. The definition has shifted since then, but Day gave a fairly extensive review in early March of what it looks like now.

“Really what it is, it’s a hybrid,” Day said of the bullet. “Last year it was hard to take those linebackers off the field. We had Baron Browning, Justin Hilliard, Tuf (Borland) and Pete (Werner). We felt that was a strength of our defense with those guys. Boy, they made a lot of plays. But as we head into this offseason, looking at our personnel and who we have and then some of the offenses we’re going to face and how we need to adapt, we’re going to continue to talk about that and figure out how the bullet plays into this season.”

For Ohio State, the “bullet” position is its nickel back, because the nickel back is the fifth defensive back on the field. It’s a blanket concept that covers any and all fifth defensive backs, regardless of the position they play. A bullet, a slot corner, a third safety – all fit into the nickel definition. If there’s a fifth defensive back on the field, that’s your nickel. If there’s a sixth, that’s the dime back, because it’s a dime defense – which is less common but becoming more prevalent.

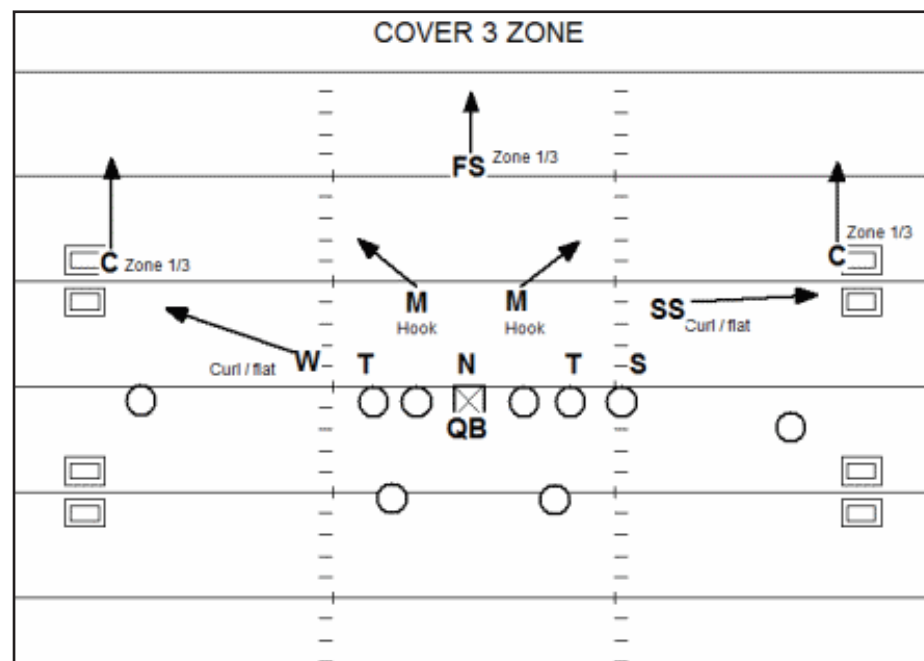
Then there are the details within that nickel umbrella, not as common at OSU but still worth knowing as a modern football fan. The most common is slot corner, which Ohio State does use in the form of Marcus Williamson, though he’s not a nickel defensive back because he’s the fourth defensive back on the field. (Ohio State uses just one safety on most plays, which we will get to in a moment.) This is the most common use of the nickel back, and its directive is exactly as it sounds – slot corners cover slot receivers. They’re usually smaller and quicker with a focus almost exclusively on coverage skills rather than tackling to account for the kind of players whom they line up across from – receivers like Purdue’s Rondale Moore or Hill, who dominated in the slot for the Buckeyes.

The bullet exists elsewhere, usually under the name “box safety,” another literal name, because this is simply a safety who lines up in or near the box, usually a little behind the linebackers. Former LSU and current Kansas City Chiefs stand-out Tyrann Mathieu is the highest-profile example and fits the definition of the position pretty well. A box safety plays a lot like a regular, run-stopping safety but lacks either the size or range to play as a deep safety, so he serves instead as a



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SMART FOOTBALL

**DIFFERENT SCHEMES – Cover 1 Free (above) sees the single-high safety dropping into a deep zone in the middle of the field while the remaining defensive backs take on man coverage assignments. The Cover 3 (below) calls for the single-high safety and the outside cornerbacks to drop into deep thirds, while the remaining four second-level defenders handle the underneath zones.**



much faster, slightly deeper outside linebacker who can help in coverage when needed.

Box safeties are very common in defenses that want to bring heavy pressure, because they can rush off the edge quicker than the traditional outside linebacker while still serving to benefit the defense in coverage, either in man coverage on an inside receiver, halfback or tight end or as an intermediate zone defender. Freeman uses two of these in his defense, both lined up behind the linebackers, to allow those true linebackers to focus on stuffing the run and rushing the passer while the box safeties fill in the zones usually assigned to those linebackers.

The third safety doesn’t require much explanation. It’s a third deep safety, usually deployed in a cover 3-heavy defense. Clemson played around with this concept against Ohio State in both of the last two playoffs, taking it from Campbell at Iowa State. The third safety is usually a bit more versatile than the traditional free safety and strong safety but still fits under that archetype.

The driving thought behind all of these nickel looks is the same, as all defenses want to be plus-one in pass defense, which simply means having one more defensive

back than the offense has receivers and tight ends. The majority of offensive sets are running with four receivers and tight ends in total, which calls for five defensive backs. Against sets with five receivers and tight ends, a defense will toss out that dime back. It’s the defensive version of creating a numbers advantage.

### Single-High Safety

As mentioned in the last section, Ohio State deploys a single-high safety in its base defensive alignment, another one of the new buzzwords that coaches like to use in press scrums. Single-high, or “middle closed” in coaching circles, means simply that the defense deploys one safety, who lines up in the deep center of the defense, rather than the traditional split safety, “middle open” look that became popular with the rise of the 4-3 in the ’80s and ’90s.

It’s not a new concept by any means. Back in the ’60s and ’70s when the 4-4 reigned supreme, defenses fielded just three defensive backs – two on the outside as cornerbacks and one as a single-high deep safety – with the idea being that the deep safety can man the middle of the field while those outside cornerbacks are responsible for the outer thirds of the field

on either side of the hash marks.

That base concept drives Ohio State’s defense now, even 50 years removed from the heyday of the 4-4 in Columbus, when players such as Jack Tatum dominated within it. The Buckeyes are primarily a cover 3 and cover 1 team, both of which require just one deep safety and benefit greatly from the fourth defensive back being a slot corner (Williamson).

For some very brief context, cover 3 is a zone defense, with the outside cornerbacks responsible for the outer thirds and the deep safety covering between the hash marks, while four remaining defenders cover quarters of the field in a second-level zone.

Cover 1 is a man defense, with that single-high safety patrolling the entire deep part of the field, while the remaining standing defenders take on man coverage assignments, with any leftovers spying the quarterback or sitting in a soft zone underneath.

The latter has become a bigger part of the defense under Coombs after the Buckeyes leaned heavily on the former in 2019 with former defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley, but both are still prevalent and important in Ohio State’s defensive playbook because they essentially cannot be distinguished pre-snap. That means Ohio State can disguise its coverage into the play, making the quarterback’s job of reading the defense more difficult and providing a larger window for the four down-linemen to pressure him. Improving in man coverage is a key for the Buckeyes this season after they struggled in both key concepts in 2020.

“We need to be able to play press man-to-man,” Coombs said after the first practice of spring. “We need to be able to do it over and over and over again. We need to be able to do it successfully. You have to be able to practice it over and over again. We got that in today. We started with that. It was awesome. With the kids that are here and the kids that are coming, my expectation is that we’re going to learn it, play it and be really good at it.”

“We’re going to hang our hat on it. Our first pitch, if we’re standing on the mound, we’re throwing man-to-man. We have to be able to play it. That’s our fastball. Everything else bleeds off of that. How much three-deep, how much split-safety, how much of anything else we play has to bleed off our ability to play man-to-man. We have to be able to do that. If we can’t, then we have to change what we do. But I think we have the guys who can do it, and I like our chances.”

The appeal of the single-high look is in the versatility that it allows a defense, both in play disguising pre-snap and flexibility in the secondary with that extra space available. Single-high allows Ohio State to keep three linebackers on the field when it wants, while creating room for both a slot corner and the more safety-adjacent bullet position to play at the same time when the Buckeyes roll with a nickel look. Given Ohio State’s commitment to recruiting defensive backs who can do a little bit of everything, single-high just makes sense for the Buckeyes.

“We’re going to be versatile,” Coombs said. “We’re going to have some guys who are going to be able to do more than one job on the back end.”

*If you have any questions for Patrick on this story or questions on other schemes, formations, positions, terminology, etc., email us at [bsb@buckeyesports.com](mailto:bsb@buckeyesports.com).*



# Sports Bars Evolve And Leave Damon's Behind

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In 1979, Earle Bruce led Ohio State to an 11-0 start in his first season as head football coach, picking up right where Woody Hayes had left off. The Buckeyes ultimately fell to USC in the Rose Bowl, but it was a year filled with plenty of excitement for the program.

On the basketball court that year, Eldon Miller helped Ohio State make the NCAA Tournament and amass a 21-8 record with signature wins over Indiana, Iowa and Purdue. That group was led by a core of Herb Williams, Kelvin Ransey and freshman Clark Kellogg.

But something else was happening in 1979 that would change Ohio sports forever. That was the creation of Damon's Grill and Sports Bar, which was founded in Columbus that year by Joe Mazzola, Sam Massara, Joe Nader, Irv Rossman

and Jerry Rossman.

In what would come to seem like a very simple concept, Damon's helped to make sports bars what they are known to be today.

"In the beginning when they just invented fire, there was Damon's," Dan Ponton, president of Roosters, a popular dining chain in central Ohio and across the state, told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "Damon's was a sports bar, but they were a restaurant, too. They were the only player in town, and everybody kind of latched on to their success and put their own twist on it."

Greg Powers, owner of Shade on the Canal in Canal Winchester, Ohio, and two other outlets, agreed with Ponton, calling Damon's one of the originators of what has come to be the modern sports bar.

"They were kind of the unicorn of the whole restaurant and bar industry at one point," Powers told BSB. "They were just an outlier. They're the ones that kind of started it. They were just

different. They were different, and they were the pioneers of the whole thing, because we all went to Damon's to watch sports."

And what did Damon's do exactly that led them to be "pioneers" in the restaurant industry? Mainly, they put an emphasis on sports, displaying multiple televisions and creating an experience that catered well to sports fans who, at the time, could not watch any game they wanted from home.

Back in the late 1970s when Damon's was founded, this was a much larger draw than it would be today, considering just how common it is to see a TV at almost any eating establishment around.

"I remember when you would go in most bars or restaurants. I can remember when you wouldn't even see a TV," Jon Self, a former franchisee of Damon's and proprietor of the ultra-popular outlet on Olentangy River Road near Ohio State's campus, told BSB. "Now, you

walk in Hyde Park (an upscale steak house) and you see a TV. It has become part of the decor, really. And in some cases, they've become the decor."

Self said that, despite he himself being a sports fan, the increased focus on becoming a sports bar was rooted in smart business above anything else.

"If you take what we call in the business your daypart, which is 11 a.m.-4 p.m., we did real well Monday through Friday because all the businesspeople were out, but we didn't do that well on Saturday and Sunday," Self said. "So, what does good on Saturday and Sunday on TV? Sports, right? Well, that helps fill that gap."

"Back when Damon's started, restaurants, their worst nights were Sundays and Mondays. But with Sunday Night Football or baseball, and Monday Night Football and whatever, it worked perfect. We just promoted sports. So, what happened is it filled all of our gaps. The worst thing in restaurants is an empty seat."

"I remember a manager and a decorator arguing about what they wanted to cover the seat with, and I was walking by and they said 'Mr. Self, what do you like, this or this? What do you want to see on this seat?' I said, 'I want to see an a—in that seat.'"

And with people in seats came a new problem: the desire to get them out of the seats to bring in new customers.

Self said the wait staff would want to try to cycle through the customers for increased revenue but that those coming in for three-plus-hour sporting events made that difficult. But, above all, Self said the important thing was that there were people in Damon's at all.

"We just opened Damon's and I had gone to visit and see how it was doing and the manager was bitching," Self said. "He said 'We're not turning tables, man. Everybody just sits there for three hours.' And I said, 'Yeah, but they're here.' He said, 'Yeah, but I want to turn tables, I don't want to run the game.' I said, 'You don't want to run the game?' He said, 'No.' I said, 'Come on and get in the car.' And he said, 'We're busy as hell.' I said, 'I don't give a damn how busy you are, get in the car.'"

"We got the car and we drove over to Olive Garden, which was absolutely empty. I said, 'How are they doing on Monday night?' He said, 'Well they don't have the game on?' and I said, 'No s— they don't have the game on, dumb—, pay attention to what we're doing here.'"

"You try to sell them something else. Try and sell them another order of fries, dessert, another beer. I don't care, but you don't want to turn the game off. It was an evolution of the business and how you had to manage it, because a lot of people didn't want that longtime seating."

That focus paid off, and it led to a major boom for Damon's, with Self saying that the heyday of the business was sometime in the '90s. Jeff Rapp, a former BSB staffer who is now a WTVN radio analyst, had plenty of experiences in Damon's, and he said that it had the perfect formula for what makes a sports bar great.

"That concept that you could sit in a big cushy booth and manipulate a box to get the volume of the screen you wanted – I think there were four big screens in there – was great," Rapp said. "I remember in the heyday of Damon's thinking how is this ever not going to succeed? It's beautiful, right? Like the food's good, it's really good barbecue and bar food. The seating is comfortable, the big screens. Everything begged you to stay for an hour and a half."

Of the many experiences Rapp had at Damon's, he recounted watching Monday Night Football games with a group of friends for a fantasy football league long before it was computerized.

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He also said he appreciated the sports directors that the restaurant had who announced scores, played games with the customers and made sure the game they wanted to watch was on. If it weren't for Damon's having that job position, Rapp said he would not have met what ended up being one of his longtime friends.

"I met one of my best friends that way because Matt Bretscher, who used to be a swimmer at Ohio State, he used to cover Ohio State as a young reporter just like me. He had a night job, where he worked at that Damon's in Pickerington, and he was a sports director," Rapp said. "I remember one time going up there to get our game boards, and I'm like 'You look familiar,' and he's like 'Yeah you look familiar, too,' and we figured out we just seen each other, earlier today at interviews, and we became good friends. It's (WTVN radio host) Matt McCoy; McCoy is like his stage name. So I even developed a really good friendship out of hanging out at Damon's, now that I think about it."

Aside from the Monday Night Football games with friends, Rapp said he would go to Damon's because it was the only place in Columbus that would have the Los Angeles Lakers games. The same could be said for Powers, except that his game of choice was on the football field with the Dallas Cowboys. But it was the same result: Damon's would have the game on.

"I could just remember the Damon's and those huge satellite dishes on their buildings, and they could get all the NFL games," Powers said. "I went there because when the Cowboys weren't on national TV, I couldn't watch them. Damon's set the bar with that. They can pick up whatever the Kansas City Chiefs station is in Kansas City with their satellite dish. They were just the pioneers. They got it all started, and it was on from there."

Among the various sporting events that made Damon's a mainstay was the men's NCAA Tournament. According to Rapp, everything that made the establishment so great for a typical football or basketball game worked even more so for March Madness, especially the Olentangy River Road location.

"I remember that would definitely be a great place to go," Rapp said. "I can remember sometimes where I just got to go out as a fan and watch games, and it would get crazy like stand outside the restaurant, hour waits and stuff like that. You had to really try to go early if you even wanted to be assured of sitting down or be willing to sit at the bar or something like that."

"Usually like local TV news would show up, too, because this concept that people could be all gathered and screaming at the TV together was almost kind of a new phase. It's so normal now, but in 1992 or something like that, it was like, 'Wow, this is a new thing that people want to do.' But business was, I'm sure, very booming then. Their concept worked perfectly for March Madness, no doubt."

Self said that it was "a little bit of everything" that helped Damon's shine in March for the NCAA Tournament. Among that was the management of the sports bar and having knowledge of what the customers wanted.

All of that led to a packed house in March, so much so that some people would go to extremes to make sure that they'd have a place to sit once they arrived at the restaurant.

