

# 'The Race Is On'

## QB Battle On Display During Spring Game

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Last year, Ohio State was not able to have its annual spring game due to COVID-19, but the major storylines from that game may have been focused on the running backs room: who could replace Chase Young, and how Shaun Wade looked in his move to the outside.

The game would not have been focused on the starting quarterback battle, with Justin Fields returning for his second season at Ohio State following a year when he led the Buckeyes to the College Football Playoff and was a finalist for the Heisman Trophy.

But for the 2021 edition of the spring game on April 17, Fields was gone, or at least he wasn't on the field. Fields was in attendance to pick up his Big Ten championship ring, and he was also there to see which of the three young quarterbacks on the roster could impress in their first throws in front of the Ohio State fan base.

What he saw was a combined 69 pass attempts between the trio of freshman Kyle McCord and redshirt freshmen Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud. With those pass attempts, they threw 45 completions (65.2 completion percentage) for 497 yards and four touchdowns to one interception, good for a combined quarterback rating of 142.0.

That was also what head coach Ryan Day saw, but he viewed the game through the lens of seeing 15 other spring practices prior to the event. With that in mind, Day said after



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**THREE-WAY BATTLE** – Freshman quarterback Kyle McCord (right) made his Ohio State debut in the spring game, completing 12 of 17 passes for 184 yards and two touchdowns. He continues to battle redshirt freshmen Jack Miller (upper inset) and C.J. Stroud (lower inset) for the starting job this fall.

the game that what each quarterback showed was "very similar to what this whole spring has been."

"Some good, some not so good, a lot of learning opportunities there," Day said. "We tried to get a little bit of a two-minute going at the end of the half, some red-zone stuff, all learning. You can see when you watch, there's flashes here and there, and then there's just learning opportunities, and the more these guys can prepare and work in the film room and just grind in the meeting

rooms, the better they're going to prepare and be ready for those moments."

Of the three, McCord (6-3, 210) finished the day with a slight edge statistically. He completed 12 of 17 passes (70.6 percent) for 184 yards and two touchdowns, good for a 200.3 QBR. His completions that ended in the end zone were to sophomore wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba and redshirt

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# Fans Return To Horseshoe For Spring Game

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State couldn't keep its fans off the field the last time they were allowed into the hallowed walls of the Horseshoe. After Penn State quarterback Will Levis' last-chance heave on fourth-and-long fluttered short of its target and Buckeye quarterback Justin Fields kneeled out a 28-17 victory over the Nittany Lions, Ohio State fans swarmed the turf.

Although Buckeye fans – just under 20,000 strong this time – didn't spill onto the field after Ohio State's 2021 spring game, the jubilation in the stadium on April 17, 2021, more than rivaled the last Buckeye home game that hosted fans, all the way back on Nov. 23, 2019 – 511 days prior.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day described that 2019 game, which secured a Big Ten East title for the Buckeyes, as a heavyweight battle.

"We talked about going into a big heavyweight match, and you have to take shots," Day said. "One of the things about playing in a game like this is you have to be willing to take punches and you have to not flinch when it happens. That was a great example. That was the first time we really were taking shots there."

He described the 2021 gathering, aptly, as

"almost normal" rather than a full return to form, but every bit as important as a return to normalcy after the devastation wrought by the coronavirus pandemic that touched every part of American life, including, but certainly not led by, the empty Horseshoe seen in Ohio State's last season.

"I think the most exciting part was getting back in the stadium and seeing the Best Damn Band in the Land, having some fans around, and it felt almost normal out there today," Day said. "I just want to thank the band for being out there. It made it feel like we were back in the 'Shoe again with a full crowd. I know usually we're used to about 85,000 for a spring game, but even 20,000 was nice. I know that there was a huge demand with the students. I really appreciate the students coming out and doing their part, even though there wasn't as many out there as they would have liked, and I know they sold a couple extra tickets. I appreciate the students coming out, but I'm just hoping that thing is full when we come back against Oregon here in not too long."

The Ohio State fans in attendance played their role in the affair to a T, hitting every note. An absent-minded observer might have assumed that Buckeye fans were reacting to a big play when they took to their feet as Ohio State took to the field for the first time. Later, when an actual big play was

delivered by way of a Kyle McCord pass to Garrett Wilson in the first quarter, that same absent-minded observer may have thought they were taking in a real game, rather than a spring scrimmage.

The scarlet and gray-clad crowd didn't quite hit decibels on that level for McCord's 55-yard bomb, but the toll that the time away took was apparent from the tunnel run and present through the entire spring-ending scrimmage.

"I'm happy for our fans," senior tackle Thayer Munford said. "Even though it was about a year and a half since we've had fans in the stadium, it was very good to have them back in the 'Shoe. I know everybody was happy to see our fans in the stadium instead of an empty stadium, so I'm happy about that."

That tunnel run was a moment that Ohio State's players and coaches have been looking forward to for more than a year. Just about every Buckeye who was asked about the return of fans in the lead-up to the spring game lit up at the opportunity, sharing their excitement to see fans in the stands again, or for the first time in the case of first- or second-year players. The Buckeyes rarely have to push to generate intensity in any form because of the nature of the program, but coaches were quick

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## From The Message Board

***Following Ohio State's spring game, we asked our readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum, as well as staff members, which player impressed them the most and why. Here are some of the responses:***

"Jack Sawyer is the real deal. He looks better than the Bosa brothers and Chase Young did at the same stage in their careers. Buckeye opponents watch out! Also, Kyle McCord does not look like a third-string QB. I cannot wait for him to start sooner or later!"

– AnthonyBuckeye

"Very difficult to answer because of the artificial nature of the spring game (no tackling, etc...) but I'd name, in no particular order, Marvin Harrison Jr., Jack Sawyer, and Jaxon Smith-Njigba."

– Terrier Buck

"Any receiver. Jack Sawyer. Jagger LaRoe."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I'm not saying he'll start, but if you are asking who was the most impressive, I'd have to say Kyle McCord on offense (followed by Jagger). McCord's first pass was a beautiful bomb and he just went from there. On defense, it is not even a contest. Jack Sawyer."

– Mcarr

"Definitely the receivers as a whole. Hard to pick just one, an embarrassment of riches."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"C.J. Stroud has an arm. The man has a cannon. Impressive."

– PeyoteBuckeye

"I'll go with Kyle McCord. The ball absolutely flies out of his hand. Looked like the most talented (not the best, just the most talented) quarterback on the roster and seemed to be the most confident of the bunch."

– Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

"Offense - WR Marvin Harrison. Many plays were designed to highlight him, and he took advantage. Defense - DE Jack Sawyer. Although difficult to tell what kind of tackler he is due to game rules, he was always around the ball."

– R1TBDBITL

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Coaches Poll, Not AP

Thank you for publishing my letter about Women Deserve Better (April 10 BSB).

In the second paragraph, you changed my letter to say that Maryland finished fourth last season. That is true only if you use the AP Poll. I always use the Coaches Poll, which is always taken after any Final Four tournament whereas the AP Poll sometimes has only included the final regular-season poll. While there was no tournament in the 2019-20 season, in the Coaches Poll, Maryland finished fifth last year.

This is a minor point, and I'm not asking for any correction. Just wanted you to know.

**Richard Rhoad**  
Westerville, Ohio

## Gardens Was The Spot For Big Fight

I would like to thank Frank Moskowitz for the trip down memory lane of the long-gone Cincinnati Gardens. I harken back to my sophomore year at Miami University. It was March 8, 1971. Three of my fraternity brothers of Phi Kappa Tau and I decided to make a trip to the Gardens for a very special event. I had attended music concerts there and enjoyed the venue, even though it was a dated facility. This time it was different. In an auxiliary auditorium which was much smaller we were there to witness Ali-Frazier I on closed-circuit television. To say the environment was electric would be an understatement.

It was beyond raucous from the opening round. We were four white guys amongst a lively African American crowd who were as welcoming as could be. We all knew we were witnessing history and that nobody was exempt or judged other than the requirement of being fight fans. Every round seemed more exciting than the previous leading up to the knockdown of Ali in the 15th. The crowd in Madison Square Garden was elite and legendary with flamboyant outfits for the paparazzi.

After the decision we left and debated the fight the whole trip back to Oxford. I was still energized about what had taken place that night when I finally fell asleep. As a side note, I wagered \$25 with a classmate that Frazier would prevail and was very proud to collect it when we met in class. Thanks again, Frank!

**Rich Brumley**  
Napa, Calif.

## Some Suggestions For Coombs

As reported by Andrew Lind in the March 27 issue of BSB, Kerry Coombs on March 19 took ownership of the Buckeye

defensive performance in the Alabama game. OK Kerry, all is forgiven and let's move forward together.

First, no more four linebackers but more nickel. An assistant should be responsible for notifying you immediately when the opposing team goes to four wideouts for the nickel substitution.

Second, no more defense where both defensive tackles are outside the offensive guards with no linebackers up the middle. I think the Clemson quarterback made his long touchdown run against this defense two years ago.

Third, the first move by the free safety can't be to run 15 yards backwards. Twice he did this in the Alabama game which left 25 yards of open space down the middle. He was covering no receivers.

Finally, two things to consider. When the slot receiver goes in motion, like Alabama did, can a defensive back on the side of the field he is running toward pick him up for coverage, and the backer who was covering him become a blitzer for the quarterback?

When the offense has trips wide in a group, can a linebacker four yards off the offensive end on the line of scrimmage cut off all passing lanes by rushing three yards forward at the snap of the ball? That should stop the bubble screen and the ability of the offensive line to go downfield because the pass is behind the line of scrimmage. The quarterback would have to throw the pass nine feet high to have a chance to get over the linebacker.

**Duke Thomas**  
Naples, Florida

## Thankful For Football

I wish to comment on the college football season of 2020.

I am extremely grateful that we got to play somewhat of the season after all. If it were not for the SEC, ACC and the Big 12 leading the way, the Big Ten and the Pac-12 would not have played at all. Plus, President Trump spoke out on behalf of the Big Ten to play football.

Too many of the so-called experts demanded that there be no college or high school sports period due to the 2.5 million Americans who were expected to die from COVID-19. Thank God we did not concede to fear!

As for The Ohio State football team, what they achieved was amazing due to COVID and limited practices. Another Big Ten championship and a huge victory in the Sugar Bowl against Clemson in the semifinals of the playoffs. That victory alone lifted the many spirits within Buckeye Nation.

Keep in mind all the lockdowns that people had to endure

for months. Plus, all the closed businesses throughout America and all the school closings that left people feeling helpless and in search of hope. Getting to see college football and our beloved Buckeyes play once again gave us a brief moment of escape from the real world. In fact, my family and friends anticipated that perhaps quarterback Justin Fields could lead this team to another championship.

In closing, losing to Alabama in the national championship was extremely painful to watch. However, without Tommy Togiai, Tyreke Smith, Blake Haubeil and Miyan Williams, our chances were slim to none. Then losing Trey Sermon after one play, ping-a-ling, game over. But at least the young warriors got to play. Congratulations, Buckeyes, you guys pounded Clemson. God bless the Buckeyes.

**Duane Risko**  
Brunswick, Ohio

## Expecting A Big Year From Fleming

To say I'm anxious for the coming season to get here would be an understatement.

Looks to me like a very well-rounded, experienced team returning not to mention those who were considering going to the NFL returning for one more year. Only question mark is at quarterback, but with coach Ryan Day's success at developing, I do not anticipate a problem.

Pardon me for being a "homer" but I'm anxious to see Julian Fleming do his thing. He comes from Catawissa, Pa., about 15-20 miles from my hometown, Lewisburg. His high school team, Southern Columbia, has been a powerhouse for many years. Look for big things from him.

Due to injuries sustained in the USMC many years ago, my legs/back will not allow me to visit the Horseshoe anymore, but that does not make me any less a fan of the Buckeyes. This could be the year.

**Rich Foust**  
Troy, Ohio

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# Needless To State What We Already Know

You might forgive Ohio State head coach Ryan Day for his reluctance to name a starting quarterback when every indication worth indicating points to C.J. Stroud as the prohibitive favorite to become the successor to Justin Fields.

Stroud connected on 16 of 22 attempts for 185 yards and two touchdowns during the annual spring game/controlled scrimmage, played April 17 in front of some 20,000 fans socially distanced throughout Ohio Stadium. More importantly, it was the 6-3, 215-pound redshirt freshman from California who took the controls of the first-team offense when the game turned to a scrimmage, leading that unit to a touchdown against members of what was presumably the first-team defense.

Not that redshirt freshman Jack Miller or true freshman Kyle McCord appeared anything but worthy competitors for the starting job. Miller began the first series of the game part of the game under center and wound up completing 17 of 30 throws for 128 yards, while McCord attempted 17 passes and completed 12 of them for 184 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

McCord actually won the day in terms of a 200.33 quarterback rating to 173.36 for Stroud. Miller was far back at 85.84 mostly because he threw the only interception of the afternoon. But make no mistake – all three of these guys could start for just about any program in college football, and each of them knows it. That's why Day prefers to keep all of them interested only in starting at Ohio State before he actually has to name a first-teamer.

The last time the Buckeyes had such a glut of quarterback talent was in the spring of 2018 when Urban Meyer had to choose a successor to J.T. Barrett. Although it appeared that Joe Burrow had outplayed Dwayne Haskins in that particular spring game, Haskins was the favorite for the starting job and everyone including Burrow knew it.

I still remember watching Burrow's demeanor on the sideline of that spring game – that of a guy who knew he was spending his final afternoon with that particular set of teammates. About a month later, Burrow announced he was transferring to LSU, and the rest is national championship and Heisman Trophy history. I'm pretty certain the very last thing on Ryan Day's mind is naming a starting quarterback and then fielding transfer questions from the two guys who didn't win the battle.

With each of the quarterbacks wearing non-contact black jerseys during the game/scrimmage, it was impossible to get a feel for the kind of mobility any of them brings to the position. But we already know that while the ability to run with the football is an added dimension for any quarterback, the days are over when Meyer would rely on Barrett and the read-option to control the tempo of a game. Day learned fairly quickly with Fields that a running quarterback is much more susceptible to injury, and one still wonders how a 100-percent healthy Fields might have altered the outcome of the 2019 national championship semifinal against Clemson.

Therefore, how each of the quarterbacks performed in the passing game was paramount this spring.

Stroud showed an ability to stand and deliver in the pocket when he took a hit on his first spring-game attempt and still managed to complete the pass. He appeared to go through his progressions effortlessly and displayed accuracy on a number of different kinds of throws. He connected on a sprint-out pass with Chris Olave for a touchdown and threw a dart to Marvin Harrison Jr. for his other score, perfectly placing the ball between the safety and cornerback as Harrison raced to the post.

McCord showcased his big arm as soon as he got the chance, completing a 55-yard bomb to Garrett Wilson. That arm was a little too big later on when McCord overthrew Jaxon Smith-Njigba on a sure touchdown, but the freshman made up for that later by hitting Smith-Njigba on a slot fade in the end zone.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Miller was exceedingly accurate on short throws, including a couple of crisp sideline passes. That accuracy waned a bit on longer throws and when Miller was on the run, and he committed the cardinal sin of any quarterback when he was picked off by redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts at the goal line. Of course, if you are a glass-half-full kind of observer looking for any plus from a defense that underachieved last season, you can credit Watts for immediately recognizing what was going to be a back-shoulder throw and getting himself in position to make the interception.

Each of the three quarterbacks was helped by the tremendous talent Ohio State has at the receiver position. Stroud's percentage was aided by a 50-50 ball that Olave took away from receiver-turned-DB Demario McCall despite the fact McCall had fronted Olave and was waiting for the ball before Olave leaped and snatched it away. And both Wilson and Smith-Njigba made acrobatic catches while such true freshmen as Harrison and Emeka Egbuka proved Ohio State truly has an embarrassment of talent at the receiver position.

The bottom line is that no matter who the starting quarterback turns out to be, the Buckeyes are going to be an offensive juggernaut. Two years ago, with Fields coming in as a largely untested quarterback, the team won its first 13 games in a row and averaged nearly 50 points doing it.

What will set the 2021 team apart is whether Stroud or Miller or McCord can remain healthy and keep Ohio State on track to take care of some unfinished College Football Playoff business.

## A Look Ahead

Before entertaining thoughts of a third straight trip to the playoff, the Buckeyes will have to navigate their way through a schedule that includes a rare midweek opener as well as a marquee nonconference opponent in week two.

Ohio State kicked off its 2017 season with a Thursday night game on the road, and the Buckeyes will repeat that scenario at Minnesota against a Golden Gophers team that struggled to a 3-4 record last season. Tanner Morgan returns as quarterback, and Minnesota is getting a lot of preseason love as a West division dark horse. But most of that love comes as the result of a schedule that gets favorable after the opener. The Gophers haven't beaten OSU since 2000, and haven't beaten the Buckeyes at home since 1981.

Ohio State's home opening opponent will be an Oregon team fresh off a Pac-12 conference championship. The Ducks have ridden the quarterback merry-go-round during the offseason with former starter Tyler Shough transferring to Texas Tech and Boston College transfer Anthony Brown taking over. No matter who operates the offense, it should provide a big early-season test for OSU's defense. But it's also worth remembering Oregon is 0-9 all-

time against the Buckeyes and just 1-8 lifetime against Big Ten opponents ranked among the top five.

What follows is a month-long breather that includes Tulsa, Akron, Rutgers and Maryland in succession before an open week to prepare for a two-week stretch at the end of October that might feature Ohio State's toughest tests of the season.

It begins Oct. 23 at Indiana against a team that seems to always give the Buckeyes fits these days. The Hoosiers return quarterback Michael Penix, who threw for 491 yards and five TDs in his team's narrow 42-35 loss to the Buckeyes last season.

That game is followed by a home contest with Penn State, a team that will supposedly give OSU a run for the East division title. Frankly, I don't see the Nittany Lions as contenders. They got off to a program-worst 0-5 start last year, and the schedule-makers did them no favors this time around. Penn State kicks off its 2021 campaign at Wisconsin and two weeks later entertains SEC power Auburn in Happy Valley.

The early November Buckeye slate features Nebraska, Purdue and Michigan State on the docket with the traditional regular-season finale against Michigan set for Nov. 27. Everyone would like you to believe the Wolverines will be much-improved over last year's 2-4 showing, but I'm hard-pressed to understand why. Defensive coordinator Don Brown was replaced after five seasons, and the offense remains a mess with quarterbacks transferring out of Jim Harbaugh's program at an alarming rate.

The bottom line is that Ohio State once again appears to enjoy a cavernous talent gap over most of the other teams in the Big Ten. But with a new starting quarterback and an overhauled defense that features scant experience at linebacker and the status of a pair of projected starters in the secondary very much up in the air – Cameron Brown rehabbing a torn Achilles and Marcus Hooker facing disciplinary action following an offseason OVI charge – the Buckeyes would do well to understand they will get every opponent's best shot and therefore act accordingly.

## More Spring Observations

Everyone, including me, has made mention of the abundance of talent among Ohio State receivers. The same can be said at running back, a position in which the Buckeyes have a number of players who could and most likely would start anywhere else in the Big Ten.

Anywhere else in the conference, fans would be positively giddy about a returning Master Teague and his career totals that include 1,409 yards, 13 TDs and a 5.5-yards-per-carry average on 256 attempts. But as Teague needed to do when J.K. Dobbins and Trey Sermon were around, he'll have to prove himself all over again in the face of competition from a group of former high school stars itching to show what they can do.

Marcus Crowley is finally healthy after tearing up a knee in 2019, a season in which he was averaging a cool 9.5 yards per carry before going down. Steele Chambers has an OSU career average of 7.9 yards per carry, and Miyan Williams came out of nowhere down the stretch last season to provide a power change of pace against the likes of Michigan State, Northwestern and Clemson.

And that doesn't even include true freshman TreVeyon Henderson, who some recruiting experts say reminds them of Dobbins. Henderson, a 5-10, 210-pound, all-everything from Virginia, led all OSU running backs in the spring game/scrimmage with 26 yards on six carries and added five receptions for 29 yards.





### NCAA Approves One-Time Transfer

Pending approval by the NCAA Division I Council and ratification by the Division I board of directors, which will meet April 28, Division I athletes will “have a one-time opportunity to transfer and compete immediately beginning in the 2021-22 academic year,” according to an NCAA statement on April 15. In other words, no more sitting out a season for non-graduate transfers.

The change, if approved, will be effective immediately for all athletes hoping to transfer who have not already transferred in their collegiate career. This rule already existed for all sports but baseball, football, men’s and wom-

en’s basketball, and men’s ice hockey, so this serves as an extension to those sports.

“SAAC feels honored to be a part of this major decision and landmark legislation,” said Caroline Lee, the Division I Student-Athlete Advisory Committee vice chair. “The ability to compete immediately offers the utmost flexibility and support of the student-athletes we serve and is a positive step toward improving their overall experience and future success.”

The committee said that the primary appeal of the rule change is the opportunity to create a uniform system for all sports.

“Allowing student-athletes a one-time opportunity to transfer and compete immediately provides a uniform, equitable and understandable approach that benefits all student-athletes,” said council vice chair Jon Steinbrecher, who chairs the Working Group on Transfers and is commissioner of the Mid-American Conference. “The decision is consistent with Division I’s goal of modernizing its rules to prioritize student-athlete opportunity and choice.”

For players who want to be declared immediately eligible after a transfer, there will be a May 1 deadline for fall and winter sport student-athletes to submit paperwork declaring their intention, and a July 1 deadline for spring sport student-athletes. Because of the lack of advance notice this year, the deadline in 2021 for all athletes is July 1, however.

The fine print of the legislation included a few key notes. First, the head coach at the new school and the student-athlete transferring must certify that there was no tampering taking place during the transfer process.

Second, schools may not object to transfer



FILE PHOTO

**MOVING ON** – Head coach Ryan Day expressed support for a change in NCAA rules that will allow athletes one free transfer with immediate eligibility at their new schools.

destinations, meaning that the days of schools preventing in-conference transfers are gone. That was originally a concern for Ohio State transfer target Henry To’o To’o, a linebacker from Tennessee, who has been reportedly considering the Buckeyes and Alabama but wasn’t sure that he would be granted immediate eligibility or that he would be permitted to transfer within his conference to play for the Crimson Tide.

Finally, “The waiver process will continue to be available for students who do not meet the criteria of the one-time transfer exception or who wish to transfer more than once,” according to the release.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day told media that he would be supportive of the rule prior to its official proposal.

“There’s two ways to look at it, and I’ve been very supportive of guys who have left our program,” Day said April 6. “I have supported them in their waivers, and I think all of the guys who have left the program in the last two years have gotten waivers to play immediately because I’ve supported them in that area. They’ve all left in good standing. I think if they have the opportunity to go play somewhere else, they should.”

“I think we have to be careful about letting them do that multiple times, though. It’s tricky. It is a slippery slope, but I’ve decided to support these guys on where they want to play.”

Most notably, former Ohio State receiver Jaelen Gill and former offensive lineman Doug Nester suited up for Boston College and Virginia Tech, respectively, immediately in 2020 after transferring out of Ohio State. Wideout Mookie Cooper is expected to do the same at Missouri this season.

### Offensive Tackle Max Wray Enters Portal

BSB has confirmed that Ohio State fourth-year offensive tackle Max Wray has entered the transfer portal and will be playing out his college eligibility elsewhere.

The Franklin, Tenn., native came to Ohio State as a four-star prospect ranked the No. 121 player in his class, but he played only sparingly for the Buckeyes during his first three seasons in Columbus. He was almost exclusively a practice squad member in his first two years but

found playing time in 2020 as a reserve tackle, most notably filling in for the Buckeyes against Michigan State when starters Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere tested positive for the coronavirus.

Ohio State had a great day on the ground against the Spartans, churning out 322 yards behind a patchwork offensive line led by Wray. He earned praise from both his head coach and his quarterback after the game.

“Watching it from the way I watched it, I thought they battled,” Day said at the time. “Was it perfect? I’m sure it wasn’t perfect. But they battled.”

Justin Fields echoed those sentiments.

“I think those guys played a great game for it being their first game,” Fields said, “so I’m just proud of those guys and proud of the way they stepped up.”

Wray has yet to announce his next school but does have a few connections across the country. He had offers from just about every top school coming out of high school, and his brother Jake plays on the offensive line at Colorado.

### Several Early Enrollees Shed Black Stripes

Ohio State defensive end Jack Sawyer and wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. became the first two freshmen to lose their black stripes this offseason, with both shedding the mark on April 6. Running back TreVeyon Henderson joined them on April 10, followed by wide receiver Emeka Egbuka and linebacker Reid Carrico on April 13.

“This next guy does not lack any confidence at all,” assistant strength and conditioning coach Chris Fenelon said of Sawyer. “In the last couple practices, he’s been talking a lot of smack and backing it up. He has a bright future.”

Sawyer came to Ohio State as a five-star defensive end out of Pickerington (Ohio) North and was ranked the No. 4 overall recruit in the 2021 class. He committed to the Buckeyes on Feb. 3, 2019, the first of any prospect in Ohio State’s class.

“I just want to thank all the coaches, all the older guys for accepting me when I came in here,” Sawyer said in a video posted to Ohio State’s Twitter account. “Happy to be a part of the brotherhood. Go Bucks.”

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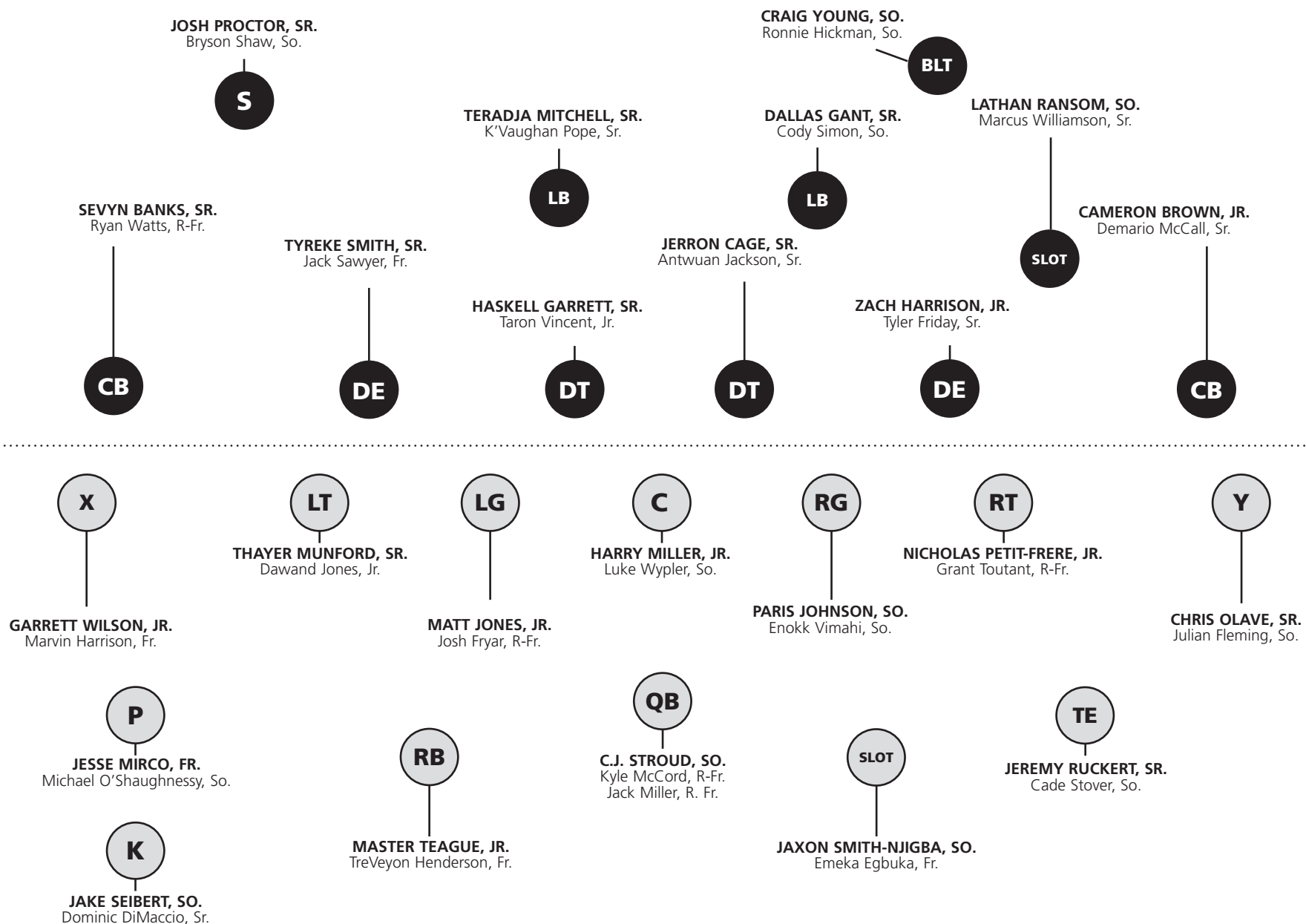
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## OHIO STATE POST SPRING TWO-DEEP DEPTH CHART



Buckeye Sports Bulletin Projection

He was compared to former Buckeye and current San Francisco 49ers defensive end Nick Bosa by 247Sports' Allen Trieu.

"Physically put-together prospect. Has taken weight and speed training seriously and that shows up. Likely will not add tons and tons of weight come college, but still has a little bit of room," Trieu wrote on Sawyer. "Great athlete who is a multi-sport guy and a multi-positional guy on the football field including even some stints at quarterback. As an end, that athleticism shows up as he gets off the ball well and can bend the corner and get up field. Also is strong enough to anchor in against the run and has the blue-collar mentality to work in the trenches. Can run plays down when they go away from him and pursues hard."

Sawyer was the second defensive player to lose his black stripe in spring practice, with the first being redshirt freshman defensive lineman Jacolbe Cowan, who sat out last season due to

injury.

Harrison, meanwhile, was the first offensive player to earn the honor. The 6-3, 202-pound receiver was a four-star prospect out of high school and played alongside freshman quarterback Kyle McCord.

"He's one of the first freshmen I've seen catch passes before 6 a.m. winter workouts," Fenelon told the team. "The future is very bright for this guy."

The son of the NFL Hall of Famer by the same name, Harrison thanked his coaches and his defense in accepting the honor.

"Shout-out to all the coaches and the defense for making me better every day," Harrison said. "Shout-out to Zone 6 (the wide receivers room). Go Bucks."

Henderson joined Harrison on the offensive side of the ball a few days later.

"First I want to thank God, and I want to thank everybody for pushing me and getting

me better," Henderson said. "I'm excited to be a Buckeye, and I'm excited to be a part of this program. Go Bucks."

Henderson was a five-star prospect out of Hopewell, Va., and was ranked the top running back and No. 22 overall prospect in the class. He was compared to Carolina Panthers running back Christian McCaffrey by 247Sports national recruiting analyst Brian Dohn.

"Wide-shouldered frame with ability to

add 20-plus pounds and play at 215 pounds. High-level athlete with speed," Dohn said of Henderson. "Has sub 11.0 time in 100 meters. Was dominant and extremely productive in high school. Is a threat catching the ball and as a running back. Combines vision, burst, balance, cut-back ability and speed. Gets through the hole quickly but also runs with patience.

Continued On Page 6

## Crosher, Mayhorn Receive Promotions

Patrick Mayhorn and Wyatt Crosher have been promoted to the position of Buckeye Sports Bulletin associate editors, BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz has announced. Mayhorn and Crosher will assist Moskowitz in the day-to-day operations of BSB and its BuckeyeSports.com website.

"In just the first few days since their promotions, Wyatt and Patrick have demonstrated a tremendous amount of enthusiasm toward their new jobs and responsibilities," Moskowitz said. "Their desire to build on our 40-year tradition and improve our products is obvious. I look forward to working side-by-side with them."

Mayhorn and Crosher will also have increased responsibilities with Reds Report, BSB's sister publication covering the Cincinnati Reds.

## Podcast Breaks Down Spring Game

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.

The Buckeye Sports Bulletin Podcast is currently on its schedule of one weekly episode, released on Friday mornings. In a bonus episode released on April 19, we recapped the Buckeye spring game and shared our full thoughts on the top performers before jumping into a full two-deep projection.

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 like Joe Dempsey, the BSB podcast has you covered on all things Buckeye, all the time. Staffers Patrick Mayhorn and Wyatt Crosher host with a constantly rotating guest list to get insight and analysis on the latest in Ohio State news.

The show is free for everyone. To find it, go to your favorite podcast app or website and type in "Buckeye Sports Bulletin Podcast," and click the subscribe button. You can listen on Amazon Music, Apple Podcasts, Audible, Google Podcasts, iHeartRadio, Podbean, Spotify, Stitcher and anywhere else that podcasts are found. For those of you that are new to the podcast world, the show is also posted at 10 a.m. every Friday on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as in the BSB Fan Forum.





Continued From Page 5

Instinctive runner.”

