

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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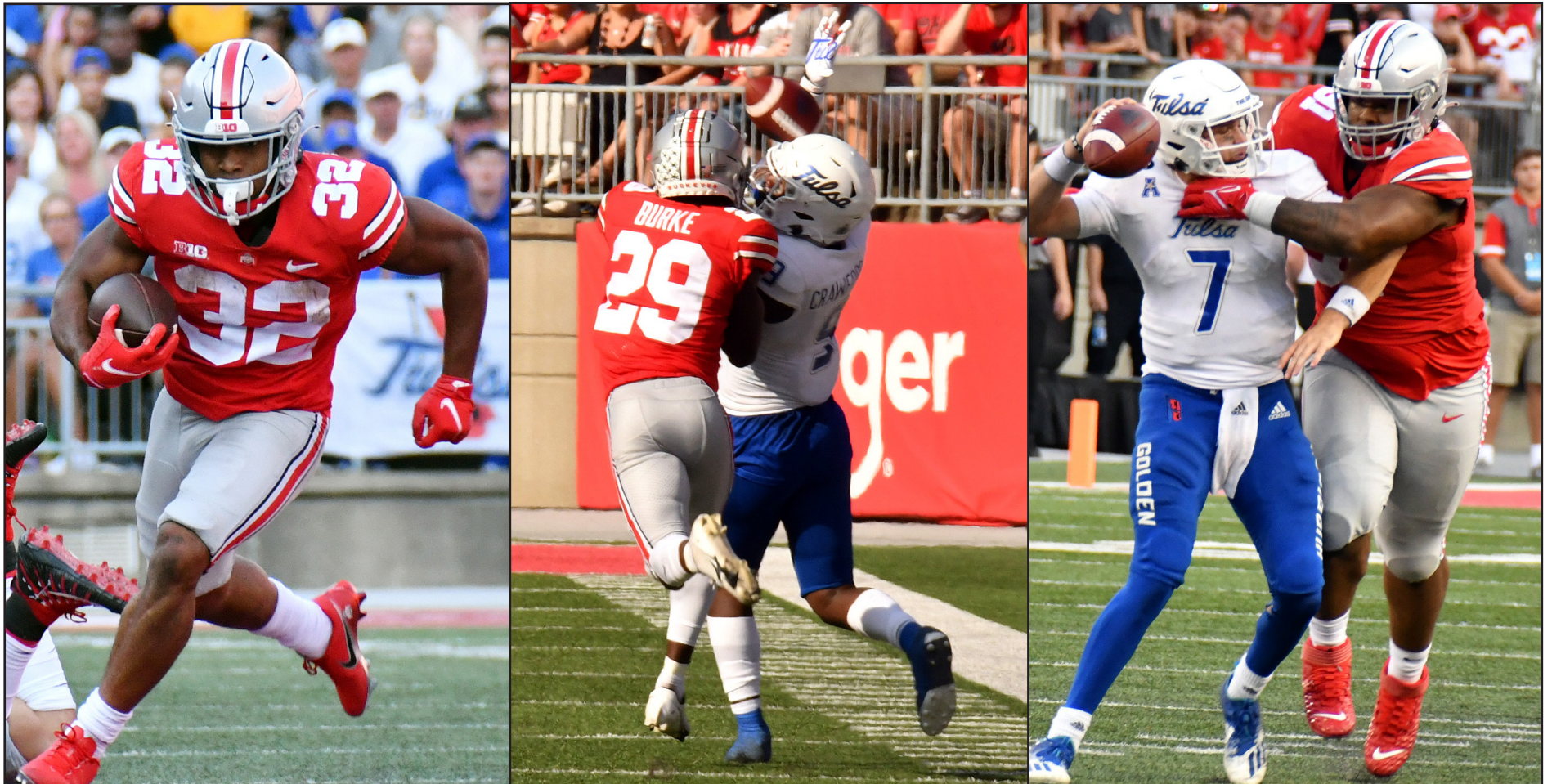
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Vol. 41, No. 3

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 25, 2021



SONNY BROCKWAY

FANTASTIC FRESHMEN - Ohio State was led to a 41-20 victory against Tulsa on Sept. 18 by a bevy of talented freshmen, including running back TreVeyon Henderson (32), cornerback Denzel Burke (29) and defensive tackle Tyleik Williams (91). Henderson broke the single-game rushing record for freshmen with 277 yards, Burke totaled five tackles and a near-interception, and Williams had an important fourth-quarter sack of Tulsa QB Davis Brin (7).

Phenomenal Freshmen

Young Bucks Steal The Show In 41-20 Win Over Tulsa

By PATRICK MAYHORN

BSB Associate Editor

Fifty years ago, Ohio State fielded its final freshman football team. Once a staple of college football and a crucial piece of Woody Hayes' Big Ten and national title-contending program in Columbus, freshman teams across the nation faded the following season as the NCAA approved first-year eligibility for college student-athletes in football and basketball.

That last group for the Buckeyes, however, was a strong one. On a roster of 45 players in 1971, Dave Purdy earned the nod at quarterback along with Neal Colzie at defensive back, tailback Harold "Champ" Henson and offensive tackle Kurt Schumacher – each future contributors for the varsity Buckeyes.

The freshmen played just three games that final year, rolling to a 55-10 win against Indiana, toppling Kentucky by a 27-7 final and closing out the team's history with a bang, knocking off in-state foe Ohio University, 38-28, on Nov. 12, just a day before the varsity squad suffered one of only two losses to Northwestern since 1964.

One page of statistics, buried deep in an Ohio State media guide, is all that remains of that group. Henson racked up 305 yards on 40 carries, while Purdy completed 17 of his 32 passes (53.1 percent) for 369 yards and six touchdowns. They were also penalized 387 yards and lost eight fumbles, which likely threw Hayes into one of his familiar apoplectic fits.

Fast-forward a half-century to Sept. 18, 2021, and a 40-21 victory against Tulsa that was quite a bit closer than the final score – bolstered by two touchdowns during the final four minutes of play –

and you will find Ohio State paying a sort of homage to that final freshman squad, riding significant contributions from youngsters all over the grid.

None was more important than Hopewell, Va., native TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio State's first five-star running back signee since Chris "Beanie" Wells arrived on campus as part of Jim Tressel's 2006 recruiting class.

Henderson kept up the throwback to the early '70s, shattering Archie Griffin's single-game rushing record for a Buckeye freshman of 239 yards gained against North Carolina in 1972, the first year with freshmen on the field, with 277 of his own, gained on just 24 carries. It's only fitting that Henderson broke the record with a 52-yard touchdown scamper, given that Griffin's final carry against the Tar Heels that set the old high-water mark came on

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

After Ohio State's 41-20 win against Tulsa on Sept. 18, the BSB staff and a select group of posters to the BuckeyeSports.com Forum doled out Buckeye leaves to deserving players who donned the scarlet and gray.

Chase Brown, BSB: TreVeyon Henderson carried the ball 24 times for 277 yards and three touchdowns. That's enough for me to give him the Buckeye leaf. However, that's not the headline. He broke the freshman single-game rushing record against the Golden Hurricane, topping Archie Griffin's 239-yard performance against North Carolina in 1972. That's not all – Henderson's performance puts him at No. 3 on the all-time single-game rushing record behind Trey Sermon and Eddie George.

Sermon rushed for 331 yards against Northwestern in the 2020 Big Ten Championship Game against Northwestern, and George collected 314 against Illinois back in 1995. Henderson's 277 yards put him behind those two Ohio State running backs and firmly in front of another Buckeye great, Ezekiel Elliot.

It looks like we could have another all-time running back blossoming in front of our eyes.

Wyatt Crosher, BSB: There is only one real pick for a Buckeye leaf in Ohio State's win over Tulsa, and that is TreVeyon Henderson.

Henderson was the only thing that felt alive for the Buckeyes on either side of the ball, and he might be the only reason that Ohio State avoided a monumental upset against the Golden Hurricane. The freshman running back's performance broke the freshman rushing record set by Archie Griffin in 1972.

This was a bad game all-around for Ryan Day's team, but Henderson masked that with true brilliance on each of his touchdown runs. He should be the no-doubt starter from here on out for the Buckeyes and could be the difference in snapping out of this lull that Ohio State has been in through the first three games of the 2021 season.

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: As my coworkers have, I'm selecting the talented running back from Hopewell, Va., for my Buckeye leaf this week. We're going to have to make more room on his helmet.

It's hard to find a starting place when talking about this young man because watching him play really just takes your breath away. He's as fast as any Buckeye back of the modern era, and he has the instincts of a 10-year NFL veteran. The way that he reads defensive flow and cuts against it is just brilliant.

And it was on full display against the Golden Hurricane as the afternoon turned to evening in what was otherwise a snoozer for the Buckeyes against a feisty but overwhelmed Tulsa team. Henderson was just about the only draw, breaking away for nearly 300 yards and busting big run after big run with a style that seems almost uninfluenced by blockers or defenders. The Buckeye back is a delight.

Mark Rea, BSB: After careful consideration, I am awarding a helmet full of Buckeye leaves to TreVeyon Henderson. One leaf is for his 173 yards and two touchdowns in the third quarter alone, one more is for breaking Archie Griffin's 49-year-old record for most rushing yards by an Ohio State freshman, and he gets a whole handful for being diplomatic when asked if he had ever met Griffin or watched tape of the two-time Heisman winner. Henderson said he had never met Griffin but had watched him on tape. Then when asked what he admired about Griffin, Henderson paused, smiled and said, "I know he was a great player."

Well played, Mr. Freshman.

BuckeyeScott: Honestly, I wish I had a way to watch this game in the way coaches do. Large format with all the players in the view, and you can zoom in on anybody. But the offensive line has to get some Buckeye leaves if the offensive back does what he just did!

Michael Bauer: Yes!!! BuckeyeScott has it right. Can't give it to the RB unless you give it to the fatties as well.

AnthonyBuckeye: TreVeyon Henderson is obviously already a star and is sure to be a first-round draft pick in a few years, Denzel Burke for his takeaway that was denied by the refs and his superlative play, Cameron Martinez for the interception/TD and his energy throughout the game, Haskell Garrett for tackles near the line of scrimmage again, Ronnie Hickman for being a tackling machine in each game, Jaxon Smith-Njigba for another very good game, Master Teague for an energetic effort and the run defense for making significant improvements.

PeyoteBuck: Emeka Egbuka deserves a Buckeye leaf. The Bucks are young and have growing pains, but we saw enough flashes against Tulsa to look forward to a magnificent team down the road.

Poster That Harley Built: Tyleik Williams for his game-changing 17-yard sack. Maybe there is hope for the Buckeye pass rush. And what can I say about Henderson?

BUCKEYE SPORTS .COM

From The Message Board

Ohio State got back in the win column with a 41-20 victory against Tulsa on Sept. 18 but did not look very convincing in the process. Despite that, we asked readers on the BuckeyeSports.com Forum what areas they thought the Buckeyes improved upon during the victory, as well as what areas they thought still need to get better. Here are some of the responses:

"I saw no improvements. No way Tulsa should be throwing 500 yards on us. Ryan Day should thank his lucky stars he has TreVeyon Henderson on the roster."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I saw a much more aggressive defense today. Yes, they bent a lot at times, but heck we only gave up six points in the first half. We clearly shut down their run game (73 yards). Of course, the tradeoff was the 428 yards they threw against us. Still room for improvement. Anyway, I saw some new players contribute today. We are incrementally improving."

– BuckeyeScott

"Although a few players may have improved, the overall team performance showed no improvement."

– Terrier Buck

"I saw many non-starters more hungry and aggressive than the starters, particularly on defense."

– R1TBDBITL

"Rushing game showed improvement (welcome to stardom, Mr. Henderson). Rushing defense showed improvement. Passing D continues to be a train wreck."

– bstu9

"The run D was much improved. The red zone D in the first half was also very good, limiting Tulsa to two field goals. The energy levels and the quickness of the defensive players flying to the ball seemed better. I believe that we may be on our way to finding our defensive identity. On offense, Henderson looks as good as any Buckeye running back from history.

"What didn't work was pressure on the opposing QB. Our defensive ends appeared to be held often without it being called, but the DL by itself is not at the level it was in when Chase Young played at Ohio State."

– AnthonyBuckeye

"I thought the rushing defense improved in the third and fourth quarters. It's almost like a light came on. Not super bright light but light nonetheless."

– PeyoteBuck

"Still not enough pass rush. Opposing QBs are able to play pitch and catch with their receivers who are wide open on most plays. So far, the QBs have been very accurate. Maybe the offense will have one or two new/different stars each week. Chris Olave is too good to go an entire game without a catch. I know, one big catch was nullified. As always, the Buckeyes are always getting an opponent's best shot.

"We'd like to believe the porous defense will suddenly fix the problems and be great again, but the fact is sometimes what you see is what you get. In games where the offense struggles and doesn't score 40-plus points, those will be defeats. The defense we see may be the best that it can be, until the young dudes gain experience and learn new schemes."

– Byron McNutt

"The run game was obviously the major improvement. It wasn't just Henderson (and to a lesser degree Master Teague). The holes from the offensive line were much bigger. You could have given Henderson the ball 30 times against Oregon, and I don't think he would have gained half as many yards as he did against Tulsa."

– Poster That Harley Built

"I too am concerned about the lack of a pass rush, although they did get a few pressures in the second half. Denzel Burke covered well on some plays and Cameron Martinez looked good. A lot of work needs to be done on defense, but I think they will continue to improve."

– Carl F. Dietz

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Coombs Must Go

In the last three games, Kerry Coombs' defensive schemes have been dismal against Alabama, Minnesota, and Oregon! He is nothing more than a glorified cheerleader! Head coaches are paid to make big decisions. Ryan Day had better figure out that this guy isn't the answer before Coombs drags Day's career down with him.

**Pence Roth
Bradenton, Fla.**

Let's Stop Pretending

Cheerleaders are a fantastic part of college football game days. They pump up crowds and players before the game, set the mood for a spirited day of action on the field and engage with fans throughout the game inciting loud chants and cheers.

Cheerleaders don't make solid defensive

coordinators, however. Kerry Coombs is a beloved cheerleader that wears his emotions on his sleeve. Let's stop pretending that he's going to evolve into anything more than just our best cheerleader.

**Brian Copfer
Cincinnati**

Troubles Nothing New

Another dreadful defensive performance. Last year's OSU defense allowed 25.8 points per game.

The year before, it was 13.7 points per game. This year through two games, it is 33.0 points per game so far. Why doesn't Ryan Day see what most Buckeye fans see? Against Michigan and in bowl games, John Cooper was 5-18-1. It took Andy Geiger 13 years to show him the door.

What will Ryan Day do with Mr. Coombs? The offensive unit is strong enough, but a team

can't be first-rate if it is one-dimensional. Every year, OSU recruits well, but the talent is only as good as the coaching.

**Jim Chesney
Bluffton, S.C.**

Loss Should Wake Up Bucks

It was Saturday, September 11, 2021, when the favored Buckeye team had what many fans are calling "Another Reality Nightmare" football game. Granted, the team had high expectations placed upon them by the sports media, fans and coaches due to their past experiences and recruiting abilities with a new freshman class mixed in and returning players that would give immediate leadership skills. But with all of these accolades, we witnessed a defensive effort that went awry when the Oregon Ducks executed one play that scored three sweeping left touchdown runs that helped this reality nightmare.

This fan believes it was a rude awakening for the coaches and players but a wakeup call

for Big Ten league play. You can win with an offensive team that is capable, but a defensive team that has to improve. There were too many penalties, players out of position or not fast enough, and defensive coaches not prepared to make field play changes.

Yes, it was disappointing to witness losing, but the season is far from over. Go Bucks and show us you are still capable of winning titles.

**Nelson Bell
Toledo**

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

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PUBLISHER
 Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
 Becky Roberts

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
 Mark Rea

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
 Wyatt Crosher Patrick Mayhorn

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
 Karen Wachsmann 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
 Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
 Kevin Dye Josh Winslow

CONTRIBUTORS
 Chase Brown Craig Merz
 David Breithaupt Bob Roehm
 Bill Conley Mark Schmetzer
 Joe Dempsey Steve Siegfried
 Rich Exner Jeff Svoboda
 Mike Wachsmann

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
 Jan Jager Ron Friedman

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After Three Games, Bucks Remain Puzzling

Imagine having a plain cardboard box filled with puzzle pieces. You understand that once all the pieces are in place, they will make a beautiful picture, but you have no clue as to how they fit together.

Now you know how Ryan Day feels.

After Ohio State's 41-20 victory against Tulsa, a game that was still a one-score affair deep into the fourth quarter, Day knows where some of the puzzle pieces fit. But while the head coach might have an image of the finished picture in his mind's eye, it's still largely a mystery whether the puzzle will produce a work of art or something more abstract.

I think everyone can rest assured that freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson is well on his way to becoming the centerpiece of the 2021 puzzle. Heretofore showing only tiny glimpses of his game-breaking ability – such as a 70-yard touchdown explosion against Minnesota in the season opener – Henderson seemed content enough to wait his turn as the Buckeyes experimented with different rotations during the first two games.

But sensing a need to take some of the offensive burden off the aching shoulder of first-year starting quarterback C.J. Stroud, Day gave Henderson his first career start, and the 5-10, 215-pound speedster took that opportunity and ran with it – literally.

By the end of the first half, Henderson already had 14 carries, equaling his total from the first two games. Then during the third period, the tectonic plates behind Ohio Stadium began to shift as Henderson provided his own personal earthquake. Inside those 15 minutes alone, he carried eight times for 173 yards and two touchdowns.

His first score set the tone for the second half after the Ohio State defense forced a rare (at least for them so far this season) three-and-out series from Tulsa to begin the third quarter. Henderson then had a couple of nondescript 4-yard carries before exploding through a huge hole provided by seal blocks from wideout Garrett Wilson and tight end Jeremy Ruckert. He motored untouched to about the 35, where he juiced Tulsa safety Kendarin Ray out of his shoes before pinballing off two other defenders to finish a 48-yard touchdown bolt.

The second touchdown, although scoring a little lower on the wow-o-meter, provided something of a dagger to Tulsa's heart. The Golden Hurricane had sacked Stroud on the previous possession, causing the QB to fumble, and Tulsa converted that turnover into a touchdown to pull back within seven at 20-13.

But just three plays into the ensuing possession, on the final play of the third quarter, Henderson cut back into a huge hole in the middle of the field before gliding to his left in the blink of an eye. This time getting downfield blocks from Garrett and Chris Olave, the freshman made one defender miss and then high-stepped the rest of the way down the far sideline for a 52-yard score.

It was that particular carry that elevated Henderson past Archie Griffin's single-game rushing record for OSU freshmen, a mark that had stood since 1972.

Henderson, along with his offensive line, led a rushing attack that rocked the Golden Hurricane to the tune of 323 yards and provided Day with the knowledge that his team doesn't have to throw the ball 50 times to win a game.

That's a useful puzzle piece moving forward because the jury remains out on Stroud as starting quarterback. Perhaps that's a harsh assessment for a guy who has thrown for 963 yards and eight touchdowns in just three games, while completing his passes at a 62.3-percent clip and showing a QB efficiency rating of 162.67.

But there's just something that is missing. One might say the puzzle pieces aren't quite fitting together. Maybe it is a sore shoulder that is causing his frequent overthrows. Perhaps it is his inexperience that causes the redshirt freshman

to continue to stare down primary receivers. And there are times when faking a handoff and keeping the ball would net him huge chunks of rushing yardage.

The best part is that Stroud acknowledges his shortcomings and remains intent upon getting better. There is no doubt that he is the starter, though, if the sideline body language of his fellow QBs means anything. Kyle McCord, Jack Miller and Quinn Ewers undoubtedly remain hopeful they will see some action at some point this sea-

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

son, but it seems clear Stroud is Day's clear-cut pick and, barring something unforeseen, will remain so.

The receiving corps is another puzzle piece that should fit together easily, but the fact someone like Olave wasn't more involved against Tulsa is a bit of a head-scratcher. Olave had zero catches in the game, and although a 47-yard catch was erased by a penalty and he had an uncharacteristic drop on a simple sideline route, the future first-round NFL draft pick was targeted only four times.

Wilson had six receptions for 70 yards and a touchdown, but that should be his normal output. No other OSU receiver had more than two catches, and Stroud's longest completion of the afternoon went for only 20 yards.

It's nice to have a well-oiled machine of a running game on which to rely, but the Buckeyes are never going to get to where they want to go without balancing their running and passing attacks. The Tulsa game was another indication that the offensive puzzle still has some missing pieces.

We Don't Rebuild ...

Every program rebuilds at one point or another. Every program, that is, with the exception of Ohio State. Rebuilding is a luxury Day does not enjoy. You either win in Columbus or you ply your trade elsewhere. Sometimes, even winning isn't good enough, and if you don't believe that, ask Jim Tressel or Urban Meyer for their thoughts on the subject.

With such a youthful roster, especially on defense, it would perhaps be beneficial if the Buckeyes could experiment a little on game day with different alignments and personnel groupings. And, in fact, they did try that to open the season, experimentation that led to a too-close-for-comfort win at Minnesota and an excruciating loss to Oregon in the home opener.

That led to Day being forced to pretty much erase his defensive blackboard and start over from scratch. Defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs was demoted in everything but title, shuttled upstairs to the press box while defensive backs coach Matt Barnes took over play-calling duties on the sideline.

The Buckeyes tried some different looks vs. Tulsa, such as starting the game in a Cover 2 set that really wasn't a Cover 2 because one of the safeties kept creeping toward the line of scrimmage. There were also a couple of blitz calls – something Coombs very rarely employs – and that led to some increased pressure on Tulsa quarterback Davis Brin late in the game, especially when defensive tackle Tyleik Williams got to the QB in the fourth quarter and sacked him for a huge 17-yard loss.

There were other individual flashes of defensive brilliance. In addition to Williams' sack, there were interceptions by Ronnie Hickman and Cameron Martinez, the latter of which was returned 61 yards for a touchdown. Denzel

Burke nearly had an interception of his own until it was overturned by replay.

But those were just flashes in an otherwise fairly dismal effort against a winless team that had struggled on offense during its first two games. Tulsa piled up 501 total yards, meaning Ohio State has given up 500-plus yards in back-to-back games for the first time since at least 1960. Additionally, Brin became the first quarterback from a nonconference opponent since 1968 to torch the Buckeyes for at least 400 yards through the air during a regular-season game.

To say there are missing pieces remaining in the Ohio State defensive puzzle would qualify as the understatement of the year. The question remains how long it will take Day and his reconfigured staff to put the various pieces in place.

What Have We Learned?

Most Big Ten teams have hit the quarter pole in the 2021 championship chase, and it has been an unusual season so far.

Rutgers is off to a 3-0 start for the first time since 2012 when the Scarlet Knights started 7-0 on their way to a 9-4 finish. Victories against Temple, Syracuse and Delaware hardly qualify for headline news, however, and Greg Schiano's team will take a step up in competition the next two weeks – at Michigan on Sept. 25 and at home vs. Ohio State on Oct. 2.

Speaking of Michigan, the Wolverines are also 3-0, and they haven't enjoyed that kind of start since winning each of their first four games in 2017. Jim Harbaugh's offense was supposed to be a work in progress, but it has averaged 47.0 points in those three wins.

Nebraska might not be as bad as once feared. The Cornhuskers are 2-2, which doesn't make head coach Scott Frost's hot seat any less warm, but Nebraska gave third-ranked Oklahoma everything it wanted and more before losing a 23-16 decision in Norman. That was a rivalry game, of course, and it will be interesting to see if the Huskers can rise to the occasion Sept. 25 when they travel to Michigan State.

Experiencing a bit of a renaissance under second-year head coach Mel Tucker, Sparty is another 3-0 team. Believe it or not, despite all the success enjoyed by Mark Dantonio during his 13-year run, Michigan State hasn't started a season with three wins since 2015.

Penn State has risen to No. 6 in The Associated Press rankings thanks to a 3-0 start – not bad for a team that lost its first five games last season. This year, the Nittany Lions already have marquee victories against Wisconsin and Auburn, and everyone in Happy Valley now has Oct. 9 circled. That's when they get a shot at fifth-ranked Iowa at Kinnick Stadium, a place where Penn State has a three-game winning streak.

The Hawkeyes have quietly risen into the top five of the national rankings on the strength of wins over two ranked teams – No. 17 Indiana to begin the season and Iowa State, which was No. 9 when they lost a 27-17 decision at home to their in-state rivals on Sept. 11.

Then, there's Maryland. The Terrapins have started 3-0 just once since they joined the Big Ten in 2014 and are determined to live or die with a potent passing attack. Whether that is a prudent strategy will be tested the first weekend in October when the Terps get their shot at Iowa.

Big Ten West preseason favorite Wisconsin and media darling Indiana each lost their conference openers, as did defending West champion Northwestern. The Wildcats have already lost to Michigan State and Duke, and they embark upon a brutal four-week stretch in late October that includes road games at Michigan and Wisconsin bookending home contests against Minnesota and Iowa.

So, what have we learned? That based on a relatively small sample size, the Big Ten title chase is going to be something of a thrill ride.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Despite Win, OSU Drops In Rankings

After a sluggish performance during a 41-20 win against winless Tulsa, Ohio State dropped one spot in each of the major rankings released Sept. 19. The Buckeyes dropped to No. 10 in The Associated Press writers' poll and to No. 12 in the coaches' poll.

Alabama and Georgia remained the top two teams in the AP rankings, while Oregon moved up to the third spot after defeating Stony Brook. The Ducks made a significant jump from No. 12 to No. 4 last week after upsetting Ohio State on the road, and they leapfrogged previously third-ranked Oklahoma, which squeezed out a 23-16 win at home against unranked Nebraska. The Sooners slipped a spot to No. 4, and Iowa rounds out the top five.

Oklahoma remained at No. 3 in the coaches' poll with Oregon at No. 4 and Texas A&M at No. 5.

Penn State picked up four spots to take

No. 6 in the AP poll after a 28-20 win against No. 22 Auburn at Happy Valley. Texas A&M sits at No. 7, followed by Cincinnati, Clemson and Ohio State.

Iowa is ranked sixth according to the coaches, followed by Clemson, Penn State, Cincinnati and Notre Dame.

Three other Big Ten teams claimed spots in the latest rankings. Wisconsin, Michigan and Michigan State are bunched together at Nos. 18, 19 and 20 in the AP poll, while the Badgers are 15th according to the coaches, leading the Wolverines (19th) and Spartans (21st).

Munford Not Expected To Miss Much Time

Ohio State senior left guard Thayer Munford was not expected to miss significant time after he sustained a right ankle injury that sent him to the locker room on a cart late in the first quarter of the Buckeyes' win against Tulsa. Head coach Ryan Day said after the game that Munford's injury did not appear to be serious, though he would be undergoing further tests.

"It doesn't look long-term," Day said. "How long, I don't know. But the (X-rays) that were taken and everything, it does not look long-term."

If Munford's injury does last multiple weeks, Ohio State could find itself down two offensive line starters. Center Harry Miller has been listed as unavailable for the first three games of the season. Day has not cited any reasons for Miller's absence, but Luke Wypler has been starting in his place. If Munford can't play, Matthew Jones, who

2021 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 2	at Minnesota	W, 45-31	Fox	2-1, 30-0 win over Colorado
Sept. 11	OREGON*	L, 35-28	Fox	3-0, 48-7 win over Stony Brook
Sept. 18	TULSA*	W, 41-20	FS1	0-3, 41-20 loss to Ohio State
Sept. 25	AKRON	7:30 p.m.	BTN	1-2, 35-14 win over Bryant
Oct. 2	at Rutgers	TBA	TBA	3-0, 45-13 win over Delaware
Oct. 9	MARYLAND	Noon	Fox	3-0, 20-17 win over Illinois
Oct. 23	at Indiana*	TBA	TBA	1-2, 38-24 loss to Cincinnati
Oct. 30	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	3-0, 28-20 win over Auburn
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	TBA	2-2, 23-16 loss to Oklahoma
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	2-1, 27-13 loss to Notre Dame
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE	TBA	TBA	3-0, 38-17 win over Miami (FL)
Nov. 27	at Michigan	Noon	Fox	3-0, 63-10 over Northern IL
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	Fox	

* - 2020 bowl team ** - at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)

filled in against the Golden Hurricane, will likely take his place.

Munford was described after the game by tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere as one of Ohio State's most important linemen.

"Losing Thayer is a big loss," Petit-Frere said. "Like I said at the beginning of the season, Thayer is one of our most important offensive linemen, and he's a leader not only on the offensive line but the offense and the team in general. He's been a staple for a few years."

"But things like this happen. Matt Jones stepped in, and he did an amazing job. He communicated really well with me and Luke at center. He had an amazing day. I think he had a really good day on the offensive line, and I just couldn't be prouder of him stepping in and filling his role when his number was called."

Ohio State was also missing defensive end Zach Harrison against the Golden Hurricane, which Day said was a game-time decision. Holding out the junior defensive end was described as a precautionary measure.

"We are hoping to get him back to practice next week," Day said. "We felt like the best thing was to hold him for this game and then hope to get him back next week."

No Divided Loyalty For Former Coach

Former Ohio State head coach John Cooper

doesn't believe much in divided loyalties. That's why he had no problem rooting for the Buckeyes as they notched a 41-20 win Sept. 18 against Tulsa.

Cooper might have been excused for just a tinge of loyalty toward the visiting team since he was head coach of the Golden Hurricane from 1977-84 and won a Missouri Valley Conference championship in each of his final five seasons in Tulsa.

"No, I'm a Buckeye now and I'll be one until the day I die," Cooper told BSB. "I will say, though, those years in Tulsa were good ones. My family and I have a lot of fond memories of those years."

Cooper had been an assistant coach for 15 years before succeeding F.A. Dry as head coach of the Hurricane in 1977. And he took a proactive approach toward landing his first head coaching job.

"I called the University of Tulsa and told them I'd like to be their next head football coach," said Cooper, who was an assistant at Kentucky at the time. "(My wife) Helen told me, 'You're just kidding yourself. You don't know anybody at Tulsa.' But I got a call back, saying they'd like to talk to me. So I got every piece of information I could find about Tulsa, like who was on the board and who was really doing the hiring, and I found out who the important people were who were going to make the decision."

Leading the search committee were booster club chairman Mickey Whitney and Tulsa oilman Joseph "Buddy" LaFortune.

"There was a park in Tulsa named after Buddy," Cooper said, "so I figured he must be important."

Cooper met with both men as well as other members of the selection committee but was not offered the job.

"I got up the next morning early and, boy, I decided that I wanted that job in the worst way," he said. "So I looked up Mickey Whitney's number in the phone book, and I called him to tell him how much I appreciated them considering me and how much I thought I could help their football program. And then I looked up Buddy LaFortune's number, called him and told him the same thing."

