

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

Vol. 40, No. 24

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

August 2021

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JOSH WINSLOW

GEARING UP - Ohio State enjoyed a full offseason of training in preparation for another year of football after the COVID-impacted 2020 offseason.

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Buckeyes Look For Big Ten Crown & More

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

It's been a chaotic offseason in the world of college football, though it almost feels fitting after the 2020 campaign that saw masked coaches and players take the field across the country in front of empty or near-empty stadiums. Although the summer of 2021 can't quite match the anarchic season that preceded it, it has done its best to turn the sport on its head once again.

The biggest hits came in the latter half of the offseason, as if the former half had served as a time of rest for the players, coaches and administrators who had just scraped by for four months to salvage a season. There was little energy to enact serious change back in February.

As the spring turned to summer, though, those winds of change could be felt in every college town around the nation. The College Football Playoff management committee opened June with a proposal to expand the four-team College Football Playoff to 12 teams, featuring the six highest-ranked conference champions, six at-large teams and a first round of matchups played at home stadiums, rather than in corporate-sponsored NFL venues. The plan was designed, as the committee tells it, to involve new teams.

"This proposal at its heart was created to provide more participation, for more players and more schools," CFP executive director Bill Hancock said. "In a nutshell, that is the working group's message."

However, as the new changes in college football go, this seems to be the one with the longest timeline to being to fruition.

"This is an enormous undertaking with dozens and dozens of moving parts, and it's not going to be a rapid process," said Big 12 commissioner Bob Bowlsby.

"It's going to be at least (this) fall before we have the necessary conversations and possess the necessary information to make informed decisions."

What happened later in the news cycle requires far less projection. After years of pontificating in athletic departments, within the NCAA and even in the halls of the federal government, the day of reckoning arrived for name, image and likeness rights for college athletes.

Those debates bubbled over in late June, yielding a sweeping ruling in favor of the athletes in early July that allows for all student-athletes to profit from their NIL rights for the first time in the history of collegiate athletics. Brand sponsorships, commercials, car deals, T-shirts festooned with player logos – if there was a way to use a likeness to make money, it's a safe bet that college athletes were doing it and will continue to indefinitely.

Not to be outdone, as July came to a close, news leaked that Big 12 stalwarts Oklahoma and Texas planned to depart from the conference in hopes of joining the SEC. Just 10 days later, the leaks were fully confirmed, the Sooners and Longhorns sent in applications, and the SEC accepted its newest members with a unanimous vote.

When it is all laid out like that, "chaotic" may not be enough to aptly describe three months that will define the sport in the years to come. The 2021 offseason never reached the fever pitch of the 2020 regular season, but it may prove to be more significant in the long run. Coaches are still piecing together what it means for their programs, too.

"I think that the easy thing to do is to get super concerned and start to panic, throw your hands up and get super frustrated, or you can embrace it," Ohio State head

Continued On Page 10



From The Message Board

Ohio State is coming off a shortened 2020 season impacted by COVID-19, yet the Buckeyes still ended it with a Big Ten title and a trip to the national championship game. But with a new quarterback and questions with the defense, there is plenty of unknown for the Buckeyes heading into the 2021 campaign. We asked readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum, as well as staff writers, what their predictions are for this upcoming season. Here are some of the responses:

“I think they will make the playoff at 11-1 with a Big Ten title for the fifth straight year. There is something about that Oregon game early that has me nervous. I’m hoping the defense is better (it can’t get much worse) and I’m hoping the quarterback play is what we have grown accustomed to since Ryan Day took over.”

– **Tiffin Buckeye**

“I think they will lose two games, possibly three. I just don’t see anything that was done to improve the defense from last season. And the quarterback play will definitely be downgraded so it won’t be as easy to outscore teams.”

– **bstu9**

“I say it will be a 10-2 season as it might take a while to hit their stride. I expect some speed bumps, but we will end up with a fantastic team by season’s end.”

– **PeyoteBuck**

“Looking forward to seeing Miyan Williams and TreVeyon Henderson in the back-field. They could really help take the pressure off the new quarterback and open up big plays downfield for Chris Olave. The defense’s back seven will be a work in progress. Despite the weak schedule, I expect trouble against Oregon and Indiana for a 10-2 record and no playoff.”

– **Bucks89**

“I am looking forward to see if the Buckeyes can unleash all this great team speed they have recruited and apply it in the kickoff and punt return game. I know the rules have changed on the kickoffs and the current strategy on those plays has no doubt limited our chances to return the kickoffs back. However, we have some of the best football athletes on the planet and yet in five years we have only managed to take one punt return to the house. Clearly there is room for improvement and I long for those Teddy Ginn return days.”

– **BuckeyeScott**

“I’m going to focus on Chris Olave for this, one, to avoid redundancy for our seasons predictions story, and two, because he is chasing a trio of program records in his senior season. He needs 91 catches, 1,124 receiving yards and 13 receiving touchdowns to break Ohio State’s career records in each category, and I think he ends with 2 of 3.

“The yards record is the one that I am most confident in him getting, as he has become a great deep threat and consistently broke 100 yards a game last season. I think the 91 catches will be most difficult, and while certainly possible, that would also require him breaking Parris Campbell’s single-season record of 90, which I don’t see happening. Finally, I think the touchdowns will come down to the wire, but I think Olave

will get the 13th in the last game of the season, which I expect to be in the College Football Playoff, again battling Clemson.”

– **Wyatt Crosher, BSB**

“As Wyatt mentioned, I’ll try to avoid repeating myself because this paper is filled with plenty of my thoughts on this team. I think this is an important season for Ohio State not because of what this team is, but because of what it can establish down the road. I don’t think this group has the defense to win a national title and I don’t expect that even the best offense in program history could make up for that. We’ve seen what’s happened to Oklahoma in recent years, after all.

“However, I don’t think that’s the worst thing in the world. The offense will remain excellent beyond this season, and I think that another team coming up short of a national title because of its defense inspires Ryan Day to make actual changes to his defensive staff, which is a very good move in the long run for the Buckeyes. Find some pieces on defense that can contribute down the road, build out a more reliable staff on that side of the ball, and get ready for Day’s best shot yet at a title in 2022.”

– **Patrick Mayhorn, BSB**

“I think the Ohio State defensive line will become the anchor of the defense this season. The defensive backs displayed glaring limitations last season, and the linebackers will look incredibly different from last year. I expect Haskell Garrett and Zach Harrison to live up to their preseason All-American rankings. One of them, or both of them, will fall short of the Bednarik award, but they will elevate the teammates around them and make a significant impact during multiple games this season.

“Tyreke Smith continues to improve, and Taron Vincent is finally healthy. Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau are two of the most talented freshmen in college football and will battle for playing time early in the regular season. The defensive line is loaded, and I predict that they will be the heart of the defense this year.”

– **Chase Brown, BSB**

“I’m curious to see if/how the identity of the Ohio State offense changes with Stroud under center, and especially with two legitimate tests to start off the season in Minnesota and Oregon. Also, will we see the birth of a true star at running back this season, or will reps truly be as split as they seem to be in camp so far?

“With the variety of questions about the Buckeye defense, I would not be surprised if Ohio State loses a game during the regular season. However, I’d still bet on the Buckeyes to go 12-0 unless some of the potential red flags manifest themselves in a major way early on.”

– **Griffin Strom, BSB**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lucas Era Legendary At OSU

I was a freshman in 1958 with Jerry Lucas, John Havlicek and Bob Knight. We were housed in Baker Hall. With a new state-of-the-art arena and a great freshman class, much was expected. The Bucks would go 78-6 over the 1959-62 seasons, winning a national championship and appearing in two more finals. It was the golden era of Ohio State basketball and will never be matched again. Lucas was the finest basketball player to wear an OSU uniform. I know, I’ve seen them all. No single player wearing a Buckeye uniform influenced the game as Lucas did. Thank you, Jerry and Jeff Rapp, for the memories. Well done.

Don Miljus

Tipp City, Ohio

Enjoyed The Interview Issue

Just wanted to let someone know that your latest edition (July Interview Issue) is one of your best. The interviews were great and I read from cover to cover!!! Tim May was a great interview!!!

Thanks for the enjoyment of reading

about Ohio State.

Mike Lieber

Baltimore, Ohio

Lucas, May, Park Were Great

Just wanted to drop you a line thanking you for the great in-depth interviews in the July 1 edition. I graduated from OSU in 1976 and have been a Buckeye fan since I was a kid. I love reading OSU sports history, since I have lived a lot of it. I especially enjoyed the interviews with Jerry Lucas, Tim May and Jack Park.

Stephen Sinkey

Lake Havasu City, Ariz.

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

Who Is The Greatest Quarterback In Ohio State History?

Options:

J.T. Barrett ____

Justin Fields ____

Joe Germaine ____

Cornelius Greene ____

Dwayne Haskins ____

Bobby Hoying ____

Rex Kern ____

Craig Krenzel ____

Braxton Miller ____

Terrelle Pryor ____

Art Schlichter ____

Troy Smith ____

Instructions:

Number your picks 1-10 (feel free to write in any players we left off the list) and mail this ballot to Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, OH 43212. Lists can also be emailed to bsb@buckeyesports.com or subscribers can vote on the forum at BuckeyeSports.com. Please provide your name, age and any additional comments regarding your ballot. Copies of the ballot are accepted and voters are welcome to attach additional paper if more space for comments is needed.

Comments:

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

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

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

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2020-21 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 40)

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

The 2021 Buckeye Sports Bulletin schedule is subject to change.

The next issue (Sept. 11 cover date) will be mailed on Sept. 7.

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

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OPINION

Looking At What's In Store For Buckeyes

Numbers don't lie. Ohio State is the only team in Big Ten history to win a conference football championship four years in a row. Additionally, the Buckeyes head into the 2021 season working on an 18-game league winning streak as well as a 21-game win streak in regular-season contests.

Even with new starters at quarterback and running back, plus new faces up and down the defensive depth chart, OSU remains the overwhelming favorite to roll to another league title and make a third straight trip to the College Football Playoff.

Before any of that can happen, however, the Buckeyes must navigate their way through a 12-game obstacle course that will include every opponent trying its level best to slay one of the sport's Goliath programs.

Here is a brief look at what lies in store for Ohio State over the next three months.

Sept. 2 at Minnesota – Offense should be no problem for the Golden Gophers with Mohamed Ibrahim, the reigning Big Ten Running Back of the Year, leading the attack. QB Tanner Morgan returns for his third season as the starting quarterback, and he has a stable of excellent receivers.

But if the Gophers are to have any chance at the kind of season fifth-year head coach P.J. Fleck envisions, they will have to improve upon a defense that gave up an average of 30.1 points per game last year.

Fleck believes his team has what it takes to open its season with a massive upset. But history is not on the side of Minnesota and its excitable coach. Ohio State is 45-7 against the Gophers since the series began in 1921 and has 27 victories in the last 28 meetings.

Sept. 11 vs. Oregon – Oregon will head to Columbus as two-time defending Pac-12 champions, but the Ducks will be in the same boat as their opponents as far as breaking in a new quarterback.

Last year's starter, Tyler Shough, led the league in pass efficiency and was second in total offense. But he was forced to share snaps in the team's Fiesta Bowl loss to Iowa State, prompting Shough to transfer to Texas Tech.

That leaves Anthony Brown, who transferred last year to Oregon from Boston College, as the likely starter in 2021 as long as he can stave off the advances of true freshman Ty Thompson, a much-decorated four-star prospect. Does that scenario sound the least bit familiar?

Sept. 18 vs. Tulsa – It wasn't that long ago that the Golden Hurricane was the laughing-stock of the American Athletic Conference. They won only nine games in 27 tries during the three-year period between 2017 and 2019. But last year, Tulsa finished 6-3 with its losses coming by a combined 14 points.

Like many other teams, the Hurricane suffered a number of graduation losses, including quarterback Zach Smith and running back Corey Taylor as well as Lombardi Award-winning linebacker Zaven Collins, who was drafted No. 16 overall by the Arizona Cardinals in April.

Teams currently affiliated with the American Athletic Conference are 3-30-1 lifetime against Ohio State with the most recent of those three victories a 32-27 win engineered by SMU in 1950.

Sept. 25 vs. Akron – The Zips have enjoyed exactly one winning season over the past 15 years and enter 2021 as losers in 22 of their last 23 games.

Akron finished near the bottom of the Mid-American Conference in most offensive and defensive categories last season. It did feature a decent running attack, but leading rusher Teon Dollard (666 yards, six TDs) entered the 2021 season on suspension following a March arrest on a felony weapons charge.

The Zips have played Ohio State on eight

previous occasions with their lone victory coming in 1894 when they took a 12-6 win against the Buckeyes in a game played on the Ohio State Fairgrounds. It remains the last time a current MAC team claimed victory over the Buckeyes.

Oct. 2 at Rutgers – If you listen to the so-called pundits, Greg Schiano is about to turn the Scarlet Knights into a conference title contender just as he did during his first stint at Rutgers. But that was then, and this is now, and the Knights are still a long way from challenging for the Big Ten East crown.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
Mark Rea

Schiano has the services of first-team All-Big Ten linebacker Olakunle Fatukasi, who switches from outside to inside this season. There is also receiver Bo Melton, who victimized OSU on a trick play to return a punt 58 yards for a touchdown, the first opponent to return a punt against the Buckeyes for a score since 2013.

Still, the talent gap between Rutgers and Ohio State is just too big to entertain any thought of an upset. And before you dismiss that as hyperbole, check the facts. The Buckeyes are undefeated in seven meetings since the Knights joined the Big Ten in 2014, outscoring Rutgers by a 376-75 margin.

Oct. 9 vs. Maryland – Despite the fact they have burned through four head coaches since 2015, and their record against conference opponents is a paltry 12-37 during that span, the Terrapins remain an interesting team. For example, did you know Maryland averaged more yards through the air last year than Ohio State? It's true.

QB Taulia Tagovailoa was second only to OSU's Justin Fields in pass efficiency among Big Ten starting quarterbacks last year, and he has a nice stable of receivers including speedster Rakim Jarrett, who averaged 14.8 yards per catch as a freshman in 2020.

Taking over as offensive coordinator is veteran coach Dan Enos, who was quarterbacks coach at Alabama in 2018 when Tagovailoa's brother, Tua, won the Walter Camp and Maxwell awards while finishing second in the Heisman Trophy balloting.

Oct. 23 at Indiana – If you're looking for the scariest opponent on this year's schedule, you can stop right here. The Hoosiers are as talented as they have been in decades, and they have a bit of a chip on their shoulder after being shuttled out of last year's Big Ten Championship Game in favor of Ohio State.

The Buckeyes got to see just how talented IU has become last November when the Hoosiers nearly rallied from a 35-7 deficit before finally dropping a 42-35 decision. OSU defenders probably still see QB Michael Penix Jr. in their nightmares after his 491-yard, five-TD performance.

Not only are Penix and star receiver Ty Fryfogle back, but the Hoosiers welcome former USC running back Stephen Carr and Florida State receiver D.J. Matthews Jr. courtesy of the transfer portal. Also returning are first-team All-Big Ten linebacker Micah McFadden as well as DBs Jaylin Williams and Tiawan Mullen, each of whom earned second-team honors a year ago.

Oct. 30 vs. Penn State – The Nittany Lions are once again the preseason darlings of the pundit class to unseat Ohio State in the Big Ten East. Sorry. I wasn't buying that in previous seasons, and I'm not buying this year, either.

It was a tale of two seasons in 2020 when Penn State got off to a program-worst 0-5 record before winning its final four games. But those final four wins came against teams that finished a combined 9-21 – not exactly a Murderers' Row.

At least we'll get to separate pretenders from contenders early. Penn State travels Sept. 4 to Camp Randall Stadium to take on West division favorite Wisconsin. Then two weeks later, Auburn becomes the rare SEC team willing to travel north to take on a Big Ten team during the regular season.

Nov. 6 at Nebraska – The question is not whether Scott Frost is on the hot seat, but whether the fourth-year head coach can even make it to the start of the regular season. Nebraska announced in mid-August that the NCAA is looking into allegations that Frost circumvented rules regarding staff members as well as practice protocols during last year's pandemic-riddled season.

Frost has not exactly been the godsend Nebraska fans had hoped for when he returned to Lincoln after a successful two-year run at Central Florida. The Cornhuskers are working on three straight losing seasons, a streak of futility unrivaled since the 1950s and early '60s.

NU should get off to a decent start this season, traveling to Illinois before hosting Fordham and Buffalo. But a renewal of an old Big 8/Big 12 rivalry at second-ranked Oklahoma on Sept. 18 should tell a lot about just how good (or bad) the Cornhuskers can be in 2021.

Nov. 13 vs. Purdue – The Boilermakers are making a concerted effort to beef up their defense, bringing in Brad Lambert from Marshall to switch from the 3-4 alignment to the 4-3. But will Lambert's presence be a case of too many cooks spoiling the proverbial broth? He is one of three co-defensive coordinators on Jeff Brohm's staff.

The offense should be no problem. Despite going just 2-4 last season, the Boilermakers averaged more than 27 points per game.

But quarterback remains a question mark. Aidan O'Connell started three games before a foot injury ended his season. Jack Plummer threw for 938 yards and eight TDs in the final three games of the season. And then there is UCLA transfer Austin Burton, who presumably didn't move from Los Angeles to West Lafayette to ride the bench.

Nov. 20 vs. Michigan State – Apparently Spartans head coach Mel Tucker believes the future for his team is now. Few programs have scoured the college football waiver wire – also known as the transfer portal – as much as Michigan State, bringing in 15 players through the portal.

The new faces include former Temple QB Anthony Russo (6,292 yards and 44 TDs in 31 games for the Owls) as well as running back Kenneth Walker III, last seen rushing for 1,158 yards and 17 TDs in two seasons at Wake Forest.

MSU's schedule is a grueling one that includes road contests at Northwestern, Miami (Fla.), Indiana, Purdue and Ohio State.

Nov. 27 at Michigan – The Wolverines open as an unranked team as far as The Associated Press is concerned, pretty much what one would expect from a program that finished 2-4 last season, the first losing campaign since the final season of the Brady Hoke experiment in 2014.

The program has suffered a lot of turnover, both to the roster and coaching staff, since last year, and to be brutally honest, several pieces are going to have to fall into place perfectly for Michigan to avoid back-to-back losing seasons.

And those pieces had better start falling before November. The Wolverines begin the final month by hosting upstart Indiana and then traveling to Penn State before ending it with the traditional rivalry game against Ohio State – a game Michigan has won exactly once in the last 15 meetings.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Friday, Johnson Expected To Miss Season

Senior defensive end Tyler Friday was nowhere to be seen as Ohio State opened fall camp. Ohio State head coach Ryan Day announced later that Friday won't be available for fall camp and could miss a significant portion of the season with an undisclosed injury.

"Tyler Friday won't be available," Day said. "I won't get into his injury just yet. I haven't talked to him about making it public, but he won't be available for camp and really for most of the season."

Without Friday, Ohio State finds itself in a familiar place up front: looking for young replacements to step into more prominent roles. Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tumoloau looked like the third group of defensive ends in practice, alongside Jacob Cowan and walk-on Aaron Cox, but the expectations in Columbus are certainly high, and they may be even higher now with an open spot in the rotation.

"For a lot of those guys (this is crucial)," Day explained. "There are a few other guys in that same boat (as the freshmen) but they're going to have to get onto the field a little bit sooner than maybe we thought before. It's really up to that whole defensive end room now because they lost a guy."

Ohio State also announced that freshman Jaylen Johnson suffered a torn ACL during his first training camp with the Buckeyes and he will miss the remainder of the season to begin the rehabilitation

process on his knee.

Johnson's setback comes two months into his Ohio State career following a June arrival on campus. While the Ohio State coaching staff had not revealed Johnson's position on the depth chart, it is fair to assume that he would not have been a consistent contributor to the Buckeye defense. However, he was expected to be a part of the special teams.

Warren Has No Regrets From 2020

Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren's opening press conference at Big Ten Media Days on July 22 almost ended without him answering a question about his decisions as conference leader last year.

After his nearly 30 minutes of remarks came to a close, Warren took questions from reporters in the gallery of Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Warren discussed reports of Texas and Oklahoma attempting to join the Southeastern Conference, the Big Ten's approach to this football season and his personal experience during the pandemic.

With the final question of the press conference, Jayson Jorgenson of KRVN Radio in Lexington, Neb., asked the commissioner if he had any regrets for how the Big Ten handled the COVID-19 pandemic and its 2020 football season.

"I don't have any regrets," Warren said. "Quite naturally, we all look back on our lives and other things we wish we would have maybe done a little bit differently. But if I had the chance to do it all over last year, I would make the same decisions we made."

In his formal comments, Warren acknowledged the difficulty of running the Big Ten during the pandemic and recognized the conference's imperfect decisions during the football season. He also noted that the widespread remarks from fans and teams were heard loud and clear.

Despite the criticism, Warren claimed 2020 to be "one of the best years of his

Ohio State Enters Season No. 4 In Consensus Poll

Last season, Ohio State fell short of its desired national championship goal, falling to Alabama 52-24 in the College Football Playoff final. However, that loss is not the end of the Buckeyes' pursuit of a title, as no one loss ever is in Columbus.

Ohio State returns 11 starters – six on defense and five on offense. Chris Olave may be the country's best wide receiver, and Garrett Wilson might not be too far behind. Thayer Munford anchors an imposing offensive line, while Haskell Garrett and Zach Harrison have All-America potential on the defensive line. These talented players, along with many others, seem to have caught the eyes of voters.

The Buckeyes are ranked No. 4 in the consensus poll of eight significant publications and news sources, including rankings from The Associated Press, Athlon Sports, College Football News, ESPN, Kenny White Sports, Phil Steele, Sporting News and USA Today (coaches poll).

Buckeye Sports Bulletin awarded points for its consensus poll on a 25-24-23 basis. The maximum number of points a team can earn is 200. The total number of first-place votes received is included in parentheses

According to the rankings, Ohio State is the favorite to win the Big Ten, and for good reason. The Buckeyes are the defending champions looking to extend their title streak to five in a row this season.

Wisconsin (14), Penn State (19), Indiana (20) and Iowa (21) sit behind Ohio State in the consensus poll within the conference. The Buckeyes will face Indiana in a road matchup on Oct. 23 before hosting Penn State the following week on Oct. 30.

If Ohio State beats those two teams and eventually reaches the title game, it could see Wisconsin or Iowa on the other side. The Buckeyes have faced the Badgers three times in Indianapolis (2014, 2017, 2019) – winning each game – while Ohio State and Iowa would meet for the first time in the Big Ten Championship Game.

Team	Points
1. Alabama (6).....	198
2. Clemson (1).....	189
3. Oklahoma (1).....	188
4. Ohio State	172
5. Georgia.....	167
6. Texas A&M.....	140
7. Notre Dame.....	132
8. Iowa State	129
9. North Carolina	127
10. Cincinnati	114
11. Oregon.....	111
12. LSU.....	100
13. Florida	92
14. Wisconsin.....	88
15. USC	81
16. Washington	75
17. Miami.....	73
18. Texas	65
19. Penn State.....	60
20. Indiana	51
21. Iowa.....	50
22. Arizona State	33
23. Ole Miss	24
24. Coastal Carolina	21
25. NC State.....	20

Ohio State will also host No. 11 Oregon in its second game of the regular season. The Ducks are contenders for the Pac-12 crown this season, along with USC (15), Washington (16) and Arizona State (22) and should prove to be a challenging matchup for the Buckeyes early in the year.

- Compiled by Chase Brown

life" and said leading the Big Ten through the pandemic taught him to appreciate his first year as commissioner of the conference.

"This was a very complicated and complex time in our nation, in our world and in college athletics," Warren said. "It was complicated for all of us. This was not a perfect time for us in the conference, but it was productive. We learned – I know I personally learned – many important lessons, and I feel that we grew stronger together as a conference."

Warren said he grew stronger in the past year. He learned to have faith in people, to build relationships and to lean on others.

"I am grateful that I had the opportunity to go through what we did last year," Warren said. "I'm also grateful that I had the belief system to hold true to my values and my promise to keep our student-athletes and their health and safety and wellness No. 1, which I believe that we did. So last year – as I look back over my life – last year will be one of the years that I'll look to that I continually grew as a person and that I'm grateful for to go through all the things that we went through."

"I'm one of those people that always looks for positives. What we did allowed me to really understand the importance of relationships, the importance of communication, but also to have gratitude for life, and I'm so grateful for last year. I embrace

it and I'm glad to be here today."

Smith Says Ohio Stadium Will Be Full

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith told Dom Tiberi of 10TV in Columbus that, as expected, Ohio State will be joining many other college football teams in going forward with a plan for full capacity crowds this fall, including pregame tailgating.

"We're going all the way live," Smith said in an interview with the television station. "We're tailgating. We don't see any change in what we had prior to COVID. Now, we're hopeful that we don't end up in a situation where we have a huge spike as a result of the Delta variant. But right now, we're all the way live. We're a full stadium, full tailgating, full nine yards."

"Obviously, we're in a good spot right now relative to the positivity rate. I'm concerned that our vaccinations are low compared to where we would like them to be. I'm hopeful that we could stay on an upward trajectory toward vaccinations. And hopefully, the COVID-19 variant that has hit our country and is hitting our state doesn't impact us. I don't see any reason why we wouldn't be at full capacity if we stay on this upward trajectory."

Ohio State won't host its first home game of the season until Sept. 11, opening the season at Minnesota, but that week two matchup against Oregon suddenly

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looks like one of the hottest tickets of the season. The Buckeyes will also host Tulsa and Akron during the nonconference slate before jumping into a conference home schedule that will see Maryland, Penn State, Purdue and Michigan State.

Smith Would Prefer Playoff Expansion Pause

After talks throughout the summer of a 12-team College Football Playoff model that could go into effect as early as 2023, Ohio State athletic director Smith told Yahoo Sports' Pete Thamel that it may not be the top priority at the moment.

Amid the decision by Oklahoma and Texas to ultimately leave the Big 12 and join the SEC, Smith told Thamel that there may be other things that move the CFP expansion down on the list of priorities.

"I think the pause button should be hit," Smith told Thamel. "We need to evaluate the landscape and what it's going to look like. We still need to evaluate the 12-team playoff. We don't need to rush into that when there's legitimate concerns that need to be addressed."

Smith spoke with Buckeye Sports Bulletin on June 17 about the proposed expansion model, back before the Oklahoma and Texas moves were made public. Even then, Smith said he was excited about the model but also that there were parts of it that would need to be worked out before it was put into place.

"I think the group of four that studied this for two years did an excellent job looking at all the different permutations and different models and then came up with a pretty exciting model. I think what we have to do is now allow practitioners like myself and others to look at the great work they've done and try and, practically, see how it could work. Learn what we need to learn and what they learned in their process," Smith said. "It took them two years to get to that. We've just looked at it for the first time and actually haven't seen a lot of the details around it. So I'm curious to talk to my colleagues.

"I've talked to a few nationally, but as ADs and others, we have to get together. And it's hard now because we're in that time of year where people are taking vacations, particularly after COVID. But I'm looking forward to having conversations with my colleagues and learning more about the model, but I think the work they did was excellent."

Among those concerns at the time was the proposed home-away games for the first round of the playoff, where teams ranked 5-12 would play at the higher seed's home stadium.

"I want to talk about that more, look at that more. It sounds great, fans always love that. But there is a reality that your first priority is a quality experience for your player," Smith said. "I think we have to look at when is that window of time that the game will be played? What's the historical climate? Do we want to truly, truly play in 32 degrees, in a cold rain or snow? Is that really right for the players? Or, if you're in the North, can you take that game to one of your domes in Indianapolis or Minneapolis or Ford Field (in Detroit)?

25 Ohio State Student-Athletes Receive Degrees

Twenty-five current and former Ohio State student-athletes received their degrees during summer commencement at the Schottenstein Center on Aug. 9. The graduating class included an Olympian, record setters and All-Americans.

Anavia Battle dominated the Big Ten Conference over four seasons at Ohio State. She won seven individual Big Ten sprint titles to rank third in school history, and the conference named her the track athlete of the year four times. The three-time All-American ran the 200 meters in 21.95 seconds – the fastest time for a collegiate woman ever. Battle competed in the same event at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, reaching the semi-finals and finishing 16th overall.

The men's lacrosse program had four players complete their master's degrees in kinesiology – Jeff Henrick, Tre Leclaire, Ryan Terefenko and Alec Van de Bovenkamp. Terefenko, the program's first four-time All-American, and Leclaire, the first Buckeye to earn All-Big Ten accolades four times, earned All-Big Ten honors this year.

Four women's lacrosse players will also receive their master's degrees in kinesiology: Mary Kate Bonanni, Liza Hernandez, Kelsey Reed and Jillian Rizzo. The Big Ten awarded Bonanni, Hernandez and Rizzo with all-conference honors

for their academic success. Rizzo completed her five-year career with the Buckeyes as the program's all-time leader in saves, and Hernandez ended her career fifth in program history in goals and points.

Chris Crane, a member of the Ohio State men's hockey team from 2011-2013, earned his degree in sport industry through the athletic degree completion program. He spent seven seasons playing professional hockey after leaving the university.

Alexanne Verret competed for the women's fencing team, becoming a two-time women's épée conference champion and NCAA qualifier. She earned All-America accolades in 2020 and earned three first-team All-Midwest Fencing Conference selections.

Other athletes include Bernard Melus, an All-American with the pistol team and member of two national championship squads, and four Ohio State football players – Thayer Munford, Jeremy Ruckert, Master Teague III and Marcus Williamson.

A complete list of Ohio State's 25 student-athlete graduates, as well as their majors, can be found below in alphabetical order by sport.

Men's Basketball – Jimmy Sotos, economics.
Men's Cross Country/Track and Field – Te-

vin Brown, education studies.

Women's Fencing – Jessica Thow, psychology.; Alexanne Verret, accounting.

Football – Thayer Munford, human development and family sciences; Jeremy Ruckert, human development and family sciences; Master Teague, communications; Marcus Williamson, public management.

Women's Gymnastics – Kaitlyn Gilson, communications.

Men's Hockey – Christopher Crane, sport industry.

Men's Lacrosse – Jeffrey Henrick, kinesiology; Tre Leclaire, kinesiology; Ryan Terefenko, kinesiology; Alec Van de Bovenkamp, kinesiology.

Women's Lacrosse – Mary Kate Bonanni, kinesiology; Elizabeth Hernandez, kinesiology; Kelsey Reed, kinesiology; Jillian Rizzo, kinesiology.

Pistol – Bernard Melus, electrical and computer engineering.

Men's Soccer – Devyn Etling, sport industry; Matthew Kiley, communications.

Women's Soccer – Emaly Vatne, exercise science.

Women's Track – Anavia Battle, human development and family sciences.

Wrestling – Elijah Cleary, film studies; Lucas Hunter, sociology.

I don't know.

"These are the questions that I have, along with a number of others. Just being curious and see and make sure that we do what's right for the players. It sounds good, it sounds like a great idea to play that at your own site, but I'm not so sure playing that game a little bit further north is a good idea, so we have to study that a little bit."

Gaoteote Arrives At OSU, Chambers Moving To LB

Ohio State landed USC linebacker transfer Palaie Gaoteote from the transfer portal in early July, though the school has yet to officially announce the transfer as he awaits an NCAA ruling on his eligibility.

Gaoteote was a five-star prospect in the 2018 recruiting class and was considered the 15th-best player that year nationally. The 6-2, 250-pound Las Vegas native is a

graduate of Bishop Gorman High School, which Ohio State defensive lineman Haskell Garrett also attended.

Since then, he has recorded 105 tackles, including 7½ for loss and two sacks in an injury-riddled collegiate career. He appeared in only the first two contests of the 2020 season, posting nine tackles, before he suffered a concussion that cost him the rest of the year. Hurting his ankle sidelined him for five games during his sophomore campaign in 2019. He had 58 tackles in the eight games in which he did play. As a freshman, he missed the start of the season while recuperating from knee cartilage surgery but still managed to record 38 tackles and two sacks.

"(Palaie) is a great kid and (from) a great family and has done a lot of service for our football team," USC coach Clay Helton said following Gaoteote's depar-

ture. "You know, he came in and basically said, 'Coach, I want to explore all my options.' "

Day said that he still has some hurdles to clear to get onto the field for the Buckeyes this fall, though.

"He's paving his own way right now," Day said at Big Ten Media Days on July 23, "and then we're going to hear from the NCAA about his eligibility here maybe in a few weeks. Then we'll go from there."

Reports from earlier this summer stated Ohio State was awaiting word on an appeal that would permit Gaoteote to play immediately since he entered the transfer portal before the NCAA amended its transfer rules. Day said Gaoteote's situation is more specific than an appeal, though.

"This one's a little bit different," Day said. "That is not that. This is more of an

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eligibility situation.”

In the meantime, Gaoteote is allowed to participate in team activities. However, the coaching staff will not add him to the travel roster until the NCAA clears him.

Elsewhere in the linebacker room, third-year running back Steele Chambers has moved onto the defensive side of the ball and suited up for the linebackers throughout fall camp. For more on Gaoteote and Chambers, take a look at the BSB linebackers preview on page 27.

Jacoby Enters Transfer Portal

Ohio State third-year offensive linemen Ryan Jacoby has entered the transfer por-

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tal, ending his time in Columbus without playing a collegiate snap for the Buckeyes. He’s Ohio State’s first transfer since May, when cornerback Tyreke Johnson left the program, and the second offensive lineman this offseason, along with tackle Max Wray, who left for Colorado earlier this off-season.

A former four-star recruit from Mentor, Ohio, Jacoby was a two-time first-team All-Ohio selection as a high schooler but never really seemed to catch on at Ohio State as he shifted from tackle to guard.

He played 54 snaps for the Buckeyes at guard in the spring game but didn’t see any reserve time in either of the last two seasons and wasn’t expected to factor into the Ohio State two-deep. Jacoby’s classmates Enokk Vimahi and Dawand Jones serve as serious contenders for starting roles, and 2020 recruits Josh Fryar, Luke Wypler and Paris Johnson are also challenging for time.

“I think we have really good depth,” Day said this spring. “We have a good group in that room. I think Greg Studrawa has done a really good job recruiting. We have different shapes and sizes, have some versatility in there. We have over 20 guys in that room with walk-ons and scholarship guys.

“We have to continue to develop some of the guys in there, and we’ve developed some guys into being good players. It’s fun

2021 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2020 Record
Sept. 2	at Minnesota	8 p.m.	Fox	3-4
Sept. 11	OREGON*	Noon	Fox	4-3
Sept. 18	TULSA*	3:30 p.m.	FS1	6-3
Sept. 25	AKRON	TBA	TBA	1-5
Oct. 2	at Rutgers	TBA	TBA	3-6
Oct. 9	MARYLAND	Noon	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	Noon	Fox	2-4
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	Fox	
* – 2020 bowl team ** – at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)				

to see where that’s headed this year, because I think we have a chance to have a really good room.”

Jacoby signed with the Buckeyes in 2019 as the No. 283 overall prospect and seventh-best player from Ohio, joining his Mentor teammate, defensive end Noah Potter.

Buckeyes Will Take On Bowling Green in 2027

Bowling Green announced on July 28 that the game between the Falcons and Ohio State, which was initially scheduled for Sept. 5 last season, will now be made up on Sept. 4, 2027, in Ohio Stadium.

This is the second nonconference game that has been scheduled for Ohio State’s 2027 season, with the other being the first of a home-and-home series against Alabama. The matchup with the Crimson Tide will take place on Sept. 18, also in Ohio Stadium.

This game between Bowling Green and Ohio State was canceled last season because of the lack of nonconference games in the Big Ten’s modified schedule, which changed twice due to COVID-19. Ohio State will be paying Bowling Green \$1.8 million to play.

From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce earned a three-year contract extension prior to the 1986 season, which was essentially unprecedented in an athletic department that usually doled out one-year deals each season for all of its coaches. However, Bruce said that the vote of confidence was no coat of armor as he entered his eighth season at the helm in Columbus.

“A three-year contract is good for one thing – it’s good for recruiting,” said Bruce. “It’s not going to protect me.

“You don’t think about that. You’ve got to go do your job. I work as hard as I possibly can, do the best job I can. And I’m going to look in the mirror and say, ‘Dang it, I’m not satisfied with 9-3 either.’ I know that’s pretty good, but I don’t say I’m satisfied with that. Who in the heck’s satisfied with anything but perfect?”

Still, Bruce was grateful for the extension.

“I’m glad it came,” he said. “In reality, when you started recruiting, they started hammering at the contract back in 1980, ‘81. That’s when we started to feel the effects of a one-year contract. Up until that time, that was not a big thing in recruiting. But now that everyone seems to have that, very few people don’t have some type of extended contract in our profession. That’s been the drawback for Ohio State.”

30 Years Ago – 1991

A published report that Ohio State junior defensive lineman Alonzo Spellman had sought a transfer to Central State in the previous winter was denied by OSU head coach John Cooper and Central State head coach Billy Joe.

The report, published in the July 23-Aug. 12 issue of College and Pro Football Newsweekly, was written by John Hadley. He wrote that Spellman “continues to experience difficulty academically and reportedly attempted to bypass his final two seasons of eligibility.

“Central State (Ohio) head coach Billy Joe attempted unsuccessfully to lure Spellman. Ohio State head coach John Cooper refused to grant Spellman a release to transfer to Central State.”

Joe denied the report.

“I have not, and no one from my staff has ever, had any contact with Alonzo Spellman,” Joe told BSB.

“I had heard that Alonzo might have trouble with his eligibility academically, so I asked Coach Cooper about it,” Joe said. “He told me that Alonzo was going to be eligible and that was the last I heard about it.

“If he isn’t eligible, let me know, because we’d love to have someone like Alonzo. But no, we’ve never had any kind of contact with him.”

25 Years Ago – 1996

Buckeye recruits Andy Katzenmoyer and Paris Long were both officially cleared to play in 1996 – at least academically – but Long would be a little late in arriving.

The imposing lineman likely wouldn’t enroll at Ohio State until winter quarter, effectively missing the season, but he was expected to be eligible for spring practice. Long had suffered a knee inju-

ry at the tail end of his senior season at Columbus Beechcroft High School, and that was largely the reason he wouldn’t be around for the Buckeyes in 1996.

Katzenmoyer, USA Today’s national defensive player of the year and Ohio’s reigning Mr. Football from Westerville South, was given the go-ahead to wreak havoc on defenses, and one source at Ohio State said the Westerville native did a lot better than originally believed on his testing scores.

20 Years Ago – 2001

Shock and sadness spread across both the Ohio State football community and all of professional football Aug. 1 after former OSU All-America offensive tackle Korey Stringer died of heatstroke. Stringer died after a grueling practice the day before with the Minnesota Vikings at the team’s training complex in Mankato, Minn. He was 27.

“It’s extremely unfortunate,” said former Ohio State receiver and Vikings star Cris Carter. “We’re devastated. There was not a more well-liked player on our football team. There was not another player that anyone enjoyed spending more time with than Korey.”

Stringer’s death was believed to be just the second ever by an NFL player during preseason camp.

15 Years Ago – 2006

The Big Ten welcomed a pair of new coaches filling big shoes at its annual Big Ten Media Kickoff Luncheon on Aug. 1-2, as Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald and Wisconsin head coach Bret Bielema took center stage for the first time as leaders of their programs.

At Northwestern, Fitzgerald was thrust into the spotlight after the tragic passing of former head coach Randy Walker on June 29. A former Northwestern linebacker from 1993-96, Fitzgerald had been serving as Northwestern’s linebackers coach and recruiting coordinator.

“We’re continuing the legacy Randy Walker left,” Fitzgerald said. “It’s been a difficult month, and through communication we’re going to try to build a bridge to get us through.”

Bielema, meanwhile, was taking over for legendary UW head coach Barry Alvarez, who had announced his retirement at the end of the 2005 season. Bielema played at Iowa from 1989-92 and took over as the Wisconsin defensive coordinator under Alvarez in 2004.

“We have a lot of great returning players and a lot of younger guys coming up in a program that is known for taking good players and making them great,” Bielema said.

10 Years Ago – 2011

Three veteran Ohio State football players – former five-star high school recruit Dorian Bell and former four-star prospects Jonathan Newsome and James Louis – were absent when the Buckeyes began fall camp in August, although head coach Luke Fickell refused to officially close the door on any of them returning after the start of the season.

“Nothing is completely set in stone yet,” the first-year head coach said.

Rusty Bucket Added To VIP Perks

Rusty Bucket, the popular neighborhood tavern, has been added to the list of perks for Buckeye Sports Bulletin VIP subscribers. BSB VIP members at all levels will receive a \$10 comp card for food at Rusty Bucket.

"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."

"We also want to thank Rusty Bucket, a valued partner for many years."

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

In addition to the Rusty Bucket comp card, 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.

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Scarlet VIPs: Anthony Ananthanarayanan, Rochester, Mich.; Greg Brooks, Gahanna, Ohio; Marty Brumbaugh, Troy, Ohio; Dennis Dahm, Sandusky, Ohio; Tom Goila, Cincinnati; Doug Harris, Lima, Ohio; Ed Helal, Ashland, Ohio; Phil Helal, Strongsville, 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.

From there, the Buckeyes blew out the Falcons 44-13 on Sept. 13, 1997, before Bowling Green nearly earned its first victory of the series, falling 24-17 on Sept. 20, 2003. Ohio State has been dominant since then, winning 35-7 on Oct. 7, 2006, and then, most recently, crushing the Falcons 77-10 on Sept. 3, 2016.

Preseason List Season Hits Columbus

The Maxwell Football Club named four Ohio State football players to preseason watch lists for the Maxwell Award and the Chuck Bednarik Award.

Wide receivers Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson are potential candidates to win the 85th Maxwell Award, which honors college football's most outstanding player. Defensive linemen Garrett and Zach Harrison are on the list Bednarik Award, which marks the most outstanding defensive player. Garrett, Harrison and Sevn Banks were also listed on the watch list for the Bronko Nagurski Trophy, which goes to the best defensive player as well.

The Football Writers Association of America announced its 80-member list for the Outland Trophy watch list on July 27, and Ohio State was one of five schools to earn three selections. The watch list members are all returning players, and the award is for the top interior linemen from the Football Bowl Subdivision. Offensive and defensive tackles, offensive guards and centers are eligible for consideration

Podcast Prepares For Football Season

With Ohio State preparing to open its 2021 season, the Buckeye Sports Bulletin podcast is set to return to its twice-weekly football season posting schedule, beginning the week of Sept. 2 as the Buckeyes take on Minnesota.

The BSB podcast, hosted by associate editors Wyatt Crosher and Patrick Mayhorn, covers each game from every angle, releasing a full game preview on the Friday morning before the game (Thursday morning, in the case of Ohio State's weeknight matchup to open the season) and an in-depth recap on

each Monday morning.

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

for the award.

Those three players for Ohio State were a pair of offensive tackles in junior Nicholas Petit-Frere and fifth-year senior Thayer Munford, as well as Garrett.

According to the release, "The Outland Trophy winner is chosen from three finalists who are a part of the annual FWAA All-America Team. The FWAA All-America Committee, after voting input from the entire membership, selects a 26-man first team and eventually the three Outland finalists. Committee members, then by individual ballot, select the winner."

Ohio State has not won the Outland Trophy since offensive tackle Orlando Pace earned the honor in 1996. Pace was also nominated in 1995. Ohio State had also won three times prior, with John Hicks in 1973, Jim Stillwagon in 1970 and Jim Parker in 1956.

Elsewhere, the Bobby Dodd Coach of the Year Foundation and Peach Bowl Inc. named Day to its preseason watch list for the 2021 Dodd Trophy, a national coaching award honoring scholarship, leadership and integrity.

"The Dodd Trophy is the most coveted

coach of the year award because it looks beyond just the results on the field and measures the overall impact these coaches have had on their players, universities and communities," chairman Jim Terry said.

The foundation created the list through a selection process, considering each program's graduation rate, commitment to service and charity in the community, projected success for the 2021 season and academic progress for student-athletes. Day was one of 17 coaches selected.

"These coaches are coming off one of the most unprecedented and trying seasons in the history of college football but found a way to persevere in the face of adversity," said Peach Bowl Inc. CEO and president Gary Stokan.

Last season, Northwestern head football coach Pat Fitzgerald won the award after leading his team to a Big Ten West title and finishing with a 7-2 record. Day and the Buckeyes handed Fitzgerald and the Wildcats their second loss in the Big Ten Championship Game when Ohio State won the matchup 22-10.

Continued On Page 8

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Continued From Page 7

Former Brown, Buckeye Bo Scott Dead At 78

Former Ohio State and Cleveland Browns running back Bo Scott passed away on Aug. 4 at 78 years old of a heart attack. Born Robert, Bo picked up the nickname from his sister early in his life and stuck with it through his football career, which saw him recruited from Connellsville, Pa., by Woody Hayes in 1961.

Scott played just one season for the Buckeyes, though, running 21 times for 142 yards and a touchdown in 1962 before academic problems ended his tenure in Columbus. Still, in 1965, the Cleveland Browns selected Scott to join their loaded backfield, which at the time featured Jim Brown and Leroy Kelly. To avoid riding the bench, Scott signed instead with the Ottawa Rough Riders, starring in the CFL

and winning the 1968 Grey Cup before the Browns brought him back to the States a year later.

He joined Kelly in the post-Brown backfield, tallying 2,124 yards and 18 touchdowns in six years with Cleveland. He returned to Ohio State after his career ended to earn his degree before starting a 25-year career as a member of the staff at the Franklin County Juvenile Court.

Scott is survived by his wife, Phyllis, daughters Robin, Nikki and Shelly and son Shawn.

Former OC Gibbs Dead At 80

Alex Gibbs, who coached as Ohio State's offensive coordinator and offensive line coach in the 1970s before embarking on an NFL assistant career that spanned more than 30 years, died on July 12 of complications from a stroke at the age of 80.

The news came from a press release by the Denver Broncos, where Gibbs coached their offensive line from 1984-87 and again from 1995-2003 before again joining the Broncos for one year as an offensive line consultant in 2013 for what would be his final season as a coach.

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of Alex Gibbs, who had a profound impact on the Denver Broncos and the National Football League as an offensive line coach," the Broncos said in a state-

ment. "During his 14 years with the Broncos, Coach Gibbs left a lasting legacy on this league with his innovative blocking schemes and outstanding teaching ability."

Gibbs started his coaching career in 1966 as head coach at Mount Airy High School in North Carolina. Then, after stints at Duke, Kentucky and West Virginia, each of which was as a defensive backs coach, Gibbs joined Woody Hayes' Ohio State staff on the offensive side of the ball in 1975.

The Buckeyes averaged 32.0 points per game in Gibbs' first season with the team, fourth best in the country. Ohio State's offense remained in the top 25 each of his four years there, during which the team earned 36 wins to just 10 losses.

After his time at Ohio State, Gibbs went to Auburn, then to Georgia before making the leap to the NFL with his first stint at Denver.

It took until his second tenure with the Broncos for Gibbs to reach the summit. Denver won a pair of Super Bowls (XXXII and XXXIII), much in thanks to Gibbs' offensive line schemes, specifically his zone-blocking schemes, which he helped to popularize throughout his time at the pro ranks.

Gibbs' schemes can be seen in a variety of ways to this day, including still at Ohio State, where offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson continues to implement many of the same ideas in the run game of a coordinator who was on the same campus more than 40 years prior.

Martell Transfers To UNLV

Former Ohio State quarterback Tate Martell, who was most recently a part of the roster at Miami (Fla.), is going to his third program during his college tenure, transferring closer to home with a move to UNLV.

The team swapping isn't new for Martell, as it is something that started during his recruitment. He committed to Wash-

ington on July 26, 2012, when he was just 14 years old. He decommitted from the Huskies on Jan. 5, 2015, and committed to Texas A&M on Aug. 20 of that year. On May 4, 2016, he decommitted again before ultimately committing to the Buckeyes on June 12.

