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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 9, 2021

Stroud Takes Full Advantage Of Week Off, Leads Buckeyes To Rout Of Rutgers

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

After what must have felt like the longest 13 days of his young life, Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud returned Oct. 2 from his forced sabbatical to showcase a seemingly more streamlined version of himself during a 52-13 blowout of Rutgers at SHI Stadium in Piscataway, N.J.

Showing none of the amped-up overthrows from his first three starts, and no ill effects of the sore shoulder that kept him on the sideline for a 59-7 romp over Akron, Stroud completed 17 of 23 pass attempts for 330 yards and five touchdowns in an almost effortless performance against an opponent that was supposed to have put up more of a fight.

Since an uneven performance Sept. 18 against Tulsa, a game in which he still led his team to a three-touchdown victory while throwing for 185 yards and a touchdown, Stroud had been fodder for every rumor-mongering fan, blogger, radio call-in show and fly-by-night website within a hundred-mile radius of Columbus.

Everyone was suddenly an expert on the subject of quarterbacks, wanting to know if Stroud was really the best option for Ohio State at quarterback, especially with strong-armed Kyle McCord and Jack Miller ready, willing and able to take over at a moment's notice.

McCord and Miller got their chance against Akron and played well for the most part. McCord overcame some early jitters to throw for 319 yards and two touchdowns, and Miller appeared more than capable in relief, connecting on 5 of 8 attempts for 66 yards.

But OSU head coach Ryan Day – who actually is something of an expert when it comes to quarterbacks – has never wavered from the decision he made in fall camp regarding the position. When asked Sept. 28 during his weekly press conference if Stroud was still the starting quarterback of the Buckeyes, the coach – who typically spices his answers with a liberal amount of coach-speak – answered with a simple and forceful, "Yes."

That had to have been sweet music to Stroud's ears because there was something else he displayed against Rutgers in addition to increased decisiveness, accuracy and feel for the game. The youngster also flashed a smile that had been too often unseen.

"I had a good week of practice and I definitely felt way better coming into this game," Stroud told reporters after the game.



Welcome Back, C.J.

SONNY BROCKWAY

EXECUTING THE PLAN — Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and quarterback C.J. Stroud (7) go over strategy on the sideline Oct. 2 during a 52-13 victory at Rutgers. After missing a week with a sore shoulder, Stroud returned to the lineup and threw for 330 yards and five touchdowns against the Scarlet Knights.

"That Tulsa game, I wasn't feeling right at all, but this week I could actually put something into my throws and not feel like my shoulder was going to fall off.

"Last week helped me to take a step back and realize what position I'm in. This is a big-time university, a big-time fan base, a big-time everything, and that week off really helped me step back and take a rest. It helped me work on being a leader and seeing my guys and that they really do trust in me."

It wasn't too difficult for Stroud to get into the flow of the game. Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano, who had repeated-

ly reached into his bag of trick plays against the Buckeyes in 2020, tried to fool them again at the end of his team's first offensive possession. But a pass attempt off a fake punt was knocked away by freshman cornerback Cameron Martinez, and Ohio State had its first crack at offense at the Rutgers 48.

After Stroud got things going with a 4-yard flip to tight end Jeremy Ruckert, freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson exploded up the middle and didn't stop until he had raced 44

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

The Ohio State football team returned to Big Ten play with a trip to Rutgers on Oct. 2 and came away with a convincing 52-13 victory. Members of the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff and posters at the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum passed out a variety of Buckeye leaves after the big victory.

Chase Brown, BSB: Against Tulsa, Denzel Burke had an interception taken away after officials reversed the call on the field, awarding the Golden Hurricane with a catch. This week, though, there was no doubt for Burke, who intercepted Rutgers quarterback Noah Vedral and raced 23 yards down the near sideline for a pick-six.

The freshman cornerback continues to improve in each game. Through five weeks, he has not backed down from covering an opposing team's best receiver. He has looked strong in man and zone coverage, keeping pace with his assignment while playing a physical brand of football.

Burke is a budding star on Ohio State's defense. While I don't want to hurl projections on a first-year player, I think Burke has the potential to be another one of the great Buckeye cornerbacks, continuing to improve the school's claim of being Defensive Back University.

Wyatt Crosher, BSB: For the first time since he was a freshman in 2018, Chris Olave was getting questions about his production. He followed a game in which he was shut out by one in which he had just two catches for 12 yards, even with one of those going for a touchdown.

Against Rutgers, Olave put those questions to bed, leading the Buckeyes with 119 yards on five catches, two of which went for touchdowns in a dominant road victory.

With C.J. Stroud back behind center, he found the senior wide receiver early and often, with Olave consistently finding space and breaking open big plays as he has for much of his Ohio State tenure.

For Olave to do that, against a Rutgers defense that was allowing just 150.0 yards per game through the air coming in, proves how

dynamic and impressive a receiver he is. It also proves how important he is to the offense's success as a whole.

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: Fresh off a week of rest, C.J. Stroud certainly looked like a rejuvenated man for the Buckeyes against Rutgers, operating a somewhat new-look offense masterfully to the tune of 330 yards and five touchdown passes on 17-of-23 passing.

Stroud was cool and collected in the pocket and thrived in a system that allowed him to make more quick reads and throws than the one Ohio State deployed in his first three games, and he connected with receivers all over the field.

He was still the beneficiary of quite a few impressive runs after the catch from such players as Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, but anyone at the helm of this offense is going to be.

But in delivering accurate balls throughout the game to open receivers, Stroud looked again like the quarterback he had been when healthy against Minnesota. He still doesn't seem quite 100 percent, but his 90 percent is more than enough to cement his spot as QB1 for the Buckeyes moving forward.

Mark Rea, BSB: A handful of Buckeye leaves to young Mr. Coleridge Bernard Stroud III, who returned to the fight against Rutgers and looked like a more streamlined version of the redshirt freshman who started the first three games for Ohio State. Stroud seemed much more decisive, more relaxed and more in charge as he made 330 yards and five touchdowns look almost effortless.

One more leaf for Jeremy Ruckert, who like most Ohio State tight ends for the last 20 years, blocks and blocks and blocks, patiently waiting for the game when a few passes come his way. Ruckert made the most of that opportunity vs. the Scarlet Knights, totaling four receptions for 40 yards and his first touchdown of the season.

BuckeyeScott: I'm going to give some Buckeye leaves to Marcus Crowley. Good running and nice catch and run for a big first down. He actually led the running backs in all-purpose yards.

MCarr: C.J. Stroud, obviously. Denzel Burke, who seems to be

growing into a potential star before our eyes, and Tyleik Williams, who recorded Ohio State's only sack and continues to shine. And Chris Olave, who came out of hibernation to add to his legacy with a fine game.

AnthonyBuckeye: C.J. Stroud for his accurate passing, taking what the D gave him and letting the talent around him do the work, his toughness in throwing a TD pass as he was being hit, and for being a consummate QB, probably the best in the country this Saturday. The wide receiver trio of Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and Jaxon Smith-Njigba for clearly being the best in the country. The entire OL for another excellent game, the running backs, TreVeyon Henderson, Master Teague and especially Marcus Crowley for spirited running throughout the game, tight end Jeremy Ruckert for stretching the opposing D in all directions.

Ronnie Hickman for being the tackling machine, Zach Harrison and Tyleik Williams for QB pressure leading to interceptions, Haskell Garrett for tackles close to the line of scrimmage and for stopping a third-and-1 run, the special teams for repeatedly stopping Rutgers short of the 25 on kickoff returns and Matt Barnes and all the defensive coaches for an excellent game plan.

realisticbuck: I'm going to give Buckeye leaves to the whole Ohio State team. Yes, Stroud and the offense were humming on all cylinders, but this team looked like it came out with something to prove in what was supposed to be a tough road game. Offense, defense, special teams and coaching came together and smashed the Scarlet Knights in what was even more of a whitewash than the final score indicated. This was an all-around excellent team effort!!

Michael Bauer: I agree with all the staff choices, but I'm with BuckeyeScott in awarding an additional leaf to Marcus Crowley. He came in during garbage time like a one-man energy drink! He was the one player among the offensive reserves that made me want to see him in action with the ones and twos. Man, our running back room is deep!



From The Message Board

Ohio State won its third straight game but looked more impressive this time around in a dominant 52-13 victory over Rutgers. Because of the impressive play from the Buckeyes on both sides of the ball, we asked the readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum if the win was enough to change their expectations on what the team can accomplish this year. Here are some of the responses:



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"This looks like 2014 all over for me. The early struggles seem to have shaken off all overconfidence on the part of the coaches and the players. The players seem to be listening, buying into the coaching and performing up to their talent levels! If these improvements and focus continue, I see the Buckeyes beating 'Bama this year!"

- Anthony Buckeye

"I think the sleeping giant is starting to wake up. Defense has been lights out for two weeks. I'm hoping this is a sign of more to come."

- Tiffin Buckeye

"Let's hope Cody Simon's injury wasn't serious. C.J. Stroud needs to stay healthy. McCord looked capable of leading the team against Akron, but should Stroud have to miss several games, will McCord hold up against the Big Ten's best teams? Was a little disappointed that the back-ups were not allowed to use the entire playbook in the second half against Rutgers because of the big lead. This team needs to continue to get better each week and not become complacent or overconfident."

- Byron McNutt

"Winning breeds confidence and confidence fuels motivation! If you listen and read what Ryan Day has been saying, the youngsters on this team just need to believe in themselves. I'm thinking they are starting to believe. I'm starting to believe, too!"

- BuckeyeScott

"Defense is obviously the key and the defense has looked better the last two games. I hope we aren't being lulled into a false sense

of security because of the caliber of the competition in Akron and Rutgers. I was actually disappointed in the play of Rutgers. Was that because the Buckeyes played well on defense or we overrated Rutgers? The defense needs only to be competent because this offense has all the tools and then some."

- Mcarr

"While the Bucks have looked good the past couple of weeks, you have to consider the competition. I think we will have a better idea of the potential of this team after Penn State visits on October 30."

- bstu9

"This was an excellent road win over an overrated Rutgers team. It remains to be seen what this team is capable of. All the goals are still reachable: beat Michigan at the Big House, win the Big Ten title and play in the College Football Playoff. We will know how good OSU is when they play Penn State. By looking at this season so far, Ohio State might be too young to be a major player in the quest for a national championship. I say they are a year away from having that type of team. Their defensive issues aren't going to magically disappear by shutting down Akron and Rutgers, two teams that don't have quarterbacks that put fear into you like dual-threat Anthony Brown of Oregon."

- realisticbuck

"I hate to say it because I have been saying all along Ohio State should score five touchdowns on every team on the schedule and give up no more than three touchdowns per game, so it didn't change my view much."

- Terrier Buck

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OPINION

Buckeyes Beginning To 'Find Their Stride'

Welcome to the new and improved C.J. Stroud, who quickly went from a work in progress to the leader of an Ohio State football team that bears little resemblance to the one that walked off the field in bewilderment after a mid-September loss against Oregon.

The recuperative powers of a 19-year-old are truly remarkable when Stroud took less than two weeks to go from damaged goods to a quarterback who looked so comfortable that he resembled a guy out for an afternoon stroll with his buddies.

After a game against Tulsa during which Stroud continually looked out of sorts, admitting later that he felt like "my shoulder was going to fall off," he watched from the sideline while his teammates took Akron to the proverbial woodshed. But observing what transpired on the field, and content with the knowledge he didn't have to worry about preparing for an upcoming opponent, apparently had the relaxing effects of a week at an exclusive Palm Springs spa.

Stroud looked as cool as the other side of the pillow while he went about dismantling the Rutgers defense for 330 yards and five touchdowns. At one point in the proceedings, he completed seven passes in a row for 138 yards and three scores. On third down alone, he was a perfect 5 for 5 for 133 yards and two TDs,

Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano, who has the reputation of being a pretty good defensive coach, never knew what hit him or his team.

"We had a bad day," Schiano said to reporters after the game in what might qualify as the understatement of the 2021 season. "And we had it against a team that's kind of finding their stride."

If the Buckeyes are enjoying the upgrades that come with Stroud 2.0, the same is true for the defense, which has gone from looking like a New York City traffic jam to an honest-to-goodness college defensive unit with players actually knowing where they are supposed to line up before the snap.

Perhaps it was the stubbornness of Kerry Coombs that led the Buckeyes to ash-can his defensive philosophy and replace it with the soft-spoken approach favored by Matt Barnes. Maybe it's just the fact that players are allowing their talent to take over. And perhaps it is part and parcel of the last two opponents Ohio State has played.

Whatever it is that's going on, though, has made for marked improvement in the defense. That performance has spilled over to an offense that was already one of the most prolific in college football. Perhaps your quarterback settles down if he doesn't think he has to manufacture a touchdown on every possession.

Pick-sixes in three straight games? The Buckeyes haven't done that since the first three games of the 2016 season. And it has been accomplished by Cameron Martinez (a former quarterback), Ronnie Hickman (a prep All-America lacrosse player) and Denzel Burke (a converted receiver). You can teach someone how to play a Cover 2, but you can't teach athleticism. You either have that or you don't.

Years ago, an old high school coach told me that his young team was having trouble grasping the game plan. But he was confident that once they did, the sky would be the limit.

Then he said something that has stuck with me all these years: "They really don't know how good they are."

Fast-forward about 40 years and my old friend could just as easily have been describing the 2021 Buckeyes.

Use Your Slugger

The very next game I coach will be my first, a fact that has been pointed out to me several times over the years.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

After the 1979 season opener at Ohio State, a 31-8 win against Syracuse in Earle Bruce's first game as head coach, I mentioned that Bruce had indicated all summer that the Buckeyes were going to throw the ball more. So, after the game, I asked the head coach why he didn't call for more passing against the Orangemen.

"Well, we threw it 16 times," Bruce said. "How many times do you think we should throw it?"

Then there was the time Urban Meyer asked me how many football games I had coached.

I answered, "None," before glibly adding, "But I'd be willing to bet I've watched more football games than you've coached."

I probably know where I can stick this advice, but I'm going to throw it out anyway as something OSU head coach Ryan Day might want to think about. He has talked about TreVeyon Henderson as his home-run hitter, but what good is a slugger if you take him out of the lineup in the middle innings?

With the exception of the Tulsa game when he got 24 carries and broke Archie Griffin's long-standing OSU single-game rushing record for freshmen, Henderson has gotten just 30 carries in his other four games combined. That's just 7.5 carries per game for a guy who is second in the nation with an average of 9.4 yards per carry.

Maybe when the weather turns colder, and the level of competition increases, Day will rely a little more on Henderson. After all, wouldn't it seem prudent to feature a power running attack if your team was still breaking in a new starting quarterback? Couldn't you control the tempo of the game, and thereby limit the time your young and still-evolving defense was on the field?

I realize that Henderson was dinged up against Rutgers, and there was no real benefit in putting him back into that blowout. But I have also heard the theory posited that because the freshman running back had no senior high school season due to COVID, that he might be well-served to be eased back into live competition.

Give me a break. Anyone who uses that line of thinking obviously hasn't seen Henderson run with the football. Sure, he still has a lot to learn regarding blitz pickups and blocking assignments. But the kid is an electric player with the kind of breakaway speed not seen at Ohio State since the days of Ted Ginn Jr. I can't see much downside to giving him the football at least 20-25 times a game.

Of course, while that kind of theory might seem the logical way to go, if you know anything about Day, you know his mind doesn't exactly work that way.

In his 30 games as head coach of the Buckeyes, an individual running back has

gotten 25 or more carries only five times. Meanwhile, quarterbacks have attempted 25 or more passes in a game on 18 occasions. Eight times, QBs have thrown the ball 30 or more times in a game.

Henderson might be a home-run hitter, but Day prefers to swing for the fences another way – by throwing the ball.

Fear The Beard

Tradition, it seems, has taken a back seat to superstition.

For the third year in a row, Day decided to shave his offseason beard before the 2021 season opener against Minnesota, admitting, "I'm just too superstitious. I'd like to (keep it). I've thought long and hard about it. My wife and I had a conversation about it. (But) I'm not taking that chance, especially starting with a conference game. The beard has to go."

That was then, this is now. Since the week-two loss to Oregon, Day's superstition has gone out the window along with his razor.

Asked about the return of the facial hair at the end of his weekly press conference on Sept. 28, the coach gave a dismissive shake of his head as if to say, "Don't you think I have better things to worry about?" But it appeared that the beard was back as Day ran onto the field vs. Akron, and there was no question it was in full growth when the Buckeyes took the field at Rutgers.

It's been well-documented that Day has coached with a beard just once during his career, and that was in 2016 as quarterbacks coach for the San Francisco 49ers. The team went just 2-14 that season, and Day has gone to the clippers before opening day ever since.

While there are a handful of other head coaches around college football who have facial hair, and there have been OSU assistant coaches in the past who have sported mustaches – a young Meyer in the mid-1980s being just one example – Day is the first full-bearded coach in the 132-year history of the Ohio State football program.

So far, the beard is 2-0.

And Finally ...

It will be interesting to see what the pollsters do with the loser of the Oct. 9 matchup between No. 3 Iowa and No. 4 Penn State. I suppose it will depend a lot upon the final score, but the Big Ten had better remain mindful of the fact that No. 8 Arkansas dropped only five spots after second-ranked Georgia spit-roasted the Hogs to the tune of a 37-0 shutout.

Georgia and top-ranked Alabama seem to be on a collision course to the SEC Championship Game, and everyone this side of Athens and Tuscaloosa knows that whichever team comes up short in that game will still be lobbying for a spot in the College Football Playoff.

And if that comes to pass – and it most likely will – the Big Ten should engage in the very same kind of politicking when it comes to the loser between the Hawkeyes and the Nittany Lions.

The same should hold true for Ohio State if its recent resurgence is the real thing and the one-loss Buckeyes stomp their way to a fifth straight Big Ten championship.

There is lots of football to be played between now and then, of course. But in a season that has already seen a record 34 ranked teams go down, anything can and probably will happen.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Buckeyes Rise Four Spots In Latest AP Top-25 Poll

All teams need to do in college football is win games. After a number of highly-ranked programs lost the weekend of Sept. 25, the unpredictable action continued the following weekend.

Ohio State defeated Rutgers by a 52-13 final at SHI Stadium in Piscataway, N.J., improving to 4-1 and ascending four spots to No. 7 in the latest top-25 rankings from The Associated Press.

Ohio State's only loss this season came against Oregon, which fell 31-24 in overtime to Stanford on Oct. 2. The Ducks dropped from No. 3 to No. 8 in the AP poll.

Through the first five weeks of the 2021 season, 34 ranked teams have suffered losses, the most in poll history dating back to 1936.

SEC unbeatens Alabama and Georgia remain 1-2 in the rankings with the Crimson Tide garnering 53 of the 62 first-place votes. The Bulldogs received the other nine.

Iowa jumped to No. 3, its highest ranking

since 2015, while Penn State remained at No. 4. The Hawkeyes will host the Nittany Lions in the highest-ranked matchup at Kinnick Stadium since 1985, when top-ranked Iowa got a last-second field goal to take a 12-10 win against second-ranked Michigan.

Cincinnati cashed in on its 24-13 win at Notre Dame with the victory pushing the Bearcats to No. 5. That is UC's highest ranking since 2009.

Oklahoma, Ohio State, Oregon, Michigan and BYU round out AP's top 10, while Michigan State sits at No. 11 after a 48-31 win against Western Kentucky.

Clemson won a narrow 19-13 verdict at home against Boston College, but that wasn't enough for voters to keep the Tigers inside the top 25. They fell to No. 26, ending a streak of 107 consecutive weeks in the rankings. The last time Clemson was unranked was in October 2014.

The top 10 over in the AFCA coaches' poll has the same teams as the AP with a slight adjustment.

Alabama, Georgia, Iowa and Penn State occupy the top four spots with Oklahoma fifth and Cincinnati at No. 6. Ohio State is seventh followed by Michigan, Oregon and BYU.

The Crimson Tide earned 62 of a possible 65 first-place votes from the coaches. Georgia got the other three.

Despite Up-Front Shuffling, Offense Continues To Roll

Ohio State entered the 2021 season with a pair of potential All-America offensive linemen ready to protect a new starting quarterback. But then came fall camp and an urgent need to shuffle the deck.

2021 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 2	at Minnesota	W, 45-31	Fox	3-2, 20-13 win over Purdue
Sept. 11	OREGON*	L, 35-28	Fox	4-1, 31-24 loss to Stanford
Sept. 18	TULSA*	W, 41-20	FS1	1-4, 45-10 loss to Houston
Sept. 25	AKRON	W, 59-7	BTN	1-4, 34-17 loss to Ohio
Oct. 2	at Rutgers	W, 52-13	BTN	3-2, 52-13 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 9	MARYLAND	Noon	Fox	4-1, 51-14 loss to Iowa
Oct. 23	at Indiana*	TBA	TBA	2-3, 24-0 loss to Penn State
Oct. 30	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	5-0, 24-0 win over Indiana
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	TBA	3-3, 56-7 win over Northwestern
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	3-2, 20-13 loss to Minnesota
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE	TBA	TBA	5-0, 48-31 win over Western Ky.
Nov. 27	at Michigan	Noon	Fox	5-0, 38-17 win over Wisconsin
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	Fox	

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

Due to injuries and the desire to get the best five players on the field at the same time, the Buckeyes shuffled Thayer Munford from left tackle to left guard, switched Paris Johnson from tackle to right guard, moved Nicholas Petit-Frere from right to left tackle, inserted 6-8, 360-pound Dawand Jones into the lineup at right tackle and called upon redshirt freshman Luke Wypler to replace ailing center Harry Miller in the starting lineup.

When Munford turned an ankle in week three against Tulsa, junior Matthew Jones answered the call until Munford returned to his starting role vs. Rutgers. Also missing in the Tulsa game was offensive line coach Greg Studrawa, the culmination of a few weeks away from the team due to a back problem that eventually required surgery.

While many teams would likely struggle with that amount of upheaval along their offen-

sive front, especially with a first-year starting quarterback at the controls, the Buckeyes have purred right along with an offense that ranks No. 1 in the nation in total offense, averaging 555.6 yards per game.

"It's not easy and that's something that probably got glossed over," said OSU head coach Ryan Day. "Luke Wypler, Paris Johnson, Dawand Jones, Nick gets moved to left and Thayer goes inside - that's five guys doing something new for the first time. And while they've practiced together against our defense, they're seeing a four-down scheme over and over again. When we get into these games, you see different styles, different patterns, different spacings, and then coming over to the sideline to make adjustments.

"And then not having Stud here for those couple of weeks - that was a bumpy time for those guys, and I give them a lot of credit.

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BSB Podcast Now Twice Weekly

With Ohio State into its 2021 season, the Buckeye Sports Bulletin podcast is back to its twice-weekly football season publishing schedule, posting preview and recap shows each week of the regular season.

The BSB podcast, hosted by associate editors Wyatt Crosher and Patrick Mayhorn covers each game from every angle, releasing a full game preview on the Friday morning before the game and an in-depth recap on each Monday morning.

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

They've stuck together, and I think the offensive line room, their culture, their energy, their dedication, their buy-in is off the charts, and I give Stud a lot of credit for maintaining that."

Day said he wasn't initially keen on the idea of moving so many pieces around, especially Munford, who was named a preseason first-team All-American at tackle. But the moves were born of necessity.

"The idea is that you try to find the best five, and that meant we had to move some pieces around," Day said. "When you talk about the culture of that room – Thayer Munford is one of the most unselfish players I've ever been around. That's why he's our 'Block O' recipient. That's why he's a captain. He said that what's better for the team is that he move to guard. That's certainly going to pay huge dividends down the road for him because a lot of (NFL teams) will be able to see him play multiple positions. He's already proven he can play tackle, and now he's proving he can play guard.

"The easiest thing for him to have said is, 'I'm not moving.' But he didn't do that. He put the Buckeyes first, he put the team first, and

that speaks for the culture in that room and how impressed I've been with the entire culture of that room. And that has allowed us to put the best five on the field.

"The good news is that we've built some depth there, so we have the ability to roll some guys," Day continued. "But we always take into consideration the chemistry factor. The offensive line is somewhere that you typically don't roll positions and roll guys in and out, but we'll talk about it moving forward, and if it's appropriate, we'll do it."

Miller Returns; Wypler Remains Starting Center

For the first time in the 2021 season, Miller was available for the game against Rutgers. During the week leading up to the Buckeyes' matchup with the Scarlet Knights, Day confirmed the junior center had returned to the team after missing the first four games.

"He's been dealing with some health issues," Day said. "He's going to come back this week and be part of the team – which we're all excited about – and get back to work."

Who Is The Greatest Quarterback In Ohio State History?

Options:

J.T. Barrett ____
Justin Fields ____
Joe Germaine ____
Cornelius Greene ____
Dwayne Haskins ____
Bobby Hoying ____
Rex Kern ____
Craig Krenzel ____
Braxton Miller ____
Terrelle Pryor ____
Art Schlichter ____
Troy Smith ____

Instructions:

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

Comments:

The junior was expected to slide into Ohio State's starting center role this season after starting at left guard in 2020, but his absence opened a spot for Wypler, a redshirt freshman who said that he was caught off-guard when asked to start in the season-opening game against Minnesota.

"I wasn't expecting it going into the season, but things happen," Wypler said. "Going forward, I think I've finally settled into what my role is as the center and how I have to lead the

offensive line every week."

As for whether there would be a competition at center now that Wypler is entrenched as a starter, he didn't have much in the way of a firm answer.

"I think that's for Coach Day and Coach Stud to decide," Wypler said. "Every week, I'm coming ready to play and staying prepared."

Meanwhile, Wypler made a triumphant return home when the Buckeyes traveled to New

Continued On Page 6



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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

Jersey to take on the Scarlet Knights.

Wypler said he and his other teammates

from the Garden State – including safety Ronnie Hickman and linebacker Cody Simon – bring a part of the state's culture of blue-collar toughness to the Ohio State locker room.

"I think coming from that area, coming from Jersey, everyone kind of knows the Jersey rugged, tough guys," Wypler said. "That mold, I think, we try to bring that here to our locker room. We try to pass it along to some of our teammates."

Wypler, a Montvale, N.J., native, grew up about an hour away from SHI Stadium and went to many Scarlet Knights football games in his youth.

"Growing up, I was a decent Rutgers fan," he said. "My uncle had season tickets when I

was growing up. I went to quite a few games, but to be honest, I wasn't a huge, die-hard fan."

The 6-3, 300-pound lineman became a highly touted recruit for former Rutgers head coach Chris Ash in high school. The four-star prospect from St. Joseph Regional said he considered committing to his home-state school but ultimately decided to join the Buckeyes.

After playing one game as a true freshman, Wypler started in his fifth career game for the Buckeyes against Rutgers. He said he played in front of about 200 family members and friends, and the only problem with that was securing enough tickets for everyone who wanted one.

Buckeyes Find Leadership In Many Different Places

Leadership – where it's coming from and how it's being received – has been an underlying topic of conversation recently regarding the Ohio State football team in 2021.

Ripples of locker room discord before, during and after the Sept. 25, 59-7 victory against Akron appeared as cracks in what many team members refer to as "The Brotherhood." Three days before the game, fourth-year senior linebacker Dallas Gant announced he was entering the transfer portal, and then fellow fourth-year senior linebacker K'Vaughan Pope essentially quit the team in the second quarter. He was officially dismissed the following day.

It was a tale of two players at the same position, each in his fourth year in the program waiting for his turn in the starting lineup, each passed over by younger players. In the day and age of easy transfers and being able to play four games and still take a redshirt year, these are the kinds of things that are going on throughout college football.

Still, one might have thought that a pair of fourth-year seniors might provide leadership, especially at a position that lost so much experience after last season.

So where does the leadership come from when your team is starting only five seniors against Akron alongside six freshmen?

"In the perfect order of things, your older guys are the ones who are the leaders, who are the ones who are playing," Day said. "Sometimes, when you have younger guys come in, that does change the dynamic a little bit. But that's football, and every team has its own different journey. That happens to every team, and I think this year we're experiencing some of that."

"You kind of count on some of the older guys who are playing to be the strong leaders, the guys you're counting on in the field to be the voice. And when some of those guys are still trying to get those reps under their belt and find their role and find their identity, then sometimes it makes for a dynamic that isn't ideal. But the idea is that we move forward and start to fill those roles. We have some guys with really good leadership skills, and I think they're going to embrace that and you're starting to see that already."

Sometimes, leadership comes from expected players. Super senior Haskell Garrett has embraced his captaincy, saying it is a chance for him to pass down the knowledge he has gained during his time as a Buckeye.

"I finally get a chance to teach and share with others my knowledge," Garrett said. "We have a very young group, and I find it joyful to teach the young guys what I was taught coming up. Being behind Dre'Mont Jones, the Bosas, Chase Young, B.B. Landers and all those guys that came before me – now I get to share the knowledge that I got from them and pass it down."

While leadership is expected from someone such as Garrett, it can come from places where you might not expect it. Day said that three different players – starting receiver Garrett Wilson, backup receiver Xavier Johnson and fifth-year senior Jerron Cage, who has worked his way back into the defensive line rotation after fighting an injury – stepped forward to address the team during the week before the Akron game.

Wilson spoke in the locker room after the Tulsa game while Johnson addressed his



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Online Predictors Face Tougher Task With Big Ten Opponents

Like many of us, the BSB staff saw Rutgers on the road as a tougher game than it proved to be while making their weekly predictions at BuckeyeSports.com. Mark Rea had the biggest blowout, and even he underestimated the Buckeyes' dominance with a 45-20 prediction. Based on margin of victory, Chase Brown followed at 35-20, Wyatt Crosher saw it 34-24 and Patrick Mayhorn predicted a squeaker with Ohio State winning 28-27.

Watch for the staff predictions before each game, and don't forget the immediate coverage after each game posted at BuckeyeSports.com as well as discussion of the game at our Fan Forum, including the "Official Game Thread" with real-time comments from BSB staff members and readers throughout the game.

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

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

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or, 'Compare yourself to somebody else.' That's not really a recipe for success.

"The recipe for success is focusing on yourself, getting better and having a long-term approach, and I think Evan has done a very, very good job of that. I think you're going to see a very good player here in the future."

While Pryor got a taste of pay dirt with his 12-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter against Akron, Egbuka got close before running out of gas on his long reception. It was still the longest play from scrimmage for the Buckeyes since 2014 and tied for the longest pass play in program history.

"I can't say enough about what I've seen regarding Emeka's approach every day," Day said. "He works really, really hard, he's tough, he plays special teams. He takes his job very seriously. He's got a chance to be an excellent leader. I think the future is extremely bright for Emeka, and I couldn't be happier with what he's done so far."

"His approach, his maturity level – that's a tough room right now to break through, but you don't hear a word from him. This is a guy who was highly recruited, and he's only going to get better. He just keeps getting better and putting days on top of days with no expectations, and you can see what he's capable of."

teammates before a midweek practice session. Then, it was Cage's turn after the Thursday practice.