"Then I'm getting ready to go out the door to the airport when the phone rang, and it was Mickey calling me back, telling me to postpone my flight and come down to his office and talk some more. He sent his driver out to pick me up, I rode into downtown Tulsa and we talked in his office for a couple of hours."

"Finally, he asked me, 'What time does your plane get back to Lexington?' I told him about 6 o'clock, and he said, 'Well,

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FILE PHOTO

FORMER HURRICANE - Former Ohio State head coach John Cooper (right) is also a former head coach and athletic director at Tulsa. Cooper, who was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2008, spent eight seasons as head coach of the Golden Hurricane and won five Missouri Valley Conference championships.

when you get back, you'll have a phone call from the university president asking you to become our next coach.' I didn't even meet the president when I was at Tulsa, but when he called me, I didn't wait for an introduction. He offered me the job, and I accepted."

That began an eight-year tenure that produced the five MVC championships and a 25-2 conference record from 1980-84. In addition to his football duties, Cooper was also director of athletics at Tulsa, which earned a well-deserved reputation for excellence that included championships in a variety of sports.

"When I was at Tulsa, I couldn't have been treated any better," Cooper said. "I was the athletic director, head football coach, (son) Johnny was playing high school football and his team won the state championship, and then he turned down several scholarship offers and decided to stay home and play for me.

"And we had a good, solid program. We played a bunch of good teams on the road and beat them. We beat Air Force, Kansas State, Kansas, Virginia Tech, the University of Florida in Gainesville. We scored more points against Texas Tech than any nonconference team ever did. And we did that in Lubbock. We recruited pretty well, too, and that was at a time when Barry Switzer was at Oklahoma, Jimmy Johnson was at Oklahoma State and Lou Holtz was at Arkansas. I was extremely proud of what we accomplished at Tulsa."

Day More Than Satisfied With QB

After his first two games as starting quarterback at Ohio State, C.J. Stroud had passing stats that jumped off the page. His 778 yards ranked fourth in the nation, and his average of 389 yards per game was nearly 50 yards per game ahead of the pace set by Dwayne Haskins during his record-shattering 2018 season.

But as any OSU quarterback knows, the bottom line is winning, and when your team isn't doing that, your performance is subject to criticism from the members of Buckeye Nation.

So it seemed only natural that Day was asked in the wake of the Sept. 11 loss to Oregon if he had given any thought to playing another quarterback. The reply couldn't have been more succinct.

"No, not after how he played (vs. Oregon)," Day said. "I thought he was really accurate. I thought he made some throws I haven't seen a young kid make in a long time. That was not our issue. We have to help him more. We have to run the football better, and we have to play better defense. That's the bottom line."

Stroud threw for 484 yards against the Ducks, the second-highest single-game total in program history. But critics seemed to want to concentrate more on the redshirt freshman's perceived reluctance to run with the ball, pointing to his five carries for a net of minus-3 yards in the loss.

Day took exception to that perception as well.

"I don't think he was that tentative," the OSU head coach said. "I thought he was pretty aggressive. I thought the third down that we got the holding call on, he did an unbelievable job there. It was third-and-10, he tucked it and got the first down and took a good shot in there. He lowered his shoulder there and took a big hit. But we ended up getting a holding call to make it third-and-20, which was a major call, a major point in the game. But I thought he really competed at that moment.

"He had a really good scramble down the sideline for (15 yards and) a first down early on. I think he got himself out of trouble. In two games, he's had two sacks, so I think he has a pretty good feel in the pocket. He is a threat with his legs, and we'll continue to build on that as time goes. There will be times when we will want to (run the read-option) with him and he'll do a good job with it."

About the only thing with which Day found fault with his young quarterback was the volume of his cadence.

"The (three false-start penalties we had against Oregon) happened when we were in tempo," Day said. "I think we need to be louder in our cadence, and we just need to keep our poise a little bit. When we're going fast, we have to get up there and make the calls.

"It's all happening fast, they're communicating, they're talking and identifying what's going on up front, and then there's a false start. That happened a couple of times, and it was a shame because if we get the ball snapped, we had big plays. That's

something we have to get fixed in practice. We have to practice it better in practice and then go from there."

Defensive Changes Coming For Bucks

Day called upon secondary coach Matt Barnes to call defensive plays against Tulsa, switching roles with defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, who had called plays from the sideline last season and continued to do so against Minnesota and Oregon while Barnes sat in the press box for those games. Against the Golden Hurricane, Barnes stood on the sideline while Coombs had an aerial view.

"Every situation is different," Day told reporters Sept. 16. "We can't worry about feelings. We can't worry about anything other than giving our team the best chance to be successful."

In addition to a shakeup on the coaching staff, Day said there could also be changes to the depth chart in the upcoming weeks. Bryson Shaw and Marcus Hooker will compete for snaps at free safety after Josh Proctor suffered a season-ending leg fracture against Oregon. He also mentioned that bullet Kourt Williams and cornerback Ryan Watts could see time at the safety position.

Additionally, Ohio State will consider shrinking the rotation at linebacker. Coombs called upon five different players to play the position against Minnesota. That number increased by two against Oregon and then shrank back to six vs. Tulsa.

Another area of concern against the

Continued On Page 6

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Ducks came along the defensive line. Despite a unit filled with four- and five-star talent, including Zach Harrison, Haskell Garrett, J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer, the Buckeyes failed to sack Oregon quarterback Anthony Brown in his 35 passing attempts. Ohio State managed only two sacks against Tulsa – one each from Antwan Jackson and Tyleik Williams.

Day said he liked how the defense responds to criticism during practice. Still, he wants to see their preparation lead to results on game day.

"The energy has been good, but now we have to go put it on the field," Day said. "It's not something that gets fixed overnight, and I think guys understand that. You have to go out with great energy and be aggressive."

Coach Tries Putting Loss Into Perspective

It's not like Day doesn't know how losing feels. He was the receivers coach at Temple in 2006 when the Owls finished 1-11. He was the quarterbacks coach for the San Francisco 49ers when that team posted a 2-14 record in 2016.

Even the first two full seasons of his head coaching career at Ohio State ended with tough losses, so Day knows how it feels. More importantly, he knows how he wants his team to respond in the wake of defeat.

"I know no one is used to losing or anything like that, but we just have to move on and make corrections," Day said. "The sun came up and we're going to go from there."

It's nothing different guys haven't felt before. They've lost games before, but the thing it really does is the opportunity to allow you to address issues that are already there. That's what's going on here. They have to get addressed and they have to get fixed because certainly we don't want it to happen again."

The only previous losses in Day's tenure as OSU head coach were season-ending losses to Clemson in 2019 and Alabama in 2020. In each case, the Buckeyes had an entire offseason to agonize over the losses rather than have an opportunity for redemption the following week. And despite the critical fallout that accompanied the loss to Oregon – the first regular-season loss to a nonconference opponent for the Buckeyes since 2017 – Day was eager for his team to get back to work and address the issues that went wrong.

"There are two great things about something like this," he said. "One, the issues that

are there get exposed and you get a chance to address them with this group. And then two, you get to find out a lot about a lot of people when adversity hits. You find out about their true character. It's one thing when things are going well (because) people can be front-runners. They can pat you on the back, whether it's outside the program or inside the program. But when something goes bad, you find out about who people are."

"And that's something – it's called life. It's a great opportunity for our guys to learn about that and grow, and if we come out of this thing strong, it can make us better. And that's what we have to use it for – to build some strength within us and build some leadership, and that's what we're going to do."

While Day tried to paint the loss to Oregon in the most positive kind of light, he admitted it was a tough pill to swallow.

"This loss doesn't sit well at all," he said.

Complete Issue Of BSB Posted Immediately Upon Mailing

With the Ohio State football season under way, Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers are beginning to get a sense of when their BSB will be delivered each week. For those of you who are having problems with your mail delivery, here is a reminder that the complete print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted on the BuckeyeSports.com website at the same time as the paper is mailed. This is a free service to all print subscribers, as is all the other content provided at the site.

BuckeyeSports.com offers immediate coverage of each game 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. Also watch for the popular Staff Predictions before each contest. Chase Brown was closest for the Tulsa game, predicting a 42-21 Buckeye victory. Mark Rea was next at 38-21.

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 and other topics that are just entertaining.

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"We wanted to win this game. We had it circled for a long time, so we're disappointed. But we're able to get back on the field within the week and start to get to work on getting things fixed."

Ohio State hasn't lost back-to-back games since the 2013 postseason – 34-24 to Michigan State in the Big Ten Championship Game and 40-35 to Clemson in the Orange Bowl.

Stroud Named Top Freshman Again

For the second week in a row, Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud was selected Big Ten Freshman of the Week after a strong showing in his team's 35-28 loss to Oregon on Sept. 11.

Stroud set career highs and approached several school records against the Ducks, completing 35 of his 54 passing attempts



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for the 484 yards and three touchdowns, while throwing just one interception on a desperation heave at the end of the game. He was just 16 yards short of topping Dwayne Haskins' record-setting 499 passing yards against Northwestern in 2018 and becoming the first Buckeye to surpass the 500-yard mark in a single game.

Stroud was the lone Buckeye to claim a weekly award through the season's first three weeks, though Illinois and Nebraska were alone in competing for the so-called "week zero" crowns.

Olave Nearing Career Records

Chris Olave returned to Ohio State for his senior season instead of entering the NFL draft, and because of that, he is now in the running for three program records – career receptions, receiving yards and receiving touchdowns.

Entering the season, Olave had 111 catches for 1,775 yards and 22 touchdowns. That left him 91 catches behind K.J. Hill (201, 2016-19), 1,124 yards behind Michael Jenkins (2,898, 1999-2003) and 13 touchdowns short of David Boston (34, 1996-98).

Despite being shut out in the receiving department against Tulsa, Olave still has 16 receptions for 243 yards and two touchdowns for the season. But he has fallen behind a pace to break each of the three records.

Over a 14-game season, which includes the regular season, the Big Ten Championship Game and a postseason game, Olave would have 75 catches for 1,134 yards and nine touchdowns. That would be enough to reach Jenkins' yardage figure, while falling short of the other two marks.

No Champions For Oregon Game

Following its 35-28 loss to Oregon on Sept. 18, Ohio State did not release performance grades.

During a typical week, the coaching staff announces a list of offensive, defensive, spe-

cial teams and scout players who ranked as champions – a grade awarded to Buckeyes who performed well in practices as well as the game.

Ex-Buckeye Critical Of Coach's Approach

Former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer is taking fire from a variety of sources as he continues to try to make the transition to the NFL.

Already under criticism for some of his own missteps, statements after preseason losses and unnamed sources saying he hasn't been able to grasp the day-to-day tasks of being an NFL coach, Meyer was broadsided by one of his former players after his Jacksonville Jaguars lost a 37-21

decision to the Houston Texans in the 2021 season opener.

Denver Broncos defensive end Dre'Mont Jones, who spent five years playing for Meyer at Ohio State, said his old coach is going to continue to struggle if he doesn't begin to relate to players the way grown men expect from their coaches.

"Going from college to pros is always difficult no matter what the level is, whether coaching or playing," Jones told reporters Sept. 16. "Especially because a lot of his philosophies are college-based, and you can't do that with 30-plus men or even 25-plus men who have been around the league and know what they're doing now and are well-established. You've got to shake things up in how you coach."

Jones said he was not surprised to hear stories that Meyer was having personality clashes with his veteran players in Jacksonville.

"Am I surprised by it? No," Jones said. "I just know how he is. I'm not going to go into great detail about it, but no, it doesn't surprise me."

In June, Jones joined Broncos teammate Shelby Harris on Harris' weekly podcast. When asked if he thought Meyer's coaching style would translate to the NFL, Jones pulled no punches.

"NFL coach-wise, he's going to have to shake things up to how he was doing," Jones

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said. "How he coached us was, he didn't really (bleep) with you if you weren't like a player. If you weren't playing, those conversations didn't exist. Like we'd walk past (each other) in the hallway and I'd say, 'How you doing, Coach?' This man looked at me like I was crazy for speaking to him and just kept walking. He showed zero respect. Zero respect."

"I'm like, 'This the type of dude you are?' As things go on, I'm starting to learn more. Every time he talks to you, it feels like it was his first time talking to you. It's like he didn't remember having a conversation with you."

Jones said Meyer treated such star players as Joey and Nick Bosa as well as Ohio State's quarterbacks J.T. Barrett and Dwayne Haskins like "kings and gods," while the rest of the players had to fight to be acknowledged.

"This man ridiculed you, dogged you," Jones said. "He'd do it in front of the team so bad he'd make you want to quit."

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"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, what we have done the previous 40 years, and what we plan to do in the future."

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As mentioned, 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.

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in Cleveland, Jones was a three-year starter at defensive tackle for the Buckeyes from 2016-18. He earned Academic All-Big Ten honors in 2017 and first-team All-Big Ten honors in 2018.

The Broncos made him their third-round pick in the 2019 NFL draft, and he is currently one of their starting defensive ends.

Jones, who has 10 career sacks in just 29 games, wasn't much of a factor in his team's Sept. 19 game against Meyer's Jaguars. He was credited with only one assisted tackle, but his team picked off Jags QB Trevor Lawrence twice and won a 23-13 decision in Jacksonville.

Meyer Not Interested In Job At USC

Meyer told reporters that he has no interest in the USC football head coaching job, which opened Sept. 13 when the Trojans fired Clay Helton after seven seasons.

"No chance," Meyer replied when asked about the situation during a Sept. 17 press conference. "I'm here, committed to trying to build an organization."

Meyer ended his brief retirement from coaching in January after two seasons away from the game, citing the desire to build the Jaguars and the opportunity to work with No. 1 overall pick Lawrence.

"You have 11 picks in the first seven rounds," Meyer said of the situation he walked into in Jacksonville. "You have the most salary-cap space in the NFL. You have the first pick in the draft. You have an organization and an owner that wants to win in the worst way."

"You tell me when in history you'll have that aligned again like that. We have to do a very good job selecting. We call it talent acquisition. And other than developing culture, the most important thing is talent acquisition."

A frequent topic for just about every major-college football job opening, Meyer has been tied to USC in years past but was never seriously considered beyond standard message board fodder. However, after early struggles with the NFL learning curve, rumors floated as soon as Helton was fired that Meyer could be looking to get back into the college game, where he had previously spent his entire career.

Meyer has had several false starts before on career moves, retiring twice from the

game only to return, including the most recent retirement from Ohio State, when he said that he felt he was finished with coaching and could no longer handle the pressure and noise as he continues to deal with a cyst on his brain.

"I learned my lesson long ago," Meyer said at the time. "All I'm going to say is I believe I'm done (coaching). I think I'm done."

Former Buckeye Hubbard Honored

Former Ohio State running back and assistant coach Rudy Hubbard was honored Sept. 11 at Florida A&M as the National Football Foundation recognizes members of the 2021 College Football Hall of Fame class with special on-campus salutes.

Each inductee returns to his respective school to be honored with official induction ceremonies scheduled for Dec. 7 in Las Vegas.

Hubbard is the only head coach from a historically Black college to win the Division I-AA (now Football Championship Subdivision) national championship, leading Florida A&M to the title in 1978.

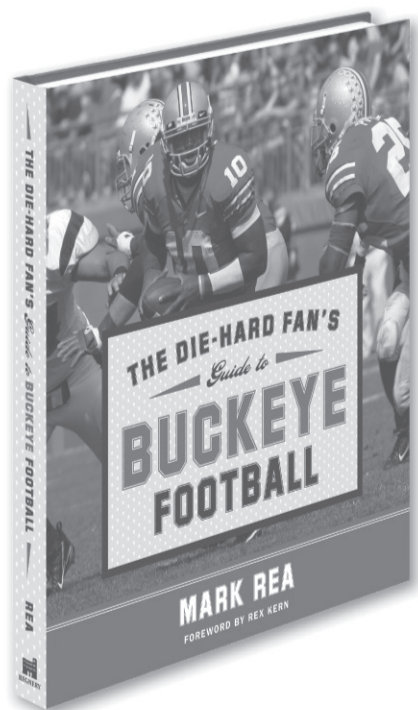
Hubbard played halfback at Ohio State from 1965-67 and was the starter at left halfback during his junior and senior years. He finished his career with 293 yards rushing and three TDs, and he caught 24 passes for 203 yards and a score. Following graduation, he joined Woody Hayes' staff as the first African-American assistant in program history and remained for six seasons before taking over as head coach at Florida A&M in 1974.

He compiled an 83-48-3 overall record in 12 seasons with the Rattlers, including back-to-back Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference titles in 1977 and '78. The 1978 season featured a 12-1 record that culminated in a 35-28 victory against Massachusetts in the inaugural NCAA Division I-AA Football Championship Game.

Hubbard ended his collegiate coaching career in 1985 but returned to the sidelines

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as head coach at James S. Rickards High School in Tallahassee, Fla., from 2008-11. Now retired, he is collaborating with his son to write a how-to-book on winning. He was also involved with staging the inaugural Classic for Columbus on Aug. 28 between HBCU rivals Kentucky State and Central State at Ohio Stadium.

Gonzalez Will Not Seek Re-Election

Former Ohio State receiver and current two-term U.S. Representative Anthony Gonzalez announced Sept. 16 that he will not run for re-election in 2022. Gonzalez said he was leaving Congress in large part because of family considerations and the difficulties of living between two cities.

Gonzalez, who turned 37 on Sept. 18, represents Ohio's 16th District. He was first elected in 2018, earning 56.7 percent of the vote, and re-elected in 2020 with 63.2 percent of the vote. However, he was facing a primary challenge next year ostensibly because he was one of 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach then President Donald Trump after the Jan. 6 Capitol riot.

While the congressman indicated shuffling back and forth between Cleveland and Washington, D.C., had begun to put a strain on his young family, he also made clear that strain had only grown worse since his impeachment vote, after which he was deluged with threats and feared for the safety of his wife and children.

Gonzalez recounted what he described as an eye-opening moment earlier this year when he and his family were greeted at the Cleveland airport by two uniformed police officers, part of extra security precautions taken after the impeachment vote.

"That's one of those moments where you say, 'Is this really what I want for my family when they travel – to have my wife and kids escorted through the airport?' " he told the New York Times.

"Politically, the environment is so toxic, especially in our own party right now. You can fight your butt off and win this thing, but are you really going to be happy? And the answer is, probably not."

Gonzalez was a starter for the Buckeyes in 2005 and 2006, and he finished his career with 87 receptions for 1,286 yards and 13 touchdowns. He was taken in the first round of the 2007 NFL draft with the 32nd overall pick by the Indianapolis Colts and played five seasons before injuries ended his career.

After he retired from the game, Gonzalez earned a master's degree in business administration from Stanford. He went into politics in 2018 and won the seat for Ohio's 16th district, becoming the first Cuban-American to represent Ohio in Congress.

Congressional maps are set to be redrawn this year, and the 16th district is scheduled to be eliminated in January 2023.

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Henderson's Big Day Saves Buckeye Offense

Continued From Page 1

a 9-yard jaunt into the end zone down the same left sideline at Ohio Stadium.

"It's a blessing," Henderson said of establishing a new freshman rushing record. "I'm excited right now. At the same time, I have to keep this going. I can't just let this be a one-time thing. I have to stay hungry and get back to practice this week coming up. Work hard again and do it again next time out."

"I've never met (Archie). I watched his film a lot. I watched a lot of the past Ohio State running backs. He was a great player. Everybody knows he was a great player."

Despite the lofty numbers and the difficulty of toppling a record more than twice as old as he is, Henderson hardly seemed to break a sweat for the Buckeyes on the field or off it. He ripped through the Tulsa defense before explaining after the game that breaking a seemingly unbreakable record was only one of his goals for the season and that he expected that type of performance from himself.

"It's all natural," Henderson said. "I try not to think too hard. When the time comes, it's all natural."

"Like I told you all before the season, I had a lot of goals for myself. I reached one of those goals today, but I have plenty more, so I have to keep working."

He wasn't alone in his confidence. That Ohio State put the ball in his hands 24 times during a tightly contested matchup was enough to prove how much trust he enjoys from the coaching staff, but head coach Ryan Day took it a step further when asked about his new running back after the win, saying that Henderson doesn't act like a freshman.

"Since he's come here, he has worked hard," Day said. "He's very mature – does not act like a freshman. I thought our offensive line really established the line of scrimmage and controlled the game at times. He has the ability to hit home runs like you saw in the first game, and you saw it again today."

Henderson also earned the acclaim of his offensive linemen, who were able to bounce

back after the Oregon defense held the OSU rush attack pretty much in check in week two. The Buckeyes ran for a season-high 323 yards on the ground – the most for Ohio State since Trey Sermon's record-setting performance of his own with 331 yards in the 2020 Big Ten Championship Game against Northwestern. Ohio State ran for 399 yards in that game. Henderson is now third on the program's single-game rushing list, trailing only Sermon and Eddie George, who ran for 314 yards against Illinois in 1995.

Left tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere, who helped to anchor the Buckeye offensive line after left guard Thayer Munford left the game with an ankle injury that Day described as fairly minor, gushed over the new starting running back.

"TreVeyon obviously had an amazing day," Petit-Frere said. "I couldn't be more proud of him. He's worked so hard. From the beginning when he got here to now, everything is kind of going for him and he's showing it."

"He's probably one of the hardest workers we have, especially with him coming in early. The way that he's worked and the way he's shown his work ethic day in and day out – not only on the field but in the weight room and the meeting rooms – he's one of the toughest players we have, especially in that running back room."

"It's nice to see all of his work and effort pay off. At the end of the day, we're all a team. We're just happy for each other. Whatever records are broken, whatever games we win or whatever happens, we are just happy for each other whenever someone is accomplishing something because that means we are accomplishing something as a team at the end of the day."

It very nearly wasn't all roses for Henderson in what could very well be his coronation as Ohio State's next feature back. Early in the third quarter, sitting on 133 rushing yards and fresh off a 48-yard touchdown trot during the preceding drive, Henderson followed tight end Jeremy Ruckert on an inside



SONNY BROCKWAY

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT - Ohio State head coach Ryan Day was much more complimentary of his defense following a 41-20 victory against Tulsa. Day shuffled some of his defensive staff's assignments and liked a lot of what he saw from the Buckeyes on that side of the ball.

handoff and met a trio of Tulsa defenders at the line of scrimmage. Linebacker Grant Sawyer made the initial contact, but it was big nose tackle Everitt Rogers who brought him to the turf, rolling awkwardly onto the freshman's left knee.

Henderson recoiled instantly, pulling his leg back and putting a serious scare into just about every Ohio State fan, coach and player in attendance. He was ushered to the sideline and checked for any major injuries but apparently managed to avoid any damage, returning to the field on the team's next drive with a 54-yard rush on his first touch (though a face-mask penalty shaved 15 yards off that run).

"I went down and I think it was the nose tackle that came down on my knee," Henderson said. "I felt like it almost snapped, so it was almost like a reaction. I just tried to hur-

ry up and get my knee out. Luckily I came out healthy and everything was straight."

Burke's Near-INT

While Henderson buoyed an otherwise lackluster Ohio State offense – a 5-yard reception pushed his total yards gained to 282, accounting for 55.5 percent of the team's 508 total – it was another fresh face who served again as the bright spot for the much-maligned defensive unit.

True freshman Denzel Burke earned his third consecutive start for the Buckeyes as their No. 1 cornerback, his second opposite junior Cameron Brown, and for the third straight game, Burke more than held his own in the eyes of his coaches and teammates. He caught Day's eye in the loss to Oregon as well, despite Ohio State's defensive woes elsewhere.



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"I think that he's shown in the games what he's shown in practice," Day said Sept. 14. "I thought that (Oregon) went after him a couple of times downfield, and he did a really good job in that area. I think he's got a very, very bright future."

"He's like a lot of the younger guys out there in that everything he's doing is for the first time. For a young player stepping into a couple of these spots, he's done a good job. The future is bright with him and a bunch of the younger guys we have."

It was a similar story for Burke against the Golden Hurricane. Matched up largely with fifth-year senior wide receiver Juan Carlos Santana, Burke allowed his share of receptions – Tulsa threw for 428 yards, after all – but bounced back with a number of impressive plays.

The OSU freshman recorded five tackles, notched two pass breakups and snagged what certainly looked to be his first career interception on a third-and-12 late in the second quarter deep in Tulsa territory. Covering Sam Crawford Jr., another fifth-year senior receiver, on the outside, Burke jumped a comeback route and looked to pluck the ball away from Crawford as the two fell to the ground short of the line to gain. However, upon further review from the Big Ten officiating crew, Crawford was determined to have made the catch.

Still, Burke's play did not go unnoticed by his teammates, including fellow youngster Cameron Martinez, who recorded his first career interception and turned it into his first career touchdown late in the fourth quarter.

"The moment he came in, he's been that kind of player," Martinez said of Burke. "It's no surprise to me. He just keeps on getting better. He's going to be a really good player. He is a really good player right now."

Elsewhere from the 2021 class, a bevy of defensive linemen grabbed a share of the spotlight. Defensive tackle Tyleik Williams earned his first career sack and teamed with fifth-year senior Jerron Cage for a tackle for loss, J.T. Tuimolau notched a pair of tackles and was in the backfield just about every time he was called upon, and his battery mate, Jack Sawyer, was a Tulsa holding call away from a sack of his own. And while the freshmen have found the leap from high school to major-college football involves a steep learning curve, their youthful exuberance also serves as a reminder of just how limitless their future can be.

"They always talk about being ready," Martinez said. "They put us in positions in practice to always stay ready and to be successful. That's what they've been doing every week. My name was called this weekend, and it was a lot of fun. I had a blast doing everything they had me do. It's a great time to be out there with my guys."

New Play-Caller

After alluding to it during his weekly press conference on Sept. 14, Day confirmed a change in his staff responsibilities shortly after the end of the matchup with Tulsa. Defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, who was moved off the sideline and into the press box for the first time, passed his defensive play-calling duties to secondary coach Matt Barnes against the Golden Hurricane. Pending Ohio State's film session, Day said Barnes will remain in the role moving into Ohio State's Sept. 25 matchup with Akron

and beyond.

"I have to watch the film and assess it, but that's kind of the way I see it moving forward as I stand here now," Day said. "It's still a team effort, but I think things today went pretty smooth."

"We took a hard look at it, had a hard conversation, talking about the rhythm and structure moving forward. Look, (Kerry's) a team player. He just wants to win. He still very much a big part of this defense."

The final statistics did little to improve Ohio State's defensive standing. The Buckeyes gave up 501 total yards, including 428 through the air on 31 completions for quarterback Davis Brin (a career high in both categories). But the Buckeyes did flash a number of new defensive looks, and 20 points allowed is a new low for the season.

Chief among the new alignments was the much-anticipated two-high safety set. Ohio State didn't deploy it often, sticking primarily to its standard one-high safety look with

Bryson Shaw filling in for Josh Proctor, but the Buckeyes did drop bullet Ronnie Hickman into a deep zone for a Cover 2 look on multiple occasions. It also experimented with post-snap rotations for that second safety, rather than pre-snap as it had been doing. In other words, Hickman didn't return to his spot in the box until after Brin snapped the ball, giving the quarterback a little extra something to think about.

Barnes was also quite a bit more aggressive with blitz calls. Ohio State sent pressure up the middle from a pair of linebackers on several key third downs and even dialed up a cornerback blitz early in the game, though the blitzing Marcus Williamson was stopped well short of his destination when he ran into his own defensive end. The dialed-up pressure yielded just two sacks, and Tulsa left points on the board by choosing to kick a pair of early red-zone field goals, but Day was pleased with some of the new looks that he saw from his defensive staff.

"I thought we stopped the run better," he said. "We did mix up some of the looks, but those were some the conversations we had this week and thought we would change things up. We'll look at film and analyze what we did, but I thought we played with good energy. We made some in-game adjustments that were done a lot better than last week."

All in all, although his Buckeyes didn't pull away from Tulsa until quarterback C.J. Stroud found Garrett Wilson in the end zone to give Ohio State a 34-20 lead with just over three minutes to play, Day left Ohio Stadium on Sept. 18 much happier than he did the week before.

"Today was a step in the right direction, for sure," the OSU head coach said. "How far? We'll know better after watching the film. This is a journey yet to be determined. But that is the fun part of college football. This is a unique challenge, a new journey that we're on."

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QB Taking On Physical, Mental Aspects Of Game

C.J. Stroud is a fast learner.

Not only is the redshirt freshman quarterback trying to digest everything he can about Ryan Day's offensive mind-set, but Stroud is learning that being the starting quarterback at Ohio State is almost as much mental as it is physical.

Ever since throwing for 294 yards and four touchdowns in the season opener at Minnesota, Stroud has been nursing a sore throwing shoulder. It didn't seem to hamper him much during a 35-28 loss to Oregon when he set program records for freshmen by throwing 54 times for 484 yards, but he was seen alternately shaking and rubbing the shoulder several times while the Buckeyes carved out an arduous 41-20 victory against America Athletic Conference opponent Tulsa on Sept. 18.

Stroud's accuracy numbers have gone from 62.5 percent (5 of 8) during a productive second half of the opener against the Golden Gophers to 64.8 percent (35 of 54) vs. the Ducks to just 60.0 percent (15 of 25) against the Golden Hurricane. He has thrown for 973 yards already this season, the highest total of any OSU quarterback through the first three games of a season. But 185 yards against Tulsa was by far his lowest output so far.

"I'm healthy enough to play," Stroud told reporters after the game. "I'm definitely not 100 percent, but who is at this point? Winning isn't easy, especially when we have a target on our backs. But we got the win and

GAME NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

that's what's important.

"It hurts, but life hurts. I just have to grind through it. That's football. You're never at 100 percent after the first game. I think I'm a tough guy pretty much, though."

While he struggles with the physical part of the game, Stroud is also trying to navigate the mental aspect. Despite setting a pace that would produce only the second 4,000-yard passing season in program history, there has been criticism about his decision-making, errant overthrows and seeming reluctance to tuck the ball and run with it.

"Every game is a learning aspect for me," he said. "I'm only 19. I mean, that's no excuse, but I still have a lot to learn. I know a lot of people don't agree with that, but that's OK. I put my blood, sweat and tears out there every day. I'm all about the positive."

"I know everybody is going to look at the interception, and we got a funky look (from the Tulsa defense) on that. It's not something that you see every week, but that's not an excuse. I have to see the coverage better. And I need to be a little more accurate, especially at the beginning of the game."

Stroud began the game only 2 of 6 for 25



SONNY BROCKWAY

GET OUTTA MY FACE - Ohio State freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson (32) tries to keep Tulsa defender Travon Fuller (2) at arm's length during a 54-yard run in the third quarter. Officials determined Henderson grabbed too much of Fuller's face mask and flagged the OSU freshman for 15 yards.

yards in the first quarter, but he connected on three of his first four attempts in the second period during his team's first touchdown drive. The three completions to three different receivers went for 16, 13 and 18 yards and were the kind of medium-range gains that prove most effective against Tulsa and its unusual defensive alignment.