Henderson came to Ohio State as one of two running backs in the 2021 class, joining four-star commit Evan Pryor.

Egbuka came to Ohio State as a five-star prospect from Steilacoom, Wash., ranked the No. 9 overall player and No. 1 wideout in the 2021 recruiting class.

“This is another one of those guys that comes in to get work in before workouts and stays late to get in extra work,” Fenelon said.

“He has such a bright future for the Buckeyes.”

Egbuka was the second receiver to lose his black stripe, joining Harrison.

“Just appreciate you all for taking me in as a brother, shout-out all the coaches, shout-out Zone 6), let’s keep working,” Egbuka said. “Go Bucks!”

Carrico was a four-star prospect out of Ironton, Ohio, where he was the No. 86 player and No. 5 inside linebacker.

“Still has a long way to go, but he’s been trending up for all of spring ball,” Fenelon said. “This guy goes hard, he plays physical and I’ll love to see what he has to do in the future.”

Carrico is the second defender to join to team officially, along with Sawyer.

“It’s an honor to be here, I grew up a Buckeye fan, want to thank all you guys, thank H2 (the linebackers room), the strength coaches. Go Bucks!”

### Marcus Hooker Pleads Guilty To OVI

Ohio State safety Marcus Hooker pleaded guilty to operating a vehicle under the influence at his arraignment on April 12, just under a month after he was found asleep at the wheel in a Columbus McDonald’s drive-thru. He was fined \$375, sentenced to three days in jail (though that sentence has been suspended) and had his license suspended, with limited driving privileges.

Day has provided no timetable for his return



FILLE PHOTO

### BACK TO FOOTBALL – Former Ohio State running back and Heisman winner Eddie George is the new head coach at Tennessee State, his first coaching job.

to the team at this time, after he was suspended for all of spring practice, though he is expected to be allowed to return this season.

### George Named Tennessee State Head Coach

Former Ohio State running back and Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George was named the head football coach at Tennessee

State on April 13, marking his first foray into coaching. He told media in his introductory press conference that the decision revolved around a desire to get back around the game after several years away.

“I am excited about being named head coach at Tennessee State University,” said George. “I thank (president Dr. Glenda) Glover, (athletic director Dr. Mikki) Allen and each of you for

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 35 Years Ago – 1986

Ohio State’s annual spring game went off without a hitch on a beautiful day in Columbus on April 26, but it also went off without much in the way of excitement. That may have been by design., The Buckeyes showed very little in a 13-0 victory for Gray over Scarlet, with Alabama head coach Ray Perkins – Ohio State’s season-opening opponent – in attendance.

“I think the only thing we wanted Ray Perkins to see was the Horseshoe, and that’s about it,” head coach Earle Bruce said, smiling. “There was no offense today, no big plays.”

The Buckeyes kept the intrigue and the appearances from stars to a minimum thanks to both fatigue and injuries. Approximately 19 contributors missed the game for a variety of reasons, and that didn’t even account for quarterback Jim Karsatos and wide receiver Cris Carter, both of whom were used sparingly.

### 30 Years Ago – 1991

Four months after Greg Frey took his last snap from center at Ohio State, head coach John Cooper said he didn’t know who would succeed him as the Buckeyes’ starting quarterback.

In fact, Cooper made it plain he probably wouldn’t know for another four months whether senior Kent Graham, junior Kirk Herbstreit or redshirt freshman Joe Pickens would lead the Buckeyes into the 1991 season opener against Arizona.

“Even if I knew in my own mind right now who the quarterback was, I wouldn’t tell you,” Cooper joked with the media. “I wouldn’t tell them either. I think the best thing we can do is let those guys work hard the rest of the spring, stay here in the summertime and work in the conditioning program, and compete early next fall.

“In our situation of not having an experienced quarterback I think that’s the best thing that can happen to us. And it will happen because that’s the way we have it planned.”

The trio combined to complete 14 of 25 passes for 251 yards in the annual Scarlet and Gray Game, with Graham leading the way on a 4-of-8 day for 121 yards.

### 25 Years Ago – 1996

None of Ohio State’s three quarterbacks who survived spring practice managed to take firm control of the starting job and make it their own in the spring.

Instead, the quarterback battle – between juniors Stanley Jackson and Mark Garcia and sophomore Joe Germaine – would rage into the fall.

“I’m not troubled,” said Cooper after his team’s spring game April 27 at Ohio Stadium. “You guys (the media) will worry about that more than I do. We’ll have a quarterback to start the first ballgame.

“It’s been my experience that a lot of progress can be made between the end of spring ball and the start of fall practice. Our players, obviously, will all stay here this summer, and we’ll have a lot of seven-on-seven drills. A lot of stuff (quarterbacks coach) Walt Harris has been preaching to those quarterbacks all spring long will hopefully sink in.”

### 20 Years Ago – 2001

New Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel tipped his hand a bit when he said midway through spring practice that sophomore Scott McMullen had probably earned the No. 2 nod at quarterback behind two-year starter Steve Bellisari.

As the spring-ending Scarlet and Gray Game neared on April 28, most fans looked forward to a showdown for the starting job between Bellisari on the Gray team and McMullen on the Scarlet.

But the game seemed to show that Ohio State had as many as four serviceable quarterbacks, and it also appeared to show that Bellisari had no intention of surrendering the starting job without a fight.

“I would say that after 15 practices, with 29 more to go (in the preseason), the pecking order is about the same as it has been the last few days,” Tressel said. “That doesn’t mean the game is over by any means.”

In fact, sophomore Craig Krenzel and redshirt freshman Rick McFadden had succeeded in muddying the waters for Tressel and his coaching staff with their performances in that spring game. Krenzel helped rally the Scarlet team to two late touchdowns on its way to a 22-21 win, while McFadden went 9 of 13 passing for 90 yards and a score for the Gray.

Neither of the presumed leaders struggled, either. Bellisari completed 11 of his 17 passes for 120 yards and a touchdown, while the gunslinger, McMullen, went 6 of 14 for 42 yards and a score.

### 15 Years Ago – 2006

Ohio State was looking to break in several new defensive contributors after losing much of its dominant 2005 group, and the Buckeyes had plenty to be encouraged about as they concluded spring practice with the annual spring game, which had many of those new faces shining. In fact, 18 of the 31 healthy players on the defensive depth chart were sophomores, redshirt freshmen or true freshmen, and at least 11 of those were in serious contention for starting roles.

“We’ve got a lot of young guys that are real anxious,” said OSU defensive coordinator Jim Heacock. “The neat thing is that everyone that’s out there has a chance to play, and they know that.

“They’re kind of champing at the bit to get in there and show what they can do.”

Chief among the impressive youngsters at the spring game were sophomore cornerback Malcolm Jenkins and sophomore linebacker James Laurinaitis, both of whom saw playing time at the end of the 2005 season and recorded 10 and six tackles in the spring scrimmage, respectively.

### 10 Years Ago – 2011

As Ohio State completed its spring, there was still no answer as to which quarterback would take over for the suspended Terrelle Pryor that fall. Joe Bauserman appeared to have the upper hand through spring practice, but true freshman Braxton

Miller had started to make a name for himself.

Miller finished the spring game having completed 7 of 12 passes with a touchdown.

“That kid really has something special about him,” wide receiver DeVier Posey said. “It’s going to take time to get to know the plays, get to know our system just to be comfortable. At a place like this, you don’t just hand a job over to a true freshman. You have to earn it, and I feel like Braxton has to show a little bit more urgency.”

### Five Years Ago – 2016

J.T. Barrett got the start, but he wasn’t the one in the spotlight when Ohio State’s 2016 spring game ended. He wasn’t the winning quarterback, after all.

In the finale of the first spring that featured Barrett as the Buckeyes’ unquestioned starting quarterback, it was backup Joe Burrow who led the Gray squad to a 28-17 victory in front of a spring game-record 100,189 spectators April 16. That unprecedented crowd provided Ohio State fans a taste of Ohio Stadium action before the season in the fall, and it gave the Buckeye coaching staff a chance to see how young players such as Burrow, Torrance Gibson and Austin Mack responded to a game-like atmosphere.

“I’m extremely grateful to Ohio State, Buckeye Nation for doing that today,” head coach Urban Meyer said of the crowd in the postgame press conference. “That was awesome.”

Barrett, who struggled in his half of play for the Scarlet team, noted how incredible it was to have that many fans come out to watch a practice in April.

“I appreciate our fan base,” Barrett said. “It’s crazy how many people come out to watch a practice, a very basic practice at that. It just shows the love that we get from the best fans in the land, and I know as an Ohio State football player you definitely appreciate that.”

### One Year Ago – 2020

Former four-star Westerville (Ohio) South wide receiver Jaelen Gill announced on April 22 that he had entered the transfer portal and would be leaving Ohio State after two seasons.

“Growing up as a Buckeye fan, my childhood dream was to play for The Ohio State University, and I’m thankful and blessed I was able to live that dream,” Gill said. “It was after careful consideration with my family that I decided that I’d like to explore other options as a student and athlete going forward and entered the transfer portal.”

During his two years with the Buckeyes, Gill struggled to find playing time, playing in just five games and reeling in seven total catches for 62 yards and a touchdown. Despite coming to Columbus as an all-purpose back, Gill was moved into the hybrid H-back role as a freshman and switched to wideout full time in 2019. There, he was caught behind K.J. Hill in the slot and served exclusively in late-game situations when the Buckeyes held a large lead.



## 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) |                        |                  |     |             |

the confidence you have placed in me.”

George credited his time in football, as a businessman and in acting as preparing him for this move, his first foray into the coaching ranks after more than a decade away from the game.

“All I have done has prepared me for this moment, whether that’s my football career, my entrepreneurial endeavors, my acting career. Coaching is a full commitment, a duty of service. I take that seriously. I’ve done a lot of soul-searching and due diligence. The more I thought about it, I got more and more excited about it. It was like picking up an old guitar or getting back on a bike. It’s familiar but in a different capacity.

“It’s exciting. I’m going to be innovative, creative and fun.”

The Buckeye standout is replacing Rod Reed, who was let go after a 2-5 spring season, capped by a 46-23 loss to Southeastern Missouri on the day that news broke of George’s imminent hiring.

“After thoroughly evaluating the state of the TSU football program, we’ve decided that it was time to make a change in leadership,” Allen said in a statement. “Eddie George has been a winner in every facet of the game, and we look forward to him bringing that same commitment to our players and having it translate into winning on and off the field. We are excited to have him join us and lead the next chapter of our storied football program.”

Day spoke glowingly about him when asked about his new role during an April 12 meeting with media, saying that George “will do great” and that he “a lot to offer the game. I’m excited to see where that goes.”

George played at Ohio State from 1992-95, exploding onto the scene in his final two seasons, rushing for 1,442 yards and 12 touchdowns in 1994 and 1,927 yards and 24 scores in 1995, his Heisman season.

From there, he was selected in the first round, No. 14 overall by the then-Houston Oilers, who would become the Tennessee Titans. In nine NFL seasons, George rushed for 10,441 yards and 68 touchdowns. Since his retirement from the league in 2004, George has found his way onto the stage as an actor, while being involved in several businesses – including “Eddie George’s Grille 27.”

### Buckeyes Get Big Ten Title Rings

On April 15, Ohio State received its reward for its 2020 Big Ten championship victory over Northwestern: rings. The jewelry, adorned with gold and diamonds, commemorates not just that title victory, but each of Ohio State’s three that came before it to celebrate the rare conference title four-peat.

It also shows off Ohio State’s 49-28 victory over Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinals on the side, with the word “fight” inscribed on the back on the ring.

### The Basketball Tournament Returning To Columbus

The Basketball Tournament (TBT), the popular 64-team, \$1 million winner-take all

event, will return to Columbus with the Covelli Center serving as the 16-team Ohio State Regional from July 23-27.

The arena was scheduled to host a regional in July 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic changed plans. The entire tournament was held in a 24-team “bubble” at Nationwide Arena in downtown Columbus. It was the first sporting event to crown a champion amidst the nationwide lockdown.

“Columbus has been home to TBT for four consecutive years, and we’re excited to partner with Ohio State and the Columbus Sports Commission to bring it back for a fifth this summer,” TBT founder and CEO Jon Mugar said. “We love the fans there and watching them support Carmen’s Crew. They have also been awesome supporters of TBT generally, and I wouldn’t be surprised if Columbus has more Elam Ending fans per capita than any city in the world.”

The Elam Ending, for reference, is TBT’s answer to late-game dramatics in basketball. Once the first stoppage with under four minutes in the fourth quarter hits, a final target score is set, eight points away from the leading team’s score.

Carmen’s Crew consists mostly of former Buckeyes, who won it all in 2019 and fell in the first round last year to the House of Paig, the Illinois alumni team. It will be a host team along with Dayton alums Red Scare.

Early commitments for Carmen’s Crew include Buford, Diebler, David Lighty and Evan Ravenel. Sullinger and Evan Turner will again be coaching the team. However, much of the team is still up in the air.

“We’re trying to keep it as many Ohio State guys as we can,” Diebler said. “We’ve obviously gone outside the program and had a lot of success with guys outside the Ohio State program, guys that are close to us friends-wise and guys that we consider family. So we’ll see. There’s time. A lot depends on when guys are getting back, who’s going to be in Columbus in the summer. There’s a lot of factors, so as that time gets closer and guys start getting back from their overseas seasons, we’ll probably lock in a little more and try and finalize our roster.”

Sullinger is also on Carmen’s Crew’s watch list, as he’s been playing well overseas in South Korea.

“I know he’s doing really well right now,” Diebler said. “Outside of TBT, it’s just awesome to see him playing again. He’s been through a lot injury-wise, and we all know how good of a player Sully is. To see him playing again, everyone knew he was going to play well. We’re working on it.”

Two teams from Columbus as well as six teams – two each from the three other regionals – will advance to Championship Weekend at the University of Dayton Arena from July 31-Aug. 3.

Other regional sites are Charleston, W.Va.; Peoria, Ill.; and Wichita, Kan.

### Funderburke Becomes Author Post-Basketball Career

In the March 13 edition of BSB, Lawrence Funderburke spoke about his experiences with the Indiana-Ohio State men’s basketball rival-

## Nearing End Of Biweekly Printing Schedule

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is coming to the end of its spring biweekly publishing schedule. The next print issue, with a May cover date, will feature our spring football wrap-up and is scheduled to be mailed on May 4. That will be the last issue until June. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff does not go into hibernation, however. We will continue to post daily reports and stories at our BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all subscribers. With the growing popularity of the transfer portal, readers will want to check in regularly to keep track of the comings and goings in all major sports..

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

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

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

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

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

ry as a player with experience on both the Buckeyes and Hoosiers.

After three seasons at Ohio State, Funderburke went on to play both overseas and in the NBA with the Sacramento Kings from 1997-2004, as well as the Chicago Bulls in 2005. But after his professional basketball career was over, Funderburke set out on a new path, becoming an author, most recently writing “Momentum Power Play: How to Create It If You’ve Never Had It and Keep It Going Once You’ve Got It” in 2019.

The book is “an inspirational guide to helping create and keep the momentum necessary to consistently win in life,” according to a press release, and is meant to offer a game plan through five key areas: the power of preparation, perspective, praise, pain and purpose.

Funderburke also does work on the Supplemental Educational Lesson Framework, or SELF, to help develop children through a variety of different learning modules that can be found on Funderburke’s website, MrFundy.com

## Become A Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# Studrawa Pleased With New Faces Up Front

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State offensive line coach Greg Studrawa has to be feeling pretty grateful as he navigates through spring practice and surveys his room in his sixth season in charge of the big boys up front in Columbus. Although the Buckeyes lost a pair of future NFL draftees in offensive guard Wyatt Davis and center Josh Myers – both all-conference players – it's very easy to envision a world where Studrawa would be breaking in four new starters this offseason, rather than just two.

That scenario hinged on a pair of coin-flip decisions at offensive tackle, at least in the eyes of many draft analysts. Both Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere would have been drafted this season had they declared, leaving the Buckeyes with just one returning starter – Harry Miller, who's already missing spring camp with an injury. But the duo decided instead to return and bookend an offensive front that desperately needed experience and leadership on the edges with new faces inside.

That gives Ohio State the stability and proven commodities that it needs on the outside, while allowing for rising talents such as Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones, who came to Columbus as tackles, to make a move inside to guard this season. Those two will be competing for an open starting role on either side of Miller, the presumed starting center.

It's never going to be easy to replace the kind of production that Davis and Myers provided, but Ohio State certainly could have done worse than a race to replace them led by Miller, Johnson, Jones, junior Matthew Jones and the redshirt freshman duo of Luke Wypler and Josh Fryar.

"For us, our tackles set a great example of what it's like to be an impact player and be great at your craft," Wypler said. "With Nick on one side and Thayer on the other, they're a prime example of what everyone in the room is striving to be. Having them as the pillars, I feel like inside the competition is going great."

The Buckeyes are the beneficiaries, as well, of a talented room, buoyed by former blue-chippers across the board, but this is a group that's impressed Studrawa with its football IQ just as much as its athletic ability.

"I've got smart guys, and they study so much," Studrawa said. "Their attention to detail, especially for the young guys that are in there asking questions all the time and wanting to learn. They want to learn everything. When you have guys that are like



FILE PHOTO

**MOVING INSIDE – Offensive lineman Paris Johnson Jr. (77) will slide from tackle to guard for the 2021 season.**

that, you can move those guys around and still come up with a cohesive unit even if you have a couple of injuries.

"And that's what it should be. When you've got an offensive line room that has depth, those things can happen and instill confidence in everybody around them."

That's quite the development from 2016 and 2017, Studrawa's first two years with the Buckeyes, which he spoke about in irreverent terms on April 7 when breaking down his position group for the media.

"I know the state of the room, what it was when I got here," Studrawa said. "For the first two years, I had five people. I stayed up at night because if somebody went down, I was like, 'Oh boy. We better get the punt team ready.' Those were my feelings."

One of the new leaders in the room fits firmly into both camps, as a gifted athlete and a committed student of the game, and seems to be as entrenched as a future starter as he could possibly be at this time of year. Despite just one season – and a COVID-modified one at that – in the program, Johnson, the former five-star tackle from Cincinnati, has wrested control of one of the two starting guard spots, likely on the right side to pair with Petit-Frere, the longtime blindside tackle. Although Johnson once thought that he could be taking over that

tackle spot this season, he's spent his time this offseason working on the shift inside as his quickest path to seeing the field as a full-time starter.

He's worked so hard at it that at times, he's even overstayed his welcome in his own coach's office.

"He is a kid that's very, very mentally tough," Studrawa said. "And without that first, you wouldn't be able to make that transition, because there's a little bit of difference sometimes between tackles and guards as far as athleticism and finesse and toughness and grit. Paris is such a student of the game. He studies the game."

"He's in my office, sometimes I have to kick him out because I'm sick and tired of seeing him. He's in there every day wanting to know this and wanting to know that. 'How do I get an edge on this?' His attention to detail and his toughness and 'I want to play, Coach' is why he's made the transition so smooth so far."

That kind of focus and dedication is key for Johnson to make a smooth transition to the inside. The differences between tackle and guard may not be huge to a fan or analyst on the outside looking in, but perfecting the minute details in the change will be key for Johnson's success and Ohio State's stability up front.

"You can't have a tackle mind-set at guard," Johnson said. "But I've learned to take the abilities that I've learned at tackle, as far as being able to read linebackers and safeties and corners. I've definitely tried to utilize that at guard, so I'm able to see the bigger picture."

Although it's not where he wants to spend the bulk of his career and it wasn't originally in his plans when he came to Ohio State, Johnson said that he's excited about the change and that he thinks adding that versatility to his game and to his résumé will help him and the team in the long term.

"When I first was recruited here, I took a look at the depth chart and I made some assumptions," Johnson said. "I saw that by my sophomore year, there would be a spot at tackle. But with everything that's happened, I'm more than happy to play guard. Coach (Ryan) Day said he wanted to have the best five people play, and he saw a fit with me

being at guard, and I'm more than happy to play at that position."

"The biggest opportunity that I have starting at guard is that I get to show versatility, and I feel like that adds a lot of value. And I feel like the biggest thing now – I'm not draft-eligible after this season – so my biggest thing this season and next season is, 'What does the team need so that we can get to where we want to be?'"

"Because when you play professional football, unless you're a veteran guy, you can't just say, 'I'm just a left tackle; I'm just a right tackle.' Somebody goes down, you're going to need to be able to play tackle and guard, left and right in the league, with the amount of people that travel. I feel like if anything, this is just preparation to being able to move around and be flexible, and I feel like the league would appreciate that when it's time."

The other guard spot is a bit more up in the air. Studrawa didn't tip his hand regarding a potential leader when discussing the group of players vying for the spot, though he did allude to a fairly defined group that is competing for that spot, led by the Jones pair, with Fryar and Wypler quickly finding their way as second-year players – though the latter seems to be destined to back Miller up at center this season.

That's not to say that the New Jersey native isn't impressing. Wypler has worked hard to find his way into the fold this offseason, kicking off the grind of the offseason as soon as he possibly could.

"That's what I love – that kid stayed here the entire time," Studrawa said. "Most guys went home for two weeks, saw their families. But this kid is in here (working) every single day. That's how important it is to him. I sat in here and watched drills of him every day. We watched film on Zoom and things like that. A guy that cares that much, is that dedicated and has the tools – he's got quickness, he's really good now at snapping the ball and stepping. He's got a rhythm now with the ability to do those things. And he studies the game. He knows every position. He knows all those things, and the time and effort he puts into it is something I love."

"A guy that works that hard, you're going to be successful, period."

That leaves the remaining three gunning for that guard spot, and although Matt Jones got the nod at the end of the season and seems to be the favorite this season, followed closely by Dawand Jones, Studrawa made it very clear that no one should count out Fryar this offseason.

"His athleticism is what excited me in his recruitment," Studrawa said of Fryar. "He was a basketball player. He's a guy who is 6-5 but has the ability to bend and play really low. Those two things were what intrigued me about him when we first got him in recruiting, and it's only gotten better through training with (strength coach) Mick (Marotti). Now he's getting stronger, he's got a little edge to him and he's a guy who has some grit. He's got some toughness, and he shows up every day."

"He's learning, putting things together, and he's got some grit. I like that, and that's what has got him going."

The race at guard will likely rage through the offseason, even at that left guard spot that seems to have a favorite in Johnson as it stands exiting spring practice. With stability outside and at center, Ohio State can afford a little bit of uncertainty and competition on the inside. And it may need that kind of fire and pressure to be the best that it can be up front in 2021.

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# QB Battle To Continue Into Preseason Camp

Continued From Page 1

freshman tight end Joe Royer from 15 and 12 yards out, respectively.

McCord opened his performance with a 55-yard completion to junior wide receiver Garrett Wilson and had another 35-yard connection to freshman wideout Emeka Egbuka. After starting the day 3 of 6, he competed his next five throws and nine of his last 11 overall attempts to end the day on a high note.

The freshman signal-caller out of Philadelphia St. Joseph's was always going to have to play catch-up to a pair of quarterbacks with a year in the Ohio State offense, but he certainly put his raw talent on display, showing why Day said back on Dec. 16 that McCord will compete for the job.

But it wasn't just the Kyle McCord show for the spring game. Stroud (6-3, 215) also showed why many believe he is the favorite to earn the job for this upcoming season. The Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., product showed plenty of promise, going 16 of 22 (72.7 percent) for 185 yards and a pair of touchdowns for a 173.4 QBR. The scores were to freshman Marvin Harrison, McCord's high school teammate, and senior wide receiver Chris Olave, both from 5 yards out.

Stroud also had a completion of 40 yards to Olave and another of 31 yards to Egbuka, who led the Buckeyes with 123 yards receiving on the day.

When asked specifically about the strong showings of McCord and Stroud, Day again emphasized the importance of the full scope of spring practices and upcoming summer workouts and fall practice. To him, it is not just about a spring game with no real tackling that happened to be the only spring practice televised to a national audience.

"We take the entire 15 practices and evaluate all those things, but when you're in the stadium and you're in a game environment with fans, how does that affect your performance? I mean if there's a change, then we have to figure out why," Day said. "There's a lot of things that go into a lot of positive things happening. What's going on in the game? If we're getting good protection, who the receivers are. I mean there's just many of those things. This is just a very small glimpse at a bunch of guys taking some reps, but there's a body of work that needs to be built from that first spring practice all the way through the first game that still has yet to be written."

The lone interception from the quarterbacks came off the right hand of Miller (6-3, 215), who threw a game-high 30 pass attempts in the most up-and-down performance of the group. He completed 17 of those attempts (56.7 percent) for 128 yards, no touchdowns and that one interception for a QBR of 85.8.

Miller was picked off by redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts in the red zone on the first drive of the game but stayed turnover-free the rest of the afternoon. He also improved as the game went on, starting 7 of 16 and finishing by completing 10 of his final 14 throws.

What the Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral product did not unleash was his deep-threat ability, with his longest completion of the game being a 13-yard connection with Wilson in the first quarter.

But Day was looking for, and has been looking for all spring, things from his inex-

perienced signal callers that go past completion percentages and impressive yardage. The Ohio State head coach said he is looking for the routines and the little things before he can worry about if these quarterbacks can make the big plays when it matters the most.

"When you're just starting and you're learning to play the position, you can't do anything out of the ordinary," Day said. "You can't try to do things other than make the routine plays routinely. Why? Because you have a really good offensive line, really good tight end, you have really good receivers, you have solid backs, so in that moment, you don't need to do anything more than just make the routine plays routinely."

"It's our job as coaches to put them in a situation to be successful and to show the best version of them. But somewhere along the line, when the game's coming down to the fourth quarter, they're going to have to make plays."

"It comes down to not just managing the game – that's a big part of it – but if you want to go win the tough games and the tight games in the fourth quarter, you're going to have to make plays in the two-minute drill, you'll have to throw really well in the red zone and you have to convert on third down."

"But we're hoping early on that, with the talent that's around the quarterback, he can just keep the offense moving and get the ball into the right skill player's hands and keep the chains moving. That's a great start, but eventually, somewhere along the line, they're going to have to step up and win games for us. But that's all part of the process."

Of course, the starting quarterback was not decided at the end of the spring game, which was a 14-7 game in favor of Team Brutus at halftime before the game became a scrimmage with no teams in the second half. Day knew the battle would not end here and said as much to the Big Ten Network prior to kickoff.

"I just want them to come in and run the offense," Day said. "I mean this is just another piece of the puzzle. We're not going to know who the starting quarterback is coming out of today. It's going to be pretty basic on offense and defense. But just to play in the Horseshoe and run the offense and get a feel for things – there will be good plays and bad plays. It's just another step in the progression."

The solution was not found in front of 19,180 fans at Ohio Stadium, but it was, as Day said, "another step" in Ohio State figuring out who will be taking over for Fields. In that decision, the Buckeyes will be replacing a two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year with a 20-2 record as a starter and who will almost certainly become a first-round pick in the NFL draft by the end of the month.

That is not a decision that will be taken lightly, and it is a decision that may not be made until deep into fall camp as Ohio State prepares for its opener against Minnesota on Sept. 2. Day has liked what he has seen from McCord, Miller and Stroud thus far, but this battle is a marathon, not a sprint.

"They've learned a lot, but now, the race is on over the next few months to figure out who can make the next stride," Day said. "Spring's been good. There's been a lot of progress made across the board, but there's still a long way to go before we play against Minnesota."



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

**GOOD FIRST IMPRESSIONS** – Ohio State's top three quarterbacks, including red-shirt freshman Jack Miller, all looked solid at the spring game, combining for 497 yards and four touchdowns.

## Comparing The Quarterback Play

How did the completion numbers from the spring game for Kyle McCord, Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud compare? Yardage below is from the line of scrimmage to the point of the catch.

| <b>BUCKEYE</b> | <b>McCord</b> | <b>Miller</b> | <b>Stroud</b> |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>20+</b>     | <b>2/3</b>    | <b>0/2</b>    | <b>1/1</b>    |
| <b>16-20</b>   | <b>1/3</b>    | <b>0/1</b>    | <b>2/4</b>    |
| <b>11-15</b>   | <b>0/1</b>    | <b>5/11</b>   | <b>2/4</b>    |
| <b>6-10</b>    | <b>5/5</b>    | <b>6/8</b>    | <b>3/4</b>    |
| <b>1-5</b>     | <b>4/4</b>    | <b>5/7</b>    | <b>5/6</b>    |
| <b>0</b>       | <b>0/1</b>    | <b>1/1</b>    | <b>3/3</b>    |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>12/17</b>  | <b>17/30</b>  | <b>16/22</b>  |



# Early Enrollees Take Advantage of Spring Practices

By **CRAIG MERZ**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A record 15 signees from the class of 2021 enrolled early at Ohio State to have the opportunity to better prepare themselves for their first season at a big-time program.

The group features the cream of the crop such as five-star quarterback Kyle McCord, five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer and receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. (four-star) and Emeka Egbuka (five-star).

No matter their star rating, the goal for each athlete is to take advantage of the extra time afforded them by being on campus. It's something that can't be taken for granted after the experiences of the incoming freshmen a year earlier.

That group of early enrollees lost invaluable training because the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the winter of 2020 forced the closure of the school in mid-March and cancellation of the spring game.

Fortunately, the Buckeyes got through all their scheduled workouts this year, culminating in the April 17 spring game in Ohio Stadium.

Now, coach Ryan Day and his staff have data to analyze as they prepare for the season.

While those freshmen who arrived in Columbus in January may get a leg up on their peers in the battle to earn playing time, Day said young players must learn that it's the process of reaching that point that matters.

"When you come to Ohio State, typically you're highly recruited, and there's an expectation that comes with that," he said. "Sometimes it's for the player but a lot of times for the parents and the people back home and the public. To me, when guys come in, the No. 1 thing they have to worry about is getting developed. That's it."

Here's a look in alphabetical order at the 15 enrollees:

## Wide Receiver Jayden Ballard

The Massillon (Ohio) Washington product enters a deep and talented room that includes Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and Jaxon Smith-Njigba, not to mention newcomers Egbuka and Harrison. Ballard (6-2, 192) is the Tigers' career leader in touchdowns (37) and receiving yards (2,636).

Receivers coach Brian Hartline said all three of his freshman pass catchers show maturity beyond their years.

"Jayden is coming along," he said. "All of these guys are performing at a very high level. They don't carry themselves like freshmen. They don't act like freshmen. So, at this point, my job is to throw as much at them as possible because they have shown me they can pretty much handle it."

Ballard had two catches for 11 yards in the spring game.

"I do think the young guys have had a great work ethic," Day said afterward of his new receivers. "They have a great mentality and approach. I'm impressed with all the young guys. I think Marvin, Emeka and Jayden have all shown that they have the ability to play this season."

## Defensive Back Denzel Burke

Hailing from Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro, Burke (6-0, 192) was recruited as an athlete because he can play in the secondary or be a

receiver. He's shown in the practices that putting him at cornerback was the correct call.

"It's actually uncanny how natural he does a lot of things at corner for not having played there very much," secondary coach Matt Barnes said.

"I don't know if it's 7-on-7 development or he just had a trainer or somebody he worked with, but he does a lot of things naturally very well. It's been fun to watch."

With OSU having one of the worst pass defenses nationally last season, there may be an opportunity for Burke this season. He had two tackles during the spring game.

"He has elite feet and patience that you don't see from many people regardless of their age but particularly for a young guy to sit at the line of scrimmage and have the patience that he has to play press technique and some other techniques," Barnes said.

"Not that we're surprised, but I am, to a degree, just kind of blown away by how far along he looks at times. Now, he still has a long way to go."

## Linebacker Reid Carrico

Ranked by 247Sports as the third-best prospect in Ohio, he will be the first player from Ironton to don the scarlet and gray since halfback Marcus Williams from 2006-09.

Carrico (6-2, 228) has already made an impression by being among the first five freshmen to lose their black stripes from their helmets, signifying they are full-fledged Buckeyes.

"He's going to have a great career here just because of the way he takes care of himself in the classroom, on the field," Day said in December. "He's one of the toughest guys I've seen on film running sideline to sideline."

Ohio State lacks depth and experience at linebacker, so Carrico is a welcome addition. He assisted on a tackle in the spring game.

"The linebackers are the glue that hold the defense together," said junior defensive end Zach Harrison. "They're making plays and giving a lot of effort."

## Offensive Lineman Ben Christman

There are a lot of veterans along the line, but Christman (6-6, 312) out of Richfield (Ohio) Revere has the tools to be a factor down the road. He was the top-rated lineman in Ohio for the 2021 class and committed to the Buckeyes on June 26, 2019.

He and fellow early enrollee Zen Michalski will be under the tutelage of offensive line coach Greg Studrawa.

"The foundation of technique and how to be tough and how to use your hands to block – that's where I am with those guys," Studrawa said.

## Defensive Back Jantzen Dunn

The four-star from Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren had offers from the likes of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Oklahoma, Penn State and Southern Cal but hopes to find a home in the Ohio State secondary.