Martell played in reserve time for Ohio State, but his numbers were impressive. In his lone season on the field, 2018, Martell completed 23 of 28 passes for 269 yards and a touchdown. He also ran 22 times for 128 yards and two scores.

His highlight performance came against Rutgers on Sept. 8. There, Martell completed all 10 of his passes for 121 yards and a score, the touchdown coming on a 51-yard heave to Terry McLaurin in the second quarter. Martell also made an explosive play on the ground, scoring on the ground from 47 yards out to make it 52-3.

But Martell has not made a splash since his time with Ohio State. He did make a splash verbally in his final weeks with the program, first calling his shot at the starting job once Dwayne Haskins left during the Rose Bowl's media day.

Eventually, Martell went back on his words and entered the transfer portal, ultimately landing with the Hurricanes. He finished third in the race for the starting job with the Hurricanes to both N'Kosi Perry and Jarren Williams before Houston transfer D'Eriq King took over in 2020, as Martell opted out.

Martell finished his time with the Hurricanes completing his only pass for 7 yards and rushing seven times for 7 yards with no touchdowns.

Now, Martell joins a UNLV team that could very well need a spark from a former high four-star in-state prospect who ranked as the No. 56 player in his recruiting class out of Las Vegas Bishop Gorman. The Rebels went 0-6 in 2020 and have not had a winning record since 2013, when they went 7-6.

Hubbard Inks Extension With NFL's Bengals

Former Ohio State defensive end Sam Hubbard signed a four-year, \$40 million contract extension with the NFL's Cincinnati Bengals on July 25.

The Bengals drafted Hubbard with the 77th pick in the third round of the 2018 NFL draft. In four seasons with Cincinnati, he has started in 28 of 44 career games, recording 16½ sacks, eight passes defended, three forced fumbles and a fumble recovery for a touchdown.

"I have no intentions of wanting to play anywhere else," Hubbard told Bengals.com senior writer Geoff Hobson. "This is my city that raised me. My whole family is here. I love this team. It's hard to put into words what this means for my family and me.

"I love this team and the guys in the locker room. We're a young team, and we're coming together for some years now. Everyone on this roster has the same mind-set. We're hungry. We want to win games, and we want to do things the right way. That's why it's a pleasure to come to work and go to war with these guys."

Hubbard will earn a base salary of over

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\$2 million in 2021 – the final year of his rookie contract. His extension begins the following season when Hubbard's salary will increase to \$10 million per year over the next four seasons.

"Sam is about all of the things we want to be about, and it was a priority to get this deal done," head coach Zac Taylor said. "He's been a tremendous leader on this team. He comes to work every single day, and we look forward to him being a leader for us for years to come."

Ginn Announces Retirement From NFL

Former Ohio State wide receiver Ted Ginn Jr. announced July 16 that he would be retiring from the NFL after a 14-year professional career.

In his time at the pro level, Ginn, who is now 36, played 193 total games for six different teams, finishing with 412 receptions for 5,742 yards and 33 touchdowns. The former No. 9 overall pick in the 2007 NFL draft had a strong start to his career with the Miami Dolphins, hauling in 56 catches for 790 yards and two touchdowns in his second season. Both the catches and yards ended as career highs.

His best span of seasons came from 2015-2017, the first two of which were with the Carolina Panthers and the last of which was with the New Orleans Saints. Ginn broke 700 receiving yards in each of those seasons, including in 2015 when he had 44 catches for 739 yards and a career-high 10 touchdowns.

Ginn was a part of two teams that made it to the Super Bowl, but neither of those teams – the 2012 San Francisco 49ers and 2015 Carolina Panthers – could finish the job, falling to the Baltimore Ravens and Denver Broncos, respectively.

Chase Brown, Wyatt Crosher, Patrick Mayhorn and Griffin Strom contributed to this report. For up-to-the-minute Ohio State news and discussion, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports.com and the BSB Fan Forum, available to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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

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

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

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

BSB Returns To Weekly Print Schedule On Sept. 7

Buckeye Sports Bulletin returns to its weekly football season publishing schedule on Sept. 7, with coverage of the Minnesota game. There will be immediate coverage of that game posted on our BuckeyeSports.com website, as well as discussion of the game at our Forum, including the "Official Game Thread," with real-time comments from BSB staff members and readers throughout the game.

Please note that recent developments with the mail service have us concerned about delivery time for BSB this football season. We remind you the complete print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted at BuckeyeSports.com at the time the issue is mailed and is available online to subscribers free of charge, as is all the other content provided at the site.

The BSB staff provides daily posts on any and all Ohio State sports news, including the latest in football recruiting, as well as presenting reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Additionally, staff members man the BuckeyeSports.

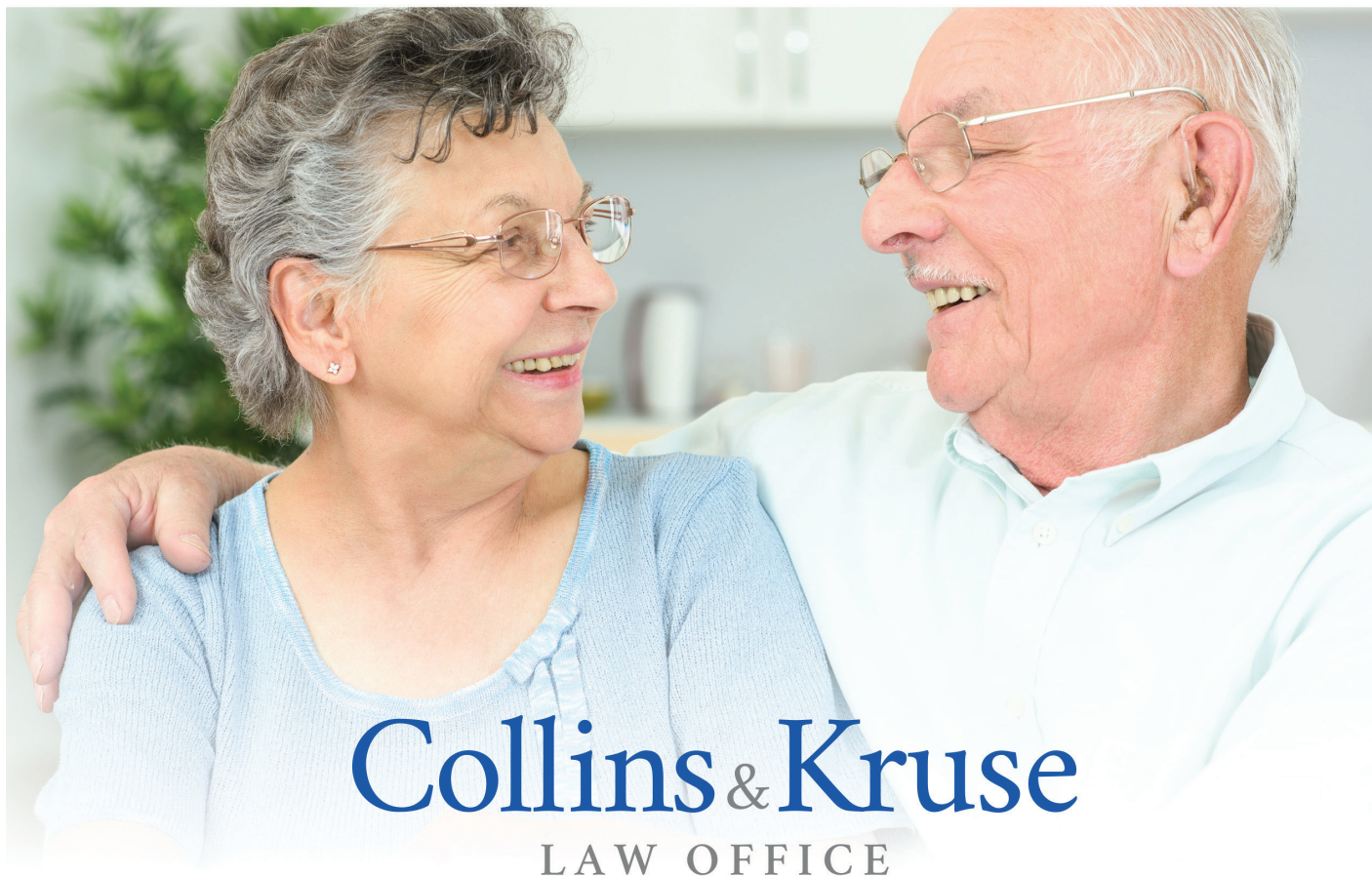
com Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day.

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If you 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.

As mentioned, 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.

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Jackie Collins
Attorney/Army Veteran



Wren Kruse
Attorney

Key Returns Set To Lead The Way For OSU

Continued From Page 1

coach Ryan Day said of the summer changes. “And we’re going to embrace it. We have a lot to sell right now, and I think recruiting is going very well, but they have to develop when they’re here, they have to play when they’re here and we have to continue to build this culture so that we understand that it’s about us, it’s not about one person at any one moment.

“The one-time transfer, the NIL, all of those things are a little more geared toward the individual than they are the unit and the team, and so we have to continually work on the culture. I know that we have a great university and a great culture, and if we just put one foot in front of the other, we can come out of this thing in a great position.”

Like the 2020 regular season, the dizzying churn of this offseason looked as though it wouldn’t include Ohio State through its early stages. The expanded playoff and NIL rights impact the team, but the Buckeyes were not the focal point of either and they weren’t involved in any early expansion talk, regardless of what misinformation peddlers on message boards indicated in the immediate wake of the Big 12’s presumed demise.

However, just as the Big Ten had entered the fray in October after missing the first wave of last season, so too did the Buckeyes in August, bursting onto the scene with the first real drama this iteration of Ohio State has faced.

Of course, drama can be a whole lot worse than what Ohio State is facing, as 2022 five-star quarterback recruit Quinn Ewers became 2021 five-star enrollee, forgoing his senior season and joining the Buckeyes at fall camp a year ahead of schedule on Aug. 16.

Ewers cited, among other things, a desire to get a head start on learning Ohio State’s offense and the inability to cash in on NIL offers as a high schooler in Texas – an opportunity that the market around Ohio State football and the new NIL rules will gladly afford him.

Whether he’d actually compete for Ohio State’s starting quarterback job was a hot hypothetical around Columbus, but it never looked to be a serious consideration for the Buckeyes. That can be attributed to things outside of Ewers’ talent, given his late arrival at camp and the status of the three quarterbacks he joined in Kyle McCord, Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud, all of whom carry the experience trump card (even if they combine for zero collegiate passes) and seem to be confident in their abilities to hold off the newcomer while helping him along in learning the ropes.

“We’ll accept him in the room with open arms, just like we did Kyle,” said Stroud, a redshirt freshman. “At the end of the day, it’s all a brotherhood. I don’t believe in having a beef with my teammates or anything like that. Quinn and I are really cool anyways. I’m definitely excited to get him in here.”

When asked if he would have to look over his shoulder now that Ewers is in the picture a year earlier than anticipated, Stroud actually laughed.

“Nah, there’s no rush, man,” he said. “At the end of the day, they help us to be a better person, a better player every single day. That’s my focus. I’m not worried about anybody running up on me or anything like that.”

That quarterback battle was easily the biggest story through fall camp in Columbus,

but it came to an anticlimactic close when Day confirmed what had been assumed for months, naming Stroud the next starter at Ohio State on Aug. 21.

If recent history is any indication, the 21 positions around the Buckeye signal caller might be much more intriguing. Those positions have proven much more difficult for Ohio State to pin down as it emerges from its third fall camp under Day’s guidance, or second if not counting the COVID-addled 2020 edition.

The Buckeyes have key returning pieces and fully established starters in several spots, especially in that offense that it’s preparing to hand off the keys to, but six starters depart on either side of the football and questions remain about several of the more experienced members of a defense that struggled significantly in Ohio State’s season finale against Alabama. For a program that likes to signal stability and continuity as best it can, Ohio State has instead seemed to embrace a young and hungry roster this offseason.

Of course, the Buckeyes really don’t have much of a choice in the matter.

“There are a lot of young players who haven’t played a lot of football here,” Day said to open fall camp. “They’ve had a really good summer leading up to camp, and then we have some older guys that need to get game-ready here in a hurry.”

That dynamic has Ohio State unsure of exactly what it has entering the season beyond the talent that anyone can see on paper. With a program that produced double-digit NFL draft picks for the second straight season, Day said there are still some unknowns about what exactly he has this time around.

“I don’t know (what I feel about this team),” Day said. “There are a lot of guys on the team that have played a lot of football, when you think about some of the guys on the offensive line, you look at Haskell Garrett, Antwan Jackson, Zach Harrison, Jeremy Ruckert, Chris Olave, Master Teague, they’ve played a lot of football. But there are also a lot of young guys. It’s a combination of the two.

“I don’t think we’ll really know what we have until we start getting into some of these games and figure it out, because there are a lot of big personalities and a lot of production that left the team from last year, certainly at the linebacker position as well – four guys that had such an impact on leadership and production on the field. I don’t think we know yet, but I think coming off the summer, talking about how many guys had good summers, that’s a great projection of what’s going to happen in the fall. If we can stay healthy and continue to work the way we’re working, we’re going to have a good season.”

With so much up in the air, Ohio State is looking to lean heavily on the players whom it knows it can trust. For the offense as it introduces a new quarterback, that will mean an even larger workload for players such as Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, who formed one of the nation’s most lethal receiver tandems in 2020 and are projected by many as potential All-America selections this season.

As Wilson moves back to the outside after lining up in the slot last season, Ohio State will need to find a new face inside – likely in the form of Jaxon Smith-Njigba – but has another experienced pass catcher off the line in senior tight end Jeremy Ruckert.

The Buckeyes are looking to be a bit more balanced between the run and the pass this season after relying heavily on Justin Fields’ arm in 2020. But in the pass game, it is hard to ask for a better-looking skill corps when breaking in a new quarterback, and it’s even harder to turn down that luxury.

“I love it,” Buckeyes wide receivers coach Brian Hartline said of his group being leaned on. “I love the situation with a young quarterback. It just asks us and demands us to be more detailed than ever. I mean, not that these guys can’t bail us out at times, but to be exact with landmarks, be very clean with body language to not confuse people. Having a younger quarterback that is maybe not learning it all for the first time, but they also don’t have a large body of work.

“I think it’s awesome. I think it provides a lot of clear direction on what’s expected – ‘are we doing it, are we not’ – and then we don’t have the cloudiness all the time of maybe quarterbacks making us right.”

Ohio State has another vet whom it can trust in the running game in Teague, but if fall camp reps are to be believed, the senior from Tennessee has been removed from his perch atop the room for a second straight season after surrendering the starting job to Trey Sermon late last year.

Redshirt freshman Miyan Williams and true freshman TreVeyon Henderson both took reps with the top group throughout fall camp and look to be surging into a co-starting role, as Ohio State sacrifices some experience to improve its talent level. It’s a move that makes sense when looking beyond the backs at the offensive line leading the way for them.

Offensive line coach Greg Studrawa’s starting five is not yet set in stone, but he alluded heavily to the possibility of a four-tackle set in the starting group that would mesh better with the smaller Williams (5-8, 225) or Henderson (5-10, 215) than it would with the bruising Teague. That lineup would see senior Thayer Munford and redshirt freshman Paris Johnson Jr. moving into the guard positions next to junior center Harry Miller, clearing space for junior Nicholas Petit-Frere at left tackle and junior right tackle Dawand Jones – who has flourished this offseason after Munford issued a challenge to him.

“I talked to Dawand, I was like, ‘Hey, I might be coming back.’ He kind of felt like, ‘Ah, OK.’ Down in the dumps,” Munford said. “But I did tell him, ‘If you can prove to me during workouts that you’re on top of your stuff and do the right things all the time, I would consider moving to guard.’ If that happens, it happens. If it’s a permanent change, it’s a permanent change.”

Lost production or not – and Fields, Sermon, Jameson Williams, Luke Farrell, Wyatt Davis and Josh Myers, among others, could be difficult to replace – Ohio State holds plenty of talent and experience on what does return on its 2021 roster.

But there are two halves to a football team, and Ohio State has six departed starters from a defense that already struggled to work its way off the field last season. This presents a much more pressing issue for Day and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, both of whom were not pleased with the defense’s performance last year.

So the Buckeyes are adjusting, starting with a reconfiguration of the defensive staff.

No longer is Coombs splitting time between the secondary and the defensive coordinator job, with special teams coordinator and safeties coach Matt Barnes jumping into the former role, while Coombs settles exclusively into the latter, allowing him to survey more of the defense and build a more complete plan on a game-by-game basis.

“I get to go down and watch (defensive line coach) Larry Johnson’s guys sometimes – I get to watch Larry coach,” Coombs said. “You want to have fun, go watch Larry coach for a little bit. Watch what those guys do in some drills. Watch (linebackers coach) Al Washington. Al is out there wearing his pad and they’re hitting him, his head is snapping back. I love watching those guys coach. That part is really cool and I’m getting so much more connected with all of those guys in those other areas. It’s a blessing to have Matt because it does allow me to do some other things.”

From that connection, the entire defensive staff emerged from the long summer into fall camp with a new plan, one that could almost be described as positionless football, despite disagreement on that verbiage from coaches. Instead, the directors of these new Silver Bullets have taken a distinct interest in playing the best 11 players, with the definition of “best” predicated on fit for a matchup instead of pure talent.

“A lot (will be) dictated by matchup,” Coombs said of his defensive scheme. “I had a guy that played nickel in Tennessee, but when the offense went 12 (one running back, two tight ends) personnel, he played corner. It’s going to be based on our opponent and on our skill set. The best 11 players to win that play are going to be on the field for the Ohio State Buckeyes. And then the next play, it will be the same. We have a lot of good players here. We should have guys on the field that maximize their strengths to our defense, to match up in the best possible way to our opponents.”

It’s hard to know at the onset of the season what the best 11 will look like for Ohio State when it takes the field against Minnesota on Sept. 2, Oregon on Sept. 11 or any opponent beyond that, because even as the Buckeyes exit fall camp, it’s easy to get the sense that they still don’t quite know.

There are top players whom Coombs said Ohio State can’t really afford to take off the field, like No. 1 cornerback Sevnyn Banks, defensive tackle Haskell Garrett and safety Josh Proctor, but the depth chart beyond those three has been in a constant state of flux throughout fall camp and doesn’t seem to be headed for a true conclusion anytime soon.

Whether this dynamic new approach can clean up the nation’s No. 122 passing defense, replace six starters and return Ohio State’s defense to the heights that it reached in 2019 is as difficult to predict as that starting lineup. But with a deeper defensive backfield, one of the nation’s most talented lines and a full offseason of training, Coombs is confident and optimistic.

Surrounded by a rapidly changing college football landscape and fresh off the most chaotic first season that any coordinator could possibly encounter, it would be hard for him to ask for much more.

“Today, it’s 180 degrees from last year,” Coombs said. “It’s a much more comfortable feeling.”

2021 Ohio State Football Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Year	Hometown/Previous School
1	Demario McCall	CB	5-9	191	Sr.	North Ridgeville, Ohio/North Ridgeville
2	Chris Olave	WR	6-1	188	Sr.	San Ysidro, Calif./San Marcos Mission Hills
2	Kourt Williams II	SAF	6-1	220	R-Fr.	Harbor City, Calif./Bellflower St. John Bosco
3	Quinn Ewers	QB	6-2	200	Fr.	Southlake Texas/Carroll
3	Teradja Mitchell	LB	6-2	239	Sr.	Virginia Beach, Va./Bishop Sullivan
4	Julian Fleming	WR	6-2	205	So.	Catawissa, Pa./Southern Columbia
4	Lejond Cavazos	CB	6-0	195	R-Fr.	San Antonio, Texas/Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
5	Garrett Wilson	WR	6-0	192	Jr.	Austin, Texas/Lake Travis
5	Marcus Williamson	CB	5-10	185	5th Sr.	Westerville, Ohio/Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
6	Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	215	Fr.	Mt. Laurel, N.J./Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
6	Taron Vincent	DT	6-2	305	Jr.	Baltimore, Md./Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
7	C.J. Stroud	QB	6-3	218	R-Fr.	Empire, Calif./Rancho Cucamonga
7	Sevyn Banks	CB	6-1	200	Sr.	Orlando, Fla./Jones
8	Javontae Jean-Baptiste	DE	6-5	255	Jr.	Spring Valley, N.Y./Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic
8	Kamryn Babb	WR	6-0	205	Jr.	St. Louis, Mo./Christian Brothers College
9	Zach Harrison	DE	6-6	272	Jr.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy Orange
9	Jack Miller III	QB	6-3	215	R-Fr.	Scottsdale, Ariz./Chaparral
10	Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	195	Fr.	Massillon, Ohio/Washington
10	Cameron Martinez	DB	5-10	192	R-Fr.	Muskegon, Mich./Muskegon
11	Tyreke Smith	DE	6-3	265	Sr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Cleveland Heights
11	Jaxon Smith-Njigba	WR	6-0	198	So.	Rockwall, Texas/Rockwall
12	Lathan Ransom	SAF	6-1	205	So.	Tucson, Ariz./Salpointe Catholic
12	Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-1	205	Fr.	Steilacoom, Wash./Steilacoom
13	Jordan Hancock	CB	6-1	185	Fr.	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett
13	Gee Scott Jr.	TE	6-3	225	So.	Seattle, Wash./Sammamish Eastside Catholic
14	Ronnie Hickman	SAF	6-1	205	So.	Wayne, N.J./DePaul Catholic
15	Craig Young	LB	6-3	223	So.	Fort Wayne, Ind./Wayne
16	Ryan Watts	CB	6-3	205	R-Fr.	Little Elm, Texas/Little Elm
16	Cade Stover	TE	6-4	255	So.	Mansfield, Ohio/Lexington
17	Bryson Shaw	SAF	6-0	195	So.	Eldersburg, Md./Potomac Bullis School
18	J.P. Andrade	QB	6-2	210	Jr.	La Verne, Calif./Bonita
18	Marvin Harrison Jr.	WR	6-3	205	Fr.	Philadelphia, Pa./St. Joseph's Prep
19	Jagger LaRoe	QB	6-3	225	Sr.	Colleyville, Texas/Texas A&M
19	Dallas Gant	LB	6-3	235	Sr.	Toledo, Ohio/St. John's Jesuit
20	Dominic DiMaccio	K	5-8	195	Sr.	Powell, Ohio/Columbus DeSales
20	Mitchell Melton	LB	6-3	245	R-Fr.	Silver Spring, Md./Olney Our Lady of Good Counsel
21	Palaië Gaoteote IV	LB	6-2	248	Sr.	Las Vegas Bishop Gorman / USC
21	Evan Pryor	RB	5-10	198	Fr.	Cornelius, N.C./William Amos Hough
22	Steele Chambers	LB	6-1	225	So.	Roswell, Ga./Blessed Trinity Catholic
23	Marcus Hooker	SAF	5-11	200	Jr.	New Castle, Pa./New Castle
24	Marcus Crowley	RB	6-1	216	So.	Jacksonville, Fla./Trinity Christian Academy
24	Jantzen Dunn	SAF	6-1	190	Fr.	Bowling Green, Ky./South Warren
25	Jaylen Johnson	SAF	6-1	223	Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/La Salle
25	Xavier Johnson	WR	6-2	215	Jr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Summit Country Day
26	Cameron Brown	CB	6-0	190	Jr.	St. Louis, Mo./Christian Brothers College
26	Cayden Saunders	RB	5-10	190	Fr.	Northville, Mich./Northville
28	Reid Carrico	LB	6-2	230	Fr.	Ironton, Ohio/Ironton
28	Miyan Williams	RB	5-8	225	R-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Winton Woods
29	Jesse Mirco	P	6-4	220	Fr.	Fremantle, Australia/St. Louis Christian Brothers College
29	Denzel Burke	CB	6-1	192	Fr.	Scottsdale, Ariz./Saguaro
30	Corbin Cleveland	WR	5-11	180	Fr.	Rockwall, Texas/Rockwall-Heath
30	Cody Simon	LB	6-2	233	So.	Jersey City, N.J./St. Peter's Prep
32	TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-10	215	Fr.	Hopewell, Va./Hopewell
32	Jakailin Johnson	CB	6-0	185	Fr.	St. Louis, Mo./De Smet
33	Master Teague III	RB	5-11	225	Jr.	Murfreesboro, Tenn./Blackman
33	Jack Sawyer	DE	6-4	250	Fr.	Pickerington, Ohio/North
34	Mitch Rossi	TE	6-1	245	Sr.	Franklin, Tenn./Franklin
34	Andre Turrentine	SAF	5-11	190	Fr.	Nashville, Tenn./Ensforth
35	Tommy Eichenberg	LB	6-2	235	So.	Cleveland, Ohio/St. Ignatius
36	K'Vaughan Pope	LB	6-1	225	Sr.	Dinwiddie, Va./Dinwiddie
37	Garrison Smith	K	5-8	180	Fr.	Norwalk, Ohio/Norwalk
38	Cameron Kittle	DB	6-0	183	So.	Glouster, Ohio/Trimble
39	Andrew Moore	DB	5-11	185	Fr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Cleveland Heights
41	Josh Proctor	SAF	6-2	205	Sr.	Owasso, Okla./Owasso

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Year	Hometown/Previous School
43	Ryan Batsch	SAF	6-2	228	Sr.	Loveland, Ohio/Loveland
44	J.T. Tuimoloau	DL	6-4	275	Fr.	Edgewood, Wash./Sammamish Eastside Catholic
46	Cade Kacherski	LB	6-2	225	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Jerome
48	Max Lomonico	LS	6-3	225	Fr.	Pickerington, Ohio/Central
49	Patrick Gurd	TE	6-4	245	So.	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
50	Jackson Kuwatch	LB	6-4	235	Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/West Chester Lakota West
51	Mike Hall	DT	6-2	290	Fr.	Streetsboro, Ohio/Streetsboro
52	Antwuan Jackson	DT	6-2	300	5th Sr.	Ellenwood, Ga./Blinn Junior College
53	Luke Wypler	OL	6-3	300	R-Fr.	Montvale, N.J./St. Joseph Regional
54	Tyler Friday	DE	6-3	264	Sr.	Ramsey, N.J./Don Bosco Prep
54	Toby Wilson	OL	6-2	298	Fr.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy
55	Matthew Jones	OL	6-4	310	Jr.	Brooklyn, N.Y./Erasmus Hall
56	Aaron Cox	DE	6-3	255	Sr.	Mantua, Ohio/Crestwood
57	Jalen Pace	LB	6-0	220	Fr.	St. Louis, Mo./Mary Institute and Saint Louis Country Day
58	Ty Hamilton	DT	6-3	290	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Central
59	Darrion Henry-Young	DL	6-4	265	R-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Princeton
60	Ryan Smith	OL	6-1	285	Jr.	Valley City, Ohio/Medina Buckeye
61	Jack Forsman	OL	6-6	305	Fr.	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
62	Bryce Prater	DL	6-0	280	Fr.	West Lafayette, Ohio/Ridgewood
63	Zach Prater	DL	6-0	285	Fr.	West Lafayette, Ohio/Ridgewood
65	Zen Michalski	OL	6-7	305	Fr.	Floyds Knobs, Ind./Floyd Central
66	Enokk Vimahi	OL	6-4	305	So.	Kahuku, Hawaii/Kahuku
67	Jakob James	OL	6-4	295	R-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Elder
69	Trey Leroux	OL	6-7	310	R-Fr.	Norwalk, Ohio/Norwalk
70	Josh Fryar	OL	6-6	315	R-Fr.	Beech Grove, Ind./Beech Grove
71	Ben Christman	OL	6-6	315	Fr.	Akron, Ohio/Richfield Revere
73	Grant Toutant	OL	6-7	315	R-Fr.	Warren, Mich./De La Salle
74	Donovan Jackson	OL	6-4	300	Fr.	Bellaire, Texas/Episcopal
75	Thayer Munford	OL	6-6	320	Sr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Massillon Washington
76	Harry Miller	OL	6-4	315	Jr.	Buford, Ga./Buford
77	Paris Johnson Jr.	OL	6-6	315	So.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Princeton
78	Nicholas Petit-Frere	OT	6-5	315	Jr.	Tampa, Fla./Berkeley Prep
79	Dawand Jones	OL	6-8	360	Jr.	Indianapolis, Ind./Ben Davis
80	Corey Rau	TE	6-4	250	5th Sr.	Katy, Texas/SMU
81	Sam Hart	TE	6-5	245	Fr.	Aurora, Colo./Cherokee Trail
82	Sam Wiglusz	WR	5-11	189	Sr.	Brecksville, Ohio/Brecksville-Broadview Heights
83	Joop Mitchell	WR	6-2	180	Fr.	Wyoming, Ohio/Wyoming
83	Cormontae Hamilton	DL	6-2	265	So.	Memphis, Tenn./Whitehaven
84	Joe Royer	TE	6-5	245	R-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Elder
85	Austin Kutscher	WR	6-0	198	Sr.	Massillon, Ohio/Washington
86	Jerron Cage	DT	6-2	305	Sr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Winton Woods
86	Chris Booker	WR	6-3	193	Sr.	St. Louis, Mo./University of Dayton
87	Reis Stocksdale	WR	5-10	188	Fr.	Morrow, Ohio/Little Miami
88	Jeremy Ruckert	TE	6-5	250	Sr.	Lindenhurst, N.Y./Lindenhurst
89	Zak Herbstreit	TE	6-2	235	Fr.	Nashville, Tenn./Montgomery Bell Academy
90	Jaden McKenzie	DT	6-2	290	So.	Wake Forest, N.C./Wake Forest
91	Tyleik Williams	DT	6-3	315	Fr.	Manassas, Va./Unity Reed
92	Haskell Garrett	DT	6-2	300	5th Sr.	Las Vegas, Nev./Bishop Gorman
93	Jacolbe Cowan	DL	6-4	273	R-Fr.	Charlotte, N.C./Providence Day School
95	Noah Ruggles	K	6-2	190	5th Sr.	Odessa, Fla./University of North Carolina
96	Michael O'Shaughnessy	P	6-3	208	Jr.	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
97	Noah Potter	DE	6-6	275	So.	Mentor, Ohio/Mentor
98	Jake Seibert	K	6-1	205	R-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/La Salle

COACHING STAFF: Ryan Day, head coach; Larry Johnson, associate head coach/defensive line coach; Kerry Coombs, defensive co-ordinator; Al Washington, linebackers coach; Tony Alford, associate head coach for offense/running backs coach; Brian Hartline, wide receivers coach; Greg Studrawa, offensive line coach; Kevin Wilson, offensive coordinator/tight ends coach; Matt Barnes, secondary coach; Mickey Marotti, assistant AD/director of football sports performance; Corey Dennis, quarterbacks coach; Parker Fleming, special teams coordinator; Ricky Brown, quality control coach - special teams; Keenan Bailey, quality control coach - offense; Billy Fessler, graduate assistant - offense; Kennedy Cook, graduate assistant - offense; Joe Bolden, quality control coach - defense; Lorenzo Jackson, graduate assistant - defense; Todd Fitch - offensive analyst; Paul Rhoads - defensive analyst.

2021 Big Ten Schedule

	WEST DIVISION							EAST DIVISION						
	ILLINOIS	IOWA	MINNESOTA	NEBRASKA	N'WESTERN	PURDUE	WISCONSIN	INDIANA	MARYLAND	MICHIGAN	MICHIGAN STATE	OHIO STATE	PENN STATE	RUTGERS
SEPT. 4	NEBRASKA (Aug. 28) UTSA (Sept. 4)	INDIANA	OHIO STATE (Sept. 2)	at Illinois (Aug. 28) FORDHAM (Sept. 4)	MICHIGAN STATE (Sept. 3)	OREGON STATE	PENN STATE	at Iowa	WEST VIRGINIA	WESTERN MICHIGAN	at N'western (Sept. 3)	at Minnesota (Sept. 2)	at Wisconsin	TEMPLE (Sept. 2)
SEPT. 11	at Virginia	at Iowa State	MIAMI (OHIO)	BUFFALO	INDIANA STATE	at UConn	EASTERN MICHIGAN	IDAHO	HOWARD	WASHINGTON	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	OREGON	BALL STATE	at Syracuse
SEPT. 18	MARYLAND (Sept. 17)	KENT STATE	at Colorado	at Oklahoma	at Duke	at Notre Dame		CINCINNATI	at Illinois (Sept. 17)	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	at Miami (Fla.)	TULSA	AUBURN	DELAWARE
SEPT. 25	at Purdue	COLORADO STATE	BOWLING GREEN	at Michigan State	OHIO	ILLINOIS	vs. Notre Dame (at Soldier Field)	at Western Kentucky	KENT STATE	RUTGERS	NEBRASKA	AKRON	VILLANOVA	at Michigan
OCT. 2	CHARLOTTE	at Maryland (Oct. 1)	at Purdue	N'WESTERN	at Nebraska	MINNESOTA	MICHIGAN	at Penn State	IOWA (Oct. 1)	at Wisconsin	WESTERN KENTUCKY	at Rutgers	INDIANA	OHIO STATE
OCT. 9	WISCONSIN	PENN STATE		MICHIGAN			at Illinois		at Ohio State	at Nebraska	at Rutgers	MARYLAND	at Iowa	MICHIGAN STATE
OCT. 16		PURDUE	NEBRASKA	at Minnesota	RUTGERS	at Iowa	ARMY	MICHIGAN STATE			at Indiana			at N'western
OCT. 23	at Penn State		MARYLAND		at Michigan	WISCONSIN	at Purdue	OHIO STATE	at Minnesota	N'WESTERN		at Indiana	ILLINOIS	
OCT. 30	RUTGERS	at Wisconsin	at N'western	PURDUE	MINNESOTA	at Nebraska	IOWA	at Maryland	INDIANA	at Michigan State	MICHIGAN	PENN STATE	at Ohio State	at Illinois
NOV. 6	at Minnesota	at N'western	ILLINOIS	OHIO STATE	IOWA	MICHIGAN STATE	at Rutgers	at Michigan	PENN STATE	INDIANA	at Purdue	at Nebraska	at Maryland	WISCONSIN
NOV. 13		MINNESOTA	at Iowa		at Wisconsin	at Ohio State	N'WESTERN	RUTGERS	at Michigan State	at Penn State	MARYLAND	PURDUE	MICHIGAN	at Indiana
NOV. 20	at Iowa	ILLINOIS	at Indiana	at Wisconsin	PURDUE	vs. N'western (at Soldier Field)	NEBRASKA	MINNESOTA	MICHIGAN	at Maryland	at Ohio State	MICHIGAN STATE	RUTGERS	at Penn State
NOV. 27	N'WESTERN	at Nebraska (Nov. 28)	WISCONSIN	IOWA (Nov. 28)	at Illinois	INDIANA	at Minnesota	at Purdue	at Rutgers	OHIO STATE	PENN STATE	at Michigan State	at Michigan State	MARYLAND
DEC. 4	Big Ten Championship Game - Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis - 8 p.m. ET													

Buckeyes Name Six New Captains

By GRIFFIN STROM
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Not a single one of Ohio State's 2021 captains is a returning face from the seven-man 2020 group.

That could be a cause for concern for head coach Ryan Day, who acknowledged the youth and inexperience of this team at Big Ten Media Days in July, if not for the fact that the last time the Buckeyes turned over their entire list of captains back in 2014, the team won a national championship.

The jury is still out on Ohio State's national title hopes this season, but its new slate of captains is set in stone, with six players making the cut three weeks into preseason camp. Junior wide receiver Kamryn Babb, senior wide receiver Chris Olave, super-senior left tackle Thayer Munford, super-senior defensive tackle Haskell Garrett, junior defensive end Zach Harrison and senior linebacker Teradja Mitchell are all first-time captains for the Buckeyes this season. Here's a closer look at each of them.

Kamryn Babb

Entering his fourth season in the program, Babb's on-field career at Ohio State has been nothing short of snakebit at every turn. The former four-star wideout and top-100 prospect in the class of 2018 has suffered a number of season-ending injuries over the past several years.

However, the nod as team captain appears to be a vote of confidence from coaches and teammates that the St. Louis native is still very much an influential member of the Buckeye program despite

his numerous setbacks.

Babb redshirted each of his first two seasons in Scarlet and Gray due to knee injuries before seeing his first playing time in 2020, logging 32 snaps before season's end.

The Christian Brothers College alum didn't get much of a chance to build on that this offseason before the injury bug struck again though. Babb suffered another injury this spring that is expected to keep him sidelined for at least the start of the 2021 season.

"He's been an unbelievable leader," Day said. "He's set a standard. The hard part for Kam is he really just hasn't spent much time on the field. But his impact has been left already on this program, and I know he wants to leave a legacy, and this is an unbelievable way for him to do that. He could have walked away two or three different times, and he hasn't. He stuck with us. I'm just really happy for him and proud of him for what he's done already in this program."

Haskell Garrett

A returning CBS Sports and PFF All-American, Garrett is a super-senior with a year of experience starting at defensive tackle and one of just two returning starters on Larry Johnson's defensive line in 2021.

After suffering bullet wounds through the face last September, Garrett didn't miss a single game for the Buckeyes in 2020, spearheading a defensive front



Kamryn Babb



Haskell Garrett



Zach Harrison



Teradja Mitchell



Thayer Munford



Chris Olave

that finished sixth in the country with just 97.6 rushing yards allowed per game.

Garrett's two sacks were tied for third best on the Buckeye roster, and his four tackles for loss were more than all but three Ohio State players recorded on the season. Garrett finished with 20 total tackles on the year and also intercepted a pass in the end zone for a touchdown against Michigan State.

The Las Vegas Bishop Gorman product missed the spring with a leg injury but still wound up a preseason 2021 All-American according to a number of outlets, and he landed on watch lists for the Outland and Nagurski trophies as well as the Bednarik Award.

"I feel like he's definitely matured a lot," Harrison said. "I can tell by the way he talks to the room and talks to the unit and talks to the team."

Zach Harrison

Harrison, a former five-star defensive end recruit, is poised for a breakout junior campaign by all accounts, and his emergence as a vocal leader for the Buckeyes this offseason has helped move him into a role as captain.

"It's definitely something I've continued to work on, my leadership skills," Harrison said. "I always have room to improve. Being more vocal as opposed to just being a lead-by-example guy, which I've always kind of been. That's something I'm working on every day."

Listed at 6-6, 272 pounds, the Lewis Center, Ohio, native had a solid freshman season in 2019 with 3½ sacks and 5½ tackles for loss but followed it with just two sacks during the COVID-shortened 2020 season.

Harrison never became the full-time starter that many expected him to be as a sophomore, with Jonathon Cooper and Tyreke Smith seeing most of the first-team reps. But with Cooper gone, Harri-

son will likely rise to the top of the depth chart alongside Smith this year.

Despite his relative statistical shortcomings last season though, Harrison has the highest PFF grade of any returning Power Five defender in college football who logged at least 200 snaps in 2020, with a mark of 88.8.

Teradja Mitchell

On a unit that will see an all-new lineup for the Buckeyes in 2021, Mitchell is a surefire starter at linebacker for Ohio State after waiting his turn behind NFL-caliber linebackers such as Malik Harrison and Pete Werner for the past few years.

Mitchell was a five-star recruit in the class of 2018, and the 247Sports composite rankings had the Virginia Beach, Va., native pegged as the No. 44 overall prospect in the country.

However, instant success and playing time eluded Mitchell for the first three years of his collegiate career, as veterans ate up most of the snaps in the position group. As a result, Mitchell has just 18 total tackles to his credit thus far since joining the Buckeyes, including just six in 2020.

With the departure of Werner, Tuf Borland, Baron Browning and Justin Hilliard from last year's team though – a group that included two captains in Borland and Hilliard – Mitchell has stepped up this offseason to become a much-needed vocal leader for the revamped linebacker room, with a number of coaches raving about his maturation as the team prepares for the 2021 slate.

"He's matured. His preparation, his consistent effort, but obviously he's got to perform, and he's been doing that," linebackers coach Al Washington said. "He's been really working at it. Obviously, he's eager to go out and do what he loves to do, and it's play football. The best thing about football is, when you get on the field, your play speaks for itself."

Thayer Munford

Had he left school following the 2020 season, Munford would have been a sure-fire NFL draft selection. However, the fifth-year Buckeye and Cincinnati native returned for one last run to stake his claim as the top tackle in this class.

With Munford's career-best 2020 campaign serving as a jumping-off point, that pursuit won't be in vain if the former three-star recruit can replicate that level of success in his fourth season as a start-

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: CAPTAINS

er on the Buckeyes' front line, although he may move over to left guard for the first time in 2021 due to the emergence of junior offensive lineman Dawand Jones as a potential starter at right tackle.

"The things that he's done, the growth that he's made, seeing that shows you what kind of a person he is," offensive line coach Greg Studrawa said. "That's why he's such a great player. He'll go in there and be an All-American guard, because that's how he takes things. And he wants more than anything else for this team to win."

Ohio State had the nation's seventh-best total offense last year with Munford anchoring the left side of Studrawa's offensive line, and according to Pro Football Focus, Munford didn't commit a penalty on any of his 512 snaps for the season. In fact, PFF listed Munford as its top tackle in the country heading into 2021, with his 91.8 grade being the highest among all returning players in the country at the position.

Munford enters his fifth year as a pre-season Walter Camp All-American, and he also landed on the Outland Trophy Watch List this offseason.

With starting center Josh Myers and right guard Wyatt Davis – both captains in 2020 – departing the program, Munford is the lone captain on the unit this season, as well as its most experienced performer.

Chris Olave

Perhaps the most established and experienced weapon on the Ohio State offense entering 2021, Olave surprised many with his decision to play a senior season in Columbus, but he might just play his way into becoming an early first-round draft pick as a result.

"I feel like we have unfinished business," Olave said in the spring. "I believe in the quarterback play, I believe in Coach Day, I believe in the program. I wanted to do another year to try to win a national championship."

The California native was Justin Fields' favorite target last season and led the Buckeyes in nearly every receiving statistic. Olave caught 50 passes for 729 yards and seven touchdowns, and that production came in just seven games.

Olave is widely regarded as one of the best wideouts in the country entering 2021, and his name appeared on a slew of preseason All-America lists, as well as watch lists for the Walter Camp Player of the Year and the Biletnikoff and Maxwell awards.

Paired with junior Garrett Wilson, Olave is part of what many expect to be one of the nation's most prolific wide receiver duos, with the only question being whether new starting quarterback C.J. Stroud can deliver the ball with the same



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OSU Beat Predicts Another Playoff Run For 2021

By **WYATT CROSER**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For the second straight season, Buckeye Sports Bulletin has reached out to the writers and reporters from various news publications surrounding the Ohio State beat in order to see what they think will happen for the upcoming season.

In 2020, there was a near unanimous agreement that the Buckeyes were set for an undefeated regular season and a run to the College Football Playoff, though none of those writers could have assumed it was going to be a five-game track to the Big Ten championship.

Last year, 35 total writers, including those at BSB, were taken into account, and this year that number was boosted to 36. This time around, there were also more questions for the beat members to answer, with this questions list given to each person:

- Regular-season record?
- Who are the loss(es) if any?
- Who is the Big Ten champion?
- Does Ohio State make the playoff? If so, at what ranking?
- Who is the national champion?
- Who is the starting quarterback by the end of the season?
- Will that be the same starting quarterback at the start of the 2022 season?
- Who will lead the team in rushing?
- Who will lead the team in receiving?
- Who will be the No. 3 receiver in production?
- Who will lead the team in sacks?
- Who will lead the team in interceptions?
- Which freshman will have the biggest breakout season?
- What will Ohio State's national pass defense be ranked at end of the season?

The new questions mainly surrounded the quarterback position and the secondary, the two biggest talking points of Ohio State's offseason. The quarterback questions were to see if the beat believes that C.J. Stroud, who was named the week one starter, will keep the job both throughout the season and into the 2022 season with a pair of five-star freshmen (Quinn Ewers, Kyle McCord) and Jack Miller battling to take his spot.

The pass defense question asked how much improvement the Buckeyes are expected to make in year two under defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs. The 2020 pass defense ranked No. 122, sixth worst in a 127-team FBS. Now, there are 129 other teams to compete with, but the media expects quite a big jump forward.

When putting together all 36 predictions for the pass defense, the average ranking was at 45.9. The 46th-ranked pass D last year, Fresno State, allowed 217.7 yards through the air, 86.7 yards fewer per game than the Buckeyes.

The beat is also convinced that head coach Ryan Day will lead Ohio State to its third straight playoff berth by winning the Big Ten for the fifth straight time, both of which were unanimous decisions. What was not unanimous, or close to a majority,

was the eventual national champion, which was evenly split between five programs: Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, Ohio State and Oklahoma, with the Crimson Tide getting the slight nod with 10 votes.

Elsewhere in the poll, nearly two-thirds of the writers (23) expect another undefeated regular season, and of the 13 who expect a loss, almost half think it will come in the second game against Oregon.

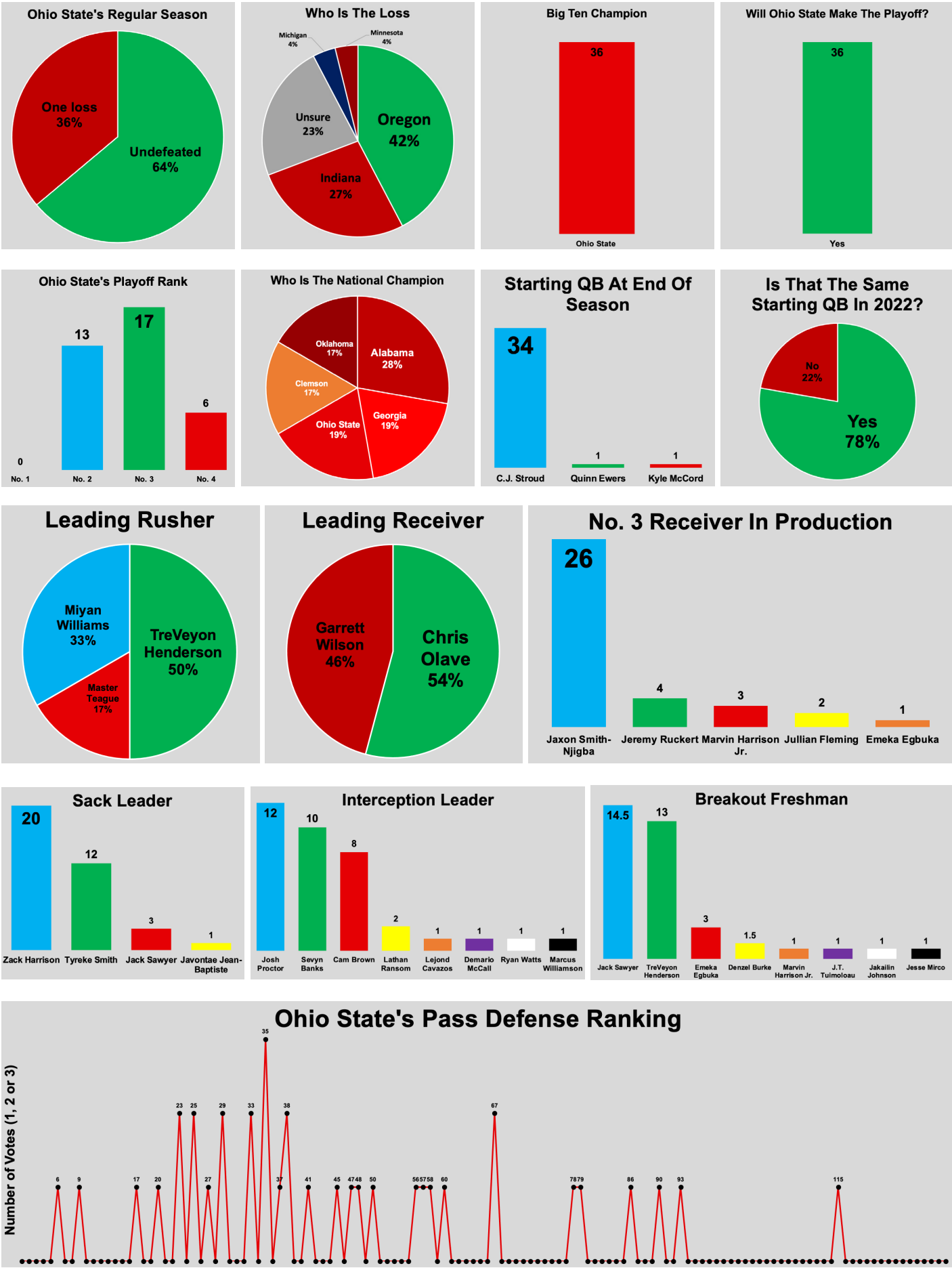
Going position by position, the beat

thinks that true freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson will break through and lead the team on the ground, while it is a near toss-up whether Chris Olave or Garrett Wilson leads the Buckeyes through the air, though the beat is pretty confident Jaxon Smith-Njigba will be trailing behind in third.