"They run a 3-3-5 (alignment), and anybody who knows football know that it's hard to get a rhythm going against that kind of defense," Stroud said. "They want to force you to make the short throws, and then if you get greedy ... that's when I turned the ball over."

Nursing a 10-6 lead as the second-quarter clock wound under five minutes, the Buckeyes had just crossed midfield and were looking at a second-and-6 at the Tulsa 49. Stroud faded in the pocket and threw to his left, trying to hit tight end Jeremy Ruckert in the deep boundary. But the pass, which traveled more than 30 yards in the air, was picked off by Tulsa cornerback Travon Fuller. TV cameras then focused on Stroud staring at the ground, disgusted with his decision.

"Like I said, they do some funky things on defense," he said. "They drop eight on every play. But that's no excuse. It's still about execution, and that starts with me. I have to do my job better."

The interception wasn't Stroud's only turnover in the game. Late in the third quarter, on a first-and-15 near midfield, he was victimized by a backside safety blitz he never saw coming. Running back TreVeyon Henderson made one of his rare mistakes during the afternoon when he missed Tulsa safety Kendarin Ray as Ray came barreling in on a blitz and knocked the football loose from Stroud's grasp. Tulsa defensive lineman Anthony Goodlow, who was also bearing down on the Ohio State quarterback, grabbed the loose ball at the OSU 48, and five plays later,

the Golden Hurricane scored a touchdown to pull within a score at 20-13.

"That's a read I have to make," Stroud said. "Taking a sack is one thing, but losing control of the football and fumbling - that's unacceptable. That can't happen. But I'm sure I'll see it again on film and learn from it."

Day knows that his first-year starter is going to go through some growing pains.

"Everybody works through different pains, different sorenesses," the OSU head coach said. "I still thought he threw some good balls. He missed some, for sure, and there was the fumble. But there is still a lot of good going on with him. He's going to miss some throws, but he's learning, he's growing. He just needs to get better from here."

Penalties Beginning To Bother Head Coach

Coupled with the steep learning curve for his young quarterback, and continued problems on the defensive side of the ball, Day is becoming more and more concerned about a disturbing trend for his team.

"One of the other things we have to stop are the penalties," he said. "Those are the things that really hurt you."

The Buckeyes were whistled eight times and assessed 81 yards, but that was only the tip of the iceberg. Grabbing the face mask by offensive players wiped out a 47-yard reception by Olave and shaved 15 yards off what would have been a 54-yard run by Henderson during the third quarter.

Those wasted yards could have pushed Stroud's pass yardage total past 230 for the game and 1,000 for the year, while Henderson would have been closing in on only the third 300-yard rushing day in program history for an Ohio State running back.

There were two more false-start penalties as well as a snap violation on the offense

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

It's difficult to fathom how much better the Ohio State running game could have been after averaging 7.9 yards on 41 attempts. Of course, when you have a freshman running back the likes of TreVeyon Henderson, and you give him 24 carries, chances are pretty good that he's going to break off a few long ones.

Henderson tallied touchdown runs of 5, 48 and 52 yards, that 52-yarder coming at the end of the third quarter and giving the Buckeyes a little breathing room. His freshman-record 277 yards helped OSU roll up 323 yards on the ground, the most against a nonconference opponent in the regular season since totaling 375 during a 77-31 win in the 2018 season opener against Oregon State.

While Henderson possesses superior talent, he didn't get all those yards by himself. The offensive line, despite losing left guard Thayer Munford late in the first quarter to what appeared to be a right ankle injury, distinguished itself. With Luke Wypler once again standing in for regular center Harry Miller and Matthew Jones filling in admirably for Munford, the Buckeyes controlled the line of scrimmage.

Special teams play was another check mark in the Ohio State plus column. Punter Jesse Mirco averaged 44.3 yards on three punts, each of which he deposited inside the Tulsa 20-yard line. Meanwhile, kicker Noah Ruggles drove home field goals of 43 and 44 yards. The Buckeyes were only 2 for 4 last season in field-goal attempts of 40 yards or longer.

Even the return game provided a little jolt. Garrett Wilson returned a punt 20 yards, and three different Buckeyes combined to return five kickoffs for 103 yards.

What Didn't Work

Some of the looks were different, but the result was painfully similar for the Ohio State defense, which remains very much a work in progress. Secondary coach Matt Barnes was put in charge of calling the defensive plays while defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs was shuttled upstairs to the press box, robbing the Buckeyes of Coombs'

kinetic sideline energy.

The unit began the game in what appeared to be a Cover 2 alignment, but it resulted in a sloppy mixed bag that Tulsa exploited for a 16-play, 81-yard drive that consumed six minutes and 30 seconds of clock. About the only thing that went right for the Buckeyes was that Tulsa head coach Philip Montgomery opted for a field goal rather than go for it on fourth-and-1 at the Ohio State 3.

With redshirt freshman C.J. Stroud at the controls, the passing game continues starts and stops. Stroud is playing with a self-described sore shoulder, but it doesn't appear to affect his velocity. He air-mailed several receivers – again – and any passing attack that doesn't take full advantage of a future first-round NFL pick such as Chris Olave is only shortchanging itself. Olave was targeted only four times and had zero catches in the game.

Play Of The Game

It's tempting to select Henderson's 52-yard touchdown run on the final play of the third quarter. Tulsa had just pulled back within seven points at 20-13 when the OSU freshman got loose down the sideline to essentially break the backs of the Golden Hurricane.

But it was Henderson's 48-yard scoring run earlier in the third period that was more remarkable as he took on and wiped out nearly the entire Tulsa secondary.

After taking the handoff from Stroud and breaking into the open, thanks to seal blocks from Wilson on the inside and tight end Jeremy Ruckert on the outside, Henderson exploded downfield, where he put a stutter-step move on Tulsa safety Kendarin Ray that led to a whiff, avoided cornerback Travon Fuller as he tried to punch the ball from the freshman's grasp, and then powered his way over cornerback Tyon Davis at the goal line. Speed, strength and power – all in one touchdown run.

— Mark Rea

while the defense committed a pass-interference infraction, an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty and a roughing-the-passer that aided in one of Tulsa's touchdown drives.

The Buckeyes have been hit with 21 penalties for a Big Ten-high 200 yards in just three games. Included in those infractions are six false starts on the offensive line, four face-mask violations, three holds, three pass-interference penalties and two roughing-the-passer flags.

It's enough to earn the consternation of a head coach whose plate is already overflowing with other problems he needs to address.

"Those are things that we have to clean up," Day said. "I know we're playing a lot of young guys, but they just have to learn and grow up really quick."

Teague Works His Way Back

With the emergence of Miyan Williams at running back last year and the debut of freshman phenom Henderson, Master Teague had become almost an afterthought in the Ohio State running game.

Teague, who entered the season with career numbers that included 1,409 yards and 13 TDs, received only six carries in a four-man rotation during the season opener against Minnesota and then was relegated to riding the bench against Oregon.

But the 5-11, 225-pound junior kept his head down and stayed ready. As a result, he was the perfect complement to Henderson against Tulsa. While Henderson was establishing a new OSU freshman rushing record with 277 yards, Teague got a season-high 14 carries and turned them into 62 yards.

Much of that workload came during a late second-quarter possession that resulted in a 44-yard field goal from OSU kicker Noah Ruggles. Henderson had already set a new career-high with 14 carries when Teague took over on a drive to give the freshman a rest. He carried the ball on each of the first three plays of the possession, totaling 30 yards, and then reeled in a short pass from Stroud that he turned into a 7-yard gain.

Teague carried twice more during the drive, giving him six touches on the nine-play possession.

When asked about his running back rotation for the game, Day replied, "We were playing the hot hand. TreVeyon was running well, obviously, and I thought Master did a good job as well. Miyan missed a practice during the week, and those other guys practiced well. We were just playing the hot hand."

Glitter Among Defensive Gritty

What is it they say about small victories? The Ohio State defense surrendered more than 500 total yards to a second consecutive opponent and let an opposing quarterback throw for more than 400 yards for the third time in the last five games dating back to last year.

There were open seams, soft zones and virtually no pressure up front, but the defense could celebrate a couple of big plays that have been lacking so far this season.

Freshman cornerback Denzel Burke appeared to come up with a diving interception late in the second quarter, a play that was later overturned by replay. But later in the period, sophomore safety Ronnie Hickman made a clean pick against Tulsa QB Davis Brin, grabbing a pass that was broken up by

redshirt freshman Cameron Martinez.

Martinez made a pick of his own in the fourth quarter and returned it 61 yards for Ohio State's final touchdown. In between was an important third-down sack of Brin by freshman defensive tackle Tyleik Williams, a 17-yard loss that pushed the Golden Hurricane back across midfield and into their own territory while the Buckeyes were holding a precarious 27-20 lead.

"We're taking a lot of deep breaths (with the defense), but it is exciting," Day said after the game. "To see Cam Martinez run back an interception for a touchdown, to see Denzel Burke get an interception even though it was overturned. To see Ty Williams get a sack there at the end. There were other encouraging things, too."

"It's a give and take with these young players, and we're going to have growing pains along the way. But what you invest (in coaching these young players), you're going to get so much back. We're really, really young, but we're also talented. If we continue to improve and continue to get stronger, our future's going to be really, really bright."

Williams' performance, which included three total tackles and a quarterback hurry in addition to the sack, helped offset the absence of defensive end Zach Harrison, who sat out the game with an undisclosed injury. Day said it was a game-time decision to sit Harrison, but the coaching staff erred on the side of caution and is hopeful he can return against Akron.

Where Did All The People Go?

Day prefaced his postgame comments

the week before by thanking the Ohio Stadium crowd for the role they played in creating a hostile atmosphere for Oregon.

Following the Tulsa game, there were no such comments since the announced crowd of 76,540 was the smallest since Sept. 11, 1971, when only 75,596 showed up for a 52-21 victory against Iowa.

During the 2019 season, the last one be-

fore the COVID-19 pandemic, the Buckeyes averaged 103,383 fans over seven home games. They have been among the top four schools in average home attendance every year since 1949.

In two home games so far this season, OSU has averaged 88,511 fans, the lowest average since the 1989 season, when Ohio Stadium's capacity was listed at 86,071.



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Henderson Breaks Archie's Record In Tulsa Win

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The first two games of 2021 were all about the Ohio State passing attack with first-year starting quarterback C.J. Stroud slinging the ball all over the place with varying amounts of success.

For game three vs. Tulsa in Ohio Stadium on Sept. 18, head coach Ryan Day wanted to get the running game going to create a balanced attack. He got only half his wish, but no one was complaining.

TreVeyon Henderson broke two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin's freshman single-game rushing record with 277 yards and scored three touchdowns as the No. 9 Buckeyes held off pesky Tulsa, 41-20.

Of the Buckeyes' 508 total yards, 323 were on the ground compared to 185 passing.

"We haven't (gotten that balance) yet," Stroud said. "If we do that, we'll be the best offense in the country."

Henderson had TD runs of 5, 48 and 52 yards and another gain of 54 yards in the second half as part of his 24 carries for the game. He had only 70 yards on 14 carries and a score in the first half.

First-Half Struggles

The Buckeyes needed a response after a 35-28 home loss to Oregon on Sept. 11, but they couldn't put Tulsa away in the first half.

After the Buckeyes punted on the game's first possession, the Golden Hurricane (0-3) went from their own 16-yard line to the OSU 3 before deciding to settle for a 22-yard field goal from Zack Long at the 5:40 mark instead of going for it on fourth-and-1. That was perhaps because Deneric Prince had been stopped for no gain on third-and-1.

Tulsa used 16 plays and 6:30 on the clock with quarterback Davis Brin going 6 for 9 for 75 yards, including 18-yards to Prince and JuanCarlos Santana.

Ohio State came back with a 12-play, 47-yard drive that resulted in a 43-yard field goal by Noah Ruggles with 57 seconds left in the quarter.

Stroud got the ball moving with a 20-yard completion to Garrett Wilson. Henderson, making his first collegiate start, carried five times for 21 yards but fumbled the last one at the Tulsa 32. Nicholas Petit-Frere recovered it for the Buckeyes to complete the first down, and then Henderson had one more carry for 7 yards before Master Teague took



SONNY BROCKWAY

PREMATURE CELEBRATION - Ohio State freshman cornerback Denzel Burke (29) celebrates what he thought was a second-quarter interception with teammates Bryson Shaw (17), Antwuan Jackson (52) and K'Vaughan Pope (36). Unfortunately, Burke's pick was overturned by replay.

over the running duties.

Also on the play, OSU left guard Thayer Munford injured his right ankle and was replaced by Matt Jones.

Tulsa continued to befuddle the Ohio State defense and ran 5:10 off the clock and made four first downs during a 14-play drive to chew up 62 yards before a Long field goal of 31 yards made it 6-3 at 10:47 of the second quarter.

Ezra Naylor had a 13-yard catch on a third-and-12 from the Tulsa 34 to keep the drive alive, and Shamari Brooks had a grab of 10 yards for a first down at the OSU 19.

Ohio State chunked its way to a 10-6 lead at the 8:44 mark on Henderson's 5-yard run. Emeka Egbuka's 36-yard kickoff return started the drive at the OSU 36.

Stroud had completions of 16 yards to Jeremy Ruckert, 13 to Garrett Wilson and 18 to Jaxon Smith-Njigba to the 17-yard line. Henderson rushed for 12 yards to set up the score on the next play, the last of six that ate up 1:56 and consumed 64 yards.

After Stroud was intercepted by Travon Fuller at the Tulsa 25, freshman cornerback Denzel Burke thought he had a pick at the Golden Hurricane 33 when he stripped the ball from Sam Crawford Jr. But a review awarded the 10-yard catch to Crawford, and

Tulsa punted 62 yards for a touchback on the next play.

OSU then traveled to the Tulsa 27 before stalling, and Ruggles connected from 44 yards with 47 seconds left to make it 13-6.

Teague had runs of 9 and 17 yards, and Wilson had a 13-yard catch during the possession.

The Buckeyes were outgained by a 217-199 margin in the first half. Tulsa had 204 yards through the air while the Buckeyes had 100 rushing yards.

To The Rescue

The sun-drenched crowd on an 88-degree afternoon was waiting for something to happen, and it finally did on the Buckeyes' fifth play of the second half. After a 16-yard reception to Gee Scott Jr. to the OSU 48 on a third-and-6, and a 4-yard carry by Henderson, the freshman took a handoff and used his blocks to get to the second level for the 48-yard TD.

Henderson swerved at the 40, cut to his right at the 20 and carried a tackler into the end zone from the 3 for a 20-6 lead at 12:12 of the third period. The drive went 72 yards in just 1:46.

"He's somebody that can hit home runs," Day said. "What an exciting start to his career."

A series after limping off the field with a twisted knee, Henderson returned to rip off a 54-yard run to the 35 but was penalized 15 yards at the end for grabbing the face mask of Fuller. The run went for naught when Stroud

was sacked on a blitz and lost a fumble to Tulsa's Anthony Goodlow at the OSU 48.

Tulsa took advantage when Brin hit Cannon Montgomery for a 21-yard TD to make it 20-13 with one minute left in the third quarter. Josh Johnson earlier had a 15-yard catch, and another 15 were added for a roughing-the-passer penalty on Jacolbe Cowan. Johnson then lost a yard on a run before the score.

Henderson broke Griffin's record on his 22nd carry of the game, the 52-yarder to make it 27-13 on the final play of the third quarter. The freshman went up the middle and then left down the sideline to reach the end zone.

Tulsa would not go away, however, and Brin tossed a 22-yard touchdown strike to Johnson to make it 27-20 with 12:07 remaining in the game. The score was set up by a 38-yard catch by Naylor.

On Tulsa's next possession, it had a third-and-7 at the OSU 43 before Tyleik Williams had a 17-yard sack of Brin.

Henderson responded with a 31-yard carry when the Buckeyes got the ball back after a punt. Teague added an 11-yard run before Stroud connected with Wilson on a 12-yard TD for a 34-20 lead with 3:07 left.

Defensive back Cameron Martinez had a 61-yard interception return with 1:50 to go for the final margin.

Ohio Stadium was less than three-quarters filled with 76,540 fans even though the full capacity of 102,780 was permitted. Excluding last season when spectators were banned because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the smallest home crowd since 75,596 attended Ohio State's 1971 season opener against Iowa.

Notable

Stroud was 15 of 25 for 185 yards, a TD and a pick.... Wilson had six catches for 70 yards, and Teague rushed 62 yards on 14 attempts. ... Brin was 31 of 54 for 428 yards, two touchdowns and two INTs. ... Tulsa had 73 rushing yards among its 501 total yards. ... Defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs spent the game in the press box while secondary coach Matt Barnes was on the field and handled the defensive play-calling duties. ... Tulsa has the smallest Football Bowl Subdivision enrollment with 2,292 undergraduate students based on 2020-21 statistics. OSU's enrollment is 57,466. ... The Buckeyes have one native Oklahoman on their roster. Senior safety Josh Proctor is from Owasso in the Tulsa metro area but did not play against the Hurricane. He was injured against Oregon, underwent surgery on his right leg and is out for the rest of the season.



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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 41, Tulsa 20

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on bouncing back against Tulsa: "We got last week out of our system, and that was good. I thought they battled out there. It was great to get the running game going – that was a big emphasis along with stopping the run. I thought we made some steps in the right direction on a long journey."

Tulsa head coach Philip Montgomery on his team hanging around with Ohio State: "I'm really proud of the way we played today. We did some good things and gave ourselves some good opportunities. We went toe to toe with an exceptional team. It's been a tough start, but I am encouraged by the way we played today."

Tulsa quarterback Davis Brin, who had a career-best 428 yards passing against the Buckeyes: "I definitely felt the rhythm today and the chemistry (with receivers). We've got to get to the end zone a little bit more often there, but I'm proud of the way we started today. We're going to keep building."

Montgomery on his decision to settle for a pair of red-zone field goals early in the game: "I could roll the dice and be a little bit more aggressive right there, (but) I don't want to second-guess that part of it. I wanted to give our guys the opportunity to continue to keep having success."

Ohio State left tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere on how the whole offense contributed to freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson's record-breaking performance: "We communicated more. We had a lot of trust in each other and understanding the plays and everything like that, but it's a team effort. At the end of the day, we had a lot of great tight ends block well, wide receivers that blocked, and C.J. (Stroud) made a lot of good reads to hand the ball off when he needed to."



SONNY BROCKWAY

RIGHT THIS WAY - With teammate Bryson Shaw (17) leading the way, Ohio State redshirt freshman Cameron Martinez (10) streaks down the sideline on his way to a 61-yard interception for a touchdown. The pick-six capped the scoring for the Buckeyes as they secured a 41-20 victory against Tulsa.

Henderson on who he looks up to at Ohio State: "The older guys. When I look into their eyes, I can see how bad they want it. I know I'm playing beside a bunch of dogs. I don't get nervous before the game anymore. I can look into their eyes and see how bad they want it."

Petit-Frere on right tackle Dawand Jones' performance against Tulsa: "Dawand is an amazing player, so it doesn't surprise me that he was having a great day. I told you before that we were hungry this week. Every single one of us on the offense and the defense – we all just wanted to go out there and compete."

It's a testament to him and the work that he's made throughout his years here and him being able to put it out there on the field."

Ohio State cornerback Cam Martinez on his pick-six in the fourth quarter: "It felt good. I had all the confidence in the world that during that drive that we were going to get a pick. I didn't know who was going to get it. Luckily it was me. I had the confidence and I knew that once I caught it that my teammates were going to have my back, too, and make all the right blocks and take it to the house."

Martinez on how the defense handled adjustments against Tulsa: "We always felt like we were at home. The coaches do the best job putting us in positions to be successful and do what we have to do to play freely. They've been doing that a lot this whole season. It's been going really well right now. I feel like our group has all the confidence in the world to be the best that we can be."

Montgomery on keeping his team's morale high despite a winless record: "We still have a lot of football ahead of us. We have a good football team, and now we have to focus on getting over the hump. We have to get back on the practice field and get back to work."

Montgomery on taking moral victories against Ohio State: "I've never approached our team that way. When we step on the field, we want to win. What I want to see our team do is take positive steps forward. Our team is still growing and taking steps to be better."

Montgomery on a 21-yard touchdown catch in the third quarter by Cannon Montgomery, the coach's son who scored his first career touchdown: "Pretty special for him, for our football team. But if I can be selfish, it was pretty special for the two of us as well."

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.

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 41, Tulsa 20

Sept. 18, 2021 – Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
TULSA	3	3	7	7	20
OHIO STATE	3	10	14	14	41

First Quarter

TUL – Long, 22-yard kick, 5:40; 16 plays, 81 yards, 6:30 TOP.
OSU – Ruggles, 43-yard kick, 0:57; 12 plays, 47 yards, 4:39 TOP.

Second Quarter

TUL – Long, 31-yard kick, 10:47; 14 plays, 62 yards, 5:10 TOP.
OSU – Henderson, 5-yard run (Ruggles kick), 8:44; 6 plays, 64 yards, 1:56 TOP.
OSU – Ruggles, 44-yard kick, 0:47; 9 plays, 54 yards, 2:44 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Henderson, 48-yard run (Ruggles kick), 12:12; 5 plays, 72 yards, 1:46 TOP.
TUL – Montgomery, 21-yard pass from Brin (Long kick), 1:00; 5 plays, 48 yards, 1:36 TOP.
OSU – Henderson, 52-yard run (Ruggles kick), 0:00; 3 plays, 72 yards, 0:55 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

TUL – Johnson, 22-yard pass from Brin (Long kick), 12:07; 6 plays, 75 yards, 2:53 TOP.
OSU – Wilson, 12-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 3:07; 7 plays, 65 yards, 3:42 TOP.
OSU – Martinez, 61-yard interception (Ruggles kick), 1:50.
Att. – 76,540

Weather – Sunny, 88 degrees, wind 3 mph south

Team Statistics		
	TUL	OSU
First Downs	25	24
Rushing	5	13
Passing	17	11
Penalty	3	0
Rushes-Yards	28-73	41-323
Passing Yards	428	185
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	31-54-2	15-25-1
Offensive Plays	82	66
Total Net Yards	501	508
Third Down Efficiency	9-17	6-11
Punts-Avg.	6-47.5	3-44.3
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	2-1
Penalties	11-100	8-81
Time of Possession	31:34	28:26

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – TUL: Prince 9-38; Brooks 10-31; Watkins 4-25; Ford 1-3; Johnson 1-(-1); Davis 3-(-23). **OSU:** Henderson 24-277-54; Teague 14-62; TEAM 1-(-2); Stroud 2-(-14).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – TUL: Brin 31-54-428-2-2. **OSU:** Stroud 15-25-1-185-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – TUL: Johnson 8-149; Santana 7-78; Naylor 5-81; Crawford 5-44; Hall 2-19; Montgomery 1-21; Prince 1-18; Brooks 1-10; Watkins 1-8. **OSU:** Wilson 6-70; Smith-Njigba 2-33; Ruckert 2-30; Stover 1-17; Scott Jr. 1-16; Fleming 1-7; Teague 1-7; Henderson 1-5.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – TUL: Wilson 6-47.5. **OSU:** Mirco 3-44.3.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – TUL: None. **OSU:** Wilson 1-20.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) TUL: Watkins 2-23; Ford 1-14. **OSU:** Egbuka 2-53; Johnson 2-37; Chambers 1-13.

MISSED FIELD GOALS – TUL: None. **OSU:** None.

FORCED FUMBLES – TUL: Powers, Ray. **OSU:** None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – TUL: Goodlow 1-0. **OSU:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS – TUL: Fuller 1-0. **OSU:** Martinez 1-61; Hickman 1-19.

SACKS – TUL: Ray 1.0-7; Wick 1.0-7. **OSU:** Williams, 1.0-17; Jackson 1.0-10.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – TUL: Ray 1.0-7; Wick 1.0-7; Player 1.0-1. **OSU:** Williams, 1.5-18; Jackson 1.0-10; Garrett 1.0-2; Simon 1.0-2; Smith 1.0-1; Cage 0.5-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – TUL: Davis 5-2-7; Wright 3-4-7; Powers 4-2-6; Ray 3-3-6; Wallace 4-1-5; Fuller 4-0-4; Sawyer 3-1-4; Martin 3-0-3; Wick 2-1-3; Taylor 2-0-2; Burnett 2-0-2; Ellis 1-1-2; Terry 1-1-2; Hopkins 1-1-2; Kulkin 1-1-2; Rogers 1-1-2; Oliver 0-2-2; Player 1-0-1; Jackson 1-0-1; Brooks 1-0-1; Anderson 1-0-1; Stevenson 0-1-1; Lamp 0-1-1; Goodlow 0-1-1. **OSU:** Hickman 7-2-9; Ransom 5-3-8; Brown 5-1-6; Burke 4-1-5; Shaw 3-2-5; Simon 2-1-3; Garrett 2-1-3; Williams 1-2-3; Chambers 1-2-3; Smith 2-0-1; Tuimoloau 1-1-2; Jackson 1-1-2; Martinez 1-1-2; Hooker 0-2-2; Johnson 0-2-2; Gaoteote 1-0-1; Jean-Baptiste 1-0-1; Williamson 1-0-1; Hamilton 1-0-1; Hamilton 0-1-1; Booker 0-1-1; Gant 0-1-1; Cage 0-1-1; Kacherski 0-1-1; Young 0-1-1.

Players In The Game

TUL – Johnson, Santana, Brin, Prince, Crawford Jr., Hall, Smith, Wheeler, Paul, Couch, Bray, Davis, Fuller, Revels III, Martin, Powers, Wallace, Wright, Burnett, Player, Wick, Stevenson, Naylor II, Ray, Brooks, Solomon, Terry, Ford, Jackson, O’Keefe, Carlisle, Jones, Ellis, Benjamin, Sawyer, Montgomery, Watkins, Anderson, Oliver, Hendrix, Wilson, Rangel, Anderson, Kulkin, Hopkins, Higuera, Tipton, Anderson, Ostroski, Lamp, Reh, Tayloer, Wade, Bivens, Baah, Gadlin, Muskrat, Tryon, Long, Goodlow, Grant, Rogers.
OSU – Olave, Wilson, Stroud, Smith-Njigba, Henderson, Wypler, Munford, Johnson Jr., Petit-Frere, Jones, Ruckert, Vincent, Jean-Baptiste, Smith, Ransom, Hickman, Shaw, Brown, Burke, Simon, Eichenberg, Garrett, McCall, Williams, Fleming, Williamson, Banks, Martinez, Egbuka, Scott Jr., Young, Watts, Stover, Harrison Jr., Gant, Gaoteote IV, Chambers, Hooker, Johnson, Mirco, Teague, Sawyer, Pope, Kittle, Robinson, Tuimoloau, Kacherski, Jackson, Jones, Hamilton, Henry-Young, Vimahi, Fryar, Jackson, Hamilton, Cage, Booker, Williams, Cowan, Ruggles.

Season Statistics

2020-21 Game-By-Game			
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Spt. 2	(4) at Minnesota	W, 45-31	50,805
Spet. 11	(3) OREGON (12)	L, 35-28	100,482
Sept. 18	(9) TULSA	W, 41-20	76,540
Spet. 25	(10) AKRON	7:30 p.m.	
Oct. 2	at Rutgers	TBA	
Oct. 9	MARYLAND	Noon	
Oct. 23	at Indiana	TBA	
Oct. 30	PENN STATE (6)	TBA	
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE (20)	TBA	
Nov. 27	at Michigan (19)	Noon	
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.	

OSU’s gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent’s ranking is after the name.

Team Statistics		
	OSU	Opp
First Downs	73	76
Rushing	29	26
Passing	42	42
Penalty	2	8
Average Per Game/Rush	217.3	181.7
Average Per Game/Pass	321.0	289.7
Total Offense	1615	1414
Total Plays	199	230
Average Per Game	538.3	471.3
Average Per Play	8.1	6.1
Penalties-Yards	21-200	20-185
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	2-2
Third Down Efficiency	16-34	25-47
Percentage	47%	53%
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-5	2-2
Percentage	40%	100%
Sacks-Yards	4-45	4-34
Time Of Possession Avg.	26:40	33:20

Score							
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	10	20	42	42	0	114	38.0
Opponents	3	31	28	24	0	86	28.7

Individual Statistics						
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long	
T. Henderson	38	346	9.1	4	54	
Miyan Williams	23	202	8.8	1	71	
Master Teague	20	91	4.6	0	17	
Marcus Crowley	6	19	3.2	0	7	
C.J. Stroud	10	-4	-0.4	0	15	
TEAM	1	-2	-2.0	0	-2	
OSU Totals	98	652	6.7	5	71	
OPP Totals	116	545	4.7	6	77	

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	63	101	62.4	963	8-3	162.7
OSU Totals	63	101	62.4	963	8-3	162.7
OPP Totals	62	114	54.4	869	5-2	129.4

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	19	267	14.1	3	56
Chris Olave	16	243	15.2	2	61
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	11	190	17.3	2	29
Jeremy Ruckert	6	81	13.5	0	21
Miyan Williams	3	38	12.7	0	17
TreVeyon Henderson	3	87	29.0	1	70
Julian Fleming	2	17	8.5	0	10
Cade Stover	1	17	17.0	0	17
Gee Scott	1	16	16.0	0	16
Master Teague	1	7	7.0	0	7
OSU Totals	63	963	15.3	8	70
OPP Totals	62	869	14.0	5	38

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
T. Henderson	5	–	–	–	–	30
Noah Ruggles	–15-15	–	–	–	3-3	24
Garrett Wilson	3	–	–	–	–	18
Chris Olave	2	–	–	–	–	12
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	2	–	–	–	–	12
Haskell Garrett	1	–	–	–	–	6
Miyan Williams	1	–	–	–	–	6
Cameron Martinez	1	–	–	–	–	6
OSU Totals	15	15-15	–	–	3-3	114
OPP Totals	11	11-11	–	–	3-3	86

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	0-0	1-1	2-2	0-0	3-3
OSU Totals	0-0	1-1	2-2	0-0	3-3
OPP Totals	1-1	1-1	1-1	0-0	3-3

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	8	349	43.6	0	62
OSU Totals	8	349	43.6	0	62
OPP Totals	16	674	42.1	0	67

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Cameron Martinez	1	61	61.0	1	61
Ronnie Hickman	1	19	19.0	0	19
OSU Totals	2	80	40.0	1	61
OPP Totals	3	23	7.7	0	23

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	5	13	2.6	0	20
OSU Totals	5	13	2.6	0	20
OPP Totals	1	9	9.0	0	9

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	4	109	27.3	0	29
Xavier Johnson	2	37	18.5	0	22
TreVeyon Henderson	1	19	19.0	0	19
Steele Chambers	1	13	13.0	0	13
OSU Totals	8	178	22.3	0	29
OPP Totals	6	92	15.3	0	XX

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Ronnie Hickman	18	12	30	–	–
Teradja Mitchell	8	13	21	1.0-3	–
Cody Simon	6	10	16	2.0-13	1.0-11
Lathan Ransom	8	4	12	–	–
Haskell Garrett	5	6	11	1.5-2	–
Bryson Shaw	6	5	11	–	–
Dallas Gant	4	6	10	–	–
Denzel Burke	7	3	10	–	–
Josh Proctor	3	7	10	–	–
Cameron Brown	7	2	9	–	–
Tommy Eichenberg	3	6	9	–	–
Antwuan Jackson	5	4	9	2.0-11	1.0-10
Tyreke Smith	4	4	8	1.0-1	–
Zach Harrison	7	0	7	1.0-7	1.0-7
Taron Vincent	3	3	6	0.5-1	–
Steele Chambers	1	4	5	–	–
Tyleik Williams	1	3	4	1.5-18	1.0-17
Lejond Cavazos	4	0	4	–	–
Ryan Watts	3	0	3	–	–
J. Jean-Baptiste	1	2	3	–	–
J.T. Tuimoloau	1	2	3	–	–
K’Vaughan Pope	0	3	3	–	–
Xavier Johnson	0	3	3	–	–
Marcus Hooker	0	2	2	–	–
Marcus Williamson	2	0	2	–	–
Cameron Martinez	1	1	2	–	–
Cormontae Hamilton	1	0	1	–	–
Ty Hamilton	0	1	1	–	–
Palaie Gaoteote IV	1	0	1	–	–
Chris Booker	0	1	1	–	–
Craig Young	0	1	1	–	–
C.J. Stroud	1	0	1	–	–
Jerron Cage	0	1	1	0.5-1	–
Cade Kacherski	0	1	1	–	–
OSU Totals	111	110	221	11.0-57	4.0-45
OPP Totals	114	66	180	7.0-40	4.0-34
Fumbles Forced:	2 –Harrison, Ransom.				
Fumbles Recovered:	2 – Garrett, Eichenberg.				