He's been getting reps at safety, and in the spring game he had two tackles (one solo).

Day said players such as Dunn (6-1, 188) who excelled in high school must learn patience at the next level.

"One person's timetable is maybe different than another person's timetable, because of

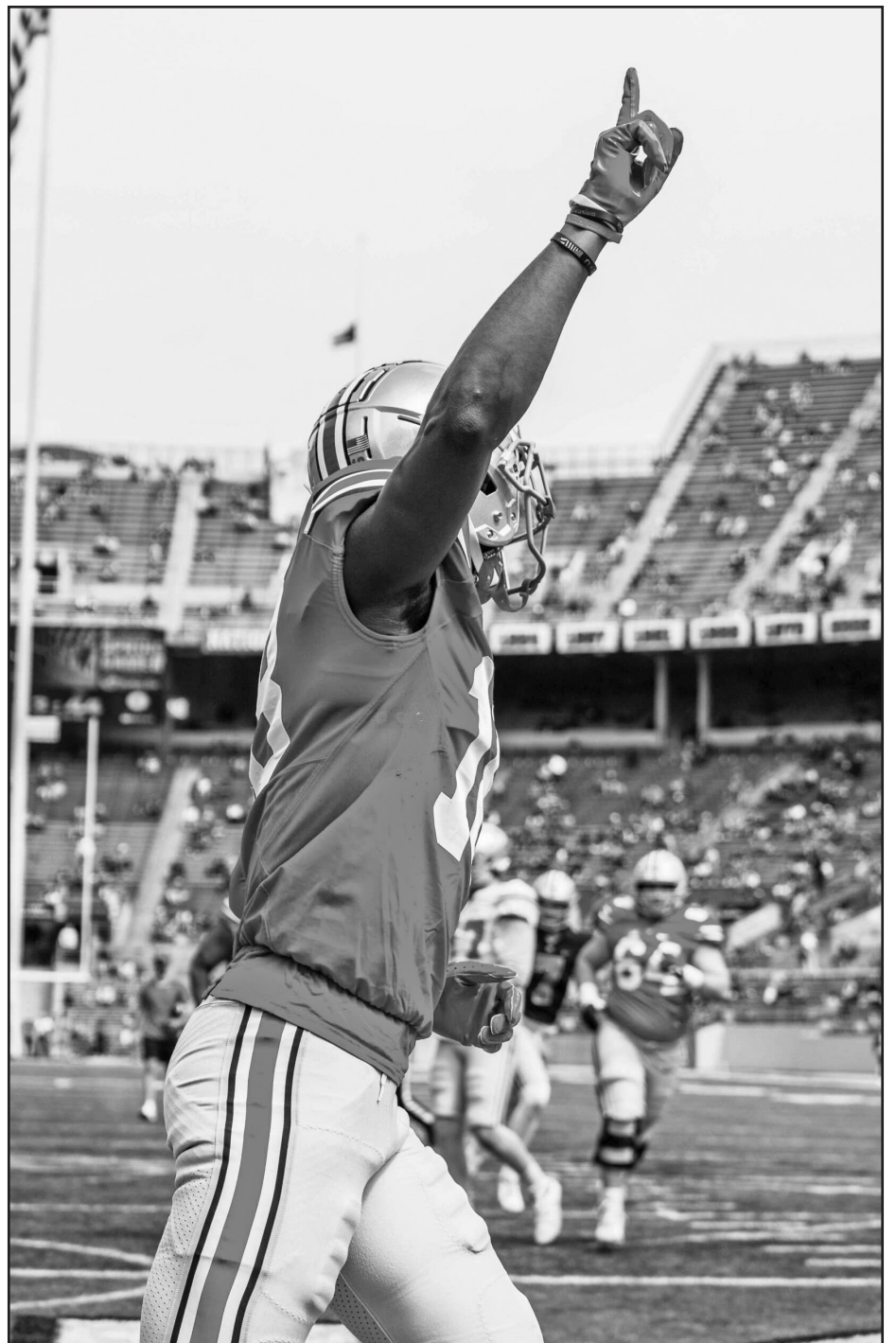


PHOTO COURTESY PAUL VERNON/ASSOCIATED PRESS VIA THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS  
**ON THE BOARD – Freshman wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. celebrates his first touchdown in a Buckeye uniform in the first quarter of the spring game.**

where they grew up, how they grew up, what they were exposed to, their physical, mental makeup, maybe the position room," Day said. "There are a lot of things that come into play, and there's a fine line. You can't wait around for anybody. There has to be urgency to get on the field, but you also have to have the mind-set of, 'I have talent, but I also have to have skill and discipline in my life.' And that's the goal."

## Wide Receiver Emeka Egbuka

The No. 1-rated receiver in the nation from Steilacoom, Wash., had a five-star career and is expected to someday in the not-too-distant future provide a one-two punch with Marvin Harrison similar to what the Buckeyes have now with Olave and Wilson.

Egbuka (6-1, 203) led all receivers in the spring game with 123 yards on seven catches while Harrison's seven receptions produced 49 yards and a touchdown.

The two were among the first to get their black stripes removed.

"It's not just about on the football field," Hartline said. "It's how you carry yourself off the field, and these guys embody all of that."

"I don't see anybody that spends more times on the Jugs machine or more time in the room and doing extra than I do those two young men at this point."

## Wide Receiver Marvin Harrison Jr.

Harrison, the son of eight-time NFL Pro Bowl wide receiver Marvin Harrison, teamed with McCord to win the past three Pennsylvania 6A state championships at Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep.

Day said it's easy to see how Harrison (6-3, 202) has had so much success, including 37 TDs in high school.

"He has lots of discipline, excellent attention to detail with his routes and is somebody who cares a lot," Day said. "He's in here after hours. He's here early in the morning. He takes a lot of pride in his work, and he's making plays. He's just a freshman who has a long way to go, but early impressions have



## Ohio State's 2021 Early Enrollees

| No. | Name                | Pos. | Ht.  | Wt. | Previous School                     |
|-----|---------------------|------|------|-----|-------------------------------------|
| 10  | Jayden Ballard      | WR   | 6-2  | 192 | Massillon (Ohio) Washington         |
| 29  | Denzel Burke        | CB   | 6-0  | 189 | Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro          |
| 28  | Reid Carrico        | LB   | 6-2  | 228 | Ironton, Ohio                       |
| 71  | Ben Christman       | OL   | 6-6  | 312 | Richfield (Ohio) Revere             |
| 24  | Jantzen Dunn        | SAF  | 6-1  | 188 | Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren    |
| 12  | Emeka Egbuka        | WR   | 6-1  | 203 | Steilacoom, Wash.                   |
| 18  | Marvin Harrison Jr. | WR   | 6-3  | 202 | Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep      |
| 81  | Sam Hart            | TE   | 6-5  | 240 | Aurora (Colo.) Cherokee Trail       |
| 32  | TreVeyon Henderson  | RB   | 5-10 | 210 | Hopewell, Va.                       |
| 14  | Kyle McCord         | QB   | 6-3  | 210 | Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep      |
| 65  | Zen Michalski       | OL   | 6-9  | 295 | Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central   |
| 29  | Jesse Mirco         | P    | 6-4  | 210 | Fremantle, Australia                |
| 21  | Evan Pryor          | RB   | 5-10 | 197 | Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough |
| 33  | Jack Sawyer         | DE   | 6-4  | 240 | Pickerington (Ohio) North           |
| 91  | Tyleik Williams     | DT   | 6-3  | 330 | Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed           |

been excellent."

Harrison had a 5-yard touchdown pass from C.J. Stroud in the spring game.

"Marvin Harrison is the real deal," Olave said. "Route runner. Technician. All that. He's a deep threat. He's a real good receiver."

### Tight End Sam Hart

The former standout wrestler at Aurora (Colo.) Cherokee Trail enters a room that has senior Jeremy Ruckert; senior walk-ons Corey Rau and Mitch Rossi; sophomore Cade Stover, who switched last season from playing defense and looks to be the backup to Ruckert; and redshirt freshman Joe Royer, who had a TD catch in the spring game, all in the mix.

Rossi has been impressed with how Hart (6-5, 240) and Royer are trying to add to the depth chart of tight ends coach Kevin Wilson.

"Those guys have been working really hard, getting with Coach Wilson," Rossi said. "(This is a) big-time development position, so in the offseason they are trying to work on everything – body position, hands, feet – to get ready to help us out."

### Running Back TreVeyon Henderson

The No. 1-ranked running back in the nation out of Hopewell, Va., Henderson did not play in the fall of 2020 because of the pandemic. In 2019, he was Virginia's Gatorade Player of the Year when he rushed for 2,424 yards and 45 touchdowns.

Henderson (5-10, 210) has had his black stripe removed.

Said Day: "He's still really young and didn't play last year, hasn't played football in a while. That's the other thing. He and a few other guys who are young freshman last year didn't play high school ball. But he has done a good job. He's had a good attitude, he has a good work ethic. He's done everything right so far."

"Now, he still has to play more and learn every day – he needs a million reps – but the talent is there, the work ethic is there. I think he's going to have a really bright future for us. He's done everything we've asked him to do so far. He's flashed at times already, and we're excited to see what that looks like during the spring game."

Henderson gained 26 yards on six carries and had five catches for 29 yards in the spring game.

### Quarterback Kyle McCord

McCord (6-3, 210) was the No. 3 pro-style QB at St. Joe's Prep and finished his career as Philadelphia's career leader in passing yards (6,687) and TD passes (88).

He will battle Stroud and Jack Miller to

replace Justin Fields. McCord's first pass in the spring game went 55 yards to Garrett Wilson. He was 12 of 17 for 184 yards with a 15-yard TD to Smith- Njigba and a 12-yarder to Royer.

Day sees the unlimited potential in McCord.

"I just think it's about getting more reps and trying to get better with each play," Day said. "The thing you can't do is that you can't run every single play into all different coverages every practice. What you have to do is be able to play the plays in your mind, play with an imagination, put the work in off the field."

"Because if you can solve some of those problems on your own, not just when you're in the building and when you're out at practice, you're going to accelerate your learning. I think he's done a good job of that. I think he can continue to get better at it because that's a huge part of the game."

### Offensive Lineman Zen Michalski

Michalski (6-9, 295) is part of the long-term future along with Christman and five-star lineman Donovan Jackson, who will join the team this summer.

The trio might not see much playing time right away but eventually they'll add depth.

"I've got smart guys, and they study so much," Studrawa said. "Their attention to detail, especially for the young guys that are in there asking questions all the time and wanting to learn. They want to learn everything, and when you have guys that are like that, you can move those guys around and still come up with a cohesive unit even if you have a couple of injuries."

"And that's what it should be. When you've got an offensive line room that has depth, those things can happen and instill confidence in everybody around them."

### Punter Jesse Mirco

Mirco, like former OSU punter Cameron Johnston, is a former Australian rules football player who got his apprenticeship from ProKick Australia, which has delivered numerous kickers to U.S. colleges from Australia.

Mirco (6-4, 210) was the No. 6 punter in the class of 2021.

"Had a great winter to get stronger," special teams coordinator Parker Fleming said. "There's a lot of things that specialists need – mentally, physically, all that – and then getting with the team and doing our drills."

Mirco had five punts for a 33.8-yard average in the spring game.

### Running Back Evan Pryor

Like Henderson, Pryor (5-10, 197) had his senior season of football canceled at Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough because of COVID-19. As a junior, he rushed for 1,130 yards and 11 TDs, and he added 646 receiving yards and eight scores.

Junior running back Master Teague, who will be challenged for carries by Pryor and Henderson, likes what he's seen of the pair.

"They're doing great so far, just in the detail," Teague said, "They've been learning quick, and they love the game. Everybody has a process, and they've come here and they're going through their process. We have a great room, and everybody's just making each other better."

Running backs coach Tony Alford said Pryor and Henderson are eager to learn.

"They're both extremely, extremely coachable kids," he said. "They're always on a quest – give me more, give me more."

"When you start coaching, you start to correct. And they don't take it personally. It's not a personal attack at them. They want to know, 'What can I do better here?'"

Pryor had 1 yard in three carries and two catches for 12 yards in the spring game.

### Defensive End Jack Sawyer

The top player in Ohio and fourth overall from nearby Pickerington North made a splash at the spring game when he had four tackles (three solo), including three sacks for 14 yards.

"All the things that stand out are pretty obvious," Zach Harrison said afterward. "He's going to be a great player at Ohio

State. Jack's real. Jack's legit."

Sawyer (6-4, 240) is expected to be one of the freshmen to make a major contribution this season. He and Marvin Harrison were the first freshmen to have their black stripes removed.

"He's off to a great start, for sure," Day said of Sawyer after the spring game. "He's earning more and more reps. He's working his way up the depth chart. I think across the board our D-line was solid this (spring). We have some good depth there. But Jack in particular came in with a lot of confidence. He's made a lot of plays."

"What you saw today was pretty much most every practice out there. If he can keep building and getting stronger and keep build-

ing, then hopefully he's going to have an impact and be able to participate here early in the season."

### Defensive Tackle Tyleik Williams

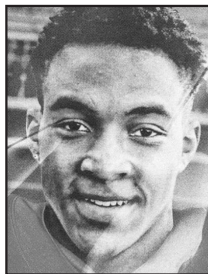
The four-star Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed product could push for playing time to replace Tommy Togiai. Williams (6-3, 330) is raw but has an upside with his athleticism and desire to improve.

"You have to spend time and you have to work at it, and everybody has a different journey in that along the way," Day said. "You look at different guys and different stories, maybe it took five years, one year, two years. Everybody is on a different (path)."

"Sometimes these guys just need the room to grow and to understand that it takes time, but on the other side of that, let's not wait around. Let's try to get on the field as fast as you can."



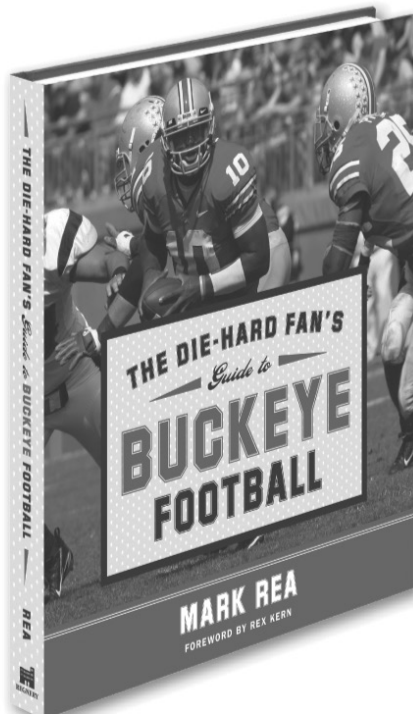
Jack Sawyer



TreVeyon Henderson

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# Buckeye WR Room Has Talent From Top To Bottom

By LORI SCHMIDT  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

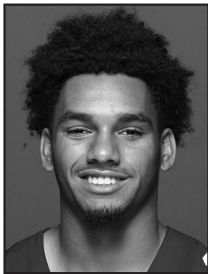
Ohio State senior receiver Chris Olave surprised ESPN draft analyst Todd McShay when he declined to turn pro after the 2020 season.

"I thought worst case, he was going somewhere in the second round in what shapes up as a pretty deep wide receiver class," said McShay on the ESPN "First Draft" podcast Jan. 19.

Olave shocked even teammate Garrett Wilson.

"I'm not going to lie, I was surprised," Wilson said. "When you're as good as Chris, you think those (players) are as good as gone."

Olave was the team's leading receiver a year ago, averaging 104.1 yards per game, good enough to rank No. 12 nationally in that category. Wilson's average of 90.4 yards wasn't far behind. With their performances against Nebraska and Penn State, they became the first Buckeye duo in school history to account for 100 receiving yards each in consecutive games. Conference coaches ended up voting them both first-team all-Big Ten.



Chris Olave

Add in senior tight end Jeremy Ruckert, who was third on the team in terms of receptions (13) and receiving touchdowns (five), and head coach Ryan Day knows he has players who are capable of catching the ball.

"The positive is we have a lot of weapons, and it's going to be hard for teams to single up, man-to-man in certain situations any of those guys, because they can be a mismatch," Day said. "The negative is I think they all want the ball, so understanding that we're a team, there's only one football, and doing a great job when the ball is not in your hands is critically important."

Wilson's reaction to Olave's return certainly makes it sound as if he's more than willing to share, if that's what it takes to duplicate the success of a campaign that had the Buckeyes reach the national championship game, although he's undoubtedly

hoping for a better fate than their 52-24 loss to Alabama in that game.

"When he told me, I knew that we were going to be right back," Wilson said, "hopefully, right back where we were last year with a chance to compete for everything we want."

Ohio State plans to deploy Wilson in a slightly different manner in 2021, however. Unlike this past year when he mostly played inside as a slot receiver, Wilson will be moving outside to play the X-receiver position.

Among the candidates to take over Wilson's former spot is Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who has impressed receivers coach Brian Hartline with a skill Hartline has long prized.

"He may be our best blocker in the room," said Hartline. "His desire, his physicality is much needed."

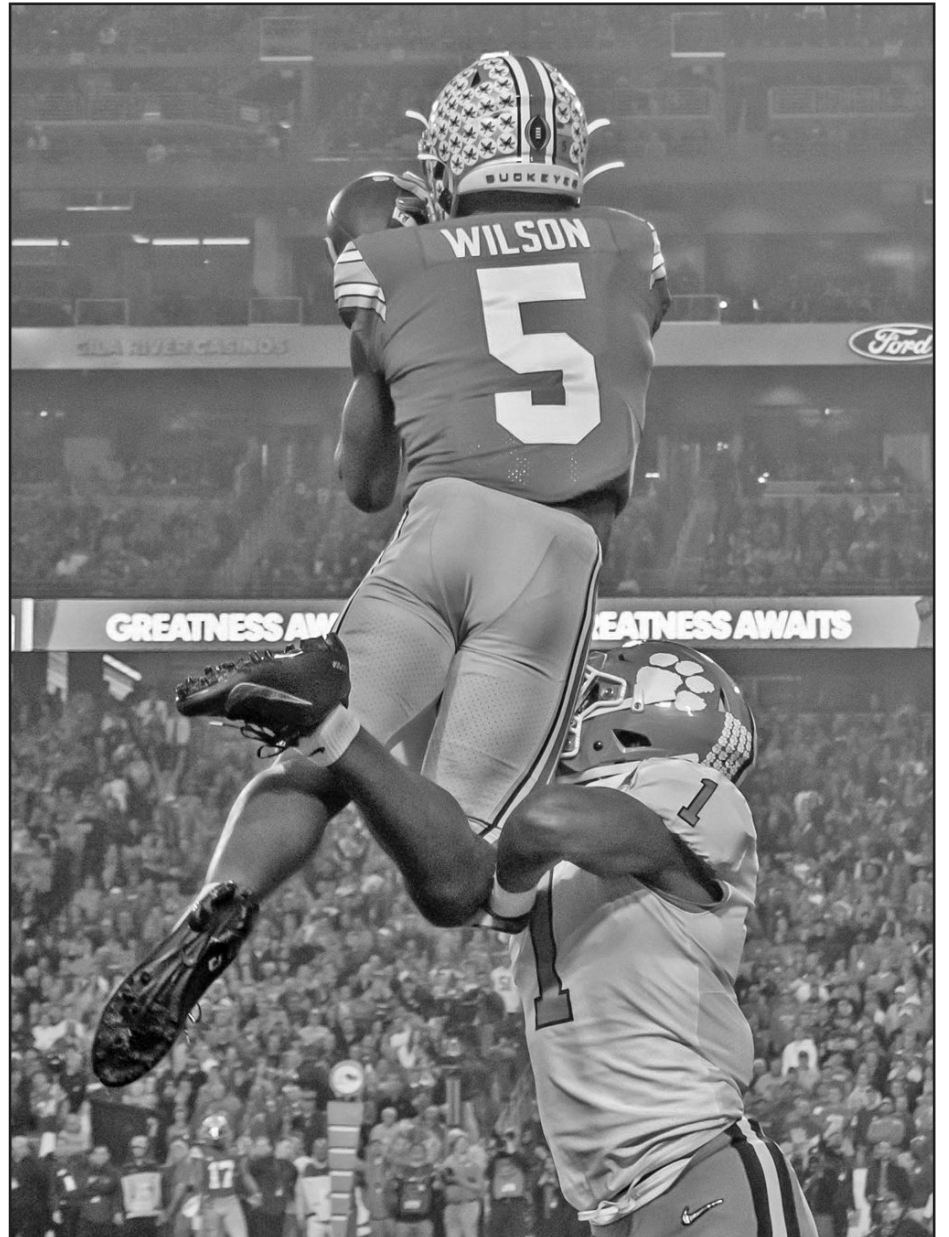
Smith-Njigba, a former five-star recruit out of Rockwall, Texas, had catches in six of the seven games he played in as a freshman, including two receptions each in 2021 College Football Playoff matchups with Clemson and Alabama.

"We want him to be in the mix with the first group," Day told reporters. "He can do so many great things. He just needs to be more consistent, but we're excited about this year. He's had a good, solid spring. He needs to now have a great summer so he can have a great preseason going into the year, but he's flashed."

That's all before mentioning Jameson Williams, who started the last six games of his sophomore season, was third on the team in receiving yards and receiving yards per game, and says he is ready to make an even greater impact as a junior.

"This offseason, I feel like I got a lot better – better routes, catching the ball more consistently, basically playing around with my speed," Williams said. "I'm a fast guy. You know, sometimes I have to tempo it down a little bit and get a better route in."

Having that type of top-end talent is important, but the Buckeyes have more than that. They have depth, and that will aid in the development of a new starting quarterback with Justin Fields moving on to the NFL,



FILE PHOTO

**INSIDE (TO) OUT – Ohio State wide receiver Garrett Wilson (5) will move from the slot to the X-receiver position for the 2021 season. Wilson averaged 90.4 yards per game last fall.**

because whomever the signal callers target in practice will be minding the minutiae of their position.

"I love the situation with a young quarterback," said Hartline. "It just asks us and demands us to be more detailed than ever."

The Buckeyes will have to wait until this fall to get a better idea of how junior Kamryn Babb and sophomore Julian Fleming fit in the depth chart, because both have been hurt. Babb has missed several weeks of spring workouts with an undisclosed injury. Fleming was seen by reporters working off to the side of spring drills during open sessions, indicating he was banged up. That was not a complete surprise, given that he had hip surgery while at Southern Columbia High School in Pennsylvania, and Hartline indicated he's been playing with a linebacker's strap on an ailing shoulder while at OSU.

"He needs to get ultra-healthy first so he can maximize what he's capable of doing," declared Hartline. "Unfortunately, we did not have enough time with him through the spring, because of getting things fixed since high school."

"The guy's been operating at 75 percent for the last couple years."

When Fleming is 100 percent, he's an intriguing talent.

Hartline called him a "special individual" and added that Fleming's combination of

size (6-2, 205) and speed are unlike anything he's ever personally seen in college football. That's what made him the No. 1 receiving prospect in his recruiting class and the third-ranked player overall.

Incoming freshmen Emeka Egbuka and Marvin Harrison Jr. were also highly regarded as recruits and have impressed since arriving on campus. In fact, Egbuka, like Fleming the year before, topped the 247Sports list of high school receivers. Both Egbuka and Harrison have had their black stripes removed, making them official members of the team.

"I don't see anybody spend more time on the Jugs (machine), more time in the room coming in extra than I do those two young men at this point," Hartline said. "They don't carry themselves like freshmen. They don't act like freshmen."

Hartline also praised the work ethic of yet another freshman, Jayden Ballard, a four-star recruit who recorded 141 receptions, 2,636 yards and 37 touchdowns during his career at Massillon (Ohio) High School.

The 2021 additions helped make the wide receiving corps so deep that super senior Demario McCall has moved to practicing with the defensive backs, and sophomore Gee Scott is learning to play tight end.

"We expect to have one of the best rooms in the country," said Wilson.

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# Cheers Ring Out At Ohio Stadium Once Again

Continued From Page 1

to mention that the presence of fans was providing a boost in energy.

"They're excited," defensive line coach Larry Johnson said on April 8 of the players. "This is going to be fun for our players to get a chance to be (out there with) fans in the stands, and especially for the parents That's what's most important. They get to see them for the first time, and I know the young guys are excited about that. It's a good feeling to be able to walk into the stadium, look around and see people instead of posters. That's going to be pretty cool."

Others pointed out that the stands weren't technically empty last season, with pockets of the stands populated by family pods, but that did little to simulate the true impact the Horseshoe can have on a game. The roughly 20 percent capacity crowd didn't capture that energy either – Ohio State's first- and second-year players will have to wait until Oregon comes to town on Sept. 11 to feel that if restrictions are lifted – but it did serve as a fun return for the Buckeyes.

"It's really exciting. From family to friends, everybody is just happy to go to the stadium and to be back in there, and we're happy to have Buckeye Nation back in the stadium," defensive tackle Haskell Garrett said. "It's a little bit different when you have just your family (in there). Having your family is awesome, but having the whole Buckeye Nation, having fans back in there so that they can experience what we experience is even more enticing. We're just happy to have everybody back in."

That's not to say that the now-populated Horseshoe didn't live up to expectations for those young Ohio State players, either. Freshmen could be seen on the sidelines playing up to the crowd, asking for more noise and being quickly obliged by those in the nearest sections of the football cathedral. Wilson flashed a huge grin at the crowd after a first-quarter snag.



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

**HAPPY RETURN** – For the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, fans were welcomed into Ohio Stadium for the 2021 spring game. Nearly 20,000 fans jumped at the chance to see the Buckeyes in action.

It was a blast for those in attendance, too. Cheers rang out as Buckeye fans flooded into the stadium and filed into their seats – socially distanced and sporting masks, of course. BSB caught up with Zach Fleer, a fan in attendance, who shared the same sentiment as the players: It's good to start getting back to normal.

"It's wonderful," said Fleer. "For us (Fleer attended the game with his wife), we met at a game in 2016. She's pregnant now too, so for our baby – he's not here yet – but to be here with him was really cool. To be back in the stadium, it felt normal. Hearing the band, hearing the crowd, it was all just really cool."

Although Ohio State is delighted about the increasing odds for a normal fall and a full house this upcoming season, the

Buckeyes – always considering a competitive edge and plotting out contingency plans – are still working to make sure that they're prepared for that return of rocking stadiums and belligerent road crowds. If everything goes according to plan, they'll run into one such crowd to open the 2021 season, with a Thursday night trip to Minnesota's TCF Bank Stadium on Sept. 2.

The Golden Gophers aren't known for their raucous crowds, though the 50,805-seat stadium will likely be packed and hopping if state laws allow for it by the time September rolls around. It was the last time Ohio State came to town on Nov. 15, 2014, when 45,778 fans took in a 31-24 Buckeye victory in freezing temperatures.

"It's going to be an adjustment phase

again," Day said, "We had to adjust with no fans, and then we got used to that, and now we have to adjust to having fans again. It's fun though. Thank goodness that we're able to get some people in the stands. I'm looking forward to having our guys play in front of a crowd and get back to some normalcy here. We're very excited about that. We're hoping that we can get a packed house here when Oregon comes to town, depending on how things are going here in the state, because that's a huge deal for us. That's a huge advantage, and I know our guys are excited about it."

"But like I said, there's going to be a little bit of an adjustment again, getting people back in the stands. But I know our guys love that because they're all show-offs. That's what I call them."

## Top Performers At The Spring Game

**Freshman wide receiver Emeka Egbuka** – The No. 1 wide receiver in the 2021 class, Egbuka exemplified why he was so coveted across the country in the spring game. He hauled in seven receptions for 123 yards, including an extremely difficult catch where he sprawled out to snag a pass thrown behind him.

**Freshman wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr.** – He received rave reviews throughout spring camp and backed up the praise in the spring game. Harrison reeled in seven receptions for 49 yards and one touchdown, consistently finding openings in the secondary and displaying his sure hands.

**Sophomore safety/bullet Ronnie Hickman** – After taking a redshirt as freshman due to injury, Hickman spent his first active season as a backup. Now in his third year, Hickman is ready to take the next step in the Buckeye secondary, evidenced by his eight-tackle outing in the spring game, which included five solo stops.

**Freshman quarterback Kyle McCord** – In his first live action in front of fans since arriving at Ohio State as an early enrollee in January, McCord flashed the ability that made him one of the highest touted prospects in the country for the 2021 class. The true freshman threw just five incomplete passes on his way to a 12-for-17 passing performance for 184 yards and two touchdowns in the spring game.

**Senior linebacker Teradja Mitchell** – After sitting behind a slew of veteran

linebackers for his first three seasons, Mitchell is poised to emerge as a force at linebacker for the Buckeyes. Although the hard-hitting linebacker could not display his pop due to the no-tackling rule, he was frequently in the right place to make the play in the spring game. Mitchell finished with 10 tackles (seven solo) and one tackle for loss.

**Freshman defensive end Jack Sawyer** – Perhaps no one looked more impressive in the spring game than the highest-rated member of the Buckeyes' 2021 class. Sawyer stood out for the Buckeyes, recording four tackles and three sacks with a forced fumble, demonstrating what all his recruitment hype was about.

**Redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud** – After displaying his ability as a runner with a 48-yard touchdown against Michigan State in 2020, Stroud showed part of his playmaking ability, but his passing skills had not yet been showcased. The second-year signal caller answered any doubters by making on-time and on-target throws all day to the tune of 185 yards and two touchdowns on 16-of-22 passing.

**Redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts** – It was far from a perfect showing for Watts, but the young cornerback flashed promise for the future in the spring game. In addition to his six tackles (five solo), Watts put his playmaking ability on display when he grabbed the game's lone interception.

– Joe Dempsey



# No Candidate Springs To Front Of QB Race

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The focus of Ohio State's spring game in Ohio Stadium on April 17 was the competition to replace star quarterback Justin Fields, who will be an early pick in the NFL draft later this month.

Redshirt freshman quarterbacks Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud and true freshman Kyle McCord are competing for the spot to not only replace Fields but meet the high expectations brought to the position by third-year head coach Ryan Day.

Although each had his moments, it was clear there is more work needed before one of them wins the starting job.

Miller was 17 for 30 for 128 yards and an interception. Stroud completed 16 of 22 for 185 yards and two touchdowns, and McCord hit on 12 of 17 passes for 184 yards and a pair of TDs.

"All learning, flashes here and there," Day said afterward. "The more these guys can prepare and work in the film room and just grind, the better they're going to prepare. Now the race is on."

First-year receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka and true freshman defensive end Jack Sawyer also stood out with their performances.

What was more notable was just having the game after it was canceled a year ago because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were real fans, not cardboard cutouts, and The Best Damn Band in the Land performed.

On a partly cloudy 58-degree afternoon the reduced capacity crowd of 19,180 – which included some 10,000 caregivers and health care workers from the Wexner Medical Center and select entities on campus – brought a sense of normalcy, even if it wasn't a normal game.

The format was two 10-minute quarters for the first half with the rosters split among Team Brutus (coached by defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs) and Team Buckeye (coached by offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson). In the second half it was the more traditional offense vs. defense scrimmage.

For the record, Brutus won 28-13.

To prevent injuries, tackling was prohibit-



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

**CENTER STAGE** – Ohio State football coach Ryan Day (center) speaks to a trio of quarterbacks during the 2021 spring game. The spotlight was on the quarterbacks, who are battling for the starting job this fall.

ed and there were no kickoffs. The quarterbacks wore black jerseys and were off-limits to being hit. Nonetheless, it was still football.

## First Quarter

Team Buckeye got the ball first and Miller took the first snap at his own 25. He drove them to the 15 with the big plays being completions of 11 yards to junior wideout Jameson Williams and 13 to junior receiver Garrett Wilson.

On 1st-and-10 from the 15, Miller was intercepted by redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts at the 1, and Watts had a return of 29 yards. Miller on the drive was 6 of 9 or 51 yards.

Stroud immediately got Brutus rolling by hitting Egbuka for 15 yards and then connected with senior wide receiver Chris Olave for 40 yards to the Buckeye 15. Redshirt freshman Miyan Williams ran for 3, caught a pass for 5 and rushed for 2 more to place the ball at the 5.

From there, Stroud found Harrison for the TD at the 3:44 mark for a 7-0 lead by Brutus, which had the ball for 1:43 with six plays and 70 yards.

When Team Buckeye got the ball back, McCord wowed the crowd with a 55-yard strike to Wilson to the 20. The series stalled at the 23 when Sawyer was credited with the strip "sack" of McCord, who recovered his own fumble for a 4-yard loss. Redshirt freshman Jake Seibert missed a 40-yard field goal.

Later, Australian true freshman Jesse Mirco had a 43-yard punt.

## Second Quarter

Team Brutus took a 14-0 lead at 5:03 of the second when Stroud connected with Olave for a 5-yard score at the end of a 13-play, 61-yard series that used 3:35. Egbuka had receptions of 12, 8 and 10 yards to help set up the TD for a 14-0 lead.