Junior defensive end Zach Harrison holds the edge for the projected sack leader over senior DE Tyreke Smith, and it is

pretty much anyone's guess who will lead the team in interceptions, though the veteran group of Josh Proctor, Sevn Banks and Cam Brown earned the bulk of the votes.

For a more in-depth look at each individual vote for the poll, go to [BuckeyeSports.com](#) for the online version of the story.





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Elevating The Brand: How OSU’s Recruiting Evolved

By GRIFFIN STROM
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

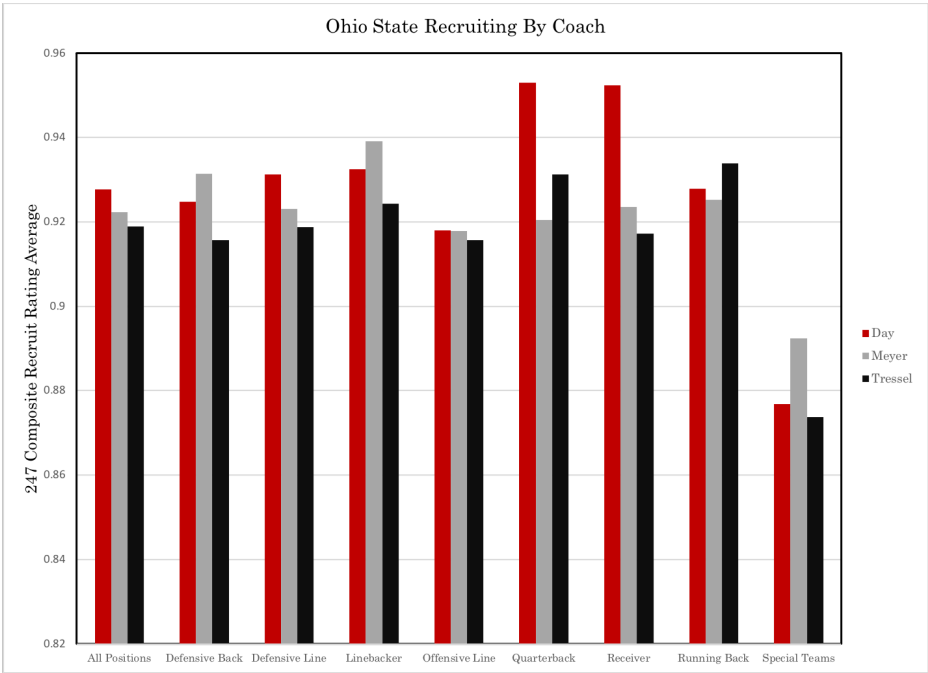
Seven Big Ten titles, six top-10 finishes in the AP top 25 poll and a combined winning percentage of .722 are all indicators that the Ohio State football program was nothing to scoff at under head coaches Earle Bruce and John Cooper from 1979 through 2000.

On the other hand, the Buckeyes won no national championships, went 8-11 in bowl games and held a record of just 7-14-1 against archival Michigan during an era that spanned more than two decades – a far cry from the accolades accrued by Woody Hayes in the 28 seasons prior.

Upon taking over the program in 2001, Jim Tressel made a key change in recruiting strategy that helped bolster Ohio State’s status as a legitimate perennial national championship contender. Further alterations to the program’s recruiting philosophy brought in by Urban Meyer and Ryan Day – although vastly different from Tressel’s own – have only raised the bar in Columbus, keeping the Buckeyes securely among a handful of the nation’s top teams while pulling in many of the most highly touted high school prospects in program history.

“The Ohio State brand was elevated from where it was under Cooper and, before him, Earle Bruce,” Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. “Earle was known as ‘9-3 Earle,’ and Coop never won a national title, and there were all those losses to Michigan. I just think the Ohio State brand really suffered. They were still a great program under Bruce and Cooper, but they weren’t where they are now. Where now, you can argue they’re no worse than the No. 3 program in America. It’s probably ‘Bama, Clemson, Ohio State. It wasn’t that way in the ‘80s and ‘90s. There’s no way you would have had Ohio State as the No. 2 or the No. 3.”

By the end of Tressel’s second season with the program, the Mentor, Ohio, native had already accomplished something that neither



BSB graphic

DIFFERENT STROKES - Jim Tressel, Urban Meyer and Ryan Day are strong in different areas of recruiting, but all found success on the trail

of his predecessors had done in bringing a national championship home to Columbus.

Why the sudden change? One contributing factor came on the recruiting side, where Tressel made a conscious effort to focus resources on in-state battles for prospects whom Cooper and company had been losing to competitors all too regularly.

“The main change was when Tressel took over for John Cooper, there was a thought then that Ohio was not keeping the Ohio kids home,” Greene said. “Michigan was doing a great job recruiting the state of Ohio then. And they were coming in and battling for the top kids in Ohio, which they don’t even do now, and they were winning a lot of those battles. So Tressel’s emphasis was, and the phrase that was coined was, that they were going to keep a fence around Ohio. That became his priority. And the strategy became, early on, they wanted to lock up the top 10, 12, 15 (Ohio recruits) – depending on how

strong the class was.”

Greene said Tressel believed in building his teams with in-state talent who grew up dreaming of playing for the Buckeyes, and the “fence around Ohio” approach was clearly paying off in spades for the new Ohio State head coach early on.

The true freshman class that helped the Buckeyes win the national title in 2002 included running back Maurice Clarett, linebackers Bobby Carpenter and A.J. Hawk, offensive lineman Nick Mangold, quarterback Troy Smith and wide receiver Roy Hall – just to name a few – with all of them hailing from the Buckeye state.

But the national title win did help Tressel expand his recruiting outreach, even if he never truly wavered in his Ohio-centric approach. At the end of the 2007 season, Ohio State had appeared in three BCS National Championship Games in six seasons, which undoubtedly played a role in helping Tressel land a 6-6, multitaled quarterback out of Pennsylvania who still ranks as the second highest-rated recruit in program history, according to 247Sports.

“The brand got elevated by Tress, and he still wanted those Ohio kids, but now he was able to go get Terrelle Pryor and guys like that to look at Ohio State,” Greene said. “He still built the team on the Ohio kids, but he was able to branch out and get a better-quality athlete once the Ohio State brand got elevated.”

The national recruiting arm brought to Ohio State under Meyer went far past that of Tressel, but that doesn’t mean he got the better of his predecessor in terms of average 247Sports composite recruiting ranking at every position.

In fact, The Senator still has the edge on both Meyer and Day when it comes to the average rating of his running back commits from 2001 through ’11. Greene said the obvious changes in the way that the sport is played nowadays provide one explanation, but also that Ohio simply happened to produce can’t-miss talent at running back during the Tressel era.

“The game was definitely played differently then, but you also had a couple generation-

al talents come through that wanted to play for Ohio State,” Greene said. “Maurice Clarett, Beanie Wells – we just haven’t seen guys like that in Ohio since then. I think if there was a Beanie Wells today, Ryan Day would recruit him in a second. Plus the game was different then. You definitely would load up and take two, three running backs every year. It’s just the way the game was played. But I just think that Ohio hasn’t had those type of impact running backs like that, I mean guys that are first-round draft pick types.”

As mentioned before though, the entrance of Meyer into the program in 2012 ushered in an era of nationwide recruiting excellence that would have made his predecessors blush.

While Tressel’s impressive 2002 class included 18 Ohio natives, Meyer’s heralded 2018 class (No. 2 in the country) featured just five in-state prospects.

“(Tressel) would take the three-star linebacker that he thought had a chance to be really good, where Urban wasn’t going to take a kid like that,” Greene said. “It just wasn’t going to happen. I’m actually surprised that every single position group wasn’t higher under Urban, really, with the way his philosophy is.”

Of Ohio State’s top 20 highest-rated all-time recruits, just six came from the pre-Meyer era, and only seven hailed from the state of Ohio. Just a few highlights on Meyer’s résumé, as far as all-time recruits are concerned, are Pittsburgh defensive end Noah Spence (2012), Florida defensive end Nick Bosa (2016), Florida offensive lineman Nicholas Petit-Frere (2018), Maryland defensive end Chase Young (2017) and Texas cornerback Jeff Okudah (2017).

“Forget the border, forget protecting Ohio,” Greene said of Meyer’s recruiting strategy. “If the Ohio kid was the best linebacker on the board, then take the Ohio kid. If the Florida kid was better than the Ohio kid, then they’re not taking that Ohio kid. They want the absolute best talent, most talented player they can get. It’s a direct opposite of the Tressel way. The Tressel way was more building a team of Ohio guys, where Urban was more like collecting baseball cards and trying to get the very best player at each position. I think both strategies were successful.”

Aside from Meyer’s pre-established pedigree as a multi-time national championship-winning head coach at Florida, Greene said the addition of Mark Pantoni to the program in the role of player personnel director, in conjunction with the rise of social media, has had an unmistakable impact on expanding Ohio State’s recruiting reach.

“That was a position that we had never heard of before,” Greene explained. “Personnel guy in college? There was no such thing. I think Mark Pantoni has brought so much to Ohio State recruiting. He’s the best in the country in his field, and a lot of people don’t know what he does or his importance, but people that are involved in recruiting know. He’s the one that really was responsible for elevating the brand, and he did it great. And then Ohio State’s social media presence, they’re so good at it, and I think they kind of took that lead from him.”

There’s no doubt that Day’s task, with the luxury of having Pantoni by his side, has been to maintain the Buckeye recruiting system Meyer built, rather than retool it.

However, some things have changed un-



FOOTBALL PREVIEW: RECRUITING DATA

der Day. At the quarterback and wide receiver positions, the former NFL quarterbacks coach has helped bring in higher-caliber recruits on average than either Tressel or Meyer so far.

Although Day's work is a much smaller sample size, Greene attributed Day's ability to bring in five-star talents such as Quinn Ewers and Kyle McCord to the pass-happy system he helped install back in 2017 and the shift away from a Meyer offense that relied heavily on the quarterback run.

"When Ryan Day comes in, now a kid can realistically look and say, 'If I play there, if I start a year or two – or maybe one year, like Haskins – I can be a first-round draft pick,'" Greene said. "They didn't want to be Tristen

Wallace or Danny Clark or Matthew Baldwin and those guys. They want to be Justin Fields; they want to be Dwayne Haskins. That's the whole thing. Ryan Day bringing the NFL offense to Ohio State, you're going to get NFL-aspiring quarterbacks."

The proliferation of top-level quarterback recruits has gone hand-in-hand with the embarrassment of riches that wide receivers coach Brian Hartline has been able to rake in over the past few years, with five-star prospects Garrett Wilson, Julian Fleming, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Emeka Egbuka all joining the program in a two-year stretch.

BuckeyeGrove recruiting analyst Joseph Hastings said as long as Day and company can continue their torrid recruiting pace at

one of those positions, the other will likely follow suit.

"It's kind of a case of, which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Hastings said. "What a lot of wide receivers tell me is they want to go play with guys like Kyle McCord, C.J. Stroud, Quinn Ewers. And then what a lot of quarterbacks tell me is they want to throw to guys like Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Chris Olave, Emeka Egbuka. They're both very complementary positions, and when one's being recruited well, the other's being recruited just as well, if not better."

Hastings said that with recruiting resources being expended more toward the aforementioned positions, the Buckeyes are just fine settling for three- and four-star talents at tight end – a unit that has scarcely seen the ball in the passing game in recent Ohio State history.

Even with five-star players such as Petit-Frere, Harry Miller and Paris Johnson Jr. on the Buckeye offensive line, recruits in that group are among the lowest-rated for both

Meyer and Day, with the latter having only a slight edge in average recruit ranking.

Hastings said one reason for the slight drop-off up front in comparison to other position groups could be the polarizing coaching style of offensive line coach Greg Studrawa,

whose "old-school, tough mentality" is either a big hit or a turn-off with recruits, depending on their personality.

Still, Day's class of 2021 alone produced three of the top five highest-rated recruits in Ohio State history, with freshmen defensive ends J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer coming in at No. 4 and No. 5, respectively, and Ewers overtaking

Pryor for the No. 1 overall spot.

Heading into his third year as head coach at Ohio State, Day has yet to equal Tressel and Meyer with a national championship of his own. With the momentum he has built on the recruiting trail though, and particularly in the passing game, it may not be long before he gets the brass ring.



Ryan Day



STAYING HOME – Jim Tressel made Ohio a focus after John Cooper struggled in the Buckeye State.



EXPANSION ERA – Urban Meyer took Ohio State's recruiting on the road, hitting Texas and Florida hard for top talent.



DON'T FIX IT – Ryan Day hasn't strayed far from Meyer's template, though he has shifted away from Florida, looking closer instead at states such as North Carolina and Washington.

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Stroud Answers Call For Starting QB Job

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

The anticipation had been building as the contestants vied for the coveted spot, which is considered a life-changing opportunity. It's not easy replacing a respected and well-liked star, but those hardy few who ventured into the fray knew the reward would be worth it.

Finally, around mid-August there was word that a decision had been rendered, one that could be debated for years by the fanatics.

Yes, it was true. Mike Richards was named to succeed the late Alex Trebek as the nighttime host of "Jeopardy!" and actress Mayim Bialik was tabbed to host prime-time tournaments, although Richards resigned nine days after the Aug. 11 announcement because of inflammatory remarks he made on a podcast.

Wait. That's not what you were expecting?

Oh, the other big decision. Well, the definitive answer as to the signal caller for Ohio State in the Sept. 2 season opener at Minnesota arrived on the third Saturday in August, and the correct response in true Jeopardy! form was "Who is C.J. Stroud?"

Five days after coach Ryan Day declared that redshirt freshman C.J. Stroud had moved ahead of his competitors, he made it official at a morning press conference on Aug. 21.

"I thought over the body of work between the spring and also through the preseason," Day said, "he separated himself with his decision-making, his leadership skills and his accuracy. Now we've got to prepare him to play a game.

"I think he knows that this is an opportunity. It's not an accomplishment – it's an opportunity."

Day did not name a backup.

Just as taking over for Trebek is a hard act to follow, replacing Justin Fields, now of the Chicago Bears, is an epic challenge. In his two seasons at OSU, Fields guided the Buckeyes to the College Football Playoff twice, including the title game vs. Alabama last season. He threw for 63 touchdowns against nine interceptions and exuded a toughness that carried Ohio State to a semi-final win over Clemson last season.

Stroud had to overcome another obstacle, namely the abundance of talent in the QB room, albeit none of them has thrown a collegiate pass.

Stroud (6-3, 218), from Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., and Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral product Jack Miller (6-3, 215) were 2020 four-star recruits. Freshman Kyle McCord (6-3, 215) was a 2021 five-star prospect from Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep.

And there's more. The Buckeyes were surprised when Quinn Ewers (6-2, 200), the top-ranked player in the 2022 class, opted to forgo his senior season at Southlake Carroll in suburban Dallas to enroll at Ohio State in

Projected Starter

Quarterback
7 • C.J. Stroud

6-3 • 218 • R-Fr.
Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.

Played briefly in three games in relief of Justin Fields last season. Did not throw a pass but had a 48-yard TD run vs. Michigan State.

the middle of August after camp had started.

"It's a very rare situation, and that's what you come to Ohio State for," Miller said. "At the end of the day, you come here to compete and be in the room with the best guys in the country. And now we're doing it."

It's Day's job to handle his young group, knowing that the rapid evolution of NCAA transfer bylaws makes it easier for backups to take their talents elsewhere without losing eligibility.

It's also true that with the recently enacted name, image and likeness (NIL) legislation, players could literally lose tens of thousands of dollars in product endorsements if they're not on the field. Buckeye fans might want to take a good long look at the four QBs now because it's likely at least one and probably two won't be hanging around for next season.

"I'm not resigning myself to that, but knowing that that may happen, that's kind of the way it goes," Day said. "It's almost like now it's like free agency in the NFL. Guys can go different places, and I guess you can worry about it, stress about it or you can just embrace it and try to do the best you can to manage it."

Stroud was the preseason favorite to win the starting job based on last season's order for the rare occasions Fields left the game. Stroud was first off the bench and appeared in three games. He had a late 48-yard touchdown run against Michigan State.

He also replaced an injured Fields for one snap against Clemson, a sure sign that he was ahead of Miller on the depth chart.

Stroud said he and the other quarterbacks know what's at stake but that doesn't interfere with their friendships.

"We compete as brothers, and we understand that we all want the same goal," he said. "But there's not any aspect that we hate each other. We're all brothers. We all love each other. It's just the culture of 'fight' and the culture of Ohio State. Our structure is just competition."

Miller played against Nebraska and Michigan State and had a 21-yard TD run vs. the Cornhuskers in his debut.

"I'm working on improving and being the best I can be," he said. "You need a level of competitiveness, but at the same time, that is your teammate and you have to treat him like that."

"It's important to stay hungry every single day. Camp is pretty long, so everybody is going to know if you're going out there and



JOSH WINSLOW

LOCKED UP – C.J. Stroud has been the leader in the clubhouse for the quarterback job since the spring.

don't actually want it."

Miller watched Fields with amazement.

"Watching him every single day, he comes with the same energy, the same mind-set, the same approach to practice – no matter if it's a walk-through or a Tuesday full-padded practice," Miller said. "He's coming to get better every day, and you can just sense it. It was really impressive for me to see because I've never seen anything like that."

McCord was glad he enrolled in January because it took some time to learn the nuances of Day's system.

"Around practice 11, 12, I started hitting my stride and started getting comfortable and then I felt like I did pretty good in the spring game too," McCord said.

He was 12 of 17 for 184 yards and two touchdowns in the intrasquad game in Ohio Stadium on April 17.

"I feel like just taking care of what I can take care of – being a leader and controlling all the things that take no talent, being on time, being accountable and things like that – I think are definitely some of the areas I'm trying to focus in on," McCord said. "Then just getting to a point where I know the playbook like the back of my hand and I can just let my talent speak for itself."

Stroud in the spring game was 16 for 22 for 185 yards and two TDs. Miller was 17 of 30 for 128 yards but had a glaring interception on his first drive.

At that point, Ewers was still in Texas eyeing his senior season. But, being in high school and unable to earn income through NIL was a factor in his decision to head north. He has since inked a deal with a Texas-based kombucha company.

In two seasons at Southlake Carroll, he completed 70 percent of his passes for 6,445 yards, 73 touchdowns and eight interceptions.

Ewers was the highest ranked quarterback since Vince Young in the 2002 class.

"It's a very unique situation for sure," Day said of Ewers' early arrival. "But we're excited to have him here. He's got tremendous talent. His family are awesome people. He's about the right things. We saw him at an early age, kept recruiting him and built that relationship. And we're obviously very excited that he's a Buckeye."

Although all the quarterbacks lack experience, they are fortunate to be surrounded by veterans on offense, including what could be the best receiving corps in college football beginning with potential 2022 NFL

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: QUARTERBACKS

first-round picks Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson.

"I have 100 percent confidence (in the quarterbacks)," Wilson said.

McCord is building that trust in a unique way. Since his January arrival, he has been rooming with freshman receivers Jayden Ballard, Emeka Egbuka and Marvin Harrison Jr., a teammate at St. Joseph's Prep.

"It's awesome living with them," McCord said. "We pretty much come back to the facility every single day and get extra work in throwing together, just getting that chemistry down. We're all in it together at the end of the day. I might play a different position than them, but we're still learning the same offense.

"I get the details of a receiver, where they're breaking their route and what their landmark is. Then I can tell them what I'm thinking, what my read is. Having that relationship on the field is huge."

With a strong group of receivers and a promising backfield, the Buckeyes appear ready for another big season on offense.

"It could be really good," offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson said. "There's some playmakers outside, and it'll be interesting to see if there's a running game that can take off. If we can have balance and run the ball, that 'car' is going to be shiny and we'll see where that goes."

As the days grew closer to the opener, quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis preached to his pupils not to get caught up in the competition.

"The quarterback position in general is about reps. The more the better," Dennis said. "With that, when a guy gets an opportunity, he needs to maximize. That's where we are now. When you get the opportunity to get reps, you need to take full advantage."

Stroud is striving to be at his best every snap.

"Anything in life, to be successful, you have to be consistent at it," Stroud said. "We have a saying in the room: 'You're not allowed to have a bad day.' So, not having any bad days is honestly how you get the job done."

Day is proud that his quarterbacks are concentrating on team goals, not their own.

"I feel very good, when you think about the talent that we have in that room and the work that these guys have put in and where we're at right now," he said. "I'll feel a lot better after we get done with the first game. There's a lot of work to be done until then, but I'm very excited about the talent level in that entire room and the work ethic that's been shown."

"When you think about it right now, it's a long journey all the way to January of next year. That's the focus for these guys – it's to realize that for us to win championships and get to where we need to get to, the quarterback room has to be strong and they have to pull for each other."

Day made it clear that the backups to Stroud need to practice like they are the No. 1 quarterback.

"My experience is we're going to need

everybody," the coach said. "One thing is for sure: There's going to be one starter in terms of that first play against Minnesota, and then at that point, we see where it goes. The last time we won a national championship out here, it took several guys to go win it and I know that's probably going to be the case again this year."

The Buckeyes also have senior Jagger LaRoe (6-3, 225) and junior J.P. Andrade (6-2, 210) on the QB depth chart.



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C / M

THURSDAY // 7:10

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Loaded Running Backs To Compete For Carries

By **CHASE BROWN**
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State running back unit would be the most intriguing offensive position if the team didn't require a quarterback competition this fall. Tony Alford's crowded running backs room contains five scholarship players – none of whom will be a traditional bell cow, meaning each player will compete for carries and touches.

"It's a good problem to have," Alford said. "First of all, it's not a problem."

Master Teague III returns as the most experienced running back on the roster. Miyan Williams and Marcus Crowley also come back to Ohio State this season, albeit with less experience than Teague. The Buckeyes also added former Hopewell, Va., five-star TreVeyon Henderson and Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star Evan Pryor to the mix.

"The running back room is as talented and as deep as it has been in a while," head coach Ryan Day said. "We're excited about that. They're going to get out there and compete. Since I've been here, it's certainly the most depth we've had at that position. Tony Alford has done a good job of building depth there, recruiting to that room, and all those guys have great attitudes when they're out there."

Teague leads the running backs room in snaps, carries, yards and touchdowns. In three seasons for the Buckeyes, the 5-11,

Projected Starter

Tailback
28 • Miyan Williams

5-8 • 225 • R-Fr.
Cincinnati, Ohio

Williams came on strong at the end of his freshman campaign, earning playing time in both of Ohio State's playoff games and breaking off a 15-yard run against Clemson.

225-pound Teague averaged 5.5 yards per rushing attempt. Last year, he split time with Trey Sermon as the primary running back, carrying the football 104 times for 514 yards and eight touchdowns and earning second-team All-Big Ten honors.

Still, Teague isn't guaranteed to be the starting running back this season. He understands his teammates possess the talent to lead the backfield. Teague feels the urgency to compete at a high level, but he also welcomes the competition.

"It's great competition," Teague said. "They keep me on my toes. That's great teammates making each other better, and that's all you could ask for. I know it's not going to be easy. Nothing's going to be handed to me, so I'm going to have to earn everything I get. I appreciate the competition."

Teague spent the offseason working on his body and his craft. He packed on more muscle and became more explosive by investing time in the weight room. But Teague

said his most significant step came in remaining healthy for training camp.

The Murfreesboro, Tenn., native suffered a torn Achilles tendon at the beginning of spring camp last year. He also battled through other nagging injuries throughout the 2020 season that kept him from participating with the team.

"This summer, I think, is a big accomplishment being intentional about taking care of my body, recovering and hydrating," Teague said. "I'm doing everything I can to be available and work on things I need to work on and improve on."

Teague also studied his film to learn when to shift gears as a runner and move in more than one direction.

"I missed some cuts this past year, so I have to make sure my eyes are in the right place and reading the defensive line right," Teague said. "I have a better sense of the field, the whole field, and I think that's going to help me."

Williams (5-8, 225) emerged last season in the College Football Playoff semifinal against Clemson. With Teague unable to play in the game due to an unspecified injury, Sermon carried the football 31 times. When Sermon needed a break, Williams entered the contest. He touched the ball only three times, but he made his presence felt, taking one carry 15 yards and powering over Clemson defensive back Nolan Turner.

Day said the run impressed him, and he's appreciated Williams' determination to continue improving his body and technical skills in the offseason. He's affected the team beyond one defining play, Day said.

"Miyan has worked really hard," he said of Williams. "If you look at his body right now, it's hard. He looks strong out there. He's worked really hard in the weight room. He had an opportunity last year, and he did a good job with a couple of runs, certainly the big run against Clemson, but we'll still wait and see how it goes."

"I thought his pass protection in the spring was excellent. He has to keep building on that. For a guy who was a little under the radar coming in, he's made a big impact."

Crowley (6-1, 216) started to hit his stride in the ninth game of the 2019 season. His freshman year came to an unfortunate end after he suffered a torn ACL. Before his injury, Crowley carried the football 25 times for 235 yards. He rehabilitated his knee the following offseason, experiencing a pandemic and abnormal training camps during the process.

In Crowley's first game action since recovering, the Ohio State coaches called on him to take snaps during the national championship game against Alabama. He didn't have a statistically impressive performance, but the carries went a long way in setting up Crowley for his redshirt sophomore season.

"I feel good for this upcoming season," Crowley said in March. "I feel like I've made a lot of improvements since my freshman year, even after my injury, but we're going to see here soon."

Henderson (5-10, 215) arrives at Ohio State as the No. 1 running back in the 2021 recruiting class according to 247Sports' composite rankings. Henderson is a superior athlete with a next-level speed that

flashed on tape. As a junior – his only season as his high school team's primary ball carrier – he rushed for 2,424 yards and 45 touchdowns.

Ohio State could look for Henderson to immediately impact the offense, utilizing his quickness in various packages. Henderson said he would do whatever he can to make it on the field this season.

"I've got a lot of expectations for myself," Henderson said. "I don't want to put that out there, but I've got big expectations for myself."

Alford sets high standards for his unit, but he isn't setting any benchmarks for Henderson to clear. He said the freshman running back would achieve his goals if he focuses on himself and maximizes his opportunities.

"I don't want to put those expectations out like that," Alford said. "The expectation for TreVeyon and Master and Marcus and Miyan is the same as it is for Mike Hall – to be the best version of them that they can be every single day and to try and help this football team be as successful as it can be every single day."

"But to put some outside influences and pressures on them, I just don't think that's fair. But I think you can get what you want – again, and it goes back to being the best version of yourself – that's going to be good enough."

Henderson can, at times, overshadow his freshman counterpart Pryor at Ohio State, but that is more because of praise for the former rather than shortcomings of the latter. Pryor might not have put up the numbers that Henderson did while in high school, but he still became a top recruiting target for the nation's best football programs.

Pryor (5-10, 198) is the second-highest ranked recruit of all five running backs in the room. He is a powerful runner who can make a significant impact as a pass-catcher out of the backfield, which helps him stand out as a candidate for touches in the future.

Day said that he and Alford will watch the players intently in the closing practices of fall camp. He enjoys watching five talented players work hard to have an impact on their team, he said.

"It's fun to watch them compete," Day said. "It's hard to tell how the running back is always doing, certainly with no pads on but even with pads on if it's not a tackle situation. Sometimes it's difficult to tell, but we'll have some tackle situations in the preseason because we have to, and I think at that point we'll have a better idea about some of those younger guys."

Alford can say the same about the process. He looks forward to seeing the players earn their spots on the depth chart, but he isn't concerned with how many opportunities the five running backs receive. Alford only cares about increasing the number in the left column.

"Whatever it takes to win games, that's what we're going to do," Alford said. "We're not into making guys happy. This isn't a happy camp. Like I said, we're going to do whatever it takes to win. We haven't solidified exactly how that will go as far as rep counts and things like that. That will play itself out."

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Ruckert Alone Atop Tight End Room

By **WYATT CROSHER**
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The past three years of Ohio State's tight end room were dominated by the same group of names: Rashod Berry, Jake Hausmann, Luke Farrell and Jeremy Ruckert. Berry's time with the team ended after the 2019 season, and now heading into 2021, only Ruckert remains from what had been the most experienced position on the Buckeyes' roster.

But Ruckert (6-5, 250) wasn't a lock to be returning for Ohio State this season. The former four-star prospect had a résumé that already ranked as a top-three tight end if he were to have entered the 2021 NFL draft, according to The Athletic's Dane Brugler. But that decision became easier once the Buckeyes' season was over.

And it was the way the season ended – a demoralizing 52-24 loss to Alabama in the national title game – that made Ruckert decide to return for his senior year.

"There were thoughts about (going pro), definitely," Ruckert said. "I wanted to feel it out, and I didn't want to make a decision too soon. After that game, I knew there would be chances to go to the next level.

"But after that game and knowing what I can give to this team and this university, I kind of had my mind set on coming back. I set my mind on becoming the most complete tight end I could be."

Ruckert finished his third year at Ohio State with 13 catches for 151 yards, totals that were third and fourth on the team, respectively. The tight end knows those numbers don't pop off the page, but he also knows that he found the end zone on five of those catches. That was a total that was just a touchdown back of wide receiver Garrett Wilson's six last year, despite having 30 fewer receptions and 572 fewer yards.

He also knows that the tight end position is more than just about the stat line that goes down in the box score.

"I don't have that many catches," Ruckert said. "But when I do, something good usually happens, and I take pride in that. Any single thing you can do can impact your whole season. I play every play like it's going to be my last and the season is on the line. We take that personal. That's how we're trained, and that's how we're coached."

For his collegiate career, Ruckert is now at 28 receptions for 306 yards and nine touchdowns. Those numbers might feel low for a prospect who was ranked as the second-best tight end and No. 37 overall in the 2018 class.

But Ruckert said that he is still happy that he came to Ohio State, as it has allowed him to become a better all-around player at the tight end position. And despite his improvements, Ruckert said he still has places in his game to continue to develop.

"I could have gone somewhere else (out of high school) and maybe stayed at 225 pounds and been more of a receiving tight end," Ruckert said. "But coming to Ohio State, they test you physically and mentally and emotionally every single day. They make you a better man, a better player, and I think I am the most complete player I could be right now.

"There is still room to improve, and I

Projected Starter

Tight End

88 • Jeremy Ruckert

6-5 • 250 • Senior

Lindhurst, N.Y.

Finished the 2020 season with 13 receptions for 151 yards and five touchdowns, two of which came in the playoff win over Clemson.

know that. I'm working toward that. I don't regret anything. I am proud to play at Ohio State and that helped make me the man I am right now."

Although Ruckert has become the clear No. 1, the departures of multiple veterans have left a void in experience behind him, with no clear answer for the backup spot. Two of the players competing for the second-string position have never taken a snap at the college level. Two others came to Ohio State playing different positions entirely.

Those two – Gee Scott Jr. and Cade Stover – have been at the front of the talks as far as who will come in for Ruckert, or along with Ruckert if the Buckeyes use two-tight-end sets. Stover, who came over to the room after previously playing defensive end, has an extra year of experience at the position over Scott, who swapped from wide receiver this offseason.

But offensive coordinator and tight end coach Kevin Wilson likes what he has seen from both Scott and Stover. And while both are still developing the nuances of a difficult position, he thinks their backgrounds at different positions can be a benefit more than a downside.

"Gee hasn't done a lot of blocking, or Cade, having played (defensive end), but they played a lot of football, so they understand concepts and they understand defenses. In some ways, they're very, very smart," Wilson said. "It's a challenging position. It takes a lot of time. It's a developmental position. We're still a developmental program, but it's one of the hardest positions to develop. But our guys embrace it and those kids, they're going to be some good players."

Head coach Ryan Day said he's been impressed by what he's seen from Stover at practice but that he was not helped out by the lack of offseason last year due to COVID-19.

"He worked really hard this past year, but he's like a lot of these guys that didn't have a spring last spring, didn't have much of a pre-season," Day said. "Then, he played behind Luke and Ruck last year, so he didn't get a lot of game experience."

Stover indeed did not get much in-game experience. He saw very limited action – five snaps – at tight end in 2020, but it is a starting point that could help him get on the field much more this upcoming season.

The 6-4, 255-pound Stover said that, after bouncing around at a few spots on the defense to start his time with the Buckeyes, he feels comfortable at tight end and has the capabilities required to excel at the position.

"Sometimes people say versatility can get you in trouble because you get pulled around different positions," Stover said. "I think I found my home here, and I'm happy to be here. I'm comfortable with the ball in my hands and in space. Just like high school,

running back days, I feel good with the ball in my hands."

Scott came to Ohio State as a four-star receiver prospect alongside three other top-100 receiver commits in Mookie Cooper, Julian Fleming and Jaxon Smith-Njigba. While Cooper departed to Missouri, Scott instead looked for a change in position instead of a change in location.

The reason for the change, according to Scott, was because of his potential down the line as a tight end for the Buckeyes.

"If I was here to think small picture, I'd be like 'Why in the world would I want to be a tight end? Why would I want to play tight end at The Ohio State?' " Scott said. "I'm looking at the big picture and who I can be in the future."

From there, Scott's size (6-3, 225) and strength have helped prove himself as a player worth developing at the position.

"If we put a bench down and he started benching, he'll be maybe the strongest tight end we've got," Wilson said.

Because the position switch has come so recently, Scott may not see significant playing time this upcoming season. But he is prepared to sit back and learn from the other players in the room, and said he wants to take the best parts of their respective crafts and put them into his own.

"I think I definitely take parts of everybody's game in the tight end room and I apply it to myself," Scott said. "I'm taking Jeremy's route-running ability, Cade Stover's blocking ability, I'm taking all of these different pieces and I'm trying to apply it to my own game coming in as a new guy. And all of this going toward being the best player I can be."

Scott said he has truly enjoyed the blocking aspect of the tight end position but also made sure to note that he has the capability to still be a receiving threat. He also said that it doesn't matter what Ohio State's previous mentality is with throwing – or not throwing – to the tight end if he can be enough of a vertical threat once he does hit the field.

"I hear a lot of people say that the tight end position here doesn't really get the ball too much. But my answer to that is why not?" Scott said. "Why can't that change? And why can't we install different things into the offense to make that be different?"

Scott and Stover will not be alone in the backup competition. Redshirt freshman Joe Royer (6-5, 245) also developed behind the scenes last year and should see some actual in-game reps in order to prove himself worthy of the spot. A true freshman, Sam Hart, comes in bringing the same measurements (6-5, 245) and potential capabilities.

There are also a pair of veterans in Corey Rau (6-4, 250) and Mitch Rossi (6-1, 245) that could also find a role in the offense, specifically as a block-first tight end. Rossi did exactly that in 2020, earning 32 snaps, many of which came in lopsided wins over Michigan State, Nebraska and Rutgers.

A pair of walk-ons in sophomore Patrick Gurd (6-4, 245), whose father, Andy, was an OSU linebacker from 1987-91, and freshman Zak Herbstreit (6-2, 235), the son of former Ohio State quarterback Kirk Herbstreit, bring more depth to a tight end room that has one clear-cut star and a variety of options for who will back him up.

The door is open for anyone to become Ruckert's successor, but Day has seen promise so far at the position this offseason. But he is still searching for the name who will be the replacement for everything that Farrell – who was taken in the fifth round of the NFL draft – brought to the offense.

"We have a couple of different body types there (at tight end)," Day said. "Cade Stover was recognized as an iron Buckeye (for his work in the weight room) here, which is huge. We had a bunch of guys who did, but it was significant that he did because he had a really good summer. We need him to replace Luke. That's really what we're looking for.

"We have Mitch Rossi, who is really talented. He can do a few more things in the backfield, move around a little bit. We have Gee Scott Jr., who has made the move inside. He's learning the position. And then we have a couple young guys, Sam Hart and Joe Royer, who need to really come on now. It's a group of guys where we want to see who takes the next step to replace Luke. Is it going to look exactly like that when we play the first game? I don't know. I'm excited to see. I'm excited about the growth of those guys, and I think they can help us."

But the big question every season seems the same for Ohio State: Will the tight end be used more in the passing attack?

With Ruckert alone at the top, the question only burns hotter. But not for the man himself, who is only worried about doing everything in his power to win football games and, ultimately, the national title.

"I'd rather put a big ring on my finger than have 20 touchdowns," he said. "That's what we're working for. If they need me to do it, I'm willing. I think I am able. Really, this year I came back for one reason and that's just to do everything I can – making catches, making blocks or even playing on special teams – to get back where we were last year and have a different outcome."

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Olave, Wilson Highlight Deep WR Room

By **WYATT CROSHER**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Throughout the 2020 season, the general consensus was that Ohio State was getting its last season with Chris Olave, a junior and former three-star who blossomed into the team's most productive receiver each of the past two seasons.

Olave even got his revenge from the 2019 campaign, righting his wrongs in the College Football Playoff against Clemson with a dominant performance in the 2020 semifinal: six receptions for 132 yards and two touchdowns.

But after that 49-28 victory over the Tigers, Ohio State could not follow it up with the same level of performance, falling to top-ranked Alabama by 28 points to miss out on a national championship. That game, where the third-year receiver still brought in eight catches for 69 yards, was enough for Olave to make a surprise decision and return for his senior season.

"I wasn't really decided before the game, and then when we got blown out, that really caught my eye and made me think a lot," Olave said. "I only had a week to decide. So I talked to my coaches and talked to my family, and I felt like it was the best decision for me to come back."

That decision brought 111 career receptions, 1,775 receiving yards and 22 touchdowns back into a Buckeye offense that would have lacked experience without it. If the San Marcos (Calif.) Mission Hills product keeps a similar pace to what he had last



JOSH WINSLOW

BEST AROUND – Ohio State has the nation's top receiver duo in Chris Olave (left, No. 2) and Garrett Wilson (right, No. 5).

year, Olave could end his Ohio State career atop some prestigious lists.

Olave is 91 catches, 1,124 yards and 13 receiving touchdowns away from breaking career program records held by K.J. Hill (201 catches), Michael Jenkins (2,898 yards) and David Boston (34 touchdowns).



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Last year, over a 14-game pace, Olave would have had 100 receptions for 1,458 yards and 14 scores.

Beyond Olave's clear importance on the field for Ohio State in 2021, wide receivers coach Brian Hartline said having the 6-1, 188-pound receiver back on the team for another year will help what is otherwise a mostly inexperienced wide receivers room.

"I'm really happy to have him back in the room," Hartline said. "The impact he can have on the young guys in changing their lives and their careers is probably the most important aspect of it all."

But Olave is not the only wide receiver in the room bringing back plenty of in-game experience. Former five-star prospect Garrett Wilson is now a junior and spent his 2020 campaign as one of the most productive No. 2 receivers in the country.

Wilson (6-0, 192) finished just behind Olave in receptions (43), yards (723) and touchdowns (six) in his second season, joining his counterpart on the All-Big Ten first team. Olave spoke very highly of Wilson, complimenting his athletic ability that allows any ball thrown in his vicinity to be a catchable one.

"Garrett's athleticism is off the charts," Olave said. "He's probably the most talented player on the roster, really. He's so gifted, but he can also run routes well. If the ball is in his area, he has a chance to catch it, contested or not."

The compliments have not just gone one way, though. Wilson had equally positive things to say about Olave, especially for his ability to stretch the field with deep plays.

"He tracks the deep ball as well as anyone that I've ever seen," Wilson said of Olave. "And then just the way he gets in and out of cuts without breaking down like most receivers do. He can get in and out of cuts so naturally."

That duo combined for 69.1 percent of Ohio State's receiving yards last season, along with 58.9 percent of its catches and

59.1 percent of its receiving touchdowns. That was with Olave outside and Wilson in the slot, something that looks to change this season. Wilson is moving back outside in 2021, something he said was not his initial idea but that he was completely open to doing in order to help the team.

"Whenever they proposed it to me, I was cool with that 100 percent," Wilson said in April. "I understood. It is what it is."

That move, along with the transfer of Jameson Williams, who departed for Alabama, could open the door to extended playing time for a variety of players. The player most likely to benefit is sophomore Jaxon Smith-Njigba, a former five-star who flashed at times in his first collegiate season.

That flash was never clearer than in the Buckeyes' opener against Nebraska, where Smith-Njigba miraculously got one foot in at the back of the end zone for his first – and to this point, only – touchdown of his college career.

Smith-Njigba has made his impact in other ways than just his playmaking abilities. Hartline noted his blocking prowess when asked about the 6-0, 198-pound receiver.

"I think he's doing a great job," Hartline said. "I think that he may be our best blocker in the room. His blocking on the perimeter, his desire, his physicality is much needed in our room."

On the season, Smith-Njigba tallied 10 receptions for 49 yards, totals that were fifth and seventh on the team, respectively. Despite not lighting the world on fire in 2020, and despite the weird circumstances of COVID-19, Smith-Njigba said the experience he gained last season was incredibly valuable for his development.

"I know I only played seven games, but just going out there, it just helped me just to see what it's like," Smith-Njigba said. "I didn't get the atmosphere and a lot of things that I wanted, but just going out there and competing, it helped a lot."

FOOTBALL PREVIEW: WIDE RECEIVERS

Projected Starters

Wide Receiver 2 • Chris Olave 6-1 • 188 • Sr. San Marcos (Calif.) Mission Hills Led team with 50 receptions, 729 yards and seven touchdowns despite playing in only seven of eight games.	Wide Receiver 5 • Garrett Wilson 6-0 • 192 • Jr. Austin (Texas) Lake Travis Was second on team in every receiving category: receptions (43), yards (723) and touchdowns (six).	Slot Receiver 11 • Jaxon Smith-Njigba 6-0 • 198 • So. Rockwall, Texas Finished freshman season with 10 catches for 49 yards and one touchdown: an acrobatic toe-tap catch against Nebraska.
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But those weird circumstances last year did not stop at the games. Smith-Njigba also said that it was hard for him, as well as another former five-star receiver in Julian Fleming, to fully grow in year one because of the lack of a normal offseason.

“Last spring, it was hard for us,” Smith-Njigba said. “It was hard to develop. I didn’t get to develop as much because I’m not running routes and catching balls every day like I did this spring. This spring was really crucial, and it was big for us – big for me.”

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day echoed the young receiver’s sentiments, both with the missed time playing a factor in 2020, as well as the development that both Smith-Njigba and Fleming have made since arriving with the team early last year.

Day also said that the work is far from done but that he thinks both second-year receivers are on the right path to make an impact on the field in 2021.

“They missed six games last year, and I think you’re going to be pleased with what you see when they’re out there,” Day said. “They’re just going to have to compete, and they’ll make mistakes, but they’ve put in a

good summer. They have to take care of themselves and put in the work. When you get into a game plan, a lot of it has to be done in the classroom, a lot of work has to be done visualizing the plays, spending time on the field and working with the quarterback about all the details, the exact splits, the releases, the timing of all those things. And if they take that serious and they put the work in, they’re going to have great seasons.”

Fleming (6-2, 205) was the top receiver and No. 3 overall prospect in the 2020 class, but he finished his first year as a Buckeye with just seven catches for 74 yards. Day said that Fleming was dealing with a lingering shoulder injury throughout the season and that he has impressed thus far going into his sophomore campaign.

“That’s another guy that’s had an unbelievable offseason,” Day said. “He’s strong, he’s healthy again really for the first time. He was dealing with that shoulder, and it kept popping in and out last year, and he got that fixed. He looks great. He’s had a really great attitude, been working really hard. I’m excited to see what he looks like this year.”

Despite the absences of Williams and

Mookie Cooper, who transferred to Missouri; Jaylen Harris and Elijah Gardiner, who both left the team; and Gee Scott Jr., who has switched over to tight end, Ohio State remains a team with an embarrassment of riches at the position. Beyond Fleming, Olave, Smith-Njigba and Wilson – three of whom are former five-stars – is another five-star (Emeka Egbuka) and two more top-100 prospects from the 2021 class (Jayden Ballard, Marvin Harrison Jr.).

Both Egbuka (6-1, 205) and Harrison (6-3, 205) shed their black stripes in April and have been praised by Hartline for playing older than their class would suggest.

“They don’t carry themselves like freshmen,” Hartline said. “They don’t act like freshmen.”

But Ballard (6-2, 195) should not be forgotten, coming in as the fourth-best player from Ohio and the No. 99 overall prospect from this most recent class.

Fourth-year junior Kamryn Babb (6-0, 205) has struggled with injuries throughout most of his time with the Buckeyes, and this year is no different. He was unavailable for the remainder of spring practices starting April 1

and has been on a side field without pads in the fall.

A handful of walk-ons give the receivers room depth, including junior Xavier Johnson (6-2, 215), who was formerly listed as a running back who was more of a pass catcher out of the backfield. Chris Booker (6-3, 193), Austin Kutscher (6-0, 198) and Sam Wiglusz (5-11, 189) are all seniors who bring experience, while freshman Reis Stockdale (5-10, 188), an Ohio native out of Morrow, looks to eventually enter the fray.

All of that adds up to one of the most talented wide receiver rooms in college football, and one that will be of assistance to whichever quarterback is thrown out there Week 1 without a single collegiate pass to his name.

Olave knew that would be the situation at quarterback when he made the decision to return for his senior season. But he also knew that he had not completed his main goal in college of winning a title. He also believed that whichever quarterback won the battle would give Ohio State a chance to finish the job this time around.

“After the national championship, I had that terrible feeling,” Olave said. “I’m a competitor, so after that national championship, I had a terrible feeling in my stomach. I just didn’t want to leave college like that. I always wanted to win a national championship, I always wanted to do everything in college and go to the NFL, so I felt like we had unfinished business.

“I believe in the quarterback play, I believe in Coach Day. I believe in the program, so I wanted to do another year to try to win a national championship and try to do all those things.”



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Offensive Line Unit Reloads for 2021 Season

By **CHASE BROWN**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State football prides itself on reloading rather than rebuilding. To see an example, one needs to look no further than the offensive line.

Even after losing Wyatt Davis and Josh Myers to the NFL, Greg Studrawa's offensive line is one of the deepest in college football, possessing All-American and All-Big Ten talent in the starting unit and reserves who would start at almost any other school in the conference.

"I think we have really good depth," head coach Ryan Day said this spring. "We have a good group in that room. I think Greg Studrawa has done a really good job recruiting. We have different shapes and sizes, have some versatility in there. We have over 20 guys in that room with walk-ons and scholarship guys."

Thayer Munford leads the room, returning to Ohio State as a fifth-year super senior.

He is taking advantage of an extra season of eligibility the NCAA offered all fall athletes.

Munford came back to Columbus with two goals: finishing his degree and becoming one of college football's best offensive tackles.