Oregon Performance Breakout For Smith-Njigba

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With 9:35 remaining in the third quarter against Minnesota on Sept. 2, Jaxon Smith-Njigba ran a seam route past the Golden Gophers defense toward the maroon and gold "M" at the 50-yard line of Huntington Bank Stadium.

He had green grass in front of him. All he needed was the football.

Smith-Njigba turned his head, hoping to see a Wilson-branded pigskin flying through the air in his direction. However, C.J. Stroud had already thrown the ball to Garrett Wilson, overthrowing his intended target along the left sideline.

A visibly frustrated Smith-Njigba flung his arms into the air. To that point in the game, he had been targeted only twice. And after that, Stroud never looked his way again. While the redshirt quarterback was completing 13 passes worth 294 yards and four touchdowns against Minnesota, only two of those throws worth 12 yards went onto the stat sheet beside Smith-Njigba's name.

It seemed that Smith-Njigba's woes might continue against Oregon. Stroud didn't connect with the slot receiver during the first quarter of the game. Still, the redshirt freshman quarterback told Smith-Njigba to be ready.

"He was in my ear just saying, 'Stay alive, it's going to come,'" Smith-Njigba said after the game. "And coaches, too. They said it was going to come. So I just stayed on my path and tried to do the best I can."

Over the next three quarters, Smith-Njigba's patience paid off. He consistently created separation with his Oregon defender, allowing Stroud to make easy throws that led the second-year wideout into space. As a result, the pair connected on seven passes for 145 yards and two touchdowns against the Ducks.

Smith-Njigba joined Chris Olave and Wilson as the first trio of Ohio State wide receivers in program history to have more than 100 yards receiving in the same game. Olave finished the game with 12 catches and 126 yards, while Wilson added eight receptions for 117 yards and a score.

"That's everything – having a weapon at every position," Wilson said. "You can't choose which one you want to focus on and take them out of the game. You see teams like the Kansas City Chiefs play, and you've got to pick your poison. And when you do, they throw to the other one. Stuff like that is huge. It just opens up the whole offense."

Despite the trio's record-setting statistics, along with Stroud's 484 passing yards – the second-most passing yards in a single game

from an Ohio State quarterback, trailing only Dwayne Haskins' 499-yard performance in the 2018 Big Ten Championship Game – the Buckeyes lost their home opener to the Ducks.

Ohio State never enjoyed a lead in the game, and with his team trailing by two touchdowns on three different occasions, head coach Ryan Day called plays with Smith-Njigba as the first read.

During the team's first offensive drive of the second half, Stroud found Smith-Njigba for a 26-yard touchdown after the receiver used a hesitation move to break away from Oregon safety Steve Stephens. That play cut the Ducks' lead to 21-14.

Halfway through the fourth quarter, Ohio State trailed by two touchdowns again and faced a critical fourth-and-6 situation at the Oregon 15. Smith-Njigba and tight end Jeremy Ruckert ran intersecting cross routes, allowing Smith-Njigba to again get separation and catch the ball in stride on his way to pay dirt.

Day said Smith-Njigba's performance was a glimpse of the kind of player the sophomore can become at Ohio State. As a top prospect in the 2020 recruiting class, Smith-Njigba was expected to break out sooner rather than later.

"He had a good spring and preseason, and then that first game, he really didn't get into the rhythm of it all," Day said. "But with only 48 snaps, you really don't get into it. But you can see what his potential is. I think he is very, very good in the slot. He can change directions, he can wiggle free against underneath coverage players well and has big-play potential."

"He's made some really big catches for us. He had some really good routes. He has a chance to be really good for us."

Wilson said that during Smith-Njigba's first practice last year, he and Olave immediately recognized his talent and ability – things that became apparent to everyone else after his performance against Oregon.

"We saw Jaxon come in, and literally on the first day, me and Chris looked at each other watching Jaxon run a route, and we were like, 'OK, we got us one,'" Wilson said. "It's been a long time coming for Jaxon."

Smith-Njigba would have liked his breakout performance to come during an Ohio State win, saying the loss to Oregon was difficult to swallow. Still, he is excited to build upon a strong performance against the Ducks.

"It's hard to celebrate my individual accolades after a tough loss like this," Smith-Njigba said. "It feels good, but I want to win, and I'm ready for next week and for the rest of the season."



SONNY BROCKWAY

FLYING HIGH – Ohio State sophomore receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba (11), shown here celebrating a touchdown catch against Oregon with teammate Thayer Munford (75), has proved the Buckeyes have more threats in their receiving corps than just Chris Olave (2) and Garrett Wilson.

Smith-Njigba should have plenty of opportunities to improve this season. As the third wide receiver behind Olave and Wilson – projected as first-round picks in the 2022 NFL draft next April – he can learn and develop without being the top option.

But that day will come. Stroud thinks Smith-Njigba is capable of being a top target for Ohio State right now.

"He is a dog," Stroud said. "He's a great receiver. He's someone I can rely on. He made plays when his number was called (against Oregon). I appreciate him a lot. He has trust in me. He's the reason I'm here at Ohio State."

With that kind of confidence from his quarterback, it's safe to assume Stroud will begin looking more often in Smith-Njigba's direction. Because of that, Wilson thinks it won't be long before Smith-Njigba on a weekly basis puts together similar performances to what he contributed vs. the Ducks.

"We all know what Jaxon's capable of," Wilson said. "To see him do that, that's who Jaxon is. You're going to see him do that 100 more times. That was just the beginning for Jaxon."



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Schematic, Execution Issues Still Ailing Buckeyes

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day has never been subtle about his preferences for his team's defensive scheme. When he took over as full-time head coach for Urban Meyer in 2019, he quickly rebuilt the program's defensive staff – which had become a mishmash of ideologies with man coverage-heavy coordinator Greg Schiano clashing with zone expert Alex Grinch, while former NFL assistants Bill Davis and Taver Johnson struggled with their transition back to the college game.

Day wanted a united front on the defensive side of the ball, so he sought out coaches that shared ideologies based around his vision for the OSU defense – a Cover 1 and Cover 3 heavy group that operated almost entirely with just one high safety. It was a system with which Day became familiar during his time working under Chip Kelly with the NFL's San Francisco 49ers. Because it caused Day's offense the most trouble, he set out to implement it in Columbus.

To do so, he nabbed Jeff Hafley, another 49ers assistant and one of the nation's foremost single-high safety experts, to coordinate the Ohio State defense. Day paired Hafley with three more coaches with experience in the system, plucking co-coordinator Greg Mattison and linebackers coach Al Washington off the Michigan staff, and bring safeties coach Matt Barnes over from Maryland.

"The idea of this defense was something I had a vision of – four down front with Cover 1, Cover 3, and a lot of single-high," Day said shortly after his first season at the helm. "That's what Jeff fit perfectly, Barnes had done at Maryland, and Al had done in his past. It all fit."

"Based on the experiences I've had as an offensive coordinator, calling plays, I think that gives us the biggest struggle – that kind of defense. You mix that in with

the guys we're recruiting, the guys we have now, it's a great fit."

Day's theory of a staff unified around single-high was correct. The Ohio State defense, which struggled mightily in 2018, rebounded to the top 10 in nearly every defensive category in 2019. It produced a pair of top-three NFL draft picks in defensive end Chase Young and cornerback Jeff Okudah, it earned Hafley the head coaching job at Boston College, and Day received quite a bit of leeway in Columbus for continuing to flesh out the single-high system with his next batch of hires.

"This is a defense that I had a vision for," Day said. "Jeff came in and did a great job of putting that defense on the field, but recruited to that system. It was a team effort. It was everybody just communicating with that. It was Mark Pantoni, it was Matt Barnes, and I obviously had a big hand in it."

It's been nearly two years since Hafley departed for Chestnut Hill. He accepted the head coaching job at Boston College shortly before Ohio State's loss to Clemson in the 2019 College Football Playoff, and Day tabbed Kerry Coombs as Hafley's successor shortly afterward.

Now, just a little more than 19 months after Coombs was introduced at a Feb. 5, 2020, press conference, Day was so unsure of his coordinator that when asked about his confidence in Coombs on Sept. 14, he declined entirely to give his support, opting instead to talk about the standards and expectations in Columbus.

"When you look at the results of the last couple of games and in coming off of last year, it's not what we expect here," Day said. "That's all part of looking at how we need to move forward with this thing."

The head coach minutes later confirmed that Coombs was still his defensive coordinator when asked directly, though it took about 30 minutes and quite a few declined opportunities to elaborate on potential defensive changes to do so.



FILE PHOTO

HAPPIER TIMES – Ohio State head coach Ryan Day (left) and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs (right) celebrate after a 2020 victory, but after the team's second-week loss to Oregon this season, Day decided to take defensive play-calling duties away from Coombs.

"Yes, Kerry is still the defensive coordinator," Day said with a smile, chuckling at the bluntness of the question. "But we're going to look at everything and we're going to keep working and figure out how the staff is working together, how the scheme works together."

From one of the nation's top defenses to a group that surrendered chunk play after chunk play against Oregon during a 35-28 loss on Sept. 11, it's been a sharp fall for Ohio State in the year and a half since it moved to bring Coombs back to Columbus, where he served as a defensive backs coach under Meyer from 2012-17 before jumping to the Tennessee Titans in the same role for two seasons.

The defensive issues reached a fever pitch with Ohio State's loss to Oregon – the first regular-season defeat of Day's head coaching career – but it's a pattern that goes back to Coombs' first days on the job, carried through his opening season, and has now led Ohio State firmly into a pressure cooker.

"We're giving up too many yards and too many points; that's the bottom line," Day said. "I think now it's not just a single

game, it's a little bit of a pattern. We took a long, hard look during the last 48 hours (following the Oregon game) at what's going on, and we certainly have to make some adjustments – not only how we're attacking other offenses, but also structurally how we're doing our day-to-day operations."

How Did We Get Here?

The 2020 edition of the defense certainly wasn't that strong, allowing 52 points in the national title match against Alabama and surrendering 304.0 passing yards per game (a lowly 122nd in the nation), but the group still allowed only 25.8 points per contest – not ideal, but good enough for 43rd nationally, and obviously not big enough of an issue to hold the Buckeyes back from a title game berth.

And therein lies an issue for Ohio State, one that Day addressed head-on during the days after the loss to Oregon. In reworking its defensive assignments to patch up last year's shaky pass defense, paired with departures of several veteran defenders in the front seven, the Buckeyes seem to have completely shredded their own rushing defense. The secondary has looked moder-



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ately improved (granted, against two average passing offenses), but the run defense has surrendered 545 yards through three games. That is an average of 181.7 per game a year opponents averaged only 98.5 yards per game last season.

"There were a lot of things coming into this season, and off of last season especially with COVID, where it was hard to identify exactly what the issues were," Day said. "Moving forward, I felt confident that we could get them fixed."

"When you come off of last year, the passing game (defense) was obviously a big issue. We were top 10 in the country in stopping the run and we made some adjustments to get it stopped in the back end. Now we're having a hard time with the run. We have to identify the issue. Is it the style we're playing? The way we're coaching it? The scheme?"

"When you go in the offseason, you have time to make adjustments and you think they're right. But then when you come into the games and you're not getting it done, (it seems like) there were some bad assumptions made and bad changes. ... When we made the adjustments to help in the pass game, certainly it wasn't adjusted in the run game. It's a different issue, but the same outcome. We have to get it fixed."

That leaves a big question for which Ohio State has yet to find a solid answer – what is the issue (or issues) for this defensive group? The scheme is almost entirely the same as it was when Hafley took over, with the notable exception of apparently being uncomfortable with taking away players from the secondary to rush the passer,

eliminating just about every corner/safety blitz call from the playbook.

The Buckeyes still lean heavily on Cover 1 and Cover 3, though, and have flashed almost exclusively single-high looks through their first three games this season. Cover 1 has been a more frequent call in year two of the Coombs tenure than it was in 2020, thanks in part to issues that Ohio State had in correctly playing its zone assignments. But in structure, there's very little in the way of overarching adjustments in the Buckeye defense.

The scheme is single-high Cover 1 or Cover 3, designed to be simple enough to free up athletes to play in space as it was with Hafley. It's a scheme to which Day has been committed for three seasons now, and one he instructed Coombs to follow when he was hired. And, in the wake of the loss to Oregon, Coombs doubled down on that look as a solid one.

"I think that the defensive structure that has been in place is a successful one and one that a lot of folks are really comfortable with," the OSU defensive coordinator said. "We have to execute, we have to prepare, we have to have our kids in the right places to make the right plays."

"I love the scheme and I love the players. I don't take this lightly. I can assure you we will get better."

Contemplating Changes

Day, for what it's worth, put everything on the table three days after the loss, from staff responsibility changes – he was unwilling to commit to Coombs as a defensive play-caller for the Tulsa game – to a look at

moving away from the scheme that seemed to work so well during almost all of his tenure at Ohio State.

"I don't want to get into specifics," Day replied when asked about a staff shakeup. "I want to keep looking at it this week, and I don't think it's something we're going to decide right now, either. It's going to be something where we all get in there, we all take a hard look at what we're doing from scheme to our structure and all those types of things for what gives us the best chance to win the game. We'll look at all those things, but no hard decisions have been made that way yet."

Whether that would solve Ohio State's defensive woes is difficult to say. The single-high system isn't inherently flawed, and it remains very simple and easy to grasp. But it still requires a lot of talent as well as coaches that know how to coach the fundamentals tremendously well so that the system can still work.

Barnes explained it well at a 2020 coaching clinic, and though Ohio State's issues are not that its eyes became too big for its playbook in working in new looks, his notes about the importance of those fundamentals and of the scheme's simplicity are especially prescient as the Buckeyes fumble with each at the beginning of this season.

"We're very cognizant of having too much volume that we slow our players down," Barnes said. "I know that's happened at other places I've been in the past. You want to play every single coverage there is – every single front. But the next thing you know, this guy can't get lined up,

this guy missed a tackle. He's missed the tackle because he's unsure. I really feel strongly about that."

"You cannot carry too much defense, but make sure what you're carrying fits your players, so you can play it fast. The emphasis is on effort and technique."

In midseason, however, it's unlikely the Buckeyes would scrap everything and move into a brand-new defensive look. They could work in a few more two-high safety plays, just to give offenses a new thing to think about, but the unit spent the offseason as a single-high team. It has spent three years in that look, in fact.

Simplifying assignments, reworking personnel, trying to cut down on the fat that has slipped into the instruction that players are getting? Those are all things Day said he is focusing on in the middle of the season – even if he's none too pleased about it.

"I'm not in on the intricacies of it all (on defense), but I certainly needed to get in there and figure out what exactly we're doing moving forward," he said. "I hired (defensive) guys to do a job and they have to do it."

"I'm not happy about (having to help out with the defense) at all. Part of the deal here is that for me to do what I need to do on offense, I need the defense to be really on-point. Special teams on-point. I need Mark Pantoni to do a great job in recruiting, Mickey Marotti to handle strength and conditioning. The minute I get taken away to those type of things, it affects everything else that happens with the offense. To be honest with you, I'm disappointed."

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Media, Ex-Players Opine On Defensive Struggles

By **WYATT CROSHER**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State fell in its home opener in a 35-28 decision to Oregon, dropping a regular-season game for the first time in Ryan Day's head coaching tenure.

In defeat, the Buckeyes allowed 505 yards of offense and 6.9 yards per play to an Oregon team that had struggled to move the ball against Fresno State the week before. The Bulldogs also lost to the Ducks by a single touchdown but allowed fewer points and yards (358 total, 4.9 per play) during a 31-24 Oregon win.

It was not a glowing performance for the Ohio State defense, which after two lackluster performances to open the season ranked near the bottom of the Football Bowl Subdivision in a variety of categories. The Buckeyes were ranked, out of 130 FBS teams, tied for No. 77 in passing yards allowed (220.5 per game), tied for No. 108 in scoring defense (33.0 points per game), No. 112 in total defense (456.5 yards per game), No. 115 in opponents' yards per rushing attempt (5.4) and No. 122 in rushing yards allowed (236.0 per game).

Those statistics paint the Buckeyes in a bad light, even when looking at what the 2020 defense did. The pass defense was worse last season (No. 122) but showed improvement in every other major category – rush defense (No. 6), scoring defense (No. 43) and total defense (No. 59).

The level of regression through two games was not expected by many despite the number of players the Buckeyes lost to graduation as well as the NFL. Former Ohio State linebacker Jim Laughlin, who lettered for the Buckeyes from 1977-79, told BSB that the expectation for 2021 was to reload and improve.

"You always expect to get better, but you never know," Laughlin said. "Ohio State's had so many guys going in the first few rounds (of the NFL draft). You're always going to lose some great talent, but you just don't expect teams to be able to run the ball on them like

that."

Improvement was also expected from The Athletic beat writer Bill Landis, who said he thought there would be at least some tweaks to the defense after the struggles it faced during the 2020 campaign. However, while the usage of the bullet position has increased, not much else has been done.

"The one scheme or personnel thing I thought they'd make – which they have done – is incorporate the bullet position more in lieu of a third traditional linebacker," Landis told BSB. "I thought that would make them a little more ready to defend the pass. I think we all saw that coming. Then scheme-wise, I didn't think they'd get super-crazy with it and change it up. The only thing that Ohio State does that's unique is they are pre-rotated to a single-high safety structure. Not many teams do that, not even in the NFL. So I thought Ohio State would come out and play mostly the same coverages that they have played the last two years, Cover 1 and Cover 3, but a line with two safeties before the snap to make that a little more confusing for a quarterback."

"They didn't do that. They just kind of came out and did the same stuff they've been doing for two years."

Former Ohio State linebacker Brent Johnson also was expecting a change to the single-high safety look that Day has grown accustomed to during his time with the Buckeyes. He also thinks it is one of the key reasons that the defense has had its struggles to start the year.

"We need two safeties in the middle of the field," Johnson told BSB. "I cannot stand having one safety in the middle of field. It's death. I hate it."

A lot of the blame for the errors has fallen on defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, who rejoined the team in 2020 after a two-year stint as defensive backs coach with the NFL's Tennessee Titans. Coombs has no prior experience as a defensive coordinator at the collegiate level, and the defense has appeared to regress mightily during his tenure after a 2019 year when Ohio State allowed the few-



PATRICK MAYHORN

TRYING TO FIX IT - Ohio State head coach Ryan Day was faced with a lot of tough questions about his defense in the wake of a 35-28 loss to Oregon. Media members and former players pointed at several different reasons as well as potential fixes as the Buckeyes move forward.

est yards (259.7) and fourth-fewest points (12.6) per game among all FBS teams.

When looking at what the defense did against Minnesota and Oregon, Landis said he thinks it falls more upon who is on the sidelines than it does on the players who were on the field.

"They just don't seem very well-coached," he said. "It's not like no other team runs Cover 1 and Cover 3 the way Ohio State does. Plenty of teams do. It's just that there are things

that are required of players in that system that Ohio State's players don't seem to be doing right now. You just watch the way guys react to things. They just look slow, and I don't think it's because they are slow. I think it's because they're really trying to process things and overthinking it, and I think that makes them react slowly to what's happening in front of them.

"I go to coaching on that first. We don't know what checks are being made, what exactly everyone's responsibility is on a given play. But it does look to me like a lot of these guys are trying to work through multiple things and reacting to the offense as the ball is snapped. The result of that is guys either totally out of position or very slow to get to the position they need to be in."

Laughlin has looked specifically at the defensive line as a position group that needs to step up. Through two games, the Buckeyes had only three tackles for loss and one sack from their defensive line, and Laughlin said they are also the key to the entire defense's ability to stop the run.

"When I was with the Falcons, we were No. 1 or 2 in run defense, and then the guy in front of me who was a great run defender – linebacker Fulton Kuykendall, who was called 'Captain Crazy' – he got hurt for about eight games and I filled in," Laughlin said. "When I left, we were still No. 1 against the rush in the league because we had three guys up front that stuffed the hell out of the offensive line."

"Then, when I played with Green Bay one year, when Rich Wingo from Alabama got hurt, I went in for about four or five games. We were 32nd in the league in rushing defense when I came in, and when I left, we were still 32nd because they guys up front were on roller skates getting pushed back. So it sounds

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like a cliché, but it's the offensive and defensive lines that control the game."

Former Ohio State linebacker Mike McCray, who was a co-captain on the 1988 team, told BSB he thinks there has been another reason for the defensive woes, some of which would also go back to the coaching staff.

In recent years, the Buckeyes have had such talents as the Bosa brothers, Jordan Fuller, Jeff Okudah and Chase Young who were major difference-makers, even when something broke down. McCray believes that none of the players on the current defense has developed to be one of those difference-makers.

"Day did something that hadn't been done in a while and invited all the old players back to watch practice," McCray said. "When I came up, I was wowed by the offense, but then I met up with some of the former players there and said, 'Do we know anybody on defense?' This might be the first time we don't know a name on defense – a big name that just stands out."

"Let's just be honest. They are going to have to step up their game. Name a star on the defense right now. Think about it. I mean just a star. We have some freshmen that came in with all the billing, but how many times does a freshman come in and just dominate? That's rare. They play well and they're part of a solid team, but really, what senior out there is a star on this defense? They've been playing (a backup) role because other people have been in their place. But now they're on top. They have to be the alpha males now. I'm not saying that they can't. They have at least 10 more games to do that."

In-House Criticism

The Oregon loss led to Day speaking openly at his midweek press conference about his displeasure with how the defense had performed – not only to start the season, but since Coombs took over in 2020. There were so many comments from the head coach about what needs to change and what hasn't worked that Landis ultimately asked Day point-blank if Coombs was still Ohio State's defensive coordinator. Day laughed and replied that he was.

Landis said that while Coombs certainly deserves his fair share of criticism, he didn't think the finger-pointing from his head coach was fair in the grand scheme of things.

"Day was very intentional with everything he said and did not say about the defense during that press conference," Landis said. "It certainly did not cast Kerry Coombs in the greatest light. I'm not entirely sure how they can move forward calling him the defensive coordinator after Day spent 30 minutes expressing a lack of confidence in his ability to do the job. But I also think that it was reasonable to do that because Kerry hasn't done the job very well."

"The one thing about that press conference that didn't sit all that well with me is that it felt like Day did not take enough ownership of the defensive struggles when this vision for the defense is his and the coordinator was his hand-picked hire. None of this was forced upon him. He made the decision, so he has to shoulder some of that blame, too, and it felt like he was kind of saying, 'Well, my offense is fine, you guys have to fix the defense.' When you're the head coach, it's your job to fix everything. You can't portray yourself as being annoyed when you have to step away from the offense to help the defense because, otherwise, you should just be an offensive coordinator."

With all of the turmoil on one side of the ball through two weeks, Ohio State still showed flaws on defense against Tulsa. Even in a 41-20 victory, the Buckeyes allowed 501 total yards, 428 of which came through the air. The rush defense did improve, however, allowing just 73 yards on 28 carries (2.6 yards per rush).

Before the game against the Golden Hurricane, Johnson stressed the importance of both that matchup as well as the one against Akron the following week, especially because of how Ohio State had performed following the loss.

"These are games where we need to start working on changing our defense, working on zone, because we need to get prepared," Johnson said. "Michigan State is much-improved. Penn State is much-improved. Maryland is much-improved. And we still have everything in front of us. The season is not over by a long shot."

McCray agreed on the importance of this

supposed lull in the schedule and said that this year is a prime example of why there could be cons in overly stacking a team's non-conference schedule.

"I know everybody pushed for playing Power Five, top programs every year, day in and day out. But I think you always need to have a couple of games where you can work on you," he said. "You can get young players in the game, you can take some more chances, but you just know you are more talented, and you can work on you and do some things. You can put guys in a situation where you can go back and show him on that film and say, 'Hey, see this? See this scenario? See this situation?' Football is muscle memory most of time, so once you go through it, players can feel more comfortable with it."

Ohio State is still 2-1 and undefeated through one game of Big Ten play. If history is any inclination, a Big Ten champion with a 13-1 record – and that lone loss a distant one in week two – can still make the College Foot-

ball Playoff field.

But from what was seen of the Buckeyes against Oregon, does that still seem like a reasonable expectation?

"My expectation is that they still win the Big Ten and don't lose again just because the talent gap is so big over everybody else in the conference," Landis said. "But I came into the season thinking Ohio State was going to go undefeated for a lot of those same reasons. And now, I think they may be more like a two-loss team because of how bad this defense is. I'm not going to predict they finish 10-2, because I just don't think the schedule is that hard. But it does lower the ceiling for me a little bit in terms of how they ultimately finish. If they get out of it with another loss, I'm not going to be super-surprised by that."

"I'm still going to pick them to win the Big Ten and go to the playoff, but I don't think they have a defense that can win them a national championship."

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Zips Seek Progress In Third Year Under Arth

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

When Akron head coach Tom Arth accepted the position prior to the 2019 campaign, he had a pretty good idea of what he was getting into. The program was looking to replace Terry Bowden, who had managed more success than just about any coach in program history – reaching two bowl games in seven seasons – which says less about Bowden and more about Akron.

The program was also hoping to cauterize some of the wounds that Bowden left when he announced his intentions to step down. He left a severely depleted roster in his wake. With the rise of the transfer portal and the graduation of a tremendously valuable senior class, Akron saw quite a few more departures after the Bowden resignation than it thought it could reasonably withstand.

Arth knew that when he accepted the job, leaping from Chattanooga (where he was head coach in 2017 and 2018) at an opportunity to return to his home state in hopes of rebuilding the blank-slate Zips in his image.

And just as he expected, the early years of his tenure have presented challenges, more than perhaps any other FBS program in America in that time frame. The Zips have turned over the majority of their roster twice during Arth's first three seasons at the helm and have almost zero Bowden contributors remaining in year three. From September 2020 to May 2021, Akron lost 14 players to the transfer portal. It had lost another 14 in the 2020 offseason.

The Zips have lost players faster than they can bring them in and entered the 2021 campaign with just 49 players who arrived with recruiting rankings of any sort, easily the lowest number in the Mid-American Conference.

As a result, Arth attempts to rebuild the program in the face of constant turnover with a roster perpetually populated by underclassmen. Through his first two seasons, Arth coached 18 games and claimed just one victory, finally breaking into the win column Dec. 5, 2020, with a 31-3 blowout victory against a Bowling Green program that may be in even worse shape than the Zips.

In 2021, Akron has managed to match that victory total through three games, falling to Auburn and Temple during the first two weeks of the season but achieving a 35-14 victory Sept. 18 against FCS member Bryant University. It's a milestone victory for Arth no matter how small, and one that almost seemed unlikely shortly after the end of the 2020 season – though not because of anything that happened on the field or even within the program at large.

Rather, it was proceedings in the NFL that nearly put an end to the Arth experiment at Akron – not a common experience for coaches with one win, certainly. In January, Arth's best friend, Brandon Staley, was hired as the Los Angeles Chargers new head coach after coordinating one of the league's best defenses across town with the Rams in 2020.

Rumors immediately swirled about Arth as a candidate to join Staley's staff, likely as an offensive coordinator or quarterbacks coach. Arth confirmed those rumors Jan. 25 but did so as he announced his decision to decline Staley's offer and remain with the Zips, citing a desire to see through the de-

velopment of his program and his vision in Akron.

"This is where my heart is," Arth said. "There are so many things that draw you to an opportunity like that, but in my heart I keep getting pulled back here.

"I believe so strongly in our program. I believe so strongly in what we're doing and what we're capable of accomplishing. I want to be a part of that."

If Arth is looking for a challenge, he certainly has one with his 2021 roster. Even as he works his third recruiting class into the fold, his program returns only 11 total starters from last year's offense and defense, easily the lowest in the MAC with the proliferation of super seniors across both the league and the college football world at large.

The departures of such veterans as center Bryce Petersen, running back Teon Dollard and defensive ends Eric Bentley and John Mitchell during the offseason left the Zips again in need of new contributors, despite ending the 2020 season expecting to see as many as 16 starters back in town.

Of the players that have returned for the 2021 season, none is more important than senior quarterback Kato Nelson, one of the few holdovers from the Bowden era. Though not technically a returning starter since an injury sidelined him in 2020, Nelson is one of the more experienced signal-callers in the MAC and brings a level of stability and experience to an offense with nine underclassmen in starting roles, including five on the offensive line.

However, he suffered a leg injury in the second half of Akron's 45-24 loss to Temple on Sept. 11 and has been on shaky ground since. He didn't play against Bryant and will come with the Zips to Ohio Stadium as a game-time decision.

"His knee looks to be good. It's just more of an ankle situation, but our trainers said it's better than initially thought," Arth said. "Kato is resilient, tough, and hopefully we'll be able to get him back."

If Nelson can't play against the Buckeyes, backup DJ Irons has been legitimately strong while filling in, throwing for 534 yards and five touchdowns and adding 165 rushing yards in his first season with the Zips, signing in the offseason as a junior college transfer from Iowa Central Community College. At 6-6, 215 pounds, Irons has a bigger arm than Nelson but lacks both the vision in reading a defense and the shiftness that Nelson brings in the rushing attack.