"We had people actually buy tables," Self said. "They would come in and pay us for a table for a full day. And then they would have multiple people come, and it would be like a corporate table of 10. And some people come for the first section and some people come in the second day, but they got there at 11 and they didn't leave until the games were over until midnight. And they'd not only buy food, but they'd actually pay to have that table that no one else can sit there."

But despite being known as a sports bar, Damon's was more than just a place to watch sports. Self said that the biggest crowd that his

Damon's ever had was for something that was only somewhat related to the sports world.

"We were a place to watch the news as well," Self said. "The most packed I ever saw Damon's across the board was the O.J. trial when the verdict came out. That was the biggest crowd I've ever seen. They were standing up against the walls and the aisles waiting to hear the verdict of that, and they came to eat lunch while they did it."

Rapp could concur with Self, as he was at the Damon's on Olentangy when Simpson's trial verdict for the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman was announced. Simpson was found not guilty on Oct. 3, 1995, and it is a moment that has stuck with Rapp to this day.

"I was covering the football team for BSB, and they used to have John Cooper's press conferences at the Park University hotel, which was connected to the restaurant," Rapp said. "We did our Monday interviews, and when we were done with him and we started walking out or walking through the restaurant, basically, and the manager said, 'Gentlemen, I've got a room for you right here.'"

"He opened a little room that had a couple of TVs in it, because he knew that the verdict was coming in any minute, and it was all over live television, and he knew that, since we were reporters, we'd want to see it. And he opened the room up and we just all sat in there and watched this. I'll never forget that."

But even with that verdict standing out, when asked what the biggest event for Damon's was, Self said that there was no one answer he could give. With multiple locations across the country, and even across the ocean into Europe, the peak moment for a Damon's was reliant on where the sports bar was at.

"The biggest event at Damon's depended on the city you are in," Self said. "If you were in Pittsburgh when the Penguins were winning the Stanley Cup, that was the biggest event. If you were in Columbus, Ohio, when Ohio State was winning the national championship, that was the biggest event. So to say what's the biggest event for me? I couldn't say."

But over time, Damon's business model became less unique and more the norm, and with that, the company started to lose its sales. Eventually, it began to lose its locations, and on March 4, 2011, the location on Olentangy River Road closed its doors.

"I just think that Damon's never really changed with the times," Powers said. "It was cool and it was state of the art stuff, and as time moved on, the technology changed. I just think that technology caught up with those guys, and they didn't necessarily change. I mean I loved Damon's; everybody went to Damon's. When we were out of town, we'd look for a Damon's to go watch our favorite sports team play. I just don't think that they changed and adapted quick enough with the times, because when everybody got it, they just weren't as special anymore."

Though the addition of major competitors played a factor, Ponton said that Damon's ultimate fall had more to do with the product that the restaurants were putting out there. Mainly, the service and the menu left much to be desired.

"Competition started filling in the gaps and they were able to do, in my opinion, sports bars a lot better than Damon's, and there's a couple of reasons I think that Damon's ultimately failed," Ponton said. "Their service was notorious for being bad. And when people went into sports bars and they had the ribs, that's all they had. Ribs were their thing, the onion loaf, it was just the star of the show for a while. And then people discovered chicken wings, and chicken wings and beer went real well together."

"I think the competition, the poor service and they never really changed up their menu. They kept kind of the same menu all the time which

large companies tend to do. I think that was really their downfall. The service was their downfall."

From Rapp's perspective, he never lost his enjoyment of Damon's. Instead, it was more that there became other options that offered a similar product, and that things like promotion and advertising could have played a factor in being passed by similar locations.

All that came to a head when he went to a Damon's within the past decade expecting to see the same place he had watched football with his friends and the Simpson trial in a back room.

"They kind of turned us on to a good thing and then suffered from it, because all these other restaurants were like 'Yeah, we're doing that too,'" Rapp said. "We'll put memorabilia all over the walls, it's going to be loud, we're going to have big, tall, cold beers. We have all these screens, and that became the thing to do if you wanted to go out to watch sports, and they kind of became the dinosaur somehow."

"It was almost sad really because it was still a good place. I remember going in Damon's 10 years ago or whatever thinking, 'There's hardly anyone in here.'"

Today, there are no Damon's in the state of Ohio, and there are only two locations still up and functioning today. One is in Hazleton, Pa., over six hours away from Columbus. The other is even farther in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

But despite Damon's being almost completely phased out of the sports bar scene, the impact that the restaurant has had is obvious. And sports bars aren't done changing. Ponton said that he has seen a big shift in demographics after years of businesses putting all of the emphasis on the adult male audience.

"I think sports bars have evolved to a fun gathering place, and even more, they're trying to gear towards the female as well as the male," Ponton said. "Not me, but sports bars in general, it used to be we don't care about the girls. They

don't drink beer and they don't stay for hours. But I think that's one of the positives of the evolution of sports bars is they're catering more and more to women."

Another change has come thanks to something out of the restaurant's power. The COVID-19 pandemic shut down in-person dining for months, which hurt the sales of all dine-in locations, including sports bars.

But a long-term positive has come out of it, according to Powers, and that is the rise of carry-out orders that should last past when this pandemic is over.

"There's a section of people that didn't do carry-out business ever with many restaurants that are now doing it, that are enjoying that," Powers said. "If there's a silver lining of COVID, it is that our carry-out numbers are high, and I expect them to stay pretty high, not as high as they are now, but we're going to get increased carry-out business which means more open seats in the restaurant."

"I wouldn't say it's a win-win, but I think there is a benefit for all restaurants, and that is the carry-out business is going to be part of the norm, where I don't necessarily think it was in the past. We've been very fortunate. Our numbers have been OK, we've been able to survive and initially we were terrified like everybody else was, but if you asked me a year ago, if we'd be where we are right now when all this hits. I would take this."

Sports bars have changed plenty since the creation of Damon's 42 years ago, and though the restaurant has barely stuck around to see it through, Ponton thinks that these changes have been for the better.

"It's been totally positive," Ponton said. "I think it's totally evolving, and I think the variety of food and the variety of drinks and beers and alcohols make it even better. And I think the sports bars are really going to thrive once this COVID thing comes to an end."

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# Former Safety Sensibaugh Passes Away At 72

By MARK REA  
BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Mike Sensibaugh, the undersized safety with an oversized sense of humor who remains Ohio State's career leader in interceptions more than 50 years after he played his final game for the Buckeyes, died March 31 in suburban St. Louis after suffering an apparent heart attack. He was 72.

Sensibaugh, who played eight seasons in the NFL with the Kansas City Chiefs and St. Louis Cardinals, had reportedly been battling dementia for the past several years.

"We lost a great, great player and a great, great teammate," former OSU quarterback Rex Kern told BSB. "Baugh was a guy who would do anything for you – on the field or off the field. I know he had been struggling the last few years, but he never lost his sense of humor."

Sensibaugh joined such future stars as Kern, John Brockington, Jack Tatum and Jim Stillwagon as members of the 1967 recruiting class that became known as the "Super Sophs" when they helped Ohio State win an undisputed national championship in 1968. The class won 27 of 29 games, outscored their opponents by a 996-363 margin, and captured three Big Ten titles as well as a pair national championships.

On a defense that featured bruising punishers the likes of Stillwagon at middle guard and Tatum as a roving linebacker/defensive back, the 6-0, 187-pound Sensibaugh managed to fade into the shadows – until crunch

time. From his safety position, he was equally responsible for run support and pass coverage, and he seemed to excel at both.

"He was a great play diagnostician and a devastating tackler," Woody Hayes once said of Sensibaugh. "He was particularly adept at studying backfield actions and the movements of the quarterback. Because of this, he was rarely fooled on a run-pass situation."

Hayes offered his team's 1969 victory against Purdue as an example.

With Ohio State holding a 14-0 lead midway through the first quarter, Purdue QB Mike Phipps tried to get the ball to one of his favorite targets, 6-2, 220-pound tight end Ashley Bell, who would go on to catch 11 touchdown passes that season.

Unfortunately for the Boilermakers, Sensibaugh jumped in front of Bell as the pass arrived, and the OSU safety returned the interception 25 yards to the Purdue 6. One play later, Kern ran into the end zone for a touchdown, and the Buckeyes went on to record a 42-14 romp.

Sensibaugh had another interception in that game and totaled nine for the 1969 season to establish a new single-season record at OSU. That mark was tied by Craig Cassady in 1975, but Sensibaugh's career total of 22 interceptions remains a program record.

Not bad for a guy who was originally recruited out of Lockland High School near Cincinnati to play quarterback. Sensibaugh, who once ran for touchdowns of 40, 50 and 80 yards in the first quarter of a high school game, was being heavily recruited by long-

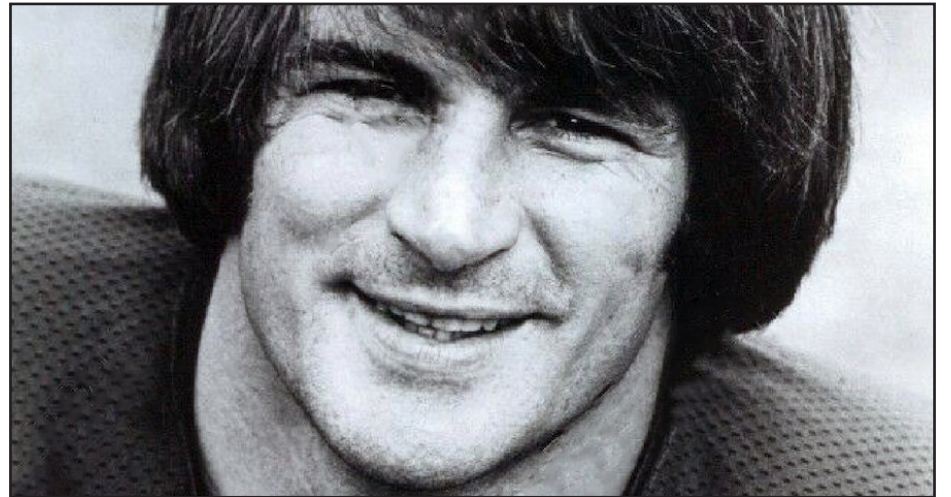


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**GONE TOO SOON – Former Ohio State safety Mike Sensibaugh (1968-70) passed away on March 31 at the age of 72.**

time Florida head coach Ray Graves. But when Hayes promised a chance to compete for the starting quarterback job at Ohio State, Sensibaugh was sold.

Hayes later forgot that promise as he did similar pledges to several other members of that '67 recruiting class. Tatum was originally signed as a running back as was future wide receiver Bruce Jankowski, while All-America tight end Jan White began his OSU career as a wide receiver.

"When we started out as freshmen, Baugh, Mace (Ron Maciejowski) and I would take turns taking snaps," Kern said. "Two of us would take the snaps in practice, and on that particular day, the third guy would play defense. Well, one day Baugh went over to play defense and we never saw him again."

Sensibaugh went on to win All-Big Ten honors during his junior and senior seasons and was named first-team All-America in 1970. He had at least one interception in 18 of the 29 games in which he played at Ohio State, at one time stringing together seven straight games with at least one pick.

"I'm proud of the (career interception) record," Sensibaugh said in 1993. "To be honest, though, I wasn't sure I was ever going to get much of a chance to play at Ohio State much less come away with all those interceptions."

The opening game of the 1968 season resulted in a 35-14 victory against SMU, a game in which the Mustangs threw the ball 76 times, still a single-game record for an Ohio State opponent. The Buckeyes picked off five of those passes – including Sensibaugh's first career pick on SMU's initial possession – but the performance evidently didn't win any points with the defensive backs coach at the time.

"There were five defensive backs (in the rotation), and our defensive backs coach, Lou Holtz, used us against each other," Sensibaugh remembered in 2006. "After our first game, he said he couldn't find me on film, so he benched me. Later in the year, in the Iowa and Michigan games, I wasn't used as a starter, either. I don't think Holtz liked me. So, going into the Rose Bowl, I wasn't sure if I would get to play that much."

Sensibaugh not only started the Rose Bowl against defending national champion USC, but he was one of the defensive stars for the Buckeyes. In addition to stopping Heisman Trophy winner O.J. Simpson twice at the goal line in the second quarter, solo tackles that led to the Trojans being forced to settle for an early field goal, Sensibaugh grabbed a fourth-quarter interception and

returned it 22 yards. He also punted seven times for 319 yards, and Ohio State clinched the national championship with a convincing 27-16 victory. The 319 punting yards set a program bowl record that stood until Brent Bartholomew broke it with 337 yards in the 1996 Citrus Bowl loss to Tennessee.

After his college career, Sensibaugh was an eighth-round draft choice of the Chiefs in the 1971 NFL draft. He played seven games as a backup during his rookie season and then moved into the starting lineup in 1972 and led the AFC with eight interceptions. He played five seasons in Kansas City before being traded to St. Louis, where he joined former OSU teammate Jim Otis as a member of the Cardinals. Although he never made a Pro Bowl, Sensibaugh was one of the league's top ball hawks, finishing his career with 27 interceptions (two of which he returned for touchdowns) and 12 fumble recoveries.

## Fun-Loving Teammate

In addition to his playing prowess, Sensibaugh had an outgoing personality and a wit to match.

"I just used to laugh at the mere mention of his name," Kern said. "We used to have a locker next to one another, and that son of a gun ... he would steal my clothes. Defensive practices would always be over before the offense, and by the time I got back to the locker room, all my clothes were gone. Baugh would take them and hide them. One time, I never did get them back. For all I know, he might have sold them."

Making an extra buck was a common theme for Sensibaugh.

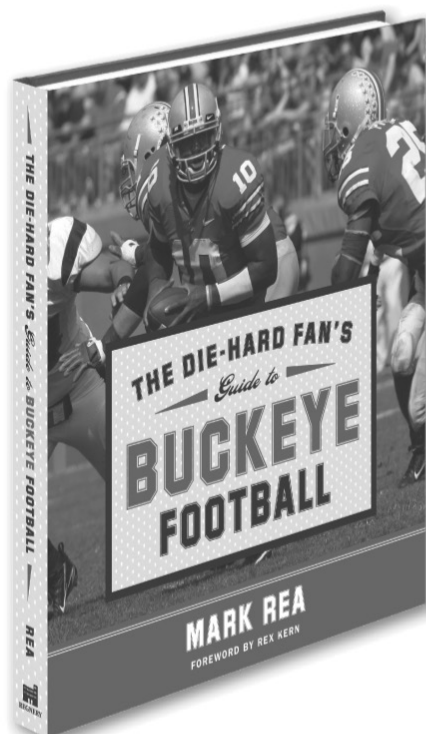
"There was a time when he came to me and asked if I would sign a helmet for some guy," Kern said. "Baugh tells me, 'If you sign it, I think I can get \$100 and then I'll split it with you.' Well, of course, I don't know what would have happened if we had gotten caught, but anyway, we got the helmet out of the locker room somehow and I signed it."

"Sometime later, a guy comes up to me after a game and says, 'I really appreciate you signing that helmet for me, and I just wanted you to know that I would have paid \$350 for it instead of just \$250.' I thought, 'Hey, wait a minute. I think I got fleeced.' Of course, when I went back to Baugh about it, he swore the guy was lying. Of course, he had a big smile on his face at the time."

"That's how I'll always remember him – as a fun-loving guy who was a great teammate, a great friend and a great family man. I'm sure going to miss him."

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# OSU Sweeps Indiana, The Big Ten's Top Team

Ohio State baseball had been on an up-and-down run of form since BSB last published, until its four-game weekend series with Indiana from April 2-4, which saw the Buckeyes, who entered the series at 8-7, bulldoze the Hoosiers, who entered the series at 11-3 and atop the Big Ten.

## FROM THE STRETCH

Patrick Mayhorn

The Buckeyes swept Indiana in the four-game series, their first series sweep of the year and easily the most impressive thing on the quickly growing résumé for Greg Beals' squad. Ohio State rode dominant pitching performances from Garrett Burhenn, Seth Lonsway, Jack Neely and Will Pfennig along with a burst of offense to the excellent showing over the weekend, improving to 12-7 in the process.

Burhenn took the mound in game one on April 2 and delivered a gem, throwing six innings and allowing two runs on three hits while striking out five batters. Patrick Murphy filled in as Burhenn's relief for two innings, walking two batters but striking out three. Closer T.J. Brock closed out the 3-2 win with two strikeouts in the ninth inning for his fifth save of the season.