In the summer, he accomplished the former, graduating from the university with a degree in human development and family sciences. The latter may be more complicated to achieve. Munford took snaps at guard throughout camp, potentially negating his dream of becoming college football's best offensive tackle.

Munford said the shift to guard didn't come

Projected Starters

<p>Left Tackle 78 • Nicholas Petit-Frere</p> <p>6-6 • 315 • R-Jr. Tampa, Fla.</p> <p>Entering his second season as a starter, Petit-Frere was an All-Big Ten tackle in 2020.</p>	<p>Center 76 • Harry Miller</p> <p>6-4 • 315 • Jr. Buford, Ga.</p> <p>Miller came to Ohio State as a five-star center in the class of 2019, and the top player at the position.</p>	<p>Right Tackle 79 • Dawand Jones</p> <p>6-8 • 360 • Jr. Indianapolis, Indiana</p> <p>One of the biggest players on the team, Jones has surged this preseason.</p>
<p>Left Guard 75 • Thayer Munford</p> <p>6-6 • 315 • S-Sr. Cincinnati, Ohio</p> <p>Munford has suited up at tackle for Ohio State for three seasons but is eyeing a move inside to guard this season.</p>	<p>Right Guard 77 • Paris Johnson Jr.</p> <p>6-6 • 315 • So. Cincinnati, Ohio</p> <p>Like Munford, Johnson was originally a tackle when he signed on with Ohio State, but the Buckeyes moved him to guard to get him onto the field.</p>	

as a surprise. He welcomed the change, offering to make a move so that players behind him would have a chance to see the field.

"I saw an opportunity," Munford (6-6, 315) said. "If I'm comfortable before the first game, then I'm cool. It's not a huge change for me. You still have to go out and play football."

Munford also said moving to guard will help him before becoming a professional because it will help NFL teams see his versatility, among other traits.

"It's a better chance for me to get ready for the next level," Munford said. "If I can do this now, I can play wherever at the next level. I'm fine with whatever, tackle or guard, left side or right side."

Dawand Jones is the biggest benefactor of Munford's position change. After putting together an impressive offseason and emerging during the first week of fall camp, the third-year lineman will likely fill the now-vacant tackle spot.

The 6-8, 360-pound Jones said he spent ex-

tensive time with performance director Mickey Marotti this summer to lose weight and put on muscle. He also runs on the treadmill after practice to work on his endurance.

Day said Jones' physical presence stands out to the coaching staff, but he wants to see him develop into a more dependable lineman before the first game.

"He has the ability to dominate because of his size, strength and athleticism," Day said. "But again, it's about consistency and being able to do it for four quarters. He's further along than he's been, so he's just got to keep growing and pounding away."

Studrawa agreed with Day's assessment. He said that Jones could go through the correct progressions and makes the right decision. When he does, he can be a handful for opposing offensive linemen.

"When he sets in pass pro, believe me, nobody is going around him, and they're not going through him," Studrawa said.

With Munford at guard, Nicholas Petit-Frere takes over at left tackle after a quietly dominant season that saw him become one of the best pass-blocking right tackles in college football.

Studrawa said Petit-Frere's most significant assignment this season would be to protect the quarterback's blind side – arguably the most challenging task in football. He also wants to see the third-year lineman improve blocking the run this fall.

"What we've got to do is make him an elite run blocker," Studrawa said. "Not just a good run blocker. ... He's got to become elite, and that's what we're focusing on now."

Petit-Frere's run-blocking isn't a weakness, but he can take small steps to improve. The 6-5, 315-pound tackle can use his size and strength to bury defensive linemen and open up holes for the run game.

"The thing that we're focusing on with Nick right now is his pad level," Studrawa said. "He's a tall guy, and for him to bend at times, it's a strain. We've been working on his pad level and making him a more productive run blocker by getting him to bend."

Petit-Frere may look to become more like Paris Johnson Jr. – one of the team's more violent run blockers. Johnson, a former five-star tackle, will likely start at right guard this season.

In the offseason, Johnson left an impres-

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: OFFENSIVE LINE

sion on Studrawa, dissuading the offensive line coach from moving him around. The second-year lineman settled into the guard position during fall camp.

"I didn't want to disrupt that," Studrawa said. "I thought we could keep that right there. He's comfortable. He's just destroying people. I didn't want to change him, and now, all of a sudden, he's got a different thought process."

The Cincinnati native filled whatever role the team needed last season, even taking snaps at guard during the College Football Playoff semifinal against Clemson. With Jones and Petit-Frere pushing for the tackle positions, Johnson may return to the interior again.

"Since I was young, I always believed in the coach's vision," Johnson said. "He's been doing it for so long that I think he knows by seeing our body types in the way that we bend and the way we play who can fit where. I'm a full believer that me being guard right now is great."

At 6-6, 315 pounds, Johnson stands tall for the guard position. He trained with former Buckeye and Cincinnati Bengals right guard Michael Jordan to handle the interior. Johnson spent time developing quickness and strength out of a three-point stance.

"What this has taught Paris is he has to play with a lot lower leverage than you have to play at tackle," Studrawa said. "And he's done that. He's really, really got that down on his pad level right now."

Harry Miller locked up the starting left guard spot last season after thoroughly impressing coaches and teammates as a true freshman. The third-year lineman won't return to the position this year, but he will stick in the starting lineup, moving to the center spot.

Miller filled in at center against Michigan State last season after the coronavirus sidelined most of the team's offensive line. He produced mixed results, snapping the ball outside of Justin Fields' numbers on more than one occasion.

Looking back on the game, Miller views it as a valuable step in his development at the position. He recognized the challenge it brought but is thankful for how it shaped him.

"It was a great learning experience," Miller said. "It was extremely difficult to switch positions quickly like that, but now I think, again, as a learning experience, it's something that would be much easier for me to do in the future."

Studrawa said Miller is in line to be the starting center this season, provided he can hold off second-year player Luke Wypler (6-3, 300). The offensive line coach called the competition between the two players a "tremendous battle."

Should Miller maintain his position as the starting center, Wypler would fall to the second team, including qualified and talented reserves Enokk Vimahi (6-4, 305), Matthew Jones (6-4, 310), Donovan Jackson (6-4, 300) and Josh Fryar (6-6, 315).

Wypler played only 15 late-game snaps as a true freshman, but a strong offseason put him in a position to compete for a starting spot on the interior offensive line. However, if Munford shifts inside and Johnson remains at guard, then Wypler could find himself in a tough place.

Studrawa raved about Wypler's work ethic following his first season at Ohio State, mentioning that the Montvale, N.J., native returned to the team facility two days after losing to Alabama in the national championship. His hard work might not be enough to earn him a spot on this season's starting offensive line, but it bodes well for his future with the program.

Vimahi is still figuring out how to make an impact for the Buckeyes. He committed to Ohio State as a guard and gained more than 40 pounds in two seasons. Vimahi took reps on the interior for his first two years and will transition to tackle this year. He will likely back up Petit-Frere on the left side this season.

Matthew Jones is the odd man out on the starting line this season. With Munford's move to the inside and the emergence of Johnson at guard, Jones may slip between the cracks. The fourth-year player from Brooklyn, N.Y., made a solid impact as a primary backup for the last three seasons. He possesses excellent run-blocking talent and will provide Ohio State with a true guard if they decide to move away from the four-tackle set in their starting lineup.

Jackson comes to Ohio State's campus for the first time this fall as the top interior offen-

sive lineman and No. 18 overall prospect in the 2021 class. He walks into the program with good size. He will likely spend most of the season as a backup, learning how to play college football and making a push for playing time in the future.

Fryar played only four offensive snaps last season as a true freshman. The Beech Grove, Ind., native, is a bit of a long shot to receive playing time this season, but his offseason efforts didn't go unnoticed by the coaching staff.

"Josh has talent, but he needed to change his body because he could do it for one or two plays, but then consistency broke down in the spring, so these 11 weeks were important for him to get himself into shape," Day said of Fryar. "We'll look at film and see if he's made that step, but he certainly has the ability."

"If you could put on a highlight tape of him

from the spring of 30 plays, you would say he's an All-Big Ten player, but then I could give you another clip where he looked like he was exhausted and made a lot of young mistakes. He certainly has the ability, and he really worked hard to change his body this summer, but we don't know how much progress he's made yet."

The goal for the Ohio State coaching staff is finding the best five players to work together on the offensive line this season. That could mean a traditional group of two tackles, two guards and a center. Or it could mean something more abstract, like four tackles and a center. Whatever Day and Studrawa decide, the main goal of the coaching staff is evident.

"We have to continue to develop some of the guys in there, and we've developed some guys into being good players," Day said. "It's fun to see where that's headed this year because I think we have a chance to have a really good room."



2021 SCHEDULE

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
29 @MEM 2:05 CT	30	31 STP 6:15	1 STP 6:15	2 STP 12:05	3 STP 7:05	4 STP 7:05
5 STP 4:05	6	7 GWN 6:15	8 GWN 6:15	9 GWN 6:15	10 GWN 7:05	11 GWN 7:05
12 GWN 4:05	13	14 @TOL 6:35	15 @TOL 6:35	16 @TOL 6:35	17 @TOL 7:05	18 @TOL 5:05
19 @TOL 2:05	20	21	22 @NAS 7:05 CT	23 @NAS 7:05 CT	24 @NAS 7:05 CT	25 @NAS 7:05 CT
26 @NAS 6:15 CT	27	28	29 LOU 6:15	30 LOU 6:15	1 LOU 7:05	2 LOU 7:05
3 LOU 2:05	<div> <div>HOME</div> <div>AWAY</div> </div> <small>*All dates and game times listed are subject to change *All Home Game Times ET *CT=Central Time Zone somewhere</small>					

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Garrett, Harrison Spearhead OSU’s Defensive Front

By GRIFFIN STROM
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Larry Johnson’s front four was the strength of the Ohio State defense last season, and given the variety of uncertainties in the secondary paired with a brand-new corps of linebackers, the Buckeyes may need their defensive line to earn that title again in 2021.

In terms of pass rush, Ohio State didn’t get home quite as much as it would have liked in 2020, with its 2.63 average sacks per game ranking just 37th best in the country. The Buckeyes played just eight games, but it was still surprising to see no individual defender hit the four-sack mark. Nonetheless, starting defensive ends Jonathon Cooper and Tyreke Smith were game-changers in Ohio State’s linchpin win against Clemson in the Sugar Bowl.

More often than not though, the rush defense was the calling card of the OSU front, with first-time starters Tommy Togiai and Haskell Garrett at the nose and three-tech defensive tackle positions, respectively, leading the charge. Just five teams in the country allowed fewer rushing yards per game than the Buckeyes, who gave up just 97.6 on average.

Johnson lost two starters to the NFL draft this offseason, with those departures doubling as his top two sacks leaders from the 2020 season. Cooper, a two-time captain, led the Buckeyes with 3½ sacks a season ago and was drafted by the Denver Broncos in the seventh round. Togiai was taken by the Cleveland Browns in the fourth round after a junior campaign during which he tallied three sacks, 4½ tackles for loss and a forced fumble.

Ohio State will have to retool at a couple of key spots, given that Smith (6-3, 265) – a senior – and Garrett (6-2, 300) – a super-senior – are the only returning starters, but Johnson will have a slew of former five-star prospects and a number of veterans from whom to choose on a line that has plenty of depth year in and year out.

“I think this could be one of the best defensive lines we’ve seen at Ohio State,” junior defensive end Zach Harrison said during camp. “And that’s saying something because we’ve had some good defensive lines.”

Garrett may be the most established performer returning to the line this season, having recorded a pair of sacks, four tackles for loss and an interception for a touchdown en route to an All-America season according to CBS Sports as well as Pro Football Focus.

“I really came back for the brotherhood,” Garrett said. “I felt like there was more I could do as a leader, and I didn’t want to leave the guys yet. There’s a lot of talk about when you go to the league. It’s a business, which I know it is, but Ohio State is special. I didn’t want to leave yet.”

Garrett missed spring camp with a leg injury that required surgery following the 2020 campaign, but he still landed on watch lists for the Bednarik Award as well as Outland and Nagurski trophies this offseason.

Smith, a Cleveland native, began to capitalize on his top-40 recruiting status late last season, beating out Harrison to start opposite Cooper at defensive end for most

of the year and proving to be a force of nature against Clemson QB Trevor Lawrence and his offensive line in the CFP semifinal. Smith was officially credited with just one sack and one tackle for loss in 2020, but his impact on the field was far greater than those numbers show.

“I feel like the older he gets, the more mature he gets and the more goal-focused he is,” Harrison said. “He’s locked in on what he wants to achieve, and I feel like once Tyreke’s locked in, no one can stop him.”

As for the talented up-and-comers who populate Johnson’s line, the defensive end position alone is home to a host of intriguing prospects who could factor into things in a major way.

Harrison (6-6, 272), a five-star in-state prospect from the class of 2019, is expected to move into a starting role for the first time. After his two-sack sophomore season, the coaching staff has been trumpeting Harrison’s evolution as a verbal leader and much-improved pass rusher this offseason.

“He’s more confident right now, and he’s playing much faster of a pace that we like him to play at,” Johnson said. “His leadership is off the charts right now, but he put the work in. He’s 270. He probably played last year around 255. He’s a bigger, stronger guy going into his junior year.”

With two of the top-10 overall prospects in the country entering as true freshmen at the defensive end position this season though, Smith and Harrison could see some push from the highly touted five-star duo of J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer.

Tuimoloau (6-4, 275) was the 247Sports composite’s No. 4 overall prospect in the class of 2021 and the No. 24-rated all-time recruit since 2000. With COVID-19 restrictions rendering him unable to visit prospective collegiate landing spots until this past June, the Sammamish, Wash., native didn’t commit to Ohio State until July 4, which could slightly stall the immediacy with which he will make an impact.

“One thing about him, he came in town in great shape,” Johnson said. “You don’t come in, start and get where he’s going unless you get in great shape. He did a great job at doing that. He’s got a really high football IQ, and he really understands the football game. And he’s a video guy, he’s a study guy, and I think that’s why he’s starting to advance so fast, because he has some things that you have to have if you want to be an elite player. His work ethic is off the charts.”

Sawyer, on the other hand, has already shown signs of week one readiness for the Buckeyes. The Pickerington, Ohio, native and early enrollee recorded three sacks in April’s spring game and has earned no shortage of praise from coaches and teammates. Listed at 6-4 and 250 pounds, Sawyer came out of high school ranked just one spot below Tuimoloau as the No. 5 player in the 247Sports composite.

“Jack is a quick and very explosive player,” Johnson said. “J.T. is just the opposite – powerful,” Johnson said. “He can play on top, end and then the six technique and knock the line of scrimmage back. He’s very powerful. He’s got great lower-body strength. Jack is a finesse guy. He’s going to find a way to beat you. And he’s a highly competitive guy. That’s what I like about both of them.”

Projected Starters	
<i>Defensive End</i> 11 · Tyreke Smith	<i>Defensive End</i> 9 · Zach Harrison
6-3 · 265 · Sr. Cleveland Heights, Ohio	6-6 · 272 · Jr. Lewis Center (Ohio) Olen. Orange
One of two returning starters for Larry Johnson’s defensive line in 2021, Smith started opposite Jonathon Cooper for most of the 2020 season.	Tallied two sacks and 4.5 tackles for loss as a true sophomore in 2020, with the latter statistic being tied for the second-most on the team.
<i>Nose Tackle</i> 52 · Antwuan Jackson	<i>Three-Tech Tackle</i> 92 · Haskell Garrett
6-2 · 300 · 6th-Sr. Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove	6-2 · 300 · 5th-Sr. Las Vegas (Nev.) Bishop Gorman
Enters his sixth season in college football in 2021, and his fourth in the Ohio State program.	The lone All-American on the Buckeyes’ defensive line last season, Garrett is one of two returning regular starters for Johnson alongside Smith.

The defensive end position is not the only one stacked with five-star talent waiting in the wings, though.

At defensive tackle, many expect 2021 to be a breakout year for redshirt junior Taron Vincent, who had his moments last season as he returned from a torn labrum that caused him to miss the entire 2019 season. Vincent (6-2, 305), who was a top-20 prospect in the class of 2018, tallied seven total tackles, a half-sack and one tackle for loss last season, but he showed promise over the course of more than 150 snaps.

If Vincent remains exclusively at the three-tech tackle spot, he will have to rotate with Garrett for snaps. Togiai’s departure means that a new nose tackle will have to start for Ohio State this season, and Johnson will have more than one candidate for the job.

“We’re training to have guys play both positions, and now instead of having two players, you gain four players,” Johnson said. “Both guys can play nose, both guys can play three-tech. That gives us more depth, and that’s what we’re trying to do. We’ll train other guys like that because they’re veteran players that can probably handle the playbook, and so far, they’ve done really well. Taron is the same way. Taron can play three-tech and nose guard if we wanted him to.”

According to Johnson, fifth-year senior Jerron Cage (6-2, 305) had the best spring of his career, and when Togiai missed the national championship game due to COVID-19, Cage logged 33 snaps for the Buckeyes. The Cincinnati Winton Woods alum and former four-star recruit recorded just five total tackles last season, but if ever there was an opportunity for him to make an impact for Ohio State, it would be this year.

Another veteran likely to share snaps at nose tackle will be sixth-year defensive tackle Antwuan Jackson (6-2, 300), who saw even more time than Cage in replacement duty for Togiai in the national title game. The Georgia native was the No. 51 overall prospect in the 247Sports composite in 2016 but made stops at Auburn and junior college before winding up in Columbus two years later. Jackson has totaled only 24 tackles in two seasons at Ohio State, but

his versatility has earned him time at both defensive tackle spots, and he may very well be the week one starter at nose tackle.

With Johnson’s penchant for rotating players on the defensive line, it’s likely that sophomore Ty Hamilton sees an uptick in snaps this season as well after logging just 25 as a true freshman. The 6-3, 290-pounder has spent time at both tackle spots but may be more suited for the three-tech, where Garrett and Vincent will likely see the bulk of snaps in 2021.

One new addition at defensive tackle who has been no stranger to offseason call-outs from the Ohio State coaching staff is Tyleik Williams, who boasts a 6-3, 315-pound frame as a true freshman. Williams was a four-star recruit according to 247Sports, and even if there are too many experienced Buckeyes on the inside to guarantee he sees real playing time this season, he is a player to watch moving forward.

Senior defensive end Tyler Friday (6-3, 264), who has been a major part of Johnson’s rotation over the past couple of seasons, missed preseason camp and is expected to be sidelined for most of the year with an undisclosed injury.

“It’s a big loss – a really big loss,” Johnson said. “He was having a great winter, great summer, right where we wanted him to be to make a push. It’s just sad. He’s a great leader, too.”

With Friday out of the picture in the foreseeable future, Sawyer and Tuimoloau will likely see increased opportunities, but redshirt junior defensive end Javontae Jean-Baptiste may benefit most of all. The 6-5, 255-pounder played 158 snaps in 2020, but even with a sack, two tackles for loss and a fumble recovery to his credit, Jean-Baptiste didn’t often jump off the field with his production.

It might be a surprise if he jumps Smith or Harrison for a starting job, but Jean-Baptiste has put himself in the mix at the top of the depth chart with an impressive preseason.

“Tyreke, Javontae and Zach have really had a great camp, and those guys are my leaders now,” Johnson said. “They’re setting the pace for those young guys and that’s what you want.”

Revamped LB Corps Must Overcome Inexperience

By GRIFFIN STROM
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For all intents and purposes, Al Washington will have to start from scratch with the Ohio State linebackers room in 2021.

The Ohio State assistant coach has plenty of Buckeye veterans remaining in the group, including a number of seniors who are expected to play a key role this season, but that doesn't mean any of them have logged enough in-game experience for the staff to know exactly what it has in the unit quite yet.

All three starters and the four top performers from last year's team are gone, with Tuf Borland, Baron Browning, Pete Werner and Justin Hilliard all moving on to pursue professional careers. Borland and Werner were both multiyear starters for the Buckeyes, and Borland and Hilliard served as captains last season.

"When great guys move on, the benefit is the guys that are next, they get a blueprint of how it's done right," Washington said. "How it's done properly. So much of what we do is obviously what you can see. My expectation is for those guys to learn from that, and they have. They've carried themselves appropriately. I'm confident, and they're all talented, so we just have to go play."

Of the 1,672 combined snaps taken by Ohio State linebackers in 2020, 1,422 of them were logged by the previously mentioned quartet, as no other Buckeye linebacker played more than 95 snaps on the season.

Those four combined for 16 tackles, as Werner, Borland, Hilliard and Browning were the No. 1, No. 2, No. 4 and No. 5 leading tacklers on the roster, respectively. In fact, no other Ohio State linebacker finished in the top 11 on the team in that category, with then-junior Dallas Gant tallying 17 tackles to come in at No. 12.

Gant is one of three seniors whom Washington and company are expected to lean on heavily in the absence of last year's corps, and he began the spring as the front-runner to replace Borland as the Buckeyes' next starting middle linebacker. However, Gant missed the spring with a foot injury, leaving the door open for a couple of other Buckeyes to fight him for first-team reps in the preseason.

A Toledo native, Gant (6-3, 235) was the No. 166 overall prospect in the class of 2018 and has 44 total tackles, 3½ tackles for loss and two forced fumbles in the past three seasons on the field in Columbus. Among returning linebackers, Gant played the second-most snaps last year, with 79.

"I have a high level of trust in Dallas as a person that, when his number is called, he can go out there and play," Washington said. "He's been engaged, he's been with us step by step, even throughout the spring. He's still a leader, front and center every meeting, still vocal. He's been here enough years, so I don't think he's far behind. Obviously you'd love to see him practice and you'd love to see him have a spring, but I think for him, the mental part is more important at this stage in his career."

The returning linebacker who played the most in 2020 was then-junior Teradja Mitchell, whose 95 snaps led to just six to-

Projected Starters	
<i>Weakside</i> 3 • Teradja Mitchell	<i>Middle</i> 19 • Dallas Gant
6-2 • 239 • Sr. Virginia Beach (Va.) Catholic	6-3 • 235 • Sr. Toledo (Ohio) St. John's Jesuit
The former five-star recruit in the class of 2018 has just 18 total tackles in his collegiate career, but played the most snaps in 2020 of any returning Buckeye linebacker.	The true senior's 17 total tackles in 2020 are the most of any returning linebacker in 2021.

tal tackles at the Will linebacker spot for the Buckeyes. A five-star recruit out of Virginia Beach, Va., the class of 2018's No. 44 overall prospect has not seen the playing time that most expected he would to this point in his career, but the 6-2, 239-pound linebacker will be a surefire starter on the inside for Washington's unit this season.

Mitchell saw first-team reps all spring and fall and should be favored to rack up more than double the 18 tackles he has to his credit the past three seasons combined this year.

"He's matured," Washington said. "His preparation, his consistent effort, but obviously he's got to perform, and he's been doing that. He's been really working at it. It's consistency, and his approach has been that. Obviously he's eager to go out and do what he loves to do, and it's play football. The best thing about football is, when you get on the field, your play speaks for itself, and he's done that."

The third senior who could step into a first-time starting role in 2021 is K'Vaughan Pope, another four-star recruit from the class of 2018 and the No. 217 overall prospect according to the 247Sports composite rankings. Pope (6-1, 225) has drilled with several of the hybrid linebacker-safeties at times this fall, but Washington said he'll most likely be competing for a spot at the Mike or Will position this season.

"K'Vaughan, what he may lack in size, he makes up for in explosiveness, quickness, instinctiveness," Washington said. "The way he runs, he runs really well. I just think in general, every player has certain attributes, certain things they do well. They're not always going to look the same. I'm confident in his ability – he can play. When the ball is snapped and he gets his cleats in the ground, he can play. We really don't spend much time thinking about that, and I think he can do that job. I think we have him at the right place."

Pope showed flashes as a true sophomore in 2019 with a pair of interceptions in back-to-back contests but saw fewer opportunities last season as he logged just 17 snaps during the course of the year to finish with two tackles. Pope is sure to see more time in 2021, although some potential schematic changes could cut into his workload a bit.

Those schematic changes have been touched on at length in both the cover story and defensive backs preview in this issue of BSB, but they do strongly impact the linebackers, so they bear mentioning here as well. With Ohio State shifting to a 4-2-5 as its base defense, bringing the new Bullet hybrid position more strongly into the fold, the Buckeyes will also be moving away from three-linebacker sets on every down.

There will still be looks that call for that more traditional defense, but Ohio State has been open about acknowledging that three true linebackers aren't likely to see the field at the same time very often this season.

For a full preview of these players, be sure to check out that defensive backs preview, but in lieu of a true Sam linebacker like Pope, Ohio State is sorting through a battle for Bullet among Craig Young, Ronnie Hickman and redshirt freshman Kourt Williams, who is looking to make an impact more than he's seriously challenging to start after an ACL tear cut his freshman campaign short.

Williams is not the only second-year Buckeye making a serious case for playing time this offseason though. Sophomore linebacker Cody Simon (6-2, 233) has benefited from a couple of injuries in the unit to garner first-team reps all throughout the spring and fall. Simon was the No. 75 overall prospect in the class of 2020 and the fourth-ranked inside linebacker in the country.

"From day one I noticed that Cody's a natural born leader," Mitchell said. "He comes in, he puts his head down, he works every day. He's very disciplined, he's very detailed about his work. He's going to be great. He's going to be one of the greats here."

The New Jersey native played just 14 snaps as a true freshman, but over the past five months he's played quite a bit next to Mitchell on the inside on what appears to be the Buckeyes' first unit.

One promising new Buckeye linebacker who did not begin the fall working with either the first or second units in practice is USC transfer and former five-star prospect Palaie Gaoteote (6-2, 250). A Las Vegas Bishop Gorman product and cousin of Ohio State super-senior defensive tackle Haskell Garrett, Gaoteote was not on scholarship in Columbus until the middle of fall camp due to an eligibility issue with the NCAA. However, with that problem now out of the way, Gaoteote gives Washington a seasoned vet and proven commodity at inside linebacker, having accumulated more than 100 tackles in his college career thus far.

"Palaie is just a great person and a really hardworking kid," Washington said. "He's really a hardworking kid and the group has really embraced him, so hopefully it works out. I just love the fact that he's around. He gives off great energy. He's definitely a good fit."

A dark-horse candidate to see time for Washington's group this season, third-year Buckeye and former four-star 2019 recruit Steele Chambers has officially made the

long-rumored switch from running back to linebacker this offseason. A two-way player at Blessed Trinity Catholic in Roswell, Ga., Chambers was given the choice to stay in a crowded running backs room or move over to defense in 2021, and the 6-1, 225-pound sophomore chose the latter.

"It's hard," Chambers said of the transition. "I have a little experience from high school, but college defense is just a whole new ballgame. But I'm getting it."

Even in the absence of last year's starters, it may still be an uphill battle for third-year Buckeye linebacker Tommy Eichenberg (6-2, 235) to see the field all that much in 2021 due to the others competing for time on the inside. The Cleveland native was a four-star recruit out of St. Ignatius in 2019, played just six snaps in 2020 and has two tackles on his résumé.

"Some of those younger guys are doing a great job in pushing – Tommy and Cody – and it's good to get Steele in there and see him running around a little bit too," head coach Ryan Day said. "That's a position obviously that's going to get a lot of attention here and focus from the staff throughout August and hopefully we'll have a better idea of who's going to be starting in that first game soon."

The top freshman in Ohio State's latest recruiting cycle is Ironton, Ohio's Reid Carrico, the No. 87 recruit in the class of 2021 who stands at 6-2, 230 pounds. Carrico is another young Buckeye who saw more time than he might have otherwise this spring due to injuries in the back seven but won't likely see an abundance of significant time this year.

Many of the biggest questions surrounding the position group won't see an answer until the season is well under way, but Mitchell said the unit is taking a businesslike approach to the new season.

"This is a very serious unit," Mitchell said. "Nobody's playing around. This is very serious to us. This is life or death for us."

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Improvement Critical For Barnes' Secondary

By **GRIFFIN STROM**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Make no mistake, there are questions about other position groups on the 2021 Ohio State roster, but perhaps none as pressing as those surrounding the Buckeye secondary.

Unquestionably the weakness of the 2020 Ohio State team, the Buckeyes gave up more passing yards on average than all but five teams in the country, and there hasn't exactly been a sweeping overhaul of defensive back personnel entering 2021.

The poor performance of the Ohio State defensive backfield did inspire some changes in the Buckeye coaching staff though, as former special teams coordinator Matt Barnes will take full control of the unit for the first time in 2021. Barnes had previously worked closely with the Ohio State safeties alongside former co-defensive coordinator Jeff Hailey in 2019 and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs in 2020, but Coombs no longer has the title of secondary coach following more than one disappointing outing from his group during the COVID-plagued season.

"I love Matt Barnes," Coombs said. "I think Matt's a great coach. He's a technician. He coaches technique, and he coaches it hard. He understands scheme, and he does a great job in that regard. He is a diligent, detailed guy and my perfect partner in the back end because diligence and details are

not always my strong suit. He holds me accountable for that."

Not least of the Ohio State secondary's poor performances was its November matchup with Tom Allen and Indiana, when quarterback Michael Penix Jr. threw for nearly 500 yards and five touchdowns to lead the Hoosiers on a furious second-half comeback that came one score shy of proving fruitful.

The most memorable display of shortcomings on the Buckeye pass defense came in January's national championship game, when an Alabama aerial assault jam-packed with NFL talent sliced through any Ohio State resistance with surgical precision. Now-New England Patriots' quarterback Mac Jones finished with 464 yards passing and five touchdowns, while Heisman Trophy-winning wideout DeVonta Smith accrued all of his 215 yards and three touchdowns in the first half alone.

As a result, Coombs will take something of a step back when it comes to the secondary as he operates the entire defense, and Barnes will try to make the necessary adjustments to a unit that loses just a single starter from last year.

"I'm going to get them going and they're going to go hard, while (Barnes) is going to make sure that every 'T' is crossed and every 'I' is dotted, and he's doing a phenomenal job," Coombs said. "I'm in all of his meetings, and he is doing a great job preparing his kids in the back end. I'm very excited

Projected Starters

Cornerback 7 • Sevyn Banks

6-1 • 200 • Sr.
Orlando (Fla.) Jones

Returned a fumble for a touchdown in 2020 season opener against Nebraska and picked off Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence in the College Football Playoff semifinal.

Slot Corner/Cover Safety 5 • Marcus Williamson

5-10 • 185 • S-Sr.
Westerville (Ohio) IMG Academy

Played 408 snaps in first season as a starter for Ohio State during his true senior 2020 campaign and is the Buckeyes' returning tackles leader (27).

Bullet 15 • Craig Young

6-3 • 223 • R-So.
Fort Wayne (Ind.) Wayne

Logged 39 snaps and four total tackles for the Buckeyes during his redshirt freshman season in 2020.

Cornerback 26 • Cameron Brown

6-0 • 190 • R-Jr.
St. Louis Christian Bros. College

A key member of the secondary rotation to start 2020, Brown is back after tearing his Achilles in week two against Penn State.

Free Safety 41 • Josh Proctor

6-2 • 205 • Sr.
Owasso (Okla.)

Beginning his junior year at cover safety, Proctor closed 2020 as the Buckeyes' starter at free safety, recording 20 total tackles in the process.

about the job that he's doing."

Despite winning the Big Ten's Defensive Back of the Year honor in 2020, former Ohio State cornerback Shaun Wade was maligned enough for his part in the Buckeyes' defensive deficiencies to fall from potential first-round status to the fifth round of this past NFL draft. However, he's the only starter the Buckeyes must replace in 2021.

Senior outside corner Sevyn Banks, super-senior slot corner Marcus Williamson, senior safety Josh Proctor and redshirt junior safety Marcus Hooker – who each started multiple games for Ohio State last year – will all be back for the Buckeyes.

Banks, a 6-1, 200-pound Florida native, will be a surefire starter on the outside despite missing most of the spring and several fall practices with an undisclosed injury. Despite not making an All-Big Ten team in his first season as a starter in 2020, Banks' physical tools have helped earn him some offseason steam as a potential first-round pick in 2022. Banks returned a fumble for a touchdown in the Buckeyes' season opener against Nebraska last season and picked off Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence at the end of the Sugar Bowl.

"I'm definitely ready," Banks said. "That's why you come to Ohio State. I sat behind Jeff (Okudah), Damon Arnette, all these guys, and now it's my time. It's going to be your time at some point, and now it's mine."

Westerville, Ohio's Williamson (5-10, 185) replaced Wade in the slot last year as the latter transitioned to the outside corner position, but Williamson's role often morphed into that of a cover safety for the Buckeyes. Williamson logged about as much experience as one could in an eight-game season, playing 408 snaps to come in third among Ohio State defensive backs, but 2020 was still just his first year as a starter.

Proctor, a hard-hitting, wiry athlete at

6-2, 205 pounds, was thought to be the replacement for longtime stalwart and team captain Jordan Fuller at single-high safety, but the Oklahoma native instead started this past year as a cover safety for Ohio State. Following some inconsistent performances from Hooker at the back of the Buckeye defense, though, Proctor found himself back at high safety by the end of the season.

"Love Josh Proctor," Coombs said. "This is the best offseason he's ever had. I haven't been here for all of them, but he's had a great offseason. Great offseason in every area of his life. I'm excited for him. Josh can run and Josh can hit, and now Josh is taking on some good leadership, communication and I'm excited to watch him play back there in the back."

With Proctor figuring to reprise that role in 2021, Hooker (5-11, 200) is left in a limbo of sorts following a tumultuous offseason that involved an OVI arrest and a suspension from the team.

Jockeying for Wade's vacant position outside are redshirt junior cornerback Cameron Brown, a former four-star wide receiver recruit from Missouri, and redshirt freshman Ryan Watts, a four-star hailing from Texas.

Brown (6-0, 190) was the No. 3 outside corner on the depth chart behind only Wade and Brown last season and saw a healthy diet of snaps in the Buckeyes' first two games before tearing his Achilles in the second half against Penn State on Oct. 31. Brown didn't participate in contact work during the spring, but he returned at the start of preseason camp and appears to have picked up right where he left off.

"Cam was playing really well last year," Coombs said. "People forget that. He had a good camp. He was playing really well. He was going out there playing nickel, playing man-to-man in some tough situations, and

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: DEFENSIVE BACKS

he was playing really well. And so it was a heartbreaking injury for him.”

Coombs said Brown had to “knock the rust off” at the start of fall camp but finds himself in a good spot as the season approaches.

In Brown’s absence this spring, Watts turned heads with his eye-popping size at 6-3, 205 pounds and with a goal-line interception in one-on-one coverage against star wide receiver Garrett Wilson on the very first drive of April’s spring game. Coombs said Watts is the tallest corner he’s ever coached, and his potential makes him an exciting prospect for both the present and future Buckeye secondary.

“My confidence has been there since last year in the fall, because we’ve been going against Garrett (Wilson) and all the first-team receivers every day in practice,” Watts said. “We’ll make good plays every day – we’ll have bad plays – but we’ll make good plays. So I always had that confidence; (the spring game interception) really wasn’t a surprise to me.”

Watts is not the only second-year Buckeye defensive back making a strong push for considerably more playing time in 2021 though. Since the end of the 2020 season, head coach Ryan Day and the Buckeye coaches have lauded the progress of sophomore safety Lathan Ransom, a four-star Arizona native who stepped in to play 62 snaps for Ohio State as a true freshman, with most of those coming in the final few games. Ransom (6-1, 205) is a cover safety who could play alongside or even instead of Williamson at the slot corner, as the two positions often bleed together in Ohio State’s scheme.

Also in the mix at cover safety is red-shirt-freshman defensive back Cameron Martinez (5-10, 192), the former Michigan Mr. Football who entered the Ohio State program as a high school quarterback and the No. 14 athlete prospect in the country in 2020.

A proliferation of the Bullet position could be the most visible change to the Ohio State secondary this season, as the Buckeyes utilized the hybrid linebacker-safety role extensively in the spring game, even if some of it was due to a number of injuries to the Buckeyes’ traditional linebackers.

Leading the charge at Bullet will be third-year linebacker Craig Young (6-3, 223), who was seen practicing with the Buckeye safeties at open sessions this spring, as well as third-year safety Ronnie Hickman and red-shirt freshman safety Kourt Williams.

Hickman, a 6-1, 205-pound New Jersey native, took a redshirt during his true freshman season in 2019 following a season-ending high school injury at DePaul Catholic. Hickman saw the field for 47 snaps during the 2020 season and followed suit with a strong spring in which he shared time with Young at Bullet.

Williams, a four-star safety prospect from Bellflower, Calif., enjoyed a promising first preseason with Ohio State in 2020 before tearing his ACL in October. Williams missed the entire season and subsequent spring but spent time rehabbing in advance of his return to full-contact action in August. Listed at 6-1, 220 pounds, Williams has the stockiest build of the bunch at Bullet, but Day insisted during Big Ten Media Days that he will remain at safety for Ohio State.

“Kourt Williams is the most diligent



Josh Winslow

BITING EARLY – Coordinator Kerry Coombs has been impressed with the strides that Lejond Cavazos (left) has taken.

worker that I have been around anywhere, anytime, anyplace,” Coombs said. “The only guy that was like him was a kid named Logan Ryan at the Tennessee Titans. This kid is the first guy in the building every day; he’s the last guy to leave. He’s been living in the training room rehabbing that knee. He watches film. He studies. Now he’s got to go play.”

Ohio State has a host of new faces entering the fold at defensive back as well this season, adding depth to a group that didn’t have much a season ago, even if most likely won’t see a surplus of snaps as true freshmen.

At corner, the Buckeyes brought in a trio of four-star recruits in Missouri native Jakailin Johnson (6-0, 185), Georgia native Jordan Hancock (6-1, 185) and Arizona native Denzel Burke (6-1, 192), who were the No. 50, No. 73 and No. 196 players in the class of 2021, according to the 247Sports composite rankings. Super-senior Demario McCall has also moved over from offense.

Burke was the first Buckeye to shed his black stripe when fall camp commenced in August.

At safety, Ohio State will have the services of a pair of first-year four-stars in Jantzen Dunn (6-1, 190) and Andre Turrentine (5-11, 190), who were both top-200 talents in the 2021 class.

Whether returning starters, emerging difference-makers or new additions to the program, Coombs said this group has an edge this season as it hopes to defy the criticism it received last season.

“They seem to me to be a really highly-motivated group of young men who – they’ve got a little ‘pissed off’ in them,” Coombs said.

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Bucks Have Big Shoes To Fill In Kicking, Punting

By **JOE DEMPSEY**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Putting a premium emphasis on special teams is a staple of the Ohio State football program that head coach Ryan Day has adapted in his tenure. Entering the 2021 season, the Buckeyes are searching for new players to replace a pair of veterans in former kicker Blake Haubeil and former punter Drue Chrisman.

During his Ohio State career, Haubeil hit 28 of 35 field goals and converted 146 of 146 extra-point attempts. The Buckeyes will need to find a reliable replacement for Haubeil, who hit a career-long 55-yard field goal at Northwestern in 2019.

Jake Seibert, a redshirt freshman, is primarily competing with Noah Ruggles, who is a graduate transfer from North Carolina for the starting kicker job. Dominic DiMaccio and Garrison Smith provide depth at the position.

“We’ve got a lot of inexperienced guys from our end,” said special teams coordinator Parker Fleming. “We’ve got one transfer who came in who has played at another place. And then Jake got some reps last year, obviously. They’ve had a great summer and a great fall so far. We have limited reps live with the team, so they’ve gotten a lot of reps on their own. And honestly, we’ve got two or three guys that have kicked in games here that have done a nice job this fall, and one guy that has a lot of experience at another place – they’ve all really had a nice fall so far. No one’s really stood up and made a name for themselves yet over the other guys, but it’s been pretty good.”

Fleming emphasized the importance of giving each of the kickers equal opportunities to compete during practice, focusing on consistency, speed and demeanor. Since Ohio State has such dynamic talent

on offense, Day and his staff are looking for a kicker who is automatic on close-range kicks.

“In the placekicking, Noah and Jake have been working through it and battling for that job. And at the end of the day, it’s going to come down to the guy who is the most consistent,” Day said. “We don’t need guys to make 55-yarders, we just need to make sure they’re consistent inside of 25, somewhere in that 30-yard range, it’s got to be good. And if we can do that and just make sure that they’re strong there, then we’ll be OK. And then all the kickers are working on kickoffs. There’s a little inexperience there, but it’s a good group, and they’ve had a good summer and a good preseason.”

As a freshman, Seibert connected on all 16 of his extra-point attempts and made 1 of 2 field goals. His top competition, Ruggles, hit all 48 of his extra-point attempts at UNC, and he made 19 of 27 field goals. Fleming was asked what Seibert will need to do to secure the gig.

“Consistency – he kicks a very nice ball,” Fleming said of Seibert. “And I know Coach Day spoke on it earlier, the philosophy around here is once we get around midfield, we’re a pooch team. And then once we get down deep in there, we’re trying to score touchdowns. We have to be consistent at field goals from a certain range.”

Perhaps the Buckeyes’ biggest loss to their special teams’ units is Chrisman, who was an All-Big Ten performer each of the past two seasons at punter. With Michael O’Shaughnessy remaining as the only punter on the team, Ohio State brought in freshman Jesse Mirco from Australia.

“Jesse’s come in and shown that he’s got a strong leg,” Day said of Mirco. “He’s a mature guy, but he’s assimilated pretty well for coming from Australia. He’s got a team

to become one of the guys. He’s got a new country to move into. There’s a lot of things there, but he’s done a good job. And I think the guys appreciate that. And as tough as a punter can be, he showed some toughness there. I think maybe the fact that he’s played rugby, or whatever it was he played over there – Australian rules football – he’s got a little edge to him, and I think the guys appreciate that.”

Fleming has also been impressed with Mirco’s composure and ability to adapt to his new situation as a Buckeye.

“He’s a quick learner and he’s really done a great job in terms of handling himself in the locker room, the weight room, as a teammate, because that’s the No. 1 job as a football player,” Fleming said. “And then, how he’s been performing on the field has been good too.”

With new faces in essential positions on special teams, Day and Fleming will rely on long snapper Bradley Robinson to provide stability and experience.

“Brad comes back and he’s played in games, so he’s got to be kind of the leader of that group,” Day said of Robinson. “He’s got to be great.”

The Scarlet and Gray excelled in punt coverage during Chrisman’s tenure, largely because of the tremendous play of their gunners.

“The history of gunners here is one of the best anywhere,” Fleming said. “And when I was a G.A. here, Devin Smith was one of the best in the country, and then you can go through the years and guys like Terry McLaurin and Jeff Okudah played gunner for us here.

“And last year, we had some experience coming back. We had Chris Olave, Josh Proctor – we’ve got a bunch of guys that have done it. Cam Brown has run down for us, a lot of different guys. And then, we’ll kind of do that by committee, based on how many plays guys are getting on offense or defense and where that flow is going. But really, we’ve got a lot of guys that are big, fast, strong, can run, and they’ve bought in, they love doing that.”

Since Olave posted another dominant season to earn first-team All-Big Ten honors, it would make sense for him to save himself for offense as a future NFL draft pick. However, Olave – who ranks sixth in school history with 22 receiving touchdowns – will continue to excel in punt coverage as a gunner.

“Coach Day has done a great job of instilling that culture of we’ve got to have the best players to play on every play,” Fleming said. “And Chris is one of the best gunners in the country, if not the best.

“If we don’t change the game in the punt, we’re going to struggle, so we have to have our best players changing the game every opportunity they have, especially at that position at gunner because of how much premium we put on that.”

Fleming said starting safety Josh Proctor will also return to his role as a gunner, referring to him and Olave as “weapons.”

“It’s a mind-set of not being denied,” Fleming said of his gunners. “Sometimes, things don’t go well. Sometimes you get a double team. Sometimes the ball’s kicked

away from you. Sometimes, OK good, but at the end of the day, I’m not going to let that returner go this way. That’s really what it comes down to.

“And those players that obviously have to have a certain athletic skill set, but then when they have that mind-set and demeanor that they want to be the guy to go force the fair catch or to go stop the returner from gaining yards, that’s something that you can see, you can feel.

“We’ve got a number of guys on our team that have been that way, and I think that’s really it, wanting to do it and then the little pride to get it done.”

In the return game, Ohio State brings back experience with Wilson as a punt returner and Demario McCall as a kick returner. Wilson returned seven punts for 51 yards, averaging 7.3 yards per return, and Jaxon Smith-Njigba returned three punts for 11 yards.

“Garrett and then Jaxon Smith – he returned punts for us last season as well,” Fleming said. “So those guys, as of now, we’ll probably get a good rotation of them – same conversation about how many reps they’re getting offense/defense, where the game flow’s going, how things are really looking on that side of the ball, who’s back there and we feel very comfortable with both of those guys right now.”

On kick returns, McCall returned five kickoffs for 78 yards, averaging 15.6 yards per return with a long of 29. In his Buckeye career, McCall has returned 27 kickoffs for 534 yards (19.8 average) with a long of 42.

“That’s still up in the air,” Fleming said of kick returns. “Demario McCall was a returner last season. We had some different guys that have gotten reps back there for us. Right now, we’re really trying to figure that out, honestly. We’ve got a bunch of guys, similar to the conversation about gunners. We’ve got a lot of talented athletes that are really good with the football in their hands. And so it will be some situational, but also we’ve had a bunch of guys catching balls back there, some of the running backs, some of the young receivers. We’ve got some dynamic players if we can get them going.”

Freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson has been seen at practice returning kicks, prompting questions about the possibility of him becoming the primary kick returner this season. As a former five-star prospect, Henderson could bring a dynamic playmaking aspect to the position.

“Well, to say he’s first-team, that’s (premature),” Fleming said of Henderson. “We just kind of rep different guys back there. You’re right, he is getting (some first-team reps) and I’ve seen the same thing that other people have seen. There are some young players and older players that you want the football in their hands, and he’s certainly one of them. He’s one of those guys that’s in the rotation.

“What you want back there at kickoff returner is someone who is a decisive, strong runner who isn’t scared to hit the hole fast when he sees it. We’ve got a bunch of guys who are capable of doing that, and he is certainly one of them.”



OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

HELP WANTED – A new-look specialist room hasn’t looked great this off-season.