"Garrett's message was that we have to create the standard here," Day said. "It's not about just winning and losing. And then Xavier talked about how every rep matters. We can't let reps get away from us. And then Jerron was talking about how we hadn't quite played a whole game nine units strong, how we weren't quite there yet and how we needed to pull this thing together."

"Three different guys at three different moments and the message was right on point. So, we're getting there. But it's still a work in progress, for sure."

Freshman Pair Shows Glimpse Of Bright Future

A pair of true freshmen got their first appreciable playing time Sept. 25 during Ohio

State's 59-7 blowout victory against Akron, showcasing the fruits of the team's coast-to-coast recruiting efforts.

Running back Evan Pryor rushed five times for 35 yards and his first career touchdown vs. the Zips while wide receiver Emeka Egbuka electrified the Ohio Stadium crowd by taking a short pass and turning it into an 85-yard gain.

Pryor was the ranked the nation's No. 2 all-purpose back out of William Amos Hough High School in Cornelius, N.C., about 20 miles north of Charlotte, while Egbuka was a consensus five-star prospect when he was a prepster in Steilacoom, Wash., a town on the southern tip of Puget Sound about 15 miles southwest of Tacoma.

Neither is expected to make much of an impact in 2021, especially with so much talent ahead of them at their respective positions. But Day made it clear each is working toward the time when they will be starters.

"Evan has a lot of talent, and I think this year is going to be very, very important for him to grow and build," Day said. "One thing Evan has done a very good job of doing is he's not comparing himself to anybody else. Sometimes in this world today, with people surrounding you – family, friends, social media – it's easy to do that. You're asked, 'Why aren't you doing this?'"

OSU To Wear Scarlet Uniforms Vs. Penn State

If you like scarlet red as scarlet red can be, chances are you'll be a fan of what the Ohio State football team will wear when it hosts Penn State on Oct. 30. The Buckeyes will don

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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an all-scarlet uniform for the Big Ten matchup, unveiling something referred to as a “color rush.”

Jerseys, pants, socks, base layers, gloves and spikes will all be scarlet with the traditional striping pattern on the shoulders and down the side of the legs. Ohio State will also wear its classic silver helmets with white Buckeye leaves.

According to a university news release, the football program wants the color rush of all-scarlet to extend to the fans and the entire stadium as well. Fans are going to be encouraged to “Scarlet the Stadium” by wearing their own scarlet jerseys, sweatshirts, hoodies, sweaters, coats and pullovers.

Game time has yet to be announced.

McCord Latest Buckeye To Win Top Frosh Award

At some point, Ohio State is going to have to learn how to share. For the fourth consecutive week, the Buckeyes had a player win the Big Ten Freshman of the Week award, and this time the honor fell to McCord after he completed 13 of 18 passes for 319 yards and two touchdowns against Akron.

It was the true freshman quarterback's first career start as well as his college football debut. McCord joined C.J. Stroud (twice) and TreVeyon Henderson as Buckeyes to earn the top freshman title this year.

Elsewhere in the weekly awards for week four, Penn State quarterback Sean Clifford and Northwestern running back Evan Hull shared Offensive Player of the Week honors. Clifford threw for a career-high 401 yards and four touchdowns during a 38-17 victory against Villanova. Hull led the Wildcats to an

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easy 35-6 win against Ohio, carrying the ball 22 times for 216 yards and two scores.

Iowa linebacker Jack Campbell gave the Hawkeyes another Defensive Player of the Week nod after recording 18 tackles, three pass breakups and a fumble recovery during a 24-14 win against Colorado State.

Finally, Michigan State receiver Jayden

Reed earned Special Teams Player of the Week honors, thanks to a 62-yard punt return for a game-tying touchdown against Nebraska late in the fourth quarter. The Spartans later took a 23-20 win against the Huskers in overtime.

Lots Of Champions Named Vs. Akron

The Ohio State coaching staff handed out 17 “champion” grades following the Buckeyes’ victory against Akron.

Recognized were linemen Wypler, Johnson, Petit-Frere and Matthew Jones; running backs Master Teague and Henderson; tight end Jeremy Ruckert; and wide receivers Chris Olave and Jaxon Smith-Njigba on offense. Defensive tackle Garrett, safety Ronnie Hickman and linebackers Steele Chambers and Teradja

Mitchell earned the grade on defense.

Offensive tackle Dawand Jones, receiver Wilson and defensive tackle Tyleik Williams were Ohio State's players of the game, and punter Jesse Mirco earned the special teams player of the game honor.

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Olave Returns To Form With Pair Of TDs

Continued From Page 1

yards for a touchdown. That started the scoring for the Buckeyes, who got a pick-six from freshman cornerback Denzel Burke and a 23-yard field goal from kicker Noah Ruggles to jump out to a 17-0 lead at the 5:45 mark of the first quarter.

Then it was time for Stroud to take over.

A simple crossing pattern by Garrett Wilson turned into an easy 32-yard touchdown pass play late in the first quarter to push Ohio State's lead to 24-0, and then a 1-yard toss to tight end Mitch Rossi early in the second quarter proved that Day will throw the ball in any situation.

The Buckeyes had apparently scored a touchdown on an 8-yard run by Master Teague, but replay overturned the call and placed the ball inside the 1-yard line. After Rutgers jumped offside to inch the ball closer to the goal line, everyone in the stadium figured Teague would be able to get back the touchdown he had taken away – everyone except Day, however, who had Stroud fake a handoff to Teague and then throw to a wide-open Rossi who had slipped unnoticed into the end zone.

Stroud, who is 6-3 and a slight 218 pounds, stood in the pocket and withstood heavy fire on his third touchdown throw. Staring down Scarlet Knights DB Kessawn Abraham on a corner blitz, Stroud stood in the pocket long enough to deliver a strike to

Ruckert on a crossing pattern, a ball the OSU tight end turned into a 19-yard touchdown.

By that time, Stroud was making it look easy. At one stretch, he completed seven passes in a row worth 138 yards and three touchdowns.

"That's the C.J. we see all the time in practice," said Ohio State wideout Chris Olave. "He got some rest for that shoulder, and I think he's back to normal. This past Tuesday, which is our hardest practice day of the week, he was back and throwing well, putting the ball where it needed to be. So we knew he was back. We had full confidence in him."

On his fourth touchdown throw of the game, Stroud again felt pressure when Schiano dialed up another blitz package. But rather than stand and deliver, this time the young quarterback escaped the rush of Rutgers linebacker Mohamed Toure and found Olave along the boundary. Olave, who had been uncharacteristically quiet during the previous two games, quickly turned the play into a 56-yard score, pushing the Ohio State lead to 45-6 at the 3:24 mark of the second quarter.

Stroud and Olave hooked up one more time before each of them called it an afternoon. Four plays after the QB threw what might have been his best pass of the day – a drop-in-the-bucket sideline dart to a well-covered Jaxon Smith-Njigba that covered 28 yards – Stroud flicked an 11-yard touchdown to Olave in the back of the end zone to make it 52-6 with 10:21 remaining in the third period.

At that point, Day had apparently seen all he needed from his redshirt freshman, who gave way to McCord and Miller to mop things up.

Asked if he thought the week of rest helped Stroud navigate what had been a hectic month since he was named the starter, Day replied, "Yeah, I thought so. And who knows? Maybe it gave him a little perspective, too, watching the game last week and watching practice. We'll see, but he did play better today. It was encouraging to see him play the way he did."

Stroud has now thrown for 1,293 yards and 13 touchdowns. With an average of 323.3 yards per game, he is tracking the single-season mark of 345.1 set in 2018 by Dwayne Haskins, a record once thought to be unbreakable.

Still, Stroud remains largely a work in progress. He knows it, and so does his head coach.

"Some throws I want back, but that's every quarterback in the country," Stroud said. "They'd have that same comment. This was just the beginning for me. I feel like my shoulder is 100 times better and that rest really did help me. I did every precaution I could to get it back to feeling right. It's feeling really good now, and I think it's just going to get better and better. I'm blessed to be in this position."

Day said above and beyond the gaudy statistics, his young quarterback showed mental and physical toughness against the Scarlet Knights. But there were also some wince-in-

ducing times such as when Stroud made the wrong read and it nearly ended in an interception. On the very next play, though, he ran away from the Rutgers pressure and found Olave for the 56-yard touchdown.

"Without getting into too many specifics, that was not the right read," Day said of the play before the touchdown. "But he came back and I thought he showed some toughness. Our message all week has been toughness. How does a quarterback show toughness? He avoids a rush and then makes a play like that."

After such a big performance, his coach is now looking for Stroud to make the next step up in his maturation.

"This is what he's capable of, and now he's got to bring it," Day said. "He's got to be consistent. There are still a lot of things we're going to watch on film that have to get corrected and have to get fixed, and then we'll have to come back and do it again next week."

"Now, there's a body of work on film and (opposing defensive coordinators) are going to look at him and try to attack him in different ways and he's going to have to have answers. But that's playing in the Big Ten."

Welcome Back, Chris

Olave must have been wondering these past couple of weeks if returning to Ohio State was such a good decision. The preseason first-team All-American who would most likely have been a first-round NFL draft pick in April was held without a catch against Tul-

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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.

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sa and then had only two receptions for 12 yards vs. Akron.

According to Day, however, the team co-captain understood what was happening and refused to let a lack of production affect him.

"A lot of time when you design a play, and you've got one of the top receivers in the country, they're going to put two guys on him or back a guy up and run him out of there and the ball's going to go somewhere else," the OSU head coach said. "Certainly we want to get a guy like Chris as many touches as we possibly can, but there are just games when that doesn't happen."

"It's obviously a tribute to his talent level and guys knowing where he is at all times. It's defenses seeing where he is and doubling him or just backing up so we can't take a shot downfield because they know he's very good at that. But I can't say enough about his approach. He hasn't let any of that stuff bother him. He's been a good leader, and he's really helped that wide receiver unit get stronger."

Olave finally shook enough defenders against Rutgers to grab five catches for 119 yards and two touchdowns. It was his eighth career game with 100 or more yards receiving, and his two TDs gave him 27 for his Ohio State career to tie Cris Carter (1984-86) for third on the program's all-time list.

"I'm all about helping this team win," said Olave, who expressed surprise when told he had equaled Carter's career touchdown mark. "The last couple of weeks were kind of tough, but you have to keep things in perspective. Today, I had some balls come my way, but the most important thing was that we came out with the win."

The 56-yard touchdown catch-and-run was a thing of beauty. After Stroud escaped trouble and got the ball to his target, Olave shifted gears down the sideline and left Rutgers DB Patrice Rene grabbing at air when Rene tried for a shoestring tackle. After shifting away from Rene, Olave cut back and juke defensive back Avery Young out of his shoes just before crossing the goal line.

Olave had another highlight-reel catch although it went for only 15 yards. On the first play of a late first-quarter possession, Stroud was flushed from the pocket. As he ran to his right, he pitched what appeared to be a throw-away to avoid a loss only to have Olave spear the ball out of midair and then somehow get a foot down in bounds. The catch was reviewed, but that only served to underscore its difficulty factor.

"That one where Chris toe-tapped along the sideline," Day said, "that was an unbelievable play, and it kind of got us going."

Two plays later, Stroud connected with running back Marcus Crowley for a 21-yard gain, and then he hooked up with Wilson on the next play for a 32-yard touchdown to give the Buckeyes a 24-0 lead.

"That catch Chris made, those are the kinds of things that really help a quarterback when he's trying to get his rhythm going at the beginning of a game," Day said.

Stroud said it was one of the best catches he's ever seen out of his star receiver, who then quickly deflected the praise back to his quarterback.

"I thought he made a huge play just to get it to me," Olave said.

Getting TEs Involved

Ohio State tight ends might dream of catching passes, but they know they're typi-

cally just another offensive lineman tasked with picking off a blitzing cornerback or sealing an edge for a running back.

Sometimes, though, they do get their moment in the receiving spotlight, and Ruckert took full advantage against Rutgers. The 6-5, 250-pound graduate senior was targeted four times and caught them all, turning his receptions into 40 yards as well as his first touchdown of the season.

The production should have been especially sweet for Ruckert, who hails from Lindenhurst, N.Y., a town located about 75 miles east of Piscataway on Long Island.

"It's good for those tight ends to get some touches," Day said. "Jeremy had a nice day coming back home, getting a touchdown."

The score came midway through the second quarter and gave Ohio State a 38-6 lead at the time. Ruckert came off a block at the line of scrimmage and drifted to his left on a crossing pattern. Stroud was hit as he threw, but the ball was still on target and the tight

end rumbled into the end zone with a 19-yard score.

It was the 10th touchdown of Ruckert's career.

Meanwhile, fellow tight end Rossi celebrated the first touchdown reception of his career when he reeled in the 1-yard pass from Stroud early in the second quarter. Rossi, a graduate senior who is in his fifth season with Ohio State as a walk-on, lined up in a goal-line formation as a fullback before drifting into the end zone unnoticed by Rutgers defenders.

Not only was it the first touchdown of Rossi's career, but it was also his first reception.

"You just have to love something like that," Day said. "Mitch has done nothing but everything we've asked him to do. He's a very tough young man, he works really hard, and he deserves everything that he's getting. He's the quarterback of the punt team, he'll play fullback on the goal line — all those thankless jobs — and I'm glad we have him. He's one of

the more reliable guys on our team."

Rossi is a four-time OSU Scholar-Athlete and a two-time Academic All-Big Ten honoree.

Freshman Sidelined

Henderson has grabbed the starting running back spot by the throat, but his teammates at the position continue to produce whenever they get their chance.

Day kept the freshman phenom on the sideline after a second-quarter tackle sent Henderson to the medical tent. He appeared ready to go in the second half, but his head coach decided to err on the side of caution and keep Henderson out for the remainder of the blowout win. Therefore, he finished with a modest 71 yards and a touchdown on eight carries.

"It was my decision to hold him out in the second half," Day said. "He was ready to go, but I felt like I just didn't want to take a chance with him."

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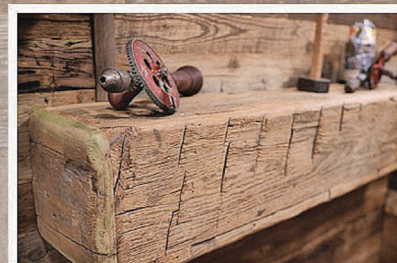
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Silver Bullets Make For Scarlet Night In New Jersey

After a 3-1 start to the season, which included a road win against Power Five team Syracuse, blowouts of Temple and Delaware, and a near-miss upset bid in Ann Arbor the week before, Rutgers was feeling generous entering its Oct. 2 matchup with the Buckeyes.

It gave away white pom-poms to fans for what was expected to be a sellout crowd – in reality, many of the 51,006 listed on the box score were disguised as empty seats – and a stadium police officer gave up his secret local pizza spot to a pair of hungry Ohio State beat writers.

When the game actually started, it was the Scarlet Knights playing giveaway on three interceptions from starting quarterback Noah Vedral, and they could have kicked away another two possessions had a pair of fumbles fallen differently. Add in three turnovers on downs, and the picture wasn't pretty for Greg Schiano's squad.

On an afternoon that Rutgers hoped would result in its coronation as a fully respected member of the Big Ten with a victory over the league's Goliath – and four-time defending champion – perhaps the generosity went a bit too far, at least on the field.

Ohio State would have rolled without the turnovers but certainly didn't turn them away. Denzel Burke took a Vedral pass on Rutgers' second possession to the house, giving his Buckeyes a 14-0 lead that it would never even begin to relinquish.

The other two interceptions, credited to Tommy Eichenberg (with a nod to Zach Harrison's deflection) and Ryan Watts (with an even bigger nod to pressure from Tyleik Williams), didn't even lead to Ohio State points.

At the point in the game when those turnovers came – midway through the third quarter and on the first play in the fourth – the Buckeyes didn't really need them. After a trio of tight matchups to open the season, including a week-two loss to Oregon (which lost a 31-24 decision at Stanford on Oct. 2 to drop from the ranks of the unbeaten),

GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Mayhorn

that was a welcome change for Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and the entire Buckeye team – as evidenced by an especially thrilled staffer's exclamation of "Why don't we just do that every game?" as OSU left the field.

It was a win that senior wideout Chris Olave described as much-needed, both for the boost it gives Ohio State in the standings (4-1 overall, 2-0 in Big Ten play) and for proof of concept.

"I feel like we needed this game," Olave said. "I felt we need this to build our confidence back up. We've been practicing hard. We just needed to show up and put it on the field in a game. I feel like we put in a full game. The defense was real good today."

Day was pleased, too. With a 52-13 win, he had very little to harp about, at least before he got the chance to sit down with the tape.

"Overall, I thought our team played with more toughness than we have in the past," Day said. "This was an important game for us because on Sept. 2, a month ago when we played Minnesota, I felt we were a much different team. I felt like that going into this week, but we hadn't shown it yet. I felt like we had some glimpses of that tonight."

Day is right. This is a significantly different team. Look no further than the lineup and the coaches directing it for proof. Ohio State's opening lineup against the Scarlet Knights boasted six new starters when compared to that opening affair vs. the Golden Gophers, and a significantly changed list of contributors as well. Day-one starters such as Eichenberg, Tyreke Smith, Taron Vincent, Watts and Miyan Williams have found themselves featured far less. Among



SONNY BROCKWAY

PICK SIX — OSU freshman cornerback Denzel Burke (29) races to the end zone with one of three interceptions for the Buckeyes against Rutgers. Burke returned the first-quarter pick 23 yards for his first career touchdown, staking Ohio State to a 14-0 lead with only 3:27 gone in the opening period.

other contributors, Josh Proctor is gone for the season with a leg injury, and Dallas Gant and K'Vaughan Pope have entered the transfer portal.

Meanwhile, the new faces shone again against Rutgers.

Running back TreVeyon Henderson earned his fourth straight start while Williams was again listed as unavailable. Un-

like the Tulsa game when Williams didn't play, Day faced no questions about him in the postgame. It seems that Henderson has erased them from anyone's mind.

Cornerback Cameron Martinez, an addition to the lineup first in week three against Tulsa and now a starter, was second on the team in tackles with seven. Linebacker Cody Simon led the linebackers in stops along with Cade Kacherski, with five. Freshmen linemen Jack Sawyer, J.T. Tuimoloau and Williams bolstered an increasingly young line, and it was again Williams leading the way in the pass-rushing department, rushing Vedral on that interception as well as earning Ohio State's lone sack.

Ohio State started 11 underclassmen against Rutgers and relied on another half-dozen or so for contributions.

"When you look at Ronnie Hickman, when you look at Cam Martinez, when you look at Jaxon Smith-Njigba, C.J. Stroud, TreVeyon Henderson, some of these guys, Cody Simon, Tommy Eichenberg – these are guys who had zero starts in their entire careers," Day said.

"Well, they're not young anymore. Now they have five games under their belt, so they're not young anymore. They do have experience, so now we know what to expect. We also know what guys can give us meaningful minutes behind them and then who needs to continue to work hard to get to where they need to be to become contributors and create a role for themselves. A game like this allows a bunch of guys to get on the field, and that's all meaningful stuff."

It was a win that Ohio State needed –

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Where to start? For a second consecutive game, Ohio State was firing on all cylinders on both sides of the ball from the jump. The Buckeyes scored on their first possession of the game when running back TreVeyon Henderson found a seam in the Rutgers defense and picked it masterfully, dashing for a 44-yard score just after his defense forced a turnover on downs.

Not to be outdone, the defense responded with a score of its own when Denzel Burke nabbed the first pick-six of his career. The OSU lead ballooned to as many as 24 points in the first quarter, and 24-6 at the end of that frame was the closest Rutgers got all game. The Ohio State defense was opportunistic, aggressive and quick to the football. It looked far more comfortable than the group that had shown up early in the season.

The offense, meanwhile, just seemed to click. C.J. Stroud looked much improved with a week of rest for his shoulder, Chris Olave was reinitiated into the offense, the rushing attack worked for every running back who touched the ball, and the Buckeyes rolled through a pretty good Rutgers defense. With the kind of talent OSU possesses, that's expected, but it was still impressive to see live. These Buckeyes should be able to score on anyone.

What Didn't Work

The rushing attack wasn't especially explosive without Henderson after he was dinged up in the first half, though it did little to limit the

offense. Master Teague is not necessarily explosive, though Marcus Crowley did look capable of breaking a few runs.

The short passing game was weirdly shaky, too. Ohio State quarterbacks were 7 of 14 passing within 5 yards of the line of scrimmage for 82 yards. The good news? They were 11 for 13 beyond 5 yards, and Stroud alone was 11 of 12 for 251 yards.

Ohio State's pass rush returned to (not-so-good) form with just one sack. But after a 52-13 win, that's nitpicking.

Play Of The Game

It's rare that a play of the game comes with nearly 12 minutes to play in the first quarter, but Burke's 23-yard interception return for a touchdown broke Rutgers' spirit early. He was actually a bit behind the receiver on a designed slant in man coverage, but he was in the right place at the right time because Scarlet Knights quarterback Noah Vedral badly overthrew his target.

Burke was right there to snare it before he showed off his ability as a ball-carrier on the way to the end zone. It was Ohio State's third pick-six in as many weeks, joining Cameron Martinez and Ronnie Hickman.

Chris Olave's first touchdown, a 56-yard breakaway on a route that he improvised as Stroud rolled, also deserves to be in contention – and was probably more impressive. But it came as the game was already well in hand, and Olave will certainly earn another play of the game. It's not often that a cornerback can claim it.

— Patrick Mayhorn

they all are if the Buckeyes hope to remain in the College Football Playoff hunt after an early loss, given the track record of two-loss teams in the CFP era – but the style of win was similarly crucial. As Olave alluded, it was the kind of win that instills confidence in a young team and in a fan base that had grown very antsy after the loss to Oregon and other early-season struggles.

Ohio State wasn't far behind in its anxiety, reacting quickly and reworking that starting lineup while moving defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs to the press box and promoting Matt Barnes to the de facto coordinator as the man with the defensive play sheet. But Day didn't want to overreact, and for at least another week, he has justification for his caution.

"We're in an area where patience is not allowed. But I understand that. I know that. I've had a bunch of talks with a lot of people, and one of them was (OSU athletic director) Gene Smith, and he said you have to be patient," Day said. "You have to continue to work some of these younger guys in. This is a unique team, but we're doing things the right way and we know that. We're recruiting the right people. We're a first-class operation, and we always do things the right way. But there are times when you have to grow through some things along the way. We're not going to panic.

"Certainly, we have to act when appropriate, but we're not going to overreact. We just continue to try and get better. That's the plan here. When you do that, you know you can put your head on your pillow at night and know you're doing the right things. A win like this has given us a little bit of juice as we head into the next month. OK, there were some tough times but we grew through it, we didn't panic and now we might have a good team as we head into October and November."

Defense Stingy Again

It's hard to imagine that just passing the defensive playbook to Barnes has shaped Ohio State's defense into top-25 form, but for two straight games, it has looked the part. The Buckeyes allowed just 142 first-half yards – when the starting group was on the field – to the Rutgers offense.

The rushing defense, which was a problem in weeks one and two, held its opponent to less than 4.0 yards per carry for a third consecutive game. The pass defense allowed 235 yards and two scores but forced the trio of interceptions and helped to hold Rutgers to just 4 of 15 on third-down attempts.

It wasn't a perfect game from the defense. Rutgers speedster Aron Cruickshank was able to break free nearly untouched for a 75-yard touchdown reception in the first quarter thanks to some rough tackling angles from secondary players. Ohio State still generated very little in the way of a consistent pass rush. But the young secondary and an improving linebacker room was up to the task and impressed its head coach.

"When the defense plays the way it did today, it just gives you more confidence," Day said. "I thought we played better team football today."

The story, as it is everywhere else with this team, was still with the youth. But with five games under their belts, Day thinks that he's ready to remove some of the inexperience-related shackles as he sees his green

defense mature on the field each week.

Barnes seems to agree because Ohio State has worked in more disguised coverages and blitzes with each passing week. That's more complex, advanced play-calling than Ohio State showed during the first two weeks of the year, and it has helped significantly in creating the turnover opportunities that the Buckeye defense is taking advantage of.

"It's now a bunch of guys who are expecting to make plays where before they were just trying to get lined up right," Day said. "Everything they were doing was for the first time. I thought the defensive staff did a good job this week with the plan. I thought they mixed up the looks. I thought we created disruption in the backfield, and then we were able to create some turnovers."

The OSU defense just looks more comfortable. It also sounds more comfortable in postgame chats with the media. Defensive tackle Haskell Garrett spoke during the week about encouraging his teammates to have fun on the field, and Ohio State's defenders took him up on that offer Saturday afternoon.

"We were just out there having fun," Burke said. "We're just playing football – the game we love. We trust the coaches to put us in positions to make plays. We practice hard every day and try to bring a lot of energy to practice. We try to play like we practice, and I thought we did that today."

That, too, comes with the comfort of experience.

"It took a few games," Martinez said. "It's good to get the first quarter of games out of the way. I know I needed this experience, and now we feel like we have that now. We just need to keep on going and keep on building."

"From my personal experience, in-game experience is a much different feeling," the redshirt freshman continued. "Coaches put us in different positions in practice and tried to make it as much like a game as they could, but until you're in a game and expe-

rience that, you really don't know what it's like."

Road Warriors

Winning on the road in conference play, as just about every coach in America would gladly tell you, is no easy feat for most programs. League play brings with it familiarity and increasingly hostile environments as teams enter the most important parts of their schedule. Mix in rivalry matchups and those road trips can make it difficult to hear yourself think as a visitor, let alone claim a victory over a 60-minute game.

Ohio State, though, has had more success than just about anyone else in the nation on the road in league play since 2012 when former head coach Urban Meyer took over. In those nine seasons, with the win against Rutgers factored in, Ohio State has a 35-3 record in Big Ten road games, with nine wins against ranked opponents. Four of those came against top-10 foes – No. 7 Michigan State in 2014, eighth-ranked Wisconsin in 2016, ninth-ranked Penn State in 2018 and No. 10 Michigan in 2019.

The team's pair of conference road wins in 2021 aren't of the ranked variety, but they were still big-time victories for the Buckeyes, especially given that all three of the road losses in that glittering 35-3 record since 2012 came to unranked teams – Penn State in 2016, Iowa in 2017 and Purdue in

2018.

"It's good to get those two wins, for sure," Day said. "With a young team, and the way the first half of this year and the way the schedule played out, it just was what it was and we had to handle it. I think it made us stronger, though. Going on the road to start and then handling a loss, those types of things have made us stronger."

"I think we can continue to build on this, and that's been the whole goal. If we just get better week in and week out and continue to get these guys reps, keep coaching better and continue to give our guys a better opportunity to be successful, then hopefully when we pick our heads up here in a month, we'll be where we need to be going into November."

The key to earning wins on the road, at least according to Day – who has a perfect 9-0 mark in such matchups – is getting off to a hot start. A 24-0 lead with a little more than two minutes to play in the first quarter would fit that billing.

"You have to play well early in conference games like this, especially on the road to hopefully take the crowd out of it," Day said. "I thought the play Cam Martinez made was a big play (deflecting a fake-punt pass attempt on the opening drive), and then a couple of plays later we scored a touchdown with TreVeyon and that kind of got us going."



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Bucks Make Quick Work Of Routing Rutgers

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A rested C.J. Stroud showed why Ohio State head coach Ryan Day had enough faith to name him the starter before the 2021 season despite limited mop-up duty last season behind Justin Fields.

Stroud returned from a one-game absence to throw for 330 yards and a career-high five touchdowns, helping to lead the No. 11 Buckeyes to a 52-13 rout of Rutgers in Piscataway, N.J., on Oct. 2.

The redshirt freshman rested his sore right shoulder when the Buckeyes (4-1, 2-0 Big Ten) rolled to a 59-7 win against Akron on Sept. 25, but he was sharp from the onset against the Scarlet Knights (3-2, 0-2) before a crowd of 51,006 at SHI Stadium on a sunny, 76-degree afternoon.

Stroud was 17 of 23 in the game and threw four of his TD passes in the first half when OSU staked itself to a 45-6 lead. Stroud's final touchdown pass before exiting in the third quarter was an 11-yarder to Chris Olave to make it 52-6.

Rutgers entered the game with confidence after a tough 20-13 loss at Michigan, but a pair of freshmen made sure the Buckeyes made an early statement with the game's first two scores 40 seconds apart.

TreVeyon Henderson had a 44-yard run on Ohio State's second offensive play. Cornerback Denzel Burke then followed with a 23-yard interception return, and the rout was on.

A No-Doubter

Rutgers' hopes of an upset quickly faded on its first series after the opening kickoff when the Scarlet Knights failed to convert a fake punt on fourth-and-8 from their 48.

The short snap went to up-man Matt Alaimo, but his pass was broken up by red-shirt freshman Cameron Martinez. On Ohio State's first play, Stroud hit tight end Jeremy Ruckert for 4 yards before Henderson cut inside and went untouched through the left side of the line for a 44-yard touchdown at the 12:13 mark.

On Rutgers' second snap of the next series, Burke stepped in front of a Noah Vedral pass and returned it 23 yards for a touchdown at 11:33 to make it 14-0. It was Burke's first career interception after he had one vs. Tulsa nullified by a penalty.

It was the third straight game with a pick-six for the Buckeyes. Martinez had one vs. Tulsa, and Ronnie Hickman took one back against Akron. It was also Vedral's first interception in 115 throws this season, but it would not be the last for the Scarlet Knights quarterback.

After a Rutgers punt, the Buckeyes went from their own 30 to the 6-yard line before the drive stalled. Rather than go for it on fourth-and-3, Day opted for a 23-yard field goal from Noah Ruggles for a 17-0 lead with 5:45 left in the opening period. Garrett Wilson had catches of 22 and 17 yards during the possession.

The OSU defense got a three-and-out,



SONNY BROCKWAY

CRUNCH TIME — With OSU freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson sidelined after the first quarter with a minor injury, fourth-year junior backup Master Teague (33) filled in with a game-high 11 carries for 52 yards. The Buckeyes ran for 208 yards in the game and averaged 5.6 yards on 37 carries.

and the Buckeyes had the ball back at their own 26 after a punt. Olave grabbed a 15-yarder from Stroud to the 41, Henderson gained 6, and after an incomplection, Stroud tossed a pass to Marcus Crowley in the backfield and Crowley turned it into a 21-yard play to the 32.

Wilson then gathered in a pass at the 28 and raced to the end zone to cap a 32-yard TD, upping the Buckeyes' lead to 24-0 at 2:34 remaining in the first quarter.

That's when the OSU defense got sloppy for perhaps the only time in the game. Vedral connected with speedster Aron Cruickshank on a crossing pattern at the Scarlet Knights 35, and he ran away with a 75-yard touchdown. Ohio State defensive tackle Haskell Garrett blocked the point-after try to leave the score at 24-6 with 2:23 still remaining in the first frame.