McCord then guided Buckeye on a 13-play, 75-yard, 3:52 march that was capped with a TD toss of 15 yards to sophomore receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba in the right corner with 1:11 left.

Heralded true freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson had a 9-yard run and a 4-yard catch, and Wilson moved the ball 10 yards to the Brutus 37 with his catch. On the next play, third-year back Marcus Crowley

took a McCord throw for 12 yards and Smith-Njigba added 10 more with his reception to the 15. Two plays later he scored to make it 14-7.

On the final Brutus possession of the first half, fifth-year senior defensive end Jerron Cage sacked Miller for a 10-yard loss to the Buckeye 45 to force a Mirco punt on the final play.

## Second Half

There was no clock for the controlled scrimmage as Day mixed and matched the personnel from both teams to get a true offense vs. defense feel.

Stroud used a 31-yard pass to Egbuka to the Buckeye 21 to ignite the first series. Egbuka also had a grab for 12 to the 5 followed by redshirt sophomore Steele Chambers' runs of 4 and 3 yards for the touchdown to put Brutus ahead 21-7. The series consisted of 75 yards on 11 plays.

On the next series, Henderson had a catch from Miller for 12 yards and a 14-yard run on a drive that ended in Seibert missing a field-goal try from 45 yards.

Brutus redshirt freshman tight end Joe Royer caught a 12-yard TD pass from McCord for a 28-7 lead during a drive that Egbuka had a 35-yard reception and third-year back Marcus Crowley ran for 8 and 13 yards and had a 7-yard catch.

The final score came when senior Jagger LaRoe took over for Stroud during the eight-play, 75-yard drive to end the scrimmage. LaRoe threw a 20-yard TD to fellow senior walk-on Sam Wglusz for the 28-13 final. There was no extra-point attempt.

LaRoe was 5 of 6 for 75 yards in the drive. Senior wide receiver Austin Kutscher had catches for 13 and 30 yards, and sophomore wide receiver Marvin Davies hauled in two passes for 12 yards.

## Numbers

Egbuka had seven catches for 123 yards. ... Harrison gained 49 yards on seven catches, including a TD. ... Wilson had four catches for 85 yards. ... Smith-Njigba made five catches for 50 yards plus a TD, and Olave's three receptions went for 57 yards and a score. ... Henderson carried six times for 26 yards while the other promising true freshman halfback, Evan Pryor, had three runs for a yard and two catches for 12 yards. ... Sawyer had four tackles (three solo) and three sacks.

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# Spring Game Box Score

## Brutus 28, Buckeye 13

April 17, 2021 – Ohio Stadium, Columbus

| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F  |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|----|
| TEAM BRUTUS       | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 28 |
| TEAM BUCKEYE      | 0 | 7 | 0 | 6 | 13 |

### First Quarter

**BRUTUS** – Harrison, 5-yard pass from Stroud (Seibert kick), 3:44; 6 plays, 70 yards, 1:43 TOP.

### Second Quarter

**BRUTUS** – Olave, 5-yard pass from Stroud (Seibert kick), 5:03; 13 plays, 61 yards, 3:35 TOP.

**BUCKEYE** – Smith-Njigba, 15-yard pass from McCord (Seibert kick), 1:11; 13 plays, 75 yards, 3:52 TOP.

### Third Quarter

**BRUTUS** – Chambers, 2-yard run (Seibert kick), 7:00; 11 plays, 75 yards, 3:00 TOP.

### Fourth Quarter

**BRUTUS** – Royer, 12-yard pass from McCord (Seibert kick), 5:00; 7 plays, 75 yards, 5:00 TOP.

**BUCKEYE** – Wiglusz, 20-yard pass from LaRoe (Seibert kick), 0:00; 8 plays, 75 yards, 5:00 TOP.

**Att.** – 19,180

Weather – 58 degrees, partly cloudy; wind 2 mph.

### Team Statistics

|                                 | BRUTUS         | BUCKEYE        |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>First Downs</b>              | <b>19</b>      | <b>20</b>      |
| <b>Rushing</b>                  | <b>5</b>       | <b>2</b>       |
| <b>Passing</b>                  | <b>14</b>      | <b>17</b>      |
| <b>Penalty</b>                  | <b>0</b>       | <b>1</b>       |
| <b>Rushes-Yards</b>             | <b>16-40</b>   | <b>16-27</b>   |
| <b>Passing Yards</b>            | <b>277</b>     | <b>295</b>     |
| <b>Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)</b> | <b>23-36-0</b> | <b>27-39-1</b> |
| <b>Offensive Plays</b>          | <b>52</b>      | <b>55</b>      |
| <b>Total Net Yards</b>          | <b>317</b>     | <b>322</b>     |
| <b>Third Down Efficiency</b>    | <b>6-9</b>     | <b>9-13</b>    |
| <b>Punts-Avg.</b>               | <b>3-116</b>   | <b>2-53</b>    |
| <b>Fumbles-Lost</b>             | <b>0-0</b>     | <b>1-0</b>     |
| <b>Penalties</b>                | <b>1-4</b>     | <b>0-0</b>     |
| <b>Time of Possession</b>       | <b>15:55</b>   | <b>24:05</b>   |

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – BRUTUS:** Crowley 2-21; Williams 5-18; Chambers 4-10; Stroud 2-3; McCord 1-0; Pryor 2-(-2); Miller 1-(-10). **BUCKEYE:** Henderson 6-26; Crowley 4-8; Pryor 2-3; McCord 3-(-4); Stroud 1-(-6).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – BRUTUS:** Stroud 14-19-0-175-2; Miller 5-11-0-40-0; McCord 4-6-0-62-1. **BUCKEYE:** Stroud 2-3-0-10-0; Miller 12-19-1-88-0; McCord 8-11-0-122-1; LaRoe 5-6-0-75-1.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – BRUTUS:** Egbuka 7-123; Harrison 7-49; Olave 3-57; Williams 2-7; Royer 1-12; Williams 1-11; Pryor 2-12; Crowley 1-7. **BUCKEYE:** Smith-Njigba 5-50; Henderson 5-29; Wilson 4-85; Kutscher 2-43; Crowley 2-21; Davies 2-12; Ballard 2-11; Wiglusz 1-20; Williams 1-11; Hart 1-7; Stover 1-5.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – BRUTUS:** Mirco 3-38.7. **BUCKEYE:** Mirco 2-26.5.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – BRUTUS:** None. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) BRUTUS:** None. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**MISSED FIELD GOALS – BRUTUS:** None. **BUCKEYE:** Seibert (40,45).

**FORCED FUMBLES – BRUTUS:** Sawyer. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES – BRUTUS:** None. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**INTERCEPTIONS – BRUTUS:** Watts 1-29. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**SACKS – BRUTUS:** Sawyer 3.0-14. **BUCKEYE:** Cage 1.0-10.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS – BRUTUS:** Sawyer 3.0-14. **BUCKEYE:** Cage 1.0-10; Cowan 0.5-1; Vincent 0.5-1.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – BRUTUS:** Hickman 3-3-6; Watts 5-1-6; Simon 5-1-6; Martinez 3-2-5; Mitchell 3-1-4; Sawyer 3-1-4; McCullough 2-1-3; Ransom 1-0-1; Carrico 0-1-1; Jean-Baptiste 1-0-1; Johnson 1-0-1; Moore 1-0-1; Henry-Young 1-0-1; Cowan 0-1-1; Potter 1-0-1. **BUCKEYE:** Mitchell 4-2-6; Eichenberg 3-3-6; Hamilton 2-1-3; Hickman 2-0-2; Dunn 1-1-2; Cage 2-0-2; Young 1-1-2; Shaw 2-0-2; Burke 2-0-2; Pope 1-1-2; Cox 2-0-2; Henry-Young 2-0-2; Cowan 0-2-2; Ransom 1-0-1; Kittle 0-1-1; Vincent 0-1-1; McCullough 0-1-1.

### Players In The Game

**BRUTUS** – Harrison, Ransom, Martinez, Hickman, Watts, Mirco, DiMaccio, Carrico, Olave, Mitchell, Jameson Williams, Stroud, Jean-Baptiste, Jack Miller, Egbuka, Johnson, McCord, Andrade, Pryor, Chambers, Crowley, Miyan Williams, Simon, Sawyer, Moore, Henry-Young, Royer, Cowan, McCullough, Potter, Seibert.

**BUCKEYE** – Hickman, Ransom, Mirco, Dunn, Mitchell, Kittle, Wilson, Jameson Williams, Vincent, Stroud, Cage, Jack Miller, Ballard, Smith-Njigba, McCord, Young, Stover, Shaw, Andrade, LaRoe, Pryor, Crowley, Burke, Simon, Henderson, Eichenberg, Pope, Davies, Cox, Henry-Young, Hart, Wiglusz, Hamilton, Kutscher, Cowan, McCullough, Seibert.

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April 5, 2021 (11:40 am) in Football

### Practice Report: April 5, 2021

Media was permitted to watch about 25 minutes of Ohio State's practice on Monday, featuring a few individual drills, stretching lines, a passing skeleton drill and then a brief look.

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April 4, 2021 (6:00 pm) in Sports, Volleyball

### Women's Volleyball Claims No. 9 Seed For NCAA Tournament

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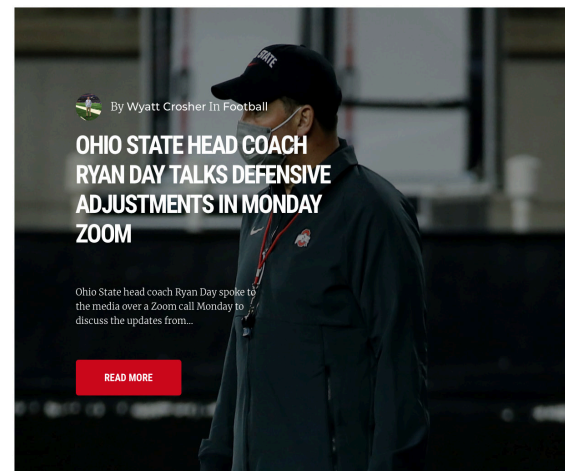
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April 4, 2021 (3:00 pm) in Football

### 2021 Norwalk, Ohio, Kicker/Punter Garrison Smith To Walk On At Ohio State

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

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By Wyatt Crosher In Football

### OHIO STATE HEAD COACH RYAN DAY TALKS DEFENSIVE ADJUSTMENTS IN MONDAY ZOOM

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day spoke to the media over a Zoom call Monday to discuss the updates from...

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# Tuimoloau News Nears With End Of Dead Period

In a normal recruiting cycle, Ohio State's 2021 class would have been solidified months ago, either by the early signing period or on the traditional National Signing Day. But just like everything else in the past year, this recruiting class is different thanks to the impact of COVID-19.

The pandemic led the NCAA to imple-

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Wyatt Crosher & Joe Dempsey

ment a recruiting dead period on March 13, 2020, and it is still not lifted 407 days later, as of BSB's print date. Although the Buckeyes still secured commitments and letters of intent from 21 recruits, despite some not ever visiting campus, there is still a spot open for Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive tackle J.T. Tuimoloau.

Tuimoloau would become the top-rated commitment in Ohio State's class as the No. 3 overall prospect in the country, but he has not made his decision and said he would not until he has visited the schools at the top of the list.

Those top schools, according to his most recent top five from Dec. 16, include Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon, USC and Washington. Of those, most prognostica-

tors believe the two front-runners are the Buckeyes, who have six crystal ball predictions for the 6-5, 277-pound defensive end, and the Crimson Tide.

But Ari Wasserman, national recruiting writer for The Athletic and former Buckeye Sports Bulletin writer, told BSB that if either team had a distinct advantage at this point, Tuimoloau's commitment would have been over months ago.

"In terms of how momentum is concerned, if anybody had momentum, he probably would have signed," Wasserman said. "I think that it's all about which team is going to feel the most comfortable while he visits them, when and if he gets the opportunity to do that."

That opportunity will be coming soon. The NCAA decided to end the recruiting dead period at the closing of its most recent extension of the period, which is May 31. Players had already begun scheduling official visits for the month of June prior to this being official, and Tuimoloau is now expected to do the same.

While the Washington five-star end does not speak to the media much, the buzz about Tuimoloau's decision should ramp up once the dead period is officially over, and he can take those visits he's desired for over a year.

"The only major update I think that you could say right now is that it seems as if the dead period is about to be lifted," Wasserman said on Tuimoloau's recruitment. "Visits are going to be able to maybe resume in June, and it seems that he's going to want to take visits at that time. It's not typical for prospects in the most recent class to have their recruitments lay out

## 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   | 6-3 | 220 | ★★★★★ | Kettering (Ohio) Archbishop Alter |
| Dasan McCullough  | ATH  | 6-5 | 220 | ★★★★  | Bloomington (Ind.) South          |
| Gabe Powers       | LB   | 6-4 | 230 | ★★★★  | Marysville, Ohio                  |
| Jaheim Singletary | CB   | 6-1 | 170 | ★★★★★ | Jacksonville Robert E. Lee        |
| Tegra Tshabola    | OT   | 6-5 | 340 | ★★★★  | West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West   |

into the following summer. A lot of players from that class have already enrolled, but it seems to me that wanting to visit and see places in person has always been the thing that's holding him up."

### Dead Period Will End In June

As previously mentioned, the NCAA Division I Council announced on April 15 that it has voted to end the dead period when the most recent extension of the period, through May 31, is up. The action will be voted on by the NCAA Division I board of directors on April 28 for final approval.

The press release states that all sports in all Division I programs can return to the regular recruiting calendars beginning on June 1. There may still be limits for certain programs in certain areas because of campus, local and state requirements.

"We are delighted to announce that as of June 1, all sports will return to their normal recruiting calendars," Division I Council chair M. Grace Calhoun, who is the athletic director at Pennsylvania, said in the statement. "We want to thank all prospective student-athletes, their families, coaches and current student-athletes for their patience as we determined the best way to move forward safely with recruiting in Division I."

The council also said that it has issued a waiver allowing "on-campus evaluations during unofficial visits during the days football camps and clinics are allowed in June and July 2021 only" and that the number of evaluation days for football will be increased from 42 to 56, also only for this year during the fall evaluation period.

"Division I has been in a recruiting dead period since March 13, 2020, when the Council decided the dead period was the

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

### 30 Years Ago – 1991

It didn't take long for tackle Greg Kuszmaul to be sold on Elliot Uzelac and Joe Hollis, the two new offensive assistants in town for the Buckeyes tasked with recruiting the Warren (Ohio) John F. Kennedy product.

As soon as he sat down for breakfast with the Ohio State coaches, he knew he would be a Buckeye.

"I sort of had it in the back of my mind all along," he said, "but there was so much stuff going on with all the coaches leaving and things like that.

"But I wanted to keep an open mind about things until I took my visit. When I got to Ohio State that weekend, I had breakfast with Coach Uzelac and Coach Hollis the first thing. After that, I knew I didn't really need to visit the campus or anything. I knew I was going to Ohio State."

### 25 Years Ago – 1996

Ohio State's football recruiting class for 1997 doubled in size from one to two with the April 24 verbal commitment of Sidney, Ohio, defensive lineman Ben Pulfer. Pulfer and his coach, Scott Roddy, came to Columbus that day to meet with OSU coach John Cooper. During that meeting, Pulfer accepted Cooper's scholarship offer.

He joined Cincinnati Elder linebacker Jason Ott as early verbal commitments in OSU's Class of '97.

At face value, Ohio State appeared to be taking a slight risk in accepting Pulfer's commitment. He was rated Ohio's 16th-best prospect by The Ohio Football Recruiting News. In fact, the offer took even him by surprise.

"(OSU recruiting coordinator Bill) Conley called over to my coach, Coach Roddy, and asked about camp this summer," Pulfer told BSB. "I wasn't sure about my schedule and whether I would be able to make it. So they hung up and I guess they called back about five minutes later to see if I'd be interested in giving them a verbal commitment.

"When my coach first told me, it was just kind of like he hit me with a ton of bricks. I wasn't sure what to think. I don't live with my parents – they live down in Cincinnati and I live with my grandmother up here. I called them up and they came up that night and we talked about it.

"I've been a Buckeye fan my whole life. We thought about it and figured that no matter where I (visited), I'd end up back at Ohio State anyhow. So I thought I might as well take the opportunity now," he said.

### 20 Years Ago – 2001

Tragedy struck Toledo Rogers High School as well as the Ohio State football program April 30 when prized football prospect Drushaun Humphrey collapsed and died after participating in a pickup basketball game.

The 6-3, 250-pound Humphrey, a junior running back and linebacker, had committed to the Buckeyes after a good showing at an OSU football camp the previous summer.

"We're kind of devastated," Rogers coach Rick Rios said. "It's so unexpected. I was just talking to him after school about what he needed to take for summer school and how we were going to try and work in (football) camp."

Humphrey, 18, was playing basketball on a court near his house when he collapsed.

"Dru fell down and kind of rolled over to the side," Rios said. "The kids thought Dru was pulling a Dru – just falling down to get a rest. They were kidding with him and telling him to get up, and he didn't respond."

His friends phoned 911 at 5:29 p.m. He was pronounced dead an hour later at the Medical College of Ohio Hospital after arriving in full cardiac arrest.

### 15 Years Ago – 2006

Youngstown (Ohio) Cardinal Mooney athlete Derrell Johnson took an official visit to Ohio State over April's penultimate weekend and told Buckeye Sports Bulletin that he enjoyed the trip but that he was still planning trips to Syracuse, West Virginia and Cincinnati.

The 6-2, 185-pound athlete was being recruited by Ohio State receivers coach Darrell Hazell as a wideout but didn't yet hold an offer from Ohio State, though many believed that he would be a likely commit when and if he did pick up that offer.

However, Johnson's offer was not contingent on his on-field talent, but rather his academic eligibility, which he was working diligently to solidify as he entered his senior year of high school after transferring from Campbell (Ohio) Memorial following his junior campaign.

### 10 Years Ago – 2011

Ohio State extended an offer to class of 2012 Miami Northwestern wide receiver Amari Cooper, who was thrilled to get his first offer from a college football power.

"I'm really excited to have an offer from a school like Ohio State,

and that goes without saying," he said. "Obviously this is huge for me, and I'm very interested in the school. I was hoping for this offer.

"I know they have other Florida players on the roster, and this is big news. I would love to get up there and see their school at some point, whether on an unofficial or an official visit. I like the coaches I've talked to at this point."

Prior to the OSU offer, Cooper's only offers had been from Central Florida, FIU, Wake Forest, Western Michigan and West Virginia.

### Five Years Ago – 2016

Akron Hoban running back Todd Sibley was asked to grayshirt and was considering alternatives to his Ohio State commitment. A grayshirt would require him to delay his enrollment until the end of the fall 2017 semester and make him count as a member of the class of 2018.

The Buckeyes had only five scholarship seniors for the 2016 season, and more than half the team had freshman eligibility, which, with more than a dozen players already committed, would mean that the Buckeyes required attrition from within the team in order to stay at 85 scholarships.

That left Sibley, a four-star running back who had been committed to Ohio State for more than a year, on the outside looking in. Despite the numbers crunch, the Buckeyes accepted a commitment from La Grange, Texas, four-star J.K. Dobbins on March 6 and were still chasing after other top running backs in the class of 2017 as well.

### One Year Ago – 2020

He had been trending toward Oklahoma for several weeks, but Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren cornerback Jantzen Dunn announced his commitment to Ohio State on April 20.

The 6-2, 178-pound Dunn was considered the 12th-best athlete and No. 208 prospect overall in the class of 2021. Dunn made his first trip to Columbus for Ohio State's win over Penn State in November 2019 and landed an offer from the Buckeyes when he attended a spring practice on March 4.

The Buckeyes were considered the favorite in Dunn's recruitment from the moment he received an offer from head coach Ryan Day and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, but a string of commitments earlier in the spring – coupled with a few higher-rated targets looking to take an official visit once the recruiting dead period ended – made it seem unlikely he'd end up in the class and allowed the Sooners to make a move. No such luck for Oklahoma, however, as Ohio State decided to accept his commitment early.



best way to protect the health and safety of coaches and current and future student-athletes," the statement reads. "The dead period has been extended multiple times, until discussions began about lifting the ban on in-person recruiting earlier this year."

### OSU Target Goodwin Commits To Kentucky

Kiyaunta Goodwin, a four-star offensive tackle from Charleston, Ind., announced his commitment to Kentucky on April 17.

Goodwin, who rapidly rose to become the seventh-ranked offensive tackle in the country after getting his body in Division I shape, had a top five that included Ohio State, Alabama, Clemson, Michigan and the Wildcats.

BSB spoke with Justin Rowland, who covers Kentucky recruiting for Rivals, about Goodwin's recruitment just two days prior to his commitment April 15.

"Kentucky was the first school to really get involved with him," Rowland said. "When he was in junior high school, I mean, you could see him walking around campus during the camp season. And this is when he was very big, and probably too big, before he transformed his body and lost 100 pounds."

The 6-7, 300-pound lineman's commitment to Kentucky did not come as a surprise because of his close relationships within the program that formed while he was growing up in Louisville. Though he moved to Charleston, Ind., Goodwin's ties to his home state remained strong.

"His trainer, Chris Vaughn at Aspirations Gym in Louisville, has a really strong relationship with the Kentucky staff," Rowland said. "That was kind of instrumental in Kentucky getting Wan'Dale Robinson to transfer from Nebraska. I don't want to say it's a pipeline – there are guys who go to Aspirations who go to other schools – but recently, the momentum has shifted heavily to Kentucky there."

Choosing the Wildcats over the likes of Alabama, Clemson and Ohio State may have come as surprise to many on the outside, but Kentucky's prowess in developing offensive linemen helped influence Goodwin's decision.

"They've had a really easy time recruiting offensive linemen, because they're putting guys into the league," Rowland said. "Drake Jackson and Landon Young are both going to be drafted this year; Darian Kinnard has a chance to be a first-rounder; and they've really kind of built an identity as an offensive line-centric program, and I think you've seen that firsthand."

"The new offensive line coach, Eric Wolford, I think has made a positive impression on him. He's put a lot of guys into the league over his career as well. And Vince Marrow has really locked down state recruiting. Now, he's not in Kentucky right now, but since Marrow took over as the main recruiter for the state, he has pretty much gotten who he wanted."

Due to the COVID pandemic, Goodwin was unable to take visits for more than a year, about which he voiced his frustrations. The powerful offensive tackle is expected to take visits in the summer, leading many experts to believe his recruitment is far from over.

According to Rowland, however, all the hoopla is for naught because he envisions Goodwin staying true to his home-state school.

"Based on my read of the situation, I would be surprised if he flipped after he committed," Rowland said.

### Bucks Crack Top 5 Of 4-Star OT

Though Goodwin committed to Kentucky, the Buckeyes remain in the mix for other elite offensive tackles across the country. On April 17, Humble (Texas) Atascocita four-star offensive tackle Kam Dewberry included Ohio State in his top five along with Alabama, Oklahoma, Texas and Texas A&M.

Dewberry (6-4, 313) referred to Ohio State as his "childhood dream school" when he landed an offer from head coach Ryan Day and offensive line coach Greg Studrawa in January 2020.

Dewberry, who is the ninth-ranked offensive tackle and No. 97 overall recruit in the 2022 class, has not been to Ohio State's campus but has taken advantage of several virtual visits.

Ohio State already holds one commitment at offensive tackle in West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Tegra Tshabola, but the Buckeyes would like to add more, especially after Goodwin chose the Wildcats.

### Buckeye Commit Hicks Earns Fifth Star

Kettering (Ohio) Alter 2022 linebacker C.J. Hicks keeps moving up the recruiting rankings. After checking in at 117th in the 247Sports composite rankings on July 29, 2020, the Buckeye commit has almost exclusively seen his star rise in the last nine months, first maneuvering into the top 100 on Aug. 31, making the top 50 on Nov. 23 and now hitting his highest mark yet.

Hicks was slotted at No. 18 overall on the April 9 update of the composite rankings with a .9881 rating, making him the third-highest-ranked recruit in Ohio State's 2022 class and the fourth prospect to earn a fifth star, joining quarterback Quinn Ewers, cornerback Jaheim Singletary and wide receiver Caleb Burton.

He's now the second-best linebacker in the nation, trailing only Cypress (Texas) Cy Park product Harold Perkins, a Texas A&M lean ranked No. 12 in the national list. Wasserman said it is not a surprising jump for the in-state linebacker to make, at least

in his eyes.

"He was pretty highly rated before, and the thing with the recruiting rankings, too, is that camps and summer camps are now just starting up again," Wasserman said. "The Under Armour camp that they had in Columbus last weekend, those camps weren't happening last year. And a lot of these kids don't even have games from their junior years. So the fact that these kids are able to go out and work out in front of these recruiting analysts, it's a huge boost to the evaluation process."

Also included in Wasserman's reasoning is Ohio State's early interest in Hicks, who committed on May 1, 2020. Getting that commitment so early from an Ohio recruit held a lot of weight in his mind for just how much they saw in Hicks' potential.

"I think anybody who saw how much Ohio State fell in love with him early on in his recruitment should have put two and two together. Ohio State doesn't fall in love

Continued On Page 18

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# McCullough Stands Firm With OSU Commitment



FILE PHOTO

**BACK TO NORMAL** – Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson is ready to get back to recruiting in person.

Continued From Page 17

with in-state prospects that hard unless they really, really think they're going to be an

elite-level player. I trust Ohio State's recruiting staff and their assistant coaches when it comes to talent evaluation."

The 6-4, 218-pound Buckeye pledge shared the news on his Twitter account,

saying that he's "blessed to receive (his) fifth (star)," but that he's never satisfied and has "more work to do."

He's one of three Buckeye linebacker commits who landed in the top 50 in the most recent rankings, along with Marysville, Ohio, outside linebacker Gabe Powers (No. 43) and Bloomington (Ind.) South athlete Dasan McCullough (No. 49). Top inside linebacker target Shawn Murphy from Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed is the No. 25 player in the class and the top middle linebacker, a slight fall from his spot (No. 17) in the last rankings, released on Feb. 26. As players return to prospect camps this summer, rankings are expected to see a drastic shift.

## Buckeye Commits, Targets Show At Under Armour Camp

Ohio State was well-represented at the Under Armour Columbus Camp on April 11. Showing up at the camp were five Buckeye commits, an Ohio State coach and various other targets from the 2022, '23 and '24 classes.

As far as Ohio State goes, linebackers Hicks, McCullough and Powers, as well as West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-stars in offensive tackle Tshabola and cornerback Jyaire Brown, all attended. Buckeye targets such as Mentor, Ohio, five-star defensive end Brenan Vernon, Pickerington (Ohio) Central five-star safety Sonny Styles and Dayton Wayne four-star guard Joshua Padilla were also in attendance.

Though coaches were not allowed at the camp to scout, assistant coach and running

backs coach Tony Alford was there to watch his son, Braydon, who is a 2024 prospect at wide receiver. Another running backs coach, Indiana's Deland McCullough, was also there in support of Dasan, as well as his brother, 2023 linebacker Daeh McCullough, who committed to the Hoosiers on April 13.

Dasan told his brother congrats on Twitter, while also stating "let the rumors begin" about him potentially flipping to Indiana to play with his brother and under his father. But McCullough has consistently stayed firm in his commitment, saying at the Under Armour camp that he has never looked back on his decision to commit with Ohio State.

## Johnson On Recruiting Through Pandemic

Ohio State associate head coach and defensive line coach Larry Johnson has been coaching at the collegiate level since 1996 and has been with the Buckeyes since 2014, but this past year of recruiting was unlike any other in his coaching career thanks to the coronavirus.

Johnson spoke to the media over Zoom on April 9 on how recruiting has changed over the past year, and he said that the main thing for him was being able to change on the fly with whatever the circumstances are around him.

"It's forced you to adapt, and you probably have to do more on Zoom than you've done before," Johnson said. "Doing videotape, showing them exactly what we do, how we do it, how we run drills. That you

## ASK AN ANALYST

### With Ari Wasserman of The Athletic

**With the recruiting dead period coming to a close at the end of May, what do you think will be the impact for the 2021 class not having been able to visit, and what do you think the impact will be for this incoming 2022 class?**

"It's just a huge thing for evaluation. I think there's going to be a wave of kids wanting to take visits because they haven't been able to visit anywhere for over a year. It's going to have the intended effect, which is allowing kids to go to campus, work out, see places in person and get a vibe for somebody in real life and all the things that made the 2021 class impossible to evaluate, because it didn't exist.

"It's going to be kind of a crazy few months. You have official visit graphics already popping up on Twitter. People are getting geared up for it, and just the idea that recruiting was done digitally for over a year is a pretty insane thing to think about. There's so much that goes into it – player evaluations, as well as kids having to see on campus and feel comfortable. I think there'll be a ton of visits, and I think kids might actually be persuaded to take their official visits sooner than they otherwise would because everybody's so eager to do it."

**Charlestown, Ind., 2022 four-star offensive tackle and Ohio State target Kiyaunta Goodwin committed to Kentucky on April 17. What does this recruiting loss mean for Ohio State's offensive line recruiting in the bigger picture?**

"It's just an interesting thing with how to really view Ohio State's offensive line recruiting from a national perspective. It's like mixed feelings on how you are supposed to feel about Greg Studrawa right now. He went out and got a five-star offensive guard from Houston (Donovan Jackson) but also had some key

misses on the national front, too, with guys like (five-star OT) J.C. Latham (of IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla.), who ended up at Alabama.

"He's done a pretty good job of keeping kids home, and of course he went and got Nicholas Petit-Frere and he got Paris Johnson. There's a lot of elite-level offensive linemen in this program, and this year's offensive line battle is a testament to that. But by the same token, it doesn't seem like Ohio State's offensive line recruiting is caught up with the rest of the team with elite-level closing on these types of prospects. Goodwin is still kind of a rung below a Latham-type, and still, you have to be able to go beat Kentucky, I don't care where he is.

"There's a lot at stake there for Ohio State's offensive line. It seems to be in a pretty good spot for the foreseeable future, and part of that is because they happened to have one of the best offensive linemen in the modern-day history of recruiting living in Cincinnati in Paris Johnson. But I think you also want to see Ohio State's offensive line recruitment expand to a national dominance level like the rest of the class."

**Cordova (Tenn.) St. Benedict at Auburndale 2022 five-star defensive tackle Walter Nolen recently included Ohio State in his top eight schools. How do you see his recruitment playing out, and what makes him a special talent?**

"If you're going to go play defensive line for anybody in the country, I don't know how it's not Larry Johnson. The issue with Walter for Ohio State is that he's a Southern prospect and he's also considering Alabama and LSU out there in Tennessee, and the SEC has kind of reigned supreme in that state.

"What makes him a can't-miss prospect is that he's

a 6-4, 300-pound human that's super athletic – and I think J.T. Tuimoloau is the example for the 2021 class. You have these can't-miss defensive linemen who can change your program. And if you look at the teams that are competing for the national championships every year and the teams that are good but aren't quite good enough to win it all, it's because the defensive line is so dominant for those top teams.

"How do I see his recruitment playing out? I'm sure there's going to be a lot of drama, as there always is with top-five national players, especially ones who live in the South. And I think Ohio State's got quite the sales pitch, and these are the types of prospects that set the Ohio States and the Alabamas and the Clemsons apart from the rest of the college programs that are trying to win a national title."

**Ohio State recently lost its position as the top recruiting class in 2022, falling behind Georgia. Do you see the Buckeyes reclaiming that crown, or is it still too early to tell?**

"I think that all the conclusions that you can make about a recruiting class and who's going to have the best recruiting class at the end of the road, it's just impossible to do in April. We learned our lesson last year, that these SEC teams can go on a run of landing five top-100 players a month and the entire perspective of what we thought was possible goes out the window really quickly.

"I don't know if it really makes much sense to do much predicting of who's going to land where at this time of the year, but the one thing I will say is that Ohio State has the nucleus of a recruiting class already committed that would rival what it had last year, which was undoubtedly one of the top two classes in the country."



## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

would usually save for the on-campus visit, or you would save to go into the house and you'd take your laptop, pull it out and try to wow the kids in the house with 'this is how we make you better.' Now, you have to do it from a distance.

"I am a hands-on guy. I like to touch and feel, and it's tough not being able to do that with the players. You really have that great connection that you need to have personally, so it's been tough, but we adapted and moved forward in it. We're having some great conversations with a lot of young players, and so I kind of like that also."

Johnson also talked about the potential leg-up that in-state recruits have in terms of development. He said that, because the coaching staff can get more in-person experience with those recruits, it can help get Ohio players a bit of head start when they arrive on campus.

"I have an advantage with those guys," Johnson said. "They're home players, like the Jack (Sawyer), the Zach Harrison, Jonathon Cooper home players. They get to get on campus more, and they get to get on the field more and go to camps. I get to spend more time with them. I think that's the key for those guys because they've been here, they've been around me. They actually get the system early, so that's the advantage for the guys that are local because they can move faster."