Lonsway was the star on April 3, a double-header day for the Hoosiers and Buckeyes. He threw a complete-game two-hitter and notched 17 strikeouts in a 6-0 victory for Ohio State in game two, before Neely, Griffan Smith and Brock combined to pitch the 5-2 win in game three.

Though Pfennig's pitching was more than enough in game four, it was the Buckeye offense that shone brightest, led by infielder Zach Dezenzo. Dezenzo had an excellent weekend in general, batting .533 on the series, and capped it with four hits in the final game, none of which were more important than his walk-off single in the bottom of the ninth inning to give the Buckeyes a 4-3 victory.

"I was really confident going into that at-bat because I've been hitting the ball so hard," said Dezenzo. "He threw me a really good slider on the first pitch and I took it. I was sitting fastball and got one, and put a good swing on it. It was such a good feeling."

The Buckeyes will take the field next for a three-game series against Michigan in Ann Arbor from April 9-11.

### Kern's Emergence Well-Earned

Ohio State freshman outfielder Kade Kern drew quite the crowd of college coaches during his three seasons as a phenom in Archbold, Ohio, and for good reason.

Kern filled up box scores and lit up scoreboards for the Bluestreaks, batting .406 and notching 22 doubles, five triples, 81 RBI and 77 runs scored while serving as a constant fielding force in the outfield during his high school career. His performance drew the eyes of all of the top programs in the Midwest and earned Kern quite a bit of recognition in the process.

By the time he graduated in 2020, he had been named the Ohio Baseball Gatorade Player of the Year and the Ohio Division III Position Player of the Year, selected twice as a member of the Prep Baseball Reports (PBR) All-Ohio first team, the All-NWOAL (Northwest Ohio Athletic League) first team and the OHSCA (Ohio High School Coaches Association) second team, along with inclusion as a 2019 Rawlings Perfect

Game All-American.

To say that the 6-0, 195-pounder was highly decorated may be an understatement. Baseball recruiting rankings are not as prominent as those in football or basketball, but the lists that are available almost exclusively declared Kern one of the best players in Ohio. The college attention that came with that praise was only natural, but it still signified a life's goal nearly accomplished for Kern.

"I've been into baseball ever since I was a little kid," Kern told BSB. "My mom played college softball, my dad played college baseball, so I just kind of grew up in the sport. It's been my goal to play at (the college) level ever since I've been a little kid. Baseball was always my favorite sport to play, so I always worked extra hard at it. This has been the goal for me since the beginning."

Although Kern drew offers and interest from some of the top schools in the region, something clicked for him when Ohio State extended an offer to the born-and-raised Buckeye fan during his junior season.

"Oh, it was just a great feeling," Kern said. "I was always a Buckeye fan growing up, and that was definitely a dream offer to receive. It was something that I was very excited about and humbled to have been able to receive."

It didn't take long for Kern to recognize that he had no interest in continuing his career anywhere else. He announced his pledge to Ohio State on Sept. 3, 2018, and completely shut his recruitment down, focusing entirely on closing out his high school career and getting to Columbus.

"It was a little bit of everything – the facilities, coaches, players, just the family," Kern said. "I've always been a Buckeye fan, so that was the start of it. Then Coach (Greg) Beals, he was my favorite coach out of all the coaches I had talked to because I liked his personality. I like how he coaches. Then coming on a visit down here, I liked the brotherhood that all the guys had and just how they run the program here."

Kern lost the opportunity to close out his high school career on top because of the coronavirus pandemic that shut down every major sport in America – right around the time that Archbold was set to begin its 2020 campaign – but he's picking up right where he left off with the Buckeyes. He found his way into the starting lineup for Ohio State to open the season, a spot that he's held onto throughout the early stretch of the year despite his lack of experience. For Kern, any chance to get back onto the field is one that he's more than happy to take, given the circumstances of the last year.

"Oh, it was ton of fun," Kern said of getting back onto the field. "With COVID, it was definitely a big setback and a long wait for that with no season last year. It's really just been preparation all last year for this moment. To finally be able to get out there and experience it was great. It was definitely nerve-racking at first, but it was a ton of fun."

Although Kern would still be enjoying himself even if he was only seeing the field in spots, the Buckeye freshman has looked like anything but a first-year player through the opening stretch of Ohio State's season. As of press time, he was first on the team in batting average at .338, first in on-base percentage at .405, third in slugging (.500) and first in RBI with 16. His best performance came on opening day, when he went 5 of 6 batting for a double, a triple and a trio of singles in a showing that he credits with helping him settle down and get into the groove of the college game – something he's still working through.

"It definitely helped," Kern said. "You never know what to expect in your first few games, so

to be able to go out there and have a good first game definitely kind of helped ease the nerves a little bit. Being a freshman, it's nerve-racking going out there every game. Every game I go out there, it's just a little less then a little less pressure I'm feeling. I'm really adjusting to that."

Kern said that the early hot start didn't exactly catch him off guard but that it's not something he could have possibly expected, either, which his head coach echoed in an interview with BSB while heaping praise on his rising star.

"Well, it's a little bit of both there," Beals said when asked if the Buckeye staff expected this hot start from Kern or if they were caught off guard. "I mean, we were very excited about Kade in the recruiting process and when he was coming in. He had a slow start in the fall because of COVID protocols, all of our freshmen did, just not having normal training in the fall semester. It slowed down the development of our personnel a little bit. But Kade Kern is a diligent worker and put a lot of work in and made sure that he was ready. We knew he was talented, but it's hard to say that a guy is ever going to start as fast as he has."

The hot start makes sense, even if it was difficult for Kern or his coaches to predict. Kern pays an immense amount of attention to his preparation both in the offseason and in the flow of the regular season, be it in strength training, batting practice or even the more granular pitch studying and vision training. Youth or not, Kern was ready to play at the college level when he arrived at Ohio State.

"Honestly, I think my greatest ability would be my preparation," Kern said. "I pride myself on that and I always come in prepared for every situation. I think I prepare myself more than most players would and work harder than most

players would. That just helps my overall game in every aspect. It's just my preparation."

"There's a bunch of people involved with that – nutritionists, strength coaches, hitting coaches, my whole coaching staff here. There are a lot of people that have helped me figure out a preparation plan, a way to prepare and a way to be ready for games."

There's a secret weapon here, too: Kern is an excellent golfer. It's not baseball preparation in the traditional sense, but he sees a lot of parallels between the sports both physically and mentally.

"The swings definitely are very similar, but I think the biggest factor that I can take away for golf is the mental aspect of it," Kern said. "Golf can be a difficult sport and frustrating. So can baseball at times when you're batting. I think being able to calm myself down in tough situations, that's what I take away from golf."

As Kern gets deeper into his career in Columbus and more comfortable with each passing game, he plans to rely heavily on that preparation that's gotten him this far. He's quick to acknowledge that he has professional aspirations like anyone who reaches the level he has, but he's even quicker to embrace the goals of the team.

"I want to win Big Ten championships," Kern said. "I want to go to Omaha each year. That's a goal we all have. I want to be a great team player for all my guys and just keep continuing to get better and better every game."

"I just work as hard as I can and hope for the best outcome. The sky is always the limit for all of us. Obviously, I'm working towards a goal like that and I want to perform to my best, but that's something you can't expect. You just work hard and hope that it happens."

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# Liddell Still Has Option To Return To Buckeyes

Ohio State sophomore forward E.J. Liddell finished a tumultuous month when he announced March 31 that he would enter his name into the NBA draft, though the door is not closed on him returning to Columbus.

## COURT REPORT

Craig Merz

His announcement came a week after he held a video conference with the media to discuss the hateful social media attacks he received following the second-seeded Buckeyes' stunning 75-72 overtime loss to No. 15 seed Oral Roberts in the first round of the West Regional on March 19.

Liddell has become the face in the movement to push back against those who post vile and racist comments at college athletes.

He was victimized hours after the Oral Roberts game – as described in the March 27 issue of BSB – during which he scored 23 points and grabbed 14 rebounds but made the mistake of missing free throws down the stretch. Liddell reposted the derogatory comments on his Twitter account and received immediate support from the university, teammates, fans and other athletes.

"I just wanted to use my voice a little bit," Liddell said of his reasons for speaking out. "I've been quiet about it, and I just keep pushing because I have pretty tough skin when it comes to criticism. But that wasn't constructive criticism – it was just brutal, hard-core. It just didn't sit right with me."

The rants included racial slurs and an "I hope you die."

A police investigation is still ongoing, Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann said March 24, and there has been no further update.

It was during Liddell's Q and A with the media that he was asked about his plans for next season and if they involved the NBA.

"I'm just focusing on getting back into my regular life, getting a little more social, getting back to my video games," he said. "I'm giving everything an option. Hopefully, I'll get to go home and see my family again soon and we'll discuss things then."

Whether his decision to declare for the draft was related to the online attacks he received is unknown but who could blame a person for opting to get paid if he or she is going to be subject to the abuse caused by playing a game?

"People act out of emotion and just don't think (athletes) probably see those types of messages, because they feel like we're on a bigger platform than them," Liddell said. "They don't even want a response. The problem is that is not OK, not only to athletes but to people in general."

There is a good possibility that Liddell will return for his junior season. The same scenario played out for sophomore forward Kaleb Wesson following the 2018-19 season. NBA rules allow a player to declare for the draft, hire an agent and go through the process of workouts with the pro teams while still retaining eligibility.

That's what Wesson did, and the feedback he got was that he was not ready for the NBA after two years in college and would likely be selected late or not at all during the two rounds of the draft.

Wesson took the suggestions and criticisms to heart and came back for his junior season about 40 pounds lighter and more mobile. He led the Buckeyes in points (14.0) and rebounds (9.3) in the 2019-20 season that was cut short by

the COVID-19 pandemic. He turned pro after the season and is playing in the NBA's G League.

C.J. Walker, a senior guard for the Buckeyes this season, also declared after his junior season before returning.

Liddell (6-7, 240) has until July 19 to withdraw his name, 10 days before the NBA draft.

"The success I've had wouldn't have been possible without the support of my teammates, coaches and family who have supported me along this amazing journey," he said in his social media announcement. "Choosing to play for Coach Holtmann and The Ohio State University has been one of the best decisions I've made in my life, and I thank God for every opportunity given to me. ...

"Reaching the NBA has always been a dream of mine ever since I started playing basketball with my first YMCA team. Timing is everything, trust I won't rush."

He was a first-team All-Big Ten selection this season while averaging 16.2 points and 6.7 rebounds per game. Liddell shot 47.4 percent from the floor, including 33.8 percent on three-pointers while the Buckeyes went 21-10 overall and 12-8 in the Big Ten.

Liddell made the All-Big Ten tournament team with 15.3 points, 5.5 rebounds and a 20-of-24 performance from the line (83.3 percent) in four games. OSU lost the final 91-88 in overtime to Illinois.

He started playing with more consistency as the season went on by scoring in double figures the final 12 games, including three with 20 or more points.

That contrasted with the Jan. 13 game vs. Northwestern, when he missed all six field-goal attempts and had six points in 24:25 of playing time, and with his seven points in 25:07 against Maryland on Feb. 8.

Although there appear to be only two options for Liddell – stay in the draft or return for a junior season – there is another choice, although he has given no indication that he might seek a transfer.

However, the ease with which players are being allowed to move from one school to another – without having to sit out a season per transfer rules – means anything is possible, especially in his case.

It is doubtful the NCAA would deny him immediate eligibility if he decided to leave the program because of the social media attacks. Remember, Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields received a waiver from Georgia after a Bulldogs baseball player directed a racial slur toward him and Fields said he did not feel comfortable there.

Again, Liddell has said nothing about a move, and he seems comfortable in his role as a leader for the Buckeyes as evidenced by his statements concerning the attacks on him.

"It definitely bothered me a little bit just because I go out there with a smile on my face every game just ready to play basketball," he said. "Just for people to feel so ill about me having a couple turnovers or missing a one-and-one free throw just doesn't sit right with me because I have feelings, too."

He also discussed the matter on CNN and "Good Morning America" because he said other athletes, particularly Big Ten basketball players such as Michigan State's Rocket Watts, Purdue's Trevion Williams and D'Mitrik Trice of Wisconsin have gone through similar experiences.

"I feel like it had to be said by someone, honestly, and I'm happy I can be, I guess, the so-called spokesperson for this," Liddell said, "because I've received messages like this for a while and I just feel as if it was time to say something, honestly."

"A lot of athletes are supposed to be looked at as just entertainers, and we're supposed to be

## OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

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

tough always and show people that things don't get to us. But sometimes it really does. I know some athletes take it different than me.

"I just look at it as my family, I have a little brother, a little sister, a mom, dad, big sister and a whole bunch of other family that supports me. I definitely wouldn't want them to be talked about like that or talked to like that. And I don't want anybody in my family to talk to people like that. I just want to be treated how a person wants to be treated."

## Coming And Going

The Buckeyes gained and lost a guard within 24 hours as they were active in the transfer portal.

On March 30, Penn State senior Jamari Wheeler said on Twitter that he would join OSU. Wheeler (6-1, 170) was named to the conference all-defensive team for a second straight season in 2020-21.

A day later, senior Musa Jallow (6-5, 201) said he planned to transfer from the Buckeyes. The fourth-year junior made five starts out of 26 appearances this season. He started and tied a season-high with 32 minutes vs. Oral Roberts.

Jallow averaged 2.9 points and 2.2 rebounds this season, and in 94 career games he had 2.8 points and 2.2 rebounds a game. He missed the 2019-20 season after undergoing surgery on his right ankle.

Wheeler comes to Columbus by taking advantage of the NCAA rule that gives players an extra season of eligibility because of the pandemic. Last season he averaged 6.8 points, 4.2 rebounds and 3.5 assists.

"I look forward to joining the family and fighting for a Big Ten title and national championship!" he posted on Twitter.

He chose Ohio State over South Carolina, TCU and UNLV as well as the ability to stay at Penn State for a fifth season.

"I just felt like it was the best fit for me and the things that I was looking for at my next school," he said to 247Sports. "They had it all, and I just wanted somewhere that plays my play style and gives me a chance to go to March Madness and compete for championships."

"Their message was with all the great pieces they have, the great guys and talent, and with a need for the point guard position that I was the piece that could help take them to the next level."

Ohio State assistant coach Jake Diebler gets credit for snaring Wheeler.

"I built a really good relationship with Coach Jake," Wheeler said. "When I was talking to my old coaches, they knew him and everything I heard from different coaches were all good about him and the whole coaching staff so it made the decision easier."

Wheeler will help ease the loss of Walker, who will not seek a sixth year. That gives the Buckeyes one available scholarship for the 2021-22 season no matter if senior forward Kyle Young opts for another season. If he comes back, he will not count against the scholarship limit.

## On Board

Ohio State, Cal, Florida and Seton Hall will compete in the 2021 Rocket Mortgage Fort Myers (Fla.) Tip-Off during Thanksgiving Week.

Games will be played at Suncoast Credit Union Arena on the campus of Florida SouthWestern State College with dates and times to be determined.

Ohio State would have played Florida in the second round of this year's NCAA Tournament if it had beaten Oral Roberts, which also beat the Gators.

Looking ahead to the 2022-23 season, Ohio State will play in the 39th edition of the Maui Jim Maui Invitational on Nov. 21-23 at Lahaina Civic Center on the island of Maui.

The other schools are Arkansas, Arizona, Cincinnati, Creighton, Louisville, San Diego State and Texas Tech. The programs have a combined 237 NCAA Tournament appearances, 36 Final Fours and eight national championships. Four of the schools are ranked in the top 35 all-time winningest programs: Arkansas, Cincinnati, Louisville and Ohio State.

Seven schools have won NCAA championships after competing in the invitational earlier in the season.

## Matta Is Back

Thad Matta, the winningest coach in Ohio State basketball history, was hired at Indiana for the newly created position of associate athletic director for basketball administration on March 28. The announcement came in conjunction with former Hoosiers star Mike Woodson being named head coach to replace Archie Miller.

There were reports that Matta had been considered for the head coach position but could not pass a physical because of back problems that plagued him in his later years at Ohio State and were cited by Matta as a reason for his dismissal in June 2017.