The Numbers Game

Final 2020-21 Football Statistics

2020-21 Game-By-Game					Individual Statistics (Cont.)							
Date	Opponent	Result	Crowd		Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS	
Oct. 24	(5) NEBRASKA	W, 52-17	1,344		Master Teague	8	-	-	-	-	48	
Oct. 31	(3) at Penn State (18)	W, 38-25	1,500		Chris Olave	7	-	-	-	-	42	
Nov. 7	(3) RUTGERS	W, 49-27	1,275		Blake Haubeil	-	24-24	-	-	5-7	39	
Nov. 14	(3) at Maryland	Canceled	N/A		Garrett Wilson	6	-	-	-	-	36	
Nov. 21	(3) INDIANA (10)	W, 42-35	635		Justin Fields	5	-	-	-	-	30	
Nov. 28	(3) at Illinois	Canceled	N/A		Jeremy Ruckert	5	-	-	-	-	30	
Dec. 5	(3) at Michigan State	W, 52-12	0		Trey Sermon	4	-	-	-	-	24	
Dec. 12	(3) MICHIGAN	Canceled	N/A		Jake Seibert	-	16-16	-	-	1-2	19	
Dec. 19	(3) N'western# (15)	W, 22-10	3,178		Jameson Williams	2	-	-	-	-	12	
Jan. 1	(3) Clemson^ (2)	W, 49-28	3,000		Dominic DiMaccio	-	3-3	-	-	1-2	6	
Jan. 11	(3) Alabama^^ (1)	L, 52-24	14,926		Jack Miller	1	-	-	-	-	6	
* OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.					Haskell Garrett	1	-	-	-	-	6	
# Big Ten Championship Game; Indianapolis, Ind.					Luke Farrell	1	-	-	-	-	6	
^ Sugar Bowl; New Orleans					C.J. Stroud	1	-	-	-	-	6	
^^ National Championship Game; Miami					Jaxon Smith-Njigba	1	-	-	-	-	6	
					Shaun Wade	1	-	-	-	-	6	
					Sevyn Banks	1	-	-	-	-	6	
					OSU Totals	44	43-43	-	0-1	7-11	328	
					OPP Totals	27	21-21	0-1	0-5	7-8	206	
					FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total		
					Blake Haubeil	2-3	1-1	2-3	0-0	5-7		
					Dominic DiMaccio	1-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-2		
					Jake Seibert	1-1	0-0	0-1	0-0	1-2		
					OSU Totals	4-6	1-1	2-4	0-0	7-11		
					OPP Totals	2-2	3-3	1-2	1-1	7-8		
					Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long		
					Drue Chrisman	27	1216	45.0	0	74		
					Zach Hoover	3	118	39.3	0	43		
					OSU Totals	30	1334	44.5	0	74		
					OPP Totals	41	1828	44.6	0	57		
					Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long		
					Shaun Wade	2	36	18.0	1	36		
					Sevyn Banks	1	38	38.0	0	38		
					Marcus Hooker	1	31	31.0	0	31		
					Josh Proctor	1	0	0.0	0	0		
					Justin Hilliard	1	0	0.0	0	0		
					Haskell Garrettd	1	0	0.0	1	0		
					OSU Totals	7	105	15.0	2	38		
					OPP Totals	6	57	9.5	0	33		
					Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long		
					Garrett Wilson	7	51	7.3	0	22		
					Jaxon Smith-Njigba	3	11	3.7	0	7		
					OSU Totals	10	62	6.2	0	22		
					OPP Totals	5	98	19.6	1	58		
					Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long		
					Demario McCall	5	78	15.6	0	29		
					Xavier Johnson	1	11	11.0	0	11		
					Garrett Wilson	1	4	4.0	0	4		
					OSU Totals	7	93	13.3	0	29		
					OPP Totals	19	337	17.7	0	39		
					Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.TFL	Yds.	Sacks		
					Pete Werner	28	26	54	2.5-10	1.0-5		
					Tuf Borland	22	26	48	3.5-16	1.5-12		
					Shaun Wade	24	11	35	1.0-2	-		
					Justin Hilliard	20	13	33	5.0-16	-		
					Baron Browning	20	10	30	3.0-13	1.0-6		
					Marcus Williamson	20	7	27	-	-		
					Jonathon Cooper	12	12	24	3.5-29	3.5-29		
					Sevyn Banks	19	4	23	0.5-1	-		
					Tommy Togiai	12	11	23	4.5-17	3.0-13		
					Josh Proctor	16	4	20	1.0-5	-		
					Haskell Garrett	12	8	20	4.0-13	2.0-9		
					Dallas Gant	10	7	17	0.5-0	-		
					Marcus Hooker	13	2	15	-	-		
					Zach Harrison	6	8	14	4.5-12	2.0-3		
					Antwan Jackson	5	6	11	1.0-1	1.0-1		
					Taron Vincent	1	8	9	2.0-5	0.5-4		
					Tyreke Smith	6	2	8	2.0-22	2.0-22		
					Teradja Mitchell	4	3	7	0.5-2	-		
					Tyler Friday	2	5	7	-	-		
					Jerron Cage	1	5	6	0.5-1	0.5-1		
					Javontae Jean-Baptiste	3	3	6	2.0-12	1.0-8		
					Lathan Ransom	6	0	6	-	-		
					Ronnie Hickman	2	3	5	-	-		
					Craig Young	5	0	5	-	-		
					Tyreke Johnson	2	3	5	-	-		
					Ryan Watts	4	0	4	-	-		
					Cade Stover	3	1	4	-	-		
					Cody Simon	3	1	4	-	-		
					OSU Totals	299	198	497	46-205	21-129		
					OPP Totals	331	214	545	51-209	21-133		
					Fumbles Forced:	11 - Werner (2), Browning (2), Stover, Gant, Hilliard, Fleming, Cooper, Togiai, Smith.						
					Fumbles Recovered:	12 - Hilliard (3), Browning (2), Jean-Baptiste, Hooker, Banks, Proctor, Gant, Harrison, Munford.						

2021 Preseason Polls

The Associated Press Top 25					Coaches' Top 25				
Rank	School	2020	Pts.	'20 Rank	Rank	School	2020	Pts.	'20 Rank
1	Alabama (47)	13-0	1,548	1	1	Alabama (63)	13-0	1,621	1
2	Oklahoma (6)	9-2	1,462	6	2	Clemson	10-2	1,508	3
3	Clemson (6)	10-2	1,447	3	3	Oklahoma (2)	9-2	1,481	6
4	Ohio State (1)	7-1	1,393	2	4	Ohio State	7-1	1,435	2
5	Georgia (3)	8-2	1,364	7	5	Georgia	8-2	1,386	7
6	Texas A&M	9-1	1,223	4	6	Texas A&M	9-1	1,286	4
7	Iowa State	9-3	1,160	9	7	Notre Dame	10-2	1,139	5
8	Cincinnati	9-1	1,014	8	8	Iowa State	9-3	1,131	9
9	Notre Dame	10-2	1,009	5	9	North Carolina	8-4	999	17
10	North Carolina	8-4	999	18	10	Cincinnati	9-1	979	8
11	Oregon	4-3	968	NR	11	Florida	8-2	870	12
12	Wisconsin	4-3	743	NR	12	Oregon	4-3	842	NR
13	Florida	8-2	728	13	13	LSU	5-5	664	NR
14	Miami (Fla.)	8-3	663	22	14	USC	5-1	655	21
15	USC	5-1	660	21	15	Wisconsin	4-3	654	NR
16	LSU	5-5	631	NR	16	Miami (Fla.)	8-3	575	22
17	Indiana	6-2	549	12	17	Indiana	6-2	573	13
18	Iowa	6-2	513	16	18	Iowa	6-2	554	15
19	Penn State	4-5	456	NR	19	Texas	7-3	427	20
20	Washington	3-1	449	NR	20	Penn State	4-5	422	NR
21	Texas	7-3	350	19	21	Washington	3-1	404	NR
22	Coastal Carolina	11-1	232	14	22	Oklahoma State	8-3	216	19
23	Louisiana	10-1	208	15	23	Louisiana	10-1	153	16
24	Utah	3-2	176	NR	24	Coastal Carolina	11-1	150	14
25	Arizona State	2-2	125	NR	25	Ole Miss	5-5	149	NR
(First-place votes in parentheses)					(First-place votes in parentheses)				

Others receiving votes: Oklahoma State 107, Ole Miss 106, TCU 40, Liberty 36, Auburn 32, NC State 14, Michigan 12, Northwestern 8, Nevada 7, Boise State 7, Ball State 6, BYU 6, UCF 5, Houston 5, Boston College 5, West Virginia 3, Army 2, UCLA 2, UAB 2.

Others receiving votes: Utah 145, Northwestern 120, Arizona State 90, Auburn 84, Liberty 68, BYU 53, TCU 48, Michigan 30, UCF 29, NC State 27, Boise State 27, Kentucky 20, San José State 18, Army 13, Virginia Tech 9, Missouri 8, UCLA 7, Pittsburgh 6, Tulsa 6, Boston College 6, Ball State 5, Houston 5, SMU 4, Appalachian State 4, West Virginia 4, Arkansas 3, UAB 3, Nevada 2, Air Force 2, Mississippi State 2, Marshall 1, Florida State 1, California 1, Stanford 1.

2020 Big Ten Year In Review

Final Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
EAST						
Ohio State	5	0	1.000	7	1	.875
Indiana	6	1	.857	6	2	.750
Penn State	4	5	.444	4	5	.444
Maryland	2	3	.400	2	3	.400
Rutgers	3	6	.333	3	6	.333
Michigan	2	4	.333	2	4	.333
Michigan State	2	5	.286	2	5	.286

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
EAST						
Northwestern	6	1	.857	7	2	.778
Iowa	6	2	.750	6	2	.750
Wisconsin	3	3	.500	4	3	.571
Minnesota	3	4	.429	3	4	.429
Nebraska	3	5	.375	3	5	.375
Purdue	2	4	.333	2	4	.333
Illinois	2	6	.250	2	6	.250

2020 All-Big Ten Teams

Here is a look at the All-Big Ten football teams as selected by the coaches and media. (Players in ALL CAPS were unanimous selections).

Coaches Team

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback – JUSTIN FIELDS, Ohio State; Running back – Tyler Goodson, Iowa; Mohamed Ibrahim, Minnesota; Wide receiver – Chris Olave, Ohio State; Garrett Wilson, Ohio State; Center – Josh Myers, Ohio State; Guard – Kendrick Green, Illinois; Wyatt Davis, Ohio State; Tackle – Alaric Jackson, Iowa; Thayer Munford, Ohio State; Cole Van Lanen, Wisconsin; Tight end – Pat Freiermuth, Penn State.

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE: Defensive line – Chauncey Golston, Iowa; Daviyon Nixon, Iowa; Odafé Oweh, Penn State; Shaka Tony, Penn State; Linebacker – Micah McFadden, Indiana; Paddy Fisher, Northwestern; Pete Werner, Ohio State; Defensive back – Shakur Brown, Michigan State; Brandon Joseph, Northwestern; Greg Newsome II, Northwestern; Shaun Wade, Ohio State.

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker – Connor Culp, Nebraska; Punter – Tory Taylor, Iowa; Return specialist – Aron Cruickshank, Rutgers.

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback – Michael Penix Jr., Indiana; Running back – Stevie Scott III, Indiana; Master

Teague, Ohio State; Wide receiver – Ty Fryfogle, Indiana; David Bell, Purdue; Center – Tyler Linderbaum, Iowa; Guard – Cole Banwart, Iowa; Mike Miranda, Penn State; Tackle – Nicholas Pettit-Frere, Ohio State; Will Fries, Penn State; Tight end – Jake Ferguson, Wisconsin.

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE: Defensive line – Owen Carney, Illinois; Jerome Johnson, Indiana; Zach VanValkenburg, Iowa; Zach Harrison, Ohio State; Tommy Togiai, Ohio State; George Karlaftis, Purdue; Linebacker – Blake Gallagher, Northwestern; Derrick Barnes, Purdue; Olakunle Fatukasi, Rutgers; Defensive back – Jamar Johnson, Indiana; Tiawan Mullen, Indiana; Jaylin Williams, Indiana; Cam Taylor-Britt; Nebraska.

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker – Charles Campbell, Indiana; Punter – Drue Chrisman, Ohio State; Return specialist – Charlie Jones, Iowa.

Media Team

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback – Justin Fields, Ohio State; Running back – Tyler Goodson, Iowa; MOHAMED IBRAHIM, Minnesota; Wide receiver – Ty Fryfogle, Indiana; David Bell, Purdue; Center – Tyler Linderbaum, Iowa; Guard – Kendrick Green, Illinois; Wyatt Davis, Ohio State; Tackle – Alaric Jackson, Iowa; Thayer Munford, Ohio State; Tight end – Jake Ferguson, Wisconsin.

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE: Defensive line – Jerome Johnson, Indiana; Chauncey Golston, Iowa; Daviyon Nixon, Iowa; Shaka Tony, Penn State; Linebacker – Micah McFadden, Indiana; Paddy Fisher, Northwestern; Olakunle Fatukasi, Rutgers; Defensive back – Jamar Johnson, Indiana; Tiawan Mullen, Indiana; Brandon Joseph, Northwestern, Greg Newsome II, Northwestern, Shaun Wade, Ohio State.

FIRST-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker – Connor Culp, Nebraska; Punter – Tory Taylor, Iowa; Return specialist – Aron Cruickshank, Rutgers.

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE: Quarterback – Michael Penix Jr., Indiana; Running back – Stevie Scott III, Indiana; Master Teague, Ohio State; Wide receiver – Chris Olave, Ohio State; Garrett Wilson, Ohio State; Center – Josh Myers, Ohio State; Guard – Cole Banwart, Iowa; Mike Miranda, Penn State; Tackle – Peter Skoronski, Northwestern; Cole Van Lanen, Wisconsin; Tight end – Pat Freiermuth.

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE: Defensive line – Owen Carney, Illinois; Zach VanValkenburg, Iowa; Kwity Paye, Michigan; Tommy Togiai, Ohio State; Odafé Oweh, Penn State; Linebacker – Jake Hansen, Illinois; Antjuan Simmons, Michigan State; Blake Gallagher, Northwestern; Defensive back – Jaylin Williams, Indiana; Jack Koerner, Iowa; Shakur Brown, Michigan State.

SECOND-TEAM SPECIAL TEAMS: Kicker – Charles Campbell, Indiana; Punter – Adam Korsak, Rutgers; Return specialist – Giles Jackson, Michigan.

Returning Big Ten Individual Player Award Winners

Ameche-Dayne Running Back of the Year: Mohamed Ibrahim, Minnesota

Richter-Howard Receiver of the Year: Ty Fryfogle, Indiana

Thompson-Randle El Freshman of the Year: Brandon Joseph, Northwestern

Rodgers-Dwight Return Specialist of the Year: Aron Cruickshank, Rutgers

Bakken-Andersen Kicker of the Year: Connor Culp, Nebraska

Eddleman-Fields Punter of the Year: Tory Taylor, Iowa



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Future Schedules

2022

Date	Opponent
Sept. 3	NOTRE DAME
Sept. 10	ARKANSAS STATE
Sept. 17	TOLEDO
Sept. 24	at Michigan State
Oct. 1	at Penn State
Oct. 8	RUTGERS
Oct. 15	IOWA
Oct. 29	INDIANA
Nov. 5	at Northwestern
Nov. 12	WISCONSIN
Nov. 19	at Maryland
Nov. 26	MICHIGAN
XXX	Big Ten Title Game (XX)

2023

Date	Opponent
Sept. 2	at Indiana
Sept. 9	SAN JOSE STATE
Sept. 16	WESTERN MICHIGAN
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame
Oct. 7	MARYLAND
Oct. 14	at Purdue
Oct. 21	PENN STATE
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin
Nov. 4	at Rutgers
Nov. 11	MICHIGAN STATE
Nov. 18	MINNESOTA
Nov. 25	at Michigan
XXX	Big Ten Title Game (XX)

2024

Date	Opponent
Sept. 14	at Washington
Sept. 28	ILLINOIS
Oct. 5	RUTGERS
Oct. 12	at Nebraska
Oct. 26	WISCONSIN
Nov. 2	at Maryland
Nov. 9	at Penn State
Nov. 16	INDIANA
Nov. 23	at Michigan State
Nov. 30	MICHIGAN
XXX	Big Ten Title Game (XX)

2025

Date	Opponent
Aug. 30	TEXAS
Sept. 13	WASHINGTON
Sept. 20	at Indiana
Sept. 27	at Iowa
Oct. 4	MARYLAND
Oct. 11	at Wisconsin
Oct. 18	UCONN
Oct. 25	at Rutgers
Nov. 1	NORTHWESTERN
Nov. 15	PENN STATE
Nov. 22	MICHIGAN STATE
Nov. 29	at Michigan
XXX	Big Ten Title Game (XX)

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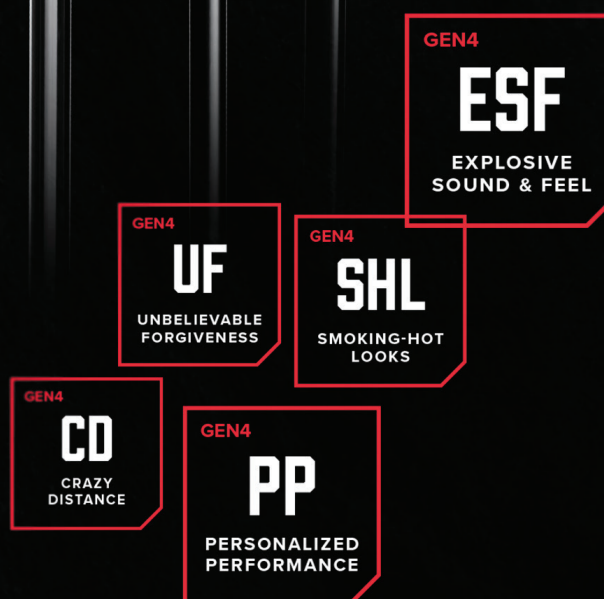


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Gophers Provide Sturdy First Test For OSU

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Don't let the seven-game schedule fool you. The Minnesota Golden Gophers were just as impacted by the COVID-altered season as any team in the Big Ten, even if they didn't lose as many games to positive tests as Michigan or Purdue (six games played each) or Maryland and Ohio State, who each played just five times in the regular season.

The comparatively lofty workload featured one of just four successful "champions week" matchups, a 20-17 loss to Wisconsin, and a lengthy layoff between a Nov. 20 win over Purdue and a Dec. 12 victory against Nebraska. During that break, the Golden Gophers saw matchups with Wisconsin and Northwestern canceled after an outbreak among players and staff. It looked, briefly, as if Minnesota had seen its season come to an end after a 2-3 record spurred by a dreadful first month from a young defense.

But the tests smiled on Minnesota enough to clear the Gophers for their game against Nebraska – or the team pushed hard enough to play despite a season-high 35 unavailable players. In head coach P.J. Fleck's mind, that game was the turning point for a Minnesota roster that needed tangible and mental victories after the brutal stretch of bad luck. That beleaguered defense held Nebraska to just a field goal in the second half, and an oft-inconsistent rushing attack helped to secure the 24-17 win for Minnesota.

"We were really close to canceling that game," Fleck said. "The Big Ten gave us the green light to play. Internally it looked like you couldn't because you had 35 players out, but if you could find a way to get on that field, our kids wanted to play. We weren't worried about just the win or the loss. We were worried about playing.

"People ask me all the time, that Nebraska game, how important was that? That's a top-three win I've ever seen in my career and for all the reasons that have nothing to do with just football. It has to do with the type of team we have and the type of team we have moving forward and what they were able to accomplish when everybody basically said there's no way they get this done."

For a Minnesota team coming off a season that tried as best it could to smother any forward momentum, the 2021 season looks like a golden opportunity. Nearly every starter from the 2020 roster returns, alongside multiple 2019 starters who sat out the 2020 season with COVID concerns. Star wide receiver Rashod Bateman departed for the NFL, but almost every other part of the passing game is back – as is the majority of the rushing attack and the defense, the latter of which Minnesota is hoping will be a bit less green this season.

There's no better place to start with this returning two-deep than at the top of it, with the longest tenured quarterback in the Big Ten. Tanner Morgan returns for his fourth season as the Gopher signal caller.

He entered the 2020 season as one of the conference's most touted passers after a tremendous 2019 campaign that saw him operate former offensive coordinator Kirk Ciarracca's run-pass option offense masterfully on the way to 3,253 yards, 30 touchdowns and just seven interceptions.

The expectations are high once again in 2021.

"Tanner is an incredible competitor – just

like all of our quarterbacks – and we'll continue to keep that standard incredibly high," Fleck said. "I know he does for himself, and he's gotten a lot better in the offseason."

Despite that, plenty of shine came off the senior quarterback in 2020, as his stats plummeted and the Minnesota passing offense stagnated. The departure of Ciarracca and the arrival of new coordinator Mike Sanford seemed to play a role, though Sanford faults COVID as a significant factor in Morgan's drop-off.

"If you look at the offenses in general in the Big Ten, there wasn't a lot of continuity with personnel," Sanford said. "There were some challenges just to find that synergy, the route timing, throwing to consistent receivers. I think Tanner did some really good things. He grew a lot. I think he's going to be even better this year because of it."

Still, a tumble to a 57.9 completion percentage (from 66.0 percent) and just seven touchdowns to five interceptions has put a serious damper on the potential of the Minnesota passing attack entering the season. The loss of Bateman won't do much to help with those issues, though a rising star certainly seemed to emerge in 2020 in the form of Chris Autman-Bell.

Autman-Bell bounced around the depth chart through three years but checked in at No. 2 in receiving yards in 2020 with 430 on 22 receptions. Minnesota will look to lean on him as it hopes to expand its passing attack beyond the star receiver role that Bateman vacated.

"I have no doubt in my mind that Chris Autman-Bell has the mentality to be the guy," Sanford said. "Really for him, it starts with a mind-set of, 'If the ball is in the air, I'm going to find a way, and I'm going to will myself to come down with that football.' That's who Chris is, and I think that Chris has always been that guy. But now his opportunities are going to continue to increase."

Senior Clay Geary, sophomore Daniel Jackson, sophomore Mike Brown-Stephens, sophomore Texas A&M transfer Dylan Wright, freshman Lemeke Brockington and freshman Brady Boyd all join him in the receiver room, though none has any significant experience, so a more versatile passing attack may fall to Morgan.

He'll have some help in the backfield with the return of yet another familiar name to Big Ten fans, running back Mohamed Ibrahim, an All-American in 2020 who gained 1,076 yards and 15 rushing touchdowns on 201 carries.

"He's one of the best players in college football. Period," Fleck said. "It doesn't matter where he plays, what conference he is in. He is one of the best players in college football, one of the smartest players in college football and he's one of the best teammates you could ever ask for."

The Gopher offense will benefit as well from as experienced a line as you'll see in college football this season, featuring the return of 6-9, 380-pound starting tackle Daniel Faalele (who sat out in 2020) along with interior blockers Conner Olson, Blaise Andries and John Michael Schmitz and left tackle Sam Schlueter.

Defensively, things in Minneapolis are much shakier and feature quite a few new faces. After losing the majority of the 2019 group, including star safety Antoine Winfield Jr., Minnesota struggled to find consistent contributors in 2020, allowing 30.1 points

Get To Know ... Minnesota

- **2020 Record:** 3-4.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 10, Defense 10, Specialists 2.
- **Head Coach:** P.J. Fleck, 5th year at Minnesota, 26-19.
- **Series History:** 53rd meeting; Ohio State leads 45-7-0
- **School Facts:** Location – Minneapolis, Minn.; Enrollment – 49,148; Nickname – Golden Gophers; Colors – Maroon, Gold; Conference – Big Ten (West Division); Stadium – Huntington Bank Stadium (Surface, FieldTurf Revolution; Capacity – 50,805).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Mohamed Ibrahim	201	1,076	5.4	15
Cam Wiley	29	179	6.2	1
Tanner Morgan	25	-35	-1.4	0

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Tanner Morgan	106-183	57.9	1,374	7-5

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Chris Autman-Bell	22	430	19.6	1
Daniel Jackson	12	167	13.9	0
Mohamed Ibrahim	8	56	7.0	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 27.3
Rushing Yards Per Game – 191.9
Passing Yards Per Game – 199.1
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 391.0

2021 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 2	OHIO STATE	8 p.m.
Sept. 11	MIAMI (OHIO)	Noon
Sept. 18	at Colorado	1 p.m.
Sept. 25	BOWLING REEN	Noon
Oct. 2	at Purdue	TBA
Oct. 16	NEBRASKA	TBA
Oct. 23	MARYLAND	TBA
Oct. 30	at Northwestern	TBA
Nov. 6	ILLINOIS	TBA
Nov. 13	at Iowa	TBA
Nov. 20	at Indiana	TBA
Nov. 27	WISCONSIN	TBA
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
M. Sori-Marin	28	26	54	1.5-5	0-0
Tyler Nubin	30	11	41	0.5-3	0-0
Jordan Howden	26	11	37	0-0	0-0
Coney Durr	25	4	29	1.0-1	0-0
Boye Mafe	18	9	27	5.5-36	4.5-35
Justus Harris	14	5	19	0-0	0-0
D. Carter	7	9	16	1.5-3	1.5-3
James Gordon	8	8	16	1.0-2	0-0

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
D. Carter	1	24	24.0	0
Josh Aune	1	5	5.0	0
James Gordon	1	4	4.0	0
Coney Durr	1	0	0.0	0
Tyler Nubin	1	0	0.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 30.1
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 207.1
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 208.7
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 415.9

per game, including 49 to Michigan and 45 to Maryland in a pair of losses to open the season. As the young group settled in, Minnesota found some stops and looked fairly strong against Nebraska and Wisconsin, but Fleck looked to shake things up this offseason regardless, hitting the transfer portal hard.

Nowhere on this defense will Minnesota welcome more new faces than up front. After allowing 207.1 yards per game on the ground last season and generating very little in the way of pressure on the quarterback, the Gophers added Clemson transfer Nyles Pinckney and N.C. State transfer Val Martin as tackles to shore up the run defense. Boye Mafe is the name to watch on the outside, after he led Minnesota in sacks in 2020 with 4½.

"Boye has a chance to be one of the better pass rushers in the league," said Minnesota defensive coordinator Joe Rossi. "He put up really good numbers last year. We want to see him improve in the run game and kind of take his game to the next level."

The linebacker room also will look a bit different, which is good news for Rossi, who had just one linebacker with any college experience to work with last season. That player, senior Mariano Sori-Marin, returns, as does 2019 starter Braelen Oliver, who sat out the 2020 season. Abilene Christian graduate transfer Jack Gibbens likely rounds out the group in Minnesota's defense, which deploys plenty of nickel looks but still uses the standard 4-3 as its base.

"As a unit we didn't play well, and that's the position I coach," Rossi said. "We had one guy that had played defensive snaps going into last year, which was Mariano.

"Now you've got Mariano back. You added

Jack, and Braelen was a starter for us in '19. So you have him back. You have Jack now, who was a four-year starter at Abilene Christian with a 4.0 GPA undergrad. ... Now you have three guys that have been starters."

The secondary will have to replace Benjamin St. Juste, one of the lone bright spots of the defense last season, after he was selected in the third round of the NFL draft by the Washington Football Team. Taking over for him at cornerback will be the winners of a battle among sixth-year senior Coney Durr, seniors Phillip Howard and Terell Smith, redshirt freshman Miles Fleming and freshman Justin Walley. Fleming and Durr have the most experience of the group, though neither played as much as the departed St. Juste.

Jordan Howden returns in one of two safety spots, while the other is expected to fall to junior Tyler Nubin, who had 41 tackles and an interception last season.

"I'm excited about the group," Rossi said. "Again, is someone going to step in and be Ben St. Juste? Probably not. But we have guys that can play."

The Golden Gophers aren't projected by many to claim the Big Ten West this season, but they are largely considered a bowl team and a group that should be in for a bounce-back season.

"I love that we have high expectations," Fleck said. "I get paid to win, and I get all that. But there were a lot of other things way more important than just winning a football game in 2020. Our team realized that. I realized that. We realized that together and we did everything we could to be the best we could be. We hit every obstacle head on, and we weren't afraid to do that."



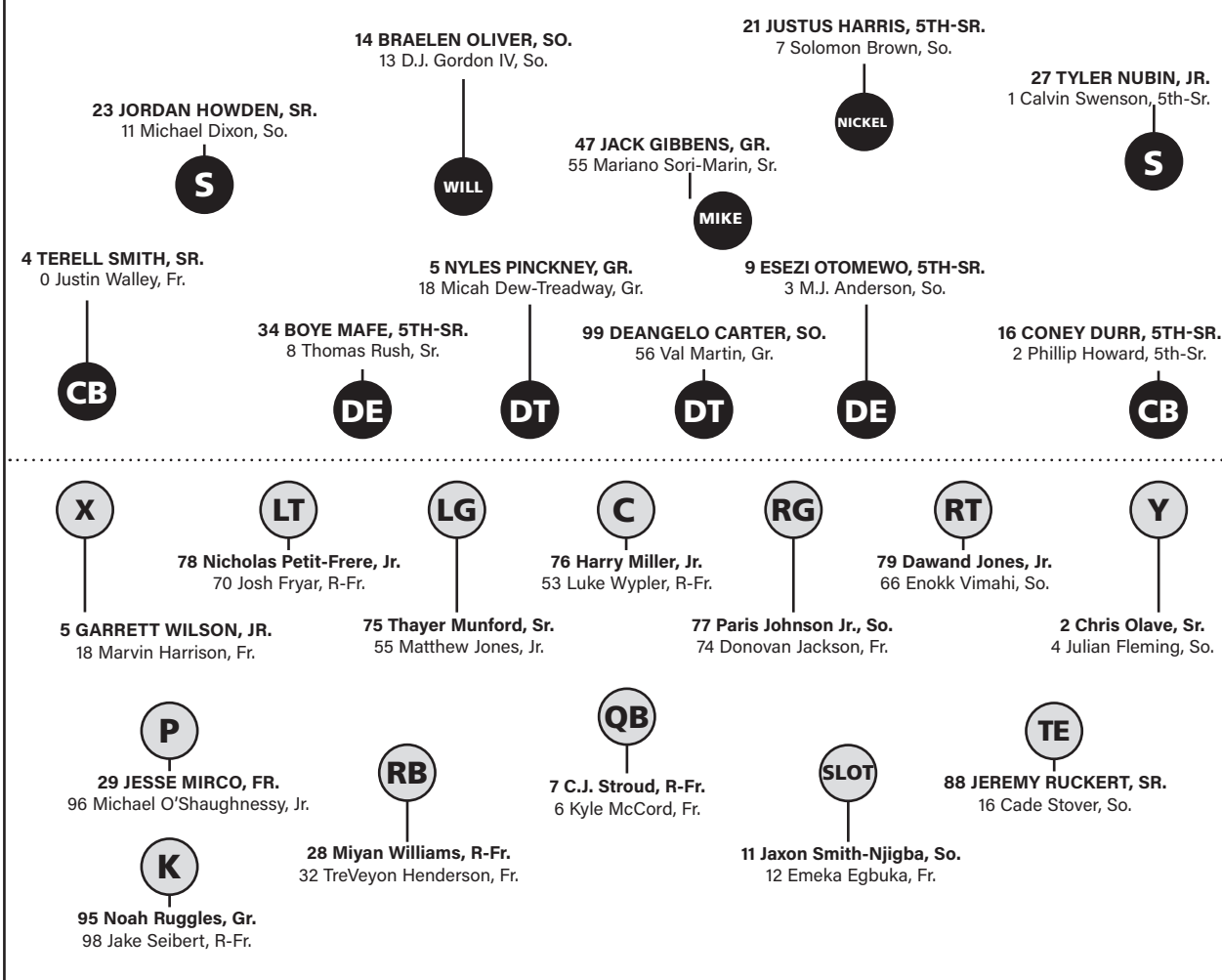
Ohio State at Minnesota

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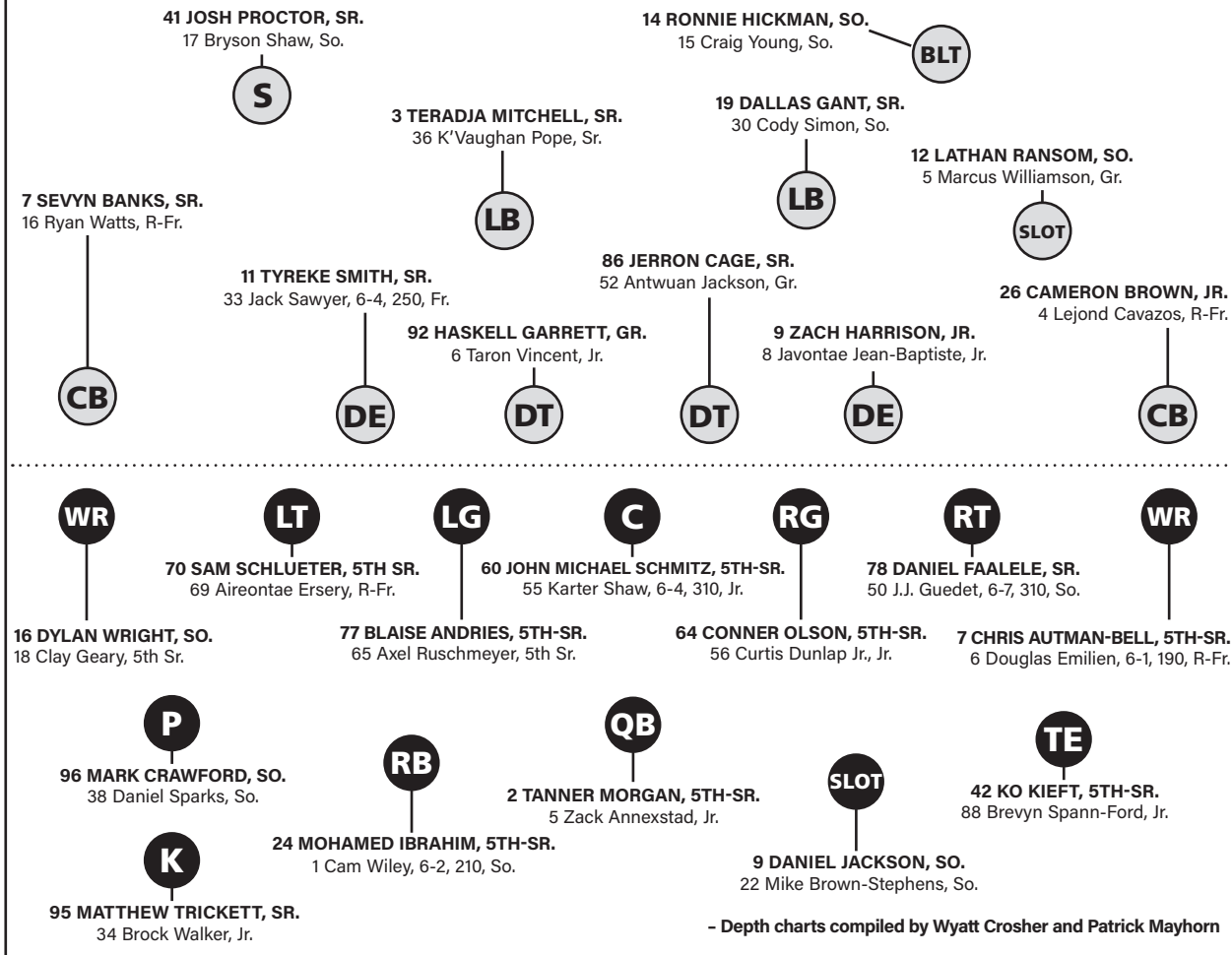


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN MINNESOTA HAS THE BALL...



- Depth charts compiled by Wyatt Crosher and Patrick Mayhorn

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. MINNESOTA RUSH DEFENSE

When it comes to running the ball, Ohio State once again will have an abundance of talent despite the departure of Trey Sermon to the NFL. The difference this season, though, is that the Buckeyes do not have quarterback Justin Fields, meaning the reliance on backs such as Master Teague, Miyan Williams and freshman TreVeyon Henderson will be more pronounced, especially until the newbie QBs get their feet wet. The Golden Gophers bring back most of their defensive starters, for better or worse, from last season when they ranked 102nd of 127 teams by allowing 207.1 yards per game. (Good news, Buckeye fans: OSU's fourth opponent - Akron - was 120th at 248.2 ypg.) Ohio State averaged 256.9 rushing yards last season. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

MINNESOTA RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Minnesota (3-4 last season) is led by fifth-year back Mohamed Ibrahim, who was named the 2020 Big Ten Running Back of the Year after 1,076 yards and 15 touchdowns in seven games. He is ninth on the program's all-time list with 2,840 yards in 28 games. He has run for at least 100 yards in eight straight games. Ibrahim will get help from Cam Riley and Treyson Potts, who each averaged over 6.2 yards per carry. They will run behind 6-9, 400-pound right tackle Daniel Faalele, who returns after he opted out last season due to the pandemic. The Buckeyes' defensive front has veterans Haskell Garrett, Zach Harrison and Tyreke Smith, but fans can't wait to see star recruits Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimolalo. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. MINNESOTA PASS DEFENSE

Kyle McCord. Jack Miller. C.J. Stroud. None of them has thrown a pass in a college game. And don't forget early, early enrollee Quinn Ewers. It's a testament to the receiving corps that despite the lack of an experienced quarterback, the Buckeyes will still have a decided advantage over almost every opponent. Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson could be 2022 first-round picks, and they are supported by the likes of Julian Fleming, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Emeka Egbuka, the top ranked receiver for the class of 2021 by the 247Sports composite rankings. The offensive line is solid but will need time to mesh. Minnesota last season was 115th with just eight sacks and last in tackles for loss per game (2.57). The Golden Gophers do have 2020 All-Big Ten honorable-mention defensive end Boye Mafe, who had 4½ sacks in six games. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

MINNESOTA PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Fourth-year quarterback Tanner Morgan will take a crack at an inexperienced secondary and a new set of linebackers. It will make for an interesting game at Huntington Bank Stadium (formerly TCF Bank Stadium). Even though Rashod Bateman went to the Baltimore Ravens in the 2021 NFL draft, Morgan still has Chris Autman-Bell, whose 22 catches last season constitute 34 percent of Minnesota's returning receptions. He had 430 receiving yards and one TD. However, he was injured at practice Aug. 12, and coach P.J. Fleck said four days later that his receiver was "week to week" heading toward the OSU game. The Buckeyes were awful last season defending anything thrown their way, ranking 122nd in pass defense (304.0 ypg). Cornerback Sevn Banks could be the next corner to hit NFL pay dirt after this season, and Cameron Brown might have a breakout season if fully recovered from an Achilles injury. **EDGE: EVEN**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Here's a fun fact: Minnesota's opponents made only 5 of 14 field-goal attempts (35.7), the lowest make percentage in the Big Ten. Meanwhile, the Golden Gophers made 4 of 6 (66.7 percent). Another fun fact: If the game comes down to field goals, the Buckeyes aren't as good as we think. Australian Jesse Mirco could be the new Buckeye punter, joining placekicker Noah Ruggles, a North Carolina grad transfer. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

Minnesota was 11-2 in 2019 and wants to prove that last season was a misstep on the road to respectability. Playing in front of fans again against the No. 4 team in the country at night will create an electric atmosphere, even though there will be no snow (we think). The Buckeyes are used to being the hunted, but it has been a while since their quarterback situation was so unknown. **EDGE: MINNESOTA**

STAFF PREDICTION

Ohio State may have some first-game jitters, but so will the Golden Gophers. The Buckeyes have too much talent and big-game experience to let this one get away, but it will provide a good test heading into the Sept. 11 showdown with Oregon. **OHIO STATE 45, MINNESOTA 17**

Ohio State Schedule Lacking In Depth

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

You have to go back to Oct. 20, 2018, to find Ohio State's last regular-season loss. It was certainly a memorable game – a 49-20 drubbing at the hands of Purdue, which shocked both the then-sixth-ranked Buckeyes and the nation. Ohio State nearly slipped up again later that same regular season, besting Maryland by one point and a matter of inches in mid-November when Terps quarterback Tyrell Pigrome missed an open target in the back of the end zone on an overtime two-point conversion attempt to preserve OSU's 52-51 victory.

Since that scare, Ohio State seems to have flipped the switch in regular-season matchups. The Buckeyes closed that 2018 season and head coach Urban Meyer's final regular-season game with a 62-39 blowout of archrival Michigan and have proceeded to rattle off 17 straight regular-season victories to open the Ryan Day era.

Most of those games have featured little suspense in terms of the final scores. Since the Day era began, Ohio State has played in just one regular-season game decided by one score or less, withstanding Indiana's second-half surge in 2020 and holding on for a 42-35 win that had the Buckeyes leading by as many as 28 points early in the third quarter.

The 2021 schedule looks to provide a bit more of a challenge at the top for the Buckeyes, with a pair of likely top-15 matchups before November and potential stumbling blocks for a young quarterback and many new faces interspersed throughout the defense.

However, Ohio State has nine teams on its schedule that finished with a losing record in 2020, including all but one (Indiana) of its conference foes. The Big Ten expects a bounce-back in 2021 after the late start and extenuating circumstances of the 2020 campaign, but it's still difficult to conjure much of a challenge narrative for the Buckeyes on this schedule, which earned the title of second easiest in the conference according to CBS Sports analyst Tom Fornelli.

"Remember earlier when I said that Rutgers' SOS is helped out by not having to play Rutgers? Well, it works the opposite way for Ohio State, which does not get to include Ohio State on its schedule," Fornelli wrote. "Still, the Buckeyes might have the most attractive nonconference game in the conference (I lean toward Wisconsin-Notre Dame) with Oregon, but Tulsa and Akron won't pose much of a threat. In the conference, the Buckeyes get a pretty favorable draw from the West with Minnesota, Nebraska and Purdue. Also, the road schedule isn't easy, but it's not nearly as tricky as what a lot of

other Big Ten teams are facing. Honestly, if not for the Oregon game, this schedule probably would've finished 14th."

As Fornelli alluded to, it's a schedule that does provide some intriguing matchups, but one that should provide plenty of opportunities for development among the supremely talented, but still young OSU roster.

Here are brief previews for all 12 matchups that Ohio State will be dealing with this season, with a full preview of Ohio State's season-opening matchup against Minnesota on pages 34-35.

Minnesota, Sept. 2 – Minnesota returns one of the Big Ten's most experienced teams, benefiting from the super-senior rule to bring back 10 starters on either side of the ball.

On the offensive side of the ball, Minnesota hopes that returning experience will spark a return to the heights of its 11-2 campaign in 2019, which had quarterback Tanner Morgan leading an offense that scored 34.1 points per game. Morgan is back to lead the Golden Gophers again, but he took a step back in 2020 after the loss of offensive coordinator Kirk Ciarocca and wide receiver Tyler Johnson.

The offense scored just 27.3 points per game, Morgan's completion percentage fell from 66.0 to 57.9, and even a strong running game wasn't enough to keep the Gophers offense ahead of the chains. Chris Autman-Bell will be tasked with replacing top receiver Rashod Bateman as Minnesota and second-year offensive coordinator Mike Sanford looks to rebuild the passing attack.

The run game has fewer questions, with five starters back up front and the return of All-America running back Mohamed Ibrahim, who rushed for 1,076 yards in just seven games in 2020. Minnesota likely returns to the top half of the conference in scoring on the strength of its experience alone.

Defensively, the Golden Gophers are looking for stability. The 2020 group was forced to break in quite a few new faces and didn't handle the turnover well, allowing 30.1 points per game, including 49 points to Michigan and 45 to Maryland in the first two games of the season.

Oregon, Sept. 11 – Ohio State's biggest nonconference matchup since 2017, when Oklahoma traveled to Columbus and Baker Mayfield planted a flag in the center of the Ohio Stadium turf, this week two matchup with Oregon will go a long way in determining the 2021 season, both for the Buckeyes and for the Ducks.

A win against Oregon would help to add cushion for playoff selection even if Ohio State takes an unexpected loss elsewhere. The Ducks are expected to stay a top-10 team throughout the season and would provide the kind of quality win that can help to

drown out questions about conference quality.

On the flip side, Oregon is hoping to become the first Pac-12 team in the national championship playoff since Washington in 2016, and head coach Mario Cristobal looks to further entrench his program as one of the nation's best. A noon kickoff does little to take the luster off this marquee matchup.

As for the actual opponent, the hype around Oregon springs partially from returning production and partially from recruiting success. The Ducks have secured three straight top-11 classes under Cristobal's guidance and come to Ohio State with top-end talent in droves, specifically on defense. The Oregon defense is led by former 2019 No. 2 overall defensive end Kayvon Thibodeaux and 2020 No. 6 and No. 13 overall linebackers Justin Flowe and Noah Sewell, along with the No. 31 prospect, cornerback Dontae Manning – who has yet to break into the starting lineup but will contend for time this season. Almost every member returns to a defense that flashed excellence.

As for the offense, the loss of quarterback Tyler Shough to a Texas Tech transfer would be more impactful had he not lost his job to incumbent Anthony Brown, with four-star freshman Ty Thompson hot on his heels. Brown is a former three-year starter at Boston College but tore both of his ACLs while with the Eagles, limiting his mobility. He completed 15 of his 23 passing attempts last season for 187 yards and two touchdowns.

Tulsa, Sept. 18 – One of the three teams with a winning record in 2020 on Ohio State's schedule, Tulsa was a force to be reckoned with in the American Athletic Conference thanks to a dominant defense. A 17-6 loss to Oklahoma State to open the season was the only blemish on Tulsa's record through the first seven games of the season before it rolled into an AAC title bout with Luke Fickell's Cincinnati squad.

A last-second field goal gave the Bearcats the win and the conference crown, and a two-point loss to Mississippi State in the Armed Forces Bowl dropped Tulsa to a less-than-representative 6-3 final mark.

However, three or four losses may be a bit more realistic for the Golden Hurricane this season. They return much of their offense but must replace first-round linebacker selection Zaven Collins and star cornerback Akayleb Evans, who transferred to Missouri in the offseason. Eight defensive starters return, including tackle Jaxon Player (9½ tackles for loss in 2020) and middle linebacker Justin Wright, but a slight drop-off from the unit's 21.6 points per game allowed last season seems likely.

The offense is expected to improve with 10 returning starters, though last season's starting quarterback, Zach Smith, is notably not among them. Head coach Phillip Montgomery, a product of the Art Briles tree at Baylor, has produced several talented quarterbacks in his day and will look to do so again with Davis Brin, who led an impressive comeback victory against Tulane late in the season when Smith was forced out of the game with an injury.

The new starter should have plenty of help from five returning All-AAC linemen, running back Shamari Brooks and star wideout Keylon Stokes, though the offense may not be fully operational by week three, when it travels to Columbus.

Akron, Sept. 25 – If you're looking for

an opportunity to see some of Ohio State's future stars take the field, this game is likely the time to do it. The Zips have won just one game in their last 23 tries, dropping the final five games of the Terry Bowden era (which came to a close in 2018) and the first 16 of new head coach Tom Arth's reign before finally claiming a 31-3 win against Bowling Green in the penultimate game of his second season at the helm.

Arth was tasked with stripping the program to the studs and rebuilding, and though Akron is expecting something resembling a leap this season, three or four wins would qualify as that leap – and Ohio State doesn't seem like much of an option for a win at this point in the rebuild.

The Zips do have a few players worth considering, though the status of the brightest of the stars, halfback Teon Dollard, seems to be in flux. Dollard was indicted in Summit County Common Pleas Court on a felony count of carrying a concealed weapon in March and was suspended from the team indefinitely, though he remained in school. He's still listed on the Akron roster, but Arth has yet to announce an official length for any in-season suspension.

Quarterback Zach Gibson flashed some ability in the team's RPO-heavy offense last year but struggled with consistency, completing just 57.6 percent of his passes and tossing five interceptions in six games.

Defensive coordinator Matt Feeney runs a defense that blitzes more than any other team in the Mid-American Conference, but it allowed 248.2 rushing yards per game in the process – good news for such players as OSU freshmen running backs Evan Pryor and TreVeyon Henderson, but perhaps less so for the Zips and Feeney.

Rutgers, Oct. 2 – Rutgers' 2020 season and the offseason that followed it have inspired quite a bit of excitement around head coach Greg Schiano's second tenure in charge of the Scarlet Knights. Hired for his ability to get the best out of Rutgers and his knack for recruiting the East Coast, the former Ohio State defensive coordinator – who lost his job in Columbus following the 2018 season – has flashed both strengths through his first year in town, landing the No. 42 recruiting class in 2021 and holding onto, as BSB went to press, the No. 17 class in 2022.

After a 2-10 season that had former OSU defensive assistant Chris Ash depose in 2019, Schiano led the Scarlet Knights to a 3-6 campaign in year one, featuring a trio of road conference victories against Michigan State, Purdue and Maryland. Rutgers seriously challenged three more opponents, falling by three points at home against Illinois (23-20), six points in triple overtime against Michigan (48-42) and a touchdown against Nebraska (28-21) to end the season. The Scarlet Knights even put a bit of a fright into the Buckeyes, moving the ball and scoring at times with lots of trickery on the way to a closer-than-expected 49-27 loss in Columbus.