The Buckeyes responded by going 75 yards in nine plays, shaving nearly five minutes off the clock to extend their lead to 31-6 when graduate senior tight end Mitch Rossi scored on a 1-yard pass for his first career reception and touchdown at the 12:31 mark

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OHIO STATE VS. RUTGERS

of the second quarter.

A 38-yard catch by Jaxon Smith-Njigba to the Rutgers 26 was the big play on the drive. Ruckert had a catch of 8 yards, and Stroud had a run for 10.

Henderson had two runs early in the drive but went to the medical tent for attention. He appeared OK afterward but remained on the sideline as Master Teague took over.

Henderson was finished for the game with 71 yards on eight carries.

"It was my decision to hold him out in the second half," Day said afterward. "He was ready to go."

Teague thought he had bulled his way in from the 8, but a video review ruled he was down just short of the goal line. Stroud fumbled the next snap for a 2-yard loss, but Rutgers was offside. Stroud then found Rossi wide open for the score on the next play.

Stroud to Ruckert for 19 yards and a touchdown made it 38-6 Buckeyes at 6:27 of the second quarter, a touchdown drive that came after Rutgers was stopped on fourth-and-2 and turned the ball over on downs at midfield. Johnny Langan took the ball in the Wildcat formation but was stacked up a yard shy of the line to gain by OSU defensive end Zach Harrison and defensive tackle Antwan Jackson.

There were five plays on the 50-yard scoring series. Olave started it with a 19-yard catch to the 31. Wilson picked up 13 on an end-around, and Teague rushed for 11. On the latter, right tackle Nicholas Petite-Frere had a personal foul after the run to move the ball back 15 yards to the 22. Teague regained 3 yards on the ground to set up the Ruckert TD.

The Buckeyes completed the first-half scoring in style with a brilliant dodge-and-weave by Olave down the left sideline for a 56-yard TD pass from Stroud to make it 45-6 with 3:24 left until the half. OSU used just 1:27 to rip off 68 yards on five plays, including a 12-yard catch by tight end Gee Scott Jr.

Stroud was 14 of 18 for 273 yards and four TDs in the first half as the Buckeyes

accumulated 406 yards and 17 first downs.

On Cruise Control

Olave's 11-yard TD catch at 10:21 of the third quarter increased Ohio State's lead to 52-6. It was his 27th career receiving touchdown to tie Cris Carter on the Buckeyes' all-time list behind David Boston (34) and Devin Smith (30).

During the 10-play, 75-yard drive, Olave also had an 18-yard catch, Smith-Njigba added a 28-yard reception, and Teague carried five times for 28 yards.

After linebacker Tommy Eichenberg made his first career interception, freshman QB Kyle McCord replaced Stroud on the next series.

Cornerback Ryan Watts' first OSU interception at the OSU 12 was on the first play of the fourth quarter as the defense excelled until Rutgers got a garbage-time TD when Cole Snyder passed 12 yards to Joshua Youngblood with 7:40 left in the game for the final points.

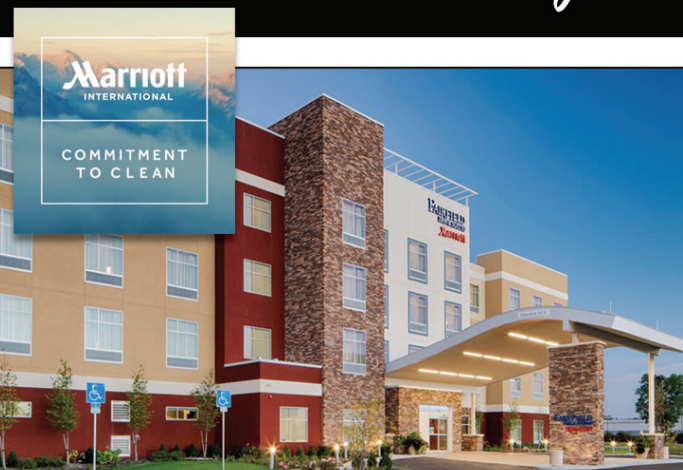
Redshirt freshman Jack Miller led the Buckeyes on Ohio State's final two series, and Rutgers ended the game with the ball at the OSU 14 when time expired.

Game Notes

Olave had five catches for 119 yards. ... Ruckert was targeted four times and had four catches for 40 yards. ... Wilson's three grabs went for 71 yards, and Smith-Njigba

gained 66 yards on two receptions. ... Crowley rushed seven times for 58 yards, and Teague's 11 carries netted him 52 yards. ... Running back Miyan Williams was unavailable for the game. ... McCord completed 1 of 3 attempts for 3 yards while Miller threw one incompleteness and also recovered his own fumble. ... Vedral went 16 for 26 for 152 yards with three picks. ... Hickman had a game-high 11 tackles (seven solo). ... One week after registering nine sacks against Akron, Ohio State had only one vs. Rutgers. Freshman defensive tackle Tyleik Williams recorded it in the fourth quarter, throwing third-string QB Evan Simon for a 7-yard loss. ... McCord's father, Derek, was a Rutgers QB from 1988-92.

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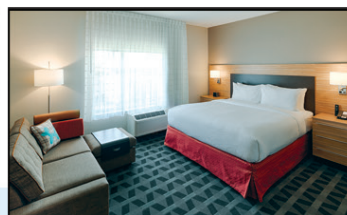


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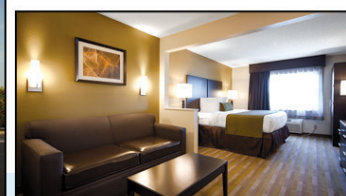
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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 52, Rutgers 13

Oct. 2, 2021 – SHI Stadium, Piscataway, N.J.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	24	21	7	0	52
RUTGERS	6	0	0	7	13

First Quarter

OSU – Henderson, 44-yard rush (Ruggles kick), 12:13; 2 plays, 52 yards, 0:32 TOP.
OSU – Burke, 23-yard interception (Ruggles kick), 11:33.
OSU – Ruggles, 24-yard field goal, 5:45; 10 plays, 64 yards, 4:43 TOP.
OSU – Wilson, 32-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 2:34; 5 plays, 74 yards, 1:49 TOP.
RU – Cruickshank, 75-yard pass from Vedral (Ambrosio kick failed), 2:23; 1 plays, 75 yards, 0:11 TOP.

Second Quarter

OSU – Rossi, 5-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 12:31; 9 plays, 75 yards, 4:16 TOP.
OSU – Ruckert, 19-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 6:27; 4 plays, 50 yards, 2:23 TOP.
OSU – Olave, 56-yard pass from Olave (Ruggles kick), 3:24; 5 plays, 68 yards, 1:27 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Olave, 11-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 10:21; 10 plays, 75 yards, 4:39 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

RU – Youngblood, 12-yard pass from Snyder (Ambrosio kick), 7:40; 11 plays, 70 yards, 5:07 TOP.
Att. – 51,006

Weather – Sunny, 76 degrees, wind 10 mph west

Team Statistics		
	OSU	RU
First Downs	25	18
Rushing	12	6
Passing	12	10
Penalty	1	2
Rushes-Yards	37-208	31-111
Passing Yards	333	235
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	18-27-0	28-40-3
Offensive Plays	64	71
Total Net Yards	541	346
Third Down Efficiency	8-13	4-15
Punts-Avg.	3-43.3	4-45.2
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	2-0
Penalties	6-65	3-25
Time of Possession	30:32	29:28

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Henderson 8-71; Crowley 7-58; Teague III 11-52; Stroud 2-13; Wilson 1-13; Pryor 3-10; McCord 2-(-3); Miller 3-(-6). **RU:** Wright-Collins 4-39; Vedral 8-34; Jones 3-14; Young 2-10; Pachecho 6-8; Sanders 1-6; Cruickshank 1-2; Langan 1-1; Simon 3-(-1); Snyder 2-(-2).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Stroud 17-23-0-330-5; McCord 1-3-0-3-0; Miller 0-1-0-0-0. **RU:** Vedral 16-26-3-152-1; Snyder 7-8-0-56-1; Simon 5-5-0-27-0; Alaimo 0-1-0-0-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Olave 5-119; Ruckert 4-40; Wilson 3-71; Smith-Njigba 2-66; Scott Jr. 2-15; Crowley 1-21; Rossi 1-1. **RU:** Sanders 7-47; Washington 4-19; Cruickshank 3-72; Pachecho 2-18; Wright-Collins 2-18; Youngblood 2-15; Monangai 2-11; Jones 2-7; Langan 2-3; Dremel 1-4; Young 1-(-9).

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Mirco 3-43.3. **RU:** Korsak 4-45.2.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Wilson 1-1. **RU:** Cruickshank 1-4.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – OSU: None. **RU:** Cruickshank 6-86.

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

FORCED FUMBLES – OSU: None. **RU:** None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – OSU: None. **RU:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS – OSU: Burke 1-23; Eichenberg 1-0; Watts 1-0. **RU:** None.

SACKS – OSU: Williams 1.0-7. **RU:** Bailey 1.0-10.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – OSU: Williams 1.0-7; Tuimoloau 1.0-3; Jean-Baptiste 0.5-5; Martinez 0.5-4. **RU:** Bailey 1.5-11; Maddox-Williams 1.0-4; Hamilton 0.5-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU: Hickman 7-4-11; Martinez 3-4-7; Batsch 2-4-6; Kacherski 3-2-5; Simon 2-3-5; Young 2-3-5; Williams 1-3-4; Hooker 1-3-4; McKenzie 1-3-4; Shaw 2-1-3; Mitchell 1-2-3; Eichenberg 1-2-3; Burke 0-3-3; Tuimoloau 2-0-2; Johnson 1-1-2; Sawyer 1-1-2; Sawyer 1-1-2; Chambers 1-1-2; Watts 1-1-2; Williamson 0-2-2; Harrison 0-2-2; Jean-Baptiste 0-2-2; Hancock 0-2-2; Babb 1-0-1; Williams 1-0-1; McCall 1-0-1; Garrett 1-0-1; Hamilton 0-1-1; Hamilton 0-1-1; Jackson 0-1-1; Ransom 0-1-1; Cavazos 0-1-1. **RU:** Fatukasi 5-5-10; Izien 5-2-7; Abraham 3-4-7; Maddox-Williams 5-0-5; Rene 4-0-4; Young 3-1-4; Avery 1-2-3; Turner 1-2-3; Toure 1-1-2; Lewis 1-1-2; Powell 1-1-2; Bailer 1-1-2; Stevens 1-0-1; Konga 1-0-1; Longerbeam 1-0-1; Majieh 0-1-1; Tverdov 0-1-1; Onyechi 0-1-1; Singleton 0-1-1; Ahanotu 0-1-1; Hamilton 0-1-1; Mack 0-1-1; Clark 0-1-1.

Players In The Game

OSU – Olave, Wilson, Stroud, Smith-Njigba, Henderson, Wypler, Munford, Johnson Jr., Petit-Frere, Jones, Ruckert, Mitchell, Banks, Harrison, Martinez, Hickman, Shaw, Burke, Simon, Tuimoloau, Jackson, Garrett, McCall, Williams, Cavazos, Williamson, Vincent, McCord, Jean-Baptiste, Babb, Miller III, Ballard, Ransom, Egbuka, Scott Jr., Hancock, Young, Watts, Pryor, Chambers, Hooker, Dunn, Crowley, Johnson, Carrico, Mirco, Teague III, Sawyer, Rossi, Eichenberg, Robinson, McFarquhar, Batsch, Kacherski, Jones, Hamilton, Vimahi, Fryar, Jackson, Hamilton, Cage, Booker, McKenzie, Williams, Ruggles, Potter.

RU – Vedral, Pachecho, Cruickshank, Haskins, Alaimo, Melton, Rainey, Paillant, Krimin, O'Neal, Pierce, Izien, Young, fatukasi, Abraham, Fogg, Avery, Rene, Onyechi, Turner, Ahanotu, Tverdov, Ambrosio, Simon, Young, Jones, Dremel, Longerbeam, Jones, Wright-Collins, Maddox-Williams, Singleton, Sanders, Banton, Igwenagu, Washington, Snyder, Clark, Jennings, Reid, Mack, Langan, Powell, Monangai, Bailey, Stevens, Igbinosun, Patterson, Lusardi, Kromah, Taylor, Hamilton, Toure, Nwaogwugwu, Zilinskas, Felter, Bordner, Lewis, Rosso, Youngblood, Robinson, Majieh, Konopka, Konga, Stewart, Brown, Korsak.

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	W, 59-7	95,178
Oct. 2	(11) at Rutgers	W, 52,13	51,006
Oct. 9	(7) MARYLAND	Noon	
Oct. 23	at Indiana	TBA	
Oct. 30	PENN STATE (4)	TBA	
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE (11)	TBA	
Nov. 27	at Michigan (9)	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	124	111
Rushing	57	37
Passing	64	60
Penalty	3	14
Average Per Game/Rush	217.2	146.4
Average Per Game/Pass	336.2	251.4
Total Offense	2767	1989
Total Plays	323	375
Average Per Game	553.4	397.8
Average Per Play	8.6	5.3
Penalties-Yards	35-360	28-243
Fumbles-Lost	5-1	4-2
Third Down Efficiency	32-58	34-80
Percentage	55%	43%
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-5	4-8
Percentage	33%	50%
Sacks-Yards	15-99	7-59
Time Of Possession Avg.	26:46	34:10

Score By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	48	65	63	49	0	225	45.0
Opponents	16	31	28	31	0	106	21.2

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	54	510	9.4	7	54
Miyan Williams	32	249	7.8	1	71
Master Teague	39	214	5.5	2	17
Marcus Crowley	12	66	5.5	0	22
Evan Pryor	8	45	5.6	1	12
Garrett Wilson	1	13	13.0	0	13
C.J. Stroud	12	9	0.8	0	15
Jack Miller III	4	2	0.5	0	8
Kyle McCord	6	-20	-3.3	0	7
TEAM	1	-2	-2.0	0	-2
OSU Totals	169	1086	6.4	11	71
OPP Totals	187	859	3.9	6	77

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	80	124	64.5	1293	13-3	181.9
Kyle McCord	14	21	66.7	322	2-1	161.0
Jack Miller III	5	9	55.6	66	0-0	117.2
OSU Totals	99	154	64.3	1681	15-4	182.9
OPP Totals	108	188	57.4	1257	8-7	120.2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	26	462	17.8	4	57
Chris Olave	23	374	16.3	5	61
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	18	349	19.4	3	38
Jeremy Ruckert	10	121	12.1	1	21
Gee Scott Jr.	4	43	10.8	0	16
Miyan Williams	3	38	12.7	0	17
TreVeyon Henderson	3	87	29.0	1	70
Cade Stover	2	42	21.0	0	25
Master Teague	2	12	6.0	0	7
Julian Fleming	2	17	8.5	0	10
Emeka Egbuka	1	85	85.0	0	85
Marcus Crowley	1	21	21.0	0	21
Chris Booker	1	16	16.0	0	16
Marvin Harrison Jr.	1	9	9.0	0	9
Jayden Ballard	1	4	4.0	0	4
OSU Totals	81	1348	16.6	10	85
OPP Totals	80	1022	12.8	6	38

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
T. Henderson	8	–	–	–	–	48
Noah Ruggles	–29-29	–	–	–	5-5	44
Chris Olave	5	–	–	–	–	30
Garrett Wilson	4	–	–	–	–	24
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	3	–	–	–	–	18
Master Teague III	2	–	–	–	–	12

Haskell Garrett	1	–	–	–	–	6
Ronnie Hickman	1	–	–	–	–	6
Miyan Williams	1	–	–	–	–	6
Cameron Martinez	1	–	–	–	–	6
Evan Pryor	1	–	–	–	–	6
Mitch Rossi	1	–	–	–	–	6
Denzel Burke	1	–	–	–	–	6
Dominic DiMaccio	0	1-1	–	–	–	1
OSU Totals	30	30-30	–	–	5-5	225
OPP Totals	14	13-14	–	–	3-4	106

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	1-1	2-2	2-2	0-0	5-5
OSU Totals	1-1	2-2	2-2	0-0	5-5
OPP Totals	1-1	1-1	1-2	0-0	3-4

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	14	618	44.1	0	62
OSU Totals	14	618	44.1	0	62
OPP Totals	28	1166	41.6	0	67

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Ronnie Hickman	2	65	32.5	1	46
Cameron Martinez	1	61	61.0	1	61
Cody Simon	1	24	24.0	0	24
Denzel Burke	1	23	23.0	1	23
Tommy Eichenberg	1	0	0.0	0	0
Ryan Watts	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	7	173	24.7	3	61
OPP Totals	4	34	8.5	0	23

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	8	13	1.6	0	20
OSU Totals	8	13	1.6	0	20
OPP Totals	3	22	7.3	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	12	178	14.8	0	23

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Ronnie Hickman	27	17	44	–	–
Teradja Mitchell	12	16	28	3.0-7	–
Cody Simon	8	14	22	2.0-13	1.0-11
Haskell Garrett	10	7	17	4.5-2	3.0-15
Bryson Shaw	10	6	16	–	–
Lathan Ransom	9	7	16	–	–
Denzel Burke	8	7	15	–	–
Tommy Eichenberg	4	9	13	–	–
Zach Harrison	8	4	12	2.0-7	2.0-7
Steele Chambers	6	6	12	1.0-1	–
Antwuan Jackson	6	6	12	3.0-16	2.0-15
Tyleik Williams	6	5	11	4.5-42	4.0-41
Cameron Martinez	5	5	10	0.5-4	–
Dallas Gant	4	6	10	–	–
Josh Proctor	3	7	10	–	–
Cameron Brown	7	2	9	–	–
Tyreke Smith	4	4	8	1.0-1	–
Marcus Williamson	4	4	8	–	–
Cade Kacherski	4	4	8	–	–
Craig Young	3	5	8	–	–
Lejond Cavazos	6	1	7	–	–
J.T. Tuimoloau	3	4	7	1.0-3	–
Marcus Hooker	2	5	7	–	–
Ryan Batsch	2	4	6	–	–
Kourt Williams	2	4	6	–	–
Taron Vincent	3	3	6	0.5-1	–
Demario McCall	2	3	5	–	–
Ryan Watts	4	1	5	–	–
J. Jean-Baptiste	1	4	5	0.5-5	–
Jaden McKenzie	2	3	5	–	–
Jack Sawyer	3	2	5	1.0-3	1.0-3
K'Vaughan Pope	0	3	3	–	–
Xavier Johnson	0	3	3	–	–
Ty Hamilton	1	2	3	1.0-1	1.0-1
Palaie Gaoteote IV	1	1	2	–	–
Reid Carrico	0	2	2	–	–
Jerron Cage	1	1	2	1.5-7	1.0-6
Cormontae Hamilton	1	1	2	–	–
Jordan Hancock	0	2	2	–	–
OSU Totals	189	192	381	27.0-128	15.0-99
OPP Totals	177	120	297	12.0-70	7.0-59
Fumbles Forced:	2 – Harrison, Ransom.				
Fumbles Recovered:	2 – Garrett, Eichenberg.				

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 52, Rutgers 13

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud on how he views Ohio State after a road win at Rutgers: "I feel about my team the way I've always felt. It really is Ohio against the world. It took me coming here to understand that, but it's true. Everybody is counting us out, which is good. I think that's a great thing. There are a lot of weird, funky things going on in college football right now, but I think that's just preparing us to be great. We had some adversity, but I think it's just preparing to be where we want to be."

Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano on Ohio State's performance: "I think Ohio State played really well. I think it's always easy to say we didn't do this and we didn't do that. They did some good things. And we played about as poorly as we've played since I can remember."

Stroud on how his teammates set him up for success: "I feel blessed to be able to go out there and show what I can really do, but the real people already know what I can do. And that's all that matters to me. We have a great O-line. They played their butts off today. My receivers, um, well, wow. You can't even really talk about them because they're the best. Our tight ends are great, our running backs are great."

Stroud on his relationship with backup quarterbacks Kyle McCord and Jack Miller: "We're a brotherhood regardless of whoever is playing. It could be me, it could be Kyle that the team is going to support. There's no competition, no beef, no whatever anyone thinks it might be. We're all here for each other. And that's what a real brotherhood is. We're not just some logo. We're a real brotherhood."

Schiano on his decision to call a fake punt on Rutgers' first offensive drive: "I thought we had an opportunity all week in studying it. It didn't go exactly the way we thought, obviously, but that's not one I sit there and say that's the game-changer. There are many ways you can go down 7-0. The fake punt didn't run all those yards untouched, either. We have to really look at what happened and how do you fix it? And I'm not dodging the question because, yeah, momentum is critical, but in a big-time game, there's several momentum swings. There weren't any today."

Ohio State cornerback Cam Martinez on expecting trick plays from Rutgers and his near-interception on the fake punt in the first quarter: "We knew to expect some of that, so I can't really say it was a surprise. I was in the right place and almost caught it. I was thinking about returning it, but maybe I just got a little too excited."

Ohio State wide receiver Chris Olave on Ohio



SONNY BROCKWAY

PREGAME CONFAB — Ohio State head coach Ryan Day speaks with Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano prior to the Buckeyes' 52-13 win against the Scarlet Knights. Day and Schiano were assistants on Urban Meyer's 2017 and 2018 staffs at Ohio State.

State's offensive approach against Rutgers: "We had good balance today. We had the running backs running good and the O-line blocking like usual, so we just have to make plays on our side for C.J."

Olave on his performance against Rutgers: "It feels good. Feels like I'm back to playing Ohio State football again. I'm glad we got the win."

Olave on receiving a text from Cris Carter after tying him for third place on the all-time receiving touchdowns list with 27: "That's huge. Cris Carter is an Ohio State legend, so that is a huge blessing."

Schiano on Ohio State's receiving corps: "They have those wideouts and they know they're really good. We were a couple of inches from a few plays, but it doesn't matter. When they get the ball in their hands, they're not only good receivers, but they're also extremely talented ball-carriers and they're really fast."

Ohio State cornerback Denzel Burke on his pick-six in the first quarter: "It was a game-changer, but I wouldn't have gotten the pick without the D-linemen putting pressure on the quarterback. I just happened to be in the right place."

Burke on the defensive improvements in the last two weeks: "Guys are getting confidence."

We're starting to get our feet wet and getting the feel of the game. I feel like we're just starting to get our groove."

Schiano on his message to the team after the game: "I'm not really worried about the goals and all that stuff. We're at the stage where we're building and we need to learn how to just be able to focus on what we are trying to accomplish today. Wednesday practice, then Friday preparation, then being ready to play on game day. I think having stuff out there that are goals is definitely motivation. But that's not where I'm going. We're going to find out where we didn't do what we're capable of doing, why we didn't and where we were maybe not able to. Then we've got to figure out if there is a better way to do it."

Schiano on where Rutgers can improve in the future: "It's early still. I know what I saw today and then I'll watch the video and see what I see off that. It always starts with introspection, and then from there you move forward. Like I said, we had a bad day, and they had a really good day."

Schiano on Ohio State running back TreVeyon Henderson: "Early in the year, No. 32, he was getting touches, but so was everybody else. When I say they were finding their stride, they figured out this is their guy. He's pretty darn good."

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Garrett 'Having Fun' During Super Senior Year

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

You probably think you know Haskell Garrett pretty well. He is the Ohio State defensive tackle who was shot in the face in August 2020 when he reportedly tried to intervene during an altercation between a man and a woman in the University District.

Garrett recovered quickly and became a first-team All-American force for the Buckeyes as they navigated their way through a stop-and-start, pandemic-shortened season all the way to the national championship game.

You also likely know the super senior tackle is a favorite of excitable Fox play-by-play man Gus Johnson. Johnson called him "Haskell the Rascal" after Garrett scored on a 32-yard fumble return during this year's season opener against Minnesota.

But did you know Garrett was born in Vermont? Did you know his father died when he was 13, prompting his mother to move to Hawaii to be closer to her family? And did you know that if the Buckeyes hadn't gone to Las Vegas to recruit quarterback Tate Martell, they likely would never have signed Garrett, who was Martell's high school teammate at three-time state champion Bishop Gorman.

Maybe you knew all that, too, but probably what you don't know is that the soft-spoken Garrett is a man of few words. But when he does speak, it is an articulation of the lifetime of experiences he has already packed into just 23 years.

Listen to Garrett talk for just a few minutes and you realize that being chosen as one of the team's six captains was almost a given. When asked his approach to being a team leader, he provided somewhat of an unusual answer.

"In terms of leadership, it's just patience," Garrett said. "It's really just getting guidance from the coaches, understanding how to be a leader, understanding it's a process and having patience. I've worked on my own process, and now it's me helping to become a better teacher."

"It's really just sharing knowledge. A lot of guys in my position like to keep to themselves what they've learned over the years. But instead of that, I want to share my knowledge and help (the younger players) rise to the occasion."

Based upon the meager stats he compiled during his first three years in the program, Garrett was once perceived as one of the most unlikely leaders on the defensive side of the ball. His first 35 games were all as a backup, and he was credited with only 20 tackles over three seasons.

Then last fall, after recovering from his gunshot wound – the bullet went in one cheek



SONNY BROCKWAY

DEFENSIVE LEADER — Ohio State defensive tackle Haskell Garrett (92) has taken on more of a leadership role as a super senior in 2021. In addition to being one of six team captains, Garrett has also become one of the Buckeyes' most productive defensive linemen as evidenced by his three sacks against Akron on Sept. 25.

and out the other, passing through his teeth and his tongue – Garrett didn't crack the starting lineup until game three against Rutgers. By that time, he had only four tackles although he did record his first career sack in the opener against Nebraska.

But he began to ratchet things up during the team's stretch drive to the national championship game. He grabbed his first career interception during a 52-12 win at Michigan State and then recorded a career-high five tackles, including two for loss, when the Buckeyes rode Trey Sermon's record 331 rushing yards to a 22-10 win against Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game.

Still, that was just the appetizer for this year's main course. The fumble return for a touchdown against Minnesota was followed by a career-high six tackles vs. Oregon and then a three-sack performance against Akron. No interior defensive linemen has recorded more than three sacks in a single game since Ohio State began compiling the stat in the 1980s.

Garrett now ranks as the team's active leader in tackles, tackles for loss and sacks. Not bad for a guy who was pretty much an afterthought just two years ago.

"Here's guy who was an inch away from serious injury or death," said OSU defensive line coach Larry Johnson. "He could have opted out. He could have said, 'Coach, I'm done with football.' But he came back, and he came back with a vengeance."

"He has worked extremely hard, he's a great practice player and he listens. He has a really high football IQ. He takes great notes in meetings, so he is mentally prepared when he goes into the game."

The early-season struggles of this year's Ohio State defense have been well-documented. After being gashed for 163 yards and two touchdowns by Minnesota running back Mohamed Ibrahim in the opener, the Buckeyes surrendered more than 500 total yards in back-to-back games for the first time in program history.

But the defense came alive during a 59-7 rout of Akron, registering nine sacks – including four from true or redshirt freshmen – as well as interceptions from first-year starters Cody Simon and Ronnie Hickman, who returned his 46 yards for a touchdown.

Granted, all of that defensive production came against an opponent that entered the game ranked 93rd nationally in total offense, but Garrett said Ohio State's performance was an indication that the defense is getting closer to being where it wants to be.

"We're really close," Garrett said. "I feel like nobody understands how young this team is. This is really a developing team, and I think we're turning into that great team. It's taken a couple of weeks, but each and every day we're getting better and better."

"I feel that these young guys want to learn. They're eager to get the knowledge out of us old guys. They're a bunch of sponges, basically. Sometimes they get caught up in trying to do things so perfectly, they forget to have fun, so I keep telling them, 'Just have fun,' and the rest takes care of itself."

Have fun? That's the secret to defensive improvement?

"Yeah, fun," Garrett said. "We all fight for each other. With everything that has transpired this year, it really allows guys to see that we really only have each other. When we're out on that field, and in front of 110,000 people, ultimately it's just the 11 guys on that field. That's who you go to war with."

"But you also have to have fun. And when I say that, we take this sport so seriously with schematics, with pressure we get through social media, through our families. But it's still just a sport and you need to have fun. You know, you have to execute your job at a high level because we are at Ohio State, but at the end of the day, it's just football. You have to have some fun."

Like a friendly competition among teammates.

"It's always been that the defensive ends had the spotlight here, but now we have a competition on the line," Garrett said. "We're all racing to get to the quarterback and we have more production coming from the inside. It's just competing. That's all it is. Just competing."

"We're always competing – pushing each other and raising the bar each and every day, each and every week. I remember last week, it was the last part of practice, and I told Zach (Harrison), 'I bet I can get to the quarterback before you.' And I did. Those little competitions are what drives great defensive players. It's gratifying to see where we were and now what we can do. And like I said, it's just competing."

This season, the emphasis in preseason practice sessions was more on instruction because the Buckeyes were counting on so many first- and second-year players to make an impact. Then, after the loss to Oregon and the subsequent revamping of the defensive coaching staff, drills became even more focused on fundamentals.

As a result, Garrett took the opportunity to become more of a teacher, both in the locker room and on the practice field.

"Young guys respond not only by telling them but showing them," he said. "Nowadays, guys like to see results. I feel that when I tell them something in the classroom, and then show them out in practice, I can bridge the gap between knowledge and actual results."

The coaching staff appreciates having another teacher/coach on the field.

"I think you're seeing the best version of Haskell," said OSU head coach Ryan Day. "Everybody here is very proud of what he's overcome. Not just the way he's playing, but the way he's handling himself, the way he's leading, the way he's practicing."

"He's gone through some tough times. But in life, sometimes you have these moments, and it kind of shakes things up and makes you realize some things, and maybe that's what happened with Haskell. Since what happened last year, he's got a different look in his eye, and I'm really happy that he was able to take a negative and turn it into a positive. He's going to be successful in whatever he does after football, and hopefully that's after a long career in the NFL."




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Henderson Gives OSU Bona Fide Home-Run Hitter

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff WRiter

For those who paid attention to Ohio State recruiting, the emergence of running back TreVeyon Henderson comes as no surprise. The former five-star running back from Hopewell, Va., shredded opposing defenses for more than 2,400 rushing yards and 45 touchdowns as a high school junior and became the third-highest ranked running back ever commit to Ohio State during the 247Sports Composite era.

Despite his obvious talent, however, Henderson wasn't guaranteed a starting role when he came to Ohio State in the spring. The Buckeyes had a room full of talented running backs with plenty of collegiate experience at the position.

As Ohio State approached its season-opening game with Minnesota, it became clear that head coach Ryan Day valued his veterans over the freshman phenom. Redshirt freshman Miyan Williams and fourth-year junior Master Teague frequently took snaps with the first-team offense, leaving Henderson with inconsistent reps playing with the starters.