Matta, 53, was brought on board at the behest of IU athletic director Scott Dolson, who made the chain of command clear.

"Mike Woodson is 100 percent the head coach," Dolson said to the Daily Hoosier. "He reports to me. He's the final decision-maker based on my final approval of basketball decisions. Thad reports to me and is a key resource for me and for Mike."

"In my mind I started thinking about this team and really based on what (Woodson) was asking me for and what he needed and then knowing in my conversations with Thad, his basketball mind, his knowledge of the business speaks for itself. I just started formulating this plan."

Woodson said he likes having someone of Matta's stature and knowledge as a sounding board.

"This is the first time I've had an opportunity to sit and talk with Thad. Again, great basketball mind," he said. "My ego has always been intact in terms of being able to accept great basketball minds and what they are thinking."

Matta had a 337-123 (73.3 percent) record in 13 seasons at Ohio State. He won five Big Ten regular-season titles and four conference tournament titles. The Buckeyes were in the NCAA Tournament nine times during his tenure, and they reached two Final Fours, including losing to Florida in the 2007 final.

In 17 seasons at Xavier, Butler and OSU, he had a record of 439-154 (74.0 percent).



# Kellogg's Output In Prep Title Game Still Special

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Before the internet, there was this thing called a newspaper. Before YouTube, people got sports highlights from the local TV sports anchors.

And before LeBron James there was Clark Kellogg, the player who became a legend because of a Saturday afternoon game in March 42 years ago that is still discussed whenever and wherever the Ohio high school state basketball championships are held.

"You'll find more people who talked like they were at the game than were actually there," said longtime reporter and former Buckeye Sports Bulletin editor Jim Wharton. "Sort of like the Snow Bowl in 1950 and Ohio State football."

What Kellogg did as a senior at Cleveland St. Joseph was score a championship game-record 51 points in St. John Arena on March 24, 1979. The mark still stands.

It was a remarkable performance, but what was maybe more amazing was that it came in a losing effort by the Vikings.

"What would that record mean if they had won it too? It probably would be even greater," said Mark Podolski, a reporter for The News-Herald in Willoughby, Ohio.

The game takes on even greater context now because the winning team that day in the Class AAA (big school) title game was Columbus East, 74-65.

One of the stars for the Tigers was Granville Waiters, the 6-11 senior center who would soon become a teammate of Kellogg at Ohio State for coach Eldon Miller.

Waiters passed away at age 60 on March 23, causing many to recall that famous prep championship game. Kellogg reflected on his relationship with "Granny," which included the obligatory needling about the outcome of that game.

"He always had the up on me, that one leg, because I have the state championship single-game record and he got the trophy because they beat us in that game, and as much as we loved each other, he'd always jab me about that on occasion," Kellogg said March 26 on "The Dan Patrick Show." "That's one of the fond memories of my former roommate and good friend."

## Mythic Performance

As mentioned earlier by Wharton, who covered prep sports at the time for The Columbus Dispatch and later the Newark Advocate, everybody claimed to be at the game.

The actual attendance of 14,055 was well above the listed capacity of 13,276.

That wasn't surprising, according to Podolski, another BSB alum. People were drawn to Kellogg and St. Joseph in much the same way as LeBron and his Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary teams were an attraction some two decades later.

"He was LeBron before there was LeBron," Podolski said. "We covered (Kellogg) all the time back then at The News-Herald, and looking at old photos there had to be people on top of people at his games. There wasn't an empty seat in the bleachers anywhere."

"Think about all the pre-internet era. You can't get a quick little video of him doing whatever. You had to be there. You had to see him in person. It's one of those things where you hear a story but do you believe it? You've got to see it in person to believe it."

Kellogg was a 6-8 forward who played

like a guard with his quickness and slick moves. St. Joseph coach Bob Straub in 1979 compared him to then-Michigan State star Magic Johnson.

"He can shoot better than Earvin," Straub said, using Johnson's first name. "I've never seen anybody in my days as good as Clark."

Kellogg averaged 27.2 points as a senior. "He was our best ball handler, our best passer, our best inside man, outside man. He could do it all," said Mike Moran, an assistant coach for St. Joseph at the time. He would later become head coach there and later at John Carroll University.

"The thing about Clark is he's a better person off the floor than on the floor. He's a remarkable young man. Well, he's still young to me."

Kellogg was a rock star among high school players. Moran remembers coaches such as Digger Phelps of Notre Dame either calling the school to talk to Kellogg or dropping by for recruiting visits.

"There were a lot of schools that put on the full-court press," Moran said. "Clark was a big celebrity. People said they loved the opportunity to watch this kid play. Every week it was like that. Tickets would go on sale Monday for a Friday game, and they were sold out Monday morning."

As Kellogg entered his final weekend of games for St. Joseph, his college decision was between Ohio State and Michigan.

## Tourney Time

Kellogg proved that he was unfazed by the pressure of the tournament when he posted 35 points, had 14 rebounds and blocked six shots in a 73-56 win over Cincinnati LaSalle in the semifinal on March 23, the same day that East defeated Akron Central-Hower 69-54 despite 35 turnovers to set up the final.

Although Kellogg's two-game point total of 86 (43.0 average) was impressive, it was nowhere near the record for the tournament, which encompasses the semifinal and final games.

Jerry Lucas, another OSU great, scored a tourney-record 53 points for Middletown in the 1956 semifinal against Cleveland East Tech and 44 in the final, a 91-69 win over Canton McKinley, for 97 points (48.5). In fact, for five career tournament games, he averaged 39.2 points.

By comparison, James scored 32 points in back-to-back games in 2002.

East was playing for its fifth title, first since 1969, while St. Joseph was in its first final four thanks to the 17-year-old Kellogg.

His father, Clark Kellogg Sr., said to Wharton after the semifinal that his son was "a good player. There's no use saying anything but that. Clark had a great game today. He told me the other day that the state title is in the books for him."

Wharton's article for the Dispatch also had a quote from former Ohio State All-American Bill Hosket on the younger Kellogg, "He has a tremendous amount of court awareness. He knows where everybody on the court is."

Hosket and many others in St. John Arena were hoping that Kellogg would continue his career the following season on the same court, and the elder Kellogg might have given a hint when he was overheard saying of his son, "He's a born-and-raised Buckeye."

## Great Isn't Good Enough

The championship game was a dream for

Kellogg but a nightmare for the rest of the team, yet he almost pulled off a Hollywood ending.

A balanced East led 54-26 at the half, but St. Joseph (which was merged by the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland in 1990 to become Villa Angela-St. Joseph) rallied to within nine late on 34 second-half points by Kellogg.

"We were down and he just took over," Moran said. "His teammates were smart enough to get the ball to the right guy. He singlehandedly tried to bring us back. He was poetry in motion that's for sure."

Kellogg was double-and triple-teamed. "The biggest key in our victory was that we didn't have to worry about the other four players," East (22-4) coach Larry Walker said afterward. "They rely on him so much."

East's Kevin Castleman scored 17 of his 25 points in the first quarter when the Tigers led 26-13. Waiters finished with 15 points and 15 rebounds, and Roy Berger added 10 points.

"Granville was a rail at that time," Moran said. "The other guy, Castleman, he had a whale of a game. There was a wealth of talent out there, but I don't think anybody would disagree with this: (Kellogg) was the cream of the crop out there. There's no doubt about it."

But St. Joseph (23-3) proved to be a one-man gang. Kellogg made 21 of 42 field goals, sank 9 of 16 free throws and grabbed 24 rebounds. No one else on the team scored more than six points or had more than five rebounds.

His brother, Eric, was 1 for 14 from the floor, and Vikings not named Clark Kellogg shot 3 for 36 (8.3 percent) for a team total of 24 of 78 (30.7 percent).

There was a 10-minute stretch in the first and second quarters when they were outscored 40-9.

"The first half was kind of rough on us," Straub said at the time. "(East) came out pretty frisky. Also, our shots weren't going in and we were only getting one."

Kellogg had 15 of the Vikings' 17 points in the third quarter, but that only cut the deficit to 64-43. He then scored their next 15 points to pull to within 68-58 with 2:41 remaining but there would be no miracle comeback.

"We took him out of the game with about 10 seconds left so he could get the ovation he deserved," Moran said. "That was probably the thing I most remember, the way he came out of the game and the crowd at St. John, both sides, stood up. They were in awe of what he did."

Kellogg afterward said he didn't notice. "They were standing up?" he asked the

reporters. "I guess I didn't see them. I had my head down. I guess I was kind of in a daze."

"Not winning it takes a little bit away from it. Not much, but it takes a little bit away."

The defeat still stung years later as he recounted to the Dispatch in 2010.

"I was crushed. I get emotional thinking about it now because I never (won) a state, Big Ten or (NBA) championship," Kellogg said.

He left Ohio State for the NBA after his junior season and was drafted by the Indiana Pacers. He played three full seasons before knee problems limited him to 23 games over the next three seasons until retiring in 1987. Today, of course, he is well known as a college basketball analyst.

## The Test Of Time

"LeBron is northeast Ohio, but LeBron is not Cleveland," Podolski said. "Up here Clark Kellogg is without question the flag bearer for not only high school basketball but all basketball."

"There's always the what-ifs if he didn't have bad knees in the NBA. You wonder what he could have done. To me that's what jumps out to me why that record and what he did in that (championship) game still resonates today."

The closest anyone has come to his 51 points in the final was 48 by former Ohio State player Jon Diebler for Upper Sandusky in the 2007 title game, an 87-85 loss to Dayton Dunbar.

"When people talk about Clark's game, they always mention that we didn't have the three-point line back then," Moran said. "I wonder what it would have been if there was the arc around the court. The only three-point play he made was when he got hammered taking a shot."

"Will it be broken? Probably, the way teams can get up and down the floor. I doubt a big guy will be able to do it, though, just because you don't find guys like that that can shoot the ball all that well from the perimeter."

Podolski said it could happen but there is a greater emphasis on defense and low-scoring games.

Of the eight teams in the four boys finals this year, Kellogg's 51 points would have bettered four of them and two others scored 56 and 52, respectively. The most points were 72 for Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary in Division II.

"Anything's possible when you've got a guy like Diebler, but that goes to show how great Clark was," Podolski said. "Back then he was so far ahead of what everybody was bringing."

Kellogg has the final words: "Just about all records are meant to be broken, and that will be, I'm sure."



Clark Kellogg

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# All-Big Ten Forward Juhasz Enters Transfer Portal

Junior forward Dorka Juhasz announced on Twitter on April 3 that she will be entering the transfer portal with two years of eligibility remaining.

"This year has been full of ups and downs," Juhasz wrote in the tweet. "I have faced many challenges that required an immense amount of faith and persistence. Our basketball season was cut short this year. As a basketball player, a postseason ban is one of the most difficult and disappointing things that can happen. Not being able to play in the tournaments and compete for the championships definitely left emptiness and sadness in my heart. Nevertheless, I'm proud of how my team and I handled the situation."

In the season prior, Juhasz tallied 13.2 points and 9.4 boards per game, shooting 47.6 percent from the field and 39.6 percent from three.

The decision to transfer leaves Ohio State short at the forward position, with Gabby Hutcherson, Rebeka Mikulasikova and Aaliyah Patty being the only forwards remaining on the roster. Tanaya Beacham, who transferred over from Toledo to play for the Buckeyes in 2020-21, was a senior but has not yet announced if she will be using her free year of eligibility to return to Ohio State next season.

## Harris Jumps At Head-Coaching Opportunity

On March 19, East Tennessee State officially announced Simon Harris as the ninth head coach in program history.

It is Harris' first career head-coaching job and comes just nine months after he joined Ohio State's coaching staff last July.

"I am so excited to welcome Coach Simon Harris as the next head coach of our ETSU women's basketball program," said ETSU athletic director Scott Carter. "His energy, incredible personality and tremendous basketball knowledge will provide the winning edge for the young women in our program. Coach Harris has built relationships throughout the country, and everyone that I have spoken with raves about his quality as a coach, but most importantly as a person. He is an authentic leader, and I am so proud that he is our coach."

"Energy. Personality. Tremendous basketball knowledge. Quality as a coach, but most importantly as a person." These are the things Carter had to say about the former Ohio State

## OSU Women's Basketball Signees

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

assistant, and they are the same things that both Patty and Hutcherson said about Harris in their one year of experience with him.

"He's very energetic. As a coach he was just motivating us," Patty told BSB. "He always wanted to win. He didn't like losing, which of course nobody does. But he was very passionate about us winning and getting us to do everything that we could to win. I would just say that was what he brought for us."

Hutcherson focused more on how personable Harris was as a coach and how much easier that made it for her to learn as a first-year player.

"Oh, (I developed under Harris) like an amazing amount," Hutcherson said. "I mean he was just a great coach. He's a person that you could talk to, a good person as well. He made it easy. He made it easier by not always coming at you as a coach, just as a person and being able to talk to you like you're another person instead of their player. He was good at that, and so it made things easier and helped me understand everything more."

Being the coach whom players can talk to is something that Harris has made a focal point in his mentality. But he told BSB it is something that holds weight for him in ways that expand past the basketball court.

"I think I emphasize it in life," Harris said. "I'm huge on being there for people if they need me. I graduated not too long ago. I was them, so I just think it's huge. I'm here to help people. I'm here to serve people. I'm here to listen to people and just be the conduit for them to get out in the world and thrive."

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said he viewed Harris' stint at Ohio State as "one more different experience before he tried to become a head coach just to further ready himself," so he was not surprised to see the former Dayton and N.C. State assistant part from the program so quickly.

As for why Harris wanted to come to the Buckeyes for that final piece of experience, he said the program speaks for itself. But Harris said it also had something to do with who is at the top of Ohio State's athletic department.

"I mean it's Ohio State. It is The Ohio State University" Harris said. "Coach McGuff in and of himself allowed me to operate as his right-hand man in so many things in order to actually have a tangible understanding of what this process is."

"I think a major thing in our discussions, especially for me, was coming and working for what I consider to be one of the most powerful men in college athletics who also looks like me. (Athletic director) Gene Smith was such a big appeal. I've been such an admirer of his from afar for so many years just growing up in college athletics. And the way that he goes about his business and he's so process-oriented and people-oriented."

With such a quick turnaround, there was bound to be some growing pains when Harris came to Ohio State, and Hutcherson said there were, but only small ones that were quickly fixed. She said that Harris had to gain a bit of an understanding for the type of personalities that were on the roster.

"I mean we're an interesting group of girls I would say," Hutcherson said. "Just adjusting to little things and the way we talk around each other or how we react to things. Stuff like that might have been an adjustment, but he did it quickly. I feel like he's had enough experience, and the teams he's coached are so diverse. He has all these people that he's coached before coming from different backgrounds, so none of it was really a big change for him. I feel like he adjusted well, and he adapted well."

McGuff was the last of five head coaches under whom Harris was an assistant, starting with Archie Miller as an assistant on the Dayton men's basketball team from 2011-14, then on Dayton's women's team from 2014-18 under Jim Jabir and Shauna Green before going back to his alma mater, N.C. State, under women's coach Wes Moore from 2018-20.

As a constant student of the game, Harris said having that many head coaches to look at for ideas and advice has been a big help for him in his coaching career.

"For me it's huge because I want to learn as much as possible," Harris said. "I genuinely don't think you can learn enough about the game of basketball. The best thing that I got was that all five people that I've worked under are just amazing with people."

Harris now moves on from Columbus to Johnson City, Tenn., for his first opportunity to be his own head of a program. His lone expectation for the team in year one is "to just do your best in all situations to the best of your ability."

ETSU finished last season with a 4-16 record, ending the regular season on a six-game losing

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

"Fulfilling my lifelong dreams both in basketball and in my education is still the number one priority for me. With that being said, after careful consideration and discussion with my family, I have decided to enter the transfer portal with two years of eligibility remaining."

Juhasz leaves Ohio State after her second straight season on the All-Big Ten first team. This past year, the 6-4 forward out of Pecs, Hungary, finished with 14.6 points and 11.1 rebounds per game. That rebound total was second in the Big Ten to Michigan's Naz Hillmon.

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streak. The Bucs did upset top-seeded Samford in the Southern Conference tournament before ultimately having their season end with a 75-64 loss to Wofford.

Harris is working to help build that program up, but his expectations for the Ohio State team he is leaving behind are much different heading into next season.