"If you can find that guy local, you love to have him because you can spend more time with them. The guy long distance, those are the ones you're going to have to take time with, so you have to do it through Zoom and try to get them caught up. But it's nothing like being in person, hands-on, to really start the development stage."

### Commits, Targets Set Upcoming Visits

The Buckeyes plan to welcome a slew of commits and targets to Columbus on June 4 for official visits. The list of 2022 Ohio State pledges who plan to make the trip the first weekend in June includes Ewers, Singletary, Hicks, Burton, Powers, McCullough, Brown and Tshabola as well as Chandler, Ariz., four-star wide receiver Kyion Grayes; Pilot Mountain (N.C.) East Surry four-star tight end Benji Gosnell; and Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona four-star tight end Bennett Christian.

Along with the prospects who have already committed to Ohio State, several 2022 targets will also be on campus on June 4, including Duncanville, Texas, five-star strongside defensive end Omari Abor; Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star safety Zion Branch; Des Moines (Iowa) Southeast Polk four-star safety Xavier Nwankpa; Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star offensive tackle Aamil Wagner; Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive tackle Dominick James; St. Louis Lutheran North four-star cornerback Toriano Pride; and Duncanville (Texas) four-star offensive tackle Jaylen Early.

Two weeks later, a pair of 2022 targets in Memphis (Tenn.) Christian Brothers four-star running back Dallan Hayden and Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert four-star wide receiver Kojo Antwi will be set to visit Ohio State on June 18.

Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star offensive tackle Tyler Booker is planning on visiting June 21. The weekend of June 25 will be a big one for remaining 2022 targets, with vis-

its planned for Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star weakside defensive end Enai White; Reading (Pa.) Governor Mifflin four-star running back Nicholas Singleton; Clayton (N.C.) Cleveland four-star running back Omarion Hampton; Norcross (Ga.) Greater Atlanta Christian School four-star offensive tackle Addison Nichols; and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic three-star cornerback Jayden Bellamy.

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star weakside defensive end Marvin Jones, who is the No. 5 player at his position nationally for the 2022 class, has an official visit set for Sept. 11, 2021.

### Ohio State Continues Making Offers

Since BSB last went to press, Ohio State has continued to stay active on the recruiting trail, particularly on the defensive side of the ball. For the 2022 class, the Buckeyes extended offers to defensive standouts in Cornelius (N.C.) William

Amos Hough four-star defensive tackle Curtis Neal, Rancho Santa Margarita (Calif.) Catholic defensive tackle Hero Kanu and Chesapeake (Va.) Oscar Smith four-star safety Sherrod Covil.

In the 2023 class, Ohio State has targeted New Bern, N.C., defensive tackle Keith Sampson and Del Valle, Texas, four-star wide receiver Braylon James, who is a former teammate of Burton.

Additionally, Ryan Day and Co. offered their first prospect in the 2024 class in Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco inside linebacker Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa.

### Other Notes From Around The Country

- Abor included Ohio State in his top 10 schools, along with Alabama, Arizona State, Georgia, LSU, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Texas A&M and USC. The 6-4, 240-pound Abor is the second-best strongside defensive end and No. 23 overall prospect in the 2022 class.

- Booker included Ohio State among his top five schools on April 12, along with

Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Oregon. Booker, who is 6-4, 315, is the fifth-best offensive tackle in the 2022 class as well as the No. 41 prospect overall. He is also ranked as the eighth-best overall recruit from the state of Florida.

- Arlington (Texas) Martin four-star defensive end Ernest Cooper included Ohio State in his top five schools, along with Notre Dame, Oregon, Stanford and Texas A&M. Cooper, who is 6-4, 235, is the No. 9 strongside defensive end and No. 195 overall prospect in the 2022 class.

- 2022 Buford, Ga., three-star safety Jake Pope announced his top eight schools, which included Ohio State along with Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Notre Dame and Oklahoma. The 6-1, 190-pound Pope is the No. 22 safety and No. 375 overall prospect in the class.

*Patrick Mayhorn also contributed to this report.*

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

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# Healthy Vincent Poised For Breakout Season

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Taron Vincent came to Columbus as one of the most highly touted prospects in the country in 2018, but the former five-star defensive tackle has not enjoyed as much success as expected through his first three seasons.

As a true freshman in 2018, Vincent earned his way into the rotation of a talented group of defensive tackles that included Dre'Mont Jones, DaVon Hamilton, Haskell Garrett, Jashon Cornell, Antwan Jackson and fellow freshman Tommy Togiai.

Despite all the elite players ahead of him on the depth chart, Vincent flashed toward the end of the season. In the 2018 Big Ten Championship Game, Vincent broke through the Wildcat front and took down Northwestern quarterback Clayton Thorson for a sack and a loss of 10 yards.

Making a big-time play with the Big Ten title on the line demonstrated the impact Vincent can have, which was part of what made him such an attractive recruit. Jones was the only defensive tackle who went on to the NFL following the season, and Vincent seemed poised to step up in his absence.

However, Vincent's sophomore season ended before it began due to a torn labrum, which forced him to take a redshirt and miss the 2019 campaign. The setback was tough for the talented defensive tackle, but discussing it with his father, Troy, who was a five-time Pro Bowl cornerback with the Philadelphia Eagles, helped give him perspective.

"Injuries are a part of the game," Vincent said. "I struggled with it at first, but I talked to my dad. And he was just telling me, 'Man, it's football. Injuries come with the sport. This is what you signed up for.' Once I had that conversation, I really just realized, 'You've just got to get healthy. Once you get healthy, you know what you can do.'"

Vincent was eager to return to his team in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all sports activities at colleges across the country, hindering his rehab.

"I wasn't really able to get the full amount of treatment that I possibly needed," Vincent said. "We were shut down and stuff, so I wasn't in the facility. That was just a little struggle with everything. It kind of delayed everything. So when we got back, I was kind of behind a little bit."

After missing the entire 2019 season, Vincent was poised to prove why he was the No. 1 defensive tackle and No. 20 overall recruit in the 2018 class. However, he had been away from the field for a long time, and his rehab had been interrupted by circumstances outside of his control.

"With the injury and being out of football for a long time, then the pandemic hit, and he couldn't practice," said defensive line coach Larry Johnson. "You don't just jump back in and get to the same level you were when you got here. That's why we've done a great job of developing him and getting his skill set back to where it needs to be. Being out of football for a year, it's tough for anybody to come back and be ready to go."

"But I think the potential is there, no doubt about that. Now it's just about getting him ready to have the opportunity to go play in a game and play some live football. We're working really hard to make sure that happens."

As a third-year sophomore, Vincent missed the first two games of the 2020 season while still recovering from his shoulder surgery. Though he played in the final six games of the COVID-shortened campaign, Vincent did not quite return to his top form.

"He wasn't healthy last year and couldn't play, and so he played late in the season when he got really healthy, but he didn't play a lot of football last year," Johnson said. "Now he's a healthier player, and he's going through spring ball, he's gone through a winter workout, and he's in a really great position right now. He's what we thought he would be when we brought him here in recruiting. He's having a great spring right now, he really is, because he's healthy. He's playing fast, he's strong at a point of attack, all the things we look for from a three-technique."

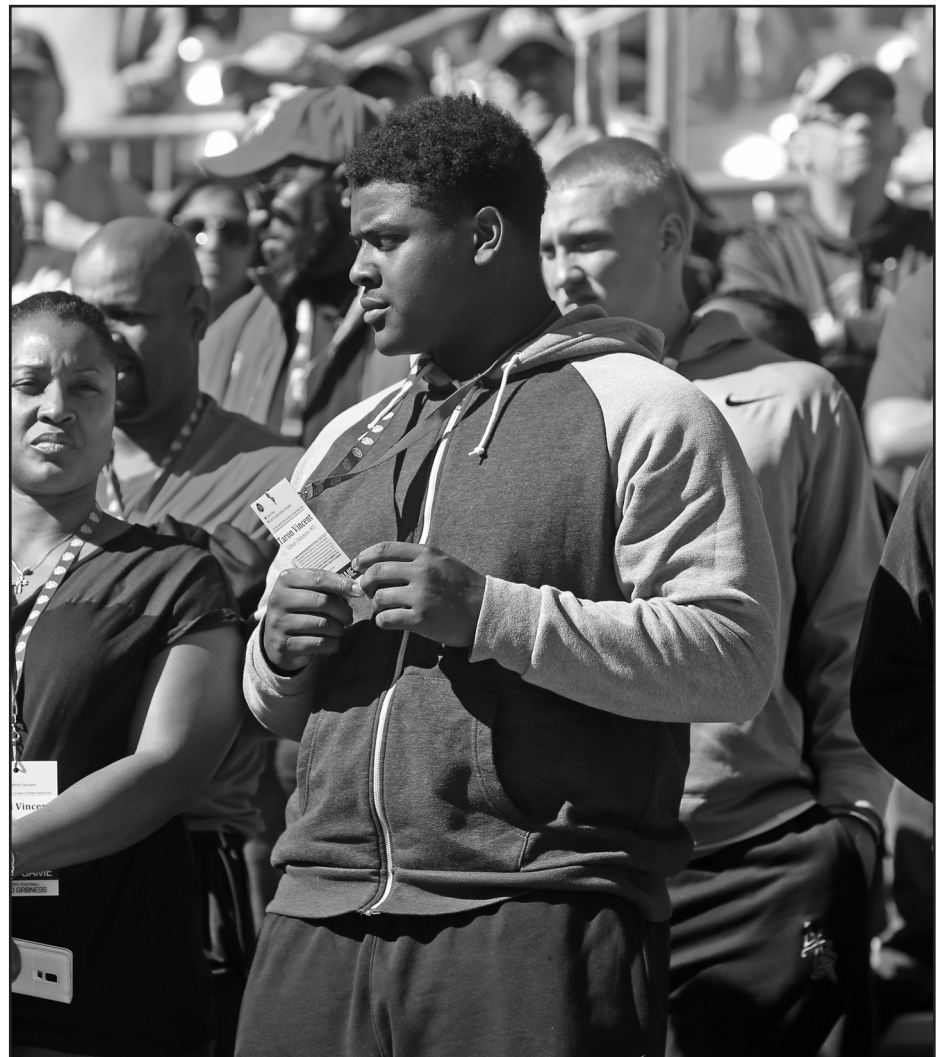
The physical prowess of Vincent (6-2, 300) does not come as a surprise. As a prep star, he was the 2017 Maxwell Football Club Defensive National High School Player of the Year at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy after moving from his hometown of Baltimore.

The talent has always been there, but Vincent's mentality has been what has impressed his defensive line coach the most through all his trials and tribulations.

"It wasn't easy for him because he wanted to be a part of it," Johnson said. "He kept telling his dad, 'I'm letting the team down. I'm letting Coach Johnson down,' and I think that says a lot about who he is. His dad's a great guy, so he understands the game. But I'll just tell you what he did. He went to work. He didn't sit around and pout about it. He went to work at it and rehabbed."

For Vincent, venting to his dad helped him deal with the pain of not being 100 percent and feeling like he was disappointing the brotherhood in a season when he totaled nine tackles (one solo), two tackles for loss and one-half sack.

"He just knows what to do to get there," Vincent said of his dad. "He's already



FILE PHOTO

**BREAKOUT POTENTIAL – Junior defensive tackle Taron Vincent has been projected as a possible new star for the Buckeyes up front.**

somewhere where I want to get to. He just gives me knowledge and everything I need."

With the talent Vincent possesses, he was seen as a player who could potentially head to the NFL after just three years of college. Due to injury, that hasn't happened, but he is finally healthy entering his fourth-year junior season in 2021.

"I've been fully healthy this whole off-season," Vincent said. "And I've been able to compete with everybody and develop my skill set that I need to take me to the next level."

While Jones, Hamilton, Cornell and Togiai have all moved on to the NFL, Vincent, Jackson and Garrett have remained at Ohio State. During spring practice, Vincent has turned more heads than just Johnson's, also impressing his longtime teammates.

"He didn't play last year, which felt very bad because he had that surgery on his shoulder," Jackson said of Vincent. "I'm really happy playing with him right now because we didn't play with each other last year. And us two, we'll just wreck the line of scrimmage, and I just like him right now. We're alike. We get off the ball and we just attack. And I like how he attacks the offensive guards in practice. It's ridiculous. I give him the utmost respect for what he has been doing in practice."

Wreaking havoc in the backfield has also caught the attention of Garrett, who emerged as an All-American at defensive tackle in 2020 after recovering from an off-season gunshot wound.

"There's a lot of guys developing, and especially Taron, he's done really well," Garrett said of Vincent. "He hasn't played ball for almost three years, and just like me, he came back the same time I did, and so he's finally getting that fresh, healthy year of playing ball and being able to really develop himself injury-free for the most part. I think he has a chance to have a great season this upcoming season."

In addition to earning praise from his defensive-line mates, Vincent has thoroughly impressed head coach Ryan Day and Mickey Marotti, who is the assistant athletic director for football sports performance, after reaching the team's top tier for off-season workouts.

"Taron Vincent has a chance to have a breakout year for us," Day said. "It started off in the offseason with Coach Mick. (Vincent) was gold in the strength and conditioning this quarter for champions. His play has been excellent. He's definitely playing his best football, and it all started in the offseason. He gave himself to Coach Mick, he got the gold and now he's about to take off. If you were asking me about the most improved, I'd probably say Taron up front."

Now a veteran, the soft-spoken Vincent is solely focused on being the best he can be to make sure he does not feel like he is letting down his team again.

"I feel stronger, faster, just more explosive off the ball and stuff like that. I can just feel it physically," Vincent said. "And the game is kind of slowing down now. I'm older now. I can see stuff happening before it happens."

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# Proctor's Versatility Gives Buckeyes Safety Net

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Josh Proctor described himself in November as a "Swiss army knife" for his ability to play different positions. The senior shared starts at free safety with Marcus Hooker in the shortened 2020 season but also saw action at slot cornerback and cover safety in passing situations.

With Hooker currently suspended by the team after his arrest for operating a vehicle while impaired on March 13, the free safety spot appeared to be Proctor's to lose as Ohio State's spring practices ended April 17.

The former four-star recruit from Owasso, Okla., gladly accepted the challenge.

"I think it will mean basically getting used to that one spot and I can actually sit and learn what I need to learn," he said on April 1. "As far as moving around in other spots, I'm still the same person. Wherever you need me, I'll be there. It doesn't matter."

As Proctor (6-2, 195) sees it, the Buckeye defensive backfield needs to redeem itself after a poor 2020 that included getting torched for 464 passing yards out of 621 total yards in the 52-24 loss to Alabama in the College Football Playoff championship game on Jan. 11.

"I feel like coming into these workouts, we came in with a chip on our shoulder," he said. "I would not say everybody has let that game go. That is something that has pushed us a lot and it's in the back of our minds every day. We just go out and go to work."

The Buckeyes last season ranked 122nd out of 127 teams in pass defense (304.0 yards per game) and 59th in total defense (401.6 ypg) due in part to losing secondary standouts Damon Arnette, Jordan Fuller and Jeff Okudah to the NFL.

Hooker began last season as the starting free safety, but Proctor used that as motivation to improve his overall game at the prodding of secondary coach/defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs.

"He kind of talked to me about multiple spots. He basically sat me down and told me that he wanted me to learn every spot in the back end," Proctor said last fall. "He said versatility is our biggest threat. I think I took that to heart, and I felt like that was my biggest chance of getting on the field."

That was the positive side of being able to play different positions.

"I'd say I'm pretty comfortable. I'm confident in what I do and my abilities, and I know I work hard," Proctor said.

The problem was that soaking in all the information and schematics was difficult under the most trying conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic that curtailed spring ball in 2020, nearly forced the cancellation of last season's schedule and reduced practice time.

All that left Proctor overwhelmed on occasion, and chemistry was lacking in the secondary.

"Sometimes my eyes get going everywhere, and I think about it a lot," he said. "I think I've slowed down. I feel like communication goes a big way. Sometimes you know your job, but if you don't know what the other person is supposed to be doing, or you don't know what the whole point of the defense may be, breaking those things down and actually learning those things has kind of helped us improve this year."

"It was our biggest difference from last year. Last year just kind of seemed like everything was so fast."

He said playing through the pandemic – and seeing the virus hit the team in a big way in the latter stages of the season – was unsettling. Three of the eight regular-season games were canceled, and players up and down the roster were quarantined.

"Not knowing who you're going to have the next week or the next day, everything just felt weird," Proctor said.

In a way, Proctor was ahead of the curve with his willingness to try different positions on the field.

"We're going to have some guys that are going to be able to do more than one job in the back end," Coombs said on March 19. "We're going to have to. That's one thing COVID taught you. You've got to have guys that can do it. Well, same thing is true if injuries or anything else arise."

The coaching staff has proved to be flexible as well, with Coombs relinquishing his secondary coaching duties to Matt Barnes, whose primary responsibilities had been special teams though he also worked with the DBs.

"The biggest change right now is the extra details and being detailed in everything we do as far as footwork and the way we may flip our hips," Proctor said. "It's just breaking down the game and understanding what we need to do and when we need to do it."

"I don't think it's a big change. Coach Barnes has taken over the role of explaining things to us. It feels like he is better at explaining things to us. He breaks things down in different ways. Coach Coombs is still very much a part of everything we do. He doesn't miss anything."

Fifth-year senior cornerback Marcus Williamson said whether it's Barnes or Coombs, the message has been one of returning the Buckeyes' secondary to the "Best In America" as they like to call it.

"I'd say – and this is an emphasis from Coach Barnes along with Coach Coombs – that we really wanted to bring back that BIA mentality, that culture," Williamson said. "And we've got so many young, inexperienced guys that even if they were here last year, you didn't have that full offseason with (strength) Coach Mick (Marotti), that spring ball, all those push-ups and sit-ups we do preparing for The Team Up North game. You didn't have those experiences."

"So being able to bring that mind-set to the practice field has been a benefit to me and Josh and some of the older guys and the younger guys as well so that they can see how we do things and how we operate the right way here."

Proctor has been playing in the shadows of others throughout his career, but if he wants to follow his predecessors to the NFL he knows what's needed.

"It's just being consistent and always being in the right spot and knowing what I'm supposed to do and not trying to make that big play and do everything by myself," he said. "That's communication, staying in the film room, just learning everything I can and taking as much as I can away from Coach Barnes."

"I've improved on my leadership in bringing the younger guys along and helping them out. I've tried to become a leader and take over that role."



FILE PHOTO

**HIS TIME IS NOW** – Ohio State senior Josh Proctor (41) could be the starting free safety when the 2021 season kicks off this fall.

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# Ohio State To Be Well-Represented At Draft

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

It may not be surprising after a season that ended in the national championship game, but Ohio State is once again expected to have a large number of players selected in this year's NFL draft.

That number is likely to be at least five, which would make this the eighth consecutive draft with five or more former Ohio State players selected. But much of the talk this year has been on one specific Buckeye who is a near certainty to be the first Ohio State player drafted on April 29.

That player is Justin Fields, who has been projected to a handful of teams at various points in the opening half of the first round – anywhere from the New York Jets with the No. 2 pick all the way to the Pittsburgh Steelers at No. 24. He has been the topic of discussion for months, with the conversation covering anything, from his ability to go through progressions to questions about his work ethic.

These potential negatives have been called out by head coach Ryan Day as things that he does not worry about at all when it comes to his former quarterback. Day emphasized Fields' drive to come back in 2020 despite his likely placement as an early draft pick even without a return for his junior campaign and his gutsy performance against Clemson this season as arguments against the poor work ethic rumors being bandied about by reporters and television talking heads.

"The season gets canceled, and this is a guy who could have easily at that point

opted out, been in the draft like so many other guys," Day said. "I don't hear people talking about them. And what did he do? He just kept working, and he 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."

"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. He didn't. He 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 is certainly not the only player expecting to hear his name called during the 2021 NFL draft, hosted in Cleveland from April 29-May 1. There are plenty of other names along the offensive and defensive sides of the ball who are expected to go in days two and three of the draft, though Fields will likely be alone in the first round.

One of those players is defensive end Jonathon Cooper, who elected to redshirt in 2019 in order to play at full strength for a full year. While that "full season" ended up being only eight games long, Cooper impressed in his fifth-year senior season, and his position coach, Larry Johnson, is excited to see what he can do at the next level.

"I mean his work ethic is off the charts," Johnson said of Cooper. "He's a guy that comes to work every day, from the day he showed up in the building, and he has not



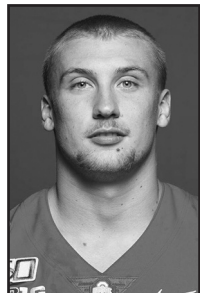
FILE PHOTO

**DESTINATION TBD** – Quarterback Justin Fields will likely be Ohio State's lone first-round pick in the 2021 NFL draft, but his future professional home is subject to debate.

stopped working. He deserves a chance, and I think he's going to have a chance to play in the NFL, no doubt about it. He's a locker-room guy, great leadership guy. He can play 10 or 15 years because he's going to do it the right way. He's a lot like Sam Hubbard, in the sense of how (he) goes to work every day. I see Coop in the same position here, and I'm really thrilled and happy for him. I can't wait to see where he ends up playing."

All in all, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is looking at 12 players who hope to be selected in the 2021 NFL draft. The following capsules feature quotes from players, either at Ohio State's pro day or, for Tuf Borland, at the senior bowl.

The capsules also feature analysis from The Athletic's Dane Brugler, whose NFL draft guide features breakdowns on 415 players across the country looking to be selected in this year's draft.



## TUF BORLAND

Linebacker  
6-0 • 229

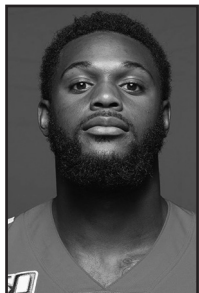
Recruit Rank: Overall 324; OLB 22  
Pro Day 40: 4.98 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Borland finished his last season at Ohio State second on the team with 48 total tackles. He was three-time team captain, the second in Ohio State history (J.T. Barrett).

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Seventh round to undrafted free agent

**BORLAND SAYS:** "My football intelligence, my ability to read and react, play inside the box, I think I do that at an elite level. As for weaknesses, you can never stop improving, with the pass rush, plays in space, coverage. I have some work to do there, but I'm confident I can do that and adjust to the NFL game."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Borland plays with the diagnose skills and adequate chase speed to make plays, although the difficulty level increases when he is asked to quickly change directions. He looked improved in coverage as a senior, but his lack of range and twitch will make him a liability in that area versus NFL athletes. Overall, Borland is likely a run-down only player at the next level, but his instincts and intangibles give him a fighting chance to make an NFL roster." – Dane Brugler



## BARON BROWNING

Linebacker  
6-3 • 245

Recruit Rank: Overall 11; OLB 1  
Pro Day 40: 4.58 seconds

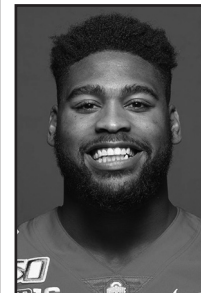
**ACCOLADES:** Browning tallied 30 tackles while forcing and recovering a pair of fumbles in 2020. His efforts landed him on the All-Big Ten third team.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third round

**BROWNING SAYS:** "I think (the pro day) helped me a lot. I think teams know my versatility, but they just wanted to verify what I could do testing-wise, so I'm glad I did what I did and made it out healthy."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Browning's next level role will be different from team to team because of his athletic versatility to play physical or hold up in space. The mental side of the position is still a work in progress as he shows inconsistent vision and block/fit recognition as an inside backer. Overall, Browning doesn't consistently play with anticipation, but he is physically impressive with the size, length and athleticism to rush the passer or drop in coverage. He projects best as a Sam linebacker or designated pass rusher with down-the-road starting potential."

– Dane Brugler



## JONATHON COOPER

Defensive End  
6-3 • 253

Recruit Rank: Overall 33; WDE 3  
Pro Day 40: 4.69 seconds

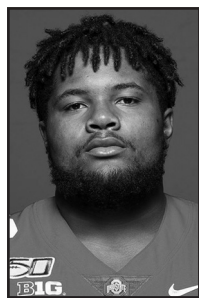
**ACCOLADES:** Cooper returned for a fifth year in Columbus and had a third-team All-Big Ten season, finishing with 24 tackles, 3½ sacks and a forced fumble.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Sixth to seventh round

**COOPER SAYS:** "With all the teams I've been talking to, they kind of see me as an outside linebacker, Sam-type position, which is my body type. I just wanted to make sure I showed the scouts and everybody that I can play linebacker and that I feel really comfortable in space and that I'm ready for the next level."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Cooper goes full speed on every play and flashes the pop in his hands to convert his speed to power as a downhill rusher. While he plays alert and urgent, he is average athletically and plays with too much wasted motion, which will be tougher to mask vs. NFL-level blockers. Overall, Cooper rushes more with energy than sequence or skill, but his relentless, hard-charging style and uplifting locker room presence give him a fighting chance in the NFL. He projects as a rotational rusher." – Dane Brugler





## WYATT DAVIS

Offensive Guard  
6-4 • 315

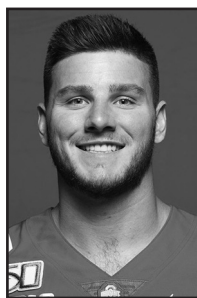
Recruit Rank: Overall 24; OG 1  
Pro Day 40: Did not run

**ACCOLADES:** Davis finished his last two seasons at Ohio State by being named a consensus All-American in 2019 and a unanimous All-American in 2020.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Second to third round

**DAVIS SAYS:** "Rehab has definitely been the priority for me, especially after going down in the national championship game. I'm just making sure that I did everything possible to make sure my knee was fully ready and 100 percent ready to go (for my pro day), and I feel like I executed that."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "In pass protection and as a run blocker, Davis is quick to get the upper hand due to his striking power, body control and competitive nature. While his physical appetite is a strength, he can be too eager to initiate contact without getting his feet underneath him, leaving him off-balance and on the ground. Overall, Davis must play under control and improve his snap-to-snap consistency, but his forceful hands, powerful anchor and finishing skills are NFL-ready. He projects as a guard who will compete for immediate snaps." – Dane Brugler



## LUKE FARRELL

Tight End  
6-6 • 251

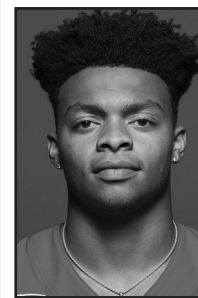
Recruit Rank: Overall 191; TE 7  
Pro Day 40: 4.79 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Primarily a blocking tight end, Farrell still made an impact through the air, hauling in 34 passes for 380 yards and four touchdowns on his career.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Undrafted free agent

**FARRELL SAYS:** "I really just had to do what I knew I was capable of. There's no place like Ohio State to prep you for that kind of pressure, so it was really like approaching a game and just doing what you know you can do, and I was happy with the result."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Farrell has workable size for an inline tight end and although his (block sustaining) skills are average at best, he uses his hands well to engage and leverage the point of attack. As a receiver, he has solid hands, but lacks the quickness/elusiveness to uncover and doesn't show the speed to be a seam threat (longest play at OSU was 24 yards). Overall, Farrell is a gritty, assignment-sound blocker, but his acceleration and playmaking skills are non-threatening." – Dane Brugler



## JUSTIN FIELDS

Quarterback  
6-2 • 227

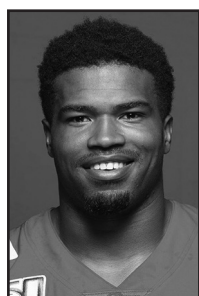
Recruit Rank: Overall 2; DUAL 1  
Pro Day 40: 4.45 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Fields was a 2019 Heisman Trophy finalist and two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year, amassing 5,373 passing yards and 63 passing touchdowns at Ohio State.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** First round

**FIELDS SAYS:** "Overall, I had a solid day. I think everybody knows my goal in that 40-yard dash was at least to be in the 4.3s, so of course I'm kind of mad about that. But other than that, I thought I threw pretty well. I thought I had a few missed throws, but that happens. Every pro day isn't going to be perfect, but overall, I thought I had a pretty solid day."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He shows excellent tempo when the play is on-schedule, but he must speed up his target-to-target progression reads and improve his urgency when the initial target is taken away. Overall, Fields' decision-making is more methodical than spontaneous, but he has high-ceiling traits with his athleticism, accuracy and intangibles. He projects as a high-end NFL starter if he can quicken his reads and process." – Dane Brugler



## JUSTIN HILLIARD

Linebacker  
6-1 • 229

Recruit Rank: Overall 35; OLB 3  
Pro Day 40: 4.81 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Hilliard played in six games during his sixth season with Ohio State, finishing with 33 tackles, a team-high five TFL, an interception, a forced fumble and three fumble recoveries.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Sixth to seventh round

**HILLIARD SAYS:** "After coaches get to know me, I notice a lot of them want to know more about my injury history. And what I tell them is pretty much the facts. I had tons of injuries that kept me off the field, but the vast majority of my injuries have been to my upper body, and that's not going to really affect me playing the game of football."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "While inexperienced in some areas, he is a twitchy mover in space with the trigger to unlock and go in a flash, finishing with a closing burst that surprises the ball carrier. Overall, the medical evaluations from teams will be the key to Hilliard being drafted, but he has unquestioned NFL talent, intangibles and determination tailor-made for the next level." – Dane Brugler



## JOSH MYERS

Center  
6-5 • 310

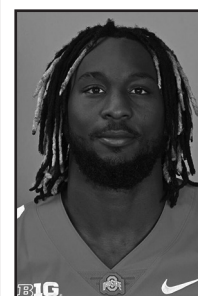
Recruit Rank: Overall 53; OG 2  
Pro Day 40: Did not run

**ACCOLADES:** Myers was a two-year starter for Ohio State and earned third-team All-Big Ten honors in 2019 before jumping to the first team in 2020, when he also served as a captain.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Second to third round

**MYERS SAYS:** "It seems like the two years of tape is enough (for evaluation). I think it helps that the recovery time (on the foot surgery) is only four months, so I'm supposed to be 100 percent recovered with no restrictions by the end of May."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Myers is a square, instinctive blocker with the core strength and competitive juices that allow him to consistently finish blocks. A guard in a run-only offense in high school, he is still developing his pass protection skills and will struggle at times vs. quickhanded rushers. Overall, Myers isn't an elite athlete for the position and needs to cut back on the aggressive leaning, but he brings the desired levels of toughness, smarts and execution. He projects as a starter in the NFL at a guard or center." – Dane Brugler



## TREY SERMON

Running Back  
6-0 • 215

Recruit Rank: Overall 191; RB 12  
Pro Day 40: 4.57 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** After three seasons at Oklahoma, Sermon transferred to Ohio State and led the Buckeyes with 870 rushing yards, including a program-record 331 against Northwestern.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third to fourth round

**SERMON SAYS:** "I felt like I did pretty well. I showed what I am capable of, along with my game film, so I'm happy with my performance. I'm not satisfied because I feel like I could have done better, but I'm still happy (with) and proud of what I did today."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "With his vision and agility, Sermon is skilled at settling his feet, dropping his hips to center his gravity and making coordinated jump cuts – all in a fluid motion to force missed tackles. He tends to be a long-striding, upright runner in space, which will make it tough for him to create chunk plays versus speedy NFL defenders. Overall, Sermon is inconsistent as an inside power runner, but his combination of vision, balance and cutting skills are intriguing traits for an outside zone scheme. He projects as a quality rotational back with third-down value." – Dane Brugler





## TOMMY TOGIAI

Defensive Tackle  
6-2 • 296

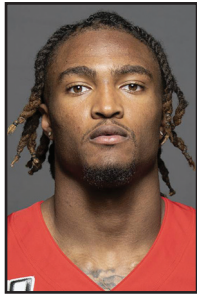
Recruit Rank: Overall 55; DT 3  
Pro Day 40: 4.97 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Togiai was a second-team All-Big Ten selection in his final season with Ohio State, finishing with 23 tackles and a forced fumble. He also claimed three sacks – all of which came against Penn State.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third to fourth round

**TOGIAI SAYS:** “Everyone thinks of me just as strong and big and that’s it, but I’ve also got the speed along with it. I can move and just wanted to put that on showcase today.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “Togiai is a bully in the trenches and has outstanding strength and flexibility through his hips to anchor, shed and make plays at the line of scrimmage. He takes the ‘hard work always beats talent’ mantra to heart, never taking plays off and competing with relentless effort. Overall, Togiai needs to develop his handwork and timing as a pass rusher, but he boasts developed power, physical hands and budding instincts. He projects as a stout run defender with pass rush upside.” – Dane Brugler



## SHAUN WADE

Cornerback  
6-1 • 196

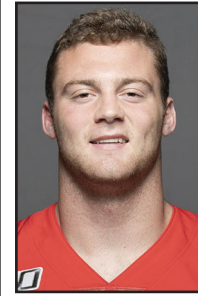
Recruit Rank: Overall 17; CB 2  
Pro Day 40: 4.43 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Wade returned after a third-team All-Big Ten season in 2019 and became a consensus All-American, as well as Big Ten Defensive Back of the Year in 2020.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Fifth round

**WADE SAYS:** “Every coaching staff, every team is different. They have a unique style how they coach and how they promote things and stuff like that, so that’ll be the No. 1 thing for me. But at the end of the day, I’m just enjoying (the draft process). Just trying to have fun, smile through it and just show them who I am since we’re not doing everything in person.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “Wade has the athletic traits and length to stick with routes up and down the field, but his fundamentals quickly break down and he is too reactionary at the top of routes. While his versatility to play anywhere in the secondary is a positive trait, he hasn’t shown a natural feel at any specific position. Overall, Wade is an intriguing talent with his size, athleticism and ball skills, but his lax technique/awareness and uneven compete skills make him an enigma regarding his ideal NFL position and development trajectory.” – Dane Brugler



## PETE WERNER

Linebacker  
6-3 • 238

Recruit Rank: Overall 277; ILB 14  
Pro Day 40: 4.58 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Werner led Ohio State with 54 total tackles in 2020 and became a first-team All-Big Ten honoree in the process.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third to fourth round

**WERNER SAYS:** “I thought it was a great day all the way around. You talk about two months of solid training just for days like this. I thought I came out here and used those months of training well and thought I had a great day.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “Werner is an athletic, heady player with great eyes, which allows him to play at full speed as a blitzer or chaser. I wish he was more of a playmaker in coverage, but he is smooth in his drops with a natural sense for play development. Overall, Werner needs to clean up some inconsistent tendencies, but he has outstanding lateral range and his sights are always on the football. He projects as a versatile linebacker with four-down potential.” – Dane Brugler

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# 'Big' Moves Could Finalize Buckeyes' Roster For 2021-22

Ohio State men's basketball got a decision by a big man in mid-April but not the one Buckeye fans had anticipated.