Henderson said he didn't mind sitting behind other running backs, adding that he appreciated how they pushed him to be a better player and helped him recognize that he still had a lot to learn to become a great college running back.

"I didn't pay much mind to the depth chart," Henderson said. "I'm a competitor. I like to compete. We've got great running backs in our room. When you're practicing with great running backs that are able to push you further each and every day – (there are) some days you don't really want to go – but the other running backs push me to go."

"I learned a lot by being with them (including) what to expect coming from high school to this level. It helped out a lot, coming in early and being able to be with Mas-

ter, being with Miyan, learning the speed of the game and things like that."

When it came time to play the Golden Gophers, Henderson entered the game as the fourth running back behind Williams, Teague and sophomore Marcus Crowley.

However, it didn't take long for Henderson to show why he was the top-ranked running back in his class and why he deserved to be an integral part of the Ohio State offense. The freshman running back finished the game with 85 all-purpose yards, including a 70-yard touchdown reception off a C.J. Stroud swing pass.

"I came in with a lot of hunger," Henderson said. "I was hungry to get on the field early. I didn't want to wait. I think having that hunger and that work ethic to put in over the spring and the summer paid off. It definitely paid off."

Henderson got a little more of a taste against Oregon when he totaled 54 yards and a touchdown on 12 carries. Still, his best performance was yet to come.

During a 41-20 win against Tulsa, Henderson ran the ball 24 times for 277 yards and three touchdowns, breaking two-time Heisman Trophy-winning running back Archie Griffin's single-game rushing record for OSU freshmen set in 1972 against North Carolina.

"Since he's come here, he's worked really hard and been very mature," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said after that game. "He does not act like a freshman and takes his job very, very seriously."

"Everyone is different, but he is someone that can hit home runs, and that's special. He has that special talent that when you give it to him and he gets to the second level and he makes a guy miss, it could be a



TreVeyon Henderson

home run. That's a whole different dynamic."

Henderson continued his success against Akron, racking up 93 yards and two touchdowns on just eight first-half carries, making Day's description of Henderson as a home-run hitter rather fitting. He is the kind of running back who makes big plays and a weapon that helps win games.

Through his first four games as a collegiate player, Henderson was leading the NCAA with 9.5 yards per attempt and ranked fifth in the Big Ten with 439 rushing yards. He was also tied for the conference lead in touchdowns with seven.

Henderson led the Buckeyes with 71 yards and a touchdown against Rutgers. He had eight carries through the first quarter but exited the contest with Ohio State leading 24-6.

Day continued to share his praise for the freshman running back in the week leading up to Ohio State's game with the Scarlet Knights. And when asked what Henderson's next steps might be to improve, the head coach struggled to find an answer.

"I don't know," Day admitted. "We're four games in, and we're going to continue to learn more as time goes on. He needs to focus on taking care of that football. That's the first thing. He's got to take care of the little things in terms of protection, making the right reads and preparing just like everybody else."

"You can see his ability to be special and take the ball from the second level to the third level to score a touchdown. He's a home-run threat and that's good. But that doesn't work without our offensive line. I think he understands how important it is that it's team football."

"Whether it's covering Chris (Olave) and Garrett (Wilson) on the outside or the offensive line up front, this is a team effort. I think our offense is embracing that. I think we are unselfish, and I think he understands that in order for us to be good on offense we need to be balanced."

In an ideal world, the Buckeyes want to have a balanced offense, finding a way to run and pass the ball effectively during a game. While Ohio State's offensive numbers are close – 154 pass attempts and 170 rushes – it hasn't been that equal on a week-to-week basis. With Henderson now established as the starting running back, however, that could change.

Day said he wants to get Henderson a healthy number of touches in each game, allowing him to find a groove and get a feel for an opponent.

"The 20-carry range is usually pretty good," Day said. "We do have a lot of depth there, too, so we feel like we can play some depth and keep him fresh. He is still young, but somewhere in that (20-carry) area is usually pretty good."

Ohio State's depth isn't going anywhere. The Buckeyes will continue using Teague and Williams to change the pace.

Teague, the most experienced running back on the team, had only six carries against Minnesota and he didn't play at all in game two against Oregon. But he has 33 for 185 yards (a 5.6-yard average) and two touchdowns over the last three games.

During Ohio State's first two games, Williams burst onto the scene, carrying the ball 23 times for 202 yards and a touchdown. He did not play against Tulsa – most likely due to an illness during the week leading up to the game – and had nine carries and 47 yards against Akron. He did not play against Rutgers for undisclosed reasons.

At the start of the season, it wasn't clear who was Ohio State's best running back or which one should be starting. Five weeks into the year, however, it seems clear Henderson is going to be the featured back moving forward.

"And this is just the start for him," Day said. "I think he's better than he was a few weeks ago, and I think the whole running back room is as well."



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Highly-Rated 2018 Class Remains In Shadow Of '17

By **WYATT CROSHER**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

On the field, the 2017 football season was a somewhat disappointing one, at least according to Ohio State standards. The Buckeyes finished with a 12-2 record, won the Big Ten championship, and then followed that with a 24-7 victory against eighth-ranked USC in the Cotton Bowl. But the team suffered a pair of losses, each of which were lopsided ones to fifth-ranked Oklahoma and unranked Iowa.

Off the field, Ohio State's effort was lauded as much more successful. The Buckeyes secured the No. 2 overall recruiting class in 2017, a class that featured more than a handful of players who would become key contributors for the Buckeyes – guard Wyatt Davis, running back J.K. Dobbins, defensive tackle Haskell Garrett, offensive tackle Thayer Munford, center Josh Myers, cornerback Shaun Wade and linebacker Pete Werner.

And that list doesn't even include a pair of top-three picks in the NFL draft – defensive end Chase Young, who was taken with the second overall selection in the 2020 draft by the Washington Football Team, and cornerback Jeff Okudah, who went one pick after Young to the Detroit Lions.

Ohio State's 2017 class finished with a class rating of 312.14, a number that it somehow topped in 2018. Yes, the Buckeyes brought in five more commitments (21 in 2017 to 26 in 2018), and class size sometimes skews ratings. But the 2018 class rating of 317.06 had an average recruit ranking of 94.29, which was the highest in all of college football.

That meant, based on numbers alone, that the 2018 class was potentially a better group than the one the Buckeyes had assembled the year before. And yet that 2018 class has not lived up to the billing in even a remotely similar way to the one that came before it.

"Probably underachieved to this point," Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Marc Giv-

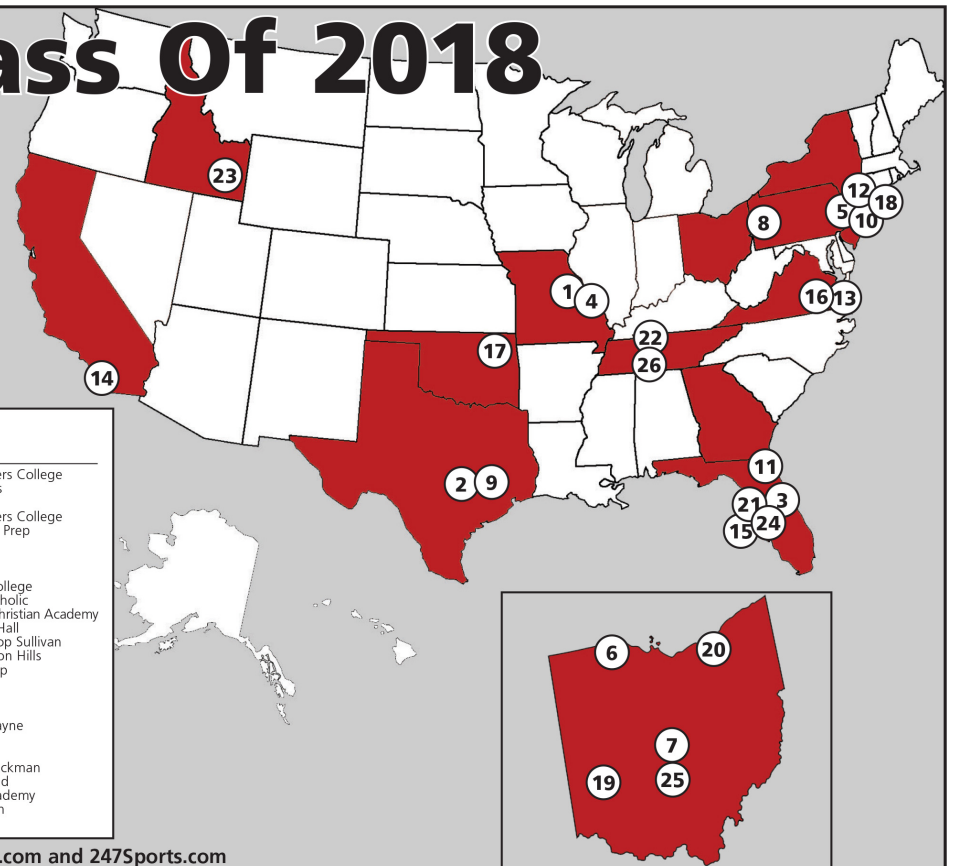
OSU's Class Of 2018

On Dec. 20, 2017, Ohio State received 21 letters of intent before signing another five prospects on Feb. 7. The Buckeyes' 2018 recruiting haul, ranked second in the nation, includes prospects from 13 different states.

Player Key (*Early Enrollee)

No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Previous School
1.	Kamryn Babb	WR	6-1	189	St. Louis Christian Brothers College
2.	Matthew Baldwin*	QB	6-3	195	Austin (Texas) Lake Travis
3.	Sevyn Banks*	CB	6-1	180	Orlando (Fla.) Jones
4.	Cameron Brown	WR	6-1	175	St. Louis Christian Brothers College
5.	Tyler Friday	DE	6-3	262	Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep
6.	Dallas Gant*	LB	6-3	225	Toledo St. John's Jesuit
7.	Jaelen Gill	HB	6-1	182	Westerville (Ohio) South
8.	Marcus Hooker	S	6-0	185	New Castle, Pa.
9.	Antwuan Jackson*	DT	6-2	305	Brenham (Texas) Blinn College
10.	Javontae Jean-Baptiste	DE	6-5	215	Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic
11.	Tyreke Johnson*	CB	6-1	191	Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy
12.	Matthew Jones*	OL	6-4	315	Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall
13.	Teradja Mitchell	LB	6-2	235	Virginia Beach (Va.) Bishop Sullivan
14.	Chris Olave	WR	6-1	170	San Marcos (Calif.) Mission Hills
15.	Nicholas Petit-Frere	OT	6-6	272	Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep
16.	K'Vaughan Pope	LB	6-2	210	Dinwiddie, Va.
17.	Josh Proctor	S	6-2	190	Owasso, Okla.
18.	Jeremy Ruckert	TE	6-6	240	Lindenhurst, N.Y.
19.	L'Christian Smith	WR	6-6	205	Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne
20.	Tyreke Smith	DE	6-3	260	Cleveland Heights
21.	Brian Sneed	RB	5-11	200	Seffner (Fla.) Armwood
22.	Master Teague*	RB	5-11	210	Murfreesboro (Tenn.) Blackman
23.	Tommy Togiai*	DT	6-3	290	Pocatello (Idaho) Highland
24.	Taron Vincent	DT	6-2	285	Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
25.	Alex Williams	ATH	6-7	250	Pickerington (Ohio) North
26.	Max Wray*	OT	6-6	289	Franklin, Tenn.

All rankings and expert evaluations from Scout.com and 247Sports.com



ler told BSB when asked what immediately comes to mind thinking about the 2018 class. "Probably underachieved."

Bill Landis, who writes about the Buckeyes for The Athletic website, had a similar thought.

"It didn't quite hit the mark," Landis told BSB. "I think it's a good class, but I don't know if a quite reached the potential or hopes that everybody had for it."

Why did the 2018 class suffer such a different fate than the one that came right before it? For starters, Givler and Landis do not agree with the numbers that state that Ohio State's 2018 class was potentially more talented than the 2017 group.

Givler said that it does come down partly to the 2017 national class being stronger

overall, which made what the Buckeyes did there that much more impressive.

"I guess you never know 100 percent, but we were pretty sure Chase Young and Jeff Okudah and those guys were going to be stars. I mean, those were the elite of the elite," Givler said. "I think 2017, at that point, was probably the best recruiting class in several years and was also the best class overall until at least 2020 came along."

"So, not only were these guys top 10 in the country, they were top 10 in the country in a class that was considered to be a fantastic national class. I think we all knew those guys were going to be superstars. I never would have thought '18 would be as good as '17, but I would have thought it would play out better than it has so far."

Landis said he remembers thinking less that Ohio State's 2018 signees were better than the 2017 class, but more that, after a pair of classes at that level, the Buckeyes should have been polishing some impressive hardware over the last few seasons.

"I don't know if we thought it would be better, but I think the idea was those two classes combined would give Ohio State a national title or two, and I think that was a fair expectation," Landis said. "At Alabama, every class Nick Saban has signed has won (at least one) national title, so when Ohio State stacks classes like they had in 2017 and 2018 on top of each other, I think you expect the same."

"I don't know if I thought 2018 would be better than '17. Maybe a little deeper, but I think the star power in '17 was still a little higher."

In 2017, the Buckeyes had 21 commitments, five of whom earned a five-star rating – Young, Okudah, Wade, Davis and linebacker Baron Browning. Fourteen more earned four stars, and just two had three-star ratings. Compare that to the 2018 group that had 26 commitments, but just three five-stars, with 20 four-stars and three three-stars.

That trio of five-star prospects in 2018 has not had the same collegiate trajectories as the five in the class prior. Offensive tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere is the exception, but defensive tackle Taron Vincent and safety Tyreke Johnson – the Nos. 20 and 21 prospects in the class – have not or did not have strong production with the Buckeyes.

Johnson, who struggled to get on the field during his first three seasons with the team, transferred to Nebraska during the offseason and has yet to record a stat through five games in 2021.

Johnson is just one of nine players from the 2018 class who have departed the program via the transfer portal. The others are quarterback Matthew Baldwin (TCU), wide receiver Jaelen Gill (Boston College), wide

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

receiver Blue Smith (Cincinnati), running back Brian Snead (Iowa Western), defensive end Alex Williams (Vanderbilt) and offensive tackle Max Wray (Colorado) as well as linebackers Dallas Gant and K'Vaughan Pope, both of whom are currently in the portal and exploring their options.

While Snead's departure was due to circumstances outside of football after being dismissed from the team following a rape allegation, many of the other players in the class left without making much of a mark on the field.

Landis thinks it was a combination of a few things that led to so many players exiting the program from the 2018 class.

"I think it was two things," Landis said. "It was the '17 class and then the COVID year kind of butting against each other. It basically sandwiched that 2018 class into a weird spot where they were waiting to get on the field, and then when their time finally came to get on the field, it was the weirdest year any of us have ever seen in college football.

"I still think you expect some development along the way because they were in the program for two years before that happened, and I guess you could argue that didn't happen enough. But when you combine the (talent of the) '17 class, the weird COVID year and the coaching changes, there was a lot of staff turnover."

Changes in the coaching staff might be more of a factor than some observers might believe – that and the fact that members of that staff might have whiffed on a few prospects.

"I do think they got caught in a bit of a weird spot as a group," Landis said. "But I also think, perhaps, that the staff that recruited them – (former defensive coordinator) Greg Schiano, (former linebackers coach) Billy Davis and (former co-defensive coordinator) Alex Grinch, and whoever else was on that staff in 2018 – maybe just misidentified some guys. That happens sometimes, but when it happens in a large chunk, which seems to have happened with this group, that's what can hurt you."

The linebacking trio of Gant, Pope and Teradja Mitchell from the 2018 class has been specifically disappointing, and it has been given a major spotlight after Pope quit the team in the middle of Ohio State's 59-7 win over Akron. Three days prior to that outburst, Gant entered the portal, leaving just Mitchell remaining from the '18 class at linebacker.

The linebacker position is a prime example of why so many players from the 2018 class underperformed, at least according to Landis. The linebackers in that group had to wait behind veterans in front of them until their senior seasons, much like a variety of other positions due to the sheer strength of the 2017 group.

"I think more than any other group, the linebackers were hit the hardest by just established guys in front of them who never relinquished their spots," Landis said. "That could be hard to deal with. I know Dallas Gant had some injury stuff, Teradja Mitchell also had some injury stuff, and I think health played an issue with them. Maybe not so much with K'Vaughan Pope, but with the other guys, for sure. I think it's tough when you're recruited by one staff and then a new guy comes in. Al Washington came in and he had basically a starting linebacker tandem (in Pete Werner and Tuf Borland), so he

could kind of rely on those guys while going out to recruit his own guys.

"Maybe those 2018 guys were caught in between with the coaching staff turnover, and things just never kind of clicked for them in a way that was going to get them on the field to be impact players. But I also think, too, in the end that maybe there was some misidentification of the talent level there."

Despite what is considered an underwhelming showing from the 2018 class as a whole, it does have one draft pick so far – defensive tackle Tommy Togiai, who went in the fourth round of the 2021 draft to the Cleveland Browns.

From who is left, Ohio State still does have some key contributors from the 2018 class this season.

Petit-Frere has been consistently strong ever since becoming a starter on the offensive line in 2020. Tight end Jeremy Ruckert may not put up big pass-catching numbers, but he has improved in other areas beyond being a receiver, specifically as an extra blocker. Running back Master Teague has been passed on the depth chart by some underclassmen, but he remains a viable option for the Buckeyes at his position.

Probably the biggest name from 2018, though, at least in terms of production, is the third-lowest ranked player in that class. Chris Olave, who was the No. 399 overall prospect with a three-star rating, has become one of the most prolific receivers in program history.

"That's how it works out sometimes," Landis said. "You sign a star-studded class, and then somebody comes out of nowhere. Pete Werner was that guy in 2017. That class was loaded and Pete was ranked somewhere in the low-200s, and then he became one of the better players in that class.

"But that happens all the time, and when you're a program like Ohio State, you need for that to happen. You need to obviously hit on your top-level targets – your five-star guys – but you need to do that true evaluation where you find a lower-rated four-star or a three-star who you know is going to become a stud someday.

"I think Ryan Day saw that pretty early on

with Chris Olave," Landis continued. "I think he just hoped that when they got him that the West Coast programs wouldn't catch on, and they never really seemed to do that. That was, I think, some of the best recruiting evaluation work I've seen from Ohio State's staff since I've been covering the team. And that makes it funny because Olave is in a class that, in general, I would say is probably one of the worst examples of (the OSU coaching staff) evaluating a class."

The 2018 class has been imperfect to say the least, but it has not been a complete failure. And sometimes, according to Givler, that just happens in recruiting. When asked what might be the cause of any class falling short of expectations, the analyst said missing on talent evaluation can just be part of being a college coach, even for the most elite recruiters in the country.

"The low-hanging fruit answer would be that they just missed on more evaluations

than they usually do," Givler said. "You're going to miss on evaluations in every recruiting class whether you're Nick Saban, Urban Meyer, Ryan Day or Dabo Swinney. A great recruiting class probably has like a 50-percent hit rate, and an elite one probably is maybe 60-65 percent. No one's batting 1.000 on these evaluations."

So what was Ohio State's batting average with its 2018 class? The jury remains out with 16 of the 26 players in that class still on the roster. But being in the shadow of the 2017 class – certainly in the running as the greatest recruiting class in the program's last 50 years – has not done the group any favors.

"It was really, really good when they signed because it was on the heels of that 2017 class, and I think everyone was in agreement that it was the best class that Urban signed," Landis said. "That class really panned out, and maybe people just expected the 2018 class to be the same."



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Rejuvenated Locksley Leads Rejuvenated Terps

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Through four weeks of the 2021 college football season, Maryland head coach Mike Locksley managed to claim one-third of his career total of victories as a head coach, starting the season 4-0 before an Oct. 1 loss to fifth-ranked Iowa. The Washington, D.C., native – who played his college football at Towson, just 46 miles north of the Maryland campus on the other side of Baltimore – is now 12-44 as a head coach in seven seasons.

The lead cause of that paltry mark? A disastrous 2½-year tenure at New Mexico from 2009-11. Locksley was fresh off a run as Illinois' offensive coordinator that had the Fighting Illini improve by leaps and bounds, including a peak in 2007 when they knocked off top-ranked Ohio State and made their first trip to the Rose Bowl in 24 years.

New Mexico was looking for an offensive-minded head coach after the Rocky Long era (1998-2008) had turned stale on that side of the ball and went with Locksley, who had no real experience in the New Mexico area but was considered one of the best young offensive coaches.

If his 2-26 in three seasons with the Lobos wasn't enough of an indication, it bears mentioning that it was the wrong move for both New Mexico and Locksley. With no ties to the area and no prior experience as a head coach, Locksley was overwhelmed by the requirements of the job. Despite a reputation for being an ace recruiter, he struggled to make inroads in the region. He butted heads with assistants as he tried to find his role as a play-caller from the top job, and at one point even came to blows with receivers coach J.B. Gerald during a coaching meeting, an incident for which Locksley was suspended 10 days.

Four games into his third season in Albuquerque, after an 0-4 start and a home loss to FCS program Sam Houston State, Locksley was sent packing. He spent the rest of the season without a job before heading to Maryland as an offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach shortly after the end of the 2011 regular season.

It was in College Park that Locksley began the second act of his coaching career, which had been on an almost constant ascent before his collapse with the Lobos. He built a fan base with the Terrapins because of his ability on the recruiting trail and nearly managed to parlay that into the head coaching gig with Maryland in 2015 when Randy Edsall was fired. Ultimately, though, Maryland decided that Locksley's struggles as a head coach in the past were too much to overlook.

Unwilling to stay on the staff under DJ. Durkin – to whom he finished second in the running for the vacancy – Locksley looked to fully rehabilitate his image with the program that has seemingly had more success in coach rehab than any other. He headed to Alabama and Nick Saban's school for wayward coaches, accepting an offensive analyst position in 2016.

"Taking that step backward to move forward, not everybody believes in that or believes in the importance of it," Locksley said. "When I took the analyst job, I looked at myself to have a year to put my thoughts together for when I become an offensive coordinator again. It was the best decision I made."

Locksley must have spent that year well because he was promoted to the full-time staff as a co-offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach in 2017 and then became the lone OC for the Crimson Tide in 2018. He was the latest in a long line of coaches who came up short

elsewhere only to find success in Tuscaloosa, following Mario Cristobal, Lane Kiffin, Mike Groh and Billy Napier and alongside other such rehabilitation projects as Butch Jones and Steve Sarkisian.

Just as it had for every coach on that list, the system worked for Locksley. He helped to produce one of the nation's best offenses with the Crimson Tide, developing Tua Tagovailoa into a first-round draft pick and a Heisman Trophy contender while learning the ropes of the spread RPO offense that Kiffin installed from 2014-16.

He came out of Saban's coaching clinic as a hot commodity once again and finally earned the job he had coveted for years when he was named Maryland's head coach on Dec. 4, 2018. It was a second chance that Locksley never expected to get as an African-American football coach, and one that he was immensely grateful for – both at Alabama and Maryland.

"It's not normal for minority coaches to get second opportunities or be recycled, especially after not having success," Locksley told CBSSports.com. "And I'm no longer the young guy, the young coach on the staff. I'm on the back nine of my coaching career."

Through three seasons at the helm, a new and improved Locksley has emerged. The Terrapins went 3-9 in 2019 and 2-3 for the pandemic-shortened 2020 season but have started their 2021 campaign hot, led by an explosive passing attack and a much-improved defense.

Locksley has landed a pair of top-35 recruiting classes (31st in 2020, 18th in 2021) and is on the precipice of another in 2022. Maryland has completed construction of a \$150 million indoor facility. The wins on the field are still a work in progress, but like its coach, Maryland certainly looks to be refined and rejuvenated.

"It's almost like a rebirth in that this is not your mama's old Maryland," Locksley told Football Scoop. "This is a program that everybody says has so much potential, and we've had pockets of success here. But I think this (\$150 million) building allows us to rebrand Maryland football from a standpoint of a program that wants to be great and be a major player in college football."

While Locksley does his best work off the field, a familiar face (or name, at least) is helping Maryland quite a bit on it. Tua's younger brother, Taulia Tagovailoa, followed Locksley to Maryland from Alabama, earned the starting quarterback job in 2020 and has fully burst onto the scene in 2021. Through five games, he is 127 for 176 passing on the year with 1,497 yards and 12 touchdowns, currently the best stats of any quarterback in the Big Ten.

"Taulia, man, that kid is special," fifth-year senior defensive lineman Sam Okuayinonu said. "I felt like his first year here, he was taking off a little bit. But now, he's just confident. He's making the right reads and utilizing other weapons around him. To see how he's able to spread the ball around, manage the clock, and put points on the board. I'm happy he's on my side."

Tagovailoa has impressed his coach, too, with his control of the Maryland offense. Locksley brought with him that spread RPO offense that he was tasked with running at Alabama, which makes for easier passes but also requires a quarterback to read several parts of the defense, both before and after the snap.

"(Taulia) really showed command," Locksley said. "He's been incredibly efficient at running what we want to run on offense, and I think we'll continue to get better."

Tagovailoa has benefited significantly, though, from the receivers at his disposal with in the offense. The Crimson Tide showed what

Get To Know ... Maryland

2021 Record: 4-1.

Team Information: Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-3; Starters Returning – Offense 6, Defense 6, Specialists 1.

Head Coach: Mike Locksley, 4th year at Maryland, 10-18.

Series History: 7th meeting; Ohio State leads 6-0-0.

School Facts: Location – College Park, Md.; Enrollment – 40,521; Nickname – Terrapins; Colors – Red, Yellow; Conference – Big Ten (East Division); Stadium – Maryland Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 51,802).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
T. Fleet-Davis	47	331	7.0	4
Isaiah Jacobs	28	116	4.1	0
Colby McDonald	17	84	4.9	1

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
T. Tagovailoa	127-176	72.2	1497	12-6

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Dontay Demus Jr.	28	507	18.1	3
Rakim Jarrett	21	276	13.1	4
Jeshaun Jones	17	218	12.8	0

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 32.6

Rushing Yards Per Game – 152.2

Passing Yards Per Game – 317.4

Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 469.6

2021 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 4	WEST VIRGINIA	W, 30-24
Sept. 11	HOWARD	W, 62-0
Sept. 17	at Illinois	W, 20-17
Sept. 25	KENT STATE	W, 37-16
Oct. 1	IOWA	L, 51-14
Oct. 9	at Ohio State	Noon
Oct. 23	at Minnesota	TBA
Oct. 30	INDIANA	Noon
Nov. 6	PENN STATE	TBA
Nov. 13	at Michigan State	TBA
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN	TBA
Nov. 27	at Rutgers	TBA
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL	Yards	Sacks
Jordan Mosley	17	7	24	–	–	–
Nick Cross	16	6	22	–	–	–
Tarheeb Still	15	6	21	2.0-12	1.0-10	–
Sam Okuayinonu	12	7	19	6.5-48	5.0-45	–
Branden Jennings	13	5	18	1.0-1	–	–
R. Hyppolite II	13	4	17	2.0-13	–	–
Lawtez Rogers	11	4	15	3.0-8	–	–
Deshawn Holt	10	1	11	2.0-13	2.0-13	–

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Nick Cross	2	10	5.0	0
Jakorian Bennett	2	0	0.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 21.6

Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 111.8

Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 226.6

Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 338.4

elite receivers can bring to that kind of system in 2020 when they rolled to a national title behind Devonta Smith, Jaylen Waddle and John Metchie. Maryland receivers Dontay Demus Jr., Rakim Jarrett and Jeshaun Jones aren't quite on that level yet, but they have a case to be in the discussion regarding the Big Ten's best receiving corps.

"The wide receiver group is the best on the team," Demus said. "We bring a spark plug to the offense. If we get going, the whole team gets going. No matter where you put us or who you put in the game, there's no drop-off."

The three complement each other tremendously well within the structure of the offense, too. Demus serves as Maryland's deep threat, hauling in 28 receptions for 507 yards and three TDs through five games, while Jarrett is the yards-after-catch expert and Jones plays as the intermediary between the two, running routes into the middle of the field and offering a steady possession threat.

"Dontay stretches the field vertically with the size," Jarrett said. "I can get underneath with the mismatches. Jeshaun Jones is a smooth guy in route running. I don't think you can stop all of us at one time."

The rushing attack is less of a focus for obvious reasons, though senior Tayon Fleet-Davis has impressed in the starting role, taking over for graduated 2020 starter Jake Funk. Through five games, Fleet-Davis was averaging 7.0 yards per carry on 47 attempts and has slotted into the job that Funk filled in 2020 as someone who can keep the Terrapins' offense ahead of the chains behind an improving offensive line with three returning starters.

"What we saw out of Jake Funk last year, I'm hoping that (Tayon) takes that next level," Locksley said. "I've seen it with maturity, I've seen it with his leadership."

Defensively, it's hard to know how legitimate Maryland's improvement has been, but it's certainly there through five games. The Terps' defense is better in almost every possible stat, from points (32.0 in 2020 to 21.6 in 2021) and

rushing yards (230.0 per game to 111.8) to turnovers (0.8 per game to 2.2). With just six starters back, the group wasn't expected to take a huge jump and has yet to play a top offense, but new coordinator Brian Stewart said his group would be more aggressive, and to this point, it has been.

"Coming into the year, we made a point of emphasis on stopping the run, creating turnovers and limiting big plays," Locksley said. "I think Coach Stewart and the defensive staff have done a great job. From last year to this year, we made a point of emphasis with the turnover differential. Last season, it was a big reason for how things ended up for us."

Maryland is still looking to find solid answers at linebacker with three new starters, but new stars up front and in the secondary have led the way, and none is more impressive thus far than Sam Okuayinonu, a super senior who has 19 tackles and five sacks through five weeks.

"I just think being able to add this extra year has helped our team because (Okuayinonu) is as explosive as any player in the country," Locksley said. "As he's gained football experience in playing and taking the techniques that (defensive line coach) Brian Williams teaches him, he keeps getting better and better. I think he's putting himself in a position where he's creating some value that may afford an opportunity to play at the next level."

In the secondary, junior Nick Cross and senior Jordan Mosley have combined to create an electric safety duo, which has been especially crucial for Maryland as it works to find consistency with new starting cornerbacks – although Tarheeb Still and Jakorian Bennett have impressed early, and depth has started to show up behind them, which has impressed Cross.

"It gives us a lot of confidence knowing there's going to be no drop-off," Cross said. "Everybody has the same intensity, the same mental, physical toughness, the same grit and desire to go out and win. It's something that is relaxing to know that the guys out there, they know what they're doing."



Ex-Badgers Assistant Denies Recording Meeting

Former Wisconsin men's basketball assistant coach Alando Tucker recently denied recording a meeting between seniors on the Badgers' 2020-21 team and the coaches.

Tucker, who is the school's all-time leading scorer, spoke to The Athletic's Seth Davis in an attempt to clear the air regarding recent allegations that he tried to undermine head coach Greg Gard

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

while on the Badgers' coaching staff.