"I thought DJ played really well," Arth said after he filled in for the injured Nelson against Temple. "It would have been difficult for him to play much better. He made some explosive plays. We just have to make sure we're making the right decision. Outside of one or two of those plays, (DJ) was on it.

"He brought a great energy and a spark to the team. He went out there and performed as well as he could. I was really happy for him."

Joining either Nelson or Irons in the backfield is true freshman running back Jonzell Norrils, who impressed throughout the off-season and managed to secure the starting role. He's taking over for Dollard, who was expected to start for the Zips this season. But he was hit with a weapons possession charge in the spring and was kicked off the team in August. That came after a further school investigation into both the weapons charge and substance abuse issues for the star back.

Get To Know ... Akron

2021 Record: 1-2.

Team Information: Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 3-4; Starters Returning – Offense 6, Defense 6, Specialists 2.

Head Coach: Tom Arth, 3rd year at Akron, 2-19.

Series History: 9th meeting; Ohio State leads 7-1-0.

School Facts: Location – Akron, OH.; Enrollment – 16,166; Nickname – Zips; Colors – Blue, Gold; Conference – MAC (East); Stadium – InfoCision Stadium (Surface, Prograss artificial turf; Capacity – 30,000).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jonzell Norrils	36	114	3.2	0
DJ Irons Jr.	31	165	5.3	2
A. Williams	21	149	7.1	1

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
DJ Irons Jr.	44-58	75.9	534	5-1

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Michael Mathison	18	230	12.8	1
K. Mumpfield	11	108	9.8	2
Tristian Brank	6	77	12.8	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 23.0
Rushing Yards Per Game – 158.0
Passing Yards Per Game – 226.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 384.0

2021 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 4	at Auburn	L, 60-10
Sept. 11	TEMPLE	L, 45-24
Sept. 18	BRYANT	W, 35-14
Sept. 25	at Ohio State	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 2	OHIO	3:30 p.m.
Oct. 9	at Bowling Green	TBA
Oct. 16	at Miami (Ohio)	TBA
Oct. 23	BUFFALO	TBA
Nov. 2	BALL STATE	TBA
Nov. 9	at Western Michigan	TBA
Nov. 20	KENT STATE	TBA
Nov. 27	at Toledo	TBA
Dec. 4	MAC Championship	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL	Yards	Sacks
Bubba Arslanian	16	21	37	1.0-2		-
Jesslord Boateng	11	10	21	3.0-11	0.5-5	
Jalen Hooks	8	3	11	2.0-3		-
Randy Cochran Jr.	5	5	10	1.0-1		-
J. Kelly-Powell	5	5	10	-		-
A.J. Watts	7	2	9	-		-
Bryce Wilson	3	5	8	2.5-5		-
C. Amankwaa	4	3	7	1.0-3		-

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
None	-	-	-	-

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 39.7
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 174.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 223.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 397.0

Michigan State transfer Anthony Williams Jr. also contributes to the Akron rushing attack as a change-of-pace back.

Out wide, the receivers are one of Akron's most proven groups with returning starter Michael Mathison, junior George Qualls Jr. and freshman Konata Mumpfield each impressive early in the season.

"I thought that wide receiver group really was a bright spot for our team," Arth said after the season-opening loss to Auburn. "We feel that's a really talented group. We feel like it's a group that can be really successful for our team, and they went out there and proved it against some of the best competition in the country."

Up front, the offensive line has achieved the impressive feat of returning four starters in a group consisting entirely of freshmen, due largely to the free season of eligibility. Petersen is the only departure from the 2020 group with left guard Ryan Beckman sliding into the center role this season while freshman Nate Williams takes over his old spot. The group has been spotty through three games but impressed Arth in bits of all three games so far.

"It's about consistency, fundamentals and technique," Arth said. "We know what to do. We just have to be able to go out there and trust it, trust that technique. That group, as well as every other group on our team, would stand up and tell you that we could be better.

"There are some really good things as well. Our quarterbacks at times had some outstanding protection. They could go through their entire progression and still had time. There were some times where we really came off the ball and ran it. But at the end of the day, it's confidence. When that doubt creeps in, it's poison."

The defense is a similar story for the Zips, even down to the most experienced leader surrounded by youth. Middle linebacker Bubba Arslanian is among the MAC's best at his position and was leading the team in tackles

through Sept. 18 with 37 total stops. He had 74 tackles in six games last season.

Around him at linebacker, Jalen Hooks is sliding into a new hybrid role as more of a blitzing box safety after playing a cornerback position in 2020, thumper Michael Scott is sliding into the other interior spot, and Michigan State transfer Jeslord Boateng has found early success in the other outside linebacker role during his first season with the Zips.

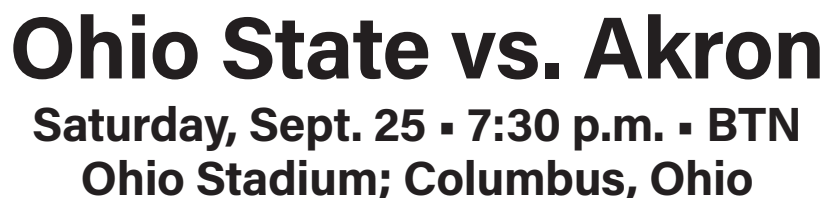
Up front, tackle Bryce Wilson is the lone returning starter after the departures of Bentley and Mitchell, but through three games, Akron has yet to settle on an end rotation with which it is comfortable. Quevan Lawson has flashed ability when healthy as has Janirr Wade, but neither has been able to produce much of anything in rushing the passer, which served as a serious issue against both Auburn and Temple.

In the secondary, returning safeties A.J. Watts and Jaylen Kelly-Powell – a former Michigan player – are among the most stable pieces on the team and helped to build a passing defense that finished in the top half of the MAC in 2020, allowing 211.7 yards per game. The results so far this season have been similar, even with new cornerbacks Randy Cochran Jr. and Charles Amankwaa working into the starting rotation on the outside.

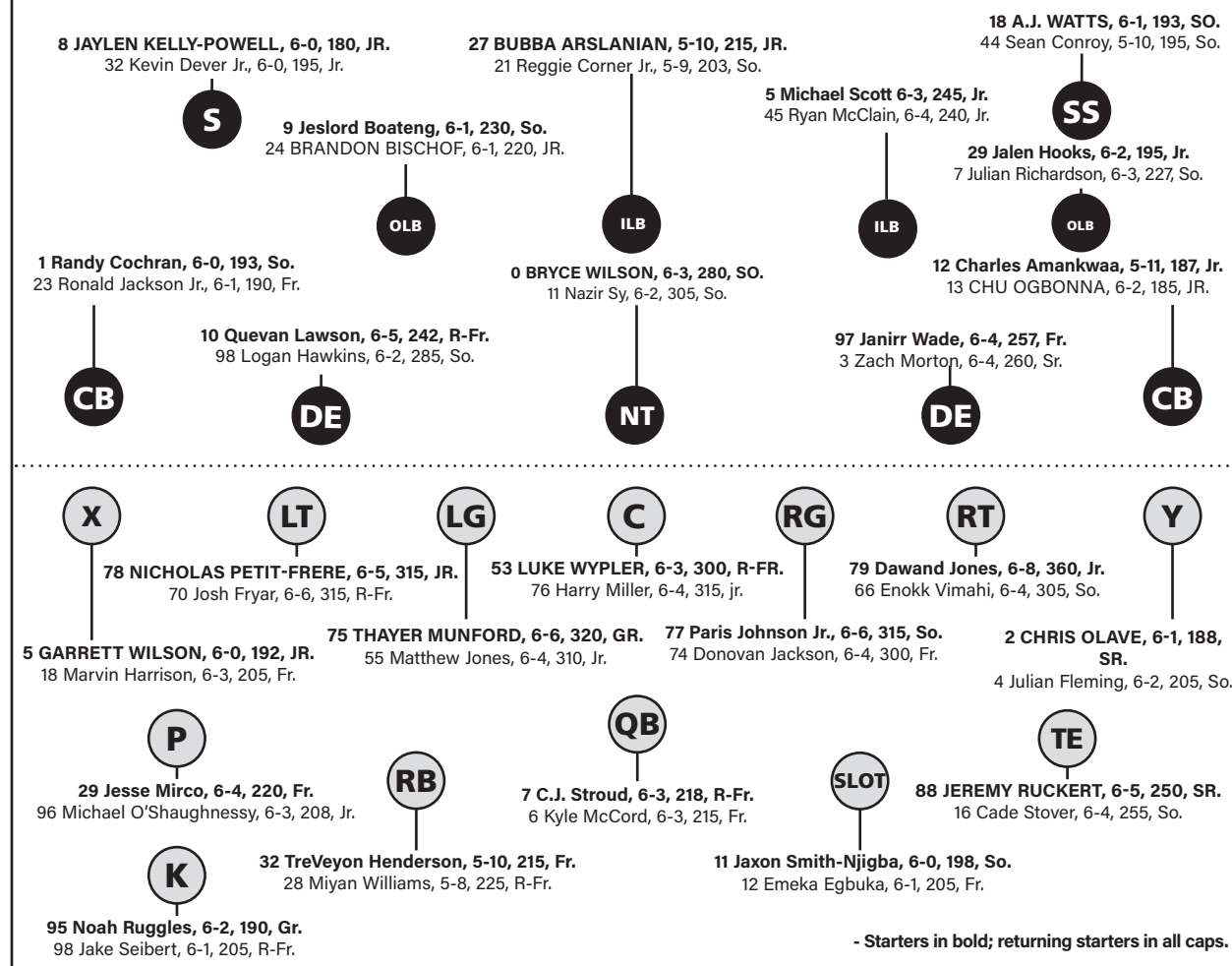
It's a team in which Arth has seen improvement, but he still thinks it needs a lesson in withstanding the emotions of a football game, including closing out games in big moments.

"When we play together, with confidence and belief in what we're doing, we are a very good football team," Arth said. "(Against Temple), we just didn't weather the storm. The next lesson we have is that you cannot ride the waves of emotion. A couple of things went wrong and we let that doubt creep in.

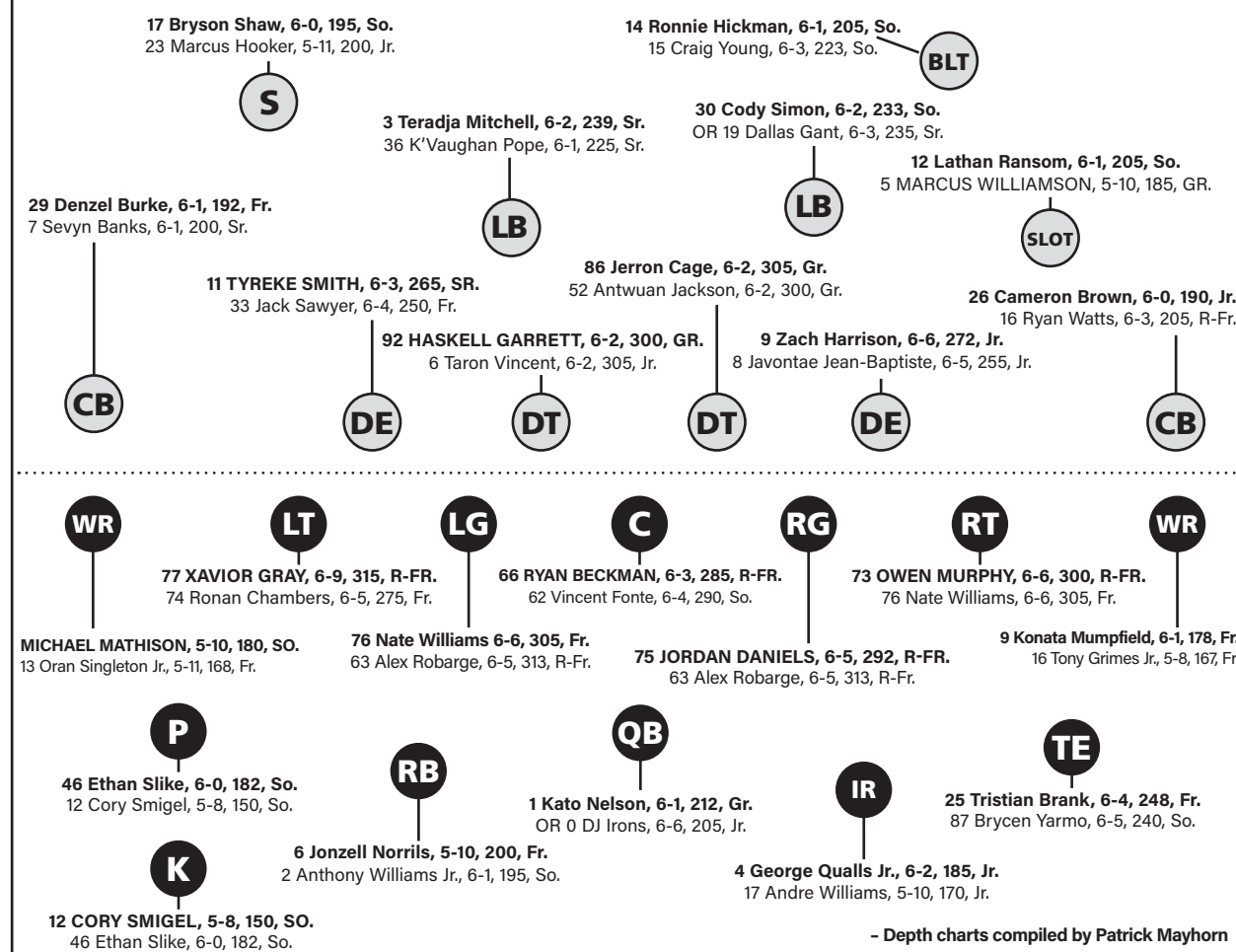
"What we have to know is that we are not the same team that we were last year or the year before that. We are a different group."



WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN AKRON HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. AKRON RUSH DEFENSE

TreVeyon, TreVeyon, TreVeyon. After he broke Archie Griffin's 49-year-old single-game freshman rushing record at OSU with 277 yards on 24 carries vs. Tulsa, it might be time to give TreVeyon Henderson an honor associated with Brazilian soccer players and rock stars – a singular name. The fact he had 207 yards on just 10 attempts in the second half shows he can be reliable in the late stages of the game. Master Teague, who did not see the field during the 35-28 loss to Oregon, had 62 yards on 14 carries. Miyan Williams, the starter the first two games, did not take a snap against Tulsa although he was available. The status of left guard Thayer Munford, who injured his right leg against the Golden Hurricane, would be a concern if the Buckeyes were playing a better opponent. Akron (1-2) allowed just 29 rushing yards on 31 attempts during a 35-14 win against Bryant, but it's hard to gain anything from that. The Bulldogs are in the lower level of the Football Championship Subdivision, and Akron served as their first-ever opponent from the Football Bowl Subdivision. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

AKRON RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE BUSH DEFENSE

Akron's top threat is quarterback DJ Irons, who netted 136 yards on 15 carries (9.1 avg.) with a 24-yard rush and a 20-yard TD run against Bryant. The Zips totaled 218 yards on a 5.9 average per carry in the game. The Buckeyes limited Tulsa to 73 yards on 28 runs (2.6) average but did allow Deneric Prince to break off a 24-yarder. The defense showed some improvement with secondary coach Matt Barnes handling the on-field decisions and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs relegated to the press box. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. AKRON PASS DEFENSE

C.J. Stroud had nice numbers (15 of 25, 185 yards, a TD and an interception) but his biggest responsibility was making sure he handed the ball cleanly to Henderson. Stroud admits his arm is not 100 percent, and it would probably behoove the Buckeyes to have a blowout soon (see: Akron) so someone else can gain experience and give him a break. The shocking takeaway was that All-America candidate Chris Olave did not have a catch against Tulsa, although a 47-yarder early in the fourth quarter was wiped out because of a face-mask penalty. Still, Olave was targeted only four times compared to 10 for Garrett Wilson. Stroud was sacked and lost a fumble while the game was in doubt, so that's a concern. Bryant managed only 117 yards through the air against Akron, but OSU might reach that total in the first quarter. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

AKRON PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

The aforementioned Irons is a good dual threat. He was 19 of 23 for 296 yards and TD passes of 38, 24 and 6 yards. He was also sacked twice. The Buckeyes' pass rush has been soft but came to life with two sacks, including a key 17-yarder late in the game by Tyleik Williams. The young secondary saw 54 pass attempts and responded with INTs by Ronnie Hickman and Cameron Martinez, the latter with a return of 61 yards for a score. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Noah Ruggles looked confident in nailing field goals from 43 and 44 yards. Jesse Mirco averaged 44.3 on three punts with a long of 49, and Emeka Egbuka had a 36-yard kickoff return to jump-start a scoring drive. Akron's Ethan Slike had a one punt for 42 yards.

EDGE: OHIO STATE

INTANGIBLES

The Buckeyes have to find the balance between confidence and overconfidence. There are a lot of players who could use another dose of positive reinforcement to remove themselves from the unsavory taste of the loss to Oregon, but this is no time for them to relax and get sloppy. The Zips can get a morale boost by winning some individual battles even though there won't be many opportunities. The Zips lost their opener by 60-10 final at Auburn and lost a 45-24 decision to Temple. Ohio State must put this game to bed early. Perhaps the biggest question is how many empty seats will there be? **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

STAFF PREDICTION

When one thinks of the first night game of the season at Ohio Stadium, what comes to mind is a top-10 matchup or a marquee nonconference opponent. Akron is neither. But it's been since 2019 that the Buckeyes have played under the lights at home – with fans in the stands – so the atmosphere should be a good one. Akron is 1-7 lifetime against Ohio State, with its only victory coming in 1894. The Zips should be happy with the paycheck. **OHIO STATE 48, AKRON 15**

Purdue Coach Retires One Year Ahead Of Schedule

Purdue head women's basketball coach Sharon Versyp – the winningest coach in program history – announced her retirement Sept. 16.

Katie Gearlds, who joined the Boiler-makers' coaching staff in March as an associate head coach with plans to replace Versyp following the season, will step in as the eighth head coach in the program's history.

In her 15 seasons at the helm, Versyp led Purdue to four Big Ten tournament titles, nine NCAA tournament appearances and more than 300 wins. Collectively, she boasted a 418-257 collegiate coaching record during her 25-year career as a head coach.

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

"Coaching at my alma mater has been the greatest honor of my professional life," Versyp said in a statement. "My purpose has always been to teach life skills through basketball – respect, hard work, discipline, selflessness, what it means to be part of a team.

"I am delighted that the alumna coaching tradition will continue with Katie Gearlds. It shows what a special program we have at Purdue. I believe that the team is in great hands with Katie and the entire staff.

"I am thankful for my close to 20 years here at Purdue and all of the people who have been such a positive and memorable part of my experience. I am ready to chase new dreams off the court."

Prior to her retirement, Versyp was under investigation by Purdue's Office of Institutional Equity under allegations that she violated the school's anti-harassment policy. She was accused of creating a "toxic and hostile" environment, according to a report.



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Versyp leaves Purdue with a program-record 301 victories.

"We sincerely thank Coach Versyp for her commitment and devotion to Purdue, her impact on the greater Lafayette community and the leadership she's provided our women's basketball program," Purdue athletic director Mike Bobinski said. "As we move forward, our program will benefit from the history of success and accomplishments under Coach Versyp's watch. We wish her the very best in the years ahead."

Versyp's replacement, Gearlds, is a former All-American at Purdue who spent the last eight years as head coach at Marian University in Indianapolis. Gearlds was a three-time NAIA Coach of the Year with the Knights, recording a 228-50 record and winning back-to-back national championships in 2016 and 2017.

Illinois Extends Underwood Deal

After the Illinois men's basketball team rose to the top of the Big Ten, won the conference tournament title and claimed both the No. 2 spot in the final Associated Press poll of the season and a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament, head coach Brad Underwood's contract extension was on the horizon.

Therefore, it came as no surprise the Fighting Illini and Underwood have come to an agreement to add one more year to his deal, an extension that will go into effect pending approval by the UI Board of Trustees at its Sept. 23 meeting.

The one-year extension will keep Underwood in Campaign through the 2026-27 season following the three-year extension he received in March 2020. Underwood is set to make a base salary of \$3.5 million for the 2021-22 season, with his salary increasing to \$3.8 million for the 2022-23 season, \$3.9 million the next year, \$4 million for 2024-25, \$4.1 million for 2025-26 and \$4.2 million for the 2026-27 season.

"It was just four years ago that we brought Coach Underwood here with the vision he and I shared of returning Illinois basketball to national prominence, and he has delivered," Illinois athletic director Josh Whitman said. "The 'Everyday Guys' culture he has developed defines our locker room and permeates every facet of the program. Coach's tenets of hard work, accountability, toughness and team-first mind-set are just a few of the principles he has instilled in our student-athletes. Coach, his staff and the players have relentlessly maintained their high expectations, and the results have followed."

When he was hired in March 2017, Underwood originally signed a six-year con-



Katie Gearlds



Brad Underwood

tract that called for annual compensation starting at \$2.75 million and escalating each season before topping out at \$3.25 million in year six. The three-year extension Underwood received in March 2020 increased his base salary to \$3.408 million this past year with escalators that would grow his salary to \$4 million by the 2025-26 season.

The terms of Underwood's latest extension fully guarantee his compensation through the next four years. The coach has a buyout clause that will also increase in line with his salary. It currently sits at \$8 million.

Underwood's revised contract will include bonus opportunities for reaching milestones such as making the NCAA Tournament and other mutually agreed-upon metrics. His previous contract stipulated any NCAA Tournament appearance between 2022 and 2025 would allow for subsequent contract extensions potentially reaching the 2029-30 season.

"It is the honor of a lifetime to be the head coach here at the University of Illinois," Underwood said. "The history, the players and the passionate fan base are part of what makes this job so special. But another key that sets us apart is our leadership, and I am so fortunate to work with Josh Whitman. His passion for the University of Illinois and championship vision for our athletic department inspires everyone. His investment in resources to continually push our basketball program forward and his unyielding support makes this feel not like a job, but a partnership. As a relationship-driven person, it has made the process so much more enjoyable and rewarding."

Nittany Lions Pick Up Four-Star Center

Penn State first-year men's basketball coach Micah Shrewsberry secured the program's fourth commitment for its 2022 class when four-star center Kebba Nije pledged his services to the Nittany Lions.

A LaPorte (Ind.) La Lumiere School standout, Nije chose Penn State over Butler and Kansas State. The 6-9, 205-pounder is rated the No. 17 center in the country and the No. 104 overall prospect as well as Indiana's fourth-ranked recruit.

Nije visited the Penn State campus Sept. 11 for the Nittany Lions' football game against Ball State and came away impressed with the program's emphasis on player development.

"I enjoyed the visit overall," he said. "I think what really stood out was their individual workout plans. When I went there, they were doing a bunch of individual work – trying to get everybody working on another skill set. That really stood out to me as a way I can get better."

The visit helped Shrewsberry and his staff lock up Nije's commitment, but the relationship they had built with him and the belief they showed in him went a long way with the prospect.

"I thought it was a great fit for me," Nije said. "I really believe in what the coaches say they can do for me and how they can take my game to the next level and also how we can win. I really believe in what they can do and believe in what I can do."

BIG

2021 Standings

East Division

	Conf.		All		
	W	L	W	L	Pct.
Maryland	1	0	3	0	1.000
Michigan State	1	0	3	0	1.000
Penn State	1	0	3	0	1.000
Ohio State	1	0	2	1	.667
Indiana	1	1	1	2	.333
Michigan	0	0	3	0	1.000
Rutgers	0	0	3	0	1.000

West Division

	Conf.		All		
	W	L	W	L	Pct.
Iowa	1	0	3	0	1.000
Illinois	1	1	1	3	.250
Purdue	0	0	2	1	.667
Minnesota	0	1	2	1	.667
Nebraska	0	1	2	2	.500
Wisconsin	0	1	1	1	.500
Northwestern	0	1	1	2	.333

Sept. 11 Games

Virginia 42, Illinois 14
Minnesota 31, Miami (Ohio) 26
Northwestern 24, Indiana State 6
Michigan State 42, Youngstown State 14
Oregon 35, Ohio State 28
Rutgers 17, Syracuse 7
Purdue 49, UConn 0
Nebraska 28, Buffalo 3
Penn State 44, Ball State 13
Iowa 27, Iowa State 17
Wisconsin 34, Eastern Michigan 7
Indiana 56, Idaho 14
Maryland 62, Howard 0
Michigan 31, Washington 10

Sept. 17 Game

Maryland 20, Illinois 17

Sept. 18 Games

Oklahoma 23, Nebraska 16
Cincinnati 38, Indiana 24
Michigan 63, Northern Illinois 10
Michigan State 38, Miami (Fla.) 17
Minnesota 30, Colorado, 0
Notre Dame, 27, Purdue 13
Iowa 30, Kent State 7
Ohio State 41, Tulsa 20
Rutgers 45, Delaware 13
Duke 30, Northwestern 23
Penn State 28, Auburn 20

Sept. 25 Games

Bowling Green at Minnesota, Noon
Ohio at Northwestern, Noon
Villanova at Penn State, Noon
Wisconsin at Notre Dame, Noon
Illinois at Purdue, 3:30 p.m.
Colorado State at Iowa, 3:30 p.m.
Kent State at Maryland, 3:30 p.m.
Rutgers at Michigan, 3:30 p.m.
Nebraska at Michigan State, 7 p.m.
Akron at Ohio State, 7:30 p.m.
Indiana at Western Kentucky, 8 p.m.

Oct. 1 Game

Iowa at Maryland, 8 p.m.

Oct. 2 Games

Minnesota at Purdue, Noon
Northwestern at Nebraska, 7:30 p.m.
Western Ky. at Michigan State, 7:30 p.m.
Charlotte at Illinois, TBD
Michigan at Wisconsin, TBD
Indiana at Penn State, TBD
Ohio State at Rutgers, TBD

Nije joined Penn State's 2022 class already featuring Philadelphia Haverford three-star guard Jameel Brown, three-star forward Evan Mahaffey of Cincinnati Moeller and Woodstock (Va.) Massanutten Military Academy three-star guard Kanye Clary.

The commitment of Nije pushed Penn State's 2022 class to No. 9 in the country and No. 3 in the Big Ten behind only Ohio State and Indiana.

Shrewsbury will try to continue to reload his roster with a top-tier target in four-star guard Otega Owheh of Blairstown (N.J.) Blair Academy. Owheh, the brother of former PSU football star Odafe "Jayson" Owheh, is set to announce his decision Sept. 24.

Badgers Add Shooting Guard

The Wisconsin men's basketball team picked up a commitment to its 2022 class from Albion (Ind.) Central Noble shooting guard Connor Essegian.

The 6-4, 190-pounder chose the Badgers over Butler, Creighton, Minnesota, Wake Forest and several other programs.

"His first year, he was a catch-and-shoot

guy," said Central Noble head coach Josh Bodey. "His sophomore year, he added the drive to his game, and he got better defensively and got better from a rebounding standpoint – a better all-around game. Then, his junior year, he started shooting on the move really well. He has gotten better at each part of his game.

"And I think this summer I've noticed that he has added some explosiveness. He is not super-athletic, but he is explosive around the rim. He is sneaky athletic around the rim."

Essegian, who is 247Sports' No. 36 shooting guard in the country, saw the interest in his recruitment skyrocket this spring and summer.

"A lot of the coaches I had been talking to really wanted to see me in person," he said. "They wanted to see some of the things I can do off the ball. Once you see film, you see scoring and all that.

"But there are a lot of things I do off the ball that helped me get to where I am today, things like making plays for my teammates, going in and rebounding, making the extra pass for an open shot."

Wisconsin head coach Greg Gard could

add a second prospect to the 2022 class, and power forward Braden Huff of Carol Stream (Ill.) Glenbard West remains a top target.

Huff (6-9, 205) holds offers from Gonzaga, Michigan State, Virginia Tech, Northwestern, Vanderbilt, Creighton and several other programs. He has visited Northwestern, Virginia Tech and Vanderbilt and is scheduled to visit Gonzaga and Wisconsin in October.

Top Performers In Week Three

Michigan State quarterback Payton Thorne continued his strong play to start the 2021 campaign, leading the Spartans to a surprising 38-17 upset win against No. 24 Miami (Fla.). Thorne threw for 261 yards and four touchdowns on 18-of-31 passing.

Rutgers quarterback Noah Vedral helped lead Rutgers to a 3-0 start with a stellar performance in the Scarlet Knights' 45-13 victory against Delaware. Vedral completed 21 of 25 passes for 323 yards and two touchdowns. Rutgers is 3-0 for the first time since 2012.

Michigan tailback Blake Corum led the

way in a dominant showing from a rushing attack that amassed 373 yards and eight touchdowns during a 63-10 win against Northern Illinois. Corum gained 125 yards on 13 carries and scored three touchdowns.

Minnesota tailback Trey Potts stood out for the Golden Gophers during their 30-0 shutout of Colorado. The third-year sophomore running back tallied 121 yards and three touchdowns on 26 carries.

Iowa running back Tyler Goodson carried the load for the Hawkeyes during their 30-7 victory against Kent State, rushing for 153 yards and three touchdowns on 22 carries.

Although Northwestern ultimately lost a 30-23 decision to Duke, backup quarterback Andrew Marty deserves credit for sparking a comeback once the Wildcats fell behind 27-0 in the first half. A fifth-year senior from Cincinnati Wyoming, Marty completed 11 of 16 passes for 151 yards and two touchdowns, and he added seven rushes for 52 yards and another score. He stepped in for starter Hunter Johnson, who threw three interceptions with only 75 yards on 6-of-16 passing.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago – 1981

Ohio State scored a lot early and a little late and held on for dear life in between while registering a 27-13 win over Michigan State in Columbus on Sept. 13.

The Buckeyes ran up a 17-0 lead at the half, but through a combination of sporadic offense and a rejuvenated Michigan State defense, Ohio State needed a valiant late breakup of a John Leister pass to avert what could have been a score to tie the game at 20-20.

Sophomore defensive back Jeff Cisco was the man who saved the day for the Buckeyes, batting away a pass intended for Michigan State's Otis Grant deep in Ohio State territory to turn the ball back over to the Buckeye offense.

Backup quarterback Bob Atha, who was filling in for an injured Art Schlichter, capped the win, directing the offense into MSU territory and darting 27 yards through the Spartan defense to put the Buckeyes up 27-13 with just one minute remaining.

"I thought the Buckeyes played a very fine first half," OSU head coach Earle Bruce said. "The second half I thought was just the opposite. I think the Spartans played very well, executed well."