With 19 starters back, as well as a fully intact coaching staff, Rutgers is looking to take another step toward relevancy in 2021. The offense is likely the better unit of the two, as it was in 2020. Coordinator Sean Gleeson, a former Princeton assistant and one of the more innovative coordinators in college football, will have returning starters at every position.

Quarterback Noah Vedral wasn't spectac-

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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: OPPONENT OVERVIEW

ular in 2020, throwing for just 1,253 yards, nine scores and eight interceptions, but top receivers Bo Melton and Aron Cruickshank return, in addition to running back Isaih Pacheco and the entire offensive line.

The defense will have to replace starting tackle Michael Dwumfour and former Ohio State safety Brendon White, but it does return eight starters and has hit the transfer portal in hopes of patching any serious gaps. The Scarlet Knights are not yet deploying Schiano's man coverage-heavy scheme, leaning instead on a veteran linebacker corps of Tyreek Maddox-Williams, Tyshon Fogg and Olakunle Fatukasi to create havoc in the backfield and across the middle.

Maryland, Oct. 9 – Head coach Mike Locksley has hired a recruiting-heavy staff and hit the ground running, landing the No. 18 recruiting class in 2021, spearheaded by five-star Miami Central linebacker Terrence Lewis and four-star Gaithersburg (Md.) Quince Orchard edge rusher Demeioun Robinson, the No. 4 and No. 10 highest-rated recruits in program history (247Sports era, since 2000). Maryland has been an active player in the transfer portal, too, bringing former Nebraska four-star receiver Marcus Fleming into the fold in 2021 after landing four Power Five transfers in 2020.

Now, the question is about deploying that talent. Locksley is 5-12 in his current stint with the Terrapins (6-17 overall, when factoring in his 2015 season as interim head coach) and those big wins on the trail and in the portal have yet to bear significant fruit on the field.

Quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa flashed his former four-star talent in 2020, but he still completed just 61.5 percent of his passes for 1,011 yards and threw as many touchdowns (seven) as interceptions.

Five-star 2020 wide receiver signee Rakim Jarrett impressed early on as well, nabbing 17 receptions for 252 yards and two scores in his freshman campaign, but the Terrapins will need him and many of their younger players to take a leap in 2021 with such veterans as running back Jake Funk, linebacker Chance Campbell and safety Antwaune Richardson all gone this season.

Maryland does return 14 starters but will be asking a lot of new faces, with just six seniors scattered throughout the projected starting lineup. A veteran receiving corps and the returning production of Tagovailoa could spark a strong passing attack under new coordinator Dan Enos, but Maryland will need more than that to seriously challenge such teams as Ohio State on the road.

Indiana, Oct. 23 – The Hoosiers provided the stiffest challenge of the 2020 regular season for the Buckeyes and will hope to do so again in 2021 as they chase after their first-ever Big Ten East title, which Ohio State has claimed for four straight seasons.

The Buckeyes will be meeting a similar team this fall. Indiana returns eight starters on offense and nine on defense, losing only starting running back Stevie Scott, slot expert Whop Philyor and safety Jamar Johnson but returning almost everyone else who contributed to a breakthrough 6-2 campaign.

Leading the offensive charge is QB Michael Penix Jr., who enters his third season as the starter hoping to buck the injury bug that has limited him to six starts in each of the last two years. With a fully healthy Penix at the helm, Indiana is home to the Big Ten's second-best passing attack as receivers Ty Fryfogle and Miles Marshall return and look to be joined by Florida State transfer D.J. Matthews in the slot. The rushing attack

was inconsistent in 2020, but IU hopes to improve with USC transfer Stephen Carr.

Defensively, Indiana returns nine starters and has opted to fill the few vacancies with transfers. Former Ole Miss defensive end Ryder Anderson slots into one starting spot ahead of incumbent James Head Jr., while former Auburn end Jaren Handy, Northern Illinois tackle Weston Kramer and Miami (Ohio) safety Deland McCullough II (the brother of former Ohio State commit Dasan McCullough) hope to patch up the two-deep.

Micah McFadden, Cam Jones, Marcelino McCrary-Ball and Bryant Fitzgerald form perhaps the conference's top linebacker unit, while Tiawan Mullen looks to prove himself as the conference's best cornerback for a second straight season, alongside slot senior Reese Taylor and No. 2 cornerback Jaylin Williams.

Penn State, Oct. 30 – Coming off its first losing season since 2004, Penn State is looking to rebound and return to the upper echelon of the Big Ten, but it will need to find replacements for a quartet of all-conference caliber players – tight end Pat Freiermuth, center Michael Menet and defensive ends Shaka Toney and Odafe Oweh – as well as longtime defensive backfield contributor Lamont Wade (graduation) and linebacker Shane Simmons and defensive Antonio Shelton (transfer).

The biggest piece to replace is, of course, top-12 draft pick Micah Parsons, but Penn State got a head start on filling in for the star linebacker since he sat out the 2020 season to prepare for the NFL draft, citing COVID concerns. His replacement, Brandon Smith, racked up 37 tackles and eight TFL in 2020 and returns for 2021, as does middle linebacker Jesse Luketa, though that's about it for returning faces in the front seven.

The secondary will be a strength, with cornerbacks Joey Porter Jr. and Tariq Castro-Fields back along with safety Jaquon Brisker.

Offensively, the backfield is intact with Sean Clifford returning at quarterback and Noah Cain at running back, though the running back room spent the year churning through injuries, so it's difficult to dub anyone a returning starter there. Jahan Dotson and Parker Washington form one of the conference's most dangerous receiving duos and will look to stretch an inexperienced OSU defensive backfield, as the duo successfully did in Happy Valley a year ago, tallying 217 yards and three scores.

Nebraska, Nov. 6 – Coming off yet another disappointing campaign in 2020, head coach Scott Frost is entering his fourth season looking for some answers and tangible improvement as he hunts for his first bowl game in Lincoln.

Despite Frost's background as something of an offensive guru, first as an offensive coordinator at Oregon and then as the head coach at Central Florida, it looks as though any major improvement for Nebraska this season will come on defense. The Cornhuskers return nine starters from a unit that improved to 64th in points per game allowed (29.4) after checking in at No. 66 in 2019 and 88th in Frost's first season.

Coordinator Erik Chinander will have to replace top cornerback Dicaprio Bootle, but corner Cam Taylor-Britt returns, along with starting safeties Deontai Williams and Marquel Dismuke, do-it-all hybrid player JoJo Domann, and defensive ends Ben Stille and Ty Robinson. Ohio State transfer Tyreke Johnson and returning sophomore Braxton

Clark will battle for the No. 2 cornerback spot, while junior Damion Daniels is expected to slot in at a vacant tackle spot.

The defense will need to move forward because the offense is practically starting from square one. Frost hired former Washington offensive coordinator Matt Lubick to tune up the offense last season – though he found little success – and now the Cornhuskers return just six players with any starting experience on offense.

Quarterback Adrian Martinez returns for his fourth season as a starter, while Luke McCaffrey, with whom Martinez split time last season, transferred to Rice. Running back Dedrick Mills is gone, too, as is wide receiver/halfback Wan'Dale Robinson, leaving Nebraska with just one running back (Marvin Scott) with any experience on the roster. USC transfer Markese Stepp is expected to fill that role, but he averaged only 3.7 yards per carry on 45 attempts in 2020. Tight end Austin Allen also returns.

Robinson's departure hurts the passing game quite a bit since he led the team with 51 receptions. Nebraska is hoping that Montana transfer Samori Toure and Iowa transfer Oliver Martin can help mitigate Robinson's loss.

Purdue, Nov. 13 – Ohio State might enter this game on high alert after the drubbing it took at West Lafayette in 2018, but this rendition of the Boilermakers has very little in common with that one, save for head coach Jeff Brohm. Entering his fifth season in charge, Brohm has seen the shine on his program dwindle significantly, falling from 7-6 in year one to 4-8 in 2019 and 2-4 in 2020.

Purdue will need to find a replacement for wide receiver Rondale Moore, answers on a troubled offensive line and personnel fits for a third defensive coordinator in as many years, with Bob Diaco passing the torch to former Charlotte head coach Brad Lambert this offseason.

Lambert will have a decent amount of experience to work with, but the Boilermakers have two tackles, a starting safety and linebacker Derrick Barnes to replace on the defense.

Like many in the Big Ten, Purdue looked to the portal to fill some of those holes, adding Damarjhe Lewis from Indiana and Joseph Anderson from South Carolina up front, Octavius Brothers from Auburn at linebacker, and C.J. McWilliams from Florida in the backfield.

DEs George Karlaftis and DaMarcus Mitchell provide very strong bookends on the line, but the back seven has plenty to prove, even with its experience.

Outside of Moore, the offense returns starters at every skill position and brings back both Aidan O'Connell and Jack Plummer at quarterback, with the latter expected to take the starting role full time. Zander Horvath is back for his fifth season after leading the team with 442 rushing yards in 2020, and while the wide receiver duo of Milton Wright and David Bell might be lacking the explosiveness of Moore, it's still among the conference's best. Improvement at quarterback and on the line will be crucial for actually getting the ball to those playmakers, though.

Michigan State, Nov. 20 – The transfer capital of the Big Ten is located in East Lansing. Entering year two of his tenure with the Spartans, head coach Mel Tucker has seen his roster shift significantly over the last nine months, with dozens of players departing and joining the program, creating a wildly different roster than the one MSU

fielded in 2020.

Going back to October, when Auburn running back Harold Joiner announced his transfer to MSU, the Spartans have landed 14 new players from the portal while losing 19 of their own to new schools.

Despite that roster upheaval, the Spartans look to be moderately improved for 2021. Lead passer Rocky Lombardi is gone, but he lost his job late in the season to Payton Thorne, who returns, and former Temple starter Anthony Russo has arrived as well to join in the battle. The team's top three receivers are back – Jalen Nailor (26 receptions, 515 yards, four touchdowns), Jayden Reed (33/407/3) and Ricky White (10/223/1), although tight end Matt Dotson graduated.

Another transfer, former Wake Forest running back Kenneth Walker, arrives after a 579-yard, 13-touchdown campaign last season. He will take over the starting spot while sharing time with Joiner as MSU looks to rehab an anemic rushing attack.

Defensively, Michigan State returns seven starts, including three DBs. It seems Tucker wasn't terribly comfortable with that group, though, bringing in four cornerbacks through the portal. MSU has also added new faces in former Tennessee LB Quavaris Crouch, Minnesota LB Itayvion Brown, Michigan LB Ben VanSumeren and Duke DE Drew Jordan, each of whom will look to contribute.

Michigan, Nov. 27 – After COVID interrupted a series that had been played continuously for more than a century, the wait for a renewal of the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry will come to an end Nov. 27 in Ann Arbor.

Ohio State will look to continue its winning streak over its archrivals to the north and should be favored heavily to do so. After a 2-4 campaign last year, Michigan is looking for any sort of positive momentum to keep head coach Jim Harbaugh in town beyond this year.

With nine starters back on defense, the Wolverines are hoping for a quick return to form under new coordinator Mike Macdonald after allowing a whopping 34.5 points per game in former DC Don Brown's final season. Defensive end Aidan Hutchinson leads the charge after missing most of 2020 with an injury, but DE Kwity Paye and LB Cameron McGrone are big losses for the defense. Four defensive backs return, but that secondary was torched to the tune of 255.5 passing yards per game and will need serious improvement even with the presence of former five-star safety Daxton Hill, often the only bright point in the back seven for the Wolverines in 2020.

On offense, senior receiver Ronnie Bell, running back Hassan Haskins, tight end Erick All and a pair of linemen with experience return, but the Wolverines lost receiver Nico Collins, running back Zach Charbonnet and quarterback Joe Milton, along with three offensive linemen. Cade McNamara looks to be the guy at QB after an admirable showing when he took over for Milton, going 43 of 71 passing for 425 yards, five touchdowns and zero interceptions.

Cornelius Johnson and A.J. Henning will step into starting roles at receiver, while Michigan's line looks to keep the quarterback upright while improving at least a bit on a pitiful rushing attack, which averaged 131.5 yards per game, good enough only for 11th in the conference.

BSB Foresees Another Playoff Or Bust Year

Ohio State doesn't often enter a season without lofty expectations, and the 2021 campaign looks to be no different as the Buckeyes emerge from their first full, uninterrupted off-season since Ryan Day's first season as head coach in 2019.

Fresh off a berth in the national title game, Ohio State is looking to make another run at the College Football Playoff and is among the odds-on favorites for those four spots, despite major losses at quarterback, running back, on the offensive line and all over the defense. The Buckeyes are as talented as ever, though, and the hype looks to be warranted – though a week one battle with Minnesota on the road looms large.

Entering yet another season of Buckeye football, it's time once again for the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff to take its shot at prognosticating the season ahead, thankfully with a bit more schedule stability this season than in 2020.

That 2020 campaign was a rough one for the BSB staff in its predications. All four staffers correctly called for the Buckeyes to return to the College Football Playoff after a Big Ten title win, though not a single prediction saw Northwestern facing off against Ohio State in Indianapolis, with Minnesota predicted to finish 8-0 across the board. The Golden Gophers would go 3-4 on the year.

In fact, only one writer saw Northwestern reaching .500, with known Wildcats overseller Wyatt Crosher calling for a 4-4 campaign in Evanston. Patrick Mayhorn was the closest to an accurate Big Ten East, predicting a 5-3 Indiana and a 4-4 Michigan, but 6-2 Penn State at the No. 2 spot can prevent too big a head.

In the full season predictions, Crosher flipped the playoff games, seeing Ohio State toppling Alabama in the semifinal and Clemson in the final – for which we will provide partial credit. Andrew Lind predicted an Ohio State win over Clemson in the national title game as well, while Mayhorn expected a first-round victory against Georgia before a national title defeat at the hands of Dabo Swinney and the Tigers. Joe Dempsey wisely avoided providing a full playoff prediction.

Surely, this will be the season that the BSB

staff is spotless in record predictions, as well as some annual Big Ten awards, which return this season after spacing issues forced them out of the 2020 season preview.

Brown: OSU Washed Away By Tide, Again

The expectation for Ohio State football never changes. The floor is a Big Ten championship. The ceiling is a College Football Playoff title. Ohio State should meet its floor with ease this season, but to reach its ceiling will be a challenge for head coach Ryan Day.

Day and his coaching staff finally settled on C.J. Stroud as their starting quarterback, and he will throw his first collegiate pass when the Buckeyes travel to Minneapolis to face Minnesota in their season opener.

The Golden Gophers have an experienced offense led by 2020 Big Ten Running Back of the Year Mohamed Ibrahim. Quarterback Tanner Morgan set program records two seasons ago and has the potential to pick apart a weak Ohio State secondary.

Still, Ohio State's offense will be too much for Minnesota. The Buckeyes will find a way to get the ball in the hands of playmakers, and Ohio State will travel back to Columbus with a victory.

Ohio State's biggest test comes in its second game against Oregon, which features a talented offense and a strong defense.

Along with senior wide receivers Johnny Johnson III and Jaylon Redd, Oregon quarterback Anthony Brown will lead the offense. The Ducks' running game features CJ Verdell, who ran for back-to-back 1,000-yard seasons in 2018 and 2019.

Future first-round pick Kayvon Thibodeaux will be a game-wrecker. He reminds me of former University of Buffalo linebacker Khalil Mack – now a first-team All-Pro with the Chicago Bears – because of his athleticism. Thibodeaux possesses the power to generate sacks and tackles for loss while also flashing the speed and quickness to cover receivers.

Oregon will score points, and Thibodeaux will make big plays. Still, a sold-out Ohio Stadium provides a significant home-field advantage for the Buckeyes, and Ohio State escapes with

a narrow victory.

Ohio State continues its season with games against Tulsa, Akron, Rutgers and Maryland. The Buckeyes will have no issue winning all four games, as the four opponents combined for a 12-17 record last season, and only Tulsa finished with a winning record at 6-3.

The Buckeyes then travel to Indiana, which nearly left Columbus with an upset last fall. Tom Allen can coach his team to a victory over Ohio State. The game will be close from the opening kickoff to the final whistle, but the Buckeyes win the thrilling midseason game.

Perhaps Ohio State's final challenge of the regular season is its game against Penn State. The Nittany Lions always prove to be challenging for the Buckeyes, especially in white-outs at Beaver Stadium. However, Ohio State plays this game at home and possesses a superior roster to Penn State, and the Buckeyes take this game by multiple scores.

Ohio State wraps up its season with four wins against Nebraska, Purdue, Michigan State and Michigan. The Buckeyes will cruise to victories over the Cornhuskers, Boilermakers and Spartans. Then Ohio State will claim its 10th consecutive victory against the Wolverines, continuing its dominance in "The Game."

The Big Ten championship brings together Ohio State and Wisconsin at Lucas Oil Stadium for the fourth time. Wisconsin enters the game undefeated with its eyes set on the program's first College Football Playoff appearance, but Ohio State makes enough impact plays to win its fifth consecutive championship and sixth conference title overall in the championship game era.

A Big Ten crown sends Ohio State to the playoff as the No. 4 seed behind No. 1 Alabama, No. 2 Clemson and No. 3 Oklahoma.

Alabama lost many weapons to the draft, but that's never been an issue for the Crimson Tide. Nick Saban reloads with five-star talent and championship expectations again in 2021. The team once again makes a run for a title.

Clemson too can overcome the loss of a generational talent. The Tigers' success with Trevor Lawrence and company continues in DJ. Uiagalelei's hands. The defense remains a strong suit, so I expect Clemson to stay in the conversation for a championship all year, eventually reaching the playoffs.

Oklahoma is getting all the love from Pro Football Focus and other analytics-driven news organizations. The Spencer Rattler-led offense is fun to watch and should light up the Big 12 from week to week. With two wins over Iowa State and a victory over Texas, the Sooners comfortably make it to the playoff.

In its CFP semifinal matchup, No. 4 Ohio State earns a rematch with No. 1 Alabama. A 52-24 championship beatdown at the hands of Alabama served as a wake-up call that the Buckeyes had a long way to go in catching up with the Crimson Tide. Both teams will play well in this game, but ultimately, Ohio State's secondary remains its downfall, and Alabama defeats the Buckeyes again in the playoff.

The game leaves Ohio State with a sour taste, but there will be lots to be excited about in Columbus for the 2022 season. The Buckeyes will develop their top-ranked recruiting classes and insert four- and five-star players at each position, hoping to keep pace with Alabama and Clemson for the following season, where the expectations still won't change.

Crosher: OSU Rolls After Early Stumble

Under Ryan Day, Ohio State has yet to lose

a Big Ten or regular-season game through two-plus seasons. One of those is going to change.

The Buckeyes, with a fresh quarterback going up against an experienced, well-coached defense, do not have the typical easy start to a season. Instead, C.J. Stroud will have to throw his first college pass on the road against Minnesota, then at home against Oregon.

While the matchup with the Gophers is not a lock – Minnesota is experienced on offense and has a chance to pick apart what proved to be a weak Ohio State secondary in 2020 – the Buckeyes' most likely loss on the schedule is in Ohio Stadium against the Ducks.

Oregon has a more veteran quarterback in Anthony Brown and should be solid offensively, but it is the Ducks' defense, led by future top-five pick Kayvon Thibodeaux, that will cause troubles for a new quarterback and lead Oregon to a narrow victory, bolstering its playoff chances by game two.

Ohio State won't stay down for long, though. In fact, it may feel a lot like the 2014 season, when new quarterback J.T. Barrett struggled in game two against Virginia Tech before he and Cardale Jones led the Buckeyes to a national championship.

Stroud will gain his footing with lopsided wins against Tulsa, Akron, Rutgers and Maryland before a showdown with the up-and-coming Indiana Hoosiers, who nearly upset Ohio State a year ago. This time around, it will be close from start to finish, but the Buckeyes will sneak out of Bloomington with another one-score win.

Penn State is the week after and may be the last major hurdle Ohio State faces before postseason play. But the Nittany Lions simply don't have enough offensive weapons to get the job done, and the Buckeyes win by multiple scores, helping cement the Buckeyes as a College Football Playoff team if they run the table the rest of the way.

Ohio State will run the table, exorcising old demons with a blowout win over Purdue, doing the same against Michigan State and then taking down Michigan for the 10th consecutive time.

The Big Ten Championship Game will not be a cakewalk. Wisconsin returns the majority of its playmakers from last season and will be a narrow defeat against Iowa away from entering Lucas Oil Stadium undefeated.

Both teams could make the playoff with a win here, but it is Ohio State, with Stroud now firing on all cylinders with his Offensive Player of the Year conference honors, making enough plays to lead the Buckeyes to yet another Big Ten crown.

The 12-1 Big Ten champions do enough to make the playoff at No. 3, with No. 1 Georgia, No. 2 Clemson and, the surprise, No. 4 Iowa State, which sneaks in after its second defeat of Oklahoma on the season in the Big 12 title game. Cincinnati finishes at No. 5 despite a 13-0 record, an AAC title and signature nonconference wins over Indiana and Notre Dame, simply because the College Football Playoff always has to make a wrong decision.

This leads to Clemson and Ohio State matching up in the playoff for the fourth time, giving the Buckeyes an opportunity to even that series. But that opportunity falls short, and the Tigers win a close one thanks to a stronger defense to help their young quarterback, DJ. Uiagalelei.

Georgia defeats Iowa State, and it is the Tigers who redeem their week one loss to the Bulldogs to get back to the top of the mountain with a national championship.



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FOOTBALL PREVIEW: BSB SEASON PREDICTIONS

How We See The 2021 Big Ten Race

Here is a look at how members of the BSB staff predict the Big Ten football season:

Chase Brown			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	12-0	9-0	Rose
Northwestern	9-3	6-3	Las Vegas
Minnesota	8-4	5-4	Music City
Iowa	7-5	5-4	Guar. Rate
Nebraska	5-7	3-6	
Purdue	2-10	1-8	
Illinois	3-9	0-9	

East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	12-0	9-0	CFP
Indiana	10-2	7-2	Citrus
Penn State	9-3	6-3	Outback
Michigan	7-5	5-4	Pinstripe
Rutgers	6-6	3-6	Armed Forces
Michigan St.	4-8	2-7	
Maryland	4-8	2-7	

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin
Offensive POY: Michael Penix Jr., Indiana
Defensive POY: Jack Sanborn, Wisconsin
Coach of the Year: Paul Chryst, Wisconsin
Freshman POY: TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio State

Wyatt Crosher			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	11-1	8-1	Citrus
Iowa	9-3	7-2	Outback
Minnesota	8-4	5-4	Guar. Rate
Northwestern	8-4	5-4	Pinstripe
Nebraska	3-9	2-7	
Purdue	3-9	1-8	
Illinois	3-9	1-8	

East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	11-1	9-0	CFP
Indiana	10-2	8-1	Rose
Penn State	9-3	6-3	Las Vegas
Michigan	8-4	5-4	Music City
Maryland	5-7	2-5	
Rutgers	4-8	1-8	
Michigan State	3-9	1-8	

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin
Offensive POY: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State
Defensive POY: Micah McFadden, Indiana
Coach of the Year: Paul Chryst, Wisconsin
Freshman POY: TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio State

Joe Dempsey			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	12-0	9-0	Rose
Northwestern	10-2	7-2	Citrus
Iowa	8-4	6-3	Gator
Minnesota	7-5	5-4	Holiday
Nebraska	5-7	3-6	Quick Lane
Purdue	4-8	2-7	
Illinois	3-9	1-8	

East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	12-0	9-0	CFP
Indiana	11-1	8-1	Peach
Michigan	9-3	6-3	Outback
Penn State	6-6	4-5	Music City
Rutgers	4-8	2-7	
Maryland	3-9	1-8	
Michigan State	3-9	1-8	

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin
Offensive POY: C.J. Stroud, QB, Ohio State
Defensive POY: George Karlaftis, DE, Purdue
Coach of the Year: Paul Chryst, Wisconsin
Freshman POY: C.J. Stroud, QB, Ohio State

Patrick Mayhorn			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	12-0	9-0	Rose
Northwestern	9-3	6-3	Las Vegas
Iowa	8-4	6-3	Music City
Minnesota	7-5	4-5	Guar. Rate
Nebraska	5-7	3-6	
Illinois	3-9	2-7	
Purdue	2-10	1-8	

East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	11-1	9-0	CFP
Indiana	10-2	8-1	Citrus
Penn State	9-3	6-3	Outback
Michigan	7-5	5-4	Redbox
Rutgers	6-6	3-6	Pinstripe
Michigan State	3-9	1-8	
Maryland	1-11	0-9	

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin
Offensive POY: Michael Penix Jr., Indiana
Defensive POY: Haskell Garrett, Ohio State
Coach of the Year: Tom Allen, Indiana
Freshman POY: Jack Sawyer, Ohio State

Craig Merz			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	10-2	8-1	Rose
Iowa	9-3	7-2	Citrus
Minnesota	8-4	6-3	Music City
Northwestern	8-4	6-3	Pinstripe
Nebraska	7-5	4-5	Red Box
Illinois	5-7	3-6	
Purdue	4-8	2-7	

East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	11-1	9-0	CFP
Penn State	9-3	8-1	Fiesta
Michigan	9-3	7-2	Outback
Indiana	9-3	6-3	Las Vegas
Maryland	6-6	4-5	Guar. Rate
Rutgers	5-7	3-6	
Michigan State	5-7	2-7	

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin
Offensive POY: Michael Penix Jr., Indiana
Defensive POY: Jack Sanborn, Wisconsin
Coach of the Year: Ryan Day, Ohio State
Freshman POY: TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio State

Griffin Strom			
West	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Wisconsin	11-1	8-1	Rose Bowl
Northwestern	8-4	5-4	Las Vegas Bowl
Minnesota	8-4	5-4	Pinstripe Bowl
Nebraska	6-6	4-5	Guaranteed Rate
Purdue	6-6	4-5	Redbox Bowl
Iowa	6-6	4-5	Quick Lane Bowl
Illinois	2-10	0-9	

East	Record	Conf.	Bowl
Ohio State	12-0	9-0	CFP
PSU	10-2	7-2	Citrus Bowl
Indiana	10-2	7-2	Outback Bowl
Cavazos	8-4	5-4	Music City Bowl
Rutgers	5-7	2-7	
Michigan State	4-8	2-7	
Maryland	3-9	1-8	

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Wisconsin
Offensive POY: Michael Penix Jr., Indiana
Defensive POY: Brandon Joseph, Northwestern
Coach of the Year: Paul Chryst, Wisconsin
Freshman POY: C.J. Stroud, Ohio State

ster the unit led by Zach Harrison, Javontae Jean-Baptiste and Tyreke Smith at end and Jeron Cage, Haskell Garrett, Antwuan Jackson and Taron Vincent on the interior.

Ohio State must replace its four top linebackers, which seems daunting, but the unit has a solid group waiting in the wings in Dallas Gant, Teradja Mitchell, K’Vaughan Pope and Cody Simon.

In the secondary, Ohio State lost only Wade, bringing back talent and experience with Sevnyn Banks, Cameron Brown, Lejond Cavazos, Lathan Ransom, Ryan Watts and Marcus Williamson at cornerback. Marcus Hooker and Josh Proctor return at safety, while Ronnie Hickman, Kourt Williams and Craig Young provide versatility at bullet.

The Scarlet and Gray start their season at Minnesota, starting a Big Ten road slate that features Rutgers, Indiana, Nebraska and Michigan. The Hoosiers lost to the Buckeyes by only seven points in Columbus in 2020, and Tom Allen’s team will provide one of the toughest challenges of the season.

The home games on the schedule include nonconference contests against Oregon, Tulsa and Akron, which will likely need to all be victories for Ohio State to reach its goals. The toughest conference home game for Ohio State will be Penn State, and comparatively, the matchups with Maryland, Purdue and Michigan State should be opportunities for Day’s squad to win handily.

Even though they lost Fields and other talented players, the Buckeyes will return to the College Football Playoff for a chance to compete for a national title.

Mayhorn: Young Buckeyes Round Into Form

The 2021 season is a hard one to predict in Columbus. Ohio State has its fewest proven players since 2016 but one of its most talented rosters of all time, if the recruiting rankings are to be believed. That 2016 group struggled through much of its season but still advanced to the playoff – though it had an experienced quarterback at the helm and an elite defense to lean on. This team doesn’t. Can it still reach those same heights?

As it stands in August, the answer in my mind is yes, though I think the first round of the College Football Playoff is likely the ceiling for this group, as it was for that one. This rendition of Ohio State is, despite its youth, supremely talented, and the conference that surrounds it has fallen off significantly since 2016, when the Big Ten crown last fell to a team that doesn’t don the Scarlet and Gray. The vets who do

return are among the nation’s best, be it pass catchers Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and Jeremy Ruckert, offensive tackles Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere or defensive front standouts Zach Harrison, Tyreke Smith and Haskell Garrett.

The new faces around them didn’t get many opportunities to shine in the compressed and COVID-impacted 2020 campaign, but the recruiting rankings aren’t often wrong, and what we have seen of them – be it in reserve minutes or the 2021 spring game – has been impressive. It’s never attractive to be breaking in a new starting quarterback without a collegiate pass to his name, but you could do a whole lot worse than picking one of four blue-chip prospects and plopping them into an offense with three returning starters up front, three of the best pass catchers in the country and a former top recruit in every other position. An improved running game could go a long way as well, and it looks like second-year freshman Miyan Williams and true freshman TreVeyon Henderson are the players to deliver that.

With that group, it’s hard to see the Buckeye offense taking any kind of significant step back, even with the loss of first-round quarterback Justin Fields and a pair of All-Big Ten linemen in Wyatt Davis and Josh Myers.

The defense is quite a bit less stable but similarly talented. The line should once again be among the nation’s best, and that’s before factoring in all-world freshman ends Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau. The 2020 group was solid but seemed to underachieve, and for a defense built around its line, improvement up front should mean improvement everywhere.

However, new starters at every linebacker position and nothing in the way of established talent in the defensive backfield, save for the oft-inconsistent cornerback Sevnyn Banks and safety Josh Proctor, will present yet another challenging season for defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, who seemed to struggle in his inaugural season. The inclusion of the “Bullet” position and the rise of youngsters such as linebacker Cody Simon, slot cornerback Lathan Ransom and outside cornerback Ryan Watts is encouraging, and all three impressed in practice, but there’s more to football than talent, and the Buckeye defense learned that the hard way last season. Significant improvement seems unlikely, but a decrease in big plays allowed would be a big step in the right direction for a group that was burned far too often in 2020.

It seems unlikely, though, that every young piece of this roster will be fully operational by

Continued On Page 40

Buckeyes Near-Unanimous Choice For CFP

Continued From Page 39

the time week one rolls around. I doubt that hurts the Buckeyes against an incomplete but explosive Minnesota team, even in a hostile environment, but the week two matchup with top-10 Oregon is a loss in my book right now. The Ducks are among the nation's most talented teams and should have a feisty defense, along with a strong skill corps on the other side of the ball. Ohio State may catch a break if Oregon's quarterback play isn't up to par, but this game is reminiscent of the 2017 matchup with Oklahoma at home, when the Buckeye defense just couldn't quite keep up with a more experienced offense. This Ohio State offense is better than that one, but I think the Silver Bullets are quite a way back from their 2017 predecessors.

That's the bad news for the Buckeyes. The good news? I don't see another loss on this schedule, as Ohio State rounds into form and rolls to another Big Ten crown, picking apart Wisconsin in the conference title game and earning its way to a third straight playoff berth. Beyond that? I think Ohio State may be running fourth among the nation's best this season and will meet a fate fitting of that in the playoff, losing to eventual national champion Oklahoma and its unstoppable passing attack. Across from that, in the 1 vs. 4 matchup, Georgia draws a rematch from the 2020 Peach Bowl with Cincinnati but falls to the Bearcats and their monstrous defense.

That may not be the finish that Ohio State wants, but Day certainly looks to be on the right track to his first national title, and with a much

more experienced roster in 2022, the Buckeyes should be as well-positioned as anybody.

Elsewhere in the Big Ten, it's another big season for Indiana and head coach Tom Allen, who takes home the Coach of the Year honors after leading the Hoosiers to a 10-2 campaign and a Citrus Bowl berth, falling only to the Buckeyes and Luke Fickell's surging Cincinnati Bearcats. Quarterback Michael Penix Jr. leads one of the best offenses in school history and snatches Offensive Player of the Year honors away from whoever wins the Ohio State quarterback job and Minnesota running back Mohamed Ibrahim.

The Buckeyes have a bit more luck in the awards circuit on defense, nabbing Defensive Player of the Year honors for Haskell Garrett and freshman of the year plaudits for Sawyer, who I think leads the team in sacks.

Merz: Almost Smooth Sailing For Buckeyes

The smart and probably logical thing to do is to go all Ohio State, all the time. With an uber-talented team and playoff experience to build from, chances are good that the Buckeyes will win every game leading into the national semifinal and collect all the individual hardware the Big Ten has to offer.

But there is a gnawing feeling that somewhere along the way OSU will hit a bump, not a major one, but one to ensure that Selection Sunday will elicit some tension.

While I have the Buckeyes going 11-1 in the regular season, I can't pinpoint when that negative result will come, although my instincts

tell me Oregon will present a challenge to the inexperienced C.J. Stroud at the helm for Ohio State. Sort of a 2014 Virginia Tech humbling of J.T. Barrett type of game.

That being said, the Buckeyes will grow week by week so it's best to put that L on their ledger early because they should roll into the College Football Playoff as the No. 4 seed vs. big, bad Alabama with another Big Ten title in tow.

Crimson Tide aside, Penn State will be the most talented opponent, but since that's a home game, Indiana and Michigan, yes Michigan, will be the toughest games on the conference schedule until the Big Ten Championship Game.

The top team from the West will be Wisconsin, but if Iowa pulls off the upset to become the representative, then Kirk Ferentz will edge OSU's Ryan Day as the coach of the year.

The offensive winner could come from the Buckeyes, but it won't be a quarterback. Chris Olave leads a deep receiving corps and will have a monster season, but he's also got to share the catching duties and limelight with Garrett Wilson.

That could leave an opening for Indiana QB Michael Penix Jr. However, anything below second place in the East for the Hoosiers would give Penn State receiver Jahan Dotson an opportunity to earn the prize.

OSU defensive end Zach Harrison is my choice for defensive POY over Wisconsin linebacker Jack Sanborn. The top frosh award is up for grabs with Buckeye back Trevon Henderson in a battle with Michigan running back Donovan Edwards among a host of choices.

Strom: Buckeyes Run Table In Regular Season

On paper, Ohio State may be susceptible to a regular-season loss this year.

The Buckeyes must replace a Heisman Trophy candidate quarterback with one of several freshmen who have yet to throw a college pass. They must fill in for a record-setting running back with one of a number of players who have yet to threaten the 1,000-yard mark for a season. Up front, two starting interior linemen – NFL draft-picks at that – are gone.

On defense, Ohio State's secondary was one of the worst in the country statistically in 2020, and there's been no overhaul in personnel. At linebacker, a source of strength for last year's team, the unit has seen sweeping turnover.

All that being said, Ohio State has given me no reason to believe it can't adequately reload, retool and return to the Big Ten Championship Game – and likely the College Football Playoff – with another perfect run through its first 12 scheduled opponents.

The first two games of the season will be telling for head coach Ryan Day and the 2021 Buckeyes, who were done no favors with early matchups against Minnesota and Oregon to start things off.

C.J. Stroud will be tested straight away in a big moment under the bright lights with a packed Golden Gophers crowd cheering against him. If that hurdle is cleared, future first-round NFL draft pick Kayvon Thibodeaux and the Ducks will be waiting in the wings to mount a formidable pressure on the new-look Buckeye offensive line.

Even Tulsa, Ohio State's third opponent of the season, is no slouch, having just come off the heels of an impressive 6-3 season in which its only losses came to Oklahoma, Cincinnati and Mississippi State.

But the Buckeyes have not dropped a season opener in more than 20 years and hold a record of 15-1 against nonconference oppo-

nents in the regular season since 2015. The last time the Buckeyes met a dangerous Group of Five team comparable to Tulsa, they blew the lid off Cincinnati 42-0 in 2019.

In fact, the 2019 team may be a good point of comparison for the 2021 iteration.

That group faced the same questions about the pass defense following an abysmal 2018 in that department yet returned almost the same secondary unit to completely different effect.

Justin Fields was the untested newcomer at quarterback two years ago, and even though he possessed a higher recruiting profile than any current Ohio State quarterback not named Quinn Ewers, the standard of play under center did not dip one iota from the year prior.

The 2019 team began a two-year undefeated streak for the Buckeyes against Big Ten opponents, a run that has been stretched to 21-straight games dating back to November 2018.

Frankly, until the day comes that Day and his staff finally fall short in a conference matchup, Ohio State deserves to be favored entering any meeting with a Big Ten team.

Even if Ohio State does have a few more obvious holes and preseason questions to address than last year's team, with Day himself openly admitting that the inexperience of the group has left him wondering what its identity may be, let's not gloss over its obvious strong suits.

The electric wide receiver duo of senior Chris Olave and junior Garrett Wilson could set records on the outside if the quarterback play is up to par, given the sheer dominance they displayed in tandem a season ago. The weapons in the pass game don't stop there though. Position coach Brian Hartline has a veritable war chest of five-star talent at wideout in the form of numerous first- and second-year options. Look past sophomores Jaxon-Smith Njigba and Julian Fleming, and true freshmen Emeka Egbuka and Marvin Harrison Jr. are not far behind.

With a routine maker of big plays in senior Jeremy Ruckert at tight end to boot, Day's biggest concern when it comes to pass-catching talent will be how to find touches for such a limitless supply of deserving candidates.

The loss of some NFL-caliber linemen up front shouldn't do much to derail the Buckeyes' offensive line. It returns two of the nation's top tackles in super-senior Thayer Munford and redshirt junior Nicholas Petit-Frere. Also starting for Ohio State will be a pair of five-star recruits in junior Harry Miller at center and much-buzzed-about sophomore Paris Johnson Jr. at right guard.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson returns an All-American in the middle with super-senior Haskell Garrett and possesses five-star options young and old on the edge, with junior Zach Harrison making a bid for a breakout campaign while the nation's No. 4 and No. 5 overall recruits join the fold in J.T. Tuimolalo and Jack Sawyer.

My pick for the Buckeyes' biggest threat in the conference is Indiana, which gave Ohio State and its suspect pass defense everything it could handle last season in a game that finished with a one-score margin. With Michael Penix Jr. and Ty Fryfogle returning at quarterback and wide receiver, there's little reason to think the Hoosiers won't enjoy similar success through the air this season.

But even against its most threatening Big Ten foes, be it Indiana, Penn State or Michigan – or even out-of-conference against the Ducks – Ohio State will be favored by a considerable margin, and likely for good reason.

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Dick Schafrath Lived Life To The Fullest

By MARK REA
BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Dick Schafrath was once described as more colorful than a box of crayons, and the description couldn't have been more accurate.

While most football fans remember Schafrath as an anchor for the offensive and defensive lines on Ohio State's 1957 national championship team as well as a four-time All-Pro tackle for the Cleveland Browns, the man known to friends as "The Mule" because of his stubborn determination enjoyed a life defined by much more than just football.

Schafrath, who died Aug. 15 at the age of 84, grew up on a dairy farm in northeastern Ohio and never saw a football game until he actually played in one. He locked horns with a bull at the age of 2 and took 40 stitches in the back of his head for the trouble. He wrestled bears, won competitive eating contests all over the state, once ran 62 miles nonstop on a dare, and paddled a canoe across Lake Erie just to see if it could be done.

Later in life, he served 14 years in the Ohio State Senate and then returned to Ohio State at the age of 69 to complete work on his bachelor's degree in sports and leisure studies.

In short, Schafrath's life was one lived in full.

"Dick is one of most extraordinary human beings I have ever met," said Pro Football Hall of Fame running back Jim Brown, who spent seven seasons as Schafrath's teammate in Cleveland. "As a teammate, he displayed an impeccable work ethic. He drove himself tirelessly to excellence. He is probably the greatest overachiever I ever met."

Schafrath was born March 21, 1937, in a small farmhouse just east of Wooster, Ohio, but birth complications forced hospitalization for the first few weeks of his life in nearby Canton. By the time he was released, however, he seemed more than ready.

"By that time, I was king of the nursery," Schafrath once said. "I weighed nearly 20 pounds."

As the first-born of five boys and two girls, Schafrath was expected to be his father's right-hand man on the farm, and he eagerly accepted those duties. Up every day before the sun to help milk the family's Holstein cows by hand, he would fill his days with plowing, planting, cutting wood, loading hay, shocking wheat and/or husking corn, and just after midnight, he would crawl back into one of two attic beds he shared with his four brothers.

"Hard work? Sure it was," he later said. "But to get to work with my dad all day, every day? I loved it."

By the time he reached high school, Schafrath had only 175 pounds spread over a spidery 6-1 frame, but he was adept at every sport he tried, including boxing, basketball and baseball. He was good enough in baseball to earn the interest of the Cincinnati Reds, but by the time he was a senior, football was beginning to take over his life. He had sprouted up an additional two inches, and thanks to a prodigious appetite, he had gained some 35 pounds to become one of the most sought-after fullback and middle linebacker prospects in the Midwest.

There was just one problem. He wasn't the least bit interested in going to college.

"I was never a very good student because I wasn't that interested in school," Schafrath said in 2014. "I liked playing football, but I didn't want to go to college. When I was done with the eighth grade, I thought I was done with school. But Mom and Dad talked me into going to high school. After that, the Reds drafted me, and I was going to go to their

training camp. Then Woody Hayes showed up in the driveway."

Sticking With Football

Fresh off his 1954 national championship season at Ohio State, the 42-year-old Hayes had made the two-hour Sunday drive from Columbus to Wooster and stepped out of his car to introduce himself to the large brood of Schafraths.

Nearly everywhere else in Ohio, such an introduction would not have been necessary.

"But we didn't know him. Never even heard of him," Schafrath said. "He came on one Sunday morning as we were getting ready to go to church, and he asked if he could join us. So we all got in the car with him and we all went to church together. When we came back, he put an apron on and helped cook lunch with my mom, and after that he went down to the barn and talked to my dad for a couple of hours. When he left, he shook my dad's hand, kissed my mom on the cheek and went back to Columbus. Never even said goodbye to me.

"I went back into the house about an hour later and told my mom that I wasn't very impressed with that Woody Hayes guy, and she said, 'Well, I'll tell you what, son. You'd better get impressed with him because you're going to Ohio State.'"

When he got to Columbus, Schafrath didn't want to stay. He showed up for his first freshman practice and was immediately told he'd be switching positions. After starring at fullback and middle linebacker in high school, he became an interior lineman, listed as both a right and left tackle. Additionally, he was listed as 10th-string on a veteran-laden team and was quickly lost in the shuffle. He disliked his classes and had no social life on campus, driving home on weekends and waiting until the last possible second on Sunday night to go back to Columbus.

Slowly but surely, however, Hayes began to take a personal liking to Schafrath, inviting him to spend some time at the coach's Upper Arlington home, especially on weekends.

Hayes had an ulterior motive, of course. "Every time I'd want to leave school," Schafrath said, "Woody would barricade me in his house."

After that rocky freshman year, Schafrath's competitiveness began to show itself. He quickly moved from fourth-string tackle at the beginning of his sophomore season to the starting left tackle midway through the season, playing next to All-America guard Jim Parker on both offense and defense. He remained at tackle throughout his junior season, helping the Buckeyes to a Big Ten title, a Rose Bowl victory against Oregon and the national championship.

He was primed for an All-America senior season in 1958 until Hayes approached him with a dilemma. The Buckeyes were loaded with talented tackles but deficient at the end position, and the coach asked Schafrath – by then a team co-captain – for a recommendation. Schafrath thought for a few moments and then offered to move to an end position, where he flourished.

In addition to catching the only touch-down pass of his career, Schafrath matched his athleticism with the mentality of his experience as an interior lineman to turn in a standout senior campaign. In his final game for the Buckeyes, he preserved an 18-14 victory over Michigan by causing a fumble near the goal line inside the final minute.

"I have often thought about what Dick sacrificed when he volunteered to change positions," Hayes said years later. "He could have been an All-American, but he wanted to help his team. I can't begin to tell you the satisfac-

tion a coach gets from that kind of unselfish athlete."

For his part, Schafrath always shrugged off those kinds of accolades.

"You don't have to be an All-American to be a team player," he said. "I was never that

talented and everything I did was probably overachieving. I never looked at stats and I never looked at press clippings. I played the hardest I could play, and if that was good enough, so be it. I give all the credit to my teammates."



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Ewers Decision Has Ripple Effect For OSU

It appeared that Ohio State’s quarterback room had a clear-cut idea of what it was looking for in its 2020-22 recruiting classes.

In the 2020 class, which came in the same year that ended up being Justin Fields’ last for the Buckeyes, Ohio State had it covered, signing a pair of four-stars in Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud. The future was helped by a five-star commitment in 2021 – Kyle McCord – and was then solidified as maybe the most talented future room in the coun-

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Wyatt Crosher

try with the commitment of Quinn Ewers, the No. 1 overall prospect in 2022.

But then, that plan earned a new wrinkle once Ewers decided it was time for him to reclassify and come to Ohio State as part of the 2021 class.

“Following conversations with my family and those I know (that) have my best interests in mind, I’ve decided to enroll at Ohio State and begin my career as a Buckeye,” Ewers wrote in a tweet. “This is not just a financial decision; this is about what is best for my football career. At 18, and with one final class about to be completed to earn my high school degree, I feel it’s time to get the

jump on my college career that is available to me.”

Now, the Buckeyes have all four quarterbacks of the future in the room at the same time. While that could lead to more transfers out, it is a situation that The Athletic’s Ari Wasserman said could be a benefit for the program as a whole moving forward.

“If you look at it from Ohio State’s standpoint,” Wasserman told BSB, “they might actually be in a position now to go after a five-star prospect in the 2023 class when that wouldn’t have been the case if Ewers would have stayed in the 2022 class.”

Wasserman mentioned names such as New Orleans Isidore Newman five-star Arch Manning, the top overall player in the 2023 class, as well as Detroit Martin Luther King five-star Dante Moore, as players who likely would not have been interested in Ohio State that the Buckeyes now have a major chance with.

And while transfers may be inevitable, Wasserman said it is not a bad thing to have every quarterback vying for the spot in the room at one time so that the decision for starter can truly be figured out.

“The good news for Ohio State at the quarterback position is that all the quarterbacks that they have recruited in the last few years will make it into the program, and they have the ability to decide who’s the best as the actual starting quarterback of the program now that they’re here,” Wasserman said. “But now, it might actually open the

OSU Football Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2022 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.						
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	
Kojo Antwi	WR	6-0	190	★★★★	Suwanee (Ga.)	Lambert
Terrance Brooks	CB	5-11	190	★★★★	Little Elm, Texas	
Jyaire Brown	CB	6-0	178	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio)	Lakota West
Kaleb Brown	WR	5-11	177	★★★★	Chicago St. Rita	
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.	
Dallan Hayden	RB	5-11	195	★★★★	Memphis (Tenn.)	Christian Brothers
C.J. Hicks	LB	6-3	220	★★★★★	Kettering (Ohio)	Archbishop Alter
Gabe Powers	LB	6-4	230	★★★★	Marysville, Ohio	
Jaheim Singletary	CB	6-1	170	★★★★★	Jacksonville (Fla.)	Robert E. Lee
Kye Stokes	ATH	6-2	185	★★★	Seffner (Fla.) Armwood	
Tegra Tshabola	OT	6-5	340	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio)	Lakota West
Ryan Turner	CB	6-0	180	★★★	Hollywood (Fla.)	Chaminade-Madonna Prep

doors for them to sign an additional five-star prospect in the class that otherwise would have been impossible now that there’s some extra separation with Ewers in the 2021 class.”