"I didn't come back to Wisconsin to be a coach," Tucker told Davis. "That was never my plan. I went there to step in for my brother, Howard, and I still have love for the coaches and the student-athletes and the university as a whole."

Howard Moore was an assistant coach at Wisconsin, and Tucker stepped in for him on an interim basis after Moore was severely injured in a car accident that killed Moore's wife and daughter.

In late June, a recording from a meeting during the season that included Gard, his assistants and the seven seniors on the team was emailed to the Wisconsin State Journal by an anonymous source. In the recording, the seven seniors leveled pointed criticism at Gard for a disappointing season, with one saying, "We're not here to build your résumé," and another adding that Wisconsin "doesn't feel like home."

The 37-minute audio file was only part of a meeting that lasted two hours, according to some people in the room, and all of the shared clip was Gard receiving criticism from the seniors.

Tucker put out a statement Aug. 4 that said he didn't want to be silent and "to state categorically that I have not done any of the things that I have been accused of." His statement came two days after the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported he tried to get Gard fired during the 2019-20 season and attempted to turn players against the head coach amid the 2020-21 campaign.

Gard said he is not sure who recorded the meeting and that he would be moving on from the issue.

Spartans Land 4-Star Tailback/Defensive Back

Michigan State head coach Mel Tucker

bolstered his 2022 class by picking up the commitment of four-star athlete Dillon Tatum from West Bloomfield, Mich.

Tatum, who is the No. 13 athlete and No. 265 overall prospect in the nation, chose the Spartans after holding offers from more than 30 FBS programs, including Big Ten rivals Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio State, Nebraska, Penn State, Purdue and Wisconsin as well as Baylor, Florida, Georgia, Notre Dame, Ole Miss, Tennessee, USC, Utah and Texas A&M nationally.

The 5-11, 190-pound Tatum stood out on both sides off the ball in high school, thriving as a tailback during his team's state title run in 2020 and drawing strong interest from elite programs as a defensive back.

"At the next level, I'm going to play defensive back," Tatum said. "They look for a guy that's explosive and can make plays all over the field, and if I've got the opportunity, I'll do it. I'm going to play safety, probably free safety, and use the range a little bit – get to both sides of the field and just make plays."

Tatum, who was also a standout in track, expressed excitement about the potential of becoming Michigan State's kick returner, which he deemed "the most exciting spot on the football field."

Tucker has continued to enjoy success on the recruiting trail with the Spartans boasting the fourth-ranked class in the conference and No. 17 nationally.

PSU Adds 3-Star WR To Nation's No. 1 Class

Penn State head coach James Franklin continued to add to the No. 1 recruiting class in the nation for 2022, picking up a commitment from three-star wide receiver Omari Evans of Killeen (Texas) Shoe-maker.

The speedy receiver chose the Nittany Lions over a final group that included Arkansas, Baylor, Houston, Indiana, Rutgers and Vanderbilt. Penn State's 2022 class remains the top-ranked group with Evans becoming the 26th member.

Evans, who ran the 40-yard dash in 4.36 seconds, is ranked the No. 1,125 overall prospect and No. 103 cornerback nationally. He earned his scholarship offer after an unofficial visit over the summer, and he took his official visit to Penn State for the White Out Game against Auburn on Sept. 17.

The Nittany Lions already held three commitments from prospects expected to play wide receiver – four-star Kaden

Saunders of Westerville (Ohio) South, Lancaster (Pa.) Manheim Township four-star Anthony Ivey and three-star Tyler Johnson of Ridgeway (Va.) Magna Vista.

Harrisburg (Pa.) Central Dauphin East four-star athlete Mehki Flowers and Argyle (Texas) Liberty Christian four-star safety Cristian Driver could also play wide receiver, but it is expected that at least one will begin his college career on defense.

Franklin and his staff were looking to bolster a receiving room that lacks substantial depth behind primary targets Jah-an Dotson, Parker Washington and KeAndre Lambert-Smith.

Nittany Lions Miss Out On 4-Star Shooting Guard

First-year head coach Micah Shrewsberry and the Penn State men's basketball program failed to pick up their third commitment in three weeks when four-star guard Otega Oweh of Blair Academy in New Jersey announced his commitment to Oklahoma.

Oweh, whose brother Odafe "Jayson" Oweh starred for the Penn State football team before becoming a first-round NFL draft pick, would have been one of the highest rated recruits in program history had he joined the Lions. The 6-4, 180-pounder is the No. 8 shooting guard nationally and the No. 73 overall prospect as well as the No. 3 player in New Jersey.

Another of Oweh's older brothers, Kaylen, joined the Penn State men's hoops team as a walk-on in September.

Penn State's 2022 class has five members and is ranked No. 11 nationally. Shrewsberry added commitments during the past two weekends from four-star center Kebba Njie of La Porte (Ind.) La Lumiere and Ardmore (Pa.) Lower Merion three-star center Demetrius Lilley.

The class also includes three-star guard Jameel Brown of Haverford, Pa., Cincinnati (Ohio) Moeller three-star wing Evan Mahaffey and three-star guard Kanye Clary of Woodstock (Va.) Massanutten Military Academy.

Wisconsin To Name Field After Former Coach, AD

The University of Wisconsin recently announced the playing field at Camp Randall Stadium will be named after former Badgers football coach and athletic director Barry Alvarez.

Chancellor Rebecca Blank announced the field will be known as "Barry Alvarez Field at Camp Randall Stadium" during a Sept. 30 ceremony honoring Alvarez, who retired as Wisconsin's athletic director this summer.

Alvarez, who was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2010, coached Wisconsin from 1990 to 2005, setting a school record for career coaching victories and winning three Rose Bowl titles. He boasted a 119-74-4 career record in Madison after taking over a program that had produced

BIG

2021 Standings

East Division

	Conf.		All		Pct.
	W	L	W	L	
Michigan	2	0	5	0	1.000
Michigan State	2	0	5	0	1.000
Penn State	2	0	5	0	1.000
Ohio State	2	0	4	1	.800
Maryland	1	1	4	1	.800
Rutgers	0	2	3	2	.600
Indiana	0	2	2	3	.400

West Division

	Conf.		All		Pct.
	W	L	W	L	
Iowa	2	0	5	0	1.000
Minnesota	1	1	3	2	.600
Purdue	1	1	3	2	.600
Nebraska	1	2	3	3	.500
Illinois	1	2	2	4	.333
Nebraska	1	2	3	3	.500
Northwestern	0	2	2	3	.400
Wisconsin	0	2	1	3	.250

Oct. 1 Score

Iowa 51, Maryland 14

Oct. 2 Scores

Minnesota 20, Purdue 13

Michigan 38, Wisconsin 17

Illinois 24, Charlotte 14

Ohio State 52, Rutgers 13

Penn State 24, Indiana 0

Michigan State 48, Western Kentucky 31

Nebraska 56, Northwestern 7

Oct. 9 Games

Maryland at Ohio State, Noon

Michigan State at Rutgers, Noon

Wisconsin at Illinois, 3:30 p.m.

Penn State at Iowa, 4 p.m.

Michigan at Nebraska, 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 16 Games

Rutgers at Northwestern, Noon

Michigan State at Indiana, Noon

Army at Wisconsin, 8:00 p.m.

Nebraska at Minnesota, TBD

Purdue at Iowa, TBD

Oct. 23 Games

Illinois at Penn State, Noon

Maryland at Minnesota, TBD

Northwestern at Michigan, TBD

Wisconsin at Purdue, TBD

Ohio State at Indiana, TBD

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a 9-36 record in the four years prior to his arrival.

“Barry Alvarez has had an immeasurable impact on the UW-Madison campus, beyond in the state and in college sports,” Blank said. “And that type of career deserves recognition at the very highest level.”

Blank said a fundraising campaign had brought in more than \$13 million in conjunction with the renovation project.

The plan includes putting “Barry Alvarez Field” in the northwest and southwest corners of the field when the Camp Randall Stadium turf is replaced ahead of the 2022 season.

“That was quite a surprise,” Alvarez said. “I’m touched. I’m honored.”

Alvarez became the Badgers’ athletic director in 2004 while he was still coaching the football team. Wisconsin teams won 16 national titles in six different sports (women’s lightweight rowing, men’s cross country, men’s hockey, women’s hockey, men’s indoor track and men’s rowing) during his run as athletic director.

Northwestern To Redevelop Stadium After Record Gift

After receiving a \$480 million gift from the family of Patrick and Shirley Ryan, Northwestern has announced plans to redevelop Ryan Field.

The Ryan family’s gift will include funds for other university projects but will serve as the lead gift for a stadium rebuild, marking the largest in the history of the university. The school will generate additional gifts to complete the project, which likely would begin after the 2022 football season.

Northwestern’s stadium was originally built in 1926 and was last renovated in 1997, when it also changed its name from Dyche Stadium to Ryan Field. Both Patrick and Shirley Ryan graduated from Northwestern, and Patrick Ryan served as chairman of the school’s board of trustees for 14 years.

While surveying bids from architecture and design firms for the stadium project, Northwestern aims to exceed Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and become more accessible to all fans. The

Wildcats will play at least one season at alternate venues, with Chicago’s Soldier Field a likely option. Northwestern could also play more late-season games at iconic Wrigley Field, where they will host Purdue on Nov. 20.

“We deeply appreciate the Ryan family’s enduring dedication to our student-athletes,” Northwestern athletic director Derrick Gragg said. “The impact of their visionary generosity on past, present and future Wildcats is truly incomparable. The rebuilt Ryan Field will be a world-class venue befitting this institution’s pursuit of excellence in all areas.”

Top Performers From Across The Conference

Iowa quarterback Spencer Petras was among the top Big Ten performer outside of the Ohio State game, leading the Hawkeyes to a 51-14 demolition of Maryland on Oct. 1. The fourth-year junior signal-caller completed 21 of 30 passes for 259 yards and three touchdowns, and he added two scores on the ground.

Hawkeye junior tailback Tyler Good-

son stood out against the Terrapins as well, tallying 151 yards from scrimmage and hauling in a 67-yard touchdown reception during the 37-point win.

Illinois fourth-year junior tailback Chase Brown gashed Charlotte for 257 yards and two touchdowns on 26 carries during the Fighting Illini’s 24-14 victory at home on Oct. 2.

Nebraska quarterback Adrian Martinez stepped up to lead the Huskers to a 56-7 victory against Northwestern, completing 11 of 17 passes for 202 yards and one touchdown. The fourth-year junior dual-threat quarterback added 50 rushing yards and three scores on eight attempts

Michigan State junior tailback Kenneth Walker led the Spartans to a 48-31 win against Western Kentucky, posting 127 yards and three touchdowns on 24 carries.

Penn State senior wide receiver Jahan Dotson dominated Indiana during the Nittany Lions’ 24-0 victory, hauling in eight receptions for 84 yards and two touchdowns. He also completed a 21-yard pass on his only attempt.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago – 1981

An upstart Florida State team coasted into Columbus and left with a 36-27 upset of the No. 7 Buckeyes.

It was a rare shootout for the Buckeyes and a second straight big game for quarterback Art Schlichter, who completed 32 of his 51 passes for 458 yards and two scores. But it was still not enough to topple the Seminoles, led by a 25-of-41 passing day from quarterback Rick Stockstill, who racked up 299 yards and two scores of his own.

Linebacker Glen Cobb, a defensive captain for the Buckeyes, had to answer for the loss and chalked it up primarily to Florida State’s talent – which was perhaps greater than Ohio State expected.

“I think right off we had it going our way,” Cobb said. “We stopped their first series and then we had our problems. We seemed to hold them on the first couple of downs, but on third-and-8, third-and-6, they would break a long one on us.

“We just made some mistakes, and they executed well. They’re a very good football team.”

35 Years Ago – 1986

Ohio State deployed a little bit of razzle-dazzle to spark its maligned offense against Illinois on the way to a 14-0 victory.

The Buckeyes scored both of their touchdowns on trick plays, striking first in the second quarter on a Jim Karsatos bootleg, complete with a rousing fake handoff to freeze the defense.

“I very seldom run the ball,” admitted Karsatos after the game. “But (fullback George Cooper) made an excellent fake, and I had an easy run for the score. There was no one around me. I very seldom score a touchdown standing up.”

The second came with just a minute left in the first half, on a third-and-3 from the Illinois 10-yard-line. Karsatos pitched to tailback Vince Workman as he rolled to the left. With the Illini defense moving toward him, Workman stopped and spotted flanker Nate Harris streaking toward the left corner of the end zone. Workman’s toss was true and Harris tumbled to the ground with Ohio State’s second and final score of the afternoon.

“Our offense was not great, but we executed well at critical times,” said OSU head coach Earle Bruce. “I thought the touchdown run by Karsatos worked well, and the other play, the pass from Workman to Harris, was well-executed.”

30 Years Ago – 1991

For the second time in its last three Big Ten contests, going back to a last-second loss to Michigan in 1990, close wasn’t good enough for Ohio State, losing by a field goal on its opponent’s final play of the game.

Illinois placekicker Chris Richardson hooked in a 41-yarder against a brisk wind with 36 seconds remaining in the game to beat the Buckeyes, 10-7.

When asked if the Buckeyes could glean anything from another heartbreaker – one that ended any hopes of an unbeaten season – offensive coordinator Elliot Uzelac had no interest in moral victories.

“We’ve had enough character tests to last us a lifetime around here,” Uzelac said. “I’d rather win games.”

That fairly well summed up the feelings of many members of the team. Saddled with a fourth consecutive loss to Illinois, many

Buckeyes struggled with their emotions after the narrow loss.

“We wanted to win bad,” safety Roger Harper said, staring at the floor and shaking his head from side to side. “We wanted to go 5-0, move up into the top 10, A loss like this hurts, man. You don’t know how bad we wanted to win this game.”

25 Years Ago – 1996

It was a showdown between third-ranked Ohio State and fourth-ranked Penn State. Ohio State held the ball for close to 35 minutes and rolled to a rather easy 38-7 win in its Big Ten opener on Oct. 5 at Ohio Stadium.

“Today was our day,” OSU head coach John Cooper said. “This was a great victory. I don’t know if we can play much better than this.”

The Buckeyes outgained Penn State by a 565-211 margin in a game eerily similar to the Nittany Lions’ 63-14 dismantling of OSU two years before in Happy Valley.

Just as it was in that game, the winning team handled the opponent up front, as Ohio State led the way with 141 rushing yards from tailback Pepe Pearson.

20 Years Ago – 2001

Like the rest of the Ohio State staff, and just about everyone else who witnessed OSU’s 20-17 loss to Wisconsin in Ohio Stadium on Oct. 13, Mel Tucker was bummed.

It’s a feeling the first-year defensive backs coach never could have imagined before as a former Badger player and graduate of Wisconsin.

“I was in Coach (Barry) Alvarez’s first recruiting class there,” said Tucker, a four-year letter-winner and former starting defensive back at Wisconsin. “It’s a strange feeling.”

Tucker’s allegiances weren’t mixed. Ohio State was employing him, after all, but he did admit that it was a straining experience.

“It’s not mixed for me because I have ‘Ohio State’ on my clothes,” he said. “I’m coaching a group of kids that play hard and put a lot of time to winning, and I always want them to succeed.

“(Still,) when you go out on the field, and you’re competing against people that you know, it’s tough. That’s pretty much all I can say about it.”

15 Years Ago – 2006

Ohio State traveled to Iowa on Sept. 30, looking for redemption from a 33-7 loss in 2004 in Kinnick Stadium and trying to gain its first win in a Big Ten road opener in four seasons.

By the time the Buckeyes’ charter flight returned to Columbus in the wee hours of Oct. 1, they not only had beaten the No. 13-ranked Hawkeyes convincingly by a 38-17 score, but they had also solidified their hold on the nation’s No. 1 ranking.

With the meat of its schedule already digested, OSU was set to turn its attention to the softer part of its schedule against six teams with a combined 14-16 record and two losses to FCS foes. The Buckeyes weren’t willing to think that way, though.

“One of the great challenges for this team – and we talked a lot about it – was how brutal our September schedule was going to be,” OSU head coach Jim Tressel. “But now that September is over, all that does is point out how tough October will be.

“We’re 5-0 now, but we still have a lot of questions left to be answered. Can we handle the success of being 5-0? We’ve handled

adversity pretty well, like coming to Iowa and winning despite a hostile environment. Now, can we continue to handle adversity as it comes? Will we continue to get better?”

10 Years Ago – 2011

The early-autumn sky was as gray as the concrete in Ohio Stadium, and Ohio State’s offensive performance was just as drab as the Buckeyes dropped a 10-7 decision Oct. 1 to No. 25 Michigan State in the 2011 Big Ten opener for both teams.

Until a touchdown drive in the final two minutes of the game, OSU was working on one of its poorest offensive outputs in many years. Before the team’s final two possessions, the Buckeyes had totaled a mere 83 yards that included minus-4 in the second half. Their final two possessions netted 33 and 62 yards, respectively, and they managed to finish with 178 yards of offense.

Meanwhile, scoring with only 10 seconds remaining in the game allowed Ohio State to avoid being shutout victims for the first time since a 28-0 loss to Michigan in the 1993 regular-season finale. The team hadn’t been blanked at home since a 6-0 defeat to Wisconsin in 1982.

“Give a lot of credit to Michigan State,” OSU head coach Luke Fickell said. “They came in here and outplayed us. We knew it was going to be a physical football game, and we just didn’t get it done.

“On both sides of the ball, we have some things to shore up. There are a lot of things we’ve got to do. We know we’ve got to be better.”

Five Years Ago – 2016

Ohio State’s postgame singing of Carmen Ohio, usually a joyous affair after a win, took a different form following Ohio State’s 38-17 victory against Indiana on Oct. 8 to improve to 5-0.

Junior middle linebacker Raekwon McMillan’s expression while he sang the school’s alma mater could be described as stoic more than anything else. Head coach Urban Meyer wasn’t too happy, either, in the postgame press conference.

Things just didn’t quite click for Ohio State on offense – especially through the air – while the defense struggled at times, though Indiana was still held to just 281 total yards.

But despite a few bad throws from junior quarterback J.T. Barrett, and regardless of those grim expressions after the game, Ohio State won and won handily.

Still, the mood in the locker room was anything but joyous. “I feel lousy,” Meyer said after the game.

One Year Ago – 2020

Ohio State introduced the creation of a new program Oct. 10 when it announced that fifth-year senior defensive end Jonathon Cooper would be the first Buckeye to don the No. 0 jersey, allowed in college football for the first time in the 2020 season.

In a post shared by the official team account, Ohio State explained that it was defining the uniform not as the No. 0, but as the “Block O” jersey and was using it in honor of the late Buckeye legend Bill Willis.

“Toughness. Accountability. Fight. These are all traits Bill Willis exemplified throughout his life,” the post read. “The number ‘0’ is a badge of honor. It represents fight – the backbone of our culture.

“Jonathon Cooper shares these traits and has been presented the opportunity to wear the ‘Block O’ jersey this season.”

OSU Makes Top Three For Four-Star Safety

Ohio State received some big news in the recruiting world two hours before kickoff against Rutgers on Oct. 2. In what would wind up being a day of winning for the Buckeyes, their first victory came when four-star safety Xavier Nwankpa of Altoona

RECRUITING
OUTLOOK
Wyatt Crosher

(Iowa) Southeast Polk included OSU among his top three schools. Iowa and Notre Dame are the other two finalists.

Nwankpa posted on social media the finalists with the caption, "It's here. My time is soon." He is rated the third-best safety and No. 45 overall prospect in the 2022 class.

Ohio State has seemed to be in the driver's seat to earn Nwankpa's commitment, holding both 247Sports Crystal Ball predictions from Michigan insider Steve Lorenz and 247Sports director of national recruiting Steve Wiltfong. But Buckeye

Scoop recruiting insider Marc Givler talked to BSB the day before Nwankpa's top three was released, and he was not 100 percent confident the Buckeyes would land the four-star prospect.

"I suspect the top three is going to be Ohio State, Notre Dame and Iowa," Givler said. "That's what I suspect it's going to be, but I think Texas A&M is in there, too. One of those four is going to be out, and whichever one of those falls out, I think it's going to surprise that fan base. We'll see. I think Ohio State will be on there. I'm just not convinced they're a stone-cold lock."

Nwankpa (6-2, 190) talked with Wiltfong about his top three, saying they were the schools with which he felt he had both the best relationships and the best fit.

Regarding Ohio State, Nwankpa said he has great relationships with other members of its class and likes the idea of going against the Buckeyes' wide receivers in practice to further his development. He also said that he is being looked at for OSU's bullet position.

"Those are some of the best relationships I have with the commits and other recruits, and you get to go against that wide receiver room every day," Nwankpa told

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	

247Sports. "That would give me the best chance of developing my coverage skills. They have a defense that's only going to get better with their new scheme, and the bullet position where they're recruiting me, the opportunities are limitless there."

Nwankpa visited Ohio State during the first weekend of June and posted pictures from his visit with the caption, "Bye Ohio. See you soon?" He is expected to visit

the Hawkeyes on Oct. 9 for their top-five matchup against Penn State and will also visit the Buckeyes for their game against the Nittany Lions at the end of October.

The Buckeyes currently have four defensive back commitments in the 2022 class – four-star cornerback Terrance Brooks of Little Elm, Texas; West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star cornerback Jyaire Brown; four-star athlete Kye Stokes

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago – 1981

With a handful of exceptions, college recruiters were finding the Columbus area to be rather barren of talent for the 1982 recruiting class.

The overall talent in the area was down considerably from previous years, with a peak of seven major-college signees in the class of 1980.

Impressively, four of the potential standouts in the area each came from Bob Stuart's Columbus Eastmoor program – one of the area's best. Leading the way was Mike Kee, a linebacker whom Stuart called "probably the best linebacker we've had." He was flanked at linebacker by a pair of college targets – Byron Lee and Stuart Wyatt, with Kee and Lee each on Ohio State's radar and Wyatt rapidly approaching it.

Halfback Carl Clinton was the final member of the quartet and looked to be a major player in the recruiting game if he could keep up with the books, thanks to his top-tier speed and more than 500 rushing yards in five wins for Eastmoor on the season.

35 Years Ago – 1986

Keeping with the tradition of making recruiting a top-secret affair, Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce did his best to evade questions when discussing the issue in early October.

"There are some good football players, and they seem to be spread out all over the country," said Bruce when asked where the best prep players were located.

"For me to say we're not going to go to California or we're not going to go to Texas, but we are going to go to Florida and Georgia and Chicago ... " said Bruce, his voice trailing off to the point of not finishing the sentence.

"I think there are some football players who can fill our needs at those places. And Ohio. Ohio is No. 1."

30 Years Ago – 1991

National recruiting expert Tom Lemming called Columbus Brookhaven linebacker Jayson Gwinn the top player at his position in Ohio, and the list of schools recruiting him seemed to indicate others agreed.

"I'm looking at Ohio State, Syracuse, Michigan, Michigan State, Florida and Tennessee," Gwinn said. "Ohio State will be one of my visits. I like Ohio State a lot, and they are showing a lot of interest in me."

Brookhaven head coach Gregg Miller said the only thing Gwinn needed to improve was his focus.

"There are no skills he really needs to work on," Miller said.

25 Years Ago – 1996

Ohio State's recruiting class moved to seven strong after the verbal commitment of Newark, Ohio, lineman Mike Collins following Ohio State's win over Penn State on Oct. 5.

Collins committed to Ohio State head coach John Cooper and offensive coordinator Joe Hollis after watching the Buckeyes dis-

pose of the Nittany Lions. He had his heart set on OSU for some time, though.

"I guess I've always wanted to be a Buckeye," Collins told BSB. "It's close to home so my family can come watch me, they've got a weight program, and I think I'll have a good chance to play there."

Collins was headed to Ohio State as a defensive tackle, but he also played offensive guard and fullback for his high school team and was open to playing on either side of the ball.

20 Years Ago – 2001

Brooklyn (N.Y) Poly Prep defensive tackle Kwakou Robinson took advantage of an open week on his team's schedule to make an official visit to Ohio State for its matchup with Wisconsin.

Robinson was considered the nation's 14th-best defensive tackle. He returned to Ohio State after attending a session of the school's football camp in June.

"It was great," said Robinson, who was hosted by fellow New York native Will Smith. "You couldn't have asked for anything better.

"Will really did a good job of pointing out their situation on the defensive line. He talked about how they would be losing some people and how some people have moved around. He thought I could have a great chance to start my freshman or sophomore year."

Robinson revealed after the visit that OSU was his new favorite school but that he was still interested in Miami (Fla.), Michigan State, Notre Dame, Penn State and Virginia.

"Just coming back from Ohio State, I like them best," he said. "I think Ohio State would be a great place for me.

"But I can't tell for sure until I take more visits. I don't have anything else set up, but I'm pretty sure I will visit Penn State."

15 Years Ago – 2006

Ohio State welcomed a trio of top offensive line prospects to Ohio Stadium on Sept. 23, allowing the three to meet for the first time in what Ohio State was hoping would become a close-knit group.

Mike Adams of Dublin (Ohio) Coffman, Orlando (Fla.) Edge-water's Michael Brewster and Kyle Long of Charlottesville (Va.) St. Anne's-Belfield met each other in person for the first time prior to the game and were seen taking pictures together.

"That was the first time that we've all been together," Adams told BSB. "It was just like we've been friends forever. We've been talking for a while, since early this summer. We've really talked about what we'd like to do along the lines of playing together, and we're all pretty excited about it."

The three frequently shared messages to each other on MySpace.com, a popular networking website. Adams – who went by the moniker "Big Mike" – had Brewster and Long as two of his top eight friends on the site.

10 Years Ago – 2011

Quarterback Cardale Jones was finishing his six-month stint at

Fork Union Military Academy in Virginia before enrolling at Ohio State in January.

"It hasn't been hard because I have wanted to be a Buckeye and I was willing to do whatever it takes to be a Buckeye," Jones said of waiting a semester to enroll at OSU.

Most difficult for the Cleveland native? Adjusting to the quirks of a military school.

"Not having a cell phone," Jones told BSB. "That has been the biggest (adjustment) so far."

Five Years Ago – 2016

Four-star cornerback Shaun Wade had been committed to Ohio State longer than anyone else in the class of 2017, but the Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian prospect was considered far from a lock to wind up in Columbus.

Wade was considered to be a soft verbal to the Buckeyes since he still considered other programs such as Alabama, Florida, Notre Dame and Virginia Tech. In the meantime, he took visits to a couple of schools, including an official visit to Notre Dame.

"It was a great atmosphere at Notre Dame," Wade said. "It's different. Their academics are different. Everybody there – it's just different. It's hard to explain. Everybody is trying to achieve something there if they're not playing football, so it means a lot. You get to meet a lot of people that are probably going to do something in life."

Wade also took a trip to Florida before he traveled to South Bend, and he said his father enjoyed the visit to Gainesville.

"He really liked it," Wade said. "That was his first college game ever, so he thought it was awesome. I've been there several times. It's really nothing different. I was just being close to the coaches one more time."

One Year Ago – 2020

On Oct. 3, Ohio State moved within percentage points of Alabama for the nation's top-rated recruiting class when Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central three-star offensive tackle Zen Michalski announced his commitment to the Buckeyes.

The 6-7, 288-pound Michalski, who was considered the 48th-best offensive tackle and No. 626 prospect overall in the class of 2021, had been committed to Louisville since April, but an offer from Ohio State on Sept. 8 following a strong start to his senior season shook up his recruitment.

Though Michalski had not been able to meet with coaches amid the NCAA-mandated dead period, he'd grown close from afar with Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, offensive line coach Greg Studrawa and graduate assistant Kennedy Cook.

He also took a trip to Columbus with his father the weekend of Sept. 27 – similar to the extra unofficial visit 2022 Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona three-star tight end Bennett Christian made before he committed to the Buckeyes on Sept. 1 – which ultimately sealed the deal for Ohio State.

ASK AN ANALYST

With Marc Givler of Buckeye Scoop

While the defensive line is without any commitments, what other positions are Ohio State hoping to fill out more in the 2022 class?

"They're still trying to hammer down this offensive line situation, which isn't looking as promising as it was a couple of months ago. They're going to get Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star Earnest Greene back. I think he's coming on his official visit for the Penn State game. But that's an area of concern right now, and I think unlike defensive line where a lot of their top targets are still undecided, the offensive line has seen some guys slip away already. That's probably a little more urgent right now as far as needing to hammer down the top target or two. So, that's definitely a big one."

From the players that Ohio State does have in the 2022 class, who has impressed you, either in performances at high school games or in the summer camps during this past off-season?

"Obviously, five-star linebacker C.J. Hicks of Kettering (Ohio) Alter is a super-impressive talent, and he's had some really good performances this year. I saw him early in the season, and I thought he was excellent. I think that's a guy who, especially with

(Ohio State's) linebacker issues, can maybe get himself on the field sooner rather than later.

"The guy in this class I really like is Kyion Grayes, the four-star wide receiver out of Chandler, Ariz. He has had a little bit of injury issues this season. He got injured and missed some time, so I'm going more off the summer camp circuit and everything. But he's a guy that I think has been underrated throughout this process. He was amazing at The Opening, had great seven-on-seven circuits, and I think he has a chance to be almost like a K.J. Hill-type of guy who you can't really explain.

"You look at him, and he's not physically imposing. He's probably not a 4.3-second 40 guy, but yet he catches 90 balls and it's just like, 'Wow, what a player.' That's kind of where Kyion is for me. I don't think he's going to flash athletically the way maybe Julian Fleming or Emeka Egbuka or Garrett Wilson would. He's just so steady and productive, and just such a hard worker and a competitor. I think that's a guy who people are going to look back on and be like, 'Yeah, we didn't really appreciate him while he was being recruited.' He sure looks like he's going to be a great player at Ohio State. I could totally see that."

Ohio State recently announced it would be wearing spe-

cial all-scarlet uniforms for its Oct. 30 home matchup against Penn State. Alternate uniforms have been discussed as a recruiting tool, but how much do you think these uniforms actually impact a recruit's decision?

"I don't think it's like a deal-breaker for these kids, but look at someone like Oregon. I mean, Oregon has almost built its program on being Nike's test dummy. It gives you a little juice, kids think it's cool, but it's still about getting to the NFL, it's still about having the confidence in your position coach to develop you, having comfortable relationships with the other recruits and then the players on the roster. It's still about all those things, and of course now some name, image and likeness probably, but it's a nice added touch.

"Recruits like the look-good, feel-good, play-good thought. They like to get a chance to have a little spice to their uniforms, and when they see these teams, they might think, 'If I go here, I'm going to get a chance once or twice a year to wear some really cool different uniforms.' That may help them vs. a team who only wears the exact same uniforms every week, every year. I think it's a nice attention-grabber, but I don't think when it becomes crunch time for a decision that it's high on the priority list."

of Seffner (Fla.) Armwood; and Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star cornerback Ryan Turner. Stokes is expected to play at safety when he moves to the collegiate level.