35 Years Ago – 1986

Some called it ho-hum, boring, terrible, sickening and ugly, but Bruce just called it a win for the Buckeyes as they held on to topple visiting Colorado, 13-10, on Sept. 20.

Freshman placekicker Pat O'Morrow, gaining a bit of redemption for an earlier miss, booted a 19-yard field goal with 25 seconds left to allow the Buckeyes to snap a two-game losing streak.

"We'll take that win," Bruce said. "It was a tough one. Colorado played really exceptionally well in the second half and moved the ball."

While Bruce credited the Buffaloes with moving the ball, it was a 13-play, 78-yard drive in the final five minutes of the game by his Buckeyes that led to the game-winning three-pointer.

30 Years Ago – 1991

Ohio State nearly allowed mistakes and self-inflicted wounds to tank its efforts against Louisville on Sept. 14 but managed to overcome its own issues to knock off the Cardinals, 23-15.

Topping the list of underachievements for the Buckeyes in the game were 15 penalties for a total of 118 yards. That set a school record for infractions and was only two short of the Big Ten mark of 17 penalties, held by Michigan State since 1957.

There were other shortcomings for the Buckeyes, such as failing to land the knockout punch against the Cardinals after taking a 16-0 lead at the beginning of the fourth quarter. Though the issues nearly cost Ohio State dearly in a game that it entered as 17-point favorites, the coaching staff felt it was a valuable.

"We're going to learn from this game," OSU offensive coordinator Elliot Uzelac said. "This game is going to teach us more than last week (when the Buckeyes routed Arizona, 38-14). We're going to learn a lot from this game."

25 Years Ago – 1996

Ohio State wasted no time establishing its dominance over

the outmanned Pitt Panthers, scoring touchdowns on the first six possessions of the game on the way to a 52-0 halftime lead and a 72-0 final.

The OSU defense overwhelmed Pitt's offense, holding it to just 120 total yards, forcing eight three-and-outs and leaving the Panthers with just 19:50 minutes of possession.

"We did pretty much what we wanted to do early in the game, jumped on them early and got the ballgame put away, and then had a chance to play all of the young football players we wanted to play," said Ohio State head coach John Cooper.

Everything went OSU's way to the point that freshman David Boston scored on a 66-yard punt return in the closing minutes when the Buckeyes had only eight men on the field.

"I can't tell you how good Ohio State is because we did not test them today," Pitt head coach Johnny Majors said. "They look like they have an outstanding football team.

"It was quite the disastrous afternoon for us."

20 Years Ago – 2001

Ohio State and UCLA met in the picturesque Rose Bowl on Sept. 22 but managed to create one ugly football game, at least for anyone not hunting for a low-scoring, defensive affair. The Bruins held Ohio State's offense down the entire game on the way to a 13-6 victory.

"I think sometimes people look at us and see those baby blue jerseys and don't think we're very physical," UCLA head coach Bob Toledo said. "But after we play, I think they realize we do have some physical football players."

The Bruins defense was the star of the show, holding Ohio State to just 166 total yards and eight first downs in the victory. On the other side of the ball, it was a frustrating afternoon for OSU head coach Jim Tressel, who saw his team unable to find the end zone despite four UCLA fumbles in its own territory.

"We probably had more opportunities than we deserved," said Tressel after his first loss as the Ohio State head coach. "They were all hurtful. We feel like we let the rest of the group down.

"I'm proud of the way our guys kept fighting. Despite the fact that we didn't move the football, this defense still came up with some stops to keep us in the game."

15 Years Ago – 2006

The high-powered Ohio State offensive machine put up enough points for a decisive victory against Cincinnati, but it slipped several times while shifting into high gear.

Ohio State stormed back from an early 7-3 deficit against the Bearcats to score 34 unanswered points en route to a 37-7 victory, but the outburst was marred by penalties, missed assignments and a generally lethargic showing.

The struggles did not escape the eyes of Tressel, who alluded to the frequent misfires in his opening statement following the game.

"It just didn't look to me like we had quite as much pep in our step as we came into this football game," Tressel said. "It just didn't seem like we were quite as explosive and flying around to the de-

gree that we like to."

10 Years Ago – 2011

Ohio State did not accomplish its first goal of the night nor many others en route to a 24-6 loss at Miami (Fla.) on Sept. 17.

Head coach Luke Fickell said he wanted to see his young Buckeyes start fast, but the famously speedy Hurricanes got the drop on them when running back Lamar Miller burst through the middle of the Ohio State line, cut back to his right and sped to a huge gain on Miami's first offensive play from scrimmage.

Three plays later, quarterback Jacory Harris dropped a pass between a pair of Ohio State defensive backs to receiver Allen Hurns for a 3-yard touchdown, giving the Hurricanes a lead they would not relinquish.

Five Years Ago – 2016

The first real test for an inexperienced Ohio State team – playing a ranked opponent in the first road game – was delayed 90 minutes at the start because of a thunderstorm, but when the ominous clouds exited Norman, Okla., the evening of Sept. 17, so did the Buckeyes' anxiety.

Jumping to a quick lead, the No. 3 Buckeyes used four touchdown passes by junior quarterback J.T. Barrett to sophomore wide receiver Noah Brown for a convincing 45-24 win against No. 14 Oklahoma.

"We have a young team," senior center and captain Pat Elflein said. "To see us do that well in such a hostile environment was pretty cool to see."

Brown, who missed the 2015 season because of a broken leg, had touchdown catches of 4, 37, 21 and 8 yards. The first three came in the first half, the last of which was a spectacular grab in the waning seconds that gave OSU a 35-17 lead into the break.

The four touchdown receptions tied a school record. Brown finished with five catches for 72 yards.

One Year Ago – 2020

The Big Ten announced Sept. 16 that its council of university presidents and chancellors had voted unanimously to resume the 2020 football season the weekend of Oct. 24.

The decision to reverse course came a little more than one month after the Big Ten announced Aug. 11 that it was postponing fall sports until the spring amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Things changed drastically when the conference's council of presidents and chancellors met remotely with the conference's return to competition task force Sept. 13 to discuss new testing programs that weren't available when the conference decided to postpone fall sports in mid-August.

During that meeting, the Big Ten's medical subcommittee – co-chaired by Ohio State team physician Dr. Jim Borchers and Penn State athletic director Sandy Barbour – presented the council with four new rapid-response antigen tests that would allow programs to conduct daily tests and decrease contact tracing.

Defensive Woes Could Have Recruiting Impact

Nearly all of the talk following Ohio State's 35-28 loss to Oregon on Sept. 11 surrounded the defense. There have been questions about the lack of pressure from the defensive line, about the linebackers seemingly confused about their assignments, and about a secondary that, while improved from 2020, is still inexperienced and mistake-prone.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Wyatt Crosher

Those questions about what was happening on the field led to questions given to head coach Ryan Day and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs off the field in the postgame press conference, with neither sounding enthusiastic about the performance their defense just put on display.

"I don't think there's any question that we have to do things differently going forward," Coombs said after the game. "Obviously the result today is not acceptable, and so we have to do things differently."

That led to more talk in Day's press conference three days after the loss, with some of his comments seeming to allude to Coombs' place on the coaching staff perhaps not being all that secure.

When asked about his confidence level in Coombs, the Ohio State head coach simply said, "It's not what we expect here, it's not our expectation." Ultimately, Day said that he wasn't sure if Coombs would be calling plays for the defense moving forward, and he had to eventually confirm that Coombs was still defensive coordinator for Ohio State.

While all of that is about what is happening on the field, Coombs' mistakes could cause a ripple effect of issues for Ohio State down the line. Of the Buckeyes' current 14 commitments in the 2022 class, six are expected to be for the defensive side of the ball – Little Elm, Texas, four-star cornerback Terrance Brooks; four-star cornerback Jyaire Brown of West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West; Kettering (Ohio) Archbishop Alter five-star linebacker C.J. Hicks; four-star linebacker Gabe Powers of Marysville, Ohio; Seffner (Fla.) Armwood three-star athlete Kye Stokes; and three-star cornerback Ryan Turner of Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep.

Lettermen Row recruiting analyst Jeremy Birmingham said that regardless of what happens with Coombs' future, simply seeing Ohio State look vulnerable on defense could have a two-pronged effect depending on the recruit.

"I think that anytime you're struggling, recruits can see it one of two ways," Birmingham said. "They can either see it as a problem that is not going away or they can

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
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
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

see it as an opportunity to get on the field faster at a place like Ohio State, which has sort of always been recession-proof when it comes to recruiting. But anytime you're dealing with potential staff changes or alignment changes as far as how you run the defense, then the messaging has to change."

When looking at Coombs specifically, Birmingham said there would be a different impact entirely if his coordinator duties were changed or if he was fired. Of those six defensive commits, Coombs is the primary recruiter for three of them – Brooks, Brown and Turner.

His departure could leave an impact with the commits Ohio State already has, but the larger impact, according to Birmingham, would likely be on targets who are currently considering Columbus as

their future destination.

"I don't think Ohio State is in any danger of losing commitments or that kind of stuff, but certainly if Kerry Coombs, who's one of the country's best recruiters, ends up not being at Ohio State next year, then there's going to be some conversations that are going to be difficult to have," Birmingham said. "But I don't think that's what they want to do. I think that they're trying to fix it without wholesale changes first because there's always a residual effect to recruiting in any decision that gets made."

Along that same mind-set, Ohio State would also be losing out on what is potentially Coombs' largest strength – his recruiting ability. Without Coombs, Birmingham said other programs would smell the proverbial blood in the water and seek out current OSU commits and targets.



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FILE PHOTO

STILL THE MAN - Although OSU defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs has had his play-calling duties taken away, he continues to remain an important part of the program's recruiting efforts, especially with regard to top-rated cornerback prospects.

The recruiting analyst added that, although the estimation of the Buckeyes' defensive coordinator might currently be low among Ohio State fans, that is likely not the same opinion held by recruits across the country.

"I think you'd have to look at any cornerback that's recruited by Ohio State and realize that most of them at this point are interested in the Buckeyes because of Coombs and his reputation as a developer of first-round talents at corner," Birmingham said. "Anyone that's committed, anyone that is a target, would be fair game for other programs because that would certainly be something they try to exploit."

"Ryan Day has no problem finding other good coaches, but those relationships matter, and again, Coombs' reputation as a

developer of cornerbacks hasn't taken any kind of hit."

Top DL Target Down To Two

One of Ohio State's top targets in the 2022 class recently gave the Buckeyes some very good news.

Following a Sept. 11 visit to OSU for the Oregon game, four-star defensive lineman Christen Miller of Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove told 247Sports that he is now down to just two schools – Georgia and Ohio State.

"I'm no longer considering USC," Miller said. "It's down to Ohio State and Georgia, and my last official visit will be to Georgia."

USC was among Miller's list of four finalists, which he released July 27. The other school mentioned was Oregon, which is also no longer being considered despite the victory the Ducks enjoyed against the Buckeyes during Miller's visit.

The Trojans dropping from consideration is seen as a huge step of progress for Ohio State toward securing the 6-4, 285-pound defensive lineman's commitment. Miller currently still has five crystal ball predictions on his recruiting page, but four of them were in favor of USC. Those all came between June 14 and July 5 of this year, meaning that Miller may have recently had a change of heart.

The lone other crystal ball is in favor of Georgia, but that prediction was made by Georgia Insider Kipp Adams, and it came back on Feb. 17. The prediction has just a five confidence level out of 10.

Miller is ranked the 19th-best defensive lineman and No. 111 overall prospect in the 2022 class. He would, as it stands, be Ohio State's first commitment for 2022 on the defensive line.

Day Talks About Recruiting Overseas

On his Sept. 16 radio show, Day was asked about freshman punter Jesse Mirco, who averaged 43.3 yards on three punts against Oregon. Even better, two of those punts pinned the Ducks back at their own 1-yard line.

Mirco was recruited out of ProKick Australia and was ranked the sixth-best punter in the 2021 class. He was also listed as the third-best player out of Australia, with a pair of punters – Mason Fletcher of Cincinnati and Isaac Pearson of Texas – edging him out.

With Mirco playing as a true freshman, Day said on the radio show that he had been impressed with how his 6-4, 220-pound punter had performed.

"So far, he has stepped in and done a good job. He made a couple of great punts for us," Day said. "He does a great job. You can tell he's been doing it his whole life. He's good at it."

Day also made sure to compliment long snapper Bradley Robinson, who is also Mirco's roommate, for his consistency in a position that is "kind of a thankless job at times."

The Ohio State head coach also discussed what it is like to try to recruit talent overseas, as he did with Mirco, and how the Buckeyes continue to look at any and all options.

Day and company showed interest in

RIG Academy's Theodor Melin Ohrstrom out of Sweden. Ohrstrom is a four-star tight end in the 2023 class who ranks as not only the top international player in the class, but as the No. 180 prospect overall. For contrast, the top international prospect in 2022 (athlete Oakie Salave'a from American Samoa) is not ranked in the 247Sports composite.

Ohrstrom ultimately committed to Texas A&M on Aug. 18, but he did have the Buckeyes and LSU among his top three.

"I would say just the winning culture they have, and the facilities were some of the best I have ever seen," Ohrstrom told Cleveland.com about Ohio State. "Obviously the coaching staff and the whole team was really impressive, but just the culture that they had, like their fight motto. I really liked Columbus, too, as a city. It was really cool."

With Mirco, Ohrstrom or any other target playing outside the United States, Day said he has to put more trust in outside sources, going off purely "film and people's

Continued On Page 28

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A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago - 1986

SuperPrep released its preseason All-American honors, including mention of a trio of Cincinnati Moeller stars - quarterback Scott Schaffner, fullback Steve Gahr and all-around athlete Ken Griffey Jr.

Several more Buckeye in-state targets joined those three on the list, including Anthony Morgan, a wide receiver at Cleveland John Adams, Mayfield tight end Dave Diebolt, Troy running back Mike Delwiche, Cincinnati CAPE running back Carlos Snow and Middletown running back Doug Lewis.

30 Years Ago - 1991

With tight end looking to be a major need for the following season, Ohio State was fortunate to have two of the nation's top prospects at that position living within Ohio's borders - Luke Fickell of Columbus DeSales and D.J. Jones of Lebanon.

The 6-4, 230-pound Fickell ran a 4.85 in the 40-yard dash, carried a 3.7 GPA and scored an 18 on the ACT. He listed Ohio State, Michigan, Penn State and Notre Dame as his top schools.

The 6-5, 253-pound Jones was considering Ohio State and Penn State, among others.

25 Years Ago - 1996

After months of evaluation and countless hours of film work, OSU quarterbacks coach Walt Harris was ready to go after his guy - or guys, rather.

The Buckeyes received verbal commitments from a pair of California's top high school quarterbacks within 24 hours of each other on Sept. 10-11.

According to reports, Harris emerged from an OSU staff meeting Sept. 9 and offered as many as four topflight quarterbacks scholarships with the qualifier that the Buckeyes had room to take only two - the first two to respond.

The first to commit was David Priestley of Cypress Brethren Christian. He was closely followed by Austin Moherman of Mission Viejo Capistrano Valley, making the duo the fifth and sixth pledges in Ohio State's 1997 recruiting class.

20 Years Ago - 2001

Ohio State heard potentially good news from wide receiver

Richard Washington of Fort Myers, Fla. "Ohio State is No. 1 right now, but I can't say who will end up No. 1," he said. "Georgia Tech is coming on strong. Georgia Tech and Florida State are tied for second."

The nation's No. 6 player at his position was also considering Tennessee.

Lancaster, Ohio, linebacker Bobby Carpenter called Ohio State his leader among a group of schools still vying for his services that included Northwestern, Notre Dame, Georgia Tech and Michigan State.

15 Years Ago - 2006

Ohio State cracked the list of top schools for four-star defensive lineman Cameron Heyward but was still fighting to get him signed up for an official visit to Columbus.

Rated the No. 4 player in Georgia, Heyward was a star for Suwanee Peachtree Ridge High School and the son of the late Craig "Ironhead" Heyward, a former All-American at Pittsburgh.

He listed nine schools left on his list with three as sure things for official visits - Florida, LSU and Tennessee. But OSU linebackers coach Luke Fickell had been in close contact with him in hopes of getting him on Ohio State's campus for one of the five available visits. Heyward, however, was noncommittal.

"I met (Fickell) when he came to our school in the spring," Heyward said. "I might visit there. I'm not sure."

10 Years Ago - 2011

Canton (Ohio) GlenOak running back Bri'onte Dunn had issued his verbal commitment to Ohio State nearly a year prior to the 2011 season, but the recruiting process of the five-star tailback didn't seem to be winding down.

Though Dunn maintained he was still committed to Ohio State, the 6-1, 215-pound prospect was keeping all of his options open, taking a trip to see Penn State on Sept. 10 in a nonconference matchup with Alabama.

He came away impressed, despite a 27-11 loss to the Crimson Tide.

"Penn State wants me to come back for an official visit, and I might do that," Dunn said. "I'm starting to feel pressured by all the

recruiting stuff, to be honest."

Five Years Ago - 2016

Emory Jones had nearly two full seasons of high school football left at Franklin (Ga.) Heard County, but his recruitment was all but over.

The four-star quarterback committed to Ohio State on July 29, and nothing had happened since to push him in any other direction. Jones told Chad Simmons, a recruiting analyst for Scout.com, that he didn't have plans to continue looking at other schools.

"I'm excited," Jones said. "I think I'm pretty done with everything right now. I feel like Ohio State is the place for me, and I feel very good about my decision."

The high school junior cited Ohio State's atmosphere and his interactions with head coach Urban Meyer and his staff as the main reasons for his commitment.

One Year Ago - 2020

As expected, the NCAA Division I Council extended the ongoing college football recruiting dead period through Jan. 1, 2021.

"While the council acknowledged and appreciates the growing desire to resume in-person recruiting by select coaches' associations, council members ultimately concluded the primary concern right now must be protecting the current student-athletes on our campuses," council chair and Pennsylvania athletic director M. Grace Calhoun said in a statement.

"We encourage our coaches to interact with prospective student-athletes virtually in this time period."

The dead period - which was originally put in place in March amid the coronavirus pandemic - prevented prospective student-athletes from conducting on-campus visits and coaches from attending their games or practices in the fall. Phone calls and virtual meetings were still allowed, however.

"We're able to stay in contact with a lot of the recruits," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "Some of the recruits don't have a season, either, so they're able to share in some of the things that they're doing. Some of them do. We're just continuing with the Zoom calls and the communication."

Continued From Page 27

reputation." He also said that, as a team, Ohio State will look at certain players and

have a "couple of groups that will identify talent."

So far, it has resulted in signing only Mirco, but if Ohrstrom's interest was an

indicator, overseas scouting could become much more significant for the Buckeyes in the near future.

OSU Makes Five-Star LB's List Of Top Schools

Since BSB last went to press, there was only one official release of top schools from a recruit that featured Ohio State, but it was a big one.

Denton (Texas) Billy Ryan five-star linebacker Anthony Hill included the Buckeyes among his top 12 schools, along with Alabama, Clemson, Florida State, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oklahoma, Penn State, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

Hill is ranked the top linebacker in the 2023 class. He is also listed as the third-best player in the state of Texas and No. 19 overall prospect in the class.

The 6-2, 225-pounder had a dominant season with Ryan last year, helping the Raiders to an undefeated season and the Class 5A-I state championship with 105 tackles (including 80 solo), 11 tackles for loss, three sacks, two forced fumbles and a pass breakup.

Hill earned his offer from Ohio State on Dec. 17, 2020, and told On3.com that he honors the defensive ability of each of the

teams remaining in the top 12.

"All 12 of these schools have an elite defense," he said. "I have a really good bond with each coach at every school on this list."

Hill does not have any crystal ball predictions at this point in his recruitment.

Bucks Give Trio Of D-Line Offers

Ohio State's defense was under criticism following its loss to Oregon, and maybe it was just a coincidence, but the following week the Buckeyes gave out offers to three players on the defensive side of the ball.

Tampa (Fla.) Catholic four-star linebacker Lewis Carter was one of those who received an Ohio State offer since BSB last went to print. The 6-0, 200-pound Carter ranks as the 10th-best linebacker and No. 112 overall prospect in the 2023 class.

Carter, who is also listed as simply an athlete on 247Sports, has offers from a multitude of programs, including Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, LSU, Penn State and Texas A&M.

Another of the offers went to four-star DL Kayden McDonald of Suwanee (Ga.)



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OSU vs. Rutgers-Sept. 30-Oct. 3- 3-night motorcoach trip to New York/Piscataway, N.J. with 3 nights accommodations in the heart of Manhattan at the Sheraton Times Square with breakfast daily, Tour of New York, game tickets in Ohio State section with transportation. Also offering land only package from Thurs, Sept. 30-Sun., Oct. 3 with 3 nights at the Sheraton Times Square with breakfast daily, airport transportation roundtrip, tour of the New York, game ticket and transportation.

OSU vs. Indiana- Oct. 22-24- 2-night motorcoach to French Lick, Indiana with accommodations at the French Lick Resort with visit to a horse farm in Kentucky and lunch at Churchill Downs enroute, game day roundtrip transportation from French Lick and game ticket in Ohio State section.

OSU vs. Nebraska-Nov 4-7 -5-night motorcoach trip with 1 overnight in each direction with accommodation for 1 night at Jumer's Rock Island Hotel and Casino in Rock Island, Illinois and 3 nights at the Embassy Suites in Omaha, Nebraska with breakfast

daily and city tour of Lincoln, game tickets in Ohio State section with transportation and 1 night on return at the Pair of Dice Hotel and Casino in East Peoria, Illinois on the return. Also offering air package or land only package from Thursday, Nov. 4-Sunday, Nov. 7 at the Embassy Suites in Omaha with breakfast daily, game tickets in Ohio State section with transportation and city tour of Lincoln. Air packages on Southwest Airlines roundtrip from/to Columbus to/from Omaha, Nebraska.

OSU vs. Michigan-"Big Game in the Big House"- Nov. 26-27- 1 night motorcoach trip with accommodations for Friday night at the MGM Resort and Casino in downtown Detroit including breakfast on Saturday and game tickets in Ohio State section at Michigan Stadium with return to Columbus when the game is over.

NFL Game- Cincinnati Bengals vs. Green Bay Packers-Oct. 10- Same day trip to Cincinnati by deluxe motorcoach to see the Bengals vs. Packers at the Bengals Stadium in Cincinnati. Game tickets are in Section 201 which is corner end-zone.

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Lettermen Row's Jeremy Birmingham

The Oregon game was a major recruiting day for Ohio State with the amount of visitors the Buckeyes saw come to Columbus. Is there another game on the schedule that you think will be the next big one for visits?

"I would lean toward the Maryland game on Oct. 9. I wouldn't be surprised if that week ends up being a night game just because Ohio State wants to have some sort of marquee game at home. Maryland will probably be one of those teams that people are viewing as a rising team at that point.

"And then the Penn State game will be a huge recruiting weekend. That's likely to be a noon game, but that one's going to be a huge weekend as well. That's really the next one that's circled as far as a big, big get-together for everyone."

The Buckeyes have not secured a commitment for the 2022 class since Englewood (Colo.) four-star offensive tackle George Fitzpatrick on July 9. What do you think is the reason for this over-two-month gap since the last commitment, and is there any reason for fans to be concerned about it?

"I think the concern is just that you've had a very defined group of top targets that you've been waiting on for a long time. Most of them waited 16 months to get to campus, and again, I don't think that anyone wants to hurry into a choice because of the way the COVID year went. I think that there's no reason to be concerned until those top targets are committing somewhere else.

"Your eggs are kind of in one proverbial basket for Ohio State when it comes to a handful of kids like Altoona (Iowa) Southeast Polk four-star safety Xavier Nwankpa or Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star safety Zion Branch and Greenwood (Ind.) four-star defensive lineman Caden Curry. All these kids are going to be around – they're all going to be on campus – but none of them have been able to see gameday experiences or anything like that. I think these recruits are just trying to make sure they get their money's worth, so to speak."

Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star wide receiver Carnell Tate recently said he would not be committing on the previously planned date of Oct. 8. What does that mean in terms of where Ohio State stands with the No. 58 overall prospect of the 2023 class?

"I don't think it changes a whole lot. From a recruit perspective, there's no real reason to make a decision that early if you still have any desire to visit other schools and see other places. Clearly, he had a decision date set because he knew in his mind where he wanted to go. But if it comes down to waiting longer to make that choice correctly, then why not?"

"It doesn't ultimately impact anything between him and Ohio State, in my opinion, who I think would have been the choice, but you do open the door for any other program. It is also just another opportunity for (wide receivers coach) Brian Hartline to keep recruiting and building a relationship because it's not like they're going to stop

recruiting him or slow down. I expect that he'll be in Columbus for a visit sometime in October, and then they'll keep pushing."

Five-star safety Sonny Styles of Pickerington (Ohio) Central has been the headliner for in-state recruits, but who else within the state of Ohio has stood out in the 2023 class? Also, who are some under-the-radar guys whom the Buckeyes have interest in?

"You look at players like Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star offensive lineman Josh Padilla, who has an Ohio State offer. He may not get all the hype that Styles does, but few people do. I think that Will-trell Hartson, the running back from Massillon Washington who visited Ohio State for the Oregon game and had (running backs coach) Tony Alford go out to see him at his high school two weeks ago, that's a kid that people could watch. I think there's a realistic opportunity for the Buckeyes to take two tailbacks in that class, and that would open up the door for him.

"But for most of these kids, especially in the '23 class, they're playing their junior season right now after the COVID year wiped away sophomore film for a lot of them or at least made it less impactful. I think that the evaluation period of that class has really just begun, so you'll see a lot of movement with that toward the end of this junior season."

North Gwinnett, the 35th-best defensive lineman and No. 239 overall prospect in the 2023 class. McDonald has offers from such other big-name schools as Georgia, Michigan, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

When speaking to Eleven Warriors, McDonald said that getting the Ohio State offer was a big, emotional moment for him.

"It's a blessing," he said. "I can't describe the feeling. I'm still happy."

He added that he had not only never been to Ohio State, he has never been to the state of Ohio and hopes to be able to go to Cedar Point whenever he makes a trip to the Buckeye State.

So far, the 6-3, 325-pound McDonald has a lone crystal ball prediction in favor of his in-state Bulldogs.

Finally, Washington (D.C.) Gonzaga defensive lineman Isaiah Neal also earned an

offer from the Buckeyes. He is not rated in the 247Sports composite but is listed as the 79th-best defensive lineman and fifth-best player from the District of Columbia in the site's in-house rankings.

The 6-3, 295-pound Neal does not have as many splashy offers at this point in his recruitment. He has picked up a handful of offers from big-time programs, though,

including ones from Boston College, Louisville, Maryland, Northwestern, Pittsburgh, Syracuse and West Virginia.

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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Brown Era At OSU Kicked Off With '41 Season

Throughout the 2021 football season, Buckeye Sports Bulletin will publish historical stories from seasons ending in the numeral "1." This week, BSB looks back at the 1941 season, the first under legendary coach Paul Brown.

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Paul Brown was a winner wherever he went. During a legendary football coaching career that spanned five decades, he won six consecutive Ohio high school championships at Massillon, four straight All-America Football Conference titles with the Cleveland Browns and three more championships when the Browns moved to the National Football League.

Yet Brown, one of the foremost innovators and tacticians the game has ever known, most cherished his three seasons as a college head coach at Ohio State. But it was a situation that almost never happened.

Because of Brown's overwhelming success at Massillon, where his teams fashioned an 80-8-2 record, including 35 consecutive victories during one stretch, many observers believed him a natural successor for Francis A. Schmidt, who had worn out his welcome as head coach at Ohio State.

Fresh off a successful five-year run at TCU, Schmidt had blown into Columbus in 1934 like a Texas tornado, becoming the first head coach of the Buckeyes to beat Michigan in each of his first three tries. But Schmidt, who began the tradition of passing out Gold Pants charms to his players after every victory over Michigan, was something of a mad scientist when it came to coaching, and his whirling-dervish approach quickly wore thin.

University officials knew they wanted rid of Schmidt, but they were looking for a coach who had already established himself in the college ranks and therefore opened a nationwide search that linked at least a dozen candidates to the vacancy. Those on the 11-man search committee seemed the least enthusiastic about Brown, especially since the 32-year-old had no previous coaching experience above the high school level. The age and inexperience arguments quickly melted away, however, when during the interview process, Brown detailed his innovative philosophy and attention to detail – the very antithesis of the wild, shoot-from-the-hip antics of Schmidt.

Brown was hired and immediately went to work overhauling every phase of the OSU program, including detailed practice schedules and assigning specific positions to be coached by his assistants, facets of today's coaching that are taken for granted.

"Complete organization in every phase of the game was the hallmark of Paul's coaching," Heisman Trophy-winning halfback Les Horvath told BSB in 1992. "Where Schmidt had more than 300 plays, Paul had very few. But those few were gradually expanded into groups that required each player to know the assignments of the other players on each offensive play or defensive alignment.

"In addition to athletic talent, Paul de-

manded intelligence, courage and dedication. The pre-practice sessions were much like a college classroom."

It was perhaps not a coincidence that Brown ran his program with the precision of a railroad. He was the son of railroad dispatcher Lester Browne – somewhere along the way, the "e" at the end of his surname mysteriously disappeared.

The elder Brown's job was to make sure the trains for the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad ran on time, and his meticulous attention to the tiniest detail rubbed off on his son. So, too, did the competitive nature of his mother, Ida, who excelled at gin rummy, euchre, pinochle and other card games in which strategy and sizing up one's opponent were the keys to victory.

When young Paul was only 9, the family moved from his birthplace in Norwalk to Massillon, and it changed his life forever. Norwalk was a small rural town located just 10 miles south of Lake Erie, founded by New England settlers and not unlike thousands of other communities dotting the Upper Midwest. Entertainment in Norwalk might include bluegill fishing along the Vermilion River, an afternoon hike through the woods at the edge of town, or listening to a band concert on a cool summer Saturday night.

An hour and a half to the southeast from the tranquility of Norwalk was Massillon, which would have been like any other grimy steel town with its fiery coal furnaces belching soot and smoke into a slate-gray sky except for its football team. Massillon featured big-time high school football, a sport Washington High School first offered in 1894. The Tigers produced their first undefeated season in 1909, and their first of a record 24 state championships came seven years later.

Brown's father hoped his son would become a lawyer while his mother wanted him to be a musician, but the youngster loved sports.

"I was just about 6 years old when my father bought me my first football," Brown said. "I used it until the bladder wore out, and then I stuffed it with rags and leaves and went on playing as if nothing had happened."

Brown entered high school in 1922, but because he weighed less than 150 pounds, he didn't even try out for the football team, joining the track team and focusing upon becoming a pole vaulter. When football coach Dave Stewart saw the youngster's analytic approach to the event, he persuaded Brown to come out for the football team. It proved a shrewd move on Stewart's part as Brown eventually became the starting quarterback for the Tigers and led them to a combined 15-3 record during his junior and season years.