"I'm expecting a lot more wins," Harris said. "That roster is incredible, and the major thing is they're all really, really good kids – like in their own way, they're amazing kids. But on top of that, it was amazing to see how collected they were and together they were."

"We were all dealing with the pandemic obviously, but we were dealt a bigger blow during the course of the season (a self-imposed postseason ban), and the fact that they came out and competed at such a high rate every single game is just a testament to who they are."

## A Different Perspective

In the last edition of BSB, players spoke about the difficulties of playing through this past season, both regarding COVID and the postseason ban.

While their thoughts were generally more positive about playing the year out and getting that valuable experience, Patty had some different views.

When BSB asked if she was happy she was still able to play the season, Patty said she was not.

"At the end of the year, the main goal is to win an NCAA championship. So not being able to reach that goal, it was hard trying to find what we're playing for as a team," Patty said. "I definitely don't wish this feeling upon anybody. I mean I'm not happy I went through it, but I had to, so it just is what it is."

Among other things, Patty said that other factors that made it difficult included not having her family able to watch the games and the daily COVID testing at 7:15 a.m., which she said "drains your body."

But having all of that on top of the postseason ban made it Patty's most difficult season at Ohio State by a long shot, and she said it likely played a factor in Ohio State's late-season slide.

"I think it played a big part in it," Patty admitted. "I don't think it should have, but at the end of the day it did. Just knowing that your season is coming to an end, it's about to be over, you're out of the postseason. And as a junior and there being some seniors on the team who lost a postseason and only have a year left, I mean it was hard. But we tried to work through it. We did what we could. But the outcome wasn't what we wanted."

## 'Completely Unacceptable'

The last paper also had comments from McGuff and former Ohio State head coach Tara VanDerveer on the difference in conditions at the women's NCAA tournament compared to the men's.

Patty said that this disparity – which was shown in the food, workout facilities and gift bags, among other things – is a major issue that should not be taken lightly going forward.

"Honestly, it's completely unacceptable," Patty said. "There are those arguments and those people who say we don't make as much money, we're not that entertaining. But then you look at some of the lower colleges, who are still receiving more than us D-I females and it's just like, there's no excuse for it."

"I have a lot of friends that are down there in the tournament, and to hear that they're starving, they can't lift, the food isn't good, they're hungry – it's crazy. It shouldn't be like that. But all the attention to it on the media, I think it's brought it to some light, which is good. And

# Hoosiers, Wolverines Make History In Tournament

The Big Ten fared well in the NCAA tournament, amassing a combined 10-7 record, with four teams earning bids to the Sweet 16 in the process.

But it was not universal success for the conference across the board, with a pair of the Big Ten's teams faltering in the Round of 64. One of those was Michigan State, which entered the tournament with the lowest seed (No. 10) of any team in the conference.

The Spartans faced off against No. 7 seed Iowa State and fell short of pulling off the upset in a 79-75 defeat to the Cyclones. Michigan State trailed by seven heading into the fourth quarter but started the frame on a 9-2 run to tie the game at 65 before Iowa State ultimately regained the lead and held on the rest of the way.

The other opening-round defeat for the Big Ten came from Rutgers, which was upset as a No. 6 seed to No. 11 BYU. The Scarlet Knights could not continue the momentum they had at the end of the regular season into the Big Ten tournament, where they lost 73-62 to Iowa, and then into the NCAA tournament, where they fell to the Cougars 69-66.

Rutgers seemed to have the game in control, up 50-43 heading into the fourth quarter, but BYU outscored the Scarlet Knights 26-16 to steal the opening-round win. The Cougars were led by guard Paisley Harding, who hit 8 of 17 from the field and 4 of 9 from three for a team-high 28 points, despite turning the ball over nine times.

Of the five Big Ten teams that made it out of the first round, only one lost in the Round of 32, and that team was Northwestern. In the opening round, the No. 7 seed Wildcats smothered No. 10 UCF, forcing 20 Golden Knight turnovers on the way to a 62-51 victory. Guard Lindsay Pulliam led Northwestern with 25 points on 9-of-16 shooting.

From there, the Wildcats were tasked with No. 2 seed Louisville, which was coming off a 31-point rout of Marist in the round prior. But Northwestern was anything but intimidated, rolling out to a 25-10 lead by the end of the first quarter. That 15-point advantage shrank to 12 by halftime and was gone completely by the third quarter, with the teams tied at 40 heading into the fourth.

That was when Louisville pulled away, outscoring the Wildcats 22-13 to come away with the 62-53 victory. Northwestern's defense stumped the Cardinals, with Louisville shooting 35.8 percent from the field and committing 16 turnovers. But on the other end, the Wildcats went ice cold, scoring just 28 points in the final 30 minutes of the game. Jordan Hamilton led the way with 17 points for Northwestern, while Pulliam struggled mightily, hitting just 1 of 11 attempts from the field in the nine-point loss.

Four Big Ten teams made the Sweet 16, the most of any conference, but three of those teams failed to make it any further. The lowest seed left for the Big Ten was Michigan, which was a No. 6 seed and had a tough matchup on paper to open the tournament.

That matchup was against No. 11 Florida Gulf Coast, which had won 25 straight games and was led by former Ohio State guard Kierstan Bell. The Eagles cut the deficit to 64-61 early in the fourth quarter, but Michigan fully took over from there. The Wolverines ended the game on a 23-5 run to bury Florida Gulf Coast and move on, despite 25 points, five rebounds, four steals and three blocks from Bell. Michigan's Leigha Brown led all scorers with 28 points.

In the next round, it was Michigan's defense that stole the show against No. 3 Tennessee. The Volunteers shot 33.9 percent overall and turned it over 16 times during a lopsided 70-55 win for the Wolverines. Brown again led Michigan with 23 points, while Big Ten Player of the Year Naz Hillmon added 19 points and 15 rebounds in the victory.

The win gave the Michigan women's basketball program its first ever trip to the Sweet 16.

The Wolverines attempted to ride that momentum into a matchup against No. 2 Baylor and came close to doing exactly that, forcing the Bears, the No. 5 team in the last AP poll, into overtime tied at 63. To even

get there, Michigan had to outscore Baylor 23-16 in the fourth quarter, including a Hillmon basket with 15 seconds left to play to tie the game. The teams traded baskets most of the extra frame, but a three-point miss by Akiemreh Johnson at the end of overtime sealed the Wolverines' fate.

Iowa's exciting run to the Big Ten tournament final showed the potential that this high-scoring team had to beat almost anyone, and the Hawkeyes only solidified that in the NCAA tournament.

After an 87-72 victory over No. 12 seed Central Michigan in the first round thanks to a pair of 23-point performances from guard Caitlin Clark and forward Monika Czinano, Iowa was expected to have a tougher task ahead against No. 4 Kentucky.

Against the Wildcats, the No. 5 Hawkeyes jumped out to a 49-22 halftime lead and never looked back, demolishing Kentucky 86-72 in a game that was over before it really started. Clark scored 24 of her 35 points in the first half, outscoring Kentucky's entire team through the opening 20 minutes.

All of this led to a showdown between the two most exciting freshmen in the country: Clark and UConn guard Paige Bueckers, who was named AP Player of the Year. The duo combined for 39 points in the matchup (Clark 21, Bueckers 18), but they were not the only stars of the show. Iowa's McKenna Warnock put up 20, and UConn's Christyn Williams added 27 to help make up for subpar shooting performances from both freshmen (Clark 7 of 21, Bueckers 7 of 18).

In the end, it was the Huskies who pulled out a 92-72 win to advance to the Elite Eight in one of the most high-energy matchups of the entire tournament.

The last Big Ten team to fall in the Sweet 16 was Maryland, despite the Terrapins coming in as winners of their last 15 games since an 88-86 defeat to Ohio State on Jan. 25. No. 2 seed Maryland destroyed the likes of Mount St. Mary's (98-45) and Alabama (100-64) in the opening two rounds, outscoring the two opponents by a combined 198-109 while shooting better than 50 percent in both games.

But Maryland did not have that same level of ease against No. 6 Texas, despite holding a 32-25 halftime lead. The Longhorns bounced back with a 24-15 third quarter to take an advantage into the fourth quarter, but the Terrapins weren't done yet. Maryland held a 59-57 lead late in the final frame, but a 7-0 Texas run at the end of the game helped to seal a 64-61 upset win over this year's Big Ten champion.

Only one team avoided the Sweet 16 pitfalls, and that was Indiana, which, like Michigan, was playing in its first Sweet 16 in program history. To get there, the No. 4 seed Hoosiers first had to get by No. 13 VCU and No. 12 Belmont, which upset Gonzaga in the Round of 64.

Against the Rams, Indiana's defense led the way, holding VCU to 22.8-percent shooting in a suffocating 63-32 win. It was a similar story for the Bruins, who shot just 31.7 percent and fell to the Hoosiers 70-48. Guard Grace Berger led Indiana in scoring with 20 and 17 points, respectively, in the first two contests.

That led to Indiana's matchup with No. 1 seed N.C. State, which came into the matchup with a 22-2 record. Indiana extended a one-point half-time lead to 58-48 heading into the fourth, but N.C. State came clawing back in an attempt to stop the upset.

The Wolfpack cut the deficit to two with 1:29 to go and then again with 13 seconds to play, but Indiana kept making free throws to hold onto its lead. N.C. State had a chance to force overtime with a final three-point attempt, but it was off, and the Hoosiers continued to move forward to their first ever Elite Eight.

Indiana's run ultimately fell short with a 66-53 loss to No. 3 Arizona thanks to a 20-9 fourth quarter in favor of the Wildcats, but the Hoosiers quickly received good news following the defeat. Senior guard Ali Patberg, the No. 3 scorer on the team and emotional leader for the group, announced on March 31 that she would be using her free year of eligibility to return to the Hoosiers next season.

then we saw that statement from the NCAA apologizing, and I was like, 'We don't want an apology; we want change.' Things have to change. That's all I have to say."

## Mixed Emotions From B1G Success

The Big Ten had a very strong opening weekend of the NCAA tournament, with four teams from the conference – Indiana, Iowa, Maryland and Michigan – all winning their first two games of the tournament.

Seeing that level of success came with a variety of feelings for Hutcherson, ranging from happy for the conference to sad that Ohio State was not a part of it.

"I'd say it's mixed emotions when it comes to that," Hutcherson said. "Obviously I love seeing girls from within our conference do well and their teams do well, but it also just

sucks not being able to go out there and show people what we can do as well. But it's exciting, because then it just goes to show that the Big Ten as a conference, it's no joke to play in."

Patty said that it has been difficult to watch the excitement of the tournament without thinking about how Ohio State had the résumé to be there as well.

"It's very depressing seeing these teams play, watching these good games and buzzer-beaters and not being able to be in that environment," Patty said. "At the end of the day, it just is what it is. It's good to be able to watch the games, but it's kind of sad not being able to play the games."

## Miller Shines In Lone March Game

Because Ohio State was forced to sit out the Big Ten and NCAA tournaments, the

Buckeyes played just one game in the month of March: a 71-63 loss to Rutgers on March 5.

In that game, it was senior guard Braxtin Miller who shone through, and she earned Plank's Lady Buck of the Month honors for her efforts despite the loss.

Miller finished the game with a team-high 19 points, eight rebounds and four assists in 38 minutes played. She shot 5 of 12 from the field, 2 of 3 from deep and 7 of 9 from the free-throw line.

Ever since her arrival to Ohio State as a transfer from Oklahoma State, Miller has played a big role as a leader for the team, but against the Scarlet Knights, she added even more to the box score. She will continue to do that in 2021-22, as Miller has already announced that she will be using her extra year of eligibility to return for her fifth collegiate season.



# Sky Is The Limit For Maisonneuve's Buckeyes

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When longtime Ohio State men's soccer head coach John Bluem retired on March 19, 2018, the trajectory of the program shifted forever. After 21 years in Columbus, four Big Ten titles, 17 Major League Soccer draft picks and all 10 of Ohio State's appearances in the NCAA tournament – including a national title appearance in 2007 – Bluem's program had started to falter in his final seasons, with the Buckeyes falling to 5-13-1 in his penultimate season and 8-10-1 in his final year.

It's hard to dispute his status as an Ohio State legend, given his ability to elevate and maintain what had been a largely listless program prior to his arrival. But the Buckeyes had fallen back behind the middle of the pack within the ultra-competitive Big Ten and were no longer equipped to compete with those at the top of the league, namely Indiana, Maryland, Michigan State and Penn State.

The blue-blood Hoosiers have served as the cream of the crop for decades, first under coach Jerry Yeagley – who led the program for 30 years and built it up to its national-contender status – and now under his son, Todd, who picked up where his dad left off seven years after the elder Yeagley's retirement, taking over in 2010 following the brief Mark Freitag tenure. If there's a program to replicate in the Big Ten, it's the one under Yeagley's command

in Bloomington.

In replacing Bluem, the Buckeyes announced their intention to do just that – replicate the Hoosiers. On April 23, 2018, Ohio State hired Brian Maisonneuve, who had been Todd Yeagley's right-hand man and associate head coach since 2010, as well as his former teammate both at Indiana from 1991-94 and with the Columbus Crew from 1996-2002. You can't get much closer to the Indiana program than that without just hiring a Yeagley, and none of those were presently available for the Buckeyes.

For Ohio State, the move was a no-brainer.

Maisonneuve has spent essentially his entire soccer life in the region, growing up in Michigan, playing for Indiana and then suiting up for the Crew for eight seasons (1996-2004) before spending time as a coach with both the Hoosiers and the Louisville Cardinals. There are very few coaches, assistant or otherwise, with as many ties to the area that Ohio State would like to recruit more than Maisonneuve, and there's no program that Ohio State would like to mirror more than Indiana's. For Maisonneuve, Ohio State was obviously appealing enough to pluck him away from one of the top programs in the nation, but it was not a job without its challenges, especially with it in the state it was in when he arrived.

"We knew we were coming into some challenges," Maisonneuve told BSB. "We

knew what was in front of us, that we had some work to do. It's (been a) great experience, but there were some challenges. We knew that it was going to take some time, building the culture that we wanted. John Bluem, who was here before us, he did a great job as well, but we wanted things a little bit differently and it takes time to build it."

It certainly took time and some serious growing pains for the new-look Buckeye staff to return Ohio State to its comfort zone of competing in the Big Ten. Ohio State bottomed out in year one under

Maisonneuve, winning the second game of his tenure against Hofstra and then losing 14 of the final 16 games, with two draws mixed in on the way to a 1-15-2 record, the worst for the program since 1972, when Bill Servadio went 0-9-2. It was a season of struggles and heartbreaking results for the Buckeyes, who went to overtime on four different occasions and couldn't once notch a victory, along with seven losses by just one goal. Ohio State was without any sort of consistent goal scoring and lacked the kind of defense needed to make up for its severe offensive impotence.

Those early troubles weren't especially surprising. Maisonneuve and his staff arrived after the spring practice window when the roster had already departed for summer break, meaning that their first season on the job was pieced together

with a patchwork fall camp and practices between games, nowhere near enough time to establish much in the way of strategy or culture.

Season two saw the Buckeyes deal with similar issues, namely in the goal scoring department, but with a spring camp to develop and begin to install a system, Ohio State did take a step forward. It improved to 7-11-1 and found a number of stable contributors to build around moving forward, with defenders Joshua Jackson-Ketchup and Sean Ryan, midfielders Xavier Green and Matteo Bennati, and forward Devyn Etling chief among them. Star forward Jack Holland led the team in points and departed after his senior season, but just about the entire remainder of the roster was set to return, meaning another year of spring development and, if things went to plan, another jump for the Buckeyes in 2020.

Given the nature of 2020, it goes without saying that things did not go to plan. That spring development period never came because of the coronavirus pandemic, nor did the fall season for the experienced Buckeyes, at least not as originally planned.

"We knew we were doing the right things," Maisonneuve said. "It was just going to take some time until things were where we wanted. And this year, you throw a COVID year that really slowed some things down, just in terms of we really only had one spring, which is usually a great time for us to really teach and develop. The fall is so much about preparing for a game



Brian Maisonneuve

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and recovery from a game and because we play so many games in a short period of time. The spring is really about developing and building, and we've only had one of those springs, because our second spring was taken away. COVID really slowed some things down on the field, but we're happy with where we're at right now. We still have a lot of work to do, but we're really, really happy with where we're at right now."