OSU In Top Five For Kanu, Styles

Making Nwankpa's final three wasn't the only good recruiting news Ohio State received on Oct. 2. The Buckeyes were also listed among the top five for four-star defensive lineman Hero Kanu of Rancho Santa Margarita (Calif.) Catholic. Also on the list are Georgia, LSU, Notre Dame and Oklahoma.

Kanu is ranked the 13th-best defensive lineman and No. 84 overall prospect in the 2022 class. His NFL comparison on 247Sports is to a former Buckeye and current Pittsburgh Steelers defensive lineman Cameron Heyward.

The 6-5, 293-pound Kanu visited with Ohio State on June 8 and July 29 and is set to come back again when the Buckeyes face Penn State on Oct. 30. OSU is still searching for its first defensive line commitment for the 2022 class.

Moving to the 2023 class, the Buckeyes stayed in the mix for maybe the top prospect on their board – Pickerington (Ohio) Central five-star safety Sonny Styles, who included the Buckeyes alongside Clemson, Florida, Notre Dame and Ole Miss.

"Big thanks to all the coaches who have recruited me," Styles posted on his Twitter page. "Blessed to be in the position I am."

Styles is ranked the top player in Ohio,

the top safety and the No. 8 overall prospect in the class. And while there are five schools technically still in the running for the 6-4, 215-pounder, Givler thinks it is really down to only two – Notre Dame and Ohio State.

"I don't see any way he doesn't either end up staying home with Ohio State or going to play with his brother (at Notre Dame)," Givler said. "I think Ohio State's in a pretty good spot right now. But I think it's going to be one of those two. I would be very surprised if it was anybody else."

As Givler mentioned, Styles could choose to play with his brother, Fighting Irish wide receiver Lorenzo Styles Jr., or stay in-state with the Buckeyes, where his father, Lorenzo Styles Sr. played linebacker from 1992 to 1994.

Sonny Styles was happy about what he saw during his visit to Ohio State, despite witnessing the team's loss to Oregon. He also talked up his strong communication with the Buckeyes throughout the recruitment process.

"It was pretty crazy. I loved it," Styles told Eleven Warriors. "That was the big thing for me, and then linking up with some of those guys, being able to talk to them. I think that was the biggest thing for me."

"I've always kept in good contact with Ohio State. I think a lot of times, it's basic conversations. It's always about football. And of course, they're always letting me know they want me here."

There is no timetable for Styles' decision. He has had one crystal ball prediction – from Notre Dame insider Tom Loy – in

favor of the Fighting Irish since June 14.

Buckeyes Tracking Bevy Of D-Linemen

Kanu is one of a variety of defensive line targets for Ohio State in the 2022 class, a class which, as mentioned, does not yet have a defensive line commitment.

The bright side for the Buckeyes is that most of their targets have simply not made their decision yet, leaving the door open for defensive line coach Larry Johnson to still get some of the top prospects on his board, including five-star defensive end Omari Abor of Duncanville, Texas; Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star defensive lineman Caden Curry; four-star defensive end Kenyatta Jackson of Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep; Owasso, Okla., four-star defensive lineman Chris McClellan; and four-star defensive end Enai White of Philadelphia Imhotep Institute.

All those names remain in play for Ohio State, and that makes Givler optimistic about Johnson's chances to still secure a strong defensive line class.

"I think they're in decent shape, but it's going to be interesting," Givler said. "It's like a domino effect right now with Kenyatta Jackson, Enai White, Omari Abor and Caden Curry, who's now being looked at as more of an edge guy. All those guys are guys Ohio State would love to land, and they're not going to get all of them. They probably couldn't even take all four of them if they wanted to."

"It's going to be interesting to see who kind of blinks first because right now

they're all waiting. Everyone is waiting for one of these guys to commit, and they're all intertwined in terms of Ohio State and programs like Oklahoma, who are also trying to get both Omari and Kenyatta. There is very much a domino effect here that's going to have to start to fall at some point."

Givler also said the delay at the defensive line position was not necessarily one that Ohio State could have anticipated.

"Another interesting thing here is, with the exception of maybe Caden Curry, a lot of these guys were expected to announce by now," the analyst said. "A lot of their defensive line targets – Chris McClellan is another one – all of these guys were supposed to announce in the summer, and it just never happened. I know that's probably causing a lot of anxiety for Ohio State fans, but they're all still uncommitted, they're all still out there. It's just the timing has been awfully weird with a lot of guys just pushing things back a few months later than we all anticipated."

Every name Givler mentioned is a big name on the Buckeyes' recruiting board, but the top prospect as ranked by 247Sports' composite rankings has been one of the most vocal in his interest with Ohio State. Abor ranks as the second-best defensive end and No. 18 overall prospect in the class and recently was given a crystal ball prediction to the Buckeyes by Oklahoma insider Parker Thune.

With that news tweeted out, Abor retweeted the image with an "O" emoji as

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Continued From Page 27

well as a nut emoji to signify the Buckeyes. Abor has also vocally put Ohio State among the top of his interests to 247Sports.

"It's more like I'm looking at three or two schools now," Abor said. "Ohio State for sure, Alabama is still in there."

Along with the Buckeyes and Crimson Tide, Abor had a top 10 on April 16 that included Arizona State, Georgia, LSU, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

'23 Georgia Prospect Stays In Home State

Ohio State missed out on one of its top defensive back targets for 2023 when Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star cornerback Kayin Lee announced his commitment to Georgia.

Lee, who committed to the in-state Bulldogs on Sept. 29, is ranked the 14th-best corner and No. 121 overall prospect in the

class. In mid-July, he revealed a top 10 of Arkansas, Indiana, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Miami (Fla.), Notre Dame, Pittsburgh, Ohio State, Ole Miss and UCF, but more recently he told Lettermen Row that he was mostly down to just two finalists.

"It's Georgia and Ohio State," Lee said. "There are some other schools up there, but they're most definitely the top two."

Ultimately, Lee decided to stay home. It's a decision that Givler said will sting, but not a surprising one, and one that the Buckeyes can most certainly overcome.

"It is a loss," Givler said. "I know he was one of their favorite guys at corner in that class, but I think you kind of had to expect he was going to end up at Georgia. A lot of those kids down there, especially in that program, are going to be tough to pull away from Georgia. I think Ohio State was one of the top schools involved there, but I don't think it was totally unexpected."

Givler said Ohio State's primary focus

moving forward at cornerback is five-star A.J. Harris of Phenix City (Ala.) Glenwood School, the third-best corner and No. 13 overall prospect in 2023.

Harris will be the Buckeyes' top target, according to Givler in what is likely to be a much smaller defensive back class than Ohio State has had the past two cycles.

"I'm sure Ohio State will take more than one defensive back in the class, but they've taken so many the last two years that this isn't going to be a big defensive backs class," Givler said. "I mean, they just took a million guys in '21 and '22. They are both huge defensive back classes, so they are going to be very selective in '23. I don't think we're going to get to a point where they are taking four or five defensive backs in that class."

Martin Has Interest In '22 QB Opening

After the reclassification of Quinn Ew-

ers, Ohio State was left without a quarterback in its 2022 class. It was also left without many options for a replacement, with the top-20 quarterback prospects in the class already committed to their respective teams.

But the player at No. 21 hasn't shut the door on the Buckeyes just yet.

Four-star prospect Justyn Martin of Inglewood, Calif., decommitted from Cal on Sept. 21, and though Ohio State has not yet offered the 6-4, 210-pound signal-caller, he told 247Sports that he would absolutely have interest if the Buckeyes ever came to him.

"Definitely," Martin said. "If Ohio State shows interest, you have to give it a chance. I have watched a couple of games and I like where their program is."

Martin is listed as the No. 276 overall prospect in the class, and UCLA currently seems to be in the best position to earn his commitment.

OSU Makes More Lists, Misses On Big One

While Ohio State was mentioned on the top lists from Kanu, Nwankpa and Styles, it did not make the cut with Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson five-star cornerback Tony Mitchell, who kept the Buckeyes out of his top seven.

OSU had been in Mitchell's top 10 but was dropped along with Florida State and Miami (Fla.). The seven remaining schools are Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Oregon and Texas A&M.

Mitchell is ranked the second-best cornerback and No. 11 overall prospect in the 2023 class. The 6-2, 180-pound prospect, who was previously committed to Tennessee, currently has six crystal ball predictions, three of which are for Alabama. None has come during the past five months.

The Buckeyes made the top 12 from four-star offensive tackle Payton Kirkland of Orlando (Fla.) Dr. Phillips. Ohio State was named along with Clemson, Florida, Illinois, Michigan State, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, Texas, Texas A&M and UCF.

Kirkland is rated the ninth-best offensive tackle and No. 123 overall prospect in the 2023 class. He made a visit to the Buckeyes from July 27-29 and got an official offer from OSU on July 29, 2020.

Currently, there are no crystal ball predictions regarding the 6-5, 330-pound offensive tackle.

Ohio State has made the top-10 list for Pike Road, Ala., four-star defensive lineman Khurtiss Perry, along with Alabama, Auburn, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and UCF.

Perry is the 10th-best defensive lineman and No. 65 overall prospect in the 2022 class and currently holds one crystal ball prediction in favor of his home-state Crimson Tide. At 6-2 and 265 pounds, Perry is another player for Johnson to consider as the first commitment for his group in the class.

Perry said he will have his list pared in half by Oct. 15.

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Haskins Seeking NFL Redemption In Steel City

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Dwayne Haskins might be in the perfect spot to launch a rebirth as an NFL quarterback after an ignominious departure from the Washington Football Team in 2020.

Haskins, the 2018 starter for Ohio State when he finished third in balloting for the Heisman Trophy, signed with the Pittsburgh Steelers on Jan. 21, 2021, following his release from Washington for several off-field incidents as well as poor performances on it.

It was quite the fall for the 15th overall pick in the 2019 NFL draft, who was met in the nation's capital with high expectations but failed to deliver.

"I think there was a lot of hope that he could be the guy when he first came here," Zach Selby, staff writer for the Washington Football Team, told BSB. "They needed more out of that position. It's a win-now league. Always was, always will be, and no matter where you're drafted, you have to produce very quickly. He was just not able to do it."

Enter the Steelers and a low-pressure situation for Haskins, who found an ally in head coach Mike Tomlin and a mentor in longtime QB Ben Roethlisberger.

"I think the one guy that really helped Haskins is the relationship he started with right off the bat with Coach Tomlin," Steelers.com reporter Teresa Varley told BSB. "He was the kind of guy who wanted to give him this fresh start. Coach T really approached it well."

"I think Ben has helped him a lot, too, because it's kind of funny when (Haskins) talks about how he watched Ben as a kid. So now, he's working with Ben and that's helping from one standpoint, but I think it's Coach Tomlin who has really, really helped."

Haskins was pegged for a third-string role behind Roethlisberger and Mason Rudolph, but if the first weeks of the 2021 season are any indication, that order might change. The 39-year-old Roethlisberger was struggling as Pittsburgh was off to a 1-3 start following a 27-17 loss to Green Bay on Oct. 3.

As is the case anywhere in football, it seems the backup quarterbacks are always the most popular players.

That's something Pittsburgh Sports Now writer Nick Farabaugh noted in a Twitter post on Sept. 28 while mentioning that Steelers fans were dreaming of Aaron Rodgers after the Green Bay quarterback earlier in the

week had said nice things about the city of Pittsburgh:

"Steelers Twitter is in hell right now," Farabaugh wrote. "Pining for Dwayne Haskins special packages. Theorizing if Aaron Rodgers is coming to PIT. Man, let's take one step back."

It would be a giant leap forward to think Haskins is ready to take control of the Steelers offense after his struggles with Washington.

Haskins joined the then-Redskins following one epic year for the Buckeyes.

He famously won the battle over Joe Burrow to replace J.T. Barrett and threw a Big Ten-record 50 touchdown passes against eight interceptions while winning the Silver Football Award as the Big Ten's MVP. He completed 70.0 percent of his passes (373 of 533) for 4,831 yards, another conference mark, while leading the Buckeyes to a 13-1 record that included wins in the Big Ten Championship Game as well as the Rose Bowl. In all, he established 28 new school records and seven new conference marks.

Despite his accomplishments, Haskins had only 14 collegiate starts, each coming in his final year at Ohio State. That led skeptics to wonder if Washington was taking a gamble, but owner Daniel Snyder wanted the Potomac (Md.) Bullis School standout over the objections of his coaches and scouts.

Haskins made his debut in week four of the 2019 season in relief of Casey Keenum and threw for 107 yards and three interceptions against the New York Giants. After coming in for an injured Keenum in week eight, Haskins' first start was against Buffalo the following game when he completed 15 of 22 passes for 144 yards in the 24-9 defeat.

Haskins finally got a win in week 12 with a 19-16 victory against Detroit. He went 12 of 29 in that one for 156 yards and an interception.

"You could see the potential he had," Selby said. "In that first win against the Lions, he showed off a lot of the skills that really encouraged them to draft him in the first place."

Haskins injured his ankle in a week-16 game against the Giants and had to leave in the third quarter. He missed the season finale the next week as a result.

In nine games, which included seven starts, he had 119 completions in 203 attempts (58.6 percent) for 1,365 yards with seven touchdowns and seven interceptions.

He also ran for 101 yards, was sacked 20 times and lost two of six fumbles.

"Those last few quarters he had before he was knocked out of that week-16 game against the Giants, he was playing really well," Selby said. "He was playing starting-caliber football, and then (new WFT head coach) Ron Rivera came in and said he believed that this was going to be the guy. They wanted to give him as many starter's reps as possible. They wanted to figure out not only if he was going to be the starter for this year but a guy we can keep around for 10 years or maybe longer."

Rivera had replaced Jay Gruden as head coach for the 2020 season and gave Haskins ample opportunity to keep the starting job, but after a 1-3 start Haskins was benched in favor of Kyle Allen and then demoted to third-string behind Alex Smith, who was trying a comeback after a career-threatening leg injury.

Later in the season, after injuries to Allen and Smith, Haskins was the starter again, but his poor performances soon dropped him to back to third-string status.

"You could see the potential, but there was also a point where they started to realize that he wasn't ready quite yet to be where they needed him to be, so they put him on the bench," Selby said.

Then there were two instances of breaking COVID-19 protocol, the latter leading to the team stripping Haskins of his captaincy and giving it to former Ohio State teammate Chase Young.

After another bad outing during a start against Carolina, Haskins was released Dec. 28 before the last game of the season and was not claimed off waivers by any team.

"It was for sure humbling," Haskins told Steelers.com in June regarding his exit from Washington.

While he completed 61.4 percent of his passes for 1,439 yards, he threw only five TDs and was intercepted seven times for the 2020 season.

"I think everyone in the building wishes Dwayne the best," Selby said. "He still has a lot of former teammates on this team, both college and professional. They appreciated him."

"Going to the Steelers, where he can go in behind a veteran like Ben Roethlisberger, is exactly what he needs right now. I think learning from a player like Ben who knows how to handle that pressure is going to do wonders for him."

Haskins agreed.

"I just wanted to be in a place where I was wanted, and I am wanted here," he said. "I am thankful for the opportunity to be somewhere where I feel like I can be myself and play ball and not worry about the other stuff that comes along with it."

So far, Haskins is doing the right things to justify the Steelers taking a chance on him.

"Dwayne's work ethic is great," Varley said. "He's the kind of guy who comes in early to watch film. He stays late. He loves to study the offense. Coach T does a good job of giving him the scouting report. I think the relationship there was the best thing to get him started on the right foot."

"He works his tail off. There's no question about his work ethic and stuff like that here. From the first time he spoke, he was fantastic. Everything about him was good."

Questions remain, of course. Will he get an opportunity with the Steelers, and will he take advantage of it?

"He can be something really special," Selby said. "It just really depends on having the right situation, the right mentorship, having the right leadership. It really comes down this: How much does Dwayne want it? That's something he has to decide for himself."

Potential is sometimes a dangerous thing, but Varley feels Haskins has it.

"Oh, my gosh, you know the talent is there," she said. "You can have talent. You can have everything, but you can just see in his heart that it's there. He has the drive. He has the motivation – definitely."

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Faculty Council Vote Ruins '61 Championship 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 1961 season, one that featured equal parts triumphant euphoria and bitter disappointment.

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Woody Hayes had produced a pair of national championships during his first decade as head coach at Ohio State, but the shine from those trophies had begun to fade as the Buckeyes prepared for the 1961 season.

The team hadn't won a Big Ten championship since 1957 and in the subsequent three seasons had failed to finish higher than third place in the conference standings. Things bottomed out with a 3-5-1 record in 1959, but the Buckeyes rebounded the following year with a 7-2 mark that included a victory against Michigan, a sixth win for Hayes in 10 tries against the Wolverines.

That gave the coach lots of reason for optimism as fall camp convened in early September.

"We have a fair number of returning players who I think are ready to reach their peak," Hayes told reporters before the season. "We had a good spring, and I think our players are ready to get going. I know their coach certainly is."

The Buckeyes had the services of several veterans on both sides of the ball, including fullback Bob Ferguson, who earned All-America honors in 1960 after rushing for 853 yards and 13 touchdowns. Also returning were halfbacks Matt Snell and Paul Warfield, giving the offense a one-two punch of power and speed.

Additionally, top receiver Chuck Bryant was back after leading the team the year before with 17 receptions for 336 yards and four TDs. In those days, Hayes kept stats for how many dropped passes each of his receivers had during the season, and Bryant had zero drops in 1960.

Halfback-turned-quarterback Tom Matte had graduated to the NFL when the Baltimore Colts made him the seventh overall pick in the 1961 draft. Hayes decided to replace his multipurpose signal-caller with a trio of players who each brought a little different skill set to the position: Bill Mrukowski excelled in running the ball, Joe Sparma had a strong and accurate arm, and John Mummey featured a little bit of both.

The optimism that was so prevalent during the preseason soon faded, however, when TCU spoiled a season opener at Ohio Stadium for the second time in five years. The Horned Frogs were coming off a 17-16 upset of eighth-ranked Kansas when they invaded Columbus for the first time since knocking off Ohio State by an 18-14 final score in the 1957 opener.

This time, the third-ranked Buckeyes scored early on a 2-yard pass from Mrukowski to Bryant and protected that 7-0 lead into the fourth quarter. But the Horned Frogs tied the game when quarterback Guy "Sonny" Gibbs threw 12 yards to end Jim Glasscock for a touchdown early in the final period.

Ohio State had a chance to pull out a

victory in the fourth quarter, pushing to the TCU 10-yard line. But on second down, Mrukowski was intercepted at the goal line by Gibbs to end the threat. Hayes blamed himself for the play-call, saying, "We should have chopped away for at least two more plays since we were within field-goal range."

After the 7-7 tie to open the season, the Buckeyes took on an upset-minded UCLA in week two. The Bruins ran the old single-wing offense and featured a few new looks on defense that held Ferguson to just 29 yards on 13 carries. But fourth-quarter touchdown runs by Warfield and Snell allowed Ohio State to come from behind for a 13-3 victory.

Ferguson was limited to just 45 yards on 14 carries the following week against Illinois, but the fullback scored four touchdowns on short runs – none longer than 3 yards – and the Buckeyes rolled to a 44-0 shutout win. That was followed by another shutout, this one a 10-0 win at Northwestern.

Then came a 30-21 victory at Wisconsin, a game that featured 357 yards from the OSU rushing attack. Hayes unveiled what he called his "double fullback attack" with Ferguson and junior Dave Katterhenrich combining for 211 yards. Warfield added 42 yards and two touchdowns.

The Buckeyes, now back up to No. 5 in the polls, returned home to take on ninth-ranked Iowa and relied on the defense to carve out a 29-13 victory. Defensive end Tom Perdue returned an interception 55 yards for the game's first touchdown, and Ohio State scored twice more thanks to turnovers. Cornerback Dave Tingley set up an 18-yard touchdown pass from Sparma to Bryant in the second period with a 17-yard interception return, and linebacker Gary Moeller returned a fourth-quarter pick 53 yards to set up OSU's final score.

Ferguson ran for 144 yards and a touchdown while Bryant caught four passes for 94 yards and two scores. His second was a 63-yard catch-and-run during which he eluded seven Iowa defenders and then carried an eighth over the goal, an effort Hayes later termed "one of the greatest individual efforts I have ever seen."

The offense sputtered a bit the following week during a 16-7 win at Indiana, but it was back running on all cylinders during a 22-12 win against Oregon. Halfback Bob Klein, Ferguson and Mummey each cracked the century mark on the ground with Klein running 72 yards on a sweep for the game's first touchdown.

The Buckeyes were ranked second in the nation behind only Alabama when they went to Ann Arbor for the traditional regular-season finale to try to make a statement as to why they should be No. 1. Ferguson carried 30 times for 152 yards and four touchdowns, while Warfield added a 69-yard touchdown run as part of his 122 yards on only six carries.

And just for good measure, Sparma connected with tight end Sam Tidmore on a 10-yard touchdown pass with just five seconds remaining in the game and then hooked up with Tidmore again for a two-point conversion to set the final score at 50-20.

Hayes later denied he was trying to run up the score, saying he was trying to set the final point tally at 70 to honor longtime assistant Ernie Godfrey, who was going to turn



FILE PHOTO

BUCKEYE SPEEDSTER — The 1961 Ohio State football team featured a blend of power and speed on offense with much of the speed provided by halfback Paul Warfield (42), shown here during one of his six runs for 122 yards against Michigan, a game the Buckeyes won by a 50-20 final score.

70 years old the following spring.

Years later, while on the summer speaking circuit, Hayes was asked again why he went for two at the end of the 1961 Michigan game and supposedly replied, "Because I couldn't go for three."

Joy Turns To Bitterness

Three days later, the Ohio State campus remained in a celebratory mood because on the same afternoon the Buckeyes were routing the Wolverines, Wisconsin had upset heavily favored Minnesota, allowing OSU to claim an outright Big Ten championship and what should have been a trip to the Rose Bowl.

Normally, the Buckeyes' invitation to Pasadena would have been a mere formality. However, two years earlier, the new Athletic Association of Western Universities (now the Pac-12) and the Big Ten couldn't agree on a new contract to send their annual champions to play one another in the Rose Bowl.

A gentleman's agreement between the conferences continued the traditional matchup, and the Big Ten had already voted by a 6-4 margin to begin negotiating a new Rose Bowl contract to begin with the 1963 game.

But the Ohio State Faculty Council, which began to raise objections in 1959 due to the academic disruption a Rose Bowl trip meant for players, students and faculty, seemed reluctant to waver. A regularly scheduled council meeting had been held

four days prior to the 1961 Michigan game with the Rose Bowl an expected topic of conversation, but it was never brought to the floor for discussion.

Therefore, as Hayes and his players met at the Ohio Union for their annual appreciation banquet, no one knew quite for sure what would happen with regard to the Rose Bowl. Should the Buckeyes receive an invitation, the bid would have to be agreed upon through a chain of command that began with OSU director of athletics Richard Larkins, who would relay it to university president Novice G. Fawcett. From there, the invitation would be acted upon by the Athletic Council with the Faculty Council having the final say.

Although the Faculty Council had objected to continuing the Big Ten's contract with the Rose Bowl two years earlier, there was conjecture in 1961 that members opposed to rewarding a successful football season with a New Year's Day trip to Pasadena were now in the minority.

Eleven months earlier, the council had voted 21-20 in favor of accepting Ohio State's share of the 1961 Rose Bowl receipts from Minnesota's trip to Pasadena that had resulted in a 17-7 loss to Washington. Council members were an even more lopsided 34-17 when accepting a restructured scholarship program, which Alumni Association secretary (and noted Hayes adversary) Jack Fullen had vehemently opposed.

Each of those votes seemed to indicate

a trend that seemed favorable for the Buckeyes. Proponents could also argue that Minnesota's faculty council had steadfastly remained an opponent of the Big Ten's Rose Bowl contract but had approved the Golden Gophers' trip to Pasadena the year before.

Therefore, the football team went on with its appreciation banquet, content in the belief it would soon begin preparations for the Rose Bowl. Players received their traditional Gold Pants charms for the win over Michigan, and Ferguson was voted by his teammates as 1961's most valuable player.

A day later, however, the celebration was over.

No Vote Triggers Protests

During a closed-door session, the Ohio State Faculty Council voted by a 28-25 margin against Rose Bowl participation. The vote was tabulated by secret ballot, but the secrecy didn't last long as members seemed eager to explain their positions.

Several council members had argued for the Pasadena trip, saying publicity generated by the Rose Bowl was good for the entire university, not just the football team.

"I think we're confusing the question of wanting to be academically great or going to the Rose Bowl," said Roy M. Kottman, dean of the agriculture college. "I don't want any part of denying the team this honor.

"Certainly, it's a tough enough job to get the support of the public and the legislature. Something like (the Rose Bowl) would help us. I think people are wise enough that they don't rate everything (at Ohio State) by football."

Added Mars G. Fonata, professor of metallurgical engineering, "We support excellence, and here we have a group that has reached the top. Why not support them? This matter of overemphasis on football has been completely overemphasized."

In the end, however, Fullen played a major role in the vote with several council members citing the alumni association secretary's argument that Ohio State's reputation as a center of learning was being threatened in favor of one as a football factory.

Marvin Fox, an associate professor of philosophy, questioned any academic benefit that would be derived from playing in the game. He also alluded to the board's 1959 decision as the reason behind his negative vote.

"If we reverse the action of two years ago when the council voted against the renewal of the Big Ten-Rose Bowl pact, we make ourselves a kind of laughingstock," Fox said. "But if we had clarity of self-respect by turning it down, we would win all kinds of acclaim all over this country."

The acclaim sought by Fox was not afforded on his own campus, however.

By nightfall, some 7,000 students had amassed to stage demonstrations against the ruling and marched in huge groups that went from the Oval to the Faculty Club, down High Street to the Ohio Statehouse and back to the campus.

Chanting, "We want the Rose Bowl!" and "We want a revote!" the demonstrations were underscored by numerous effigies – many of Fullen – who did little to hide his satisfaction over the faculty vote.

The demonstrations began about 6:30 p.m. when a mass of students formed at the intersection of 15th Avenue and High Street and constructed a huge bonfire. As the

flames gradually licked higher and higher, a group of students broke off from the crowd and began marching toward Fawcett's residence. With the discovery that Fawcett was not at home, the mob marched on the Faculty Club, where it succeeded in breaking into the lobby and causing some minor damage.

Amid yells of "You can't fight city hall, but you can tear it down," the crowd exited the Faculty Club where students strung a Fullen effigy to a lamppost and set it on fire. From there, it was on to the downtown area where a bus trolley was pulled off its tracks in front of The Union department store.

The crowd surged down High Street from curb to curb, bringing traffic to a standstill. Columbus police officers blocked off Broad Street between Third Avenue and High Street, so the marchers surged onto the statehouse grounds, where a few clambered to the top of the Peace Statue and led the crowd in a stirring rendition of "Across the Field."

About 10:10 p.m., Columbus Police Chief George Scholer addressed the crowd over a loudspeaker, saying, "I think the majority of Columbus is for you and the Rose Bowl." But after the crowd roared its approval, Scholer continued, "Now, you have made your point. Let's not spoil it."

The police chief urged the crowd to break up and go home, which it did within an hour.

Upon returning to campus, a smaller crowd – still estimated to be several hundred – returned to the 15th and High intersection where the bonfire had died out. A suggestion to reignite the flames was quickly quelled when team co-captain Mike Ingram appeared to explain there was no one more disappointed in the vote than the team members who had earned the right to go to the Rose Bowl.

"If we can take it," Ingram said, "you ought to be about to take it."

A low murmur drifted its way through the crowd, which slowly began to disperse. An hour later, all that remained of the demonstration were a few broken windows and the smoldering cinders from a burned-out bonfire.

News traveled quickly about Ohio State's decision.

UCLA head coach Bill Barnes, whose team had lost a 13-3 decision to the Buckeyes in Columbus in early October and was eagerly awaiting a rematch, said he was surprised.

"Well, I'll be damned," Barnes told reporters. "They don't know what they're missing."

Meanwhile, former Ohio State star halfback Les Horvath – the school's first Heisman Trophy winner and now a dentist in Southern California – summed up his feelings succinctly, describing the Faculty Council as "a hypocritical bunch of jerks."

While the general public continued to digest the decision, Ohio State officials continued to work behind the scenes to figure out a way to get the football team to Pasadena.

The idea was floated that the university board of trustees could overturn the Faculty Council vote. That was quickly scotched by Fawcett, however, who announced the price of such an action would result in suspension and possible ouster of Ohio State by the Big Ten.

Fawcett also declined to ask the council to vote again, and a petition to convene the entire faculty to vote on the issue died without the necessary support.

As for Hayes, privately he was seething. Publicly, though, he said all the right things.

"I would not want football to drive a line of cleavage in our university," he said. "Football is not worth that. No one should even feel sorry for himself. That's the worst thing you can do. The best thing is just to keep your mouth shut.

"We must not let anything happen at the university to cause animosity between the students and faculty. I respect the integrity of these faculty men who voted against the Rose Bowl, even though I may question their intelligence on this one issue."

The fact that Hayes was not more forceful with his criticism didn't sit well with some of his players.

"A lot of guys were mad because Woody didn't do anything about it," Tingley told BSB in 2011. "I'm sure the other guys (from the 1961 team) are telling you this. He didn't fight for the team. But it's just one of those things that happens. If you live long enough, you're going to have a lot of disappointments, but that was a big disappointment for everybody."

Others placed the blame squarely at Fullen's feet, creating a deeply-embedded emotion that continues to be felt more than a half-century later.

"From my perspective, it was a great shock because we came back from the tie in the beginning and won all the games and at that point we had the best team in the country. I don't think there was any question about it," Mrukowski said in 2011, just a year before he died. "Then they have a guy on the Faculty Council who wanted to prove something to Woody. (Fullen) said, 'Well it's a business. You've already played (UCLA) and you beat 'em. There's no sense in going out there to play.'

"And I said, 'Wait. We practice all year long and that's why everybody goes to Ohio State – to go to the Rose Bowl because it's the greatest bowl in football. Everyone wants to go and then all of a sudden you're told you can't go.' It hurt."

In the end, Ohio State's loss was Minnesota's gain. Athletic director Ike Armstrong said, "I've always been in favor of the Rose Bowl, and I see no reason why we would not want to go back."

The Golden Gophers received the invitation, taking a 21-3 win over UCLA, and thus became the first Big Ten team ever to participate in back-to-back Rose Bowls. The conference and the AAWU agreed to a new contract the following year, a deal that included a non-repeat provision. That provision was later repealed, but no Big Ten school played in back-to-back Rose Bowls until the Buckeyes played in four straight games in the mid-1970s.

Aftermath Of Decision

In the years following the 1961 season, Hayes remained contentious toward Fullen and tried several times unsuccessfully to get his nemesis replaced as alumni secretary.