Like many high school football players from Ohio, especially those from Massillon, Brown envisioned furthering his career at Ohio State. But when he showed up for his first freshman practice in the fall of 1925, coaches took one look at his smallish frame and shuffled him aside.

"I wasn't even allowed to try out," Brown remembered years later. "I was too small for that caliber of football, they told me, and it was a mortal blow to my pride. I con-



FILE PHOTO

COACHING LEGEND – Fresh off an ultra-successful run at Massillon (Ohio) High School, Paul Brown was hired as head coach at Ohio State in 1941. The legendary coach stayed only three years but produced the program's first-ever national championship before going on to lead the Cleveland Browns to multiple professional titles.

sidered their refusal to give me a tryout the cruelest injustice."

Ohio State's loss wound up being Miami University's gain. Brown transferred after his freshman year at OSU and became starting quarterback for the Redskins. He led his team to 14 victories during his final two seasons and earned second-team All-Ohio small-college honors as a senior.

Brown had every intention of following his father's wishes and pursuing a law degree upon his graduation, and he considered furthering his studies abroad, applying for a Rhodes scholarship. But his football roots had become too deep, and he began his coaching career in 1930 at a private high school in Maryland, hired at the tender age of 22.

His first team at Severn High School, a prep school for the United States Naval Academy, resulted in an undefeated season and the Maryland state championship. Two years later, he was back in Massillon, taking over a program that had grown fallow during the years after Stewart had left following the 1925 season.

Nine years and six state championships later, Brown was on the move again, this

time to Ohio State. Hired at 32, he became the youngest coach in the history of the Big Ten, earning a salary of \$6,500 per year.

"That was only about \$1,500 more than I had been making at Massillon," Brown said, "but that wasn't important. I don't believe I ever discussed salary (with OSU athletic director Lynn St. John). All my life, money had been a secondary thing. I needed it to provide the necessities for my family, but what counted was football. It was such an obsession for me that it never seemed like work."

Successful First Season

Brown was officially hired Jan. 14, 1941, and immediately set about to assemble a coaching staff. Accompanying him from Massillon were three assistants – Carroll Widdoes, Hugh McGranahan and Fritz Heisler – and he retained Fritz Mackey from Schmidt's staff. Mackey and Brown had been roommates at Ohio State in 1926 before Brown transferred to Miami.

His other two assistants came for the Ohio high school ranks – Trevor Rees, who had been head coach at East Cleveland Shaw as well as a star end for the Buck-

FLASHBACK: 1941 SEASON

eyes from 1933-35, and Paul Bixler, who had been an assistant at Canton McKinley, Brown's archrival at Massillon.

Curiosity began to build around Brown and his program, and a record crowd of 25,000 filed into Ohio Stadium for the annual spring game. In the fall, a small roster containing only 41 players – 13 seniors, four juniors and 24 sophomores – showed up at Brown's first camp.

The opening-day opponent was Missouri under veteran head coach Don Faurot, one of the finalists for the Ohio State job before it went to Brown. Faurot pulled out all the stops in order to try to prove the Buckeyes had made a mistake when they didn't hire him, but OSU got a pair of touchdowns from All-America fullback Jack Graf to squeak out a 12-7 win.

According to OSU football historian Jack Park, it was a victory Brown nearly didn't get to enjoy.

"When the team bus carrying the players and coaches arrived outside the stadium that morning, Brown stepped off to say hello to several Massillon friends who had come to wish him well," Park told BSB. "After several minutes, the new coach turned back toward the stadium gate, but the bus and its police escort had already pulled inside and the gate had closed behind them."

Brown approached the guard at the gate, who asked to see his ticket. When Brown informed the guard that he was the new coach, the guard replied, "Right. And I'm President Roosevelt. Listen, Sonny, if you want to see the game, you have to have a ticket."

Realizing the guard was serious, Brown walked hurriedly to the stadium's southwest corner below the Ohio State locker room and began throwing pebbles against the windows. When a trainer finally peered down, Brown yelled, "Send someone down here who can get me through the gate!"

The trainer ran down to the gate attendant to assure him that Brown was really the new head coach of the Buckeyes. Only then did Brown gain entrance to the stadium for the game against Missouri.

The following week, Ohio State traveled to the West Coast and came home with a stunning 33-0 upset of USC in front of 65,000 fans at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The win was a program-first win for the Buckeyes against any team from the West Coast and the first shutout suffered by the Trojans in 11 years.

After a week off, the Buckeyes squeezed out a 16-14 victory against Purdue before hosting No. 13-ranked Northwestern. Brown and his new staff had attended a coaching clinic hosted by Wildcats head coach Lynn "Pappy" Waldorf the previous spring, but it was obvious Waldorf didn't divulge all of his secrets during the session. Behind sophomore tailback Otto Graham, Northwestern carved out a 14-7 win before an Ohio Stadium crowd of 71,896.

Brown never forgot how Graham had played that day against his team, and five years later when he had accepted an offer to coach Cleveland's new franchise in the All-America Football Conference, Brown contacted Graham to ask if he would like to lead the new team. Graham accepted the offer, became the first player to sign a contract with the new Cleveland Browns and then led them to seven league championships.

Meanwhile, the Buckeyes rebounded from the Northwestern loss to string together three consecutive victories – 21-14 at Pittsburgh, 46-34 vs. Wisconsin and 12-7 against Illinois – to set up what had become the traditional regular-season finale against Michigan.

Because of injuries, Brown had only 36 players dressed for the game, but the Buckeyes put up a valiant effort just one year after suffering a 40-0 home loss to their archrivals. The game was tied 7-7 at half-time and 14-14 after three quarters before Ohio State marched 96 yards to take a 20-14 lead early in the fourth quarter.

Graf, who had scored each of OSU's first two touchdowns, flipped a short pass to halfback Dick Fisher, who bolted to the end zone to finish the 52-yard scoring play. Unfortunately, the Buckeyes missed the extra point, leaving them with a 20-14 lead.

Michigan took the ensuing kickoff and proceeded on a touchdown march of its own, but the fifth-ranked Wolverines also missed the PAT kick, and the game ended in a 20-20 tie. It was the first tie between the rivals since 1912 when Ohio State entered the Big Ten and one of only six games in the series to end deadlocked. The last was a 13-13 tie in 1992, an outcome then-university president Dr. E. Gordon Gee referred to as "one of our greatest victories."

After the season, Ohio State finished No. 13 in the final rankings from The Associated Press, Graf was named Big Ten MVP, and Brown finished fourth in voting for national coach of the year honors behind Frank Leahy of Notre Dame, Minnesota's Bernie Bierman, who led the Gophers to a conference title as well as a second consecutive national championship, and Earl Blake of Army.

Just 15 days after the Ohio State-Michigan game, however, college football was the furthest thing from anyone's mind. On Dec. 7, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, and the world became a much different place.

No Intention To Return

Amid the chaos that surrounded the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, the college football landscape began to change as many able-bodied young men volunteered for military service to fight in World War II. The mass exodus would not begin for another year, however, and Brown took full advantage in 1942 to produce the first national championship in Ohio State football history.

After that season, influential donors and alumni – many who had questioned Brown's relative youth when he was hired – implored St. John and university president Howard Bevis to give Brown a lifetime contract, an offer Brown later intimated he might have accepted had it been extended.

But as the war raged throughout Europe and the Pacific, college football became something of an afterthought. College and university presidents came close to canceling the 1943 season but decided against that idea and allowed games to proceed as a morale-booster for the country. The college game became a shadow of itself, however, with most of the best players either serving overseas or at one of several training facilities stateside.

Ohio State finished with a 3-6 record for the 1943 season, and a few months later

Brown was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Navy with the caveat that Ohio State would keep its head coaching job open so he could resume his duties after the war. But that 1943 season had left a bitter taste in the coach's mouth.

"Not only were we being unfair to a group of 17-year-old kids, we were exposing them to serious injury whenever we played much bigger, older and stronger opponents," Brown said years later. "My sense of justice and personal pride rebelled at these inequities, and I didn't spare Mr. St. John my feelings. His justification was that we were performing a service to intercollegiate football and saving the program at Ohio State. In reality, we were providing money for the athletic department, and while we may have kept the continuity of Ohio State's football program, it was at the personal expense of those kids."

"What made the situation worse was that no one ever appreciated what those kids went through. Actually, those Baby Bucks were a victim of the war, but I never could reconcile myself to the fact that the university never even bothered to give them a year-end football banquet. It angered me so much that it influenced my decision to go into professional football instead of returning to Ohio State after the war."

Brown was given the honorary title of "head coach in absentia" with most alumni and fans believing he would return to the Buckeyes following his military service. But in February 1945, he chose to become vice president, general manager and head coach for the Cleveland team in the upstart All-America Football Conference. The news sent shock waves through Columbus with several university officials and influential donors claiming Brown had reneged on his promise to return to Ohio State.

The university changed coaches four times during an eight-year span between 1944 and 1951, and while Brown was always mentioned as a leading candidate to fill the vacancy, he never wavered.

"I was constantly being touted as the next head coach, but I was with the Browns

then and had no intentions of leaving," he said. "Every time my name came up, however, friction arose between some factions at Ohio State and among the alumni, some of whom never forgave me for not returning as head coach after the war."

Brown coached Cleveland to four consecutive AAFC championships from 1946-49, a successful run that continued when the Browns joined the NFL for the 1950 season. The team played in the championship game in each of its first six years in the league and took home three titles. Brown left the Browns following the 1962 season, but he resurfaced six years later as head coach and general manager of the expansion Cincinnati Bengals and led that team to an American Football Conference Central Division championship in only its third year of existence.

Brown finally retired from coaching following the 1975 season, finishing his 40-year career with a combined high school, college and professional record of 338-127-15. Yet for all of his success at every level, it was those three seasons at Ohio State that he seemed to cherish most.

"He always had a warm spot in his heart for Ohio State," wrote longtime Columbus Dispatch sportswriter Paul Hornung wrote in 1994. "He still said that right up until a couple of weeks before he died. I talked to him about it and he said, 'Those were the happiest days of my life, the happiest days of my coaching career.'"

Although he admittedly never got over how his final season in Columbus played out, Brown wrote in his 1979 autobiography, "I have warm, fond memories of my time at Ohio State. My first two years there were the happiest, most exciting and rewarding period of my life, better in some respects than the great years in Cleveland because coaching the Buckeyes had been my ultimate dream."

"Ohio State was all that I had ever imagined, and the sweet taste of those first two years still lingers."



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Duke, UK Highlight OSU's Nonconference Slate

The first day of fall on Sept. 22 could mean only one thing, right? Basketball season is around the corner.

Well, only real hoop heads would think that, but it's true that the Ohio State men's team will officially begin practice for its 2021-22 season the last week of this month. Before you know it, the Buckeyes (21-10, 12-8 Big Ten last season) will play a Nov. 1 exhibition in Value City Arena vs. Indianapolis before embarking on the nonconference schedule that includes blue bloods Duke and Kentucky as well as a trio of in-state opponents.

COURT REPORT Craig Merz

Here is a quick look at whom the Buckeyes will play outside of their 20-game Big Ten schedule.

Nov. 9 – Akron (15-8, 12-6 MAC last season): Ohio State owns a 7-1 record against the Zips and won the last meeting, 72-63, in overtime in the 2016 National Invitation Tournament. Akron head coach John Groce will start his fifth season after previous stops that included Illinois and Ohio. Groce said in a release that playing a tough foe such as the Buckeyes is beneficial.

"It is important for our program to be tested and challenged by quality opponents with different styles of play during the nonconference portion of our schedule," he said. "The ultimate goal is to prepare our team/players for the rigors of Mid-American Conference play, and we believe we have built the schedule to reflect that challenge."

Nov. 12 – Niagara (9-11, 7-9 MAAC): Buckeye fans will see a familiar face on the bench for the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference program. Greg Paulus, on the OSU staff for six years under former head coach Thad Matta, joined the Purple Eagles as an assistant coach in May 2019 and was elevated to head coach six months later after Patrick Beilein resigned for personal reasons.

Paulus, a starting point guard at Duke for legendary coach Mike Krzyzewski, was the recipient of the 2019-20 Joe B. Hall National Coach of the Year Award, which is presented annually to the top first-year coach in NCAA Division I college basketball. Niagara was 12-20 that season. Paulus was Ohio State's video coordinator from 2011-13 and an assistant his final four years while helping sign top-10 recruiting classes in 2014 and '15.

This will be the first-ever meeting for the programs.

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
Felix Okpara	C	6-11	210	★★★★	Chattanooga (Tn.) Hamilton Hts. Christian
Bruce Thornton	PG	6-2	205	★★★★	Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton

Nov. 15 – Bowling Green (14-12, 10-8 MAC): The Buckeyes hold a 4-2 mark vs. the Falcons, winning the last encounter by a 61-57 final on Nov. 24, 2008.

"We will test ourselves early by opening the season with a true road game at Western Carolina," BG head coach Michael Huger said of the Nov. 9 season opener. "Shortly after returning, we will take on Ohio State, which will be a great measuring stick for our team."

Nov. 18 – At Xavier (13-8, 6-7 Big East): The Buckeyes hit the road for the first time for what will be a hostile environment for the Gavitt Tipoff Games, played between the two conferences and named in honor of Hall of Famer Dave Gavitt, founder of the Big East.

Ohio State leads the series, 3-1. The Buckeyes won at Xavier in January 1933 (31-19) and December 1933 (31-28). Xavier won, 60-57 in overtime, in the first round of the 1984 NIT, and the Buckeyes claimed a 78-71 OT win in the second round of the 2007 NCAA Tournament in Lexington, Ky., tying it at the end of regulation on a memorable Ron Lewis three-pointer. That win help catapult the Buckeyes to the Final Four.

Xavier has won 11 of its past 14 games vs. Big Ten opponents, defeating eight different teams.

Nov. 22 – Vs. Seton Hall (14-13, 10-9 Big East): The teams will square off on a neutral floor at the Fort Myers (Fla.) Tip-Off. The Buckeyes lead the series, 3-2, but haven't played the Pirates since a 75-79 loss at Seton Hall in 2003.

There are two interesting connections between the programs. New OSU assistant coach Tony Skinn spent the previous three seasons at Seton Hall. Also, Ohio State's Seth Towns and Seton Hall's Bryce Aiken were teammates at Harvard from 2016-20. Towns will not play because of back surgery.

The Pirates return four of their top six scorers and brought in four transfers who combined for more than 1,400 career points.

Nov. 24 – Vs. California (9-20, 3-17 Pac 12) or Florida (15-10, 9-7 SEC): The opponent will be based on results of the Nov. 22 games in Fort Myers with all games played at the Suncoast Credit Union Arena on the campus of Florida SouthWestern State College.

Ohio State is 8-5 vs. Florida, including an 84-75 loss in the 2007 national title game. The

Gators won the last meeting, 74-66, in the second round of the 2016 NIT.

OSU is 9-9 vs. Cal. The Buckeyes won, 76-70, on Nov. 20, 2009. Ohio State fifth-year senior forward Justice Sueing played his first two seasons for the Bears.

Nov. 30 – Duke (13-11, 9-9 ACC): Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann will face Krzyzewski for the first time in his career as part of the annual ACC-Big Ten Challenge. The 74-year-old Duke coach is scheduled to retire after the season.

The Blue Devils lead the series, 4-3, and won the most recent meeting, a 73-68 decision in Durham, N.C., in 2012.

OSU is 8-11 all-time in the challenge. The Buckeyes beat North Carolina (74-49) two years ago and last season downed Notre Dame (90-85).

Dec. 8 – Towson (4-14, 3-9 CAA): The game is sandwiched between the Big Ten opener on Dec. 5 at Penn State and the Dec. 11 conference home opener vs. Wisconsin.

Ohio State is 2-0 vs. Towson of the Colonial Athletic Conference. The Buckeyes won a 97-86 decision in the 1991 Midwest Regional first round and captured a 74-53 victory in 2004 in what was Matta's Buckeye debut.

"The schedule we put together for our nonconference slate will certainly prepare us for CAA play," Towson head coach Pat Skerry said.

Dec. 18 – Vs. Kentucky (9-16, 8-9 SEC): The teams will play in the CBS Sports Classic at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas following the UCLA-North Carolina opener.

While Kentucky leads the series, 11-10, the Buckeyes have won the past two matchups – both in the CBS Sports Classic. In 2019, No. 5 Ohio State won, 71-65, behind 13 points from D.J. Carton and 12 from Kaleb Wesson. Four years earlier, unranked OSU registered a 74-67 upset of No. 4 Kentucky in Brooklyn, N.Y. OSU is 4-3 in the event, while Kentucky is 3-4.

The Wildcats' roster has a sixth-year graduate, a fifth-year graduate, a redshirt junior, six juniors, a redshirt sophomore, two sophomores and three consensus four- or five-star prospects – Daimion Collins, Bryce Hopkins and TyTy Washington.

Dec. 21 – Tennessee Martin (8-16, 6-14 OVC): The only prior meeting didn't go well for the visitors when the second-ranked Buckeyes rolled to a 100-40 victory at VCA on Dec. 27, 2010.

The Skyhawks will be led by first-year head coach Ryan Ridder, who comes to Tennessee Martin after three seasons at Bethune-Cookman, where he posted a 48-45 record.

Dec. 28 – New Orleans (10-15, 8-7 Southland Conference): The only previous meeting was a 74-66 win for OSU at the Sugar Bowl Basketball Tournament at the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans on Dec. 28, 1989. The Privateers also have nonleague games against Ole Miss, Northwestern, Texas A&M and Utah State.

"This is possibly one of the most exciting

2021-22 OSU Men's Basketball Schedule

Date	Opponent
Nov. 1	Indianapolis (Exh.)
Nov. 9	Akron
Nov. 12	Niagara
Nov. 15	Bowling Green ^
Nov. 18	at Xavier #
Nov. 22	at Seton Hall ^
Nov. 24	at Florida/Cal ^
Nov. 30	Duke*
Dec. 5	at Penn State
Dec. 8	Towson
Dec. 11	Wisconsin
Dec. 18	at Kentucky \$
Dec. 21	Tennessee Martin
Dec. 28	New Orleans
Jan. 2	at Nebraska
Jan. 6	at Indiana
Jan. 9	Northwestern
Jan. 13	at Wisconsin
Jan. 16	Penn State
Jan. 22	Nebraska
Jan. 27	at Minnesota
Jan. 30	at Purdue
Feb. 3	Iowa
Feb. 6	Maryland
Feb. 9	at Rutgers
Feb. 12	at Michigan
Feb. 15	Minnesota
Feb. 19	Indiana
Feb. 24	at Illinois
Feb. 27	at Maryland
March 3	Michigan State
March 6	Michigan
^ – Fort Myers Tip-Off	
# – Gavitt Tipoff Games	
* – Big Ten/ACC Challenge	
\$ – CBS Sports Classic at Las Vegas	

nonconference schedules we have had in our tenure," New Orleans head coach Mark Slessinger said.

Recruiting News

Orlando (Fla.) Lake Highland Prep four-star forward Brice Sensabaugh (6-4, 240) was in Columbus for the Tulsa football game on Sept. 18. He was offered Aug. 20, and the Buckeyes are on his final list that includes Alabama, Florida and Georgia Tech.

Sensabaugh is rated 75th nationally in the latest 247Sports composite rankings. Holtmann visited with his family in Orlando the week before his visit, and Sensabaugh's father attended OSU and has relatives in Columbus.

Sensabaugh would add to the top-ranked 2022 class and would ease the pain of potentially losing out on five-star small forward Dillon Mitchell, who is considering signing a professional contract with the new Overtime Elite development league.

Mitchell was thought to be an Ohio State lean at one point, and 247Sports still has Auburn, Florida State, Illinois and Tennessee in the mix.

Also, 2023 Christian Academy of Louisville (Ky.) combo guard George Washington III is expected to visit for the Sept. 25 Akron football game.

Washington (6-2, 165) is ranked 42nd nationally and ninth at his position. OSU assistant coach Chris Pedon watched him practice at his school Sept. 9. On June 15, the Buckeyes were the first school to offer Washington. Louisville and Tennessee are said to be contenders for his services as well.

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McGuff Looking Forward To Upcoming Season

The Ohio State women's basketball team announced its full 2021-22 season schedule on Sept. 8. While a schedule release is always exciting for a team, this one might hold some added weight when looking at a season in which the Buckeyes – at least to this point – are eligible to make the NCAA tournament, something that has been taken away from them the past two years.

In 2019-20, the Buckeyes made a run to the Big Ten tournament championship game to seal a spot in the NCAA tourney before it was canceled due to COVID-19. Last year, Ohio State was ranked in the top 25 all season but was ineligible due to a postseason ban from the Patrick Klein investigation.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

The Buckeyes open their season, following an exhibition against Slippery Rock, with a home matchup against Bucknell on Nov. 10. That starts a run of five straight home games to open the season, ending with a matchup against in-state opponent Cincinnati at the Covelli Center.

The marquee nonconference game is Dec. 19 against UCLA, which went 17-6 a year ago. Two days later, Ohio State travels down the coast to face a San Diego State team that struggled last season.

"We've always been fairly aggressive with our nonconference scheduling, and this year is no different," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff told BSB. "We have a lot of great teams on there, and it will certainly be a challenge for us. Also, I think it will be good preparation for what's going to be one of the best years the Big Ten has ever seen."

Speaking of the Big Ten, Ohio State opens conference play on the road against Purdue, a team that struggled for most of last season with a 4-14 league record. The first major home game on the schedule is a Dec. 12 battle with Indiana, which went 16-2 in the conference in 2020-21, with one of those losses coming against the Buckeyes.

The Hoosiers are one of four teams OSU will have only a home game against. The others – Nebraska, Penn State and Wisconsin – finished ninth, 11th and 14th in the conference, respectively last season.

But the Cornhuskers, Nittany Lions and Badgers each have something else in common – they each defeated Ohio State in 2020-

21. That level of talent from the bottom half of the conference was evident to McGuff, and he thinks it is only getting more difficult this season.

When asked about which part of the Big Ten slate he thinks looks specifically difficult, his answer was easy.

"The whole thing," McGuff said. "I mean, last year was one of the best seasons we've ever had as a conference. With so many great players returning, I think this year will be even better and more challenging, so I just think overall it's going to be a very difficult Big Ten season."

Looking deeper at the conference schedule, Ohio State plays defending Big Ten champion Maryland twice – first on Jan. 20 and then on the road Feb. 17. While the Terrapins are the top team the Buckeyes get two times, they also get a familiar foe in Michigan a pair of times.

Former U-M assistant and new Ohio State assistant Wes Brooks will get to face his former team on New Year's Eve and again on Jan. 27. The Buckeyes defeated both the Terrapins and Wolverines once last season, going 1-0 against Maryland and 1-1 against Michigan.

Rutgers finished third in the Big Ten a year ago and will also face Ohio State twice, but thanks to the WNBA draft and the transfer portal, the Scarlet Knights lost their top five scorers from a year ago. Illinois and Michigan State are the other two teams the Buckeyes will get both at home and away.

The away-only matchups for Ohio State are against Purdue to begin conference play, then against Northwestern on Jan. 9, Minnesota on Jan. 15 and Iowa on Jan. 31. The Hawkeyes have reigning Big Ten Freshman of the Year Caitlin Clark returning to their roster. She led the nation in scoring last year with 26.6 points per game.

Henderson Joins Team In January

With just 13 players, 12 of whom are active for this upcoming season, Ohio State will be adding another player to its roster midway through the season. Kaia Henderson, a 2022 commitment out of New Hartford, N.Y., announced via Twitter that she would be enrolling early with the Buckeyes starting Jan. 1.

Henderson, a 5-6 guard, is New Hartford's all-time leading scorer. She averaged 33 points a game as a junior, though it did come in only six games during a COVID-shortened season. She had offers from a variety of schools, including Rhode Island, St. Bonaventure, Syracuse and Virginia Tech.

Her ability to score should fit well with the fast-paced offense McGuff likes to run. The Buckeyes finished 15th in the country with 76.3 possessions per 40 minutes in 2020-21,

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

according to Her Hoops Stats, and should be even faster with such a guard-heavy lineup.

"She's ecstatic," Matt Oswalt, program director for Henderson's AAU team, the Syracuse Royals, told the Utica Observer-Dispatch about her commitment to Ohio State. "I think the way they run things and the way they do things, there's just a fit for her."

With the move, the Buckeyes are down to two commitments for the 2022 class, both from Ohio – four-star guard Cotie McMahon of Centerville and guard Mya Perry of Reynoldsburg.

McGuff is unable to comment on the move by Henderson until she enrolls at the university.

Prahalis Inducted Into Hall Of Fame

Former Ohio State women's basketball star Samantha Prahalis was one of 12 Buckeye alums honored Sept. 10 as inductees for the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame.

While the group of honorees was selected in 2020, formal induction ceremonies were postponed due to the pandemic. As a result, the inductees were honored during a Sept. 10 ceremony at the Covelli Center and then recognized at halftime of the OSU-Oregon football game at Ohio Stadium a day later.

"I'm so honored and grateful for this," Prahalis said during the Sept. 10 ceremony. "It's a blessing. I want to pay homage to the 13 women's basketball inductees that came before me. I am super-pumped to be No. 14, I'm honored to be No. 14, and thank you for paving the way for me."

Prahalis, described as "Pistol Pete with a ponytail" when she was recruited to Ohio State, was a two-time All-American during her time with the Buckeyes, finishing with 901 career assists, still the most in Big Ten history. She ranks in the top 10 in program history in points, assists, steals, field goals, three-pointers made and free throws, and she was named Big Ten Player of the Year in 2011-12 after averaging 19.8 points, 4.1 rebounds and 6.3 assists per game.

The Commack, N.Y., native was known not only for her ability on the court, but also the passion and energy with which she played, something Prahalis acknowledged in her speech.

"I want to thank the OSU fans and community for accepting a crazy kid from New York in 2008 and making it a great four years for me," she said.

Prahalis also made sure to give her thanks to Jim Foster, who was head coach throughout her tenure with the Buckeyes, which included four NCAA tournament appearances, three Big Ten tournament championships and two regular-season conference titles.

"Coach Foster's my guy," Prahalis said. "There are not many players that can play for a legendary coach like him. He not only taught me the game of basketball, but he taught me

the game of life as well. I am a huge person on trust and loyalty, and he never wavered for me one time. Whether I scored 50 or had a terrible game, he never, ever wavered and was always in my corner."

Smith Named One Of WNBA's Best

Katie Smith, another Ohio State Athletics Hall of Famer, was recently named one of the 25 best WNBA players of all time.

Smith was listed on "The W25," a list produced by a "select panel of media members and women's basketball pioneers and advocates," according to a news release. The list was compiled to honor the WNBA's 25th season.

In her four years with the Buckeyes, Smith broke what was then the Big Ten scoring record for men or women with 2,578 points. She also helped lead Ohio State to the national championship game during her freshman season and earned the conference's player of the year award as a senior.

Smith continued that dominance after leaving OSU, first in the American Basketball League, helping the Columbus Quest earn championships in each of her two seasons, and then in the WNBA. Smith spent 15 seasons in the league, tallied 6,452 points and was a seven-time all-star and a two-time champion, each of which came with the Detroit Shock.

The top-25 ranking, which will be determined by fan vote, will be released during the WNBA finals. The league playoffs begin Sept. 23.

2021-22 OSU Women's Basketball Schedule

Date	Opponent
Nov. 3	Slippery Rock (Exh.)
Nov. 10	Bucknell
Nov. 14	Norfolk State
Nov. 17	Bowling Green
Nov. 23	Bellarmine
Nov. 27	Cincinnati
Dec. 1	at Syracuse
Dec. 5	at Purdue
Dec. 7	Mount St. Mary's
Dec. 12	Indiana
Dec. 15	Alabama State
Dec. 19	at UCLA
Dec. 21	at San Diego State
Dec. 31	at Michigan
Jan. 3	Penn State
Jan. 6	Illinois
Jan. 9	at Northwestern
Jan. 12	Michigan State
Jan. 15	at Minnesota
Jan. 20	Maryland
Jan. 23	at Rutgers
Jan. 27	Michigan
Jan. 31	at Iowa
Feb. 7	Rutgers
Feb. 10	Nebraska
Feb. 14	at Illinois
Feb. 17	at Maryland
Feb. 20	Wisconsin
Feb. 27	Michigan State




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Kids 14 & younger



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- Post-Game Fireworks Show, presented by Adams Recovery Center

SATURDAY // 2:10

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SUNDAY // 1:10

- Family Sunday, presented by Klosterman Bakery
- Eugenio Suárez Fathead® Kids Giveaway, presented by Great Clips
Kids 14 & younger



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Field Hockey Team Relying On Veteran Leaders

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After the Ohio State field hockey team won seven of its final nine games last season and finished runner-up at the Big Ten championships, head coach Jarred Martin believed his team had only started to realize its potential.

And the coach has been proven correct.

Through the first seven games this season, the Buckeyes have continued to build on what they started at the end of last year. Ohio State had a 6-1 record through Sept. 18 with victories against Ball State, Lafayette, Miami (Ohio), Wake Forest, Appalachian State and Michigan State.

"Every weekend, I feel like we are getting better and better," Martin said. "That's all we can ask for. It's nice to have victories, but we are looking for progress. That's all we want to make sure we are seeing – that we are better than we were last weekend."

Martin said the team made great strides during the offseason, in large part due to veteran leadership. He relied on junior midfielder Leanne Bough, senior midfielder Emma Goldean and senior goalkeeper Aaliyah Hernandez to serve as role models for their teammates during training and workouts.

Through their first seven games, Bough led the team with five goals – one-third of Ohio State's goal total this year – and 10 points. The Whitney Point, N.Y., native settled into a goal-scoring role as a sophomore, albeit with hesitancy. Now in her third season with the Buckeyes, Bough looks confident with every shot, expecting the ball to go into the net.

"Leanne's been unbelievable to start the season," Martin said. "She is a workhorse. The kid never stops. She will always stay in, and she wants to be around the play, and I want her to be around the play because she is talented. She is one of our best players. She's scoring goals and playing well. I think she's holding down the midfield with our senior captain Emma Goldean."

Like her teammate Bough, Goldean didn't become an offensive threat until last season. In the spring, she paced the Buckeyes with four goals, six assists and 14 points. This year, Goldean was third on the team in goals and points and third in assists through those first seven games.

"Those two have worked together for the last couple of years now, and it's just been a force," Martin said. "Going into every game, I feel like those two can control the center of the field, create things on offense and play



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

ONE FOR ALL - Members of the Ohio State field hockey team have developed the kind of camaraderie that translates into success. The Buckeyes have parlayed success at the tail end of last season into several important victories at the beginning of this campaign.

hard on defense."

Bough believes her strong start to the season is a product of the teammates around her. Without them, she wouldn't have the chance to score goals and put Ohio State in a position to win.