Despite the COVID pause and a much longer offseason than usual, with all non-football fall sports being kicked back into the winter and spring, Ohio State did still find a jump on the pitch, even if the record doesn't necessarily reflect it yet. The Buckeyes started the year with a 3-1-1 record – the lone loss coming in game one to those pesky Hoosiers – and made their first appearance in the top 25 of the Maisonneuve era, debuting at No. 21. They've fallen back since that peak and sit at 3-5-1 entering Big Ten tournament play set to open April 10, but the step forward shows on the pitch. Even if it didn't, the opportunity to return to play has been one that no one in Columbus is taking for granted.

"Oh, man, it's unbelievable," Maisonneuve said of getting back onto the field after the extended layoff. "I mean it, and I think the players feel the same way. It just makes you appreciate all you have when something takes it away, and then to get it back, it just makes you appreciate everything. All the small things or big things, the things that sometimes used to seem like an inconvenience, you're honored to have them back. It's been great to be back on the field, to be the coach and to be around the guys. To have everything that you love, to have coaching back, it feels so good."

As Ohio State closes out this season unlike any other, it hopes for nothing more than an eventual return to normalcy, to continue its development both on the pitch and in the locker room. Indiana's greatest strength is its culture, and the Buckeyes can't chase that program if they don't have the opportunity to install that culture themselves, and that takes time more than anything else.

"I know a lot of people say it, but it's just building the culture that you want from a coaching staff," Maisonneuve said, "What are the expectations? How do you go about things on a daily basis? I'm a big believer that what you do on a daily basis really determines your success and that championships and NCAA tournament bids are all a byproduct of what you do every single day. Those habits, things that you do every single day, are really created by the culture that you have. X's and O's don't mean anything if we don't have the right culture."

"We really needed to establish that, to get that down in terms of what we want our championship culture to look like. And then we can really focus on the X's and O's after building that right culture. It takes time. We've turned some good corners, but we took some injuries and we just weren't quite as deep as we needed to be (last season). This year, thank God, we're deeper, but we're still taking injuries, we're still dealing with protocols. We've been really thin at times, but a credit to our guys. They've battled and are really taking to heart a lot of the culture expectations. Now, on top of that, we've started implementing some of the more advanced X's and O's."

Although the name of the game is development and progress for the Buckeyes in

the early days of this new era, it's hard not to recognize those who helped to set the stage for what Ohio State hopes will be a jump into the big time. Ohio State's current senior class – populated by goalkeeper Noah Lawrence; midfielder Joe Ortiz; Jackson-Ketchup; defender Mitch Bergman; Bennati; and the lone redshirt senior, defender Samuel Buzzas – has seen it all during their time in Columbus. They joined the Buckeyes during the downswing of the Bluem tenure, welcomed a new staff after one season (or two in the latter's case), drew or lost all but one game in a season and then suffered through a pandemic that nearly ended their college careers early.

Despite it all, the class has never wavered, taking to Maisonneuve's personality and approach right away to set the bedrock for the burgeoning program.

"They've done an unbelievable job of really taking the program to that next level," Maisonneuve said of his seniors. "Their leadership, their expectations, the quality that they bring every day in terms of focus and commitment and mind-set – they've really done a good job of setting that standard."

No one from that group has taken up the mantle more than Jackson-Ketchup – who was one of three Buckeyes drafted in the MLS SuperDraft in January along with Lawrence and former defender C.C. Uche – but has remained in Columbus to finish out his college career with a bizarre senior season, but a senior season nonetheless.

"You can either elect to go out for the team that drafted you and try to sign a contract and you would forfeit your eligibility as a college soccer player, or you can elect to come back and finish out your season," Jackson-Ketchup told BSB. "Due to COVID, we were granted two extra seasons."

"Honestly, it was a blessing in disguise. It gave me some time to play my actual final senior season. And hopefully it will be my final season and I'll be playing with the Crew this summer and moving forward, I'll be onto my professional career."

It's been a wild ride both to Columbus and to the Columbus Crew (who selected him in the second round) for the star full-back. He originally committed to play at Wake Forest before flipping over and signing on with Bluem, spending one season under his tutelage.

"I first committed to Wake Forest, which was at the time the No. 1 team in the country," Jackson-Ketchup said. "They talked about all this stuff saying, 'Oh we can get you to the professional level,' and this and that. But some things fell through with financial aid, and so I had to turn them down. I had to decommit, and I had to find someone else. Ohio State came to one of my games. I went to Montverde Academy for high school, which is a private boarding school in Orlando, and they came out to my game. They had talked to me and my parents and offered me some scholarship money at the time, and they just said, 'Come up, just take a visit, and I promise you will be committing here.'"

"I was thinking, 'I don't really want to go to Ohio,' but then I came up for visit. Once I got here, it was history. They were right. The people, the staff, the way that they treat the players, they treat them like family. When you come in, it's not just about doing your four years and then you're gone, spread your wings and fly on your own. You're a Buckeye for life, and that's something they emphasized from the very get-go, from day one before I even stepped foot onto the campus. That's what they

would always say on the phone whenever I talked to them."

Despite signing on to play for the old regime, Jackson-Ketchup, along with the rest of the roster, could tell that it was time for a change when Bluem stepped away.

"Really, it was just about having heart," Jackson-Ketchup said. "That was something that we kind of lacked in the couple of years before Coach was here. We didn't really have a purpose that we were playing for, we were just going out to play with John Bluem, and as always, I give my thanks to him, but in his last few years he was just on his way out. We didn't really feel motivated. It was something that we lacked."

"Once Coach Maisonneuve came in, he said, 'I can feel that you guys want to play, but you don't have that energy every day. We need to instill that drive into everybody. We need to make sure that everything is a battle at practice. That battle is preparation for the next game that's coming up. Even if it's a scrimmage, we're battling there as well. That's something that we always need to work on.' It was a building process, and it was something that everybody was on board with, because we all felt that we needed a coach that was willing to give us drive and to keep pushing us forward, to get better each and every day. And that's something that we really didn't have (early in my career)."

The struggles in year one made Maisonneuve's message a bit harder to digest and portended more work on that front, but Jackson-Ketchup says that the new-look staff jelled with the Buckeye roster right away and that it was only a matter of time for everything to start to click into place.

"I would say, as far as relationship-wise, everybody loved him," Jackson-Ketchup said. "But due to our record in my sophomore year, we struggled. It was not even that we were playing bad games. We would have a great game, we'd just come up short. It really wasn't the quality."

"But as far as relationships, we really didn't miss a beat with Coach. He really rallied us up, and he kept us motivated every game. Even when we were at 1-9-2 or something like that, we still felt that we had a chance to keep fighting, keep going on through it and we didn't feel down about, 'Oh dang, we have to play another game,' or just playing not to lose. We still were going out there to battle each and every single time, no matter what our record was. We didn't care."

It certainly helped Maisonneuve's cause that he came in with a staff loaded with coaches who had played and coached at the highest levels of American soccer.

"I was kind of starstruck," Jackson-Ketchup said. "Really it was like, 'Wow, these guys are really a star-studded crew coming from top-tier colleges and the top-tier programs of the professional level,' especially with Maisonneuve's experience and (director of operations) Chad Barson, who is not really a coach but he still chimes in here and there with some points. He played the same position that I do now, and he played it professionally, and he's just such a great help."

"The whole staff is just incredible. They know what they're doing. The preparation, this is really next level. Honestly, it's top-tier, and Maisonneuve's experience, the way that he came in, he didn't miss a beat. He kind of hit the ground running, and everybody was rallying up with him because he just knew what he was talking about. It just seemed like he was ready to go, and you

could just feel the experience that he was bringing in."

Even though he won't be a part of the future on the pitch for the Buckeyes, Jackson-Ketchup sees a bright path forward for the program that helped prepare him for the next level.

"I really think Ohio State could be a national contender," Jackson-Ketchup said. "I think we can definitely make the tournament and that could be a consistent thing with Maisonneuve, just from the culture that he's installing into this program. It's all about staying motivated and giving us the power to set goals for ourselves. That's something that we hadn't done, where he would tell us, 'What do you guys want to accomplish? Whatever you guys want to accomplish, I want to help you guys get there.'"

"And of course, everybody wants to win but to what degree? With us being able to now say that, 'Yes, we want to be in the tournament, we want to contend for a national title. We want to win the Big Ten, we want to win the Big Ten championship just like everybody else.' Everybody else wants to win as well, but it was the way that he was saying that he would help us, the way that he would go out and ride for us and tell us, 'OK, if you want to do this, this is what it's going to take.' At practice, he'll bring that mentality, and he'll tell us exactly what we need to do. He'll break it down and keep it real with us, and that's something that we really needed."

As the Buckeyes improve that culture with another offseason – COVID-allowing – they're building up quite the roster as well. Ohio State's recruiting has seen a significant uptick under its new management, headlined by an excellent freshman class, with none more impactful from the jump than English midfielder Laurence Wootton, a product of the Cardiff City and Stoke City academies who came to America to play for the Buckeyes. He was one of three international products in the class and looks to be the future of the Buckeye midfield.

"Our staff did a great job of really identifying what we needed and then going out and finding it," Maisonneuve said. "At a school like Ohio State, we like to get the best Buckeyes in the state and then in the region. It's a school that has a draw even if you have to go out of the region or even out of the country. Because it's Ohio State, you can get some of those top recruits, and we are fortunate to do that."

Wootton hopes to be the man leading the Buckeyes into the future.

That word, future, is a big one at Ohio State right now. It's hard not to be swept up in Maisonneuve's energy and passion for soccer and for building up a program that can last at Ohio State. It shows on the recruiting trail and on the pitch, where the former United States Men's National Team standout often looks as though he could slip on a Buckeye jersey and dominate just as he did in Columbus as a member of the Crew. He doesn't see a ceiling for the program that he's been tasked with building, and through three seasons, there's no reason to doubt that assessment.

"We're (still) developing the big picture," Maisonneuve said. "There's no reason that Ohio State can't be one of the best programs in the Big Ten or even in the country with the resources, with the athletic department, in the Big Ten conference, one of the best conferences in the country. There's no reason why we can't be battling for Big Ten championships and national championships here in the near future."



# Woodson Returns To Indiana As Head Coach

On March 28, former Indiana All-American Mike Woodson was announced as the 30th head men's basketball coach in Hoosier history by IU vice president and athletic director Scott Dolson.

Woodson returns to Bloomington with a wealth of experience after a substantial coaching career in the NBA, including nine years as a head coach with the Atlanta Hawks and New York Knicks. He also played 11 seasons in the league and was most recently an assistant coach with the Knicks for the 2020-21 season.

## BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

"This is a great day and a great fit for Indiana basketball," Dolson said. "Throughout this process, I was looking for someone I could partner with to return Indiana basketball to a level of success that Hoosier fans have come to know and expect, and Mike is that person."

"During the last two weeks, I have spoken with numerous individuals at the college and NBA levels, and they were unanimous in their support of and respect for Mike. From his ability in terms of X's and O's to his skill at building relationships and developing players, his reputation is outstanding. As a coach, he's succeeded at the highest levels of the NBA, and he's mentored some of the game's all-time great players."

"On top of all of that, as one of our program's legendary players, Mike certainly gives us a bridge to our past. But more important than what he did as a former Hoosier player, he's someone who shares my vision for what Indiana basketball is about, and I'm thrilled about what this day means for our program."

As a player for the Hoosiers, Woodson was the 1980 Big Ten Player of the Year and an NABC All-American when he led the team to a conference title and a berth in the NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16 as a senior. Despite undergoing back surgery in December of 1979 and missing seven weeks, he was honored with the Chicago Tribune's Silver Basketball Award as the Big Ten's top player to cap his career.

Additionally, Dolson announced that former Ohio State head men's basketball coach Thad Matta will join the athletic department in the newly created position of associate athletic director for basketball administration.

### Ben Johnson Named Minnesota MBB Coach

Ben Johnson agreed to a five-year deal to become the 18th head men's basketball coach at Minnesota.

Johnson returned to his alma mater after spending three seasons at Xavier as an assistant coach. Johnson previously served as an assistant coach at Minnesota from 2013-18 and was a two-time captain during his playing career for the Golden Gophers.

"Ben is a proven coach who is ready to lead his own program," Minnesota athletic director Mark Coyle said. "He has earned this opportunity and is a tremendous teacher, recruiter and relationship builder. I am



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**HOME SWEET HOME – Mike Woodson (right) was named the new head coach at Indiana, where he was the 1980 Big Ten Player of the Year after leading the Hoosiers to a conference title and berth in the NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16.**

thrilled for him to lead his alma mater, and I am excited for the future of our men's basketball program."

At Xavier, Johnson had success as a recruiter, leading the Musketeers to back-to-back top-30 recruiting classes in 2019 and 2020. Xavier went 51-37 overall in his three seasons on the staff.

"The University of Minnesota is such a special place and has impacted me in immeasurable ways on and off the court," Johnson said. "I want to thank President Joan Gabel, Mark Coyle, (deputy athletics director) Julie Manning and everyone involved in the search process for believing in me and trusting me to lead this historic program. I am ready to get to work."

In his previous stint with the Gophers, Johnson helped recruit local standouts and current members of the Los Angeles Clippers Daniel Oturu and Amir Coffey to Minnesota. He also recruited current Gopher Gabe Kalschauer to the Gophers. Johnson was instrumental in recruiting and developing Jordan Murphy, who finished his career atop the Gopher record books in rebounds (1,307), free throws made (460) and free throws attempted (698) and second in scoring (1,802 points).

### Moseley Named WBB Head Coach At Wisconsin

Marisa Moseley was named the head women's basketball coach at Wisconsin.

"I could not be more thrilled about Marisa joining our Badger family," said Wisconsin athletic director Barry Alvarez. "She has been a winner as a student-athlete, assistant coach and head coach. She values the student-athlete experience on the court, in the classroom and in the community. And she is a bright, engaging person who I know our student-athletes, fellow staff members, community members and fans will come to know and enjoy. I can't wait for her to get started."

Moseley was named the 2019 Patriot League Coach of the Year while leading Boston, where she led the program to a 45-29 overall record in the three seasons.

"I am thrilled to be a Badger and to lead this program back to great heights. Wisconsin

has a rich and storied tradition of success in all its sports, and I am confident that our women's basketball program will be joining those ranks in the future," Moseley said. "I can't wait to meet my team and get started. As soon as I arrived in Madison and met the people, I knew this was a special place where I could plant roots. We have a wonderful community behind us, and I look forward to connecting with all the faithful Badger fans."

Moseley had a nine-year stint as an assistant coach at perennial power UConn, where the program won five NCAA titles and appeared in the Final Four each season during her tenure. The Springfield, Mass., native also has experience in the Big Ten, serving as an assistant coach at Minnesota for two seasons, which both ended in NCAA tournament appearances.

Wisconsin's new leader has shown initiative in promoting diversity and inclusion. Moseley is a founding member of the Patriot League's Anti-Racism Commission; a member of the University of Connecticut's Diversity Council and a member of the University of Denver's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, where she began her coaching career after playing at Boston.

### Iowa Standout Clark Earns National Honor

Iowa freshman guard Caitlin Clark won the 2021 Dawn Staley Award as the best all-around guard in the country and was named WBCA Co-Freshman of the Year.

Clark, who averaged 26.6 points, 7.1 assists, and 5.9 rebounds per game, became the first freshman to win the Dawn Staley Award. The well-rounded freshman earned high praise from Staley, who was a two-time national player of the year at Virginia (1991, 1992) and currently is the head coach at South Carolina.

"It's always a special day when we give out the Dawn Staley Award, but I absolutely love that this year it's going to be a freshman because it means fans of our game get to watch Caitlin Clark, an absolute star for so many years," Staley said. "Caitlin Clark is so talented. She can score from anywhere, has incredible vision for someone so young and is a relentless defender."

"Those of us who pay attention to this game have known about her for some time, but the world is now getting to see what she can do on the biggest of stages. Caitlin is going to be a huge part of women's basketball for a long time, and I couldn't be more proud that she is the recipient of this year's Dawn Staley Award."

Clark won the award over UConn stand-out Paige Bueckers, with whom she shared Co-Freshman of the Year honors from the Women's Basketball Coaches Association. Bueckers became the first freshman to win Women's Naismith Player of the Year as well as the first to win Associated Press Women's Player of the Year.