Fullen held onto his post until his 1967 retirement, however, and several years later admitted his feud with Hayes was something of a lost cause.

During an interview for the 1974 book "Buckeye: A Study of Coach Woody Hayes and the Ohio State Football Machine," Fullen told author Robert Vare, "We lost the war to scale down the program, so how can I tell you we won anything? The big loser is the

Ohio State University. Sure, there have been some gains academically. But the sideshow is still the main attraction and the stuff under the tent is of secondary importance.

"My quarrel was never really with Woody Hayes the man. I wasn't going after Woody so much as the status of the football team as most favored nation."

Meanwhile, Hayes remained convinced that Fullen was using his football factory stance as a tool for career advancement.

"He was just using the football issue to campaign for university president," Hayes said years later, "and I made damn sure he didn't get near it."

It was Fullen who nearly had the last laugh, however.

Following the Faculty Council's decision not to allow the 1961 football team to go to the Rose Bowl, Hayes' program suffered a downturn. The coach who had won national championships in 1954 and '57 – and a third in '61 when the Football Writers Association of America voted Ohio State its No. 1 team – suddenly faced some lean years.

The team slipped to a 6-3 record in 1962 and 5-3-1 the following season as opposing coaches used the negative Rose Bowl vote against the Buckeyes on the recruiting trail.

After the team had slipped all the way to 4-5 and a sixth-place tie in the 1966 Big Ten standings, the chair under Hayes grew hotter and hotter as many fans and boosters joined Fullen to call for the coach's ouster.

"One of the things that is hardly discussed is the adverse effect the (Rose Bowl) decision had upon recruiting," OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "Lost were some very good prospects who thought of Ohio State as sort of anti-Rose Bowl."

"That wasn't the case, of course, but it was something Woody had a tough time overcoming for a couple of years. It wasn't that the program went downhill, but it wasn't as good as it might have been."

As a result, Hayes was forced to expand his recruiting base outside Ohio, a change in philosophy that culminated in a 1967 freshman class that included such out-of-state prep stars as Jack Tatum, John Brockington, Jan White, Tim Anderson and Bruce Jankowski – the nucleus of the Super Sophomores who helped Ohio State win the 1968 national championship.

The Buckeyes went to the Rose Bowl to cap that '68 season, of course, rolling to a 27-16 victory against defending national champion USC. That marked the first of six New Year's Day trips the team would make to Pasadena over the next eight years, solidifying the new agreement signed in 1962 between the AAUW and Big Ten – an agreement supported by an overwhelming majority of the Ohio State Faculty Council, an ironic juxtaposition not lost on members of the 1961 team.

"We deserved the right and the honor, and there was great disappointment on my part we weren't able to participate in that Rose Bowl," Warfield said in 2014. "To have that taken away from you because there was a spat between one area and another area regarding the significance of intercollegiate football and the educational value of going to the Rose Bowl vs. commercialization was ridiculous.

"Look at the way things are today, of course, and it's even more ridiculous."

Transfer Wheeler Wants His Defense To Be 'Contagious'

Ohio State knew what it was getting when it reached into the transfer portal and plucked out former Penn State point guard Jamari Wheeler. The senior from Live Oak, Fla., isn't exactly subtle about what he brings to a basketball court.

In fact, nothing about Wheeler's game is subtle. He's rambunctious and hard-headed, playing with the kind of reckless abandon that almost seems to border on a complete lack of control – though it never actually breaks that way. Wheeler is always completely in command, possessing the kind of bodily awareness that really only comes from a decade of experience in throwing yourself all over a basketball court to make plays on defense.

COURT REPORT Patrick Mayhorn

Look no further than a pair of plays from his time at Penn State, made against three opponents whom Wheeler now counts as teammates.

The first came on the opening tip against Indiana on Jan. 29, 2020. Serving as the lone Nittany Lions player in the backcourt, flanked to the back by Hoosier guard Rob Phinisee and to the front by new Ohio State teammate Joey Brunk, Wheeler watched Trayce Jackson-Davis win the tip-off for the Hoosiers only to leap up and over Brunk to snare the ball, knocking Phinisee over in the process, and then grabbing the ball and driving for an easy layup.

At the 19:54 mark of the first half, Wheeler had scored two points, claimed a steal, committed a foul that went uncalled and sent a message to Indiana that nothing would come easy that night – all in one smooth motion.

The second came almost one year later at the end of the first half during Penn State's 83-79 loss to Ohio State on Jan. 27 of this year. Trailing 43-35 with 25 seconds to play before the break, Wheeler's Nittany Lions set up shop on offense and worked the ball inside to Seth Lundy before Justice Sueing picked his pocket. Unwilling to surrender the position, Wheeler planted his feet just inside the half-court line and knocked the ball loose from Sueing, recovering it for an easy layup.

A possession later, seemingly in an effort to undo Ohio State's offense by himself, Wheeler welcomed a far-too-comfortable Meechie Johnson to college basketball as soon as he crossed midcourt as OSU's primary ball-handler, pouncing on the freshman and nabbing another rip-and-run layup. That made it 43-39 at halftime thanks to a four-possession swing engineered entirely by Wheeler.

But that's just who Wheeler is. He has a motor without an off switch and a drive to compete on defense that Ohio State felt it desperately needed from a guard this off-season, given its struggles against primary ball-handlers on defense last season. He isn't going to do a whole lot in the way of scoring or offensive play-making, but that's not why the Buckeyes made him their top priority in the transfer portal.

Wheeler is in Columbus so that he can turn up the heat on defense, making things more difficult on opponents while forcing his

teammates to match his energy.

"Jamari has one speed, and it is 'on,'" Dime Magazine associate editor and Penn State basketball expert Bill DiFilippo told BSB. "That has some good things about it. He plays his butt off every single night and is a really pesky defender, but he can be really loose with the ball and really struggle as a lead guard to initiate the offense."

With Johnson, Louisiana transfer Cedric Russell, freshman Malaki Branham and even Sueing comfortable leading the offense, those limitations are no real issue for Ohio State. In fact, that lack of subtlety, as well as the single-minded focus on effort and defense, were part of what drew the two parties together this off-season.

"I set the tempo on both ends of the floor," Wheeler said. "I'm here to change the game on the defensive end and to help us be better as a defensive team. I speed the game up for my opponents and I turn them over a lot. I want to make them play at my speed. It gets uncomfortable up there."

Wheeler is hoping to parlay his defensive efforts into a Big Ten Defender of the Year award – which he feels he should have won last season – after spending the last two years on the Big Ten All-Defensive Team. More importantly, though, he wants to see his energy matched by his new teammates.

"It's a team effort and with that it's just about communication," Wheeler told BSB. "Once you communicate, that makes everything easier on everybody. That's a big thing we've been harping on in practice – communicate, communicate. Once you talk, it makes everything a lot easier."

Is that energy catching with the rest of the Buckeyes? It's hard for it not to when Wheeler is running the show.

"This is almost kind of contagious," Russell told BSB. "You don't want to be that guy where the other four guys are busting their butts off and you get caught back and not ready. That defensive stuff, it's contagious. It does something to the whole team."

Sensabaugh Picks OSU

Chris Holtmann has the final piece that he was looking for in Ohio State's top-five recruiting class for 2022. The Buckeyes were the pick for four-star forward Brice Sensabaugh of Orlando (Fla.) Lake Highland Prep on Sept. 28, a little more than a month after he received an offer from the Buckeyes and 10 days after an official visit to Columbus.

Sensabaugh serves as the fifth and final member of Holtmann's 2022 recruiting class, which is considered among the five best classes in the nation – checking in at No. 2 when BSB went to press. He joins one-time AAU teammate Bruce Thornton (No. 42 nationally), a four-star point guard from Alpharetta, Ga.; Felix Okpara (No. 51 nationally), a four-star center from Branson, Mo.; Roddy Gayle Jr. (No. 64 nationally), a four-star shooting guard from Mount Pleasant, Utah; and Bowen Hardman (No. 277 nationally), a three-star shooting guard from Cincinnati.

Sensabaugh is graded as a small forward by 247Sports, but at 6-6 and 240 pounds, he could develop into a small-ball power forward for the Buckeyes as Jae'Sean Tate and E.J. Liddell have in recent seasons.

If the current class ranking holds, it would be easily the best group of Holtmann's career

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
Brice Sensabaugh	F	6-6	240	★★★★	Orlando (Fla.) Lake Highland Prep
Bruce Thornton	PG	6-2	205	★★★★	Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton

and Ohio State's strongest class in more than a decade. Ohio State's last top-five class signed in 2015, and its most recent top-three group was the 2010 class, which featured Aaron Craft, Lenzelle Smith Jr., Jared Sullinger and Deshaun Thomas. Holtmann's previous best group came in 2019, though three of the four players from that class – D.J. Carton, Ibrahima Diallo and Alonzo Gaffney – departed the program without making much of an impact.

Granted, it's also Ohio State's first five-man class since 2015 and Holtmann's largest group ever, which goes a long way in determining recruiting rankings in basketball.

Still, for Holtmann, Sensabaugh serves as both a critical win on the recruiting trail and a major rebounding effort after missing out on five-star wing Dillon Mitchell of Monteverde (Fla.) Academy, who was considered an Ohio State lean over the summer but announced a top three devoid of the Buckeyes on Sept. 27, opting instead to focus on Florida State, Tennessee and Texas.

Sensabaugh isn't as highly rated as Mitchell, checking in at No. 75 in the nation and as the No. 21 small forward (Mitchell is No. 28 nationally and the No. 8 wing) but has found himself shooting up the rankings recently. He was No. 163 as recently as mid-August, but his stock has risen thanks to some impressive summer camp performances that drew offers from quite a few top programs including Alabama, Illinois, Oklahoma and Virginia as well as Ohio State.

Ultimately, Sensabaugh picked OSU over the Crimson Tide, Florida and Georgia Tech, taking official visits to Tuscaloosa and Atlanta during the last month but using his final trip to visit Columbus. That sealed the deal for the Buckeyes.

"It was a good time with the football game and with the staff and the team," Sensabaugh told 247Sports of that visit. "It was a good time, for sure."

"I hung out with Eugene Brown, E.J. Liddell, Malaki Branham and Meechie Johnson the most. It was a great time and it felt super natural. In terms of what they have to offer, they mentioned to me a bunch how they have a bunch of guys graduating and leaving, especially at my position. That could create some opportunity there for me."

The four-star prospect, despite coming to Ohio State from Florida, actually has quite a few ties to Ohio. He has several family members who live in the Columbus area – where his father grew up – while the younger Sensabaugh was born in Cincinnati. In a blog for Sports Illustrated after his commitment, he cited both the ability to play in front of his family and the chance to get onto the court early as the primary appeals of Ohio State.

"Throughout this process, one of the biggest things I'd been looking for was opportunity, and they showed me how I'd be able to

step in and have a chance to compete from day one," Sensabaugh wrote.

"Also, I was born in Cincinnati and my dad was born in Columbus, so I've got a bunch of family out there. Playing in front of my family is something that the other schools couldn't really match."

Looking at the Ohio State roster, there seems to be an opportunity for the young winger moving forward. He'll arrive on campus ahead of the 2022-23 season, and assuming the upcoming season is Liddell's last since he nearly entered the draft in 2021, the 2022-23 Buckeyes could have as few as two scholarship forwards returning to the roster – Zed Key and Kalen Etzler. Every other forward on the roster, outside of those two and Liddell, is a senior.

Granted, this isn't a traditional senior class. With the benefit of the extra COVID season, Justin Ahrens, Sueing and Seth Towns each have one more season of eligibility remaining after this one if they choose to take it, though that would mean a seventh year of college for Towns, and a sixth for Sueing.

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	vs. Seton Hall ^
Nov. 24	vs. Florida/Cal ^
Nov. 30	Duke*
Dec. 5	at Penn State
Dec. 8	Towson
Dec. 11	Wisconsin
Dec. 18	vs. 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	
\$ – CBSSports Classic at Las Vegas	

Hutcherson Focuses On Improvement In Year Two

By **WYATT CROSHER**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The Ohio State women's basketball team enters the 2021-22 season with just three true forwards on the roster. One of those is sophomore Gabby Hutcherson, who might have played just 212 minutes (11.8 per game) during her first collegiate season but seemed to make each and every one of those count.

The stats don't fly off the page for Hutcherson – just 3.1 points and 2.1 rebounds per game while shooting 39.2 percent from the floor. But she was a spark plug off the bench for the Buckeyes, bringing an added level of energy and coming through with some crucial buckets to help Ohio State regain momentum.

"She seemed to hit a lot of timely shots," said OSU head coach Kevin McGuff. "That really made her a valuable piece coming off the bench."

Hutcherson told BSB that she learned to make every minute count last year because of the limited action.

"Every time I got on the floor, I put it all out there," Hutcherson said. "I played my hardest with as many minutes as I got."

While Ohio State has just Hutcherson, sixth-year senior Tanaya Beacham and junior Rebeka Mikulasikova at the forward position, that was not the case last season. Those three saw infrequent playing time thanks to starting forwards Dorka Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty, who transferred to Connecticut and Texas A&M, respectively.

Because of those personnel losses, Hutcherson said her focus is improving in other areas of her game that are more specific to forwards. The big one there is rebounding, something at which Juhasz and Patty each excelled.

Juhasz and Patty combined for 293 total rebounds last season, with Juhasz averaging 11.1 per game and Patty contributing 5.8. Those totals were tops on the team with no one else averaging more than 3.7 boards per contest.

"Just rebounding a little bit more and getting in there and being a little bit more physical," the 6-2 Hutcherson said when asked which facets of her game she is trying to improve. "This summer, I feel like, was important for me to put on size, strength, muscle and stuff like that so I can be a little bit more aggressive. Since we lost a lot of size, we'll have to step up in that place."

But this season's Ohio State team is not trying to replicate the personality it had from a year before. With the guard-heavy lineup in place, the Buckeyes are trying to play even faster than their already blistering pace.

Hutcherson said that has also been a key focal point in the offseason, but so have some of the more typical things needed from the team's forwards.

"Since we lost a lot of size, we're focusing on rebounding," Hutcherson said. "That's been one of our main focuses, and obviously with us being an athletic team, we're trying to get up and down the court and be a really fast-paced team."

But Hutcherson is also not a typical forward. She took only 24 attempts from three-point territory during her freshman season,

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

but she connected on 10 of them, good for 41.7 percent. That rate was tops on the team, and it proves her dynamic ability as a player on the roster.

"You can see she's a really long, rangy type of player with a great stroke from the three-point line," McGuff said. "She's worked pretty hard in the offseason, and hopefully we'll see her on the floor a little bit more. But I thought she contributed in really positive ways last year, and I'm looking forward to even more of that this year."

The Ohio State head coach added that while he knew Hutcherson had the ability to stretch the floor as a recruit out of Westerville (Ohio) South, he did not know that she would be able to transition to the college game so quickly.

"When we recruited her, we knew she had a great stroke and could really shoot the ball, but we just weren't sure how quickly she'd do that in college," McGuff said. "Sometimes (freshmen) don't get shot selection and stuff like that, so they take worse shots as they adjust to college. But she found a way to really shoot with a high percentage."

That skill set should be useful in a smaller lineup, something that Hutcherson said she really has not had much experience with during her basketball career.

"A little bit maybe in my senior year, we were kind of a smaller team, but I was one of the tallest girls," Hutcherson said. "Even still, I've never played with this many guards on the court at once. It will be interesting. I feel like it's good for us though. The way that we play, it will be fitting."

The switch-ups in the roster will not be the only thing that changes for Ohio State from last year. The Buckeyes will now be eligible for March Madness after a self-imposed postseason ban left them out of both the 2021 Big Ten and NCAA tournaments.

Hutcherson said that not having a postseason to play for did become a factor in Ohio State losing four straight and five of its last six to end the regular season during her freshman campaign.

"Toward the end, we just became so frustrated with the fact that we didn't have a postseason that we kind of just – we didn't give up but in a sense we just felt like we had nothing that we were playing for," Hutcherson said. "I feel like looking back now, I kind of regret it. I wouldn't say that we all had that mind-set, but it was just the vibe of the team last year."

Despite the poor finish, Hutcherson thinks that experience could be valuable moving forward. After feeling what the bottom is like, in spite of the talent, it only makes this year's Ohio State roster want to

achieve its goals that much more.

"I feel like it gives our team a little bit more purpose than last year," Hutcherson said. "I'm not saying that we didn't have purpose because we wanted to go in and win as many games as we could last year. But now we have a reason to play our hardest and put everything out there."

"We have something to prove now, too. Going into last season ranked and then moving up in the ranks, and then at the end of the season falling down and losing so many games, I feel like we have to come back and prove that we still are the team that we said we were at the beginning of the season."

Hutcherson might come into her sophomore season with just 212 minutes of court time to her name, but because of the flashes she showed in those minutes and because of how the roster has shaken out this summer, she is in a spot to make major contributions in year two of her career.

And even after a tumultuous first season that featured a postseason ban and various cancellations due to COVID-19, Hutcherson thinks it will only make her and her team that much stronger now that it is behind them.

"Everything happens for a reason, so this gives us a reason to walk into the season

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

with a chip on our shoulder," Hutcherson said. "We have something to prove to everybody else."

"Obviously it sucked that (the postseason ban) happened, but I'm glad that it happened to this team. I feel like it's made us stronger."

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Icers Ready To Skate Past Forgettable Season

By CRAIG MERZ

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If there was a program that needed a reboot after the strange 2020-21 season, it would be the Ohio State men's hockey team.

There was the high from the previous season of being on the verge of qualifying for the NCAA tournament for a school-record fourth straight season only to see the dream end when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of the sports world in mid-March 2020.

That was followed by the low of last season when the Buckeyes experienced one of the worst campaigns in recent memory. They finished with a 6-16 record in the Big Ten and just 7-19-1 overall.

While the team was happy just to be playing, even with a truncated schedule, it was a season to forget.

"I think that actually was a big thing," said defenseman Grant Gabriele of the canceled 2020 postseason hangover. "That kind of took the wind out of our sails a little bit because you work all season and the most important part where it pays off is coming up and you don't even get to participate in it, so that stinks.

"But at the same time, you can't use that as an excuse for last season. So I guess this year is going to be a big year just kind of forgetting about all that and now it's all new and time to start looking forward to this season."

Gabriele took advantage of the COVID-19 related NCAA rules to return for a fifth season of eligibility.

"I just feel that I can do more," he said. "I want to be here to help this program. I'm not thinking about what happens next year or anything. I'm focused on being here right now and just excited to get the games going."

Gabriele brings stability to a 28-player roster that is almost one-third new. Head coach Steve Rohlik brought in six freshmen, two graduate transfers and a senior transfer to turn the Buckeyes in the right direction.

"It's new, it's fresh, it's exciting," Rohlik said. "We're looking for normal, whatever that might be. We're looking forward to it and getting off to a good start. I think the unknown is exciting, and I think our guys are excited. I know the staff is and that's a good thing."

The coach can already sense a difference in the way the team is jelling compared to last season, although that might be an unfair comparison. Due to COVID protocols, it was impossible to put together full-team workouts in the preseason, and during the season, the players were restricted in time spent together.

"A difference from last year is we've been together," Rohlik said. "Our guys have been together working out as one group. They've been on the ice together – captains' practices are one group. I think that's really going to help us."

Senior forward Quinn Preston said the change with less stringent protocols are important with so many new teammates.

"It's been really good, especially for the new guys coming in and obviously getting them integrated in the systems," he said, "and seeing some of the guys that have been here before, too.

"I just think it's nice just to spend more time with the guys as a whole. Last year, you're only hanging out with your roommates basi-

cally and you're coming to the rink. You're in a group with them, so it's the same people all day. It's definitely nice to see all the boys and get together with the coaches as well."

Of course, all programs went through the same adversity last season, and some responded better than others. Ohio State had its share of misfortune with players unavailable because of COVID and a rash of injuries that depleted the roster.

Over the final six weeks of the season, the Buckeyes never had more than six defensemen available, and that often included a converted forward in Eugene Fadyeyev.

"Last year was not the greatest of years," Gabriele said. "I don't know if it was COVID. I think it had a big, big part to do with that, but this year it's completely different. We've completely changed around our mentality coming into preseason. I think you're going to see a team that knows their identity, and one that's going to be scoring more goals."

Oh yes, goals. The Buckeyes were as bad as any in the history of the program with 53 goals in 27 games, an average of just 1.97 per game. In comparison, Wisconsin's Cole Caulfield, who joined the Montreal Canadiens after the Badgers' season, scored 30 goals himself in 31 games.

Rohlik always stresses that scoring chances start with solid defensive play, but junior forward Tate Singleton said a balance is needed.

"We're finding the right, happy medium," he said. "How do we get to the D and then how do we transfer to the offense? I think we're going to score a lot of goals this year."

OSU was shut out eight times last season, including the final two games and four of the last six.

The good news, maybe, is that the top six scorers return, led by sophomore Travis Treloar's 20 points (eight goals, 12 assists) in 25 games. He was the first freshman to lead the team in scoring since Ryan Dzingel in 2011-12.

With goaltender Tommy Nappier signing with the Pittsburgh Penguins organization after four seasons at Ohio State and senior Evan Moyse also signing a pro contract, junior Ryan Snowden is the veteran, joined by freshmen netminders Reilly Herbst and Jakub Dobeš.

On defense, Layton Ahac signed with the NHL's Las Vegas Golden Knights, but the Buckeyes might have found a replacement in freshman Mason Lohrei, a second-round pick (58th overall) by the Boston Bruins in the 2020 NHL draft.

"He'll bring people out of their seats at one end or the other," Rohlik said.

As good a game as the Buckeyes are talking, the rest of the Big Ten is not impressed. Ohio State was voted last among the seven teams in the preseason coaches' poll, no player earned enough votes for the first or second team, and Preston was the lone Buckeye to make the honorable-mention list.

Minnesota was tabbed to win the conference title followed by Michigan, Wisconsin, Notre Dame, Penn State and Michigan State.

Preston said his "eyes got wide" when he saw the poll.

"No one cares where you are in the beginning," he said. "It's where you are at the end, and that's all we're focused on. It's not going to be the same way at the end of the season. I'll promise you that."

2021-22 Ohio State Men's Hockey Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Yr.	Ht.	Wt.	
2	James Marooney	Defenseman	Junior	5-9	165	Chaska, Minn.
3	Cole McWard	Defenseman	Freshman	6-1	192	Fenton, Mo.
6	Mason Lohrei	Defenseman	Freshman	6-4	200	Madison, Wis.
7	Evan McIntyre	Defenseman	Sophomore	5-10	174	Oakville, Ontario
9	Dominic Vidoli	Defenseman	Junior	6-0	190	Wake Forest, N.C.
10	Georgii Merkulov	Forward	Freshman	5-11	180	Ryazan, Russia
11	Kamil Sadlocha	Forward	Junior	5-11	185	Carpentersville, Ill.
13	Tate Singleton	Forward	Junior	5-9	177	West Lebanon, N.H.
14	Dalton Messina	Forward	Junior	5-11	195	Macomb, Mich.
15	Cam Thiesing	Forward	Freshman	6-0	184	Nashville, Tenn.
16	Quinn Preston	Forward	Senior	5-11	182	Trenton, Mich.
17	Mark Cheremeta	Forward	Junior	5-11	185	Parkland, Fla.
18	Michael Gildon	Forward	Sophomore	6-2	196	Plano, Texas
20	Matt Cassidy	Forward	Junior	6-0	187	Medford, N.J.
21	Joe Dunlap	Forward	Sophomore	6-0	185	Windham, N.H.
24	Ryan O'Connell	Defenseman	Senior	6-1	185	Manotick, Ontario
26	Jaedon Leslie	Forward	Junior	6-1	187	St. Albert, Alberta
27	Eric Cooley	Forward	Graduate	5-9	185	Pittsburgh, Pa.
28	Jake Wise	Forward	Senior	5-10	185	Reading, Mass.
29	Gustaf Westlund	Forward	Senior	6-0	175	Stockholm, Sweden
30	Ryan Snowden	Goaltender	Junior	6-3	205	Lincoln University, Pa.
33	Will Riedell	Defenseman	Graduate	6-1	205	Greensboro, N.C.
34	Reilly Herbst	Goalie	Freshman	6-0	185	Niwot, Colo.
44	Jakub Dobeš	Goalie	Freshman	6-4	198	Ostrava, Czech Rep
65	CJ Regula	Defenseman	Junior	6-3	205	Bloomfield Hills, Mich.
71	Patrick Guzzo	Forward	Sophomore	6-3	198	Marysville, Mich.
94	Travis Treloar	Forward	Sophomore	5-11	177	Kalmar, Sweden

Head Coach — Steve Rohlik

Associate Head Coach — Steve Miller, **Assistant Coach** — JB Bittner, **Volunteer Assistant Coach** — Dustin Carlson, **Director of Hockey Operations** — Layne LeBel, **Equipment Manager** — Tim Adams, **Athletic Trainer** — Jason Rule

Singleton likes to mix it up on the ice, and the conference's view of the Buckeyes will add to his passion.

"If that doesn't fire you up, I think you're not playing for the right reasons," he said. "We do have a lot to prove. We didn't have a good season, but I think we have the right team and the right coaches to have a good season this year."

Going Forward

The Buckeyes lost to graduation captain Austin Pooley (three goals, two assists for five points) and Collin Peters (2-3-5) but added two freshman forwards and a pair of transfers to try to bolster the attack.

Russian Georgii Merkulov (5-11, 180) played junior hockey for the Youngstown (Ohio) Phantoms of the United States Hockey League the past two seasons. In 38 games last season, he had 40 points (14-26).

"He's got as good a hands as anybody on the team," Rohlik said. "He's going to bring some things to our power play."

Merkulov scored the Buckeyes' lone goal during a 3-1 loss to Western Michigan in an Oct. 2 exhibition game off an assist from fellow frosh Cam Thiesing (6-0, 184), a Nashville native who played for Green Bay of the USHL the past two seasons. He had 44 points (19-25) in 47 regular-season games for the Gamblers in 2020-21.

"He's got sneaky good skills, a kid that can put up some numbers," Rohlik said.

The three upperclassmen newcomers – forwards Eric Cooley and Jake Wise and defenseman Will Riedell – bring a total of 318 games of college experience.

Cooley (5-9, 185) played in 130 games at Niagara, garnering 73 career points (24-49) including four goals and four assists in 21 games last season. The native of Pittsburgh

earned a degree in finance and is working toward a certificate in public management with plans to become a financial advisor.

Wise (5-10, 185) is from Reading, Mass., and a third-round pick (69th overall) of the Chicago Blackhawks in 2018. He transferred after getting 17 points (3-14) in 50 games at Boston University over three seasons. He played five games last season with a goal and an assist.

Treloar (5-11, 177) was OSU's Rookie of the Year last season. The Kalmar, Sweden, native tied for fourth among Big Ten freshmen with his eight goals.

Mark Cheremeta is a 5-11, 185-pound junior who was second in scoring for the Buckeyes with 19 points (5-14). The Parkland, Fla., product led the team in assists last season, his first with the Buckeyes. He played the 2018-19 season at Boston University before going to Dubuque (Iowa) in the USHL the following season.

Preston (5-11, 182) was the team leader with three game-winning goals during his junior season among his 13 points (6-7). He also topped the Buckeyes with four power-play goals.

Singleton (5-9, 177) skated in all 27 games last season with 11 points (6-5), including the first two-goal game of his career, both on the power play, against Michigan on Jan. 15.

"The trademark of our team is we'll play hard," Singleton said. "We're not going to be easy to play against. Our defense is going to be impeccable and once we stop, we're going to go score."

Senior Swedish forward Gustaf Westlund has struggled with consistency due to injuries. He was named to the Big Ten All-Freshman Team in 2018-19 when he had 19 points (5-14) despite missing nine games. He had 26

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY

points (12-14) as a sophomore and nine points (6-3) last season in 23 games when he was sixth on the team in scoring.

Junior Kamil Sadlocha (5-11, 185) had seven points (4-3) in 26 games to earn the team's Most Improved Player Award after scoring one goal in 21 games his freshman season.

The other junior forwards are Matt Cassidy (6-0, 187), who skated in 19 games with a goal and two assists, Jaedon Leslie (6-1, 187), who had six points (3-3), and Dalton Messina (5-11, 195). He was scoreless in 10 games.

Sophomores include Joe Dunlap (6-0, 185), whose goal against Michigan State on Nov. 29 was his lone point, Michael Gildon (6-2, 196) with two assists in 20 games, and Patrick Guzzo (6-3, 198), who scored twice, including the game-winner vs. Michigan on Feb. 19.

For The Defense

The Buckeyes allowed 3.7 goals a game last season, and there was a clear turning point when injuries throughout the team affected the entire defensive system.

OSU did not concede more than four goals in any of the first 11 games, but beginning Jan. 9 at Penn State with a 5-2 loss, the Buckeyes gave up five or more in nine of their final 16 games. That figure includes eight against Notre Dame and seven at Wisconsin.

Meanwhile, the team during that span scored more than two goals only three times with a high of eight against Arizona State on Mar. 3. OSU was shut out 5-0 the next game by the Sun Devils.

Along with more offensive production, Rohlik is looking for an improved defense and will look to some new faces to provide relief.

Lohrei (6-4, 200) is the big catch. Hailing from Madison, Wis., he was the 2021 USHL Defenseman of the Year playing for Green Bay. He led all blueliners with 59 points (19 goals, 40 assists), power-play assists (19) and game-winning goals (six).

Freshman Cole McWard (6-1, 192) competed against Lohrei while playing for the Tri-City (Neb.) Storm. He was named second-team USHL last season when he led league defensemen with nine power-play goals. McWard, from Fenton, Mo., had 33 points (14-19) in 52 games.

"We always put so much pressure on these kids at times," Rohlik said. "They're both very good players, both will make some mistakes, but I love what they bring to the table."

Another newcomer is Riedell (6-1, 205), a graduate transfer after four seasons at Lake Superior State. The Greensboro, N.C., native played in 138 games with 51 points (17-34). He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and is pursuing a public management degree.

He had 17 points (6-11) and was a plus-7 in 29 games as an alternate captain for the Lakers last season when they won the Western Collegiate Hockey Association to qualify for the NCAA tournament.

Gabriele (6-2, 197) leads the returning defensemen. He tied Preston for third in team scoring with 13 points (3-10).

The rest of the defense is experienced starting with senior Ryan O'Connell (6-1, 185), who had six assists in 17 games last season. Junior CJ Regula (6-3, 205) contributed two goals and four assists in 23 games.

Rounding out the group are juniors James Marooney (5-9, 165) and Dominic Vidoli (6-0, 190) and sophomore Evan McIntyre (5-10, 174). McIntyre had three assists in 21 games,

Vidoli contributed one helper in 16 games and Marooney was scoreless in 10.