Goldean, senior forward Sammy Stone, junior back Delaney Lawler and freshman midfielder Hallie Brost have each recorded assists to at least one of Bough's goals this season. Only one of Bough's goals went unassisted, and it was the game-winner Sept. 10 against then-No. 14 Wake Forest.

"I have enjoyed working with our forwards and being able to attack more this season," Bough said. "I think we have been really successful at sustaining pressure and attack on our opponents, resulting in goals and opportunities for my teammates and me."

Hernandez is the third-most experienced player on the Ohio State roster with 49 games played, trailing only senior forwards Katie Pyle (54) and Tess Maloney (51). Through the first seven games, she

had made 24 saves for a 77.4-percent save percentage.

The senior goalkeeper made a combined 13 saves against Wake Forest and Appalachian State – 10 against the Demon Deacons, including five in the fourth quarter, before stopping three shots vs. the Mountaineers. As a result, the Big Ten and National Field Hockey Coaches Association named her defensive player of the week for her efforts.

"She's been playing well," Martin said. "It's good to see what people see on paper after games. It is a result of a lot of hard work that she's put in. You don't see the hours and the focus she puts into her abilities and success. She works hard. She watches film, puts in extra time, and it makes it easy for me to be proud. I appreciate what she is doing with our defensive unit."

Bough said she is also proud of Hernandez and her performance over the first seven games. She was also quick to recognize the entire goalkeeping unit for how they support one another and want to make each other better.

"Aaliyah has had a great start to the season," Bough said. "She is constantly challenging herself and making everyone around her better, which makes all of us want to work hard defensively. It is good to know we have her back there to make crucial saves when needed. Aaliyah, Abby Danson and Rachel Levan are all constantly pushing each other to get better, and I think that has shown through these last couple of games."

With a high-powered offense and rock-solid defense, Martin is excited for

what the team can do on the field the rest of the season. However, he said the program's success at the end of the season would be determined by how the players care for each other.

The Buckeyes will need strong relationships when they start competing against other Big Ten teams in arguably the best conference in college field hockey.

The Big Ten features eight ranked teams, with six teams among the top 10. No. 24 Ohio State will play seven conference opponents over its final 11 games, including Michigan, Indiana, Northwestern, Iowa, Penn State, Rutgers and Maryland.

The remaining nonconference schedule doesn't offer the Buckeyes any breathing room, either. Ohio State will face Virginia, Louisville, Ohio and St. Joseph's in the other four games.

"I love this team," Martin said. "I think they are great humans. We are going to be around each other a lot this season. We have to make sure that we can trust each other and hold each other accountable. The expectation is that all of us want the same thing for this program. We need to show up every day ready to work."

"There are definitely times when you can goof around and talk about life – things other than field hockey – and can have fun because when we are in the thick of a hard practice or a great drill, connecting passes and feeling the flow of the environment, we can create respect and trust and prove that we will always have each other's backs. That's what will make us successful."



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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2021 FOOTBALL (2-1)

Sept. 2 at Minnesota, W 45-31; **11** OREGON, L 35-28; **18** TULSA, W 41-20; **25** AKRON.

Oct. 2 at Rutgers; **9** MARYLAND; **23** at Indiana; **30** PENN STATE.

Nov. 6 at Nebraska; **13** PURDUE; **20** MICHIGAN STATE; **27** at Michigan.

Dec. 4 Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis.

2022 FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 NOTRE DAME; **10** ARKANSAS STATE; **17** TOLEDO; **24** at Michigan State.

Oct. 1 at Penn State; **8** RUTGERS; **15** IOWA; **29** INDIANA.

Nov. 5 at Northwestern; **12** WISCONSIN; **19** at Maryland; **26** MICHIGAN.

2023 FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 at Indiana; **9** SAN JOSE STATE; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY; **23** at Notre Dame.

Oct. 7 MARYLAND; **14** at Purdue; **21** PENN STATE; **28** at Wisconsin.

Nov. 4 at Rutgers; **11** MICHIGAN STATE; **18** MINNESOTA; **25** at Michigan.

CROSS COUNTRY

Sept. 3 Evansville Opener at Indiana, Men: 1/6; Women: 1/7; **10** Spiked Shoe Invitational at Penn State, Men: 6/6; Women: 5/6; **23** Bill Dellinger Invite (Women Only) at Eugene, Ore.

Oct. 1 Joe Piane Invitational at Notre Dame; **15** FSU Invite/Pre-Nationals at Tallahassee, Fla.; **29** Big Ten Championships at University Park, Pa.

Nov. 12 NCAA Regional Championships at Evansville, Ind.; **20** NCAA Championships at Tallahassee, Fla.

FIELD HOCKEY (6-2)

Aug. 27 at Ball State, W 1-0; **31** at Kent State, L 3-1.

Sept. 3 BUCKEYE INVITATIONAL vs. LAFAYETTE, W 4-3 (2OT); **6** BUCKEYE INVITATIONAL vs. MIAMI, W 1-0; **10** at Wake Forest, W 2-1; **12** at Appalachian State, W 2-0; **17** at Michigan State, W 4-3; **19** Virginia, L, 2-1; **27** LOUISVILLE, 4 p.m.

Oct. 3 MICHIGAN, Noon; **8** INDIANA, 3 p.m.; **10** OHIO, 1 p.m.; **15** at Northwestern, 4 p.m.; **17** at Iowa, 1 p.m.; **22** PENN STATE, 3 p.m.; **24** RUTGERS, Noon; **29** at Maryland, 7 p.m.; **31** at St. Joseph's, 1 p.m.

MEN'S GOLF

Sept. 5-7 Erin Hill Collegiate at Erin, Wisc., 12/17; **13-15** Maridoe Invitational at Dallas, 7/15; **27-28** Windon Memorial at Glencoe, Ill.

Oct. 4-5 Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Dublin, Ohio.

WOMEN'S GOLF

Sept. 13-14 Michigan Invitational at Ann Arbor, Mich., 9/16; **24-26** Mason Rudolph at Nashville, Tenn.

Oct. 4-5 Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Dublin, Ohio; **15-17** Tar Heel Invitational at Chapel Hill, N.C.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY

Oct. 8-9 at Bentley; **15-16** UCONN; **29-30** MICHIGAN STATE.

Nov. 5-6 PENN STATE; **12-13** at Minnesota; **26-27** MERCYHURST.

Dec. 3-4 at Notre Dame; **10-11** MICHIGAN; **16-17** BOWLING GREEN; **31-Jan. 1**, LIU.

Jan. 7-8 at Wisconsin; **14-15** NOTRE DAME; **21-22** at Michigan State; **28-29** at Penn State.

Feb. 4-5 WISCONSIN; **11-12** MINNESOTA; **18-19** at Michigan.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY

Sept. 24 ST. THOMAS, 6 P.M.; **25** ST. THOMAS 2 P.M.

Oct. 1-2 at Minnesota, TBA; **15** BEMIDJI

STATE, 6 P.M., **16** BEMIDJI STATE, 3 P.M.; **23** at Wisconsin, 3 p.m.; **24** at Wisconsin, 4 p.m.; **29** ST. CLOUD STATE, 6 p.m.; **30** ST. CLOUD STATE, 3 p.m.

Nov. 5-6 at St. Thomas, TBA; **19** MINNESOTA STATE, 6 p.m.; **20** MINNESOTA STATE, 1 p.m.; **26** DC Tournament at Washington, D.C., vs. St. Lawrence, 1 p.m.; **27** DC Tournament at Washington, D.C., vs. Penn State, 4 p.m.

Dec. 3-4 at Minnesota Duluth, TBA.

Jan. 7 LINDENWOOD, 6 p.m.; **8** LINDENWOOD, 3 p.m.; **14-15** at St. Cloud State, TBA; **21** MINNESOTA DULUTH, 6 p.m.; **22** MINNESOTA DULUTH, 3 p.m.; **28** MINNESOTA, 6 p.m.; **29** MINNESOTA, 3 p.m.

Feb. 4-5 at Minnesota State, TBA; **11-12** at Bemidji State, TBA; **18** WISCONSIN, 6 p.m.; **19** WISCONSIN, 3 p.m.; **25-27** WCHA Quarterfinals, TBA

MARCH 5-6 WCHA Championships.

MEN'S SOCCER (2-3-1)

Aug. 27 WOLSTEIN CLASSIC vs. MEMPHIS, W 3-2; **29** WOLSTEIN CLASSIC vs. UAB, L 2-1 (OT).

Sept. 3 IU Classic vs. Xavier at Bloomington, Ind., L 2-1; **6** IU Classic vs. Creighton at Bloomington, Ind., T 1-1 (2OT); **10** at West Virginia, L 1-0; **15** AKRON, W 1-0; **21** CLEVELAND STATE, 7 p.m.; **24** MARYLAND, 7 p.m.; **29** BOWLING GREEN, 7 p.m.

Oct. 3 at Northwestern, 4 p.m.; **8** WISCONSIN, 7 p.m.; **12** at Indiana, 7 p.m.; **17** at Michigan State, TBA; **22** PENN STATE, 7 p.m.; **26** MICHIGAN, 6 p.m.; **31** at Rutgers, 1 p.m.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (6-3)

Aug. 10 at Notre Dame (Exh.), L 3-2; **13** PITTSBURGH (Exh.), L 2-0; **19** at BYU, L 3-0; **22** AKRON, W 4-1; **26** BOWLING GREEN, W 3-1; **29** NORTH CAROLINA, L 2-0.

Sept. 2 CENTRAL FLORIDA W 4-2; **5** NAVY, W 2-1; **9** Dayton, W 2-0; **12** TCU, L 4-1; **19** at Maryland, W, 2-1; **23** MINNESOTA, 7 p.m.; **26** at Penn State, TBA; **30** INDIANA, 7 P.M.

Oct. 3 RUTGERS, Noon; **10** at Michigan State, 1 p.m.; **14** PURDUE, 7 p.m.; **17** MICHIGAN, Noon; **20** at Wisconsin, 6 p.m.; **24** at Northwestern, 2 p.m.

SOFTBALL

Sept. 24 OHIO DOMINICAN, 6 p.m.; **26** KENTUCKY (DH), 1 p.m.

Oct. 2 BOWLING GREEN, 12:30 p.m.; **2** OHIO UNIVERSITY, 3 p.m.; **3** PITTSBURGH (DH), 1 p.m., **10** at Akron, 3 p.m.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (9-0)

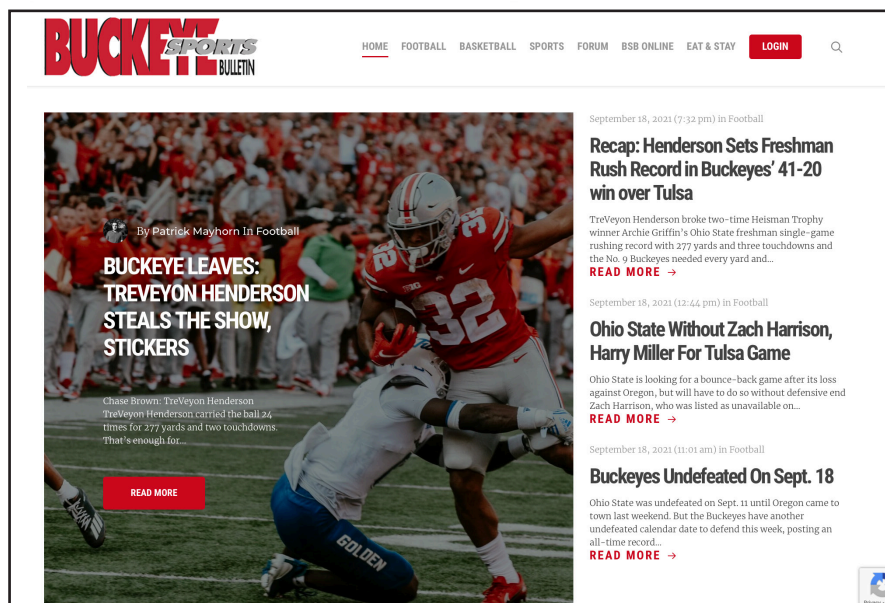
Aug. 27 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 3-0; **28** WASHINGTON, W 3-1.

Sept. 3 Red Raider Classic at Lubbock, Texas, vs. Rhode Island., W 3-0; **4** Red Raider Classic at Lubbock, Texas, vs. Texas State, W 3-1; **4** Red Raider Classic at Lubbock, Texas, vs. Texas Tech, W 3-0; **10** VCU Invitational at Richmond, Va., vs. James Madison, W 3-0; **11** VCU Invitational at Richmond, Va., vs. Virginia, W 3-0; **17** at Notre Dame, W 3-0; **19** NOTRE DAME, W, 3-2; **24** at Purdue, 7 p.m.; **26** at Penn State, 4 p.m.; **29** INDIANA, 6 p.m.

Oct. 2 MARYLAND, 7 p.m.; **8** at Michigan State, 7 p.m.; **10** MICHIGAN, 1 p.m.; **15** PURDUE, 6 p.m. **15** RUTGERS, 7 p.m.; **22** at Wisconsin, 9 p.m.; **24** at Minnesota, 5 p.m.; **29** at Michigan, 7 p.m.; **31** MICHIGAN STATE, 1 p.m.

Nov. 4 MINNESOTA, 7 p.m.; **6** NEBRASKA, TBA; **13** at Northwestern, 2 p.m.; **14** at Illinois, TBA; **19** IOWA, 7 p.m.; **21** PENN STATE, 3 P.M.; **24** at Rutgers, 7 p.m.; **26** at Maryland, 7 p.m.

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Buckeyes Take A While To Finally Get Going

It was a start.

And given all that went on during the week leading up to Ohio State's game against Tulsa, it wasn't all that bad a one.

It wasn't less than 24 hours after the Oregon debacle that Kerry Coombs' name was used in vain by most of Columbus –

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

multiple times. His defensive unit had looked utterly inept against the Ducks, and it was looking more and more evident that a lack of coordinator experience during his career was catching up with him. Fans wanted him fired, but demotion was much more likely, and that's exactly what happened. Secondary coach Matt Barnes was given play-calling duties against Tulsa, and though there were some fits and starts, the unit did, to the naked eye, look a bit better.

Head coach Ryan Day admitted he had some "hard conversations" and made some "hard decisions" but felt that progress was made.

"We stopped the run better," he said. "We changed how we did things structurally, and everyone was on the same page.

There were in-game adjustments that were made much better."

During the Buckeyes' first two contests, the defense doled out charity equally. It couldn't stop the run or the pass, allowing more than 200 yards in each category to Minnesota and Oregon.

Tulsa might not exactly be an offensive juggernaut, but head coach Philip Montgomery has gained a reputation as something of a crafty play-designer/play-caller, so the fact that Ohio State was able to shut down the Golden Hurricane rushing attack (73 yards, 2.6 yards per carry) is something of a mini-victory. OSU's run fits were much better, and the cutback lanes and holes that were there against Minnesota and Oregon were largely missing. Tulsa's longest run of the day was 24 yards, and it was due more to a missed tackle than a blown assignment.

It may sound sad, but that's progress.

And that's where we are with the Ohio State defense – where playing assignment-sound football is seen as an accomplishment.

Tulsa was able to do a lot of what it wanted through the air, with four receivers having at least one gain of at least 20 yards. Some of that came on assignment gaffes, some due to OSU playing two deep safeties and leaving the middle of the field open, and some due to guys getting beat in coverage. Those things obviously cannot contin-

ue if the defense wants to be anything other than a liability.

There were also a couple of bright spots. For the second week in a row, the guys up front got a little bit of pressure. Ohio State had three quarterback hurries, a week after registering five against Oregon. They also had a pair of sacks after being shut out in that department against the Ducks. OSU appeared to harass Tulsa quarterback Davis Brin a lot more in the second half, and that affected his accuracy and ability to hit big plays.

But four sacks in three games, for a unit that came into the season as one of the top two or three defensive lines in all of college football, is not nearly good enough. The Buckeyes have, over the last five seasons – which not coincidentally had Chase Young and the Bosa brothers up front – averaged 2.6, 3.9, 2.9, 3.2 and 2.2 sacks per game. That's nearly three (2.96) sacks per game for five straight years. Right now, OSU is at 1.33 per game. Struggling against the good, experienced offensive lines of Minnesota and Oregon is understandable. Not acceptable, but understandable. But to not be able to do what it wanted against Tulsa – which has allowed an average of 2.6 sacks per contest over that same span? Mind-boggling.

The defense as a whole is broken, at all levels. The guys up front aren't getting enough pressure, the linebackers are far too often out of position or simply don't know their assignments, and the secondary plays too soft. That was mentioned a lot during the broadcast of the game, with the thought that "Ohio State has gone away from what it traditionally does, which is get up in your face and press you." That's not incorrect.

It should be noted that the Buckeyes have had the likes of Jeff Okudah, Denzel Ward, Marshon Lattimore and Bradley Roby in recent seasons, so there was a reason press coverage worked. There might be one guy like those others on the team right now. Through three games, Denzel Burke has shown a willingness to tackle and confidence to play right up in a receiver's grill. He has excellent ball recognition and the length and athleticism to recover when he makes a mistake. He's one who looks like a standout. If only there were more of him, the pass defense might look better.

While it's not always an immediate result when plugging in new, inexperienced players on defense, the talent ratings indicate that Ohio State should be doing better on that side of the ball.

Day has noticed something that may provide optimism for the down the road.

"When you see the young guys making plays and popping, those are really encouraging things," Day said. "There are going to be growing pains, but whatever you invest in these guys, it's going to pay off in the future.

"After today, it was a step in the right direction. There were things to build on. It's a long road, and if we can keep building, we can peak as we get into conference play. The fun part about coaching college football is that the dynamics change and the people change."

Let's see how much fun Day is having in October when the conference wars are raging. If the defense looks like it did against Tulsa, the guess here is that more "hard conversations" will have be had.

The Real Deal

I might not be right very often, but one thing not that difficult to predict was early success for TreVeyon Henderson.

Anyone who watched even a little bit of his high school tape could see that not only was he a man among boys in the size department, but he also had elusiveness, explosion and speed. And those qualities make for a mighty good running back.

How good is he?

Well, in just his third game in scarlet and gray, Henderson put up the third-highest single-game rushing total in school history. Better than Archie, Maurice and Zeke, and behind only Eddie and Trey Sermon. Pretty heady company, wouldn't you say?

To watch Henderson take the ball on an inside zone play and get to the second level is breathtaking. His strides are effortless and quick, and he has enough wiggle to make guys miss but enough power to run through them.

His long runs provided the "wow" factor, but watch his first scoring run. It was just a 5-yard burst, but pay attention to his feet. He was almost gliding as he leaned inside toward the hole and did a quick pity-pat change of direction. If you weren't looking for it, you didn't see it. Tulsa defenders certainly didn't. Footwork in small spaces is what separates the good from the great, and Henderson seems to be trending toward the latter.

It isn't only on the field where Henderson has standout qualities, either.

"Since he's come here he's been very mature," Day said. "He does not act like a freshman. He takes his job very seriously. When he gets to the second level, he gives us an opportunity to hit home runs."

Hyperbole can be dangerous after three games, and if I'm wrong, I'll own up to it. But it would not be shocking if Henderson puts his name up there with those other Ohio State legends.

The ground game seems good enough that maybe, just maybe, it would be in Ohio State's best interest to transition to a power run, zone team. Day loves having quarterbacks who can challenge teams downfield, and in this day and age you need that. But that quality has not been a strong suit for C.J. Stroud, nor has the new starting QB been able to consistently read defenses or make throws good enough for receivers to pick up yards after the catch. Maybe Stroud gets better at those things with more experience. But maybe he doesn't. The point is that Ohio State still doesn't know what it has at quarterback.

It knows what it has at running back, though, and would be wise to lean on that. Reliance on more ground and pound would also take pressure off the defense, which in theory wouldn't be on the field as much.

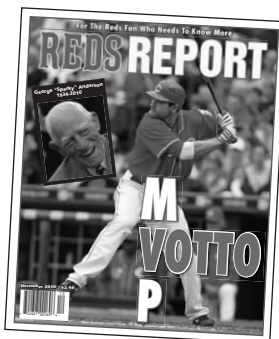
But I'm not the coach, so that decision is not mine to make.

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News Good And Bad After Win Against Tulsa

There is good news and bad news. Those of you who know me know that I prefer the bad news first.

After three games, I honestly believe that Ohio State is not a playoff-caliber team. That might change down the road, or the Buckeyes – as they exist now – might even make it to the College Football Playoff, given the caliber of the league competition. It would seem likely, however, that if Ohio State plays like it did against Oregon and Tulsa, some Big Ten foe would engineer what would not really be an upset – or at least not come as a complete surprise.

And even if Ohio State – at least as it looks now – *did* make it to the playoff, it's hard to imagine the Buckeyes competing with the crème de la crème (that's French for Alabama, Clemson, Oklahoma, Georgia, Cincinnati, et al).

Those who just see the 41-20 final score from the Tulsa game will have a rosier picture of Ohio State's performance than those of us who actually watched the game. The Golden Hurricane was very much in the game – and I was still nervous – until late in the fourth quarter. I think most of us figured the Buckeyes would take out their frustrations from the Oregon game on Tulsa from the get-go. But it's hard to take out your frustrations, despite any changes made during the week leading up to the game, when your pass defense is still a sieve and your offense is running on only half its cylinders – i.e. a subpar passing game after a subpar running game the week before.

And that leads us to the good news.

TreVeyon Henderson is the real deal. To break Archie Griffin's freshman rushing record, a mark that had survived nearly 50 years and numerous great OSU freshman running backs, is quite an accomplishment. Henderson accounted for almost 56 percent of Ohio State's offense, scored three times and also helped set up his team's final offensive touchdown with a 31-yard run to the Tulsa 34 before giving way to Master Teague.

As an aside, it's hard to figure out Ohio State's running back rotation. I think we can count on Henderson being the starter from here on out, but last week Teague didn't play and this week Miyan Williams didn't play. Against the Ducks, Williams rushed 14 times for 77 yards, while against Tulsa, Teague carried 14 times for 62 yards.

With regard to the offense running on only half its cylinders, the passing attack, after racking up 484 yards against Oregon with three receivers topping 100 yards, fell to 185 yards. While Henderson was setting records running with the ball, Chris Olave, one of the best receivers in the country, was shut out. Olave was on the receiving end of one of C.J. Stroud's better passes of the season, but the 47-yard strike was called back due to a face-mask penalty. The Buckeyes were flagged eight times for 81 yards.

Against Oregon, Ohio State threw for 484 yards and rushed for 128. Against Tulsa, the Buckeyes rushed for 323 and passed for 185. I know Ryan Day is looking for more consistent balance than that.

In the end, a win is a win. But I have to admit I was nervous about it for much of the game. And I kept thinking about how ugly things were within Buckeye Nation after the loss to Oregon. Imagine what it would have been like had the Buckeyes followed that with a loss to the Golden Hurricane.

Coaching Carousel

Most of the venom from Ohio State fans was directed at (then?) defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs. Coombs, who up until recent-

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

ly had been one of the more beloved assistants in recent memory, paid the price with a humiliating week that including criticism from all corners, plus a shift in responsibilities that – while Day did not say as much – appeared to be an in-season demotion. His cause wasn't helped by the fact that Oregon scored on virtually the same play three different times, among other things.

Yet I maintain that there was plenty of blame to go around.

Many looked back to porous pass defense from the Indiana and Alabama games from last season and kind of tagged Coombs with more of the same this season. In reality, Ducks quarterback Anthony Brown was sub-50 percent (17 for 35) in passing against Coombs' defense for what by today's standards was a rather pedestrian 236 yards. On the other hand, Oregon rushed for 269 yards and a 7.1-yard per carry average. Isn't some of that on linebackers coach Al Washington and defensive line coach Larry Johnson, whose crew did not register a single sack and had just one tackle for loss? I suppose Coombs is/was the defensive coordinator, so he is/was ultimately responsible.

But would fans and Day have reacted so strongly toward Coombs if the Buckeyes had won the game, something that they could have easily done had they converted their whopping 612 yards of total offense into more than 28 points? At last check, the offense was Day's baby. When the game was on the line, it was Coombs' defense that made three straight stands and Day's offense that converted those into zero points.

There's always going to be a fall guy. This time it was Coombs. But as I said, there was plenty of blame to go around.

Bill Landis from The Athletic offers an interesting perspective elsewhere in this issue of BSB. He talked of Day's press conference after the Oregon game.

"The one thing about that press conference that didn't sit all that well with me is that it felt like Day did not take enough ownership of the defensive struggles when this vision for the defense is his and the coordinator was his hand-picked hire," Landis said.

"None of this was forced upon him. He made the decision, so he has to shoulder some of that blame, too, and it felt like he was kind of saying, 'Well, my offense is fine, you guys have to fix the defense.' When you're the head coach, it's your job to fix everything. You can't portray yourself as being annoyed when you have to step away from the offense to help the defense because, otherwise, you should just be an offensive coordinator."

If you remember, Day had to wait until after Coombs' previous employer, the Tennessee Titans, were eliminated from the NFL playoffs before he could announce his desired hiring.

"Kerry Coombs is the coach I was really hoping we could hire and bring back to Ohio State," Day said when the hire was finally announced. "He is an excellent coach, and he has had two outstanding seasons in the NFL on Mike Vrabel's staff with the Tennessee Titans."

"I've spent a season on staff with Kerry and I really like his coaching and knowledge of the game, but I also like that he knows Ohio State and he knows how to recruit to Ohio State. He's recruited some of the players currently on the team, and he coached a handful of Buckeye defensive backs who went on to

become first-round NFL draft picks."

Day might have been more enamored with Coombs' recruiting ability than his coordinating ability. In fact, Coombs had never been a college coordinator, though he was an "assistant coordinator" under Urban Meyer in 2017. Still, Day could have altered Coombs' duties during the offseason, but he elected to pretty much stand pat on the defensive side of the ball.

The performance by the OSU defense during the first two games seems to have changed all that.

"We took a hard look at it, had a hard conversation, talking about the rhythm and structure moving forward," Day said. "Look, (Kerry's) a team player. He just wants to win. He is still very much a big part of this defense."

Sounds like a demotion to me.

What exactly does Coombs do now? You have taken his infectious enthusiasm off the sideline. He has no position group. After being publicly humiliated, I guess he got to watch as the revamped defense gave up 501 yards to a Tulsa team that is hardly Oregon, a team that totaled only four more yards at 505. It's those three touchdowns the Ducks ran on virtually the same play that were probably the backbreaker.

As someone in the office suggested, Coombs is probably already eying the transfer portal.

An interesting side note to this is speculation that Washington would have increased duties at OSU after he turned down an aggressive offer to become defensive coordinator at Tennessee. Yet it was Matt Barnes, the least experienced of the coaches on that side of the ball, who saw his responsibilities increase in the wake of the Oregon loss.

Still, one has to remember that Day was hand-picked by athletic director Gene Smith and Urban Meyer to be Meyer's successor and has received rave reviews as an Ohio State assistant, interim coach and head coach – and rightfully so. Good coaches don't become bad coaches overnight – or after one loss to Oregon in this case. And that's true of Coombs as well.

This is Day's first real bump in the road as the head coach, and it will be interesting to see how he responds to it and the job he does going forward.

The best thing about being 2-1 is it gives you a chance to be 3-1. Look out, Akron.

Quick Hitters

- If you want an indicator of how the loss to Oregon and the coaching controversy that followed affected the fan base, look no farther than the stunning 76,540 attendance figure at Ohio Stadium. The modest dip in attendance the previous week against the Ducks was attributed to a combination of COVID concerns and high ticket prices. The game with Tulsa was one of the "cheap" ticket games, so that excuse was pretty much eliminated.

- For those who were concerned about COVID, the controversy and disappointment surrounding the team gave them one more excuse to stay home. Add in the poor gameday experience for many at the home opener, which was marred by long lines everywhere, and you see an attendance mark that is almost impossible to fathom.

- Perhaps a multitude of Zips fans will help boost the attendance against Akron.

- In my traditional tight end watch, three of the big guys got in on the action against

Tulsa, with Jeremy Ruckert (two), Cade Stover and Gee Scott all registering receptions. Even better was the fact that the trio averaged 15.8 yards on their four receptions. You would think, as Stroud tries to get his quarterbacking feet under him, that the tight ends would make big and inviting targets.

- The Ohio State defensive line continues to struggle with getting consistent pressure on the opposing quarterback. The Buckeyes recorded two sacks against Tulsa to bring their season total to four. But Ohio State does seem to make the most of it when one of its defenders gets to the quarterback.

Of course, there was Zach Harrison's strip sack that resulted in a pivotal touchdown against Minnesota. Against the Golden Hurricane, freshman Tyleik Williams' 17-yard, fourth-quarter sack of Davis Brin provided one of the nails in Tulsa's coffin. Ohio State's other sack, a 10-yarder by Antwuan Jackson in the third quarter, led to a Hurricane punt.

When he was in the game, ballyhooed freshman J.T. Tuimolalo seemed all over the place and was credited with two tackles and a quarterback hurry. Maybe an injection of youth on the defensive line is just what the doctor – and Coach Johnson – ordered.

- I know this thought crossed your mind.

Tulsa head coach Philip Montgomery put together an outstanding game plan for Ohio State, and the Golden Hurricane was truly in the game right up until late in the fourth quarter. That makes his decision to go for field goals instead of touchdowns early in the game all the more perplexing. He opted for three points on fourth-and-1 at the OSU 3 as well as fourth-and-4 from the Buckeye 13.

What did Montgomery have to lose by going for it? A touchdown in even one of those situations might have changed the complexion and even the outcome of the game.

With as many gifts as Ohio State has been giving this season, I guess it's nice for someone to give one in return.

Déjà Vu All Over Again

Something that legendary coach Paul Brown said in Mark Rea's flashback on pages 30-31 of this issue struck a nerve with me. Brown was talking about his disappointment that Ohio State (and college football in general) kept playing during World War II when many college athletes had left campus to join the war cause.

"Not only were we being unfair to a group of 17-year-old kids, we were exposing them to serious injury whenever we played much bigger, older and stronger opponents," Brown said years later. "My sense of justice and personal pride rebelled at these inequities, and I didn't spare (Ohio State athletic director Lynn St. John) my feelings. His justification was that we were performing a service to intercollegiate football and saving the program at Ohio State. *In reality, we were providing money for the athletic department*, and while we may have kept the continuity of Ohio State's football program, it was at the personal expense of those kids." (Those are my italics.)

I've made no secret of the fact that I could have done without last year's COVID-crippled football season. About the only joy I got out of it was watching Ohio State putting a whupping on Clemson. People can say they played for the sake of the players or the fans, but the reality is there was too much money that would have been potentially lost by the various stakeholders in college football.

It seems that some things never change.

FOR ATHLETES

HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

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>

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