Clark, a native of West Des Moines, Iowa, led the nation in total assists (214), total points (799), points per game (26.6), field goals made (266) and three-pointers made (116), and she ranked second in assists per game (7.1) and three-pointers per game (3.87).

After the Hawkeyes were not projected to make the NCAA field of 64 at the beginning of the season, Clark led her hometown team to the Sweet 16 in her first season.

Clark broke the Hawkeye women's basketball record for points scored by a freshman with 799 points, ranking third all-time at Iowa for points in a single season behind Megan Gustafson's junior and senior seasons. She also shattered Iowa's all-time freshman assist record with 214 on the campaign, ranking fourth all-time and besting Kathleen Doyle's previous mark of 148 helpers.

### Garza Garners National Honors

Iowa senior Luka Garza earned Men's Naismith Player of the Year honors as the country's best player, adding to his résumé that includes AP Player of the Year, National Association of Basketball Coaches Player of the Year, Oscar Robertson Trophy and Sporting News National Player of the Year accolades.

Garza, who was a Naismith Trophy finalist in 2020, became the first Hawkeye to win the award after leading the country with 747 points and ranking second nationally in points per game with 24.1 behind only Oral Roberts guard Max Abmas (24.5).

"Winning an award in Naismith's name is an honor my family and I will always treasure," Garza said. "Naismith changed my life, and so many others, by creating the game that so many love. In 2015, when my dad and I watched Frank Kaminsky accept the Naismith Trophy in Indianapolis, I never thought I would be in this position six years later. I am forever thankful to the University of Iowa, Coach (Fran) McCaffery, the rest of the coaching staff, my teammates, my family and the countless other people and coaches who have helped me along the way. This is not an individual honor but a team award, and I am so proud to be able to bring this award home to Iowa City. Thank you to the Atlanta Tipoff Club for this prestigious award and thank you to Naismith for changing my life and so many others with the game of basketball."

After winning Big Ten Player of the Year honors as a junior, Garza returned to Iowa City and dominated as a senior to become only the second player ever to win the award twice in a row (Jim Jackson, Ohio State, 1991-92). The Washington, D.C., native added 8.7 rebounds and 1.6 blocks per game while shooting 55.3 percent from



the field and 44.0 percent from three (44 of 100) in an outstanding final campaign.

Garza became Iowa's all-time leading scorer with 2,306 points, and his impressive all-around game has made him the only men's player in Big Ten history to tally more than 2,300 points, 900 rebounds, 150 blocked shots and 100 three-pointers.

### Maryland's Frese Named AP National Coach Of The Year

Brenda Frese, Maryland's head women's basketball coach, was named National Coach of the Year by The Associated Press after leading the Terrapins to a 26-3 record and the program's sixth Big Ten title in seven years.

After losing five starters from the 2020 Big Ten championship team, Maryland reloaded with five newcomers, four sophomores and three freshmen to go 17-1 in conference play, losing only to Ohio State.

The Terrapins also advanced to their ninth Sweet 16 under Frese, who became just the fourth coach to win the AP National Coach of the Year honor more than once, joining Geno Auriemma (UConn), Kim Mulkey (Baylor) and Muffet McGraw (former Notre Dame head coach). Frese previously won the award in 2002, her first year at the helm in College Park.

Frese also won her 500th game at Maryland, making her the winningest coach in program history. She boasts an impressive record of 512-131 (.796) at Maryland and 569-161 (.780) in her 22 years as a head coach, which includes stints at Minnesota and Ball State.

Additionally, Frese won her fourth Big Ten Coach of the Year honor, having previously won in 2002, 2015 and 2019. She was also named ACC Coach of the Year in 2013 and MAC Coach of the Year in 2000.

### Michigan's Howard Earns Coach Of The Year Honors

Juwan Howard, the head men's basketball coach at Michigan, became the first Wolverine to be named AP National Coach of the Year since Bill Frieder in 1985.

Frieder is the only other Maize and Blue coach to receive the award in its 55-year history. Howard also became the first Big Ten coach to win the award since Bruce Weber at Illinois in 2005 and the eighth ever. Michigan State's Tom Izzo (1998) is the only other active Big Ten coach who has won the prestigious honor.

Howard led his alma mater to a 23-5 record and a 14-3 ledger in the Big Ten to claim a regular-season conference title.

The former Wolverine standout also earned the United States Basketball Writers Association (USBWA) Henry Iba Award, as well as being named National Coach of the Year by The Athletic and the Sporting News.

In addition to the national recognition, Howard was named the Big Ten Coach of the Year by the coaches and media, as well as by The Associated Press.

The Wolverines earned a No. 1 seed for the Big Ten tournament for the second time, but they lost 68-67 to Ohio State in the semifinal round.

As a No. 1 seed in the 2021 NCAA Tournament, Michigan advanced to their fourth straight Sweet 16 after wins over Texas Southern and LSU. The Wolverines topped Florida State in the Sweet 16, pushing through to their fourth Elite Eight appearance in the last eight tournaments, but they dropped a tough 51-49 game to UCLA.

With 42 wins in his first two seasons, Howard became the winningest Michigan

coach through two seasons, passing his former coach Steve Fisher (37).

### Jackson-Davis Returns To Get IU 'Back On Track'

One week with Woodson convinced Indiana standout Trayce Jackson-Davis that he wanted to return for his senior season to put the Hoosiers back on the map.

"I want to get Indiana basketball back on track," Jackson-Davis said. "That's my goal. That's why I came back. I believe in this tradition. I believe what we have here is something special. I want to be one of the reasons why. I don't want to be someone who ran away when it was tough. But really all in all, I believe in Coach Woodson and I believe in the tradition of Indiana basketball. I know we can get it back."

After Woodson was hired as the replacement for Archie Miller, he told reporters that he hoped at least some of the six players in the transfer portal would come back next season.

Parker Stewart, a graduate transfer who did not play last season, announced that he would be back, and two commits followed suit.

Bringing back Jackson-Davis, who averaged 19.1 points and 9.0 rebounds as an honorable-mention All-American last season, is the prize jewel for Woodson.

"We (his family) had a sit-down for two hours with Coach Woodson yesterday and talked about my future, where he believes and sees me in the offense, how he can help develop me into the player that I aspire to be, also winning basketball games," Jackson-Davis said. "He told us he doesn't want to rebuild, he wants to win right away. He said I'm a big piece of that. After hearing an NBA coach tell you that, it just really was a simple decision."

Jackson-Davis was the most important player for Woodson to reel back in, and his return helped retain some of his teammates like guard Khristian Lander and forward Jordan Geronimo, who announced on April 5 they'll return for the Hoosiers in 2021.

Aljami Durham already announced he is transferring to Providence, but two other players – guard Armaan Franklin and forward Race Thompson – remain in the transfer portal.

"I was almost dead set on entering the draft and hiring an agent," Jackson-Davis said. "That was probably two weeks ago. I sat down with him and we talked a little bit. I really liked him. But my parents were still dead set on me going to the NBA. I said, 'How about you come down, Dad, and give him a chance, see what he has to say?' My dad came out of the room, he said, 'Give us five minutes.' We went out of Coach Woodson's office, went into a little meeting room, and he said, 'You're staying.'"

### U-M WR Jackson Enters Transfer Portal

The exodus from Ann Arbor continued when wide receiver Giles Jackson entered the transfer portal, becoming the seventh Michigan scholarship player to do so since mid-January.

Jackson (5-9, 179) was the Wolverines' most productive returner on special teams since arriving in 2019, averaging 26.4 yards per kick return for his career and scoring on kick returns in each of his two seasons.

Jackson's last kick return score in maize and blue came in a triple-overtime victory against Rutgers in November in his last appearance for Michigan. He missed the final game against Penn State because of an undisclosed injury.

After returning 24 kicks for 622 yards

(25.9 yards per return) and one touchdown as a true freshman, Jackson improved his average to 27.1 yards per return on 13 kick returns with one score in 2020. He also returned five punts for 45 yards with a long of 32.

Jackson took advantage of limited offensive reps as a freshman, catching nine passes for 142 yards (15.8 yards per catch) and one touchdown and rushing 10 times for 69 yards and a score in 2019.

As a sophomore, he reeled in 15 receptions for 167 yards (11.1 yards per catch) to rank third on the team in both categories behind Ronnie Bell and Cornelius Johnson.

As a four-star prospect out of Oakley (Calif.) Freedom, Jackson was the No. 41 wide receiver and No. 303 overall recruit nationally. He chose Michigan over the likes of USC, Oregon and Florida among others.

### Wisconsin's Reuvers Looks To Transfer

Given the extra year of eligibility granted to all student-athletes amid the coronavirus pandemic, Wisconsin forward Nate Reuvers entered the transfer portal, opting to test his value on the transfer market.

Reuvers was a consistent contributor for the Badgers the past few seasons, averaging 8.7 points and 3.5 rebounds during his 124-game career. Wisconsin was an NCAA Tournament caliber team in three of his four seasons, including winning a Big Ten regular-season title last year.

Reuvers' best year in Madison was his junior season when he averaged 13.1 points, 4.5 rebounds and 1.9 blocks per game. His shot-blocking ability combined with his ability to knock down an open jump shot will make the 6-11 forward an attractive target as a transfer.

### Rutgers Standouts Young, Johnson Enter Portal

A pair of Rutgers' most important men's basketball players – guard Jacob Young and center Myles Johnson – entered the transfer portal following the Scarlet Knights' loss to Houston in the second round of the 2021 NCAA Tournament.

Young (6-2, 185) also entered his name into the NBA draft process after his three-year stay in Piscataway, keeping all options available. After sitting out the 2018-19 season following his transfer from Texas, Young made an impact as a junior, averaging 8.5 points, 1.9 assists and 1.0 steals per game.

As a senior, Young stepped up his game, averaging 14.1 points, 3.4 assists and 1.7 steals per contest on 46.9 percent shooting and a 36.9 percent three-point mark. He is known for his ability to make exciting plays as a pick-and-roll ball-handler and his defensive prowess.

Like Young, Johnson is a graduate transfer who will be immediately eligible wher-

ever he chooses to go. A 6-11, 255-pound center, Johnson has a forceful presence in the paint, earning Big Ten All-Defensive Team honors and ranking second in the conference in blocks per game (2.4) behind Minnesota's Liam Robbins (2.7).

Johnson led the Big Ten in defensive rebounding percentage, ranked third in effective field-goal percentage and fourth in offensive rebounding percentage, while adding averages of 8.3 points, 8.5 rebounds and 1.1 steals in 24.7 minutes per game.

### Lions' Brockington Announces Return To PSU

One of the six Penn State men's basketball players who entered the transfer portal after Micah Shrewsberry was hired as men's basketball coach will return in the team's second-leading scorer, guard Izaiah Brockington.

The 6-4, 200-pound guard from Philadelphia will also enter the NBA draft process to get feedback on his game but said he made the decision to return after meeting with Shrewsberry.

"I really believe in the vision he has for this program and feel we can do something special," Brockington posted on Twitter. "At my core, I feel like I'm a (Big Ten) player and Penn State is where I'm supposed to be."

Brockington spent the past two seasons at Penn State after playing his first year at St. Bonaventure, where he averaged 4.3 points per game.

In his first year of eligibility with the Nittany Lions, he averaged 8.1 points per game in 2019-20. He increased his production to 12.6 points per game as a junior, giving the Lions a tough playmaker for opponents to defend.

Brockington's teammates Myreon Jones, John Harrar, Trent Buttrick, Seth Lundy and Jamari Wheeler all entered the portal as well. Wheeler transferred to Ohio State, but the others have not yet announced decisions.

### Former Purdue F Wheeler Transfers To St. John's

Former Purdue forward Aaron Wheeler committed to transfer to St. John's after putting his name into the NCAA transfer portal following the 2020-21 season, his fourth with the Boilermakers.

"Excited to join the St. John's family," Wheeler tweeted.

Wheeler redshirted as a freshman at Purdue, but the versatile wing became an important part of the team's success the next three seasons. In 28 games in the 2020-21 campaign, Wheeler averaged 3.9 points, 4.4 rebounds and 1.0 assist per game while playing 18.3 minutes per contest.

The former three-star prospect from Brewster Academy in New Hampshire will join a St. John's squad that finished 16-11 with a 10-9 record in Big East action last season.



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# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

## 2021 FOOTBALL

**Sept. 2** Minnesota; **11** OREGON; **18** TULSA; **25** AKRON.

**Oct. 2** Rutgers; **9** MARYLAND; **23** Indiana; **30** PENN STATE.

**Nov. 6** Nebraska; **13** PURDUE; **20** MICHIGAN STATE; **27** Michigan.

**Dec. 4** Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis.

### MEN'S BASKETBALL (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 (12-7)

**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** IOWA, W 8-2; **27** IOWA, L 5-1; **28** MARYLAND, W 5-4; **29** MARYLAND, L 9-3.

**April 2** INDIANA, W 3-2; **3** INDIANA, W 6-0; **3** INDIANA, W 5-2; **4** INDIANA, W 4-3; **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, 7/7; **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, 2/4; **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 (3-4)

**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, W 14-6.

**April 3** Rutgers, L 10-9; **10** JOHNS HOPKINS, 12 p.m.; **18** Maryland, 5 p.m.; **24** PENN STATE, 4 p.m.

### WOMEN'S LACROSSE (3-7)

**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, W 15-12; **28** PENN STATE, W 11-9.

**April 10** NORTHWESTERN, 12 p.m.; **16** Michigan.

### MEN'S SOCCER (3-5-1)

**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, L 1-0; **27** RUTGERS, Postponed; **31** Michigan, L 2-0.

**April 4** MICHIGAN STATE, L 1-0; **10** Big Ten Tournament; **17** Big Ten Tournament Final.

**May 14** NCAA Final Four; **16** NCAA National Championship.

### WOMEN'S SOCCER (6-1-3)

**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, W 2-0; **28** NORTHWESTERN, W 1-0.

**April 3** Michigan State, W 1-0.

### SOFTBALL (12-7)

**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** MARYLAND, W 5-0; **27** MARYLAND, L 8-2; **27** MARYLAND, W 13-3 (5 innings); **28** MARYLAND, W 9-1.

**April 3** Penn State, W 2-1; **3** Penn State, W 9-3; **4** Penn State, W 9-0 (5 innnngs); **4** Penn State, Canceled; **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 (14-2, 11-1)

**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, W 7-0; **28** IOWA, W 6-1.

**April 4** Penn State, W 7-0; **9** Purdue, 2 p.m.; **11** Indiana, 12 p.m.; **16** MICHIGAN STATE, 6 p.m.; **18** MICHIGAN, 12 p.m.

### WOMEN'S TENNIS (15-3, 12-1)

**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, W 6-1; **28** Michigan, W 4-3.

**April 10** MINNESOTA, 12 p.m.; **11** WISCONSIN, 12 p.m.; **18** PENN STATE, 12 p.m.

### MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (9-9, 8-6)

**Jan. 22** PENN STATE, L 3-0; **23** PENN STATE, W 3-0; **29** Penn State, L 3-0; **30** Penn State, L 3-0.

**Feb. 5** LEWIS, W 3-1; **6** LEWIS, L 3-0; **12** McKendree, L 3-1; **13** McKendree, L 3-1; **20** LOYOLA CHICAGO, W 3-2; **21** LOYOLA CHICAGO, W 3-0; **27** Ball State, 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, W 3-0; **27** LINDENWOOD, W 3-0.

**April 2** Quincy, W 3-0; **3** Quincy, L 3-2.

### WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (15-3)

**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, L 3-1; **27** PURDUE, L 3-1.

**April 2** Indiana, Canceled.; **3** Indiana, Canceled.

### 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.



# Quarterback Battle Reminiscent Of '82 Season

Whenever there's a competition for the quarterback job during spring football at Ohio State, I think back to the greatest spring battle of them all. And this year, like then, there's a collection of highly touted, though inexperienced, players bidding to replace a superstar.

## EXNER POINT Rich Exner

By that I mean the competition to fill the Justin Fields void is much like the battle 39 springs ago to replace Art Schlichter.

Schlichter, ahead of the gambling problems that likely wrecked his NFL career, was about as good as they come.

Schlichter was the first quarterback chosen in the 1982 draft – the fourth overall pick – one spot ahead of Jim McMahon.