April 15 came and went without five-star

## COURT REPORT Craig Merz

center Efton Reid, a target of coach Chris Holtmann and his staff for three years, deciding where he would play the 2021-22 season.

Two days later, center Joey Brunk (6-11, 255) announced he was transferring to Ohio State, filling the final spot on the 2021-22 roster for now.

He will be a sixth-year senior after playing three seasons for Butler (2016-19) – including an abbreviated freshman season for which he was granted a hardship waiver redshirt due to family illness – and the 2019-20 season as a fourth-year junior at Indiana before sitting the entire 2020-21 season because of a back injury.

Additionally, forward Kyle Young is taking advantage of the one-time NCAA provision that allows him a free season of eligibility because of the COVID-19 pandemic. He announced April 16 that he is returning for a fifth season with the Buckeyes. Young is the heart and soul of the team and was missed when the Buckeyes dropped two of three postseason games in his absence due to a concussion.

The addition of Brunk, who played his freshman season at Butler for Holtmann when he was the head coach, means Ohio State is likely out of the running for Reid (6-11, 225).

Reid put out word via his mother's Twitter account that he would unveil his choice April 15 amid much fanfare for 247Sports' No. 24 player nationally, who attends IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla.

But in the early evening of the 15th his mother, Marie, posted, "Mama Bear has spoken! Efton Reid's commitment has been postponed. Stay tuned!"

As BSB was going to print, there had been no update.

Several reports had Reid as a lock for Florida State over longtime suitors OSU, Pittsburgh and Virginia and a late push by LSU. Was there an unknown last-second entrant? Did Reid change his mind?

His former high school coach in Richmond, Va., before Reid transferred to IMG told The Columbus Dispatch on April 7 that Ohio State was one of three finalists. Coach Curt Kassab did not name the other two schools.

However, on April 15 Pittsburgh Sports Now said Reid's three choices were down to Florida State, LSU and Pitt. The site also cited a source saying OSU was out of the picture and "Virginia has been out for months."

Ohio State assistant coach Ryan Pedon has been the point man in the pursuit of Reid and got him to Columbus for an official visit the weekend of Oct. 5, 2019.

Reid was there the same time as 2021 signee Malaki Branham of Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary. Reid has also visited Louisville and Virginia, but the pandemic forced a dead period in recruiting since March 13, 2020, that prohibited official visits (the order will be lifted June 1).

That edict may have played a factor in Reid putting the brakes on his announcement, but it is hard to see him holding off his announcement at least six weeks to make more on-campus visits.

As of April 16, less than 10 percent of the 247Sports top 150 recruits for the class of 2021 remained undecided.

Brunk, who will be 24 on Nov. 13, adds experience and a needed inside presence, although he certainly doesn't have the stature of Reid.

Still, in the rugged Big Ten, having him and Young will allow Holtmann to sleep more comfortably. In 60 games for Butler Brunk averaged 5.0 points and 2.7 rebounds, although his first two seasons with the Bulldogs he averaged only 5.9 minutes per game to skew his numbers.

In his lone season for the Hoosiers when he played 32 games, he averaged 6.8 points and 5.2 rebounds in 19.6 minutes. Those are figures that would fit in nicely for the Buckeyes, who relied last season on Young (6-8, 225), sophomore E.J. Liddell (6-7, 240) and freshman Zed Key (6-8, 245) in the post.

### Not Over Yet

In expected but still disappointing news for Ohio State fans, Chet Holmgren, the nation's top prospect for 2021, announced his commitment to Gonzaga on April 19. The 7-0 center averaged 20.8 points, 12.6 rebounds, 4.7 blocks and 4.5 assists this season in leading Minneapolis Minnehaha Academy to a state championship.

Besides Gonzaga, Holmgren had narrowed his choices to Georgetown, Memphis, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina and Ohio State.

That Ohio State was in the running for two of the top centers is testament to the program Holtmann has established in four seasons, but fickle fans will point out that close is not good enough. Who cares who finishes second in the Indianapolis 500, right? It's all about the winners.

All might not be lost for Holtmann, though, thanks to an impending change in regulations by the NCAA.

Its Division I Council approved April 14 a new one-time transfer rule that will be voted on by the Division I board of directors on April 28.

Under the legislation, athletes in football, men's and women's basketball, baseball and men's hockey will now receive the same treatment as all other D-I players and will be allowed to transfer once without having to sit a season.

Of course, there have been numerous instances in the past several years when athletes have been granted waivers for immediate eligibility, but now it's an across-the-board move without the drama: You want to leave? Leave.

Players who want to transfer and be eligible for fall/winter sports the following school year (2021-22 in this instance) would have to enter the transfer portal by May 1. For spring 2022 athletes, there would be a July 1 deadline to enter the portal. Because of the lateness of the ruling, fall/winter athletes hoping to transfer for the 2021-22 season will have a July 1 deadline this year only.

With the new rule it behooves coaches such as Holtmann and Pedon to make sure that if their targets sign elsewhere, the recruits still have a favorable impression of them.

After all, if OSU was good enough to be finalist, what's to prevent a dissatisfied

## 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           |

player from bolting his original destination for a do-over in Columbus? With the lax transfer rules, it could happen a lot more. The NCAA said there are more than 1,400 Division I men's basketball players in the transfer portal.

The transfer pipeline brought Brunk and Penn State guard Jamari Wheeler on March 30 and carried away guard Musa Jallow to an undetermined destination the next day.

### Fluid Roster

The roster could remain in flux for some time since senior-to-be guard Duane Washington on April 9 became the second OSU player to put his name into the NBA draft process.

Like Liddell, who entered the draft process March 31, Washington can still return for the 2021-22 season if he withdraws his name by July 19.

In the meantime, he and Liddell can attend combines, receive advice from NBA personnel and sign with agents while maintaining their college eligibility. Neither is expected to be selected in the July 29 draft.

"I feel it's in my best interest to take advantage of this opportunity to potentially make my dream come true," Washington posted on Twitter.

He started all 31 games and led the Buckeyes in scoring last season with a 16.4 average.

In an expected move, senior guard C.J. Walker said April 12 that he would enter the NBA draft. He could have used the "Super Senior" clause as Young did.

"After much discussion with my family, Coach Holtmann and the basketball staff, I've decided to take the next steps and pursue my professional basketball career," Walker said on Twitter. "I'm excited for what the future holds for me and my family. Ohio State will always be home."

The Indianapolis native played two seasons at Florida State before transferring and sitting out the 2018-19 season due to the now archaic transfer rule. He averaged 9.1 points, 3.9 assists and 3.1 rebounds in two seasons for the Buckeyes.

### Forever Young

By the time the Big Ten schedule begins in earnest, Young will be 24 years old on Jan. 5.

The Massillon (Ohio) Jackson product in his four years as a Buckeye has battled through lower leg injuries and appendicitis, and this season he had two concussions.

He scored 18 points in the first half vs. Purdue in the Big Ten quarterfinals but took an elbow to the head early in the second half and was done for the season.

He missed the 68-67 win over Michigan in the semifinals and the 91-88 overtime loss to Illinois in the title game as well as the Buckeyes' shocking defeat as the No. 2 seed to No. 15 Oral Roberts, 75-72 in overtime, in the NCAA Tournament first round.

Young averaged 8.6 points and 5.5 rebounds this season.

### Big Footsteps

Branham (6-4, 175) became the first Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary's player named Ohio Mr. Basketball since LeBron James in 2001 ... and 2002 ... and 2003. Branham, the top prospect in Ohio, scored 37 points in the Division II title game to defeat Columbus DeSales 75-50 in March.

He led the Vikings to a 25-2 record by averaging 21.3 points, 5.1 rebounds, 2.7 assists and 1.8 steals.

Branham is the first OSU commit since Kaleb Wesson (Westerville South, 2017) to win the award as voted by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association.

Ohio State had an impressive haul from 2007-10 under Thad Matta, when the award was given by The Associated Press, starting with Jon Diebler (Upper Sandusky), William Buford (Toledo Libbey) and back-to-back honors for Jared Sullinger of Columbus Northland.

Previous signees who won include Tony Stockman (Medina, 2000), Damon Stringer (Cleveland Heights, 1995) and Jim Jackson, who won it for Toledo Macomber in the award's first year of 1988 and again in 1989.

### Bruce Almighty

There was encouraging news from the 2022 class of commits as well when Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton four-star point guard and Buckeye commit Bruce Thornton was named to the MaxPrep Junior All-America Team.

Thornton (6-2, 195) was the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Class 7A Player of the Year in his home state. He averaged 17 points, nine assists and seven rebounds to lead the Eagles to their first state title since 2012.



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# Juhasz Leaves For UConn, Focusing On Pro Hopes

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

On April 3, Dorka Juhasz announced on Twitter she was entering the transfer portal after three seasons with Ohio State.

Nine days later, Juhasz had found her new home. The 6-4 forward again went to Twitter, this time to say she had committed to UConn, a program that has made 13 consecutive NCAA Final Four appearances and has won 11 national championships since Geno Auriemma took over as head coach in 1985.

When talking with Buckeye Sports Bulletin, Juhasz said the transfer process was busy and overwhelming, with her phone ringing multiple times a day in a timespan that lasted just over a week. But she also said that once UConn gave her a call, the Huskies moved right to the forefront of her decision.

"Once I entered a portal, it was just craziness," Juhasz said. "Whenever UConn reached out to me, that was definitely eye-opening, and I definitely put them on the top of my list with some other great schools. It was exciting just to do that again, going through that process again and getting to know the coaches and the program again, and now that I have some experience with the recruiting process from three years ago, I think it was a little bit easier just to look at the important little details that will make a difference between schools."

Juhasz said she was not really recruited by UConn initially as a prospect out of Pecs, Hungary. She committed to Ohio State on March 5, 2018, and headed to Columbus as a true freshman among a group of five fifth-year seniors, many of whom came to the program as grad transfers.

Even with a team full of veterans, Juhasz was the star of the group, leading Ohio State with 11.7 points and 9.0 rebounds per game as a true freshman.

She did the same in her sophomore year (13.2 points, 9.4 rebounds per game) before being beaten out by sophomore guard Jacy Sheldon (16.7 points per game) for the scoring crown in what would end up as Juhasz's final year with the program. Still, she averaged a double-double (14.6 points, 11.1 rebounds per game) for the first time in her collegiate career and ended up on the coaches' first-team All-Big Ten list for the second year in a row.

And while those scoring accolades were impressive, Juhasz is looking to develop past what she has done the past three seasons. That led into her decision to join the Huskies, which was based around basketball, the same as it was when Juhasz initially decided to commit to Ohio State.

Juhasz emphasized her desire to continue to improve as a player as well as her aspirations to play at the professional level as the key reasons she ultimately decided it was her time to leave the Buckeyes. All that, along with her ability to graduate in three years, made it the right time for her to make the move.

"Since our season ended, I had time to reflect on how this season and the past three years went, and obviously focusing more on the school, just making sure I finish my education here and get my degree and everything," Juhasz said. "I loved Ohio State. I love the people here, and it will always be very close to my heart, but I just felt like it was a basketball decision. I just

felt like I have so much more to give, and it was kind of like the perfect timing for me to take the extra step in my future just to get ready for my professional career and just looking forward to achieve my goals. I just felt like it was something that I needed to do in order to move forward obviously in life.

"Graduating from here, they can never take that away from me, and so that was just something that I had time and I talked to my parents and family, and it's something that I felt like I have to do in order to bring the best version out of myself on the basketball court."

Another thing that played a factor, though a smaller one, was the self-imposed postseason ban handed down by Ohio State for the 2020-21 season after the Patrick Klein investigation. That left Juhasz and the Buckeyes out of the NCAA tournament for the third year in a row.

Juhasz's first season missing was due to a lackluster 14-15 campaign in 2018-19, while the other two years were due to circumstances out of her control, with the 2019-20 tournament being canceled due to COVID-19.

But the postseason ban last season was specifically difficult for Juhasz and the team as a whole, and it did have a role in the forward's decision to move on.

"It was super hard," Juhasz said of the ban. "I think it was hard on all of us. I've been here for three years, but I haven't been to the NCAA tournament once, so obviously that played a factor. It wasn't the biggest factor, but that also played a factor just not being able to get there. It kind of left emptiness inside of me just not being able to compete at the national level for three years. That definitely played a little role. Obviously, it wasn't the main factor why I left, but it definitely played a little role in it."

What did not play a factor, though, is Juhasz's relationship with Ohio State men's basketball forward Musa Jallow. Jallow announced he was entering the transfer portal four days prior to Juhasz's announcement, but the two did not influence each other's decision, despite the thoughts of some users on social media.

"It was kind of funny just reading the comments," Juhasz said. "We've been talking, but that was not something that we did because the other one did it. Our two reasons for leaving are super different, so it's not like there's anything against Ohio State. We both love Ohio State, but it's something that obviously happened at the same time so it kind of made people wonder if it's a package deal, are we going somewhere together, but it has nothing to do with it."

"I want the best for him and his basketball career, and if that was that he had to leave and go somewhere else, I was supporting 100 percent, and I know that he's supporting me 100 percent. He's very excited for me to go to UConn and just play there and everything, but it's not really a factor. It's not like we have to go somewhere close."

Juhasz was the fifth Ohio State player to transfer from the women's basketball program over the past two seasons. She then was joined by a sixth player in the portal six days later when junior forward



FILE PHOTO

**HEADING EAST – Forward Dorka Juhasz (right) committed to UConn after transferring from Ohio State.**

Aaliyah Patty also announced she would be transferring (for more on this, see Double Dribble on page 27).

But Juhasz did not communicate with any of them when making her decision. She said it was important that she knew that it was a decision that she, personally, wanted to make.

"To be honest I have not talked to anyone about it," Juhasz said. "I knew that I had to leave and I was pretty sure about it. There's no like, 'Oh should I, should I not?' It was for me and I think that's why I kept it for myself because that's my decision, I don't want anyone to influence me."

"I think I have to know in my heart what are my goals, why am I doing it? I wasn't talking to any of those girls. I wasn't even talking to Aaliyah, so whenever she announced, I didn't know it. I think it's such a private thing that I think sometimes it's better if we all just keep it to ourselves and just make sure we are making the decision and not someone else making the decision for us."

The two-time first-team All-Big Ten forward now joins a Huskies team that finished last season with a 28-2 record, falling in the Final Four to Arizona as the No. 1 overall seed in the tournament.

Auriemma's Huskies are currently set to return their entire roster from that run, save for guard Anna Makurat, who left to play overseas. That returning roster includes seven freshmen from the 2020-21 campaign, one of whom is guard Paige Bueckers, the reigning national player of the year.

As far as the forward position goes, UConn often started four guards with junior Olivia Nelson-Adoda as the presence inside. Freshman Aaliyah Edwards also saw significant time during the season and played a major role in their NCAA tournament run.

But Nelson-Adoda shot just 4 of 15 from three last season, while Edwards did not attempt a shot from deep. Juhasz's best season from three for Ohio State was her sophomore year, when she hit 40 of 101 attempts (39.6 percent) from three. She did struggle from outside this past season, though, hitting just 12 of 59 (20.3 percent) from deep.

Juhasz said that her ability to stretch

the floor on the offense could give her a specific role, but that she knows nothing is promised once she arrives in Storrs, Conn.

"There's not any promises," Juhasz said. "That's something I really liked about them. There was not any promises that if you come here, you're going to play this much. I think that's what I need. All I need is an opportunity. All I need is an opportunity to actually get in the gym and show what I can do and just work hard every single day to fight for my spot."

"There are many great players, so I'm not even assuming anything with how much I'm going to play. I have self-confidence, obviously. I think if I work really hard, I can be really helpful for this team to contribute in what I can bring to that team just playing kind of like inside-outside. So I'm not really assuming. That's like the main thing. I'm just really grateful for the opportunity. Just to be a part of that program and be surrounded by great players that are going to push me and be surrounded by great coaches that are going to push me and make sure I'm doing everything right."

Juhasz leaves Ohio State with 975 points and 722 total rebounds in 75 games, good for 13.0 points and 9.6 rebounds per contest. She helped the Buckeyes reach the Big Ten championship game in her sophomore year and kept Ohio State in the top 25 for the entire 2020-21 season.

But the thing that Juhasz will remember the most from her time with the Buckeyes are the fans and relationships she made that she will take with her, both to UConn and wherever the road leads after that.

"Playing games in front of our fans, that's something that I will always remember," Juhasz said. "That was just something that I wasn't very familiar with at home. We did not have that many fans, especially at a college level, and it was great to see how many people loved Ohio State basketball and came out to support us."

"And obviously all the relationships I built. I know that even if I'm leaving, I'm still going to have those connections with them and it's not going to be like 'All right, I leave and I'll never talk to them again.' I know they're all my friends, and all the people that I have a good relationship and close relationship, I think everybody is very happy for me and know that it's in my best interest."

Where the road will ideally lead, in the mind of Juhasz at least, is to the professional level, either in the WNBA or overseas in Europe. While she hopes to accomplish the team goal of a national title in UConn, no individual accolades come close to reaching the goal of being able to play professionally.

"Obviously as a team it's just winning a national championship," Juhasz said. "Obviously it's a super talented team, and I hope we can get there, we can work there as a team. The ultimate goal is putting myself in the best position to get into the WNBA. After that, become a really solid professional player that can play overseas in the top leagues. That's definitely the ultimate goal, just to bring that out in myself and see if I can get there."

"I don't really have anything, like I have to win this award or this. That's not something that is important to me. The most important to me is just to grow, to have the opportunity to develop as a player and see what else is inside of me that maybe I haven't even seen."



Dorka Juhasz



# Patty Becomes Second To Enter Transfer Portal

Less than a week after junior forward Dorka Juhasz announced that she would be entering the transfer portal, Aaliyah Patty became the second third-year Ohio State forward to do so, announcing on Instagram on April 8 that she will be entering the portal.

"I would like to thank Coach (Kevin) McGuff and the Ohio State coaching staff for recruiting me and giving me the opportunity to play as a Buckeye," Patty wrote in her post. "Also a huge shoutout to my teammates for being my sisters every step of the way. After much thought and consideration, I have decided to enter the transfer portal. I am very excited for my next journey and to see what the future holds for me."

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

Patty started in all 18 games she played in last season, finishing the year with 11.5 points and 5.8 rebounds per game. She also had a team-high 21 blocks while shooting 45.3 percent from the field and 37.8 percent from three.

When talking to BSB on March 25, Patty talked about the difficulties of playing last season due to COVID-19, as well as the team's self-imposed postseason ban following the Patrick Klein investigation. She said that, looking back, she wishes she had not played through the year because of all the struggles that came with it.

"At the end of the year, the main goal is to win an NCAA championship," Patty said. "So not being able to reach that goal, it was hard trying to find what we're playing for as a team. 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."

Patty also talked about what she learned in what ended up being her final season with the Buckeyes. Because of both the pandemic and the postseason ban, the forward out of West Chester (Ill.) Montini Catholic felt like she developed off the court as much as, or even more than, she did on it.

"Mental toughness has been, I think, a key development for everyone playing basketball right now, just trying to stay focused on the game while there's so much going on in the world," Patty said. "For me personally, I think I've developed as a leader. Just getting older, with more experience, that kind of comes to you. Learning how to be there for my teammates, especially after all we've been through this year. I just had to try to do what I could for my team."

With first Juhasz and now Patty departing from the team, Ohio State is left with just two forwards on the roster: Gabby Hutcherson and Rebeka Mikulasikova, who were in their first and second seasons with the Buckeyes last year, respectively. Ohio State could also return

senior Tanaya Beacham, who has not yet announced if she will be using her free year of eligibility or not.

Looking statistically at the losses of Juhasz and Patty, Ohio State is losing 70.2 percent of its points production and 67.1 percent of its rebounding production, when looking at strictly what the forward room gave to the team in 2020-21. If Beacham is included in lost production, those numbers go up to 81.0 percent and 81.7 percent, respectively.

Pending any new transfers into the team, Hutcherson appears to be the face of the forward room after a promising freshman season. Despite averaging only 3.1 points and 2.1 rebounds per game, she flashed in limited action (11.8 minutes per game) and shot a team-high 41.7 percent from three. She also made some noise on the defensive end with nine blocks and 11 steals.

Hutcherson told BSB on March 25 that she made major strides in her first collegiate season – specifically on defense – and is ready to build on that heading into her sophomore year.

"I feel like I took a big leap, especially on the defensive end," Hutcherson said. "You learn a lot of things that you don't learn in high school, about positioning and rotations and stuff like that. It's more in depth in college, and so adapting to that and learning how to focus more on those things, I feel like that helped me take a big leap, and that was really important for me."

Despite the improvements, Hutcherson also knew that there is plenty to work on, even before the information on Juhasz and Patty's transfers were released.

But now, with a clear hole in the starting lineup ready to be filled, those improvements Hutcherson wanted to make in late March have become even more important for the team moving forward.

"There are a lot of things I need to work on," Hutcherson said. "Obviously getting in the weight room and just putting on a little bit more weight and muscle and adapt to Big Ten play. Then I will probably work more on my consistency – consistency with my shooting, and then finishing around the rim and becoming more aggressive off the drive on the perimeter."

Ohio State still has a large portion of its talent returning for the incoming season, especially in the backcourt. Jacy Sheldon, the team's leading scorer (16.7 points per game), as well as Madison Greene (13.4 points per game) both enter their junior seasons after starting in every game they played in last year.

Also returning is Braxtin Miller, who's using her free year of eligibility to return for her fifth-year senior season. She started in all 19 of her games played and added 11.5 points, 3.7 rebounds, 3.1 assists and 1.6 steals per game, while shooting 38.5 percent from deep, second on the team to Hutcherson.

Losing Juhasz and Patty is obviously not an ideal situation for the Buckeyes to be in, but there is still talent throughout a roster that was ranked in the AP top 25

## OSU Women's Basketball Commits

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        |
|----------------|------|------|-------|--------------------|
| Kaia Henderson | PG   | 5-6  | N/A   | New Hartford, N.Y. |
| Cotie McMahon  | SG   | 5-11 | ★★★★  | Centerville, Ohio  |
| Mya Perry      | SG   | 5-10 | N/A   | Reynoldsburg, Ohio |

## Former Buckeyes Find Varying Levels Of Success

Last season, Ohio State had four players leave through the transfer portal. They each played for their respective transfer destinations, but at varying levels of success. Forwards Dorka Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty have joined the group this year, giving Ohio State six transfers in just two years. Here's how those first four have fared so far:

- **Kierstan Bell, Florida Gulf Coast** – Bell clearly had the most success with her new team, helping the Eagles to a 26-3 record and an NCAA tournament berth after an undefeated conference season in the ASUN. Bell led the way with 24.3 points, 10.6 rebounds, 2.3 blocks and 1.9 steals per contest.

- **Janai Crooms, Michigan State** – Crooms played in 22 games and started 12 for Michigan State in 2020-21, helping the Spartans reach the NCAA tournament with a 15-9 record (8-7 Big Ten). Crooms finished the season with 5.1 points, 3.2 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game but is back in the transfer portal after just one season with the team.

- **Kaelynn Satterfield, Xavier** – Satterfield departed from Ohio State in the middle of the 2019-20 season to join Xavier and finished this season with 9.2 points and 5.9 rebounds per contest. She shot 46.8 percent from the field, but the Musketeers struggled to a 5-10 record.

- **Aixa Wone, Georgia Tech** – Wone played in just eight games for Georgia Tech, finishing with 2.5 points and 2.6 rebounds per game on 29.6-percent shooting. The Yellow Jackets reached the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament before falling to South Carolina.



Aaliyah Patty



Jacy Sheldon



Gabby Hutcherson

in every week of the season. Hutcherson said that the team should be coming in with an extra bit of fire after missing out on the conference and NCAA tournaments this past March.

"We need to come back in, and obviously with the postseason ban, we have to come back in with a chip on our shoulder almost, because we didn't have the chance to do what everybody else is doing right now (in the NCAA tournament)," Hutcherson said in the midst of March Madness. "We have to come in very prepared to surprise everybody next year and bounce back quick. I feel like, especially with the end of the season, that we have to come back in and show everybody that we were here to play, even though we didn't get the chance last year."

"That's what we need to do as a team, and that's just going to come from a lot of focus in the offseason and just working on everything."

## Buckeyes Secure Third Commit For 2022

New Hartford, N.Y., point guard Kaia Henderson announced on Twitter on April 9 that she will be committing to Ohio

State for the 2022 class.

According to Syracuse.com, she took an unofficial visit to Ohio State on April 5, was impressed by the facilities and said that the Buckeyes "scored points by laying out detailed plans for how they see (her) fitting into the program."

Henderson also had offers from a variety of other Division I programs, including Binghamton, Colgate, Dartmouth, Long Island, Niagara, Providence, Rhode Island, St. Bonaventure, St. John's, Syracuse, Toledo, Virginia Tech and UMass.

In six games this season, the 5-6 Henderson is averaging 33.0 points per game, a year after averaging 24.7 points and 3.8 steals per contest in 2019-20. She currently has 2,096 points in her high school career, fifth most in the history of New York's Section III women's basketball division.

She gives the Buckeyes their third commitment for the 2022 class, the others being a pair of in-state prospects in four-star wing Cotie McMahon and guard Mya Perry. Ohio State is also bringing in a pair of guards for 2021 in Caitlyn Costner and Taylor Thierry.

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# Buckeyes Finding Rhythm At Halfway Point

Ohio State hit – and subsequently passed – the halfway point of the 2021 season since the last time BSB went to press, playing its 22nd game in a 44-game season against Michigan to close out a three-game series on April 11. It was a 16-7 loss for the Buckeyes that gave the Wolverines a 2-1 series win after the Buckeyes claimed game one on April 9, 7-4.

That series loss served as a slight skid

## FROM THE STRETCH

### Patrick Mayhorn

in momentum after Ohio State's dominant showing over Indiana in the prior series, a four-game sweep of the Big Ten's best. But to take five of seven games against the Wolverines and Hoosiers, two of the top teams in the conference, was still a plus for Ohio State. Given that there's no Big Ten tournament this season, series wins over good teams like that are crucial for Ohio State in its hunt for a conference title and a postseason berth, as well as for team confidence.

"It certainly helps," head coach Greg Beals told BSB of that performance. "It's a belief factor, and it really helps to believe that you could beat anybody in a series. I think this team believes that they can be good. We just need to make sure to stay focused and locked in. We have 22 games left (at the time of interview; Ohio State had 19 games remaining as BSB went to print) and we need to play all 22 of them like it may be the last."

The Buckeyes didn't start the second half of the season on the right foot, losing all three of its games against Maryland to fall to 13-12 on the year.

As it stands entering the back-end of the season, Ohio State sits at No. 6 in the Big Ten standings, trailing Nebraska, Michigan, Indiana and Iowa while it's tied with the Terrapins. The Buckeyes are 5 1/2 games out of the lead, though it may not need a conference title to qualify for the postseason – it

would just be very helpful.

Taking advantage of the opportunities ahead of it and being successful in the last seven series of the season is the focus for the Buckeyes right now. As simple as it sounds, if Ohio State leaves each remaining series with equal or more wins than its foe, it will be in a good place when June rolls around. Big Ten season will end for the Buckeyes on May 30 against Northwestern.

"If we win the last (seven) series (of the season), I think we're representing Ohio State in the nationals," Beals said. "We're going to be in the Big Ten championship race if we win the rest of our series from here out because we're only a couple of games back, and that would force everybody else to win their series to keep up. That's a tough task to win out for anybody."

Much of Ohio State's recent success has been inspired by a surging offense and stellar defense, two pieces of this roster that were frequently highlighted as points of concern entering the season. Ohio State is averaging 4.5 runs per game since March 26 and holds a 7-7 record in that time, and it seems safe to assume that the two are directly correlated.

Ohio State's pitching hasn't been bad either, though it hasn't been as dominant as expected. Regardless, Beals sees plenty of positives through the first half of the season, including those surprises.

"We've seen really good signs," Beals said. "We have seen the good and the bad, and the good has been really good. It's a matter of, 'Can we develop a consistency?' We are in a position where, if we can get consistency and get ourselves going, we have a chance to be really, really good. The talent is here. We simply need to play a little cleaner baseball with just a little bit more focus offensively where we've been missing it."

"Offensively, we started out slow and our numbers may not look good, but we're getting going in the right direction. We need to make sure we capitalize on our offensive opportunities. When we get guys in scoring position, can we move them over? Can we get them in? Can we occasionally get that big two-out base hit? I think we just need that complementary stuff for our offense. I think the mass of the offense is trending in the right direction."

He has fewer concerns about the defense, which has been led from the inside out with largely error-free baseball in the infield.

"I think we can defend," Beals said. "Our infield defense and in the outfield as well, we can really defend. I like that. Our first baseman, Conner Pohl, is an elite defender. Our pitchers have got strikeout stuff. We have dynamic stuff on the mound that draws a lot of swings and misses. I've seen that when we execute offensively a game plan, how tough we can be on a pitcher."

"Basically, the last three Friday nights (against Iowa, Indiana and Michigan on March 26, April 2 and April 9), we've taken Friday night guys and beat them, and we've had a very focused and well-executed game plan. Those are the things I like. We need to clean up our free bases on the pitching side, as far as our walks and our wild pitches are concerned. Pitchers and catchers and all need to work on defending the running game. We are giving up too many stolen bases. Offensively, we just need to make sure we are able to execute when we need to with bunts and hits and runs, move runners and get them in."

### Lonsway Still Working To Control His Gifts

As Beals alluded to, Ohio State is not with-



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**HEATING UP – Junior Buckeye pitcher Seth Lonsway is hoping to lead his team back to the postseason.**

out things to clean up. Pitchers are allowing walks at an unreasonable clip, surrendering 116 on the season, with star Seth Lonsway leading the way on that front (25), much to his own disappointment. He's spending plenty of time working on it, though.

"I think overall I'm focusing on throwing more strikes, getting ahead on guys," Lonsway explained to BSB. "That has been the focus. Obviously last season and even the season before that, the walks are a little high and I get frustrated with myself. I'm always my biggest critic. When I give up a walk, I still take that pretty hard."

"I think I'm starting to understand more about what I need to do mentally. I think that was the thing I was still figuring out, knowing what helps me calm down, doing a self-talk type of thing and doing whatever can get me to get the ball across the plate and challenge the hitter. I think at times, having that swing and miss stuff, you get so used to not giving up any contact. And sometimes I think I just need to live with the fact that I'm going to give up some hits here and there, not being afraid of contact."

The mental aspect of the game has been a focus for the fourth-year pitcher for as long as he's been at Ohio State. He's a gifted pitcher, that's never been a question. Even the untrained eye can see his talent and knack for the game from a mile away. There are few pitchers in college baseball with a better one-two pitch punch than the of Lonsway, who's been fanning batters at an incredible 15.26 strikeouts per nine innings rate this season, good enough for No. 6 in the nation. But getting that stuff under control consistently and staying out of his own head remain issues for the talented Buckeye on the mound.