As far as the recruiting rankings go, Ewers still held a perfect 1.0000 recruiting score in the 247Sports composite rankings, becoming just the second quarterback in the rankings’ history (since 2000) to hold that score, with the other being Vince Young. Ewers moved from the No. 1 recruit in 2022 to No. 1 for 2021, giving Ohio State three of the top five players in the class (J.T. Tuimoloau at No. 4, Jack Sawyer at No. 5).

Despite that, the Buckeyes still finished

in second for the class, trailing Alabama. The Crimson Tide’s 327.92 points for 2021 is the most in the 247Sports era, while Ohio State’s 321.68 in 2021 ranks fifth all-time. The 2010 Florida (324.62), 2017 Alabama (323.87) and 2018 Georgia (323.31) classes rank second, third and fourth, respectively.

Lockwood Ends 2023 Drought

Ohio State earned the first commitment in its 2023 recruiting class on Aug. 19 when Thompson’s Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star tight end Ty Lockwood announced via Twitter his intentions to join the program.

ASK AN ANALYST

With The Athletic’s Ari Wasserman

Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star quarterback and Ohio State commit Quinn Ewers made waves when he announced that he would be reclassifying from the 2022 class to enroll at Ohio State this fall as a member of the 2021 class. Do you think it is important for Ohio State to get a new quarterback commitment for the 2022 class, potentially someone in-state to add depth to the room?

“I think that you have to sign a quarterback in every class in the current structure of the sport. Where they get that quarterback from I don’t know is as important as it used to be. I just think that, in a world where two or three quarterbacks can often transfer in any given season, you have to have a constant influx of talent coming into your program.”

Ohio State recently got its first commitment of the 2023 class in Thompson’s Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star tight end Ty Lockwood. How important is the Lockwood commitment, both to get him as a player and also to help what had been considered a slow start to that class?

“I don’t know what people believe to be a slow start. They haven’t even gotten halfway to building the 2022 class at this point. I know that Lockwood is a top-150 player. And when you talk about a tight end prospect who’s in the top 150, that’s about as elite as they get. And people have to remember that the recruiting rankings are based on draft positioning, and tight ends don’t typically get drafted all that high, so being a top-150 player nationally at the tight end position means you’re one of the best at your position in the country.

“In terms of starts, I don’t know that I would be panicking in the middle of the summer the year before about how fast things go. I know that usually there’s some Ohio kids or Midwestern prospects who are already ready to jump on heading into their junior year, and that’s not happening right now. I know that as an Ohio State fan, it’s pretty easy to try to figure out ways and reasons to panic, but that’s just kind of dumb.”

The tight end position has been much talked about at Ohio State, mainly about not getting them involved in the offense enough. Do you think that could impact recruiting at the position for the program?

“It’s really funny because people have criticized how little Ohio State throws the ball to tight ends since the beginning of time, but if you look at some of the tight ends that played here under Urban Meyer, they had some pretty good NFL careers. I mean, you think about Jeff Heuerman and Nick Vannett and guys like that, they’ve actually done a pretty good job of getting tight ends in the mix.

“Jeremy Ruckert was a high four-star prospect at his position, No. 2 tight end in his class. and now he might be one of the best tight ends in the country and will, in my opinion, likely be drafted pretty high next year. I know that Ohio State hasn’t necessarily had their Jeremy Shockey-type tight end where they’re just going to throw to him 60 times a year. But Ohio State tight ends have also shown to be very versatile blockers and very good in their offense and definitely have translated well to the league. So in terms of what they need to do in order to be flashy or sexy, I don’t know, but I

don’t necessarily think that the fan view of the way Ohio State uses their tight ends are shared by the actual people who play that position.”

Ohio State lost one of its five-star commits when Jacksonville (Fla.) Riverside cornerback Jaheim Singletary decommitted on Aug. 1. How much does this hurt the Buckeyes in the long run, and is the decommitment any cause for concern?

“I think that when you’re recruiting five-star prospects inside of the state of Florida, a lot of times you’re going to get them, but a lot of times you’re going to have to deal with what happened with Singletary. I mean t’s a really hard thing to recruit nationally, and Ohio State has done a very good job of making it look very easy. And people forget sometimes how hard it is.

“When you’re talking about a five-star prospect in Florida, you’re talking about a prospect that’s got offers from Alabama, LSU, Georgia, Clemson and every other powerhouse. And if you’re reading this newspaper or you’re a big Ohio State fan, I know it’s hard to believe, but some of those other places are every bit as special as Ohio State.

“When you get to this level, things are going to happen, and you’re going to get decommitments. It’s going to be hard to close on prospects who have every offer from everybody who live a plane ride away. I just think it’s par for the course and you’re going to expect these types of things to happen.”

Penn State has jumped to the top spot in the 2022 class, much in thanks to their whopping 24 commitments. After what appeared to be a lackluster 2021 class, how have the Nittany

Lions bounced back?

“Penn State’s class in 2021 was awful, there’s no other way to put it. I think they only signed one top-10 player in the state of Pennsylvania last year, and that prospect (Lonnie White Jr.) jumped in from the mid-teens to like No. 7 at the last minute. So James Franklin basically whiffed on every single top-level Pennsylvania prospect in the 2021 cycle, and if you would have asked me this question a year ago, or around the time that he signed that class, I would have told you it was the beginning of the end for Franklin there. I would have been wrong.

“They ended up really bouncing back big, and if you go back and look, Penn State has gotten to this point by recruiting Pennsylvania well. That’s the mission, that’s been the thesis statement of what his plan was supposed to be at Penn State, and I think they’ve got six commitments in the top 10 Pennsylvania prospects already. Not to mention the top player in Maryland (Owings Mills McDonogh School four-star defensive lineman Dani Dennis-Sutton). So Penn State has just done a very good job this year of taking traditional territories from a recruiting blueprint and closing on those prospects. Now, we all know this isn’t a top-five class, it’s just kind of ranked where it is based on how many commits it has at the current time, but it does have top-10 potential, and if they sign top-10 classes every single year, they’re going to continue to be a thorn in Ohio State’s side.

“Last year’s 2021 class was a complete abomination when it comes to what Penn State is supposed to be, and 2022 has done a pretty good job of making it feel like that was an anomaly.”

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

Lockwood is ranked the No. 8 tight end and No. 142 overall prospect in the class and finished his 2020 season with 43 catches for 606 yards and three touchdowns. Listed at 6-5, 225 pounds, Lockwood took two trips to Columbus over the summer and is expected to be back on campus for the Buckeyes’ home opener against Oregon on Sept. 11.

Lockwood was the Buckeyes’ first commitment since July 9. Ohio State has just one commitment at tight end for the 2022 class in Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona four-star Bennett Christian.

Colorado Tackle Fitzpatrick Commits To Buckeyes

That July 9 commitment was from Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek four-star offensive lineman George Fitzpatrick.

After closing June with a pledge from Little Elm, Texas, four-star cornerback Terrence Brooks, the Buckeyes kept their momentum into July, when they landed 2021 prize recruit J.T. Tuimoloau, a five-star defensive lineman from Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic, on July 4 and 2022 four-star Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert receiver Kojo Antwi a day later.

It took only four more days for Ohio State to keep that hot streak going with the Fitzpatrick commitment.

Ranked the No. 292 player and No. 27 offensive tackle in the 2022 class, Fitzpatrick was considered a lean for staying west of the Mississippi River. Oklahoma and Oregon were sitting atop his list and earned official visits from him in June. Ohio State earned a visit too, though, all the way back on June 4.

It seems that the visit made quite the impact, because Fitzpatrick opted to join Ohio State’s class, becoming the 17th recruit and giving offensive line coach Greg Studrawa his second pledge of the class, alongside West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star tackle Tegra Tshabola.

OSU Suffers Pair Of Decommitments

What had been the top-ranked class in 2022 took a hit on July 27, with Pilot Mountain (N.C.) East Surry four-star tight end Benji Gosnell announcing that he was decommitting from Ohio State.

“This has been very hard,” Gosnell wrote in a tweet. “I’m thankful for the opportunity OSU has given me and the class they have

shown throughout this tough decision. After thorough discussion with my family, I have decommitted from Ohio State and opened up my recruitment.”

Gosnell ranks as the No. 13 tight end and No. 320 overall prospect in the 2022 class. He had committed to Ohio State back on Oct. 4, 2020, after being offered by the team on June 2 of the same year. Gosnell also has offers from programs like Florida, Georgia, LSU, North Carolina, Notre Dame and Penn State. His brother, Stephen, is on the roster for the in-state Tar Heels.

Less than a week later on Aug. 1, Jacksonville (Fla.) Riverside five-star cornerback Jaheim Singletary also made the announcement that he would be decommitting from Ohio State.

“First off, I would like to thank the entire Ohio State coaching staff for giving me an opportunity to be a part of the Buckeye family, and believing in my talents,” Singletary wrote in a tweet. “After talking it over with my family, I have decided to decommit from The Ohio State University and re-open my recruitment. Respect my decision.”

Singletary ranks as the fifth-best cornerback and No. 15 overall prospect in the 2022 class. He had committed to the Buck-

eyes on Jan. 2, 2021. The highly touted prospect posted a variety of official scholarship offers on Aug. 1 that came from Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Ole Miss and Oregon.

Although it is a big loss for the Buckeyes, Wasserman said that he doesn’t believe the Singletary decommitment is something to consider a trend, or something that should be put into the context with how Ohio State’s pass defense played in 2020.

“I think it’s really, really funny how quickly we’ve gone from Ohio State having 900 first-round draft picks in the secondary the last five years to, ‘Should we be worried about the future?’ ” Wasserman said. “In terms of Ohio State’s secondary positioning, I wouldn’t worry too much. I mean, they’ll get somebody else, and they have a lot of young talent on this team at that position. I don’t doubt for a second that Kerry Coombs will be able to continue to recruit players in the secondary to a high level.

“I think the most important thing is to not jump to conclusions about trends until there’s a trend. I know that it’s very easy to try to find something that seems to be

Continued On Page 44

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

The state of Ohio was loaded with talent on the recruiting trail for the class of 1987, though the consensus was split on who the top player in the Buckeye state might be. Votes were cast for several options, with the answer depending on which expert you talked to.

Many experts cast their vote for Carlos Snow as perhaps the top player in Ohio.

Snow, a 5-8, 195-pound running back who had helped Cincinnati CAPE to the Division IV state playoff championship in 1985, had already surpassed 5,000 career rushing yards entering his senior season.

Also receiving a lot of attention was St. Clairsville running back John Spencer, brother of former OSU standout Tim Spencer. The younger Spencer stood at 5-11 and weighed in at 185 pounds.

But when talking about running backs, few would venture to leave out Mike Delwiche, who gained 1,628 yards in only 147 carries and scored 25 touchdowns as a junior. The 5-11, 193-pound Delwiche, from Troy High School, provided perhaps the best speed of the group, logging a 4.5-second 40-yard dash time.

30 Years Ago – 1991

Los Angeles Sylmar head coach Jeff Engilman told BSB that Ohio State was getting a multitalented athlete in defensive back Girmar Johnson.

“Girmar was one of those rare kids who had it all as far as athletic ability and intelligence was concerned,” Engilman said. “He has the body and the speed to play football at a higher level than most kids, and he also uses his head. I don’t remember him making mental mistakes.”

Though Johnson came to Ohio State by way of Los Angeles, he grew up near Ypsilanti, Mich., and still had friends and family there.

“My father still lives there, and I know a lot of the players at Michigan and Michigan State,” Johnson said. “I knew going to Ohio State would be a good opportunity to go back and see them again.

“I had offers from Colorado, UNLV and Washington State, but I kind of had my heart set on Ohio State, especially after visiting the campus.”

25 Years Ago – 1996

Although Rodney Bailey was overlooked by a number of recruiting experts early on, the Ohio State coaching staff certainly took note of him when he attended their summer football camp in June.

The OSU staff offered the Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward defensive end a scholarship on the spot, and less than four weeks later, he accepted it and became the fourth member of OSU’s 1997 recruiting class.

The 6-4, 260-pound Bailey picked Ohio State, his longtime favorite school, over the likes of Michigan, Michigan State and Northwestern. He made unofficial visits to all of his schools, including last-minute trips to Michigan and Northwestern just to be sure, before announcing his OSU commitment on July 16.

“I went to camp at Ohio State June 19-22,” Bailey said. “I had loved the place, but after that I fell in love even more.

“After that, I went to Michigan and Northwestern looking to see what they had to offer. After I left those places, I compared them

to Ohio State, and there was never a doubt in my mind that Ohio State was where I wanted to go.”

20 Years Ago – 2001

The OSU staff wasted no time in setting up official visits for its first season in Columbus, targeting the Oct. 6 night game with Northwestern as a good weekend to host at least three out-of-state prospects. Three recruits told BSB in August that they would be taking trips to Ohio State for the game.

Fort Myers, Fla., wide receiver Richard Washington as well as Huntersville (N.C.) North Mecklenburg offensive lineman Derek Morris and running back L.A. Adams all said they would be in attendance.

Ohio State was also keeping a close eye on Baltimore Gilman School linebacker Stan White Jr. – the son of former OSU linebacker Stan White – and Catawissa (Pa.) Southern Columbia athlete Nate Schiccatano. Neither had set official visits yet, but both took unofficial trips to Ohio State over the summer and told BSB that they were eyeing that Oct. 6 date as well.

15 Years Ago – 2006

Ohio State left the month of July with a quartet of new commitments in its class of 2007 after entering the month with just three pledges.

Perhaps the biggest steal of the bunch was the landing of Orchard Lake (Mich.) St. Mary’s wide receiver Taurian Washington, who was listed as a four-star prospect by Rivals.com. Washington’s commitment to OSU was rumored for a few weeks prior to confirmation on Aug. 9.

Joining him was Evan Blankenship, a 6-3, 310-pound offensive lineman from Monaca (Pa.) Center Area High School, who chose Ohio State over Pittsburgh – the two main schools he had told in May BSB that his final decision would come down to – because it was “where his heart was,” his mother, Paula, told BSB.

Less than three weeks after a June 23 trip to Ohio State for a recruiting camp that netted him a scholarship offer, Toledo Central Catholic wide receiver Dane Sanzenbacher announced his commitment to Ohio State.

Finally, Warren (Ohio) Harding running back Daniel Herron committed to Ohio State on July 10, making him the second running back in the class alongside Piqua (Ohio) High School’s Brandon Saine, who had pledged to the Buckeyes in the spring.

10 Years Ago – 2011

A trio of in-state prospects – each of them rated three-star prospects by Scout – joined Ohio State’s 2012 recruiting class, moving Ohio State to 12 commitments in its class.

Linebacker Luke Roberts, who pulled the trigger first with a commitment July 13, hailed from Lancaster. He was ranked the No. 25 middle linebacker prospect nationally and the No. 28 player in Ohio.

“I feel awesome,” he told BSB. “I’m so excited that I have the opportunity to be a Buckeye. After coming home and talking it over with my family and praying about it, I realized Ohio State was the right place for me.”

Pickerington North offensive lineman Pat Elflein made the same move a day later, just one day after picking up an Ohio State offer.

“It’s been a longtime dream for me to be a Buckeye,” Elflein told BSB. “That day I got the offer was just a really good day. It’s hard to explain the feeling.”

On Aug. 9, Pickerington Central wide receiver Roger Lewis pledged to the Buckeyes, joining high school teammate Jacoby Boren in the class.

“I guess dreams come true because this is what I’ve dreamed of since I started playing football,” Lewis said. “I called Coach (Luke) Fickell and told him I wanted to be a Buckeye. He was very excited.”

Five Years Ago – 2016

At 10:59 on the morning of Aug. 22, Ohio State didn’t have a wide receiver committed in the class of 2017. At 11 a.m., the Buckeyes received verbal pledges from two of the top five receivers in the nation.

Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star wide receiver Tyjon Lindsey was expected to announce his commitment Aug. 22 via a video released by Bleacher Report. The surprise came when the video also featured the commitment of five-star receiver Trevon Grimes, who had been expected to announce his college plans Aug. 24.

However, it was expected that both players would commit to the Buckeyes whenever they chose to make their announcements, and those expectations came true, giving Ohio State 18 commits for 2017.

Recruiting analyst Bill Greene told BSB that Grimes and Lindsey were the caliber of player who would find their way onto the field quickly.

“This is not James Clark, Alex Stump, Terry McLaurin, Paris Campbell, where you redshirt them, you try to develop them, you hope they get it – no, that’s not the case here,” Greene said. “These guys play from day one. There’s no redshirt. And they’re going to challenge for playing time. Those guys I just mentioned and then Torrance Gibson and K.J. Hill, those guys better get it going. These guys are going to be on the depth chart, so somebody is getting knocked back.”

One Year Ago – 2020

Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star cornerback Jordan Hancock committed to Ohio State on July 19, a move that seemed inevitable from the time he had decommitted from Clemson a few days prior.

The 6-1, 170-pound Hancock was considered the fifth-best cornerback and No. 77 prospect overall in the class of 2021. Ohio State had been considered an early favorite in his recruitment, as he grew up rooting for the program. He had planned an unofficial visit to Columbus in the spring, and most prognosticators expected him to announce his commitment to the program at that time.

However, after an unexpected unofficial visit to Clemson in early March, he pledged his services instead to the Tigers, citing the campus’ proximity to his hometown and the Tigers’ overall focus on faith as the reasons for his commitment.

Ohio State remained in the race for Hancock, however, and became the obvious favorite when he revoked his pledge to Clemson on July 14.

Buckeyes Still In Pursuit Of Top Prospects

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a problem or is going to be wrong with the team, but let them have a terrible year in the secondary and sign no top-400 players at a position before you start to worry a lot about what's going to happen. Ohio State is a really, really good place to go and they're going to lose commitments every now and then, but so does Alabama. It's just kind of the way it works when you're recruiting at the highest level like that."

These were the second and third de-commitments for Ohio State in the 2022 class. The other came from Bloomington (Ind.) South four-star Dasan McCullough. McCullough left to play for Indiana, where he joined his father, Indiana running backs coach Deland, as well as two of his brothers, Deland II, who transferred from Miami (Ohio), and Daeh, a four-star safety commit-

ted to the Hoosiers for the 2023 class.

Ohio State On Variety Of Top Schools Lists

Ohio State is in the mix for a variety of the top prospects around the country, and many of those players have included the Buckeyes in a top list of schools. Here are some of those names:

Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star safety Zion Branch listed Ohio State among his top five schools, along with Alabama, Clemson, Oklahoma and USC. Branch is rated the fourth-best safety and No. 49 overall prospect in the 2022 class. He is also the top-rated prospect from the state of Nevada and comes from the same high school as current Ohio State defensive tackle Haskell Garrett.

The 6-3, 190-pound Branch was com-

pared to Los Angeles Chargers safety Rayshawn Jenkins by 247Sports' Blair Angulo.

Branch visited Ohio State on the first weekend of June, which was the first weekend after the recruiting dead period had ended. He also made visits to Oklahoma and USC later in the month and has plans to visit both Alabama and Clemson on Nov. 5 and Nov. 12, respectively.

Currently, he has five crystal ball predictions, one of which is for the Trojans on Feb. 18. The rest are in favor of the Buckeyes, and all of them have come after Branch's visit to Columbus. If Branch were to choose Ohio State, he would be the fifth defensive back of the 2022 class but the first safety. The class currently includes Little Elm, Texas' Brooks; West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star cornerback Jyaire Brown;

Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep three-star cornerback Ryan Turner; and Seffner (Fla.) Armwood three-star athlete Kye Stokes, who is expected to play in the secondary at the next level.

Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star defensive lineman Caden Curry included Ohio State in his top five schools on July 24, along with Alabama, Clemson, Indiana and Oregon.

"Thank you to all the coaches who have spent time getting to know me and my family," Curry wrote in a tweet. "I'm now proud to release my top five schools."

Curry is ranked the No. 11 defensive lineman and No. 69 overall prospect of the 2022 class. He is also considered the third-best prospect from the state of Indiana.

The 6-5, 250-pound Curry visited Ohio State on June 22. Currently, the Buckeyes, who offered Curry back on May 6, 2020, hold his lone crystal ball prediction, with Florida State Insider Chris Nee offering that prediction with a 6 confidence out of 10.

Lakeland (Fla.) Lake Gibson five-star cornerback Cormani McClain included Ohio State in his top five schools, along with Alabama, Florida, Florida State and Miami (Fla.).

McClain is the top-ranked cornerback and No. 10 overall prospect of the 2023 class. He received his offer from Ohio State back on Feb. 22 of this year. The 6-2, 165-pound prospect currently has one crystal ball prediction in favor of the home state Seminoles.

Owasso, Okla., four-star defensive lineman Chris McClellan has Ohio State in his top six schools, along with Alabama, Florida, LSU, Oklahoma and USC. McClellan, who is listed at 6-3, 295, is ranked the 17th-best defensive lineman and No. 93 overall prospect in the 2022 class. He has one crystal ball prediction, and it is in favor of the Buckeyes.

Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star defensive lineman Christen Miller put Ohio State in his top four schools on July 27, along with Georgia, Oregon and USC.

Miller is ranked the No. 20 defensive lineman and No. 119 overall prospect in the 2022 class. He visited Ohio State on the first day after the recruiting dead period ended, going to the June 1-2 camp in Columbus. Later in the month, he also visited both Georgia's and USC's campuses.

The 6-4, 285-pound prospect currently has six crystal ball predictions on 247Sports, five of which are in favor of USC and one of which is in favor of Georgia. The one for the Bulldogs, by Georgia insider Kipp Adams, is from more than five months back on Feb. 17, while the rest are between June 14 and July 5 of this year.

On April 13, Miller tweeted out a photo that stated that Ohio State was with Georgia and USC as the three clear leaders in his recruitment, but the four-star defensive lineman also just received an offer from the Ducks on July 21, and it was enough for him to include Oregon among this top four.

Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star defensive end Enai White put Ohio State among his top four schools on July 31, along with Alabama, Georgia and Texas A&M.

White is ranked the third-best defensive

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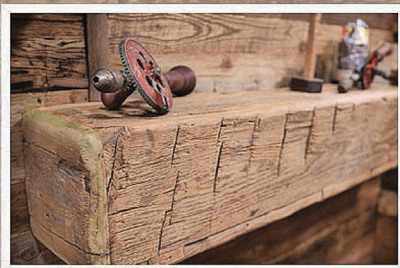
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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

end and the No. 36 overall recruit in the 2022 class. He is also the top-ranked prospect in Pennsylvania, a state that Ohio State has had recent success with.

In the 2021 class, the Buckeyes brought in a pair of Pennsylvania's top five recruits in wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. and McCord, two teammates at Philadelphia St. Joseph's. In 2020, Ohio State earned the commitment of the No. 1 prospect from Pennsylvania in Fleming, who was out of Catawissa Southern Columbia.

White visited Ohio State on June 25 and had official visits to Georgia and Alabama on June 11 and 18, respectively.

The 6-5, 230-pound White currently has no crystal ball predictions and has previously stated that he does not want to make his decision prior to the start of his final high school season. If he were to choose the Buckeyes, he could become the first defensive line commitment for Ohio State in 2022.

Finally, Lehigh Acres (Fla.) Lehigh Senior five-star running back Richard Young included Ohio State in his top 10 schools, along with Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Miami (Fla.), Oklahoma, Oregon and USC.

Young is the top running back in the 2023 class and the No. 21 prospect overall. He visited Ohio State back in June and impressed mightily during his workout with the team.

The 6-0, 190-pound Young currently has no crystal ball predictions.

Sooners Steal From OSU 2023 Targets

Oklahoma had a strong July weekend to get its 2023 class started, first earning the commitment of Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy four-star athlete Treyaun Webb on July 17 then adding to it with the commitment of Los Alamitos, Calif., five-star quarterback Malachi Nelson the next day. Both players included Ohio State among their top finalists.

Webb had included Ohio State in his top three schools, along with Georgia and the Sooners, on June 23. He had also previously stated that those would be the three schools he would choose from for a future decision in August before ultimately making it official in mid-July.

The 6-0, 188-pound Webb, who is likely to play running back at the next level, is ranked the third-best athlete and No. 34 overall prospect in the class. He has an 11.26-second 100-meter dash time and has also shone in track at high school, becoming a Jacksonville.com All First-Coast honorable mention last year.

Nelson had included Ohio State in his top seven schools one week prior to his commitment, along with Alabama, Florida State, LSU, Notre Dame, USC and the winning Sooners.

The 6-3, 180-pound signal caller is ranked the second-best quarterback and No. 5 overall prospect in the 2023 class. Nelson was compared to a familiar face for Ohio State fans by 247Sports's Greg Biggins: current Chicago Bears quarterback and former Ohio State quarterback Fields.

Ohio State has not yet sealed a commit-

ment at quarterback or running back for the 2023 class. Of course, the Buckeyes have done well in both positions in recent history.

In 2021, Ohio State signed five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson, McCord and Ewers, both five-stars, and four-star running back Evan Pryor. In 2022 the Buckeyes have Memphis (Tenn.) Christian Brothers four-star running back Dallan Hayden.

Nelson and Webb were Oklahoma's first

two commitments for the 2023 class, and they put the Sooners at No. 2 in the class rankings behind only Georgia.

Chase Brown, Patrick Mayhorn and Griffin Strom also contributed to this report. For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers, daily.

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Cockburn Announces Return To Illini

Illinois standout center Kofi Cockburn announced his return to the men's basketball team for his junior season.

"It's time to move forward," Cockburn said. "It's time to put the past in the past and take the next step. It's time to bring a national championship back to Champaign."

Cockburn averaged 17.7 points, 9.5 rebounds, and 1.3 blocks per game, earning second-team All-American accolades as a sophomore. The 7-0, 285-pound center entered the NBA draft on April 18, and after

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

attending the NBA G League Elite Camp in June and getting feedback from NBA teams, he withdrew from the draft and entered the NCAA transfer portal on July 1.

The former Big Ten Freshman of the Year listed Kentucky and Florida State as his top transfer destinations before deciding to return to Illinois.

"Champaign became my home, and Illinois basketball became my family," Cockburn said.

As a sophomore for the Illini, Cockburn shot 65.4 percent from the field, which ranked fourth in the country, and he led the country with 78 dunks. The Kingston, Jamaica, native improved over a freshman campaign where he averaged 13.3 points, 8.8 rebounds, 1.4 blocks per game on 53.2 percent shooting.

U-M MBB Standout Dickinson Returns

The Michigan men's basketball team received big news when sophomore center Hunter Dickinson announced his return to the program.

Following a stellar freshman season, when Dickinson helped lead the Wolverines to a Big Ten regular-season title, he entered the NBA draft pool. The 7-1, 260-pound center garnered interest as a possible second-round pick, but he did not expect to hear his name called.

The draft process gave Dickinson an opportunity to meet with NBA teams regarding what he needs to do to improve his status as a prospect.

"The window's definitely open (for a return)," Dickinson said in July. "That's why I was big on trying to get an NCAA-certified agent. I wanted guidance in the process, but I also wanted to retain my eligibility. That was a very important thing for me just so I could have that safety net of having the opportunity or option of coming back to school."

"The decision for me to enter the draft was a really tough one for me because I think it was just two great situations for me to either stay in college for another year or try to enter the NBA and become a professional athlete. Both decisions were decisions that I was OK with, so I think that's why it took me so long. I think my heart was with the NBA, so that's where I wanted to go."

In his first year at Ann Arbor, Dickinson earned second-team All-American honors, averaging 14.1 points, 7.4 rebounds, and 1.4

blocks per game.

Huskers Hire Trev Alberts As AD

Trev Alberts, Nebraska's only Butkus Award winner, who played in the 1994 Orange Bowl with a cast on his arm, took over at Nebraska after a 12-year administrative tenure at the University of Nebraska Omaha. He replaced Bill Moos – who retired with 18 months left on his five-year contract – and inherited a football program that has posted four straight losing seasons.

UNO did not have a football program for the last 10 years of Alberts' tenure after he cut that program – along with wrestling – as part of a decision to take UNO athletics to Division I. Alberts stayed at Nebraska Omaha after making those decisions, and he was passed over for the Huskers' athletic director job in 2012 when Shawn Eichorst succeeded Tom Osborne and in 2017 when Moos was hired.

"It is such a tremendous honor to have this opportunity to lead Husker athletics," Alberts said in a statement. "UNL (Nebraska Lincoln) has incredibly talented coaches and student-athletes and a fan base like no other program in the country. The future of Big Red is bright. I can't wait to join the Husker athletics team and get going."

Nebraska Chancellor Ronnie Green, who hired Alberts after a 2½-week search, praised Alberts' passion for Nebraska and college athletics.

"He knows how to help build competitive, winning programs and is committed to long-term success," Green said. "He knows how to navigate the complex financial aspects of a media-driven business. He remains a student-athlete at heart and prioritizes student success, on and off the playing field. I am so pleased to welcome this Husker back home to Husker Nation."

University of Nebraska President Ted Carter said Alberts "understands the special role that Husker athletics plays in the state."

As a player in Lincoln, Alberts posted one of the best defensive seasons in school history when he had 96 tackles, 21 tackles for loss and 15 sacks as a rush end in 1993. He was named a first-team All-American, the Butkus Award winner and an Academic All-American, and he notably posted three sacks with a dislocated elbow in an 18-16 loss to Florida State in the Orange Bowl.

A first-round NFL draft pick, Alberts' pro career was derailed by injuries. After his short NFL career, Alberts was a college football analyst for several TV networks before becoming the athletic director at UNO.

Nebraska HC Frost Under NCAA Investigation

The NCAA is looking into the Nebraska football program after a report said Cornhuskers staff improperly used analysts and consultants with the knowledge of head coach Scott Frost and moved workouts off campus last year when such activities were banned during the pandemic.

"We just wanted to acknowledge that there is an NCAA investigation that is currently engaged with our athletic department and our football program specifically," Alberts said. "We want you to know that we have complied 100 percent with the NCAA

and been very collaborative with our approach with them with all of their investigation."

"We will continue to do whatever the NCAA asks us to do. Our coaches, including Coach Frost, have done a great job and been very accessible working with the NCAA as we work through these investigations."

The Action Network reported that Nebraska has "significant video footage" confirming that practice violations occurred in the presence of Frost and other assistants, citing unidentified sources. Frost told reporters that any workouts held by the Cornhuskers were approved by his superiors.

"Everything we did through COVID was in the best interest and health of our players in mind and everything we did was approved by athletic department administration and campus administration," Frost said.

The NCAA has interviewed Frost, current and former staff members, administrators and football players, and Frost has hired an attorney. The alleged violations occurred in the past 12 months.

The NCAA investigation includes Nebraska's impermissible use of analysts and consultants running special teams drills, according to the report. Analysts are not among the 10 full-time on-field assistants and are not allowed to speak with players.

Amid the pandemic, the NCAA prohibited organized workouts, and according to the report, Nebraska allegedly relocated its strength workouts to an undisclosed off-campus location to avoid detection at the direction of the Huskers' strength and conditioning staff.

Frost, who holds a 12-20 record in his first three seasons at Nebraska, is set to begin his fourth season against Illinois on Aug. 28. Since his hiring, the Cornhuskers have not finished higher than fifth in the Big Ten West, and the program has had four straight losing seasons, marking its longest streak since the late 1950s.

The special teams analyst, Jonathan Rutledge, was fired in January. Gerrod Lambrecht, who was Frost's chief of staff, resigned two weeks ago.

IU RB James Enters Portal

Indiana running back Sampson James, who was once committed to Ohio State, entered the transfer portal following two seasons with the Hoosiers.

During the past two years, James rushed for 371 yards and three touchdowns. He was listed as the No. 2 tailback on the Hoosiers' preseason depth chart, competing with Stephen Carr and Tim Baldwin.

As a four-star prospect from Avon, Ind., James committed to Ohio State but was flipped by IU head coach Tom Allen. James entered the transfer portal following his freshman year, but he returned to Bloomington.

James struggled to find his footing as a sophomore, carrying the ball 32 times for 96 yards (3.0 average) after a promising freshman season.

MD MBB Adds Another Transfer

The Maryland men's basketball team added graduate transfer guard Xavier Green

from Old Dominion.

Green, a 6-6 guard, spent the past five seasons at Old Dominion. He redshirted as a freshman and is using a sixth year of eligibility that was granted by the NCAA due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The highlight of Green's tenure at Old Dominion was when he was named the Conference USA tournament most outstanding player in 2019.

The addition of Green provides the Terrapins with more experience, joining a veteran group, including graduate transfer Fatts Russell from Rhode Island, senior Eric Ayala and juniors Qudus Wahab, a transfer from Georgetown, Donta Scott and Hakim Hart.

In the past four seasons with the Monarchs, Green appeared in 121 of 122 games, averaging 30.5 minutes. Since the start of his sophomore season, Green started 90 games and averaged 10.0 points, 4.0 rebounds and 2.3 assists in 33.3 minutes per game.

In the Conference USA tournament in 2019, Green averaged 15.7 points and shot 46.2 percent on three-pointers to help push Old Dominion to the program's first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2011.

Seven Big Ten Players Selected in 2021 NBA Draft

Seven Big Ten student-athletes were selected in the 2021 NBA draft, tying the conference's second-highest total dating back to 2000 and trailing only the conference's eight selections in 2000 and 2018.

Former Michigan guard Franz Wagner became the first Big Ten player selected in the 2021 draft, heading to the Orlando Magic with the No. 8 overall pick. He became the ninth first-round pick from the Wolverines since 2013.

Michigan had multiple student-athletes selected in the draft for the 15th time in program history, with wing Isaiah Livers going to the Detroit Pistons in the second round (No. 42 overall).

Former Illinois standout guard Ayo Dosunmu became the second Big Ten player to be picked when the Chicago Bulls took him with the No. 38 overall pick. The Chicago native became the first Illini player to be selected since Meyers Leonard in 2012.

Iowa had two players selected in the draft, with Joe Wieskamp going to the San Antonio Spurs (No. 41 overall) and Luka Garza going to the Detroit Pistons (No. 52 overall), marking the third time that Iowa had multiple student-athletes selected in the first two rounds (1989 and 1998). Wieskamp became Iowa's highest drafted player since Ricky Davis was picked No. 21 overall in 1998.

Former Nebraska guard Dalano Banton was selected by the Toronto Raptors with the No. 46 overall pick. Banton, a Toronto native, became the first Canadian to be drafted by the Raptors in franchise history.

Aaron Wiggins of Maryland was selected by the Oklahoma City Thunder with the No. 55 overall pick, becoming the sixth Terrapin to be drafted in the last six years. Maryland has had at least one player selected in each draft dating back to 2018.

Offseason Anything But Slow For Holtmann

The Ohio State men's basketball program had news about the past, present and future converge in the interim since Buckeye Sports Bulletin was published in July.

The Buckeyes said goodbye to guard Duane Washington Jr., who opted to forgo his senior season in hopes of being selected in the NBA draft on July 29. He wasn't chosen but shortly after signed with the Indiana Pacers.

His departure was eased by the fact that forward E.J. Liddell decided not to follow the same route and instead will return to the current roster for his junior season.

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He will be joined by guard Cedric Russell, a transfer from Louisiana who announced his commitment to Ohio State on July 9.

Looking ahead, the Buckeyes got a major boost to the 2022 recruiting class with the addition of Chattanooga (Tenn.) Hamilton Heights Christian Academy four-star center Felix Okpara on July 26.

A day later, coach Chris Holtmann announced that three-star 2021 forward Kalen Etzler would redshirt the 2021-22 season.

Finally, tying the past, present and future together could be J.T. Tuimolou, the star freshman recruit for the football team who wants to relive a bygone era and become a two-sport athlete.

Unfinished Business

Liddell entered the NBA draft process with Washington and both attended the G League Elite Camp, but unlike his teammate, Liddell was not invited to the NBA draft combine, an indicator that he would not be picked in the draft.

With the July 7 deadline looming to withdraw his name from the draft to maintain his college eligibility, Liddell did so on July 3.

While Holtmann encouraged the former four-star recruit from Belleville, Ill., to explore his NBA options, he was happy to see Liddell come back to the Buckeyes. Liddell averaged 16.2 points, 6.7 rebounds and 1.8 assists last season to earn first-team All-Big Ten honors.

Still, the experience was invaluable in getting feedback from NBA personnel on what areas Liddell needs to improve.

"They told me I need to raise my three-point percentage by a couple of percentages and be able to play defense better on the perimeter," Liddell told Andy Katz of the Big Ten Network on Aug. 12. "But I feel the main feedback I got was being a nonstop motor, being in the best shape of my life. All those other things come afterwards."

Liddell (6-7, 240) attempted 80 three-pointers in 29 games (2.76 per game), making 33.8 percent.

He was also encouraged to handle the ball more.

"At the end of the day, it's best for E.J. and his development," Holtmann said of Liddell's return. "For him (as a power forward), he's going to be playing against, in some cases, a smaller guy or a guy his size who can move a little better so that's going to put a premium on his ball skills improving and adding some things to his game."

"The two things they hit on the most were consistent shooting and defensive versatility. The ball-handling piece was sort of third in their mind, or at least from the people we talked to. I think that's an important skill for him to continue to grow and improve in, but the other two areas, I think, for his development are most important."

Liddell is at peace with his decision. "I could have stayed in the draft and been picked by a team, but that's not where my heart was at," he said. "I was at playing in front of the fans, raising my draft stock and also just getting better."

"Last year was kind of tough because we didn't really get to see fans, have interaction with them and things of that sort. I can't wait to play in front of Buckeye Nation again."

That last quote really mattered to him because fans were not permitted to attend games during the regular season because of the COVID-19 pandemic. He told Katz he missed the fans "a whole bunch."

"I got a little taste of it my freshman year," Liddell said. "I played a little bit but having interaction with the fans, seeing them before the games, shaking kids' hands, just seeing how happy we make people, the student section – I love watching the student section. I really missed them, and I'm excited to play in front of them again."

Help Is Here

The addition of Russell helps compensate for losing Washington, although Holtmann said they have different styles.

"Even though he came in after Duane, it's not like we brought him in as quote-unquote the replacement for Duane," he said.

Washington could drive for a shot or pass while Russell is a better outside shooter. Washington started all 31 games last season and averaged a career-high 16.4 points per game. He shot 41.0 percent overall and 37.4 percent on three-point attempts.

Russell (6-2, 190) was among the national leaders in three-point shooting last year, making 40.0 percent (the Buckeyes as a team shot 36.0 percent). In four seasons at Louisiana he made 266 three-pointers. He led the Ragin' Cajuns with a career-best 17.2 points per game in 2020-21 to be named first-team All-Sun Belt Conference.

"I think Cedric's going to have to figure out this level and challenges at this level, all of those things," Holtmann said. "But I do think he's got a real ability to make shots. He's proven that throughout his career."

Big Man On Campus

The commitment by Okpara was a coup and lifted the Buckeyes to the top of the 247Sports composite rankings for 2022 ahead of Kansas.

Okpara (6-11, 210) took an official visit to Columbus on June 15 and chose Ohio State over a list that included Florida, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Tennessee and Vanderbilt.

A native of Nigeria who moved to the United States three years ago to play high school basketball, he averaged 11.1 points, 7.9 rebounds and 2.6 blocks per game last season. He was rated the eight-best center nationally and No. 45th overall prospect.

Okpara becomes the fourth commitment for the Buckeyes in 2022, joining Cincinnati Princeton three-star shooting guard Bowen Hardman, Youngstown (N.Y.) Lewiston Porter Senior four-star shooting guard Roddy Gayle Jr. and Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton four-star point guard Bruce Thornton.

Thornton is ranked No. 21; Gayle No. 44 and Hardman No. 199.

Waiting His Turn

With a stocked roster for 2021-22 and the need to add weight to his 6-8, 200-pound frame, Holtmann said he discussed redshirting Etzler during the recruiting process.

"The young man, I had a great conversation. I think it's something he's looking forward to, as is his family," Holtmann said. "We're looking forward to his development moving forward."

Etzler would have faced competition this season at small forward or center with Justin

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	205	★★★★	Alpharetta (Ga.)	Milton

Ahrens, Gene Brown, Joey Brunk, Liddell, Zed Key, Justice Sueing, Seth Towns and Kyle Young.

At least half of them will graduate or possibly turn pro by the 2022-23 season.

The Next Step

Though Washington was disappointed in not having his name called, shortly after the two-round draft ended, he signed a two-way contract with the Pacers on July 30.

He will have a chance to crack the Pacers' lineup or play for the Pacers' G League affiliate. He is eligible to spend a maximum of 45 days on the NBA roster. WHY ONLY 45 DAYS??

Washington represented the Pacers in the NBA Summer League and averaged 10.4 points on 46.6 percent shooting. He averaged 16.8 minutes for the five games.

Former Buckeye forward Kaleb Wesson didn't fare as well. He appeared in three games for the Los Angeles Clippers and averaged 0.7 points and 3.0 rebounds while playing 7.2 minutes per game.

J.T. Two-Sport?

Tuimolou, one of the top football recruits in the nation for the class of 2021, has expressed an interest in playing for Holtmann at the conclusion of the football season and appears to have the blessing of football coach Ryan Day.

"I think we're a ways away from him step-

ping onto a court," Holtmann said. "It will, I'm sure, ultimately come down to what the young man and his family really want to do."

Tuimolou (6-4, 277) is a defensive end who averaged double figures in points and rebounds the past two seasons at Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic. Oregon and Washington offered him basketball scholarships.

While doubling up was the norm years ago, he would be the first Buckeye to play both sports since safety Nate Salley played 10 games for the 2002-03 men's basketball program, scoring eight points in 29 total minutes.

"We've seen him – we haven't seen him live – but we've seen him on film," Holtmann said of Tuimolou. "Ryan and I will have conversations, but I'm not going to stand in the way of a national championship or a first-round pick – first (overall) pick I guess."

Reunion Arena

Ohio State will open play in the Fort Myers (Fla.) Tip-Off on Nov. 22 vs. Seton Hall, the school where Tony Skinn spent the past three seasons coaching before joining the Buckeyes in the spring as an assistant coach.

The Pirates were 14-13 last season. OSU two days later will play either California or Florida. Sueing, in his third season with the Buckeyes, transferred from Cal after his sophomore season.

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Mikesell Returns Home On Third Stop

By **WYATT CROSER**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Prior to the start of the 2018-19 season, Ohio State women's basketball brought in three freshmen to group up with a handful of seniors and graduate transfers. This weird mix came after the reign of Kelsey Mitchell, Stephanie Mavunga and a roster that produced a large number of wins but never made it past the Sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament.

Those three freshmen also showed flashes of potential that year. They were Janai Crooms, Dorka Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty. None of them remain on the team heading into this season.

None of those players came from within the state of Ohio, either. But a player who did from that same 2018 recruiting class was Taylor Mikesell, a former five-star guard out of Massillon Jackson.

Mikesell ranked as the No. 33 overall prospect and the top recruit from Ohio in that class. She ultimately chose to go to in-conference foe Maryland, where she played in 66 games, 57 of which were wins, while also earning a pair of Big Ten regular-season championships and one Big Ten tournament title.

That tournament win came in the 2019-20 season, and it came against Ohio State. That is still the most recent game Mikesell played in the Big Ten, but that will change soon after her decision to transfer to the Buckeyes back on April 29.

Mikesell is coming to Ohio State from Oregon, where she transferred for a year after playing two seasons with the Terrapins. This time around, the 5-11 guard chose to come back to Ohio primarily because of its proximity to home.

"The main thing for me was just coming back closer to home, to be able to have my family see me play," Mikesell told BSB. "I'm like, an hour and 45 minutes from campus, so it's a quick drive home if I need to be home. It's a quick drive for my family to

come see me. So that was really the biggest thing that led to the decision."

Mikesell comes to Ohio State with 90 total games of collegiate experience, averaging 11.5 points per game in those contests. Her area of expertise is shooting, specifically behind the arc. Over her career, Mikesell has connected on 224 three-pointers on 560 attempts, good for 40.0 percent from deep.

That strong efficiency has come on a high volume of attempts, over 6.2 per game, and can be a big part of the offense that Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff has in mind for his team.

"She can really score the ball," McGuff said. "She's an incredible three-point shooter. She's also more of a playmaker than probably people realize, and I think she's just a really good fit with the system and the style that we've evolved to. We have gone very perimeter-oriented. Even the forwards are playing on the perimeter, so that's sort of the style that we've carved out. I think our kids have done a really good job taking to it, so we're going to continue to play to our strengths, and I think with the group that we have and the skill set that these kids have, we can carve out a really exciting and effective style of play."

The pairing of Mikesell with her in-state Big Ten team could have come at any of the three times that she was looking for her collegiate program. The Buckeyes recruited Mikesell out of Massillon Jackson and had interest when she went across the country to Eugene. But Mikesell said she previously preferred to go out of state, and McGuff said he's just hoping that the journey to Ohio State will matter less now that she has finally arrived on campus for his team.

"She had a great high school career, and unfortunately we didn't get her out of high school," McGuff said. "There were some COVID reasons why she went to Oregon. It was a little bit less prevalent there than anywhere else in the country. But we would

have liked to have gotten her then, too. Hopefully, this will be a story of all is well that ends well."

In her two stops before coming to Ohio State, Mikesell was a key cog in supremely talented rosters. She has started in 86 of the 90 games in which she has appeared, but she has seen her role diminish with each season, shooting 11.1 times per game in her freshman year for the Terrapins, then 9.6 per game in year two before shooting 8.3 attempts per contest with the Ducks.

Mikesell's efficiency also dipped at Oregon. After shooting 41.8 percent from deep in two years with Maryland, she connected on just 39 of her 117 three-point attempts with the Ducks, good for 33.3 percent.

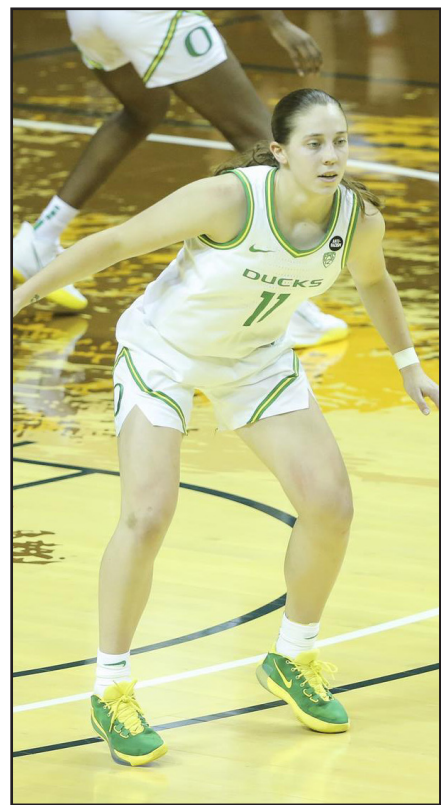
But Mikesell has a chance to return to form back in the Big Ten, a conference that she said, despite her dip in production last year, is more balanced than what she faced in the Pac-12.

"They are definitely two different playing styles," she said. "I think the Big Ten is more fast-paced and there's more of an emphasis on the defensive end. I think sometimes the Pac-12 gets a rep for being a more offensive dominant conference. I think the Big Ten, you have to play both sides of the ball. It's kind of an all-around game on the Big Ten's front, so I'm excited to be back in the Big Ten. I think it's one of the best conferences for women's basketball."

Mikesell's experience with the Buckeyes currently is five games as their opponent, each of which ended in Maryland wins. In those games, she averaged 12.2 points per game and shot both 37.5 percent overall (18 of 48) and from three (12 of 32).

Despite the perfect record against Ohio State, Mikesell remembers those games as battles that were more difficult than the box score would represent.