A couple of Hall-of-Famers were picked soon after – offensive lineman Mike Munchak at eighth overall and running back Marcus Allen 10th.

But the focus in Columbus in the spring was not on the NFL draft. It was on spring football at Ohio State, where a battle was being staged among six contenders.

**Mike Tomczak**, the eventual winner, was the only one who had game experience at Ohio State.

As a freshman during Schlichter's senior year, the recruit from Calumet City just outside Chicago threw a grand total of seven passes, completing four for 73 yards.

Tomczak eventually won the battle, becoming a three-year starter at OSU before a long NFL career despite going undrafted (and the NFL draft lasted 14 rounds in those days.)

**Brent Offenbecher** was a transfer from Wake Forest. He later would get a start in the fall after Tomczak was briefly benched.

But Offenbecher would appear in just 16 games as a Buckeye, completing 26 of 57 passes for 428 yards.

**Jim Karsatos**, from Fullerton, Calif., was part of the same recruiting class as

Tomczak, but he skipped fall practice after an injury during a summer high school all-star game. The spring was his first opportunity to practice with the Buckeyes.

Karsatos lost this competition. But later, after Tomczak moved on to the NFL, Karsatos would become a two-year starter and make it to the NFL briefly himself.

Though in the same recruiting class with Tomczak, he was able to play the two extra years because he had sat out the fall of his freshman year and then redshirted a year.

**Tim Stephens** was another serious contender that spring, a junior from Parkersburg South High School across the Ohio River in West Virginia. He appeared in 18 games over his career from 1980 through 1983.

OSU played multiple spring games in 1982.

After the first game at Kings Island, coach Earle Bruce had declared Stephens the leader, but that didn't hold. After the spring game in Ohio Stadium, Bruce said Tomczak had taken the lead.

A fifth quarterback in the race perhaps ended up having the most interesting college career, though not at the highest level. This was a guy by the name of **Scott Woolf**, from West Branch High School in northeast Ohio.

After missing out on the OSU job, Woolf became a Division III All-American at Mount Union College in 1985. He led the Purple Raiders to both the first of their many Ohio Athletic Conference titles and the first of many playoff appearances.

The sixth quarterback was **Walt Norley**, a recruit out of the Philadelphia area. He eventually transferred to Georgia, where back problems shortened his career.

Does all this sound anything like spring 2021 at Ohio State?

A star, Schlichter, moves on to the NFL, and a collection of players come to Ohio State from across the country to compete – that time from California, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Then the spring ended without the announcement of a starter, though Tomczak was considered the leader.

I remember this battle and these players like yesterday. It was our first year of publishing Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

But I still found it interesting in research to confirm a couple of details for this column to see how the official Ohio State media guide for the 1982 season sized things up:

"The number one priority is to find a replacement for quarterback Art Schlichter. And while there is no one of his stature, there are some talented candidates.

"Mike Tomczak, a wiry, quick, multi-talented athlete, has an edge. He is an effective runner, an accurate passer who can spot alternate receivers, and a leader. Close behind is Tim Stephens, who had an excellent spring. Stephens rarely fails to move a team when called upon.

"Brent Offenbecher is a puzzle. Less inclined to consistency, he has a pleasant habit of coming up with a big play. Walt Norley and Jim Karsatos, both of whom missed the 1982 season because of surgery, show good promise. Karsatos may be the best passer of the five."

Not mentioned in that summary was Woolf, but he was not forgotten by Bruce as the coach summed up the competition at the start of training camp.

"If we had to play tomorrow," Bruce said, "Mike Tomczak would be our quarterback. The backup would be Tim Stephens. Next would be Brent Offenbecher. Then it would be Walt Norley or Jim Karsatos. Scotty Woolf would be thrown in there, too."

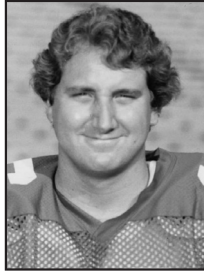
As for how the season turned out, OSU got off to a promising 2-0 start with wins over Baylor and Michigan State. Then came the first three-game home losing streak in the history of Ohio Stadium. The losses started with the fourth-quarter heroics of John Elway for Stanford, followed by losses to Florida State and Wisconsin.

Offenbecher got the start against

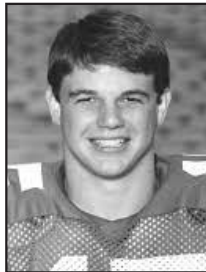
Wisconsin after the benching of Tomczak late in the FSU game. But Tomczak returned as the starter the following week. He led Ohio State on an impressive seven-game winning streak to close out the season with a 24-14 upset of Michigan and a 47-17 thrashing of BYU in the Holiday Bowl.

The win streak extended to nine games the next fall with a win over second-ranked Oklahoma in week two of the 1983 season, before second-ranked Ohio State lost to seventh-ranked Iowa on the road the third week. The 1983 season ended with a Fiesta Bowl win over Pitt.

It was the fourth of six consecutive 9-3 seasons for Bruce, a streak ended only by a 10-3 season in 1986. During that span, the quarterbacks were Schlichter, Tomczak and Karsatos.



Jim Karsatos



Mike Tomczak



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# Memories Blossomed From Game In Gardens

One thing about sports. Certain games or plays inevitably make you think of other games or plays that you have witnessed. Such was the case when the Ohio State basketball team was stunned by No. 15-seeded Oral Roberts in the first round of the NCAA Tournament on March 19. The loss made me recall the first time I had been disappointed by a Buckeye team making an early postseason departure.

The stakes weren't as high that first time. But the loss stung as much and was – at least at the time – considered equally embarrassing. The Buckeyes losing to Oral Roberts made me think all the way back to March of 1984, when Ohio State lost to Xavier at the old Cincinnati Gardens in the first round of the NIT.

This was before the rise to prominence of mid-major schools in college basketball and before Xavier had risen to the heights it would under such coaches as Pete Gillen, Skip Prosser, Thad Matta, Sean Miller, Chris Mack, etc. In fact, the Musketeers had yet to join the more prominent Atlantic 10 or Big East conferences. Xavier, instead, toiled in the Midwestern City Conference, which featured such schools as Butler, Detroit Mercy, Evansville, Loyola (Ill.), Oklahoma City, St. Louis and, coincidentally, Oral Roberts.

Ohio State, meanwhile, was considered the dominant force in Ohio college basketball, with the possible exception of Cincinnati, which the Buckeyes had been notoriously avoiding since two straight national championship losses to the Bearcats in 1961 and 1962.

Buckeye fans and observers were already on edge as Ohio State fell to the NIT by losing six of their last seven regular-season games. That came on the heels of a stretch in the middle of the Big Ten slate when the Buckeyes reeled off seven victories in eight games to put them into the conference hunt and on a path toward the NCAA Tournament.

Even after the season-ending tailspin, it was assumed that the Buckeyes would dispatch the Musketeers, who finished only third in the MCC, even though the game was played on XU's home court. This was not a Buckeye team devoid of talent. Ohio State featured the dynamic duo of Troy Taylor and Ron Stokes, along with Tony Campbell, one of the more underrated Buckeyes of the '80s, and a freshman named Dennis Hopson, who would go on to become Ohio State's all-time leading career scorer.

Instead, the Buckeyes fell to the Musketeers, 60-57 in overtime.

How big an upset was it for Ohio State? As recently as last month, Mike Goodpaster of the Grueling Truth Sports Radio Show and thegruellingtruth.com still called it the seventh-biggest win in Xavier history.

"It's obviously the greatest win since I've been here," said fifth year Musketeer coach Bob Staak after the game. "I don't want to take anything away from the '58 (Xavier NIT) championship, but I think in recent history this has got to be the greatest win Xavier has had."

I simply called it "a humiliating loss" in BSB at the time.

In a cold shooting game for both teams, Ohio State outshot Xavier, 40.4 percent to 37.3, but the Musketeers outrebounded the vertically challenged Buckeyes, 37-29.

"We always had to guard a man bigger than we should have been guarding," OSU coach Eldon Miller said. "We just simply don't have the size."

Xavier's 6-8 senior center, Jeff Jenkins, burned the Buckeyes for 30 points and 11 rebounds.

Taylor had 16 points for the Buckeyes, while Campbell had 11 and Stokes 10. If there was

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

any silver lining for Ohio State, it was Hopson giving a glimpse of what was to come when he scored 16 points and pulled down eight rebounds in just 16 minutes of action.

The Buckeyes were down by just one in the final seconds of overtime when Clarence McGee missed the front end of a one-and-one to seal the Buckeyes' fate. McGee is lucky that the Internet – at least as we now know it – did not exist or McGee would have heard it from angry Buckeye fans.

The interesting thing is that other than recalling nearly 40 years later that I was stunned by the loss, I remember absolutely nothing about that game. Anything that I have recapped here comes from Rich Exner's story in the April 1984 issue of BSB and a box score that I found online.

What I remember – and I can still visualize it clearly – was the Cincinnati Gardens. It was my first trip there. The building was jam-packed with a listed attendance of 9,715, and I especially recall the electricity in the tightly packed concourse. It was like being in Madison Square Garden, not the Cincinnati Gardens. I just fell in love with that venerable building.

Rich and I had traveled down to cover the game together, and he had similar recollections from the game – i.e., he recalled the building.

"It seemed like we had stepped back in time to a 1930 boxing event with a smokey haze lingering in the arena," he told me when I brought the game up to him. "Nothing modern but a great atmosphere."

The Gardens, which sadly was torn down in 2018, was opened in 1949 and was only seven years older than Ohio State's own St. John Arena. But, of course, I love St. John Arena.

Maybe my fascination with older athletic arenas stems from the time as a youth when my Uncle Roger took me to see the Detroit Pistons at the Olympia back in 1961. That barn was built in 1927 and served the Motor City until 1979.

I returned to the Cincinnati Gardens several times during my stint as a ring announcer for Turner Broadcasting's World Championship Wrestling in the '80s and '90s.

In fact, one of my funnier stories – funny now at least – in wrestling happened there.

Somebody had the bright idea of booking two shows on the same day, the first in Farmlands, Ind., and then an evening show at the Gardens. The wrestlers had been in Chicago the night before (I did not work that show), and most of the boys did not realize that there was an hour time difference in Farmlands and most showed up late.

That show started late and ran exceedingly long, and whoever scheduled the shows probably didn't leave enough time to get to the Queen City even in the best of circumstances. As ring announcer, I could not leave until I called the decision of the final match in Farmlands and the show in Cincinnati couldn't start until I got there to announce the participants in the first match. I must have been much the sight in full tuxedo as promoter Gary Juster and I stopped at a gas station to use the rest room and grab something to eat in the car. I have always figured the other patrons thought I was in a wedding.

We finally arrived at the Gardens more than an hour after the scheduled bell time and the assembled crowd was hostile. Who did they take it out on?

The ring announcer of course!

### Another Audition For QBs

As Ohio State entered spring practice 25 years ago in 1996, the Buckeyes faced a similar situation as they do today. They had to find a quarterback from a group of largely inexperienced players to replace Bobby Hoying, who had held the starting job since 1993.

BSB's '96 Spring Preview ran a banner headline on the cover, asking "Is Stan The Man," referring to Stan Jackson, with a subhead that asked, "Or will it be Garcia, Tom Hoying or Germaine," referring to Mark Garcia, Bobby's brother, Tom, and Joe Germaine.

The group had a little more experience than this year's QB combatants – inexperienced second-year candidates C.J. Stroud and Jack Miller and true freshman Kyle McCord. But not much more.

Jackson had been a reserve the previous two seasons, completing 26 of 53 passes for 307 yards and a 49.0 percentage with two TDs and one interception. Hoying was also in his third season as a Buckeye but had just four passing attempts and one completion. Germaine had redshirted the previous season after playing a year at Scottsdale (Ariz.) Community College. The new kid on the block was Mark Garcia, who had two years at Modesto (Calif.) Junior College under his belt and was considered the top JUCO quarterback in the country. He was also thought to be quarterbacks coach Walt Harris' guy.

"Really, even Stan doesn't have all that much practice time, although he has way more than anybody else," said Harris, who was the Ryan Day of his day as far as being a quarterback guru. "Tom Hoying has been here for three years and Joe Germaine was in here last fall, but (Mark and Joe) might be looked at with a little different eyes this spring than Stan and Tom, who know the system."

If you listen to Harris talk (articles about the start of the 1996 spring practice were posted as part of BuckeyeSports.com's Reprint Thursdays on April 1), you can just feel that he wants to move past the dual-threat Jackson and the others and get to Garcia.

"Stan can run around back there, but that's not really what we're looking for," Harris said. "What we want is to have somebody who can stand back there, stay live in the pocket, exhaust the progression of receivers and then, if nobody is open, it's nice to have a guy like Stanley Jackson back there who can run."

Germaine, of course, was that type of pocket passer. But he wasn't Harris' guy.

"Joe was recruited by the previous quarterbacks coach, Larry Coker," Harris said. "I like the heck out of Joe. He really showed some spark last fall about being a disciplined football player, but that was before he was just buried by the system and we had to go with what we had."

I don't know that the younger Hoying was ever a factor in this race, so that left Garcia.

"Upon his signing, Garcia told reporters that Harris had said he would have a chance to compete for the starting job," BSB editor Steve Helwage wrote in that March 30, 1996, issue of BSB. "That was probably the main reason why he left his home state, spurning a comfortable scholarship offer from nearby Cal, to come to OSU."

Not that Harris didn't have reason to like Garcia.

"I saw him practice twice at Modesto," Harris said. "I got a chance to see him throw

the ball and I liked his athleticism and his arm strength, not to mention the fact his team was 10-1 and he threw 31 touchdowns against just six interceptions."

But Garcia blew out his knee in fall camp, setting up one of the most spirited and controversial quarterback battles in Ohio State history between Jackson and Germaine, who just wouldn't go away. It was a battle that lasted for the 1996 and 1997 seasons.

With Jackson and Germaine entrenched as the top two quarterbacks and Harris off to be the head coach at Pittsburgh following that 1996 season, Garcia was left to finish out his Buckeye career as a reserve in 1997 and 1998, completing 21 of 49 passes for a 42.9 percentage, 364 yards, two touchdowns and an interception.

The good news for Buckeye fans is that, despite that wide-open battle in the spring of '96 and the lack of experience among the combatants, Ohio State went on to an 11-1 season, a Rose Bowl victory over Arizona State and a No. 2 ranking in the final polls. A USA Today list of the top 150 college teams of all time compiled in 2019 called that squad the 32nd-best team ever.

Will one of this year's quarterback challengers lead the Buckeyes to similar heights?

### Some Housekeeping Notes

BSB readers seem to be taking to heart my call for the return to the days of the Letter to the Editor. Many of you have checked in on page 2 of this issue.

I wanted to address one matter that will probably continue to be an issue. For the last year or so there have been some letters that some consider to be political in nature appearing in our Letters to the Editor space.

I don't consider these letters political in nature so much as they are reflections of issues in our current society that have bled over into athletics. When they become a part of the Ohio State athletic scene, those issues become part of the Ohio State sports news that we cover at BSB.

As journalists, we will always be advocates of free speech, whether by Ohio State athletes or BSB letter writers.

However, if the letters become a repetitive back and forth, I will probably ultimately put an end to the exchange.

One side will eventually get the "last word," but I will attempt to be as fair as I can. Let's try and present a wide variety of topics, which will help mitigate the situation.

Do any of you besides me have fond memories of historic sports venues or stories of the Cincinnati Gardens? How do you think the quarterback battle is going? Do you recall other great QB battles of the past? Any recollections of Granville Waiters or Mike Sensibaugh?

Send your letters to BSB at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212, or email them to [bsb@buckeyesports.com](mailto:bsb@buckeyesports.com).

Also, I admit that I am the genesis of Patrick Mayhorn's story about new terminology and formations in college football, found on page 20 of this issue. I figured if I didn't understand a lot of this stuff, there were probably BSB readers who were equally confused.

This type of thing is almost Patrick's hobby, and he did a nice job of breaking things down so those of us who are not as in tune with the X's and O's of football could understand what coaches are trying to do and what they are talking about.

If you have any questions about terminology, formations, play calling and the like, reach out to Patrick at the same address or email address listed above and we'll try to get them answered for you.