"Seth has unbelievable stuff and is a really hard worker," Beals said. "Sometimes he gets maybe too mechanically driven. I think the thing for Seth on game day is to simply go out and compete and to not be internal, thinking about himself. It's about being very external and entrenching himself in the ballgame. He's going to be really tough when he does that. The key is that he commands the fastball. When he commands his fastball, gets ahead

in the count, that forces action on the breaking ball and (he gets swings and misses on) the breaking ball."

It seems that Beals' words are getting through to his pitcher. Lonsway spoke at length about the importance of reeling himself in mentally, and he mentioned Ohio State's improved defense specifically as beneficial to him on his mound – so long as he reminds himself to trust those behind him and not to worry so much about batters making contact.

"It definitely helps," Lonsway said of the defense. "It helps with confidence when you know you have help behind if you need it. You still obviously try to go out and execute your pitches to the best of your ability. For myself, I throw two pitches that are swing-and-miss pitches, so for me, the ball isn't getting put in play a lot. But when it does, it is nice to know that you have guys back there that can make plays and get guys out."

Although that defensive strength has gone a long way for inspiring confidence within the Celina, Ohio, native, his own success is often the largest guide to more success. When Lonsway gets rolling, as he did in a 17-strikeout outing against Indiana on April 3, his confidence balloons and he locks in on just doing what works and trusting his training, rather than thinking about what goes into each pitch.

"It makes you feel very confident," Lonsway said. "You attack each inning like it's your last. You're thinking less about what you're doing physically. As far as getting guys out and executing, not thinking so much about what I'm doing with my body is great. I'm just worried about throwing strike one, strike two, strike three."

That may be a lesson that the entire Buckeye roster can take away. The talent in this group is apparent in its series wins over teams such as Indiana, but the consistency has not yet been apparent, in a way that almost mirrors the struggles that Lonsway has faced.

Beals would be the first to say that Ohio State sometimes needs to stop thinking so much and to just go out and play, and as it opens the second half of the season, it would be surprising if that isn't focus No. 1.



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# Early Success Surprise, Even For Oldenburg

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State first-year women's volleyball head coach Jen Flynn Oldenburg was caught a bit off guard when her director of operations informed her that she had been selected as the Big Ten Coach of the Year on April 8. After all, she's just the second coach in Buckeye women's volleyball history to earn the award, joining her head coach when she suited up for the Scarlet and Gray, Jim Stone, who earned the title four times during his lengthy tenure. Even though her Buckeyes registered a 15-3 record in the regular season and earned a No. 9 seed in the NCAA tournament, she didn't expect to be granted the honor, especially not this early in her career.

"Caitlin Insana, our director of operations, got the news from Candace Johnson, our sports information director, and she passed it on to the whole staff," Oldenburg told BSB. "In that moment, I was a little overwhelmed, humbled by that award, especially given that the Big Ten is a tough conference and that it has a lot of great coaches that also had good seasons. I mean, we all battled through adversity and challenges."

"To be named that by both the coaches and the media, I felt honored. But it also comes back around. Our success is because of our staff and the work they put in. I feel like it should be staff of the year, not coach of the year. Of course, it's a testament to the team and what they accomplished and what they're doing on the court too."

Oldenburg has been caught off guard by quite a bit during her first season in charge of her alma mater, though it seems as if just about every one of those surprises has been a positive one for the Buckeye head coach. She talked openly about learning on the fly in her first year as a college volleyball coach in any form, let alone as a head coach. Her background in club coaching served as valuable experience, but Oldenburg said she wears the fact that she's learning every day on her sleeve rather than trying to hide it or bluster past it.

"I feel like I'm thrown into everything every day," Oldenburg said. "I'm joking a little bit, it did help. But I know what the Big Ten is. I know the beast that it is as a player and as a coach. I knew it was going to be a lot, regardless of when we started."

"This is just one of those weird years, and I didn't know what to expect. I thought we would be pretty good, but the level we played at for a long period of time against good teams, that (caught me off guard). I think that that experience put us in the position that we are in right now and gave us a national seed in a weird tournament, but it also gives us a path to continue to build and grow on what we're doing."

It's been a tough year to be a first-year anything in college athletics. A lengthy COVID-inspired offseason pushed Oldenburg's coaching debut back by more than a year, as her Buckeyes didn't take the court until January 2021 after she was hired in January the year before. That extended offseason was considered by many to be a serious impediment for coaches who suddenly had to spend more time away from their players than ever before, but it worked significantly in Oldenburg's favor. It allowed the new-look Buckeye coaching staff to get

to know its players better, to spend more time on development and to install more complex plans for this opening season of their tenure in Columbus.

"Absolutely," Oldenburg said when asked if the extra time helped. "I mean, I think you could talk to any coach and they'd say that it wouldn't be great to have a fall season, because you have freshmen come in, they train, they start school, and then they have to compete right away. And I think that's always been something that coaches have talked about. I don't know if switching seasons (to the spring) is the right move overall. There's just so many things happening in the spring that that could create conflict, but in terms of our team, especially with the new staff and having a lack of training last spring, it was huge."

"It was good for a lot of teams, but especially our team, because we were learning about each other. We're learning the verbiage that we're going to use in the gym, how we wanted to play, a new style, a new system. I was relearning the Big Ten. (Assistant coaches) Jill Wilson and Brian



Jen Flynn Oldenburg

Wright are learning the Big Ten. I think that quote unquote 'off time' really served us well, because we were able to dive into things that we probably wouldn't have had time for if we were playing in late August and into September with a regular season. I think the time with the team and building that trust in the gym was really important for us."

For no part of this team was that more important than the underclassmen, of whom Ohio State has a whopping nine – more than half of its 16-player roster. You'd think that time away from the team and away from campus entirely would hurt the development of younger players, but the Buckeyes didn't just see positive contributions from their younger players, they were led by them.

Four underclassmen were named to the All-Big Ten team along with junior opposite hitter Vanja Bukilic. Freshman opposite hitter Emily Londot, freshman middle blocker Rylee Rader, sophomore setter Mac Podraza and sophomore defensive specialist Kylie Murr all starred for the Buckeyes.

"I think with Mac and Kylie, it was nice that they had that time in their freshman campaign to get on the court," Oldenburg said. "I think it certainly helped with Kylie, her backward passing in our defense and just her presence and experience there."

"You know, with Mac, this was a breakout year for her. As a freshman, she was sharing time with another setter, and now this year, she's running the show. I think those two having the experience in the Big Ten along with Gabby Gonzales along with Lauren Witte, who weren't recognized but carry a big load for us with everything else they do, I think that they just gave us a foundation and a solid base."

"Then to bring in Emily and Rylee Rader – they both know how to win. They've been in high school and club programs that win championships. Emily won the gold medal at the Youth World Championship in Egypt in 2019. I think that experience, I knew, was going to be important coming in for them. I think it just brought another level of com-

petitiveness to an already competitive team that really balanced things out and allows them to just go play. They didn't have the big expectations on them. It was just, 'Hey, let's go play volleyball.'"

"I think the youth is really great for the future of our program, but also in the moment. It's been great for our current team as we continue to face challenges ahead of us."

Although all four underclassmen selected to the all-conference team saw significant time on the court for the Buckeyes and made their presence felt, Londot was the best of the bunch and was recognized for her contributions as the Big Ten Freshman of the Year, Ohio State's first since Stacey Gordon in 2001. She was surprised by the decision but quick to deflect the plaudits and shift the individual achievement into an award that belongs to the whole team.

"I was surprised at first, because there are just so many great freshmen this year in the Big Ten," Londot said. "I'm super honored to get the recognition for that. I definitely could not have done it without my whole team, the coaches and everyone. The backcourt passing good balls and the setters getting up there and giving me good balls to attack. I think it's a whole team effort that shows through me."

"Coming in as a freshman is hard. But my team and my coaches made it super easy. Having the fall off really let me get better and work on what we needed to work on."

As often as it's said that a team's greatest strength is its teamwork, it's easy to get the sense that when this team says it, they really mean it. Ohio State is not lacking for talent, but given the struggles at the end of the pre-Oldenburg era, a 15-3 regular season and a run to the regional semifinals seemed unlikely for this group so early in this tenure.

Ohio State seems to fit the cliché of being more than the sum of its parts, which is helped by a primarily young team learning the nuances of the college game together.

Also important is that the team is led by a coach and a staff who have been there before – not as coaches in the Big Ten, or as college coaches in general, but as players themselves.

Oldenburg was an excellent player for the Buckeyes, as was assistant Jill Wilson (four-year starter at LSU), volunteer assistant Nicole Fawcett (four-year starter at Penn State) and assistant

Brian Wright, who suited up for the Texas men's team and was named the SIVA's Most Valuable Player in 2000.

The Buckeye roster has learned from them and followed their examples, while the coaches used their time on the court as a guideline for decisions and to make sure that player development remains a constant point of emphasis in the program. At times, Oldenburg said she is inclined to take a hard-line approach to coaching because that's what she was exposed to as a player. But her experiences in that kind of system have helped keep her away from a style that could be potentially damaging for her still-growing team.

"I think that's twofold," Oldenburg said. "The No. 1 thing is, 'Man, if I did that, my coach would have killed us.' We were just running for days. Now, because of that, part of me is thinking, 'OK, I'm not going to do that, because that's just not helpful. That doesn't work anymore.' But also, I've been in

those shoes where, even in my high school career, I was encouraged to take risks. Mistakes are OK, just be aggressive, keep going for it. I think that mentality served me well as a player."

"Then, as I got into my coaching career, (it helped me recognize that) this is a game of imperfections. If we can embrace that and move forward and focus on what's next, that's what's going to help us win matches. That type of mind-set is something I bring in my coaching style and to the team, (establishing) that they have the freedom to go for it. I'd rather them take risks, make a big swing and have an error, rather than do something lame that (the opponent) scoops right up and slams right back in their face. I don't want that kind of volleyball. I want them to be aggressive."

"Then sometimes we need to play a little looser and I'll crack a joke, and other times we need to get after it and so I'll get on them a little bit, but I wouldn't say that I'm a yeller or anything like that. Because I played at a high level, I know what they're going through. I want to make sure they understand that. Let's just play volleyball. Let's keep it simple."

The new-look, aggressive Buckeyes are playing with the kind of confidence that Oldenburg wants her program to be based around. They swept No. 25 Missouri in their first NCAA tournament matchup on April 15 but fell to the No. 8-seeded Florida Gators in the round of 16, 3-1.

Regardless of the result of this season, though, the Buckeyes look to be in as good a place as ever under Oldenburg's direction. They have just two seniors on the roster, both of whom could return with the extra COVID year if they want, and another strong incoming recruiting class to add to the already impressive young core.

The Big Ten is always going to be a difficult conference to scale for any team, but Ohio State looks primed to make that leap under its new management. Even the freshmen are confident in that.

"I feel really good about everywhere our team has been and where we're about to go," Londot said.

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# Softball's Smith Thrives Through Serenity

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State softball coach Kelly Kovach Schoenly started her April 14 interview with BSB raving about freshman pitcher Allison Smith and talking about how glad she was that Smith was getting recognized for the opening season that she's having in Columbus. She closed it with a story, unprompted, about Smith's ability to keep things in perspective and move forward, even when the game isn't going her way.

"OK, so we're playing this team, the best team in our conference at the time (Northwestern on March 14), back when we were in Florida," Schoenly said. "Runners on first and second, and she's facing a batter. She gives up a double, they end up going ahead, and it was a big moment because if she gets the batter out, the game's over. And I'm disappointed, obviously. I was worried that I called the wrong pitch and should have called something else, because I call the pitches for her."

"I went up to her and I said, 'You know, I think I called the wrong pitch,' to try to take some of the heat off of her. And she says to me, 'Coach, no. That's the pitch I wanted to throw. Nine out of 10 times, I'm going to beat that girl with that pitch. She did it the one time, and unfortunately there were runners all over. I'll get her the next time.' And I'm just thinking, 'How does she have so much perspective when I'm beating myself up about this?'"

"After, I called my dad – he's a coach as well – I call him right away and I was like, 'Dad, this girl's a winner. She gets it.' The fact that she had that perspective as an 18-year-old

and looked at it way better than me as a coach, second-guessing myself, at my age and with my experience – there's just something special there. Her parents have done a great job of the way that she frames the game. That's a big deal for a freshman."

Although coaches are always happy to praise their players, especially young ones who are catching on earlier than expected, Schoenly's sentiment – about Smith being special, being a winner – is an easy one to grasp. The freshman from Champion, Ohio, just seems to have that impact on people, be it her coaches, the foremost of whom described her as a foundational piece for the program, or her teammates, who have welcomed her with open arms from the day that she walked on campus.

Even though she's suited up for the Buckeyes only 19 times in her young career, she's already starting to make those who believed in her look clairvoyant. As a starting pitcher in her first season as a Buckeye, Smith has racked up an impressive 3.18 ERA, tallied 87 strikeouts to just 42 walks and holds a 7-9 record for the 14-13 Buckeyes, who are jostling for space in the jam-packed Big Ten.

None of this is new to her, even if it's her first time pitching in the Big Ten and donning the scarlet and gray. Smith has been dominant on the diamond for years, lighting up the Ohio high school softball and club team levels all the way back to seventh grade, when she first started to realize that she could be playing the sport at a high level for a long time.

"I hadn't yet played with (coach) Lee Pyles, and he was like, 'Hey you should come play for me,' and he actually brought the Indiana coach to watch one of my games," Smith told BSB.

"He said that the Indiana coach was really interested, so I went to my first camp (at Indiana) going into seventh grade, and that's when I got my first offer."

Ohio State realized it then too, as it watched Smith tear through the club ranks and ring up batter after batter from the circle with the kind of confidence – and velocity – that you would expect from a seasoned veteran, not a middle schooler.

"I would say in like seventh grade," Schoenly said when asked about when Ohio State knew Smith could play at the next level. "Not that I was recruiting her, I just noticed her. She was a big, strong girl. She was different than the rest of the kids, and you could see that right away. She came to camp, I think she was in seventh or eighth grade with her little local team, and they just had a blast and she was having so much fun. She didn't even realize that we were taking her that seriously, but we were."

The Buckeyes were so sold that they accepted a commitment from her all the way back in her freshman year of high school. That was before she led Champion to three state titles, before she racked up a state-record 51 home runs, and before her amazingly ascendent junior season: 16-0 as a pitcher with a 0.14 ERA and 215 strikeouts. It was that belief that the Buckeye staff had and a trip to Columbus that sold Smith on suiting up for the home-state Buckeyes, despite interest from teams all over the Midwest.

"Oh my gosh, it's actually kind of a crazy story," Smith said of her commitment. "I really had no idea where I wanted to go. I went to a lot of camps, I went to a lot of different live venues, but when I stepped foot onto Ohio State's campus and I went to a football game. I said, 'Mom, Dad, this is it.' I was like, 'I'm done. This is where I want to be.'"

"It was a mix of the coaching staff, of the tradition, of course the campus is beautiful. And then talking to some of the girls on the team, the love they have for each other and the family environment that they all talked about – it was just everything I wanted it to be. It has every opportunity that you could want as a student-athlete."

As previously mentioned, she caught on right away with the Buckeyes, establishing herself as both a force on the field and a positive presence in the locker room. Ohio State has an experienced roster, led by senior ace pitcher Payton Buresch, but none of those veterans had any qualms about welcoming the newbie into the fold and accepting her, not just as a rookie with much to learn, but as an equal and a teammate they could work with to improve their own game while helping her along at the same time.

"I think Payton welcomed her with open arms, which basically allowed Allison to just come in and throw," Schoenly said. "Payton was so welcoming. It could be intimidating to have a senior and you're a freshman with those dynamics, but Payton does a great job, along with Skylar Hayward, of just creating a culture in the bullpen where everyone can be their best and let the cream rise to the top. I think that Payton has taught Allison a lot about composure, poise, learning about opponents and paying attention to those types of things. She's been around the block a little bit. And Allison has brought some of the fun to the bullpen and let the pressure go away for everyone else. She makes it lighthearted, even though she's super competitive. She has a good head on her shoulders about just having some humor to it."

Buresch has been a crucial part of the

equation for the Buckeyes and for Smith in general this season. Despite her experience – Buresch entered the year with 281 2/3 college innings pitched – this is her first full year with the Buckeyes. She transferred from James Madison after 2019 and earned major time for Ohio State in 2020, but that season was canceled before it ever really got going.

That means that like Smith, Buresch is still getting used to the Big Ten and to pitching as a Buckeye. She's taken that move in stride and is pacing the bullpen in just about every category, from wins (7) to ERA (2.09). She's showing Smith the ropes as she goes, too.

"It's great having somebody to look up to," Smith said. "The way that she carries herself, the way that she's disciplined, the way that she works hard, everything about her is something that I want to do when I'm a senior for the freshmen. The bullpen goes so much better when she's there, just because of her attitude. If you're not throwing well, she helps lighten your mood, and that just helps you throw better. And then on top of that, she dominates. I think I've only seen her give up one home run. Her presence on the mound is so awesome, it's what you want to become."

One thing that Smith doesn't have to learn, and the thing that's likely most responsible for propelling her to this early collegiate success, is the mental side of the game. They say that pitchers must have short memories, and Smith has a knack for that.

"That's a great quality for a pitcher," Schoenly said. "One thing that I appreciate about Allison is that she lives in the facts. Something happens and she doesn't create the story around it. It's either, 'Bad pitch, she hit it because it was bad,' or 'Good pitch, and she hit it because she was better than me,' but she doesn't say, 'Oh well, that was the wrong call or this or that.' She just lives in the facts."

That's not something that she just does on the mound, either. Smith lives in the moment, to the point where, when asked about her goals for the future, she said plainly that she does not know. She hasn't thought that far ahead. In her mind, there's no real need to. Smith says that she certainly wants to be a part of a championship team, and that it would be a "bigger accomplishment than anything (she's) done in (her) life."

But there's no overarching individual goal that drives her. She wants to go out, pitch as well as she can, and do it again for as long as she can.

"I don't think there's a limit to what she can accomplish," Schoenly said. "I truly believe – and, when I recruited her, we talked about this – that she could be the cornerstone of getting one of our teams to the World Series. I think that she has that competitive drive and the desire to work to get better. I think we've had some other pitchers that have come through here that had that ability. We have a long line of pitchers that I think could take us there. It's just a matter of putting all the pieces together and trying not to put too much on her shoulders."

With the kind of talent that Smith has, it's easy to see that rinse-and-repeat model working for years to come, and Ohio State hopes it can pay off big time in the long run with what currently looks like the program's ace of the future.

Even if Smith doesn't want to think that far ahead.

*Buckeye Sports Bulletin provides a roundup of all games, matches and meets involving OSU's teams each Monday on our [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com) website, free to all print subscribers.*

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# Lucas' New Book Explores All Of His Passions

By MARK REA  
BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Some books are entertaining, others are educational. Rare is the one written that checks both boxes, but "Middie Magic and Mind Magic," the new offering from basketball legend Jerry Lucas, manages to entertain its reader with past exploits on and off the basketball court while detailing Lucas' lifelong passion for teaching and learning.

You probably know Lucas from his days as a two-time prep state champion at Middletown, Ohio, an All-American at Ohio State, an Olympic gold medalist and an NBA champion with the New York Knicks. You might even know him from numerous television appearances about his uncanny knack for memorization.

But it's doubtful the reader begins "Middie Magic and Mind Magic" with any inkling that Lucas is the world's leading authority on memory training with a trademarked learning system.

Following a foreword from former U.S. Senator and Knicks teammate Bill Bradley, including a description from Bradley about the time Lucas confounded world chess champion Bobby Fischer with his memorization skills, the first two-thirds of the book serves as a memoir of sorts. It alternately moves back and forth between family genealogy, childhood reminiscences and interesting anecdotes of the innocent escapades of a youngster, things Lucas describes as, "Today, such a shenanigan might lead to a lawsuit, (but) it was all fun in those days."

As the author describes growing up in a town anchored by a large family and surrounded by a close circle of friends, the reader is immediately impressed by the cerebral approach to basketball taken by Lucas, even at a young age. For example, while many youngsters taking up the game are interested only in scoring, young Jerry was enamored with some of the finer points of the game. He describes a particular drill he devised on his own to help make him a better rebounder.

"I was going to try to miss shots and make the ball rebound to where I wanted it to go," he writes. "There were two purposes for this drill. First of all, I had to hit the intended spot on the rim, and secondly, I watched where the ball rebounded on every missed shot. If I knew where the ball was going to go on a missed shot, I felt it would give me an advantage as a rebounder."

The proof was in the pudding. Lucas often grabbed 20 to 30 rebounds per game during his high school career, he remains Ohio State's all-time leading rebounder with a per-game average of 17.2, and he still ranks fourth all-time in the NBA with a career average of 15.6 rebounds per game.

Ohio State and NBA fans might be a bit disappointed that the book devotes only a few pages to Lucas' career with the Buckeyes and Knicks, but those who are high school basketball devotees are treated to a game-by-game recap of the 1955-56 season during which Middletown rolled to an undefeated season, beginning with brief introductions to the starting five. During an era when many high schools had only one or two students in the entire school who stood 6-3 or better, the Middies fielded a starting lineup that included a pair of 6-5 forwards, a 6-4 shooting guard, a 6-1 point guard and Lucas as a 6-8 sophomore center. Even the first man off the bench was 6-6.

It also didn't hurt that Middletown's

coach was Paul Walker, who had already won three state championships at the school.

Behind 22 points from their sophomore center, Middletown kicked off the season with a 92-63 rout of a veteran Dayton Dunbar team, and, as Lucas describes it, "the greatest era in Ohio basketball history was underway." What follows reads almost like personal diary entries as Lucas recounts how excitement throughout the community built with each victory until the team capped the season with a 91-69 victory against Canton McKinley before a standing-room-only crowd of nearly 13,000 at the old Cleveland Arena.

Lucas totaled 44 points in that championship game, a new Ohio high school tournament title game record that stood until Clark Kellogg broke it with 51 points for Cleveland St. Joseph in 1979. Lucas' career total of 196 points in state tournament games remained on the books until LeBron James totaled 206 points for Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary from 2000 to 2003. But while Lucas tallied his points in just five games, it took James eight games to accumulate his total.

One state tourney record Lucas still holds 65 years after establishing it is his 97 total points in the state Final Four. Mike Allen, who scored 78 for New Lexington St. Aloysius in 1954, is next on that list.

The Middies went on to record another undefeated season the following year and ran their winning streak to 76 games before losing to Columbus North in a 1958 state tournament semifinal game. And although his high school career ended with a defeat, Lucas has nothing but the fondest of memories for that era. He also expresses a sentiment shared by many who grew up in small-town America.

"I love Middletown and always will," Lucas writes. "It is my home. I was born there, I grew up there, and it will be my final resting place. I've been away from Middletown for most of my life, but my heart, thoughts and spirit have never left."

## 'Mind Magic'

After winning an NBA championship with the Knicks in 1973, Lucas experienced a spiritual rebirth and began to plan for the next chapter in his life. It is that next chapter that fills the remainder of "Middie Magic and Mind Magic" as Lucas details the memory retention techniques and learning system that have enhanced the lives of millions of people through seminars, public appearances, books and CDs.

A self-described "mad scientist" when it comes to learning and teaching tutorials, Lucas developed his own techniques for learning at an early age. He writes of such early mental gymnastics as counting the number of bricks constituting each of the walls in his school, determining how many painted stripes are contained in each mile of paved highway, or keeping track of how much money was in the pot during his family's penny-ante poker games.

Lucas also writes of a fourth-grade experience that he believes triggered his interest in memorization. When his teacher announced she was going to teach her students how to remember of the names of the Great Lakes, she suggested a visualization of homes floating on the lakes. Then she explained that if the students could just keep in their minds that mental picture of homes on the lakes, they could easily remember the names of the lakes because the word "HOMES" was an acronym for Huron, Ontario, Michigan,

Erie and Superior.

"The very next thought that went through my mind gave me a purpose for my life," Lucas writes. "I thought, 'What if I could picture everything I needed to learn by giving it a tangible identity,' and the game was on. I didn't know how that would happen, but I would be consumed by the process for the rest of my life."

Lucas was a frequent guest on such television talk shows as "Good Morning America" and "The Tonight Show starring Johnny Carson," even politely refusing to join in on one of Carson's trademark gags to keep the interview geared toward his memorization techniques.

In 1975, Lucas co-authored "The Memory Book," a how-to guide for readers to apply systems of learning to an individual's own needs. The book – one of 70 Lucas has written or co-written over the years – reached as high as No. 2 on the New York Times Bestsellers List, kept out of the top spot only by "All the President's Men," the Watergate scandal chronicle written by Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

Despite the success of that first memory book, Lucas was not satisfied and embarked upon a lifetime goal of bringing his learning system to the masses. The final one-third of "Middie Magic and Mind Magic" deals with the trademarked systems Lucas has developed and includes simple, easy-to-learn drills to enhance learning.

It would be impossible to encapsulate into just a few words the methods used by Lucas, but visualization is a key. For example, he asks the reader, "Please do not see a zebra in

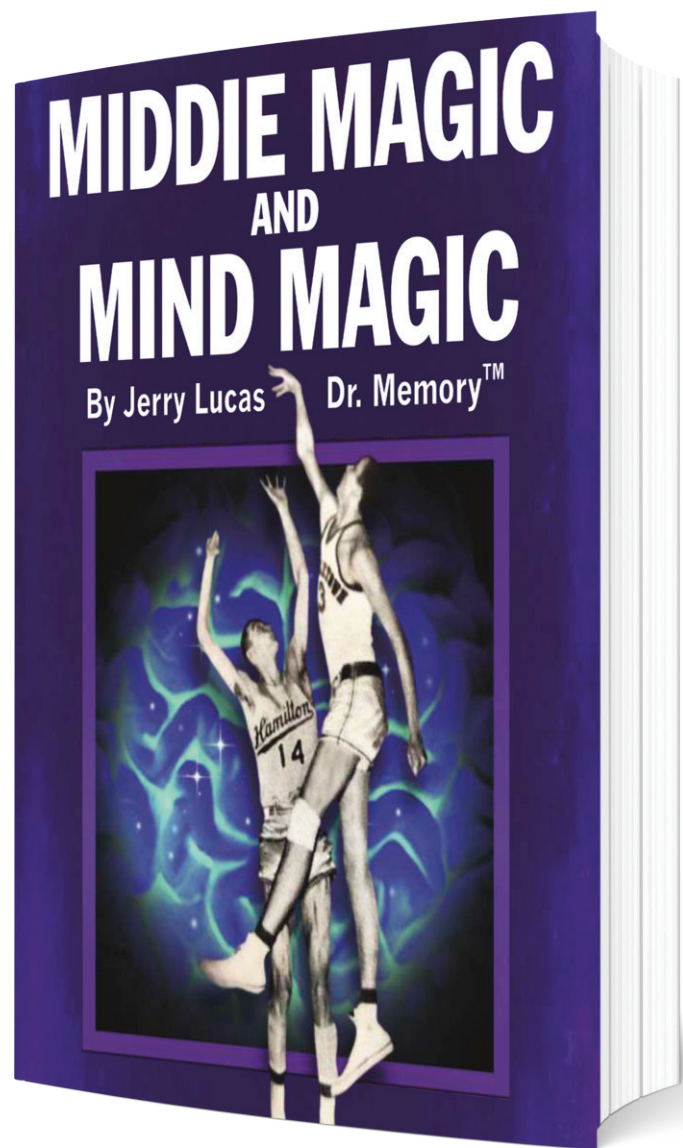
your mind. That's right. Do not see a zebra. You saw a zebra, didn't you? ... It is ink on a page that does not register in your mind like an elephant, a monkey or any other tangible object. ... Learning is easy when abstract data becomes tangible."

Adopting his trademarked moniker of "Dr. Memory," Lucas takes the reader on a tour of his revolutionary system in which mental pictures become real. Chapters include "Dr. Memory's Universe" and "Alphabet Alley," and each is supplemented with drawings to help with the visualizing technique.

Lucas, who recently turned 81 years old, makes certain the reader understands his latest book is only the latest project in his ongoing quest to enhance learning for children and adults alike. His current vision is to create a 3D version of "Dr. Memory's Universe" as a subscription-based website to be used in every school in America as well as millions of homes and businesses.

In addition to that endeavor, Lucas has already written a follow-up to "Middie Magic and Mind Magic," which he says will contain stories about some of the interesting people he has encountered through his lifetime, including such disparate personalities as Hollywood legend Mickey Rooney, members of the rock group KISS, Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, legendary college coaches Adolph Rupp and John Wooden, and Jeopardy! host Alex Trebek.

Available for purchase online at MiddieMagic.com, "Middie Magic and Mind Magic" is a book that any sports fan will enjoy, and if they're not careful, they just might enhance their capacity to learn something as well.





# Illini's Dosunmu, Cockburn Declare For NBA Draft

Illinois junior guard Ayo Dosunmu declared for the 2021 NBA draft.

Dosunmu was a consensus first-team All-American and the winner of the Bob Cousy Award as the top point guard in the country. He averaged 20.1 points, 6.3 rebounds and 5.3 assists per game while shooting 39.0 percent from three-point range and leading Illinois to the Big Ten Conference tournament title.

"In my freshman season at Illinois just three years ago, we finished at the bottom of the Big Ten," Dosunmu said. "The postseason didn't end the way we wanted it to, but what my

I received from teams, I improved my game in every category and finished the regular season with stats unlike any player in college basketball in the last 11 years.

"They learned that I'm both a playmaker and a defensive threat – making me the most complete player in college basketball."

Following in Dosunmu's footsteps, sophomore center Kofi Cockburn (7-0, 285) also announced his entrance into the NBA draft. The 7-footer became a second-team All-American as a sophomore, averaging 17.7 points and 9.5 rebounds for the Illini in 2020-21.

## Maryland Adds Wahab, Russell Via Transfer Portal

Maryland added former Georgetown center Qudus Wahab and former Rhode Island point guard Fatts Russell via the transfer portal.

Wahab (6-11, 237), a rising junior, was a key piece of Georgetown's success this season, averaging 12.7 points and 8.2 rebounds. He finished the year on a strong note with a selection to the Big East All-Tournament team following the Hoyas' run in Madison Square Garden.

An hour after landing the top center available in the transfer portal, Maryland picked up a commitment from Russell, the top point guard available. The 5-10 rising senior was a star for Rhode Island in 2020-21, leading the team in points (14.7), assists (4.5) and steals (1.9). Like Wahab, Russell is expected to be a key contributor for the team next season.

## 4-Star WR Worthy Decommits From U-M

Fresno (Calif.) Central East four-star wide

receiver Xavier Worthy decommitted from Michigan.

Worthy is the eighth-ranked wide receiver and No. 61 overall prospect in the nation, as well as California's fourth-ranked recruit.

Worthy (6-1, 165) was the second-highest ranked prospect in the Wolverines' 2021 class behind five-star quarterback J.J. McCarthy.

In his statement, Worthy said he had looked forward to starting his college football career at Michigan, "however; due to circumstances beyond my control, things did not go as planned."

Michigan held off a late effort from Alabama in order to sign Worthy, who was regarded as a prize of the Wolverines' class. He was supposed to enroll early in January, but that never happened, and he has since said he does not want to go into detail about what happened with Michigan until after he chooses a new school.

## Brooks Returns To U-M For 5th Year

Eli Brooks will return to the Michigan basketball team for a fifth season by taking advantage of the free year of eligibility granted by the NCAA to winter athletes.

The senior guard appeared in 125 career games in his first four seasons, emerging as a reliable starter as an upperclassman. Brooks has started all 57 games he appeared in as a junior and senior, missing time only due to injury.

He averaged 9.5 points, 3.1 assists and 1.1 steals while shooting 39.6 percent from three-point range in 2020-21. Brooks was considered one of the team's top defenders and was among the top shooters. He primarily played shooting guard but also handled point-guard duties when Mike Smith was off the floor.

## Livers Moves On From U-M MBB

Michigan senior wing Isaiah Livers announced his decision to move on from Wolverine basketball rather than take advantage of the NCAA-granted extra year of eligibility.

The 6-7 scoring wing played in 119 career games with 69 starts. Livers tallied 987 career points, and he would have likely surpassed 1,000 points, but his senior season ended prematurely because of a stress injury in his foot.

Livers was one of three team captains last season as the Wolverines won the Big Ten title and earned a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament. He averaged a career-high 13.1 points, 6.0 rebounds and 2.0 assists while making 43.1 percent of his three-point attempts.

Livers reagggravated an injury to his right foot against Maryland in the Big Ten tournament, sidelining him for the remainder of the season. He recently had successful surgery on his foot, and he is expected to be out for at least six months, which will prevent him from participating in the NBA combine or pre-draft workouts. He is projected by some to be a second-round pick.

Fellow Michigan seniors Smith, Chaundee Brown and Tyler Davis have also declined to return for an extra season.

## Purdue WR Carr Transfers To MSU

Former Purdue wide receiver Maliq Carr transferred to Michigan State to play both football and basketball.