"They were always great games, super competitive, and I obviously noticed that just from playing against them," Mikesell said. "They were all super close. They didn't play the score, like it was never what the



OREGON ATHLETICS

HELP ON THE WAY - Oregon transfer Taylor Mikesell brings the kind of long-range shooting that Ohio State needs.

score was. Just super competitive and really fast-paced. I think the past couple of years they've been pretty guard-heavy, so they used that to their advantage – just being able to pressure teams on defense, then get out and run in transition."

On the other end, McGuff said that Mikesell was always a key offensive weapon that the Buckeyes would have to specifically prepare for.

"She was really hard for us to guard," McGuff said. "She was very effective, especially on the offensive end, and we had a tough time guarding her. The biggest thing is, she was already a real big focal point of our defense just because she's so deadly, especially from behind the three-point line."

Now, McGuff will get to prepare his team for utilizing Mikesell instead of how to defend her, though when she will be utilized still remains a question. The NCAA has allowed for free transfers to another program, but only for one-time transfers. Because this is the second time Mikesell has used the portal, she will have to get a waiver approved if she were to play for Ohio State this season.

Mikesell said that she will be trying for that waiver, but for the time being, she is set to sit out until the 2022-23 campaign. If that were to remain the case, the fourth-year junior guard said she will just have to be a leader from the sidelines instead of on the court.

"I've seen two different sides of the Big Ten now, and just having so many different experiences, I think being able to come in just lead where I need to lead, and just be vocal and push people to work hard," Mikesell said of possibly sitting out. "I think we can get the most potential out of everybody if we're all working as hard as we can. But I think the talent is there, the mind-set is there, the work ethic is there. So I think just

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commitments

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

being that leader on the side."

Regardless of if her first game is this year or next, Mikesell is happy to be back in the Big Ten and back in her home state. She said she was excited from what she saw in summer workouts, especially with the continued guard-heavy offense that McGuff is implementing.

Mikesell could be a big boost to what is already a strong offensive Ohio State team in 2021-22, but no matter when she plays, she will be looking forward to the first matchup against her old team.

"Absolutely," Mikesell said when asked if she's excited to play Maryland. "I think it's added motivation. I have to get a waiver first, but either way I'm excited for that matchup because it was great the first time around playing against Ohio State. I think it will be even better playing against Maryland this time."

For more news coverage surrounding the women's basketball team as it heads into the 2021-22 season, go to BuckeyeSports.com

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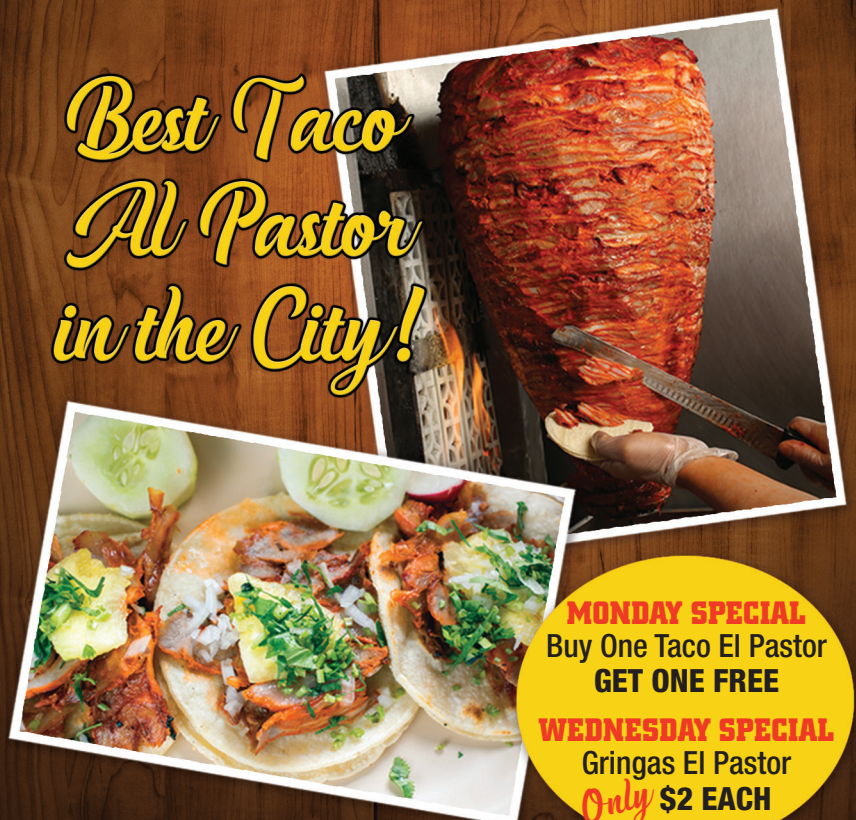
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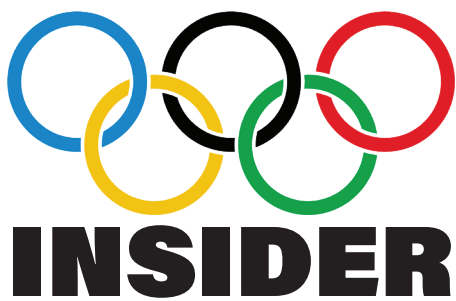
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OLYMPIC INSIDER



Four Buckeyes Medal At Olympics

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics came to a close on Aug. 8, with the United States just edging out China for gold medals, 39-38 to take the top spot in the country standings. On a much more micro scale, it was a strong Olympics for Ohio State as well, with two athletes claiming gold medals, one winning silver and one taking bronze of the 26 former, current and future Buckeyes who competed in Tokyo.

Leading the way for the Ohio State contingent was Nichelle Prince, who won gold on Canada's women's soccer team, which knocked off Sweden in the finals on penalty kicks 3-2 after a 1-1 draw. Prince started every match of the event for Canada and helped to facilitate a strong attack, though she did not record a goal herself. This is her second medal with Team Canada, earning bronze in Rio in 2016.

The second gold went to swimmer Hunter Armstrong, who swam in the preliminary for the USA 4x100-meter men's medley relay team to help secure its spot in the finals. Armstrong did not swim in the finals but will still earn a medal.

"We could not be prouder of the United States and Hunter Armstrong," said Ohio State director of swimming and diving Bill Dorenkott. "This is the stuff of dreams. And to think Hunter Armstrong from Dover, Ohio, is making his dreams come true on the world stage is pretty amazing.

"Tomorrow morning there will be a young man waking up somewhere in Ohio dreaming of being the next Hunter Armstrong, and that is pretty special. The best part is that Hunter and Ohio State are just getting started."

In one of the final events of the Olympics, Ohio State wrestling legend Kyle Snyder

came up just short of his second straight gold medal at 97kg, falling to Abdulrashid Sadulaev of ROC (Russian Olympic Committee) in the gold medal bout, 6-3. The two have long held a rivalry, trading world finals in 2017 and 2018, with Snyder claiming the former but falling in the latter matchup.

To round out Buckeyes on the podium, former Ohio State women's rower Ilse Paulis and the Netherlands' Women's Lightweight Double earned a bronze medal, putting up a 6:48.03 in the lightweight women's double sculls, just a half-second away from Italy's top spot. France earned the silver medal in the event.

Men's Lacrosse Adds New Coach

Ohio State head coach Nick Myers announced on June 19 that Ian Moore would join the Buckeyes staff after a three-year stint as a volunteer assistant at Lafayette College in Easton, Pa.

"We couldn't be happier to add Ian to our staff," Myers said. "He'll have a positive impact on our program from day one. His experience, energy and knowledge made him the perfect person to fill this opening. We're excited for him to get started with us."

Moore worked extensively with Lafayette's face-off specialists while assisting in other on- and off-the-field activities for the program.

Last season, Ohio State ranked No. 20 in the NCAA and No. 2 in the Big Ten conference in faceoff percentage, winning 53.4 percent (163-305) of the team's faceoffs.

Before his time with the Leopards, Moore spent the 2017 and 2018 seasons at his alma mater, Ursinus College in Collegeville, Pa. He was an assistant coach and an interim head coach. Moore produced four all-league athletes and two first-team selections while with the program.

In addition, Moore spent a season of assistant coaching for Arcadia and worked with United Lacrosse, a national lacrosse organization for youth, for four years.

"I am incredibly thankful to Coach Myers for extending me this opportunity, and I am looking forward to working with and learning from Coach Myers, Coach (Travis) Crane and Coach (Rick) Lewis," Moore said. "I also want to thank coach Pat Myers and the staff

at Lafayette for preparing me for this opportunity."

Moore replaces Bo Lori, who accepted an assistant coaching position at Marquette under former Ohio State defensive midfielder and captain Andrew Stimmel. Lori was a three-year letter winner and a 2018 team captain.

Lori's impact on the Ohio State program, both as a player and a coach, will be felt long after he leaves the program, Myers said.

"We're so proud of Bo and thankful for everything he's done," Myers said. "He has a long and successful coaching career ahead of him. He'll do great things at Marquette with Coach Stimmel."

Moore joins an Ohio State team that struggled with an all-Big Ten conference schedule last year, finishing 4-7 overall. Still, Moore is hopeful about the future of men's lacrosse at Ohio State.

"There is a lot to be excited about when it comes to Buckeye lacrosse, and I am eager to dive in with the players and staff on the upcoming season," Moore said.

Softball Signs Transfer Duo

Jaycee Ruberti, a first-team All-Colonial Athletic Association and second-team All-Region selection for Hofstra last season, will join the Ohio State softball team for the 2021-22 season. She'll be joined by Lexie Handley, a left-handed pitcher who spent three years at Auburn University.

"We are very excited to add Jaycee to our outfield squad," said head coach Kelly Kovach Schoenly. "Jaycee has shown she can hit for a high average while adding in power, make spectacular defensive plays, as well as has an inner drive that shows up in the biggest moments."

Ruberti finished seventh in the CAA last season in batting average, hitting .380. She led the Pride with 35 RBI and a 1.031 OPS (on-base plus slugging percentage) – her 38 hits included eight doubles, two triples and three home runs. Ruberti also proved to be a threat on the base paths, stealing 14 bases in 15 attempts.

In her three seasons with Hofstra, Ruberti started in 92 of 93 games. She finished her career with a .302 batting average, 84 total hits, 53 RBI and a .383 on-base percentage.

"I couldn't be more excited about continuing my softball career at The Ohio State University," Ruberti said. "The Buckeyes are an elite program with elite coaches and players that I'm eager to be surrounded by."

In 2021, Ohio State finished 24-19 against an all-Big Ten schedule, earning sixth place in the conference. The Buckeyes missed the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2016.

Still, Ruberti said the team's ability to compete at a consistently high level is what attracted her to use her remaining two years of eligibility at Ohio State. She immediately recognized the program's potential and how culture will lead the Buckeyes toward future success.

"The winning mind-set is very apparent when you step foot on campus, and the coaching staff is dedicated to continuing that tradition," Ruberti said. "I can't wait to take the field with this talented group of women and embrace this first-class opportunity to grind with my new teammates."

Handley served as Ohio State's second trip to the transfer portal – this time adding a talented pitcher to the bullpen.

"Lexie will be a solid addition to our roster," Kovach Schoenly said. "As a graduate transfer, she brings maturity and confidence as well as years of experience. As a southpaw, she brings an entirely unique look to our bullpen. She will throw for high velocity as well as challenge hitters with her wide array of pitches."

Handley began her college career at The University of Akron, where she tallied a 2.45 ERA while throwing 20 complete games and seven shutouts in 226 innings. She also struck out 183 batters en route to winning the 2017 MAC Freshman of the Year award.

In 2018, Handley transferred to Auburn. After sitting out her first year due to transfer rules, she pitched in three seasons for the Tigers, totaling 53 appearances and winning 11 games.

Last year, in a COVID-shortened 2020 season, Handley pitched five complete games and finished with a 2.74 ERA, which was the best in her Auburn career.

The Mogadore, Ohio, native will use her final year of eligibility to pitch for the Buckeyes.

"I'm so grateful to have the opportunity

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OLYMPIC INSIDER

to wear the Scarlet and Gray and represent my home state at such an elite university,” Handley said.

Before she began her collegiate career, Handley attended Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary High School. She set school records for strikeouts in a game (19), single season (228) and career (788). She also earned two first-team All-Ohio selections.

“Lexie will be entering our graduate program in sports coaching and will thrive in this profession postgraduation,” Kovach Schoenly said. “She has a passion for the game and growing the sport. I am confident she will have a tremendous impact on this group.”

Three Buckeye Pitchers Selected

Ohio State had two of its starting pitchers selected on day two of the 2021 MLB Entry Draft and a third on day three, as Seth Lonsway, Garrett Burhenn and Jack Neely all heard their names called.

Lonsway was the first Buckeye off the board when he was selected by the San Francisco Giants in the sixth round with the 176th overall pick. Despite an up-and-down 2020 campaign during which he struggled with his walk rate and control, his best performances and an elite curveball earned him a nod on both the All-Big Ten third team and in the draft. He ended his Ohio State career with a 12-11 record and a 3.89 ERA in 33 starts. He went 3-5 in 2021 with a team-high 98 strikeouts.

“Seth Lonsway has an elite curveball, one of the better breaking balls in the draft,” OSU coach Greg Beals said. “Scouts are aware of Seth’s ability with that breaking ball which should allow him to pitch in the big leagues. He has major-league stuff. He works tirelessly on his craft, and the quicker his fastball evolves and he commands his fastball, you’ll see Seth Lonsway in the big leagues. I have no doubt about that.”

Burhenn came off the board three rounds later, when the Tigers selected him with the No. 255 pick in the ninth round, giving them their third Buckeye pick in as many years after grabbing Burhenn’s former catcher, Dillon Dingler, in the second round of the 2020 draft and pitcher Andrew Magno in Round 15 in 2019. Burhenn was the most stable pitcher in the Buckeye rotation for several years and was, like Lonsway, selected to the All-Big Ten third team in 2021. He finishes his Ohio State career with a 15-8 record, a 4.34 ERA and 189 strikeouts to just 62 walks.

“Garrett Burhenn is steady Eddy and maybe one of the better starters in the Midwest,” said Beals. “He just takes the ball and gives his team a chance to win every game. He is in absolute control of himself all week long, and when I say that, his preparation is top-notch. His awareness of who he is and how he pitches successfully is at an extremely high level. He has command of four pitches, which pro teams are going to like as a future starter. Garrett’s a guy that the scouts believe can be a starter in the big leagues for a long time.”

Neely made it a third two rounds later when he was selected by the New York Yankees in the 11th round, No. 333 overall.

Neely pitched with the Buckeyes for only one season after spending time previously at Iowa Western Community College and Texas. While with Ohio State, Neely appeared in 12 games, including nine starts. He finished with a 2-3 record and a 6.10 ERA.

Where Neely shines is in his fastball, something that the 6-8 pitcher broke 100

miles per hour with on multiple occasions this past season. It also helped him to 62 strikeouts in 41 1/3 innings.

“I would say, overall, my ability to overpower batters with my fastball (is my top trait),” Neely told BSB in March. “I didn’t used to throw this hard. It was something I really focused on, it’s something that I trained to do. To be honest, I don’t really know how I do it. It just kind of happened, and I’m very glad that it happened. Sometimes it even kind of surprises me, because I go out there and I’m not really thinking about trying to hit those numbers but it happens, and let me tell you, I’m very happy that it does.”

That’s something Beals agreed with after the pitcher was drafted.

“Jack’s a big, tall guy with a power arm,” Beals said. “He’s fun to watch out there. The scouts see the big numbers and the power arm, and I think that’s going to get Jack his opportunity to go out and evolve his game at the professional level. His riding fastball plays well to the professional level, to the wooden bat and the higher strike zone in

professional baseball.”

With Neely joining Lonsway and Burhenn, 110 Ohio State players have been drafted since 1966. It also brings the number to 26 players drafted since Beals has been head coach, which dates back to 2011.

Two Buckeyes Earn Nod To Canadian Camp

Two Ohio State women’s hockey players – rising sophomore Jenna Buglioni and incoming transfer Raygan Kirk – earned invitations to Canada’s National Women’s Development Team summer camp, which hosted 40 young players in Calgary from July 29 to Aug. 9.

Buglioni was one of 22 forwards, while Kirk was part of the exclusive goaltender group, which featured just six invitees.

A Western Collegiate Hockey Association All-Rookie team selection in 2020-21, Buglioni made an immediate impact in Columbus, dominating on the second line and racking up 15 points (tied for third on the team) and eight goals (tied for the most

on the team). She’s not new to international play and could be a future contender for a spot on the Canadian National Team with continued development. She was named to the tournament all-star team for the 2020 U18 World Championships as a member of the Canadian team, which finished as runners-up at the event.

Kirk is a new face at Ohio State but served as a staple for Robert Morris, starting 38 games in the past two seasons and putting up a dominant 1.91 goals-against average with a .939 save percentage in 2020-21. She won gold with Team Canada at the 2019 IIHF U-18 World Championships, serving as the team’s starting goaltender throughout the tournament.

Chase Brown, Wyatt Crosher, Patrick Mayhorn and Griffin Strom contributed to this article. For up-to-the-minute Ohio State news and discussion, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports.com and the BSB Fan Forum, available to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Optimism High For 2021 Buckeyes

The Buckeyes begin the 2021 campaign as huge favorites to repeat as Big Ten champions. In fact, Ohio State is the only football program in Big Ten history to win the conference championship four times in a row. A fifth consecutive conference championship would mark another milestone in establishing Ohio State as one of the most elite programs in the annals of college football.

Many things have to go right during a football season to win a championship,

for a team that went 11-2 in 2019. Ryan Day can expect P.J. Fleck's squad to be fired up in their home opener. Look for Fleck and his offensive staff to try to establish the running game against the Buckeyes in the opener.

The Gophers return a big and experienced offensive line along with outstanding running back Mo Ibrahim, who ran for over 1,000 yards and 15 touchdowns last season. They will attempt to take it right to an Ohio State defense that lost all four of its top linebackers from 2020.

On the other hand, the Gophers have to find a way to get movement at the line of scrimmage against a stout and physical Buckeye defensive front.

Assuming Ohio State has a successful outcome against the Gophers, the next real test, in terms of conference play, comes in late October with back-to-back Big Ten East opponents: Indiana, followed by Penn State.

Like Minnesota, Indiana gets the Buckeyes at home, but the Nittany Lions must travel to Columbus, somewhere they have had little success. The rest of the schedule seems very favorable for the Buckeyes until the regular-season finale against Michigan in Ann Arbor – a game that, like always, is a season in itself.

It All Starts Up Front

The second reason the Buckeyes have an excellent chance of repeating as Big Ten champions is the depth and experience of the offensive line. Ohio State and Oklaho-

ma return the two best offensive lines in the country.

The Buckeyes will average over 300 pounds per man across the front, the largest being 6-8, 360-pound offensive tackle Dawand Jones. Besides size, the Buckeyes also have a ton of playing time under their belts. Led by Jones, center Harry Miller, tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere and guards Paris Johnson Jr. and Thayer Munford, the offensive line should be dominant in opening holes for a gifted stable of running backs and, at the same time, providing the pass protection necessary to protect a first-year starting quarterback.

Even though the defensive line does not have the same résumé as the offensive line, the defensive front has players such as defensive tackles Jerron Cage, Haskell Garrett and Taron Vincent along with defensive ends Javontae Jean-Baptiste, Zach Harrison and Tyreke Smith. All have a bunch of snaps under their belts. Look for freshmen Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau to provide extra depth on the defensive line. Sawyer has the potential to be a difference-maker as a rush end in the likes of the Bosa brothers and Chase Young.

It is imperative the defensive front play at a high level against the run game due to the lack of experience at the linebacker position. Just as importantly, they must put the heat on opposing quarterbacks on passing downs in order to help a defensive secondary which had its ups and downs last season.

Ryan Day

There is no doubt Day has proved himself to be a solid head football coach, capable of putting an elite football team on the field each and every week. That's the third reason the Buckeyes have a legitimate chance to repeat as conference champions. He is a no-nonsense guy who can motivate his players while making the game fun and competitive for them.

Day has won every Big Ten game as head coach for the Buckeyes and holds a 23-2 overall record. He's a proven recruiter who will go anywhere in the country to bring in the type of athletes who can succeed in a high-profile college program like Ohio State. He has successfully taken the reins from Urban Meyer and is putting his own mark on recruiting.

For example, all three of the top scholarship quarterbacks are similar in size and style of performance. Jack Miller and Kyle McCord are 6-3, 215 pounds and C.J. Stroud is 6-3, 218. All three have strong

arms, are accurate passers and are athletic enough to keep drives alive with their feet.

The next big test as a head coach for Day, as well as all head coaches in college football, is how he handles the new NIL situation. It will take a special type of head coach to maneuver through a system that allows players to make money off their talents and, at the same time, keep the entire squad together without jealousy among teammates.

Recruiting Machine

The fourth argument for Ohio State to win the Big Ten in 2021 is the vast overall talent on the team due to the consistent recruiting efforts of the Buckeyes. Since 2010, Ohio State has brought in nearly 30 five-star recruits including players such as Young, Nick Bosa, Sawyer and the most recent top recruit, Quinn Ewers.

To emphasize the scope of the Buckeye recruiting efforts, these four players played their high school football in Maryland, Florida, Ohio and Texas respectively. Day and his staff can go into any high school in the country and have a legitimate chance of getting a visit from the nation's best football players.

There is a reason programs such as Ohio State, Alabama, Clemson and Oklahoma are consistently contenders for the national championship, and that reason is they are the most dynamic recruiting schools. Success breeds success, and the very best high school talent wants to go to the most elite universities. They all want to play for winning teams and win championships in hopes of moving on to the NFL afterwards.

The Standard

Winning is important at Ohio State, let there be no doubt about it. In a world where "everybody gets a trophy" seems to be becoming the norm, it hasn't affected the Ohio State football philosophy. Do it right, do it fair, but do it physical if you play for the Ohio State Buckeyes. You step on the field to win the game, bottom line.

The Ohio State University officially recognized football as a varsity sport in 1890, and since then, the Buckeyes have won 931 games, eight national titles of one form or another and 41 conference championships, and Ohio State has produced seven Heisman Trophy winners. The program has always demanded the best out of its players and coaches, and do not look for that to change in the future.

That standard is the fifth reason the Buckeyes will repeat as conference champions in 2021.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

and that championship must be earned. Buckeye fans should feel very optimistic, however, that their team has all the tools necessary to win the conference and once again represent the Big Ten in the College Football Playoff picture.

The Schedule

The 2021 football schedule is one of the big positives for the Buckeyes in their trek to repeat as Big Ten champs, but the Sept. 2 opener against Minnesota may not be a cakewalk.

The Golden Gophers won only three games last season, a disappointing showing

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Buckeyes Have The Talent For Another Run

It's almost hard to believe.

Ohio State has lost only six regular-season football games over the last nine seasons, since Urban Meyer arrived to coach the Buckeyes in 2012. Just four of those losses were in Big Ten play.

Maybe more impressive, OSU hasn't lost a Big Ten game in nearly three years, since that 49-20 rout at Purdue on Oct. 20, 2018. And the Buckeyes have lost only one Big Ten game at home since 2012. That was six

to that point – Art Schlichter – there was a high-profile battle among highly recruited players. Mike Tomczak won that battle and started for three years (1982-84). Jim Karsatos, part of the same recruiting class as Tomczak, followed as a starter for two years himself (1985-86). Tomczak had a long NFL career. Karsatos was drafted but didn't make the cut.

But with all respect to Tomczak and Karsatos, they weren't in the same league as this year's grouping.

C.J. Stroud was a five-star 4??? recruit rated the No. 2 pro-style QB nationally in his recruiting class. Jack Miller was a four-star recruit rated the 14th-best pro-style quarterback in the same class (2020).

Kyle McCord, a five-star, was the No. 3 QB overall in the 2021 class (and my favorite among the three in the spring game). Add to the mix a recent enrollee and five-star who was the top-rated QB in the 2022 class before deciding to skip his senior year of high school – Quinn Ewers. According to the recruiting “experts,” he is one of the best QB prospects in the last several years.

True, none has any extensive playing time at the college level, and they are all young – none more than two years removed from high school.

But Ohio State has never had so much talent with such upside in the quarterback room. And I'm not sure any college has ever had so much talent at one time at the game's most important position. All four were very highly recruited.

It's not a stretch to say all four quarterbacks have a legitimate chance of ending up in the NFL someday, though for that to happen, some in this crowded grouping will have to move on to get their college experience elsewhere. For the NFL answer, we'll have to wait a few years.

But I especially like the chance of premium quarterback play this year, even with the inexperience, because OSU is so talented and deep with experience at the wide receiver position. Wideouts Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson would have been high NFL draft picks if they were in this spring's draft.

Plus, there's another bonus. The Buckeyes are loaded with depth at running back.

Consider this. Steele Chambers has a career rushing average of 7.9 yards a carry in two seasons. Last year he averaged 9.6 yards a carry. But with playing time limited, he's moved to defense to give linebacker a try.

Demario McCall ran for 270 yards in 2016, at the time the most yards by a true freshman in 10 years. No room for him at running back anymore. He's now a defensive back for his senior season.

Then there's Marcus Crowley, who as a freshman in 2019 averaged 9.5 yards a carry (237 yards on 25 carries, with two touchdowns). He very likely will be the fourth running back on the depth chart.

Miyan Williams, who averaged 6.4 yards a carry in limited play last season, may begin the year as the starter.

If he does, he would be ahead of Master Teague III, a solid if unspectacular back. Teague enters the season with 1,409 yards and 13 touchdowns in his career. In 2019, even while playing behind J.K. Dobbins, Teague was named third-team All-Big Ten.

Any one of these backs would likely be solid on a very good team.

But there's more – maybe a guy who could be spectacular on a spectacular team.

TreVeyon Henderson brings with him directly out of high school the highest ceiling of them all. The anticipation is reminiscent of Maurice Clarett and Robert Smith – players anticipated to do very well right out of the gate.

Smith responded in 1990 as the first Ohio State freshman ever to rush for 1,000 yards. He did so with room to spare, gathering 1,126 yards with a 6.4-yard per carry

average.

Clarett became the second to do so in 2002, helping OSU to a national championship along the way. He finished his one and only OSU season with 1,237 yards rushing (5.6 per carry) and 104 receiving.

Henderson has that type of advance billing to have a Smith-like/Clarett-like sensational freshman season.

Rated the No. 1 running back in his recruiting class, he did not play his senior season in high school after Virginia moved football from fall to spring because of COVID-19. But consider this from his junior year: 45 touchdowns, 2,424 rushing yards, 3,200 all-purpose yards. He scored four TDs in his school's winning state title game.

He's said to have run the 40 in 4.3 seconds. He's listed at 5-10, 215 pounds.

The bar for team success has been set high at Ohio State. Just 11 losses combined in nine seasons, not a single regular-season loss in nearly three seasons, and four straight Big Ten titles.

But with talent like this in camp – even very young, inexperienced talent, the bar is a very realistic if not expected level to reach or exceed this season.

This really has been a special time for Ohio State football. Someone once said, you win with people. Ohio State has the people.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

seasons ago – on Nov. 21, 2015, when they fell to Michigan State, 17-14.

Beside the Purdue and MSU losses, the only Big Ten regular-season defeats came against Iowa in 2017 and Penn State in 2016.

Otherwise, the Buckeyes are perfect during Big Ten regular-season play.

And there have been only seven other losses since 2012 – home games against Virginia Tech in 2014 and Oklahoma in 2017, postseason losses to Clemson (Orange Bowl) and Michigan State (Big Ten title game) in 2013, plus playoff losses to Clemson in 2016 and 2019 and last season's national title game against Alabama.

Overall, under Meyer and Ryan Day, Ohio State has gone 106-11, including a national championship and Big Ten titles each of the last four seasons.

Pretty impressive stuff. Great coaching. Great player development. Great recruiting.

Which leads up to this being an almost unbelievable statement in these times of success.

I'm not sure Ohio State has ever had more talent at the two most high-profile positions – quarterback and running back – heading into a season.

Some of that talent is so young that it may not be fully exploited this season. But talent, nonetheless.

The three young returning quarterbacks could probably start for several top-25 teams in the country. And the running back collection includes experience and mouth-watering potential.

Many eons ago, when Ohio State was replacing perhaps its greatest quarterback



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Young Buckeyes Not Without Some Questions

Even after an offseason that saw Ohio State lose a bunch of important talent to the NFL draft, it's pretty apparent that the Buckeyes are still the class of the Big Ten and the league's best hope for a berth in the College Football Playoff.

It's a testament to the job Ryan Day has done taking over for Urban Meyer that Ohio State has not suffered any noticeable slip-page. The results are there on the field, and recruiting has actually improved, which seemed an impossible task. The Buckeyes are once again the hunted, which seems to be how everyone likes it.

But with success comes scrutiny, and OSU is not immune to that.

Sure, OSU has had consecutive appearances in the College Football Playoff, but it still hasn't won a national title since the 2014 season. Getting there is fine; it's the goal of

and by all accounts the redshirt freshman appears to be up to the task. We won't really know until he's facing live bullets, but Stroud seems to have the requisite physical talent needed to lead the team. It's how he deals with the mental aspect that will determine success. One thing is obvious – he's got an arsenal of weapons that would make the U.S. military envious, so if he can't succeed with the receiving corps Ohio State has, then he just isn't up for the job.

There's depth behind him, but for how long? We know how it goes these days – name a starter, and the backups start looking for the quickest path to the transfer portal. It's probably too late for it to happen at OSU, but it probably will happen after the season. There's no way to keep a room with four ultra-talented guys happy, and even though they say they love the team aspect and being around their brothers, it comes down to playing time. If they aren't getting it in Columbus, they'll get it someplace else.

How Day massages the egos and deals with the potential turmoil in that room bears watching.

The last question may be the biggest – will the defense be good enough to help the Buckeyes realize their championship dreams?

The 25.8 points per game allowed in 2020 was just the second time since the national title that OSU has given foes more than 19 points per game. There were too many lapses on the back end, partially due to the lack of coverage ability from the linebackers and a scheme that wasn't conducive to stopping a lethal aerial attack.

Defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs has said all of the right things in the offseason, and OSU has shown a willingness to change, moving to a 4-2-5 base look that should put more athleticism on the field. Having an entire spring to digest the changes will help, but it wouldn't be surprising if there's still a little ragged play early in the season as guys settle into the new scheme. It's important to be clean early as Minnesota and Oregon will both be able to test the Buckeyes through the air. If fans see the football falling harmlessly to the ground with consistency, then they'll know that the Silver Bullets are back and their worrying can stop.

Oh, let's not forget another big change this year – fans back in Ohio Stadium. After a 2020 that had only family members in the Horseshoe, the cheers will once again erupt as Ohio State welcomes the fans again. It will be great to get back to tailgating and the band and all of the traditions that surround the pro-

gram that were temporarily shelved last year. It will be as close to normal as one can hope for, that's for sure.

What does all of this mean for 2021?

Well, from this corner it looks like the Buckeyes have the goods to go unbeaten through the regular season. The trip to Indiana could be a potential stumbling block, and Oregon, Penn State and Michigan won't be any walk in the park. But the rest of the slate is more than manageable, which means OSU is in excellent position to vie for the brass ring once again.

And that's just what it will do – along with Oklahoma, Alabama and Georgia. Yes, the Buckeyes should be one of the top four teams in the land once the dust settles on the regular season. Whether or not they have enough to win it all will come down largely to health and matchup.

Buckeyes Again Class Of League

It wouldn't be a preseason issue without predictions – so it's fortunate that I love making 'em and won't shy away from the heat that comes along with doing so.

For drama, the race in the West will be the one to follow.

Wisconsin certainly looks like the best team on paper, with an emerging halfback in Jalen Berger in the backfield and QB Graham Mertz looking to improve on a freshman campaign that saw him flash at times – and look like a freshman at others. The defense will, as usual, be stout, with a linebacking crew that rivals any in the conference. Jack Sanborn is the big name, but Leo Chenal and Nick Herbig could blossom into stars this season. The early part of the schedule is tough, with Penn State, Notre Dame and Michigan in the first four games. Get through that and it should be pretty smooth sailing.

Iowa is what it is – a hard-nosed, sound defensive team that will frustrate opponents by taking them out of their comfort zone. DC Phil Parker is a master at getting his troops to do what they're good at. He doesn't get fancy, doesn't try to run exotic schemes or go blitz-heavy. They just get the job done. Whether they can do so on offense remains to be seen as QB Spencer Petras was hit-and-miss last season. The receivers aren't terribly explosive, but running back Tyler Goodson is among the best in the conference. Tyler Linderbaum is the nation's best center and anchors a line that thrives on mauling opponents.

Northwestern was a bit of a surprise division winner last season, but losses on defense knock the Wildcats down a peg or two. But they won't implode as long as Pat Fitzgerald is on the sideline, and he'll have another gritty, "not afraid to get the uniform dirty" crew. The defense has a lot of new faces, but safety Brandon Joseph is All-America caliber. Fitzgerald surprised the masses by naming Hunter Johnson as starting quarterback, going against his usual method of waiting until the first series of the opener to reveal the choice. Johnson wasn't good in a brief stint in 2019, so it will be interesting to see how much he's improved.

Minnesota is a bit of a mystery. Returning 10 starters on both sides of the ball, you'd think the Gophers would be in better shape to win the division. But an inability to stop the run last year (207.1 rushing yards per game allowed) may carry over to 2021, and if a complement to Chris Autman-Bell isn't found

in the receiving corps, then the Gophers offense may not be quite as potent as expected. Look for Minnesota to lean on All-America running back Mo Ibrahim early and often, as controlling the clock is the best way to keep the defense off the field.

Nebraska, Illinois and Purdue all have work to do to have successful seasons, though the Illini will be interesting to watch with Bret Bielema returning to the league as coach. Both Scott Frost in Lincoln and Jeff Brohm in West Lafayette face make-or-break seasons. Can they respond to the pressure?

In the East, Ohio State is still the team to beat – and the only way it doesn't win the division and the league is if there are a slew of injuries to vital players.

Was Indiana a mirage, or are the Hoosiers now a yearly contender under Tom Allen? Depends on whether quarterback Michael Penix Jr. stays healthy – something he's been unable to do so far. He's the engine that makes it go, so if he's upright the Hoosiers should be good.

USC transfer Stephen Carr will jolt the backfield, and Ty Fryfogle was the first receiver in league history with consecutive 200-yard receiving games (vs. Michigan State and Ohio State). The offensive line is experienced, and the defense is trending up, especially linebacker Micah McFadden, who has All-American caliber talent. We'll know early whether IU is for real as it opens on the road against Iowa and also faces a talented Cincinnati squad before the calendar turns to October. IU gets Penn State and Michigan away but hosts Ohio State, making it the most intriguing Big Ten team to watch in 2021.

Is Penn State beginning a slow decline, or was 2020 simply an anomaly? PSU lost its opener to Indiana on a disputed late two-point conversion by Penix and could not handle adversity the rest of the way. The Nittany Lions started 0-5 before rebounding to win their last four, but cracks did show. Sean Clifford has yet to live up to his billing at quarterback, but the presence of (former OSU assistant) offensive coordinator Mike Yurcich could help him. Stellar receivers and a deep backfield give the offense potential, which it will need as the defense undergoes a major overhaul. Gone are Micah Parsons, Shaka Toney and Odafe Oweh, playmakers in the front seven. Penn State will need to be aggressive and hope that a talented secondary can create more than the four interceptions PSU had in 2020.

Never thought this would be said, but it wouldn't be a surprise if Michigan actually had a solid season in 2021. Jim Harbaugh seems to be a lot looser than in years past, and that approach may filter down to his players. The talent isn't what it once was, especially on offense, but some coaching changes seem to have rejuvenated Harbaugh, who is still looking for his first win over Ohio State. Folks will know early whether the Wolverines have improved when they take on Washington in the second game.

Rutgers is progressing nicely under Greg Schiano but may still be a year away from really contending. Maryland has upgraded the talent level a ton but needs to see that translate to the field, and Michigan State worked overtime in the transfer portal to boost the talent and experience level and should be improved. All three have potential to upset an applecart or two.

**THE FACTS
MAN**
Mike Wachsman

every major program. But it's not the ultimate goal. Winning it is, and Ohio State has come up short on its last two trips. Is there a danger that the Buckeyes are turning into the Big Ten's version of Oklahoma – rolling through the league but coming up short when facing teams with commensurate talent in the post-season? Day is an excellent coach, maybe one of the top five in the game today. But at some point, he has to lead the Buckeyes to the promised land, because that's what Buckeye Nation expects. If this current level of success continues, Day isn't in any danger of getting fired – but could be seen as an underachiever.

Think about it. Ohio State is bringing in boatloads of talent each year, yet it doesn't seem to be enough to climb to the top of the mountain. If the production isn't matching the talent level, then by definition you're failing to meet expectation. Right now, Georgia coach Kirby Smart sits at the front of the underachievers bus, but he isn't the only guy on it.

Day still has a few years to go before the title sticks, but the next couple of seasons bear watching. If the Buckeyes can't win a national title with the guys being brought into the program, when will they ever?

Naming C.J. Stroud as starting quarterback came as a surprise to absolutely no one,



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Front Four Aside, Questions Linger On Defense

If this sounds familiar, it's because this is something I have been harping on for months. While all eyes seemed fixated on the Ohio State quarterback derby, I maintain that what Buckeye fans should be watching is the defensive back seven.

While inexperienced, the quarterback room was loaded, even before all-everything Quinn Ewers passed on his senior season of high school and arrived in Columbus to join this year's fray. Back when it was still billed as a battle between C.J. Stroud, Jack Miller and Kyle McCord, I felt from the time Stroud was called on to replace Justin Fields in the crucial College Football Playoff semifinal against Clemson, the pecking order was established and Stroud was the QB to beat. My opinion didn't change through spring practice and the spring game, though I was impressed with McCord and think he might ultimately have a higher upside, whether that's fulfilled in Columbus or elsewhere.

In other words, I'm not sure the quarterback battle was really as big a battle as might have been advertised. Whichever quarterback did get the nod was going to have the benefit of throwing to some of the best receivers in the country and playing behind a talented line, one so talented that there has been some last-minute position shuffling to try to get as many of those talented players into the lineup as possible.

Running backs remain a bit of a question mark, but there are any number of players who can step up and become the next great Ohio State ball-carrier.

Whoever wound up being the quarterback was not going to have to do it all on his own.

Couple that with the fact that the last time Ohio State was forced to go into battle with an inexperienced quarterback – and forced to do it at the last minute, at that – J.T. Barrett and Cardale Jones led the Buckeyes to a national championship.

So, no, I wasn't that worried about the quarterback situation, and I'm not sure you, dear reader, should be, either. With all that talent surrounding the signal-caller, and offensive gurus Ryan Day and Kevin Wilson calling the shots, the offense should be just fine.

Now, the defense on the other hand?

I'm having a hard time letting go of my final image of the 2020 football season: linebacker Tuf Borland chasing speedy Alabama receivers, looking a little bit like me trying to chase after Jesse Owens. As I said then and many times since, that wasn't Borland's fault. In fact, he was really hustling. He just should never been put in that position.

That was my mental snapshot of what was really the defensive season as a whole.

There's no escaping the fact that Ohio State was a stunning 122nd of 127 teams in pass defense last season. Who can forget Indiana QB Michael Penix Jr. passing for 294 yards and four touchdowns in the second half alone (491 yards and five TDs in the game) as the Hoosiers battled back from a 35-7 deficit and threw a major scare into the Buckeyes before falling in a 42-35 final? The problems were not just against the eventual national champion Crimson Tide.

Over the course of the season, the Buckeyes even helped turned their top defensive back, Shaun Wade, into a fifth-round NFL pick after he had been projected as a first-rounder headed into the season.

No, the quarterback battle was just a shiny object distracting fans from the real question mark for the team, the real potential obstacle to another trip to the playoffs.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

In the recent past, when there were major problems with the defense, Day and predecessor Urban Meyer acted decisively to try to improve play on that side of the ball. After struggling in 2013 (76th in pass defense) Meyer brought in Chris Ash to rebuild the pass defense. The result was a national championship the next season. After struggling in 2018 (86th in pass defense that included the disaster at Purdue and the near-loss at Maryland), Day brought in Jeff Hafley, and the result was the Buckeyes being a controversial loss to Clemson away from a trip to the CFP Championship Game while finishing first in the country in pass defense. That means the Buckeyes dropped 121 spots in 2020.

This time around, Day elected to stay pretty much in-house, giving Matt Barnes full control of the secondary and elevating Kerry Coombs as the lone defensive coordinator. All eyes seem to be on Coombs, and I am willing to give him at least this year to prove himself. For one thing, I love Coombs for his enthusiasm and his recruiting ability. I always have. For another, I hate co-coordinators, which was the case last season with now-retired Greg Mattison sharing duties. This time around, it's all on Coombs.

Presumably, there is talent on the back end. The Buckeyes are at the top of the recruiting charts every year. The pass defense this year isn't helped by the fact that Ohio State is also breaking in a new set of linebackers. But again, the players fighting for the linebacker positions were all highly-rated recruits.

It seems that scheme may be more at play than athletes as Coombs attempts to build a championship-caliber defense.

One thing that Buckeye fans should watch for is more use of the "bullet," the hybrid safety/linebacker position in a 4-2-5 formation. You are going to read plenty about that within the pages of this issue.

For the benefit those of us like me who were raised on either a 4-3 or 3-4 defense, I asked Patrick Mayhorn, our resident expert on these things, to attempt to explain the position and formation to me so that I could attempt to explain it to you.

"The 4-2-5 may be new to Ohio State, but it's not new to college football," Patrick explained. "It picked up steam in the mid-2000s at TCU under Gary Patterson. Patterson liked it because it allowed him to put a fifth defensive back on the field, either in the form of a slot cornerback – a cornerback who specializes in defending quicker slot receivers – or a box safety, which is the more technical term for Ohio State's idea of the 'bullet.'"

"Because Patterson was facing more strong passing attacks (in the Big 12) than he was powerful running games, a third true linebacker served him little purpose, given that passing offenses were sending four or five receivers out on every play. If one of the three linebackers is going to have to defend a slot receiver, tight end or halfback on a route anyway, the defense might as well swap him out for a hybrid player who can keep up in coverage."

"That's the main appeal here for Ohio State," Patrick continued. "In the modern game, there are very few teams that frequently run the ball with seven players serving as blockers, so there's no real use in putting sev-

en defenders – four defensive linemen, three true linebackers – in the box. It does help to truly snuff out a rushing attack, as Ohio State's No. 6-ranked rush defense in 2020 shows. But linebackers cannot be consistently tasked with covering slot receivers, tight ends or halfbacks on passing plays.

"Taking one linebacker off the field and replacing him with a hybrid safety like Craig Young or Kourt Williams, or a coverage specialist like Ronnie Hickman, allows Ohio State five capable defensive backs to match five eligible receivers. That these players are rare talents, capable of defending the run as well if needed, even from outside the box, is just the benefit of pulling in top-five recruiting classes every season."

Thank you, Patrick. So it's a numbers game. If playing a modernized defense to try to keep up with modernized offenses is what it takes, I'm all in.

One player I will be watching in the secondary is Demario McCall, who moved over to defense after five years of trying to find a permanent home on the offensive side of the ball. Longtime readers of this column know that sometimes I just take a liking to a player for no particular reason other than, perhaps, he is an underdog. Maybe, in McCall's case, it's because he comes from an area that has produced such Buckeye Sports Bulletin stalwarts as Joe Dempsey and former BSB editor Jeff Svoboda.

It's McCall's last chance to live up to his recruiting hype from back in the class of 2016. Don't forget he gained 270 yards rushing as a freshman in '16, at the time the most by a Buckeye frosh in 10 years (Beanie Wells, 576 yards in 2006). I was struck by something that longtime recruiting analyst Bill Greene said about McCall – playing offense – in our 2016 BSB recruiting wrap-up.

"He has the best change of direction of any player in Ohio in the past few years," Greene said at the time.

That would seem to be an outstanding quality in a defensive back as well as a ball-carrier or receiver.

Freshmen frequently contribute to the defensive backfield, but McCall, having practiced and played against big-time colleges defenses, would seem to have a leg up on your typical first-year player.

"It wasn't a hard transition for me," McCall said of crossing the line of scrimmage. "I'm an athlete, I'm a football player – played football my whole life. So it was nothing new to me. It was probably new to Buckeye Nation and the guys who can't see me on defense or who didn't watch me in high school or before that. But I played defense my whole life until I got here."

Coombs seemed pleased with the transition, saying that Barnes frequently calls McCall's technique the best of the secondary group.

"He's a piece of clay," Coombs said. "He just does everything the way we tell him to do it because he's never done it before. Whereas other guys do things the way they want to do it because they've done it before. Not Demario."

The coach and the player seem to have a difference of opinion on whether McCall has played defense before, but that's OK if it works out and he winds up contributing. I can't help but think of when Jim Tressel and

staff moved Chris Gamble from offense to defense – within the season, no less – and it helped turn a struggling backfield into a national championship-caliber unit in 2002. I'm not suggesting McCall is the equal to Gamble, but it would be a storybook ending if he finished his Ohio State career a contributor on that side of the ball.

Whoever is back there could be tested as early as the first game of the season. While Minnesota quarterback Tanner Morgan struggled in last year's COVID-addled season, during the Gophers' breakout 11-2 campaign in 2019, he threw for 3,253 yards and 30 touchdowns against just seven interceptions with a 66.0 completion percentage.

One thing that could help Ohio State's pass defense would be another great season from Larry Johnson's defensive line. The play by the guys in the trenches might have seemed like it dropped off a little bit in 2020, but in a bit of a change, the play was dominated by the guys in the interior – Haskell Garrett and Tommy Togiai – whereas in the past it has been spearheaded by sack-machine ends such as the Bosa brothers and Chase Young. Almost by definition, the play by the guys in the interior is less flashy than the linemen outside.

Garrett returns, and with the highly touted Zach Harrison set for a breakout season on the edge and with five-star freshmen J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer set to join the rotation with Harrison, we could see the return to the sack-happy days that Buckeye fans had gotten used to since Johnson's arrival.

That would make the job of the back seven a whole lot easier.

Summer Grads

In my traditional monitoring of the graduate list, it was a small group of 25 graduating athletes in general this summer with a small group of just four football players.

But those four graduating football players have made solid contributions on the field. Thayer Munford, Jeremy Ruckert, Master Teague and Marcus Williamson each picked up their diplomas.

I also like to make note of high-profile athletes who return to school and graduate through the degree completion program. Chris Crane, a member of the Ohio State men's hockey team from 2011-13, earned his degree through that program. He spent seven seasons playing professional hockey after leaving the university.

Potential Mail Problems

I know we say this every year, but we are greatly concerned about the delivery time for your Buckeye Sports Bulletin this football season. All of us experienced the postal trials and tribulations over the past holiday season. Our readers in northwest Ohio also experienced a delay of several weeks on the delivery of their July BSB Interview Issue. Those may have just been a preview of things to come.

We encourage readers, especially those out of state, who experience mail delays to consider upgrading to first-class mail (in an envelope) for football season. You can upgrade through the football regular season for just \$28 or though the traditional football recruiting season ending in February for just \$38.

Call (614) 486-2202 to order with credit card or send your check, money order or credit card information to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212.

HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

FOR ATHLETES

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that causes your brain to rapidly move inside your skull.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

- Headache, nausea, vomiting, balance problems, dizziness, double or blurred vision, sensitivity to light or noise, feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy, just not "feeling right" or "feeling down," memory problems, confusion, and trouble sleeping.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?



REPORT IT. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

GET CHECKED OUT. If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL. A concussion can make it harder to do everyday activities, such as concentrating at school. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH AND PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain and can even be fatal.

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>

This work is funded either in whole or in part by a grant awarded by the Ohio Department of Health as a sub-award of a grant issued by Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant under the Injury Prevention Program by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, grant award. Number 1 NB01OT009358-01-00.



Ohio Department of Health