Minding The Net

Snowden (6-3, 205) last season played just over 88 minutes in a total of five games, going 0-1-0 with a 6.14 goals-against average and .866 save percentage. As a freshman, he was 3-1-1 with a 2.52 GAA and .905 save percentage.

Dobeš (6-4, 198) is from Ostrava, Czech Republic, and was selected by the Montreal Canadiens in the fifth round (No. 136) of the 2020 NHL draft. He played for the Omaha (Neb.) Lancers of the USHL last season when he was 26-16-3 with a 2.48 GAA and a .908 save percentage to earn second-team USHL honors. He played for the Czech Republic in the U-19 World Championships in 2019-20.

Herbst (6-0, 185) started the 2020-21 season with Dubuque before finishing as a teammate of Dobeš in Omaha. The Niwot, Colo., native played eight games for the Lancers, posting a 3.60 GAA and a .857 save percentage.

Rohlik said there is an open competition for the starting job in goal, although it is expected to be between Snowden and Dobeš.

"I'm not set on whether we go with one, two or three guys," the OSU coach said. "We'll see how that plays out."

"We know what Snowden can do. He's been solid for us. Jakub comes in after he had a fantastic junior career. He's athletic, loves to compete. Reilly is such a competitor. He's a workhorse. He may not have the track record of some of the other guys, but he has an unbelievable work ethic."

Who's On Tap

Ohio State opens the season Oct. 8-9 with a pair of nonconference games at Bentley before hosting Connecticut on Oct. 15 and 16 at the "new look" Value City Arena.

The upper portion will be curtained and seating will be capped at around 7,500 in the lower sections. There will be no exceptions for games such as those against Michigan that could draw five figures.

Also, the end zone opposite the student section will have sets of bistro tables and chairs instead of seats, so up to 100 fans can sit or stand next to the glass at the Ice Level Plaza.

Spectators were not allowed at games last season due to the pandemic.

"For our guys to walk out there and see fans, it's certainly going to be a world of difference," Rohlik said.

The Buckeyes begin Big Ten play with home games vs. Michigan State (Oct. 29-30) and Penn State (Nov. 5-6).

Of note, OSU plays at Bowling Green on Dec. 16 and home vs. the Falcons the next night in sort of a throwback series. BG is part of the rebirth of the Central Collegiate Hockey Association.

OSU and the Falcons were members of the old CCHA until it disbanded following the 2012-13 season when the Buckeyes joined the newly formed Big Ten hockey conference.

Also, the Buckeyes host Long Island University on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day with times dependent on a possible OSU football bowl game.

The regular season ends Feb. 18-19 at Michigan.



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Dudukovich Continues Strong Career At OSU

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Kailyn Dudukovich comes from a family of athletes. She is the daughter of former Butler University basketball players Dan Dudukovich and Debbie Benziger, and Kailyn seemed destined from an early age to become an athlete.

Dudukovich grew up playing basketball and soccer, falling in love with both sports and devoting countless hours to her craft. She excelled on the court and the pitch, eventually becoming one of Ohio's best high school athletes in the 2021 class.

Ohio State head coach Lori Walker-Hock recognized Dudukovich's talent as early as her freshman year of high school and decided to recruit her to be a Buckeye. It only seemed natural. Dudukovich hails from West Chester, Ohio, and attended Lakota West High School, one of the premier athletic institutions in the state's southwest region.

After her first visit to Ohio State's campus, Dudukovich said she felt an instant connection to the university.

"I loved that Ohio State fit the person I am as well as the player I am," she said. "I also loved the culture that they've created here. It's family-oriented and that was really important to me. They had amazing resources here, great academics and then it's close to home, which was a bonus for me."

As Top Drawer Soccer's No. 8 recruit,

Dudukovich had options for where to continue her soccer career. Still, she felt the land grant university just north of downtown Columbus was the right fit, and she committed to Ohio State on Nov. 11, 2020.

When Dudukovich arrived on campus in June, she said three fifth-year seniors taught her what it means to be an Ohio State soccer player, while other teammates made the program feel like a second family.

"Izzy Rodriguez, Marissa Birzon and Bailey Kolinski set the tone for the rest of the team," Dudukovich said. "Everyone else has been so welcoming and supportive since I've been here in the summer and beyond. They taught me to put the team first, and that's a big part of our culture. We strive to get one percent better every day, and I think everyone supports each other and pushes each other to get better in competition."

Dudukovich said she struggled with the game's speed during her summer training, and although she knows that's an old cliché, it's one she believes to be true. It's also something Walker-Hock sees a lot in first-year players.

"When freshmen come in and have the skill set and natural talent that Kailyn has,



Kailyn Dudukovich

what you see in those players is that the game is faster," Walker-Hock said. "The decision-making needs to be faster and the movements need to be sharper. She strikes the ball well with both her feet. She's very good in the air and can find the goal with her head. But it's the processing and decision-making that needed growth."

Dudukovich used her natural talent and athleticism to outpace an opposing defense and score goals in high school. Her strength and speed played a significant role in helping her have two of the greatest high school soccer seasons in Ohio prep history.

The Firebirds experienced a season to remember during Dudukovich's junior year. She helped her team to a 22-0-2 record and won a state championship, scoring a remarkable 50 goals in the process – a Lakota West and Greater Miami Conference single-season record. She also chipped in nine assists and accounted for 109 points which helped her win 2019 Gatorade Ohio Girls Soccer Player of the Year honors.

The following winter, Dudukovich fractured her foot during the final game of the Lakota West basketball season when she landed awkwardly during a tournament loss to Springboro. She underwent surgery and walked with the aid of crutches for a month before wearing a boot for two months before she could return to training.

After recovering from her injury, however, she once again led the league in goals (46) and points (99) in her senior season. She managed to break all existing scoring and point total records for the Lakota School District with a two-year total of 96 goals and 208 points.

Despite her dominance in high school, Dudukovich understands she still has a lot to learn about playing collegiate soccer, especially when it comes to her offense.

"At this next level, the space and the window that you have to get your shot off is way smaller," she said. "You have to be turned on and in the box. There's sometimes in college soccer where all you're going to get is a little bouncing ball in the box, so you have to be turned on for all set pieces. Those are huge. Following up shots is a big thing, but getting your shot off in the smaller windows is big."

In Ohio State's 4-3-3 attacking scheme – a formation that uses four defenders, three midfielders and three forwards – the Buckeyes put Dudukovich in a position to score goals. While senior Kayla Fischer and junior Emma Sears run wide, Dudukovich sets up in the middle.

The 4-3-3 easily transitions into a 4-1-4-1 – four defenders, a center defensive midfielder, four midfielders and a forward – with Fischer and Sears dropping back on defense and Dudukovich left alone to play near the center circle.

When Dudukovich claims the midfield, Walker-Hock wants her to make play predictable for the Ohio State defense by taking away the opposing team's strengths. That means winning balls in space, making her feet available and picking off passes to build a counterattack.

"Her job is to be a nemesis for those two center backs," Walker-Hock said. "She can come to get the ball and run behind. Her timing is very good. She's strong, so you're

not going to body her off the ball. There's a lot of bumping that goes on as a player tries to run through a back line. There's a lot of physical contact, but she's strong enough to handle that and not have that throw her off her target.

"She holds the ball well and she moves well. Her growth will come from reading the field and finding space, finding those small windows and doing that with a quick trigger."

Through Oct. 3, Dudukovich was leading the team in goals with six. She also was leading the Buckeyes in scoring efficiency, collecting her six goals on only 39 shots (a .154 shooting percentage).

When it comes to scoring, it's rather straightforward for Dudukovich. She scores goals, and she scores them at a high volume. It's what Walker-Hock recruited her to do, but it's not the only thing she sees to be unique about her game.

"I think one of the things I've watched in Kailyn is she is a very bright woman, and she constantly wants feedback and information," Walker-Hock said. "She's a student of the game. She comes up against players equal to her stature physically, and she is figuring out tactical ways to be crafty and use those things to her advantage. She's always looking to get on the ball. As the ball comes to her, she spins the center back and looks for a shot. She can lay a ball off underneath and then get herself back in a high position. She has grown with the game because of her desire and her level of intelligence to do more than just what her physical attributes have gifted her with."

It's high praise for a freshman, but Walker-Hock stands behind her words. That's not to say Dudukovich doesn't have things to work on, though. The good news is that the freshman forward has more than three seasons to improve, and the head coach said she is already working on her character, competitiveness and leadership.

"When she's in college, she will maximize all of those qualities," Walker-Hock said. "She will work with our strength coach to improve her technical ability, but it's those other intangibles that you see in her and why I spent two years just recruiting her. She wants her success to be everyone's success, and she understands that it's not all about Kailyn."

Dudukovich's goal for her Ohio State career is simple – get better every day. If she can get that one percent better with every training session, practice and game, she believes that will lead her to be successful.

"When I look back, I want to be able to say that I was a good teammate and that I left it all out on the field," Dudukovich said. "I want to be able to say that I always gave 100 percent every day."

In order to better introduce BSB readers to Ohio State's Olympic sports teams and athletes, we have shifted to more feature-oriented coverage of the various squads. Buckeye Sports Bulletin will provide a roundup of all the games, matches and meets involving OSU's teams each Monday on our BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all print subscribers.

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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2021 FOOTBALL (4-1)

Sept. 2 at Minnesota, W 45-31; **11** OREGON, L 35-28; **18** TULSA, W 41-20; **25** AKRON, W 59-7.

Oct. 2 at Rutgers, W 52-13; **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., 9/17.

Oct. 1 Joe Piane Invitational at Notre Dame, Men: 6/21; Women: 9/24; **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 (6-3)

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, L 2-1 (2 OT).

Oct. 3 MICHIGAN, L 1-0; **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., 7/14

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., 6/15.

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 (4-0-0)

Sept. 24 ST. THOMAS, W 6-0; **25** ST. THOMAS, W 4-1

Oct. 1 at Minnesota, W 4-2; **2** at Minnesota, W 4-1 **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.

WOMEN'S LACROSSE

Oct. 9-10 Power 5 Fall Fest at Notre Dame, TBA; **16** Navy Play Day at Annapolis, Md., TBA; **17** UVA Scrimmage at Charlottesville, Va, TBA; **23** BUCKEYE PLAY DAY, TBA.

MEN'S SOCCER (4-5-1)

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, W 2-0.; **24** MARYLAND, L 1-2; **29** BOWLING GREEN, W 2-1 (2 OT).

Oct. 3 at Northwestern, L 1-0; **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 (6-5)

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, L 4-2; **26** at Penn State, W 1-0; **30** INDIANA, T 1-1 (2OT).

Oct. 3 RUTGERS, L 2-1; **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 (2-1)

Sept. 24 OHIO DOMINICAN, W 16-0; **26** KENTUCKY (DH), L 4-1, W 4-2.

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 (12-2)

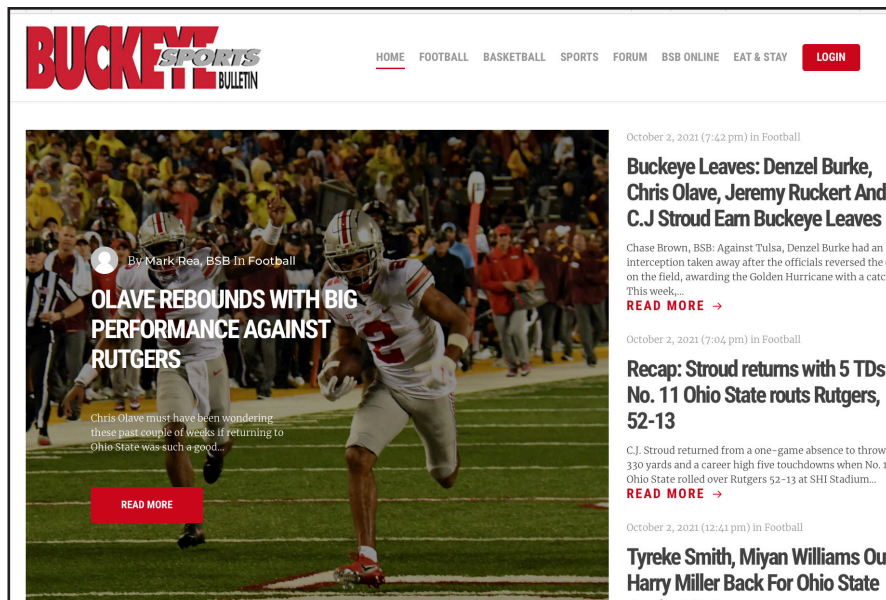
Aug. 27 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 3-0; **28** WASHINGTON, W 3-1.

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. VCU, 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, L 3-2; **26** at Penn State, L 3-0; **29** INDIANA, W 3-0.

Oct. 2 MARYLAND, W 3-0; **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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OSU Rounds Into Form Behind Youth Movement

It's usually a bad sign for a team when freshmen are grabbing the headlines.

That typically indicates an overall lack of talent in the program, and the young guys have taken over. A rebuilding year is often the case.

But for Ohio State, it's not a problem. It's a blessing.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

The Buckeyes had a huge roster turn-over heading into 2021, and maybe those of us who rank teams should have figured out that even a program seemingly impervious to missteps could have one – especially when breaking in a new quarterback.

It's been a long-held belief from this seat that teams breaking in new starting quarterbacks and a majority of new offensive linemen are going to struggle. Quarterback is such a demanding spot, and offensive line is so dependent on chemistry, and when you have guys who haven't played together or are getting their first taste of college experience, it can be a concern.

That inexperience led to a hiccup against Oregon in week two when the Ducks flew out of Columbus with a 35-28 upset of Ohio State. There were questions about the freshman quarterback, about whether or not he was the guy to continue the lineage of topflight play at OSU.

Now healthy, C.J. Stroud has answered those questions.

Stroud early in the season had a penchant for missing guys high and not always seeing open receivers. The latter can be attributed to a lack of experience, but many were chalking up the former to him simply not being good enough. When it was re-

vealed that he had been playing with a bum shoulder, it might have opened a window into his early inconsistency.

Ryan Day and company made a smart move, sitting Stroud against Akron to allow his shoulder to heal, and it was the best thing for everyone involved. It gave freshman Kyle McCord a chance to play for real, and he passed that test with mostly exemplary marks. It also allowed Stroud to really dive into film and the playbook, which is where he will make his biggest leap.

After what Day said was a good week of practice, Stroud looked like a different quarterback against Rutgers. His passes had zip, he was throwing well on the move – heck, he even willingly ran the ball a few times, something he had been reluctant to do previously. He looked like a guy able to take Ohio State to a Big Ten title and a run at a College Football Playoff berth, and that's not something that could be said a few weeks ago.

But he wasn't the only youngster who turned out against the Scarlet Knights.

TreVeyon Henderson took his first carry from scrimmage 44 yards to the end zone, showing once again why he has a chance to be truly special at a position that has been littered with special players since the beginning of time. He finished with 71 yards on just eight carries, getting dinged up a little bit but probably not anything serious. Day said Henderson was ready to go back in the game in the second half but was held out, as the coach didn't want to take any chances with that kind of talent.

In just five short weeks, Denzel Burke has become the best corner on the team, and he showed off his skills on a pick-six that accounted for OSU's second touchdown of the day against Rutgers. He's sticky in coverage and has a nose for the ball. The sky seems to be the limit for Burke.

For the third straight week, Tyleik Williams netted a sack – the only one recorded against Rutgers for the afternoon. He's

strong, quick and physical, and needs to be on the field a lot more than he has been.

Throw in solid performances from J.T. Tuimolalo, Jack Sawyer and Kourt Williams, and it's easy to see that the freshman at Ohio State are not a problem, but a part of the overall solution.

"These guys aren't young anymore, they have five games under their belts," Day said after the game with the Knights. "Now we know what to expect. A game like this allows a bunch of guys to get on the field, and it's all meaningful stuff. It's now a bunch of guys who are expecting to make plays where before they were just trying to get lined up right."

Ohio State has been excellent on the road for a while now. The road win over Rutgers was OSU's 11th straight and the eighth in a row by double digits.

Whether it's guys finally feeling comfortable, the change of defensive coordinator to Matt Barnes or a little bit of an easing of the schedule, Ohio State's defense has started to look like a legitimate unit.

"This was an important game for us because I felt like a month ago, when we played Minnesota, we were a much different team," Day said. "I felt like that going into this week, but we hadn't shown it yet. I think we saw some glimpses of that today."

Firing On All Cylinders

When the bullet position was created for Brendon White a few years back under Greg Schiano, it was more this nebulous idea than something the coaching staff actually implemented. The thought was that they could take a player who was big enough to play linebacker and fast enough to cover and have him all over the field. After touting it, though, it never happened. So it was easy to see why people were skeptical heading into this season when the coaches talked about the bullet and that it would be an important position.

Ronnie Hickman has done more than talk. He's been Ohio State's most consistent defender. He is what the bullet was created for – a guy who can pack a wallop and tackle in space but who isn't thrown off picking up a crossing route in pass coverage.

Hickman led the team in tackles against Rutgers with 11 and paces the Buckeyes for the season with 44. He's not flashy, he's just good.

And he's a big reason the defense looks to be improving.

Who Would Have Guessed?

The success Luke Fickell has had at Cincinnati is nothing short of amazing. He's built a Group of Five program into one that looks and plays like a Power Five team, and there was no better evidence of that than the beatdown his Bearcats put on Notre Dame in South Bend.

Cincinnati was just the better team. It didn't play into the Notre Dame mystique, it wasn't worried about Fighting Irish defensive coordinator and former UC assistant Marcus Freeman knowing what it does – it went out and bullied the Golden Domers and now sits in perfect position for a breakthrough into the College Football Playoff.

It's a far cry from 2011 when Fickell looked like a deer in headlights patrolling the Ohio State sideline in the aftermath of the Jim Tressel resignation/firing. Fickell inherited a team that was pretty good and led it to a less-than-stellar 6-7 campaign – choosing Joe Bauserman to start at quarterback over freshman talent Braxton Miller. Many decisions were questioned that season, and fans who had loved Fickell wanted him gone sooner rather than later, believing he wasn't good enough for the top job at Ohio State.

He is now.

It was obvious as that 2011 season went on that Fickell was in over his head. But he was the good soldier, the guy who stepped up for his school despite being a neophyte to the head coaching ranks. He didn't sulk or pout about his time as OSU head coach. He put his head down, continued to grind and did a solid job as defensive coordinator on Urban Meyer's staff. When he left for Cincinnati prior to the 2017 season, he inherited a team that was short on culture and victories, going just 4-8 during Tommy Tuberville's final season. The Bearcats repeated that finish in 2017 but had a big turnaround in 2018, going 11-2 and bursting onto the national scene.

Fickell is now so highly thought of that his name routinely comes up when big-time jobs open up – USC being the most recent. He isn't leaving the Queen City anytime soon as he has a son who plays for the Bearcats and younger children still in school. He and his wife love the city, love the community and have really become the face of Cincinnati football.

A nearly impossible thought in 2011.

Two Stand Above The Rest

October is when you can finally begin figuring out which teams are good and which are pretenders, and it's pretty obvious right now that the SEC has the two best teams in college football. What's behind them is open for debate as a stunning 34 ranked teams have lost through the first five weeks of the season. The chaos that's unfolding each week threatens to give 2007, the all-time king of wacky seasons, a run for its money.

Here is one guy's look at the "best" teams in college football – noting that best only applies to the top two at the moment.

This week's Dandy Dozen:

1. Georgia (5-0)
2. Alabama (5-0)
3. Cincinnati (4-0)
4. Iowa (5-0)
5. Penn State (5-0)
6. Oklahoma (5-0)
7. Oregon (4-1)
8. Ohio State (4-1)
9. Michigan (5-0)
10. Kentucky (5-0)
11. Michigan State (5-0)
12. Arkansas (4-1)

An epic showdown awaits in Kinnick Stadium when Iowa hosts Penn State, so this list will change quickly. It may also give an insight into how good the Hawkeyes and Nittany Lions really are.



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Stroud Starting Status Seems Secure — For Now

Nearly every Buckeye fan I spoke to as well as those who posted on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum during the week following Ohio State's 59-7 annihilation of Akron was clamoring for Ryan Day and his offensive staff to play Kyle McCord at quarterback when the Buckeyes traveled to face Rutgers in Big Ten action on Oct. 2.

They all got their wish.

McCord did, indeed, play against the Scarlet Knights. He entered the game after C.J. Stroud, the anointed starter heading into the season, staked Ohio State to a 52-6 lead early in the third quarter. The established pecking order was back in place.

As I mentioned in this space in the last issue, I was a little surprised at the "oust Stroud" movement among OSU fans. His line in the first three games of the season — the first three starts of his career — was solid if not up to the standards of Dwayne Haskins or Justin Fields, who had been the most recent starters before him. More importantly, Day, the acknowledged quarterback guru (think Haskins and Fields) had determined that Stroud gave Ohio State the best chance to win. I trust his judgment on Saturdays over the opinion of the armchair quarterbacks who do their thing on Mondays.

As best I can tell, the beefs against Stroud were that he sometimes threw the ball too high, he was reluctant to run with the football, and he presided over the debacle with Oregon. The first two complaints might have had to do with his sore shoulder, which could have affected his throws and made him reluctant to tuck it and run. As for the loss to Oregon, there was plenty of blame to go around there, from the head coach to the water boy, with the players — especially those on defense — in between.

Even with Stroud's sore shoulder, Day still must have felt he provided the Buckeyes with the best chance to win because he kept him in against the Ducks — he threw for 484 yards and three touchdowns, though he tossed a costly interception near the end of the game — and he started him again in game three against Tulsa. With an overmatched Akron next on the docket, Day wisely chose to rest Stroud and his shoulder and also get some important work in for McCord and fellow backup Jack Miller.

Both shone against the Zips, with McCord, who earned the start, completing 13 of 18 passes for 319 yards, two TDs and one interception. It was a solid performance, no doubt, but I saw nothing in McCord's efforts against lowly Akron that would cause me to bench a guy who had earned the starting job over the course of the spring and fall camp. What I did take from McCord's performance was a greater confidence in him if the starter should go down.

Stroud most likely staved off the call for his ouster with his strong performance against Rutgers. He led the Buckeyes to a 45-6 halftime lead with identical 7-of-9 passing lines in the first and second quarters for a total of 273 yards and four touchdowns. He added an 11-yard touchdown toss to Chris Olave on the first possession of the second half to end his day with 17 completions in 23 attempts (73.9 percent) for 330 yards and five touchdowns without an interception or a sack. He also showed great mobility in extending plays and even added two runs for 13 yards, including a 10-yard run for a first down to the Rutgers 8 early in the second quarter. Not bad for a guy who had been criticized for his reluctance to use his feet.

"That's the C.J. we see all the time in practice," said Olave, sounding more like Day than the many fans calling for Stroud's oust-

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

er. "He got some rest for that shoulder, and I think he's back to normal. This past Tuesday, which is our hardest practice day of the week, he was back and throwing well, putting the ball where it needed to be. So, we knew he was back. We had full confidence in him."

While Stroud seems secure in his starting status for now — and rightfully so — one stumble and I'm sure fans will be calling for McCord again. As the old saying goes, "The most popular player on any football team is the backup quarterback."

Quick Hitters

My weekly tight end watch rolls into a "Wow, the Buckeye offense is firing on all cylinders on offense" note this issue.

Jeremy Ruckert, who could have left for the NFL after last season, finally got a chance to show his wares against Rutgers, grabbing four passes for 40 yards and a touchdown, nearly equaling the six catches he had entering the game. Gee Scott added two catches, and in one of the feel-good stories of the game, blue-collar Buckeye Mitch Rossi reeled in his first career catch and first career touchdown all in one play.

With Olave coming out of his two-week lull with five catches for 119 yards and two scores to remind us just how stacked the OSU receiving corps is, and the running backs helping the Buckeyes grind out 208 net yards on the ground despite freshman phenom TreVeyon Henderson playing less than a quarter and opening-day starter Miyan Williams not playing at all, the tight ends seem to be now in the game plan and Stroud is looking more comfortable using all of those weapons. What can you say but "Wow!"

- The defense probably played its best game of the season against Rutgers. The unit looked like it was comfortable and knew what it was doing, and the Buckeyes seem like they are finally settling into a consistent rotation.

The defense did take a step back in the pressuring-the-quarterback department. The Buckeyes recorded just one sack against Rutgers and were also credited with only one quarterback hurry. Not surprisingly, the sack went to Tyleik Williams (the hurry went to Taron Vincent), who has had at least one sack in the last three games and has been the big surprise of the defensive line, so far overshadowing his more publicized freshman line mates J.T. Tuimolalo and Jack Sawyer, though those two seem to be getting more and more involved in the action.

I think Buckeye fans are a little out of their comfort zone in seeing a lot of the pressure coming from the interior, rather than from the defensive ends as we are all used to. Williams leads the team with four sacks, while fellow inside man Haskell Garrett follows with three.

I hope we are not being tricked into a sense of improvement by the defense based on the caliber of competition offered by Akron and Rutgers. But I like the way the schedule is laid out as far as growth for the defense with things probably getting a little tougher against Maryland and even more so against Indiana before the big showdown with Penn State on Oct. 30.

Looking Back To Claret

Since Henderson smashed Archie Griffin's Ohio State freshman record for rushing yardage in a game against Tulsa, as part of our Reprint Thursday on our BuckeyeSports.com

website, we have been looking at the breakout games of other standout freshmen who have come since the two-time Heisman Trophy winner. On Sept. 30, we recalled Maurice Claret with stories from the Sept. 21, 2002, issue of BSB.

Like J.K. Dobbins, who was the Reprint Thursday subject on Sept. 23, Claret burst on the scene in his very first game, rushing for 175 yards on 21 carries in a season-opening victory against visiting Texas Tech. But Claret quickly bettered that performance.

In the third game of the season, Ohio State took a step up in competition when they hosted No. 10 Washington State. Claret carried the ball 31 times against the Cougars for 230 yards and two touchdowns and led the Buckeyes to a 25-7 victory that would prove to be an important early win in OSU's march to the 2002 national championship.

As I read the stories about Claret and his bruising performance, I couldn't help but think what might have been had he played three or (heaven forbid) four years at Ohio State. Let me say that in writing the intro to the Thursday reprints, I mistakenly wrote that BSB had given Claret the nickname of "The Franchise." It was actually members of the team who did it.

"When I came back into the locker room, they were calling me 'The Franchise,'" Claret said after the game.

Whether it was BSB or his teammates who gave him that moniker, when a player gets a tag like that after only the third game of his freshman year, you get an idea of what a significant talent he was.

In addition to his talent, I had forgotten how colorful Claret was. He had apparently decided that he was the working man's running back, both in his style of play and who he was playing for.

"I'm playing for the guy who works 9 to 5 every day so he can pay \$50 to watch us play," Claret said in the days leading up to the game with the Cougars. (There's certainly been an increase in ticket prices over the last 19 years). "I want him to get his money's worth — to leave the stadium thinking, 'That was one of the best football players I've ever seen.'"

After the game, he was sticking to the same tune.

"Some people work all week. All they have to look forward to is the Buckeyes game," he said after the big victory. "Then they come out here and some of them have the worst seats in the house — Section ZZ, Seat 99. Basically, all they can see is the top of our helmets."

"But they came to see a good game just like the people in the good seats. I try to give people their money's worth. I try and work hard for every fan in the stadium."

Section ZZ, Seat 99. I love it. I think all of us have been in that seat at one time or another.

Apparently, Claret's claims of working hard were not just idle chatter.

"He works hard from Sunday to Friday to get better every week," OSU linebacker and teammate Matt Wilhelm said. "Everything he gets, he deserves."

In a situation similar to that of this season, Claret wasn't the only talented tailback on the club, and he was initially set to share time with the more experienced Maurice Hall and Lydell Ross. But Claret kind of took the matter of playing time into his own hands.

"One has to wonder if (OSU head coach

Jim) Tressel, running backs coach Tim Spencer and the rest of the Buckeye offensive brain trust are going to rethink the strategy that seemed to be in place during the first two games of trying to keep all the running backs happy and just go with Claret as the featured back," I wrote in this space in that 2002 issue. "The freshman proved he can handle the bulk of the carries, and his 7.3-yard per carry rush average after three games is a statistic that usually adds up to victory."

The current coaching staff seems to have come to that conclusion this season with regard to Henderson and the other, more experienced backs. I'm not sure the 5-10, 215-pound Henderson is built to carry the load 31 times like the 6-0, 230-pound Claret was, but like Claret did in 2002, Henderson has proved that he deserves the bulk of the carries.

Tressel had this to say about the rugged Claret after seeing him pound on the Cougars: "One thing that I think about Maurice Claret is I think a little bit like when we had Keith Byars here. He wore on people. In that first quarter, you might get him down for 2 yards, and then in the second quarter, you might get him down for 3. In the third quarter, you couldn't get him down. (Claret's) that kind of guy."

There's a lesson to be learned there for the current Buckeyes. Obviously the 2021 team has one of the best collections of receivers on an Ohio State team — or any team — ever. They also have an explosive running back in Henderson. While I don't think Henderson is the type of back to pound on a team like Claret or Byars, the Buckeyes have a huge offensive line that can do some pounding. As the Big Ten season progresses and the competition gets stiffer, ramping up Henderson and the running game might wear on opposing defenses, giving Henderson more opportunities to break one, which in turn would give Stroud and the receivers an even better chance to do their thing.

In the 2002 win against Washington State, quarterback Craig Krenzel had to throw the ball only 10 times, completing four of those attempts for 71 yards. I'm pretty certain the days of an Ohio State team throwing only 10 passes in a game are gone, but I think power football still has a place in the Big Ten and can complement the dynamic passing attack of the Buckeyes.

Another Quotable

I also loved this quote from Mark Rea's flashback story in this issue about the 1961 Ohio State team not going to the Rose Bowl due to a Faculty Council vote. Some members of the Faculty Council believed "Ohio State's reputation as a center of learning was being threatened in favor of one as a football factory."

Mars G. Fonata, a professor of metallurgical engineering, was not one of those who believed football was getting out of control.

"We support excellence and here we have a group that has reached the top," Fonata said of the football team. "Why not support them? This matter of overemphasis on football has been completely overemphasized."

Members of the Faculty Council on either side of the 28-25 vote not to go to Pasadena would be unable to comprehend what a big business Ohio State football and college football in general have become and how much of a way of life it is on campus. Nor could they have foreseen how the Rose Bowl's place in that big business has been diminished.

HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

FOR ATHLETES

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that causes your brain to rapidly move inside your skull.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

- Headache, nausea, vomiting,
- balance problems, dizziness,
- double or blurred vision,
- sensitivity to light or noise, feeling
- sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy,
- just not "feeling right" or
- "feeling down," memory
- problems, confusion, and
- trouble sleeping.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?



REPORT IT. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

GET CHECKED OUT. If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL. A concussion can make it harder to do everyday activities, such as concentrating at school. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH AND PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain and can even be fatal.

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>

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