Carr (6-5, 235) played in just three games in 2020 and caught one reception. He was a four-star prospect coming out of Oak Park, Mich.,

and he was ranked as the No. 4 tight end in the nation in 2020.

As a prospect, his list of basketball schools he was considering included Robert Morris, Oakland and Western Michigan.

The Spartan football program has hit the portal hard with 14 players joining the team via transfer since the end of last season.

The Michigan State men's basketball squad has one scholarship open with Thomas Kithier and Rocket Watts in the transfer portal, Aaron Henry leaving for the NBA draft and Joshua Langford not returning for the extra season.

## Nebraska Adds Xavier Transfer Wilcher

The Nebraska basketball team added former top-100 recruit C.J. Wilcher as a transfer from Xavier.

Wilcher played in 15 games for Xavier, averaging 3.3 points and 1.1 rebounds in 10.0 minutes per game while shooting 40.0 percent from the floor and 34.5 percent from three-point range.

Wilcher earned more playing time late in the season, playing 10 or more minutes in seven of his last nine contests. In the final four games with Xavier, he averaged more than 20 minutes per game.

"You can never have enough shooting, and C.J. is an elite-level shooter," Nebraska head coach Fred Hoiberg said. "He was one of the best shooters nationally in the class of 2020, but his game is much more than that. He has good size (6-5, 195) on the perimeter and uses it to create space and has an aggressive mindset. He played significant minutes at Xavier, and that experience will help him in the transition to the Big Ten."

As a four-star recruit coming out of Roselle (N.J.) Catholic, Wilcher was ranked the No. 113 overall prospect in the class of 2020. As a senior in New Jersey, he averaged 18.8 points, 4.5 rebounds and 2.8 assists, though he missed nine games due to injury.

Wilcher has four years of eligibility remaining in Lincoln.

## U-M WR Jackson Transfers To UW

Former Michigan wide receiver/return specialist Giles Jackson transferred to Washington with three years of eligibility remaining. The 5-9, 188-pound speedster will join his cousin, Washington safety signee Vince Nunley.

"Washington has always been one of my dream schools growing up," Jackson said. "I always wanted to play in the Pac-12. Having the opportunity to play for them, it's a great decision. And my little cousin is going there, so he also played a huge part in that decision."

"But just to play with him and go to the Pac-12 and live out my dreams, that's a big reason why (I chose Washington)."

Jackson's decision may have been influenced by his cousin Nunley, with whom he works out every day at a facility in California. "They reached out right away," Jackson said of Washington. "And as soon as they reached out, I called Vince, and he didn't answer for like four hours. I was like, 'Bro, Washington just called me. I'm trying to go!' He's been bugging me ever since (to commit)."

The Huskies are scheduled to play at Michigan in their second game of the season. The Oakley, Calif., native averaged 26.4 yards per kick return and two return scores in his two seasons with the Wolverines.

"I just wanted to be closer to family overall," Jackson said of what motivated the move. "I wanted them to be able to come to the games, and they weren't able to do that at Michigan."

## BIG TEN NOTES

Joe Dempsey

teammates and I accomplished in three short years was pretty remarkable."

The 6-4 Dosunmu, who has a 6-9 wingspan, is considered one of the top prospects in the draft. He was one of the most efficient pick-and-roll players in the college game, converting 42.0 percent of his pull-up jumpers, which was the third-best rate among draft prospects, according to Synergy Sports Technology. Dosunmu also ranked third in transition scoring.

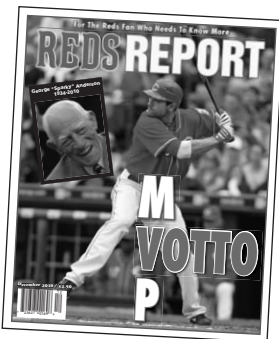
"Because I talked to a lot of teams last year, I'm confident they learned that I will put in the work to convert constructive criticism into results," Dosunmu said. "Using feedback

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# BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

## 2021 FOOTBALL

**Sept. 2** at Minnesota; **11** OREGON; **18** TULSA; **25** AKRON.

**Oct. 2** at Rutgers; **9** MARYLAND; **23** at Indiana; **30** PENN STATE.

**Nov. 6** at Nebraska; **13** PURDUE; **20** MICHIGAN STATE; **27** at Michigan.

**Dec. 4** Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis.

## BASEBALL (13-12)

**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, L 4-0; **12** Nebraska at Minneapolis, L 10-4; **13** Iowa at Minneapolis, W 7-4; **14** Nebraska at Minneapolis, W 6-4; **20** at Rutgers, L 6-5 (11 innings); **21** at Rutgers, L 2-0; **22** at 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** at Michigan, W 7-4; **10** at Michigan, L 7-0; **11** at Michigan, L 16-7; **16** at Maryland, L 10-6; **17** at Maryland, L 5-4 (10 innings); **18** at Maryland, L 9-4; **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** at Minnesota, 6 p.m.; **8** at Minnesota, 2 p.m.; **9** at Minnesota, 1 p.m.; **14** MICHIGAN STATE, 6:05 p.m.; **15** MICHIGAN STATE, 3:05 p.m.; **16** MICHIGAN STATE, 1:05 p.m.; **22** Nebraska at Bloomington, 1 p.m.; **23** Nebraska at Bloomington, 1 p.m.; **23** Indiana at Bloomington, 5 p.m.; **24** Indiana at Bloomington, TBA; **28** NORTHWESTERN, 6:05 p.m.; **29** NORTHWESTERN, 7:05 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 Invitational at Kiawah Island Resort, S.C., Postponed; **15** Kiawah Invitational at Kiawah Island Resort, S.C., 7/14; **16** Kiawah Invitational 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** Boilermaker Invitational at West Lafayette, Ind., T10/16; **11** Boilermaker Invitational at West Lafayette, Ind., 10/16 **16** ASU Thunderbird Invitational at Phoenix, Ariz., 16/17; **17** ASU Thunderbird Invitational at Phoenix, Ariz., 13/17; **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** at Florida Atlantic, W 301-300.

**Feb. 8** at FAU Paradise Invitational, 6/13; **9** at FAU Paradise Invitational, 7/13; **21** at Gators Invitational, 4/14; **22** at Gators Invitational, 10/14; **23** at Gators Invitational, 9/14; **26** at Florida State Match Up, 4/14; **27** at Florida

State Match Up, 6/14; **28** at 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** at Clemson Invitational, 14/18; **27** at Clemson Invitational, 12/18; **28** at Clemson Invitational, 10/18.

**April 17** at Indiana Invitational, 12/16; **18** at Indiana Invitational, 11/16.

## MEN'S GYMNASTICS (4-3)

**Jan. 23** at Illinois, L 402.550-396.250; **30** Navy (virtual), W 397.200-382.000; **31** at Michigan, Postponed.

**Feb. 6** MINNESOTA, W 401.050-387.250; **14** PENN STATE, W 405.500-403.900.

**March 6** at Nebraska, L 411.100-406.700; **13** IOWA, W 406.100-395.750; **17** Michigan (virtual), L 408.350-397.950; **21** William & Mary (virtual), Canceled.

**April 3** Big Ten Championships, 7/7 (394.900); **16** NCAA Championships at Minneapolis, 4/7 (394.956).

## WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS (8-4, 5-2)

**Jan. 16** at Michigan, L 197.225-196.000; **23** at Iowa, L 196.550-193.800; **30** vs. Michigan State and Nebraska at East Lansing, Mich., 2nd/3, Michigan State (195.775); OSU (195.325); Nebraska (194.725).

**Feb. 7** MICHIGAN STATE, W 196.375-194.500; **7** ILLINOIS, W 196.375-196.075; **14** at Rutgers, W 195.950-194.050; **21** at Penn State, W 196.400-195.925; **21** at Maryland, W 196.400-196.275; **26** Big Five Meet at College Park, Md., 4/5 (195.275).

**March 7** vs. MICHIGAN, PENN STATE and RUTGERS, 2nd/4, MICHIGAN (198.025); OSU (196.000); PENN STATE (195.250); RUTGERS (194.800). **12** MICHIGAN STATE, Canceled; **20** Big Ten Championships at Minneapolis, 8/14 195.225.

**April 2** NCAA Regionals, 2/4 (196.525); **2** NCAA Regional Finals, 4/4 (195.625).

## MEN'S LACROSSE (4-5)

**Feb. 20** at Johns Hopkins, W 14-8; **27** RUTGERS, L 22-12.

**March 6** at Penn State, L 15-13; **14** MICHIGAN, W 13-10; **20** MARYLAND, L 16-8; **27** at Michigan, W 14-6.

**April 3** at Rutgers, L 10-9; **10** JOHNS HOPKINS, W 14-12; **18** Maryland, L 18-8; **24** PENN STATE, 4 p.m.

## WOMEN'S LACROSSE (3-7)

**Feb. 14** at Northwestern, L 23-7; **21** MICHIGAN, W 15-12; **26** at Rutgers, L 12-9; **28** at Rutgers, L 10-9.

**March 5** JOHNS HOPKINS, L 12-11; **7** JOHNS HOPKINS, L 10-9; **18** at Maryland, L 14-9; **20** at Maryland, L 11-5; **26** PENN STATE, W 15-12; **28** PENN STATE, W 11-9.

**April 8** NORTHWESTERN, L 21-14; **16** at Michigan, W 12-9.

## MEN'S SOCCER (3-6-1)

**Feb. 23** Indiana at Westfield, Ind., L 3-0; **27** at Maryland, W 1-0.

**March 3** at Michigan State, W 2-0; **7** NORTHWESTERN, W 4-2; **15** MICHIGAN, T 2-2; **19** at Wisconsin, L 1-0; **23** at Penn State, L 1-0; **27** RUTGERS, Postponed; **31** at Michigan, L 2-0.

**April 4** MICHIGAN STATE, L 1-0; **10** Big Ten Tournament at Penn State, L 3-1.

## WOMEN'S SOCCER (7-2-3)

**Feb. 20** MICHIGAN, T 1-1; **25** WISCONSIN, W 3-1; **28** NEBRASKA, Postponed.

**March 4** at Maryland, W 3-1; **7** at Rutgers, L 2-1; **13** PENN STATE, T 2-2; **18** at Purdue, T 1-1; **21** at Illinois, W 2-1; **25**

INDIANA, W 2-0; **28** NORTHWESTERN, W 1-0.

**April 3** at Michigan State, W 1-0; **8** BIG TEN REGIONAL vs. MARYLAND, W 4-2 **11** BIG TEN REGIONAL vs. RUTGERS, L 1-0.

## SOFTBALL (14-13)

**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 (5 innings).

**April 3** at Penn State, W 2-1; **3** at Penn State, W 9-3; **4** at Penn State, W 9-0 (5 innings); **4** at Penn State, Canceled; **9** MICHIGAN, L 7-0; **10** MICHIGAN, L 3-1; **10** MICHIGAN, W 3-2; **11** MICHIGAN, L 11-0; **16** at Indiana, L 4-1; **17** at Indiana, L 8-0 (5 innings); **17** at Indiana, W 10-9 (8 innings); **18** at Indiana, L 3-0; **23-25** RUTGERS; **30** Purdue.

**May 1-2** Purdue; **7-9** Illinois; **14-16** MICHIGAN STATE.

## MEN'S TENNIS (18-2, 15-1)

**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** at Northwestern, W 4-0; **21** at Illinois, W 4-1; **27** PENN STATE, W 7-0.

**March 5** PURDUE, W 7-0; **7** INDIANA, W 7-0; **12** at Michigan State, W 7-0; **14** at Michigan, L 4-3; **19** at Minnesota, W 6-1; **21** at Wisconsin, W 6-1; **26** NEBRASKA, W 7-0; **28** IOWA, W 6-1.

**April 4** at Penn State, W 7-0; **9** at Purdue, W 7-0; **11** at Indiana, W 6-1; **16** MICHIGAN STATE, W 7-0; **18** MICHIGAN, W 4-3.

## WOMEN'S TENNIS (18-3, 15-1)

**Jan. 16-18** Michigan Invitational at

Ann Arbor, Mich., NTS; **23** SYRACUSE, W 4-0; **24** 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; **13** INDIANA, W 7-0; **19** at Maryland, W 5-2; **21** at Rutgers, W 7-0; **26** MICHIGAN STATE, W 6-1; **28** MICHIGAN, L 4-3.

**March 6** at Nebraska, W 5-2; **7** at Iowa, W 5-2; **14** at Penn State, W 6-1; **20** MARYLAND, W 6-1; **21** RUTGERS, W 7-0; **26** at Michigan State, W 6-1; **28** at Michigan, W 4-3.

**April 9** MINNESOTA, W 4-0; **11** WISCONSIN, W 7-0; **17** PENN STATE, W 6-0.

## MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (9-10, 8-6)

**Jan. 22** PENN STATE, L 3-0; **23** PENN STATE, W 3-0; **29** at Penn State, L 3-0; **30** at Penn State, L 3-0.

**Feb. 5** LEWIS, W 3-1; **6** LEWIS, L 3-0; **12** at McKendree, L 3-1; **13** at McKendree, L 3-1; **20** LOYOLA CHICAGO, W 3-2; **21** LOYOLA CHICAGO, W 3-0; **27** at Ball State, W 3-2.

**March 11** BALL STATE, L 3-2; **19** at Purdue Fort Wayne, W 3-1; **20** at Purdue Fort Wayne, L 3-1; **26** LINDENWOOD, W 3-0; **27** LINDENWOOD, W 3-0.

**April 2** at Quincy, W 3-0; **3** at Quincy, L 3-2; **10** MIVA Tournament at Ball State, L 3-1.

## WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (16-4, 15-3)

**Jan. 22** MARYLAND, W 3-2; **23** MARYLAND, W 3-2; **26** at Penn State, Postponed; **31** at Michigan State, W 3-0.

**Feb. 1** at Michigan State, W 3-2; **12** IOWA, W 3-0; **13** IOWA, W 3-0; **17** PENN STATE, W 3-2; **19** at Illinois, W 3-1; **20** at Illinois, W 3-2; **26** at Rutgers, W 3-0; **27** at Rutgers, W 3-2.

**March 3** at Penn State, W 3-0; **5** MINNESOTA, Postponed; **6** MINNESOTA, Postponed; **12** at Nebraska, L 3-2; **13** at 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** at Indiana, Canceled; **3** at Indiana, Canceled; **15** vs. Missouri at NCAA Second Round at Omaha, Neb., W 3-0; **18** vs. Florida at NCAA Second Round at Omaha, Neb., L 3-1.

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# Don't Spring To Conclusions About Game

Let the worrying begin.

There will no doubt be a lot of talk between now and the Sept. 2 season opener at Minnesota about just how good the 2021 Ohio State Buckeyes will be. People will take what they saw in the spring game and make judgments or conclusions about the upcoming season, not realizing that it's a fool's task to do so.

## THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Just two years ago, Justin Fields went 4 for 13 in the spring game (and some thought he was outplayed by Matthew Baldwin), and there were fans who were worried that the quarterback position was going to be what cost the Buckeyes a game or two. All that happened was Fields putting up seemingly impossible numbers – 63 TD passes in two seasons – and making a case for being the best quarterback to ever don the scarlet and gray.

The very nature of a spring game makes it impossible to glean much of anything. Sure, you can see if a player is in position or running a good route or using his blockers properly, but with teams often consisting of a mishmash of starters and reserves, there isn't an opportunity to gain cohesion or rhythm, so saying "the quarterbacks looked bad" or "the secondary is going to be a huge liability" is just silly. We just don't know – and really won't until the action becomes real.

Ryan Day has yet to lose a regular-season game, a mark that will be tested this season with a bunch of youth at key positions. Still, the way he and his staff have recruited and the way they design and call the offense makes you think that the Buckeyes will once again be right in the thick of the chase for the national title.

Here are a few thoughts from one scribe following Ohio State's spring game.

**Armed, Potentially Dangerous**  
Ohio State has been spoiled at quarterback for the last few seasons now – from J.T. Barrett to Dwayne Haskins to Fields – so having to overhaul that position could be daunting. There is enough talent in the room to bring optimism, but until they are facing live bullets, there will justifiably be some concern.

C.J. Stroud looked the most comfortable and probably has a leg up in the race for the starting job. His release is quick, he's athletic and he has a big-time arm. Interestingly, for all that athleticism, he seems to be much better throwing from the pocket than on the move. That was one area where Fields was lethal –

getting out on the edge and firing a seed to one of his talented receivers. Stroud sailed a good number of throws on the move, and that's something that will need to be tightened up as it's a staple of Day's playbook. Without the ability to make throws on the edge, the Buckeye offense will be much less lethal.

Kyle McCord showed why he was touted as a five-star talent with his first throw of the game – a deep toss to Garrett Wilson that was decisive and well-placed. McCord appears to have a good grasp of the offense and never really had moments of "where was that ball going?" that you sometimes see from incoming players. From this corner, he has the backup role.

Jack Miller could be the odd man out, though in his defense there were more drops than with the other two candidates. Miller looked just a tick slow on some of his timing routes, threw behind guys too often and made a bad throw on a first-quarter interception.

Though very young, this is a group that has a world of potential and upside, and after seeing them in action, it's not quite as worrisome as it was when spring camp began. There has been talk that someone will likely enter the transfer portal, but I don't think that will happen this season. It could happen next year when phenom Quinn Ewers arrives, but it's my belief that the three you see now are the three who will enter fall camp.

### Carrying The Mail

John Cooper was always fond of saying that the ideal situation at running back was to have "a pair and a spare," and the Buckeyes appear to have exceeded that by quite a bit.

While Master Teague is the most veteran of the bunch, it is my contention that freshman TreVeyon Henderson will end up with the best season of anyone in the backfield. The few glimpses we saw in the spring game showed a kid who has a good wiggle in the hole, can get to the outside and make defenders miss and, most importantly, can catch the football. The way Day used the running backs in the passing game will add another dimension, one that should make the transition at quarterback a lot easier. Having guys leaking out of the backfield and catching the ball means that the quarterback won't feel the need to make a big play every time out.

Marcus Crowley finally looked healthy and showed good burst and power, and he would be my choice as "the spare." Powerful Miyan Williams won't be easily left out of the discussion, and Steele Chambers and freshman Evan Pryor make the running back room one of the better ones on the entire team. This amounts to a pair and four spares, really, which would make any coach smile.

### The Hands Team

It's really unfair the amount of talent the Buckeyes have at receiver. What does a

defensive coordinator do when he sits down to develop a strategy to stop OSU's passing attack?

"Let's double Olave!"

"Um, Coach, that leaves Wilson in single coverage."

"Well, then let's double Wilson, too."

"Um, Coach, that leaves our slot guy matched up with Smith-Njigba."

"Well, then – um – dammit, let's just hope they drop the ball because we can't cover all of these guys."

In Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, the Buckeyes have the best receiving duo in college football. That's not up for debate. They could have the same impact that Jaylen Waddle and DeVonta Smith had last year for Alabama, and it wouldn't be a stretch to say that both guys will contend for All-America honors in 2021. If they were the only two weapons at receiver, that would be pretty special, but throw in Jaxson Smith-Njigba and Jameson Williams, who both had their moments last season, and former prep No. 1 wideout Julian Fleming, who could be ready to emerge after an injury-plagued freshman campaign, and it's even better.

As they say in the infomercials – "But wait! There's more." Freshmen Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka look every bit the part of the studs they were touted as and will cause headaches for Big Ten secondaries for the next few seasons. Harrison already has "the look" and plays a lot like his Hall of Fame daddy, while Egbuka provides an inviting slot target who is quick into his cuts and has Velcro hands.

### The Big Uglies

It's difficult to measure progress on the offensive line in a spring game.

So rather than breaking down the unit's play, let's just say there shouldn't be much worry here as OSU returns maybe the best tackle combo in college football in Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere, two guys who could be ticketed for first-round draft status in 2022. All-star Paris Johnson will kick inside to guard and should bring some attitude to the inside, and Harry Miller will slide into his more natural center spot after having a rocky freshman year at guard. That leaves just one guard position as a possible concern, but there are more than enough experienced guys on hand to make the worry become minimal.

### Rushing Into Things

There are just two words that need to be said when talking about Ohio State's 2021 defensive line: Jack and Sawyer.

OK, OK, that might be a tad hyperbolic, but the kid looks like the real deal. He is lightning-quick off the edge, and post-game thoughts from Day, Munford and Zach Harrison said that's how he looks every day.

It's going to be tough to keep him off the field, for sure. Am I the only one who thought he looked a bit like a Bosa? His stance, the way he uses his hands and his quickness to the quarterback are all reminiscent of Joey and Nick, at least to these eyes. Harrison and Tyreke Smith will be the anchors on the edge, but Sawyer will be in heavy rotation. We know that the interior is in good hands with Haskell Garrett returning, but finding a reliable running mate for him will be crucial.

### Less Is More At Linebacker

It's no secret that the Buckeyes didn't get consistent play at linebacker in 2020, so maybe having new faces there will be a bonus. After three years of waiting, Teradja Mitchell finally looks ready to make an impact, and Tommy Eichenberg was impressive in the spring game in terms of coverage and positioning. He's already better in coverage than Tuf Borland ever was and could be squarely in the mix for a lot of playing time. Dallas Gant was injured and didn't play but should be ready to go in the fall, and freshman Reid Carrico will be one to watch as his instincts and physical play scream for him to be used in some fashion.

### Secondary A Primary Concern

We are no closer to knowing how the back end of the defense will look in 2021 because Sevn Banks was out with injury and Marcus Hooker is suspended due to an OVI charge. Banks should contend for all-league honors at one corner spot, but the rest of the secondary seems to be a work in progress.

It was nice to see the coaching staff actually sticking with the Bullet role, a hybrid safety/linebacker, in the spring game. It was designed a couple of years ago to, in theory, utilize the talents of Brendon White but was never really used. White has since transferred to Rutgers, and the Buckeyes have gotten wise and figured out that getting bigger, speedier athletes on the field in coverage is the best course of action. Craig Young flashed a few times at that spot in the spring game, but the coaches seem high on Kourt Williams, who was making strides in fall camp last year before getting injured and missing the season. He could be a real wild card in this equation.

To the naked eye it appeared that defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs has embraced the 4-2-5 look as OSU's base, which would be a good thing as it would put the best athletes on the field together. Who lines up where is still largely unknown, but that's why those guys are making the big money.

What we do know is that there is an exceedingly deep roster of talent, albeit a tad light on experience. I would, however, much rather have that than an experienced roster with less talent, because talent is what wins football games.




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# Defense Is Secondary To QBs In Spring Game

Ohio State spring games generally don't show much of substance, but for whatever reason – OK, primarily because of the format – this most recent one seemed to reveal even less than usual. While all attention was on the quarterbacks – and we got an eyeful with 75 passes – the patty-cake format left it particularly difficult to evaluate the defense, which you may recall was a problem area for the Buckeyes last season.

But we've got all summer and the fall camp to worry about the defense. We were curious about the completely inexperienced – though highly rated by recruiting analysts from coast to coast – quarterbacks.

This was just a glorified practice. I'll even go so far as to say there were probably other practices that were more intense. This one simply had fans (hallelujah!!). Still, I am going to go ahead and take Ryan Day's word when he said after the game that what each quarterback showed was "very similar to what this whole spring has been."

If that is true, and Lord knows coaches have been known to bend the truth on things like this, here's how I would rate the quarterbacks coming out of spring ball:

1) C.J. Stroud, based on not just his performance but his modest experience and a fact that I can't ignore: When Justin Fields was knocked out of the Clemson game, Day went right to Stroud, indicating that he was performing better than the also present Jack Miller in last year's practices.

2) Kyle McCord. He caught everyone's attention when he connected with Garrett Wilson for 55 yards on his first play from scrimmage. He also showed nice touch on his TD passes to Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Joe Royer. McCord looks like he has the highest upside of the three contenders.

3) Miller. Other than pitching the lone interception of the afternoon, he didn't do a lot wrong. He really didn't do anything to distinguish himself from the other two, however.

And while we're talking about quarterbacks, this may be the only time I get to give him his props in this space, so what about Jagger LaRoe, previously best known for his great name? I have no idea who was in on defense to close out the game, but LaRoe came in and completed a sharp 5 of 6 passes for 75 yards and a 20-yard touchdown strike to Sam Wiglus. I think most people enjoyed the performance as much as I did.

LaRoe will never be Fields, but if Ohio State were to have a horrible run of bad luck and lose its top three signal callers, Buckeye fans would probably feel a little less anguish with QB No. 4 now that they have seen the senior out of Colleyville, Texas, show his wares.

Whoever ends up winning the starting quarterback job will have the benefit of the incredible receiving corps that was on display in the spring game. Chris Olave and Wilson did their usual thing, which I believe will be at All-American caliber in 2021. The two combined for seven receptions, 142 yards and a touchdown. That's a 20.3-yard average if you are keeping count. Then comes the parade of young receivers, led by – but certainly not limited to – Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka with seven receptions each and Smith-Njigba with five.

In this department, the Buckeyes have an embarrassment of riches, if ever there was one.

But the new quarterback would also be aided by a strong running attack. This was an area where the spring game's format, along with the absence of presumed – at least for the time-being – front-runner Master Teague, limited the ability of the fan or observer to make much of a judgment on the pecking

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

order or progress of the veteran and freshmen contenders.

On thing I did notice, however, is that the quarterbacks were quick to throw to highly rated freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson out of the backfield. It may have been hard to get a sense of his running ability, though he was credited with 26 yards on six carries, but he looked quite comfortable on the receiving end. He caught five passes for 29 yards with a long of 12, and the other freshman phenom, Evan Pryor, added two receptions for 12 yards.

If Day and offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson make passing to Buckeyes coming out of the backfield a big part of the offense, it could make the learning process and success of the eventual starting quarterback a lot easier with the availability of safer targets. Last season, Teague and the departed Trey Sermon combined for 17 catches for 141 yards out of the backfield, just over two receptions per game.

While the four quarterbacks were throwing the ball all over the yard with mostly positive results, one needs to remember that the 50 completions on 75 attempts came against an Ohio State defense that ranked 122nd out of 127 teams while yielding 304.0 passing yards per game last season. Also, the secondary presumably lost its best defensive back in Shaun Wade, though the effectiveness of Wade was a source of debate among Buckeye fans. Maybe we should have been watching the play of the secondary as closely as we were watching the quarterbacks who were racking up 572 yards through the air and five touchdowns against just one interception.

Even in a spring game which may have been designed to feature the quarterbacks, that's a lot to give up by a unit in desperate need of improvement.

About the only play that stood out to me on pass defense was a pass breakup by Craig Young, where he swatted the ball away with ease. We have been hearing a lot about Young, though he has yet to really have an opportunity to show his ability. He is listed as a linebacker, but his big play against the pass in the spring game may be an indicator of the evolving Ohio State defense, where he may end up playing more like a safety – the "bullet" in departed defensive coordinator Greg Mattison's scheme.

Ohio State's lone interception was turned in by redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts.

In thinking about it as I write, it is kind of amazing that Ohio State made it to the national championship game with such a porous pass defense. Of course, the main reason the Buckeyes didn't go on and win the championship is because of that same porous pass defense.

The 2021 defense won't have Fields to help keep Ohio State one step ahead of the opposition, so keep as sharp an eye on the secondary going forward as you do on the quarterbacks.

Obviously, if the pass defense had excelled in the spring game we would probably be fretting about the quarterbacks. Buckeye fans are such worrywarts.

Speaking of the defense, I don't think anyone would disagree with the notion that the big winner in the spring game was Jack Sawyer. The defensive end from nearby Pickerington was credited with three sacks in the game. He came to the team highly touted and did nothing to dispel that notion in his first public appear-

ance as a Buckeye.

One thing that I found very encouraging and exciting coming out of the spring was the fact that Sawyer and several other of the most highly touted freshmen were among the first to lose their black stripes, making them full members of the football team. Along with Sawyer, Harrison, Henderson, Egbuka and linebacker Reid Carrico were all quick to shed their stripes. These are guys the Buckeyes need for success in 2021, and it's a good sign that they have the maturity to be so honored so early.

One last thought about spring football.

I have never understood why coaches are so unwilling to display things in a spring game. I know some of the restrictions put in place are to avoid injury, but you are going to have to have contact at some point and injuries in practice are inevitable. How much of the dummied down of the spring game has to do with not tipping any hand to the opposition?

Check out our From the Pages of BSB feature on page 6. As far back as 1986, Earle Bruce was trying to hide things from Ray Perkins, coach of Alabama, the Buckeyes' first opponent that season. Perkins was in attendance for the spring game.

"I think the only thing we wanted Ray Perkins to see was the Horseshoe, and that's about it," Bruce said, smiling. "There was no offense today, no big plays."

That was in preparation for the opener. I sort of get it.

Does Day think Jim Harbaugh or Nick Saban is going to break down the tape of Ohio State's spring game? They have position battles and preparation of their own to worry about. By the time the Buckeyes face the Wolverines, Harbaugh will have 11 actual games to break down, and if they get to Saban, the Crimson Tide will have 12, 13 or 14.

I think it's kind of a waste of a valuable practice to put such restrictions on a scrimmage. You must go live at some point. Give the fans their money's worth.

### QB Battles No Rarity

We tend to get caught up in the moment. This year's quarterback battle is on all our minds. However, it's not like quarterback battles are uncommon in college football. It's not as if you can tie up a great quarterback like Fields with a long-term contract. Quarterbacks come and go, just as players do at all positions.

Maybe the QB combatants in other years brought a little bit more experience to the fight than this year's trio, but if you again check From the Pages of BSB, you'll see that there were spring battles in 1991 to replace Greg Frey, 1996 to replace Bobby Hoying and an unexpected one in 2011 to replace the suspended Terrelle Pryor.

The battles didn't seem to bother John Cooper, who was at the helm in both 1991 – when senior Kent Graham, junior Kirk Herbstreit and redshirt freshman Joe Pickens were battling it out – and in 1996, when juniors Stanley Jackson and Mark Garcia and sophomore Joe Germaine were the participants.

"Even if I knew in my own mind right now who the quarterback was, I wouldn't tell you," Cooper joked with the media after the spring game in 1991. "I wouldn't tell them either. I think the best thing we can do is let those guys work hard the rest of the spring, stay here in the summertime and work in the conditioning

program, and compete early next fall.

"In our situation of not having an experienced quarterback I think that's the best thing that can happen to us. And it will happen because that's the way we have it planned."

Cooper sounded similar in 1996.

"I'm not troubled," said Cooper after that year's spring game. "You guys (the media) will worry about that more than I do. We'll have a quarterback to start the first ballgame."

"It's been my experience that a lot of progress can be made between the end of spring ball and the start of fall practice. Our players, obviously, will all stay here this summer, and we'll have a lot of seven-on-seven drills. A lot of stuff (quarterbacks coach) Walt Harris has been preaching to those quarterbacks all spring long will hopefully sink in."

Decades later, Day didn't sound all that different after the most recent spring game and his own quarterback battle.

"We're not going to know who the starting quarterback is coming out of today," Day said.

"They've learned a lot," he added of his young quarterbacks. "But now, the race is on over the next few months to figure out who can make the next stride. Spring's been good. There's been a lot of progress made across the board, but there's still a long way to go before we play against Minnesota."

### Practice Makes Perfect

Elsewhere in this issue, Mark Rea reviews the latest book from Ohio State basketball legend Jerry Lucas. I have not read "Middie Magic and Mind Magic," but I was fascinated by a drill Mark recounts that Lucas, also a noted memory expert, invented and repeated over and over again when he was learning the game.

"I was going to try to miss shots and make the ball rebound to where I wanted it to go," Lucas wrote. "There were two purposes for this drill. First of all, I had to hit the intended spot on the rim, and secondly, I watched where the ball rebounded on every missed shot. If I knew where the ball was going to go on a missed shot, I felt it would give me an advantage as a rebounder."

The drill must have worked.

Lucas averaged 17.2 rebounds a game for his career at Ohio State. To put that in perspective, Illinois' 7-0 Kofi Cockburn led the Big Ten in rebounding with 9.5 per game this past season.

After helping the Buckeyes to three NCAA Final Four appearances and Ohio State's lone national championship in 1960, Lucas moved on to the NBA, and he kept on rebounding. He averaged 15.6 off the boards in his 11-season career. That mark ranks fourth all-time behind only Wilt Chamberlain, Bill Russell and Bob Pettit, three of the NBA's greatest players ever.

There are many out there who are gifted athletes. But the truly great are usually the ones willing to give that extra effort. This drill was one of many things that helped make Lucas arguably the greatest Ohio State basketball player of all-time.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers can order "Middie Magic and Mind Magic," online at MiddieMagic.com.

### Letter Topics

The Letters to the Editor continue to come in. Perhaps some of you want to share your recollections of Jerry Lucas. And I know many of you have an opinion on the quarterback derby.

Send your letters to BSB at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212, or email them to bsb@buckeyesports.com.



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