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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 23, 2021

Ohio State Picks Up Third Straight Blowout Win Behind Impressive Offensive Performance

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

There was no subtle shift for Ohio State's offense, which started the season as supremely talented but inconsistent and now sits, after its last two games, as a seemingly unstoppable scoring machine. The Buckeyes didn't show any real signs that presaged the leap. One game, they were hovering in the mid-20s late into the game against a then-winless Tulsa team, and the next, they were rattling off 53 points with ease against Rutgers, and 66 a week later during an Oct. 9 romp over Maryland.

The bisecting affair, a blowout of an over-matched Akron squad, offered little in the way of insight with Ohio State turning the game over to a number of second-temers. The offense was clunky and uncomfortable – and then it wasn't, as if a switch just flipped.

That's a rare occurrence in any sport, let alone one built around 18- to 22-year-olds. Improvement is usually slow, spread throughout the course of the season, to the point where it's hard to identify as it happens. Ohio State's last team that made so significant a jump, the 2014 group, didn't show how much it had actually grown until its final three games – a trifecta of which Buckeye fans certainly need no reminder and to which they have likely already harkened back this season.

This team has shown no such need for patience, at least not in either of its last two games, and the only explanation falls firmly on the shoulders – or right shoulder, more specifically – of starting quarterback C.J. Stroud. Ohio State's offense often looked as though it was missing something in those first four weeks of the season, even when it found success against Minnesota and Akron to bookend the first third of the 2021 campaign.

As it turns out – at least as head coach Ryan Day, Stroud himself and just about everyone else affiliated with the offense tell it – that missing piece was a healthy QB.

"I'm just feeling more comfortable," Stroud said after the Maryland game. "God has blessed me with supernatural healing in my shoulder. My arm is feeling a whole lot better, and every



SONNY BROCKWAY

TOUCHDOWN TREVEYON — Ohio State freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson (32) celebrates one of his three touchdowns Oct. 9 during a 66-17 blowout of Maryland. Henderson ran for 102 yards and two scores and added four receptions for 67 yards and another score as the Buckeyes won their fourth consecutive game.

day I'm rehabbing it to make sure nothing else goes wrong. That's been a big thing for me, and it's making me more comfortable. The coaches are starting to trust me more with the football. Two games straight now, we don't have any turnovers on offense, which is really good. We have to keep building on that."

That growing trust is evident in everything Ohio State is doing on the field. Deep posts to senior wide receiver Chris Olave, once a staple under Justin Fields but rarely seen through the first five games, have returned, with Stroud hitting one for a touchdown and nearly connecting for a second.

"I'm not surprised to see this," Olave said. "We have the best play-caller in the country in Coach Day. We dial it up in practice, and we run it exactly in the game how it is in practice. We just try to build on that. We got the same look in the game that we got in practice on that skinny post. We just had to connect on it."

There's still room to grow for the redshirt freshman signal-caller, but Day was quick to tell media members that the internal expectations and the internal trust in Stroud has

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Costly Penalties A Constant

The Oct. 2 “View From 15th & High” calls attention to unacceptable penalties in the Akron game and their potential to cost a game or championship. In the 1975 Rose Bowl, No. 5 USC squeaked past No. 3 Ohio State, 18-17, and a spiked ball might have been the difference.

With 8:30 left in the third quarter, OSU was leading, 7-3, and USC had the ball at its own 24-yard line. On third-and-9, Pat Haden attempted a pass. Neal Colzie intercepted and returned it to the 9 before being forced out of bounds. Colzie vigorously spiked the ball into the ground – so hard that it bounced up more than 10 feet, out of camera view. Spiking was then a relatively new penalty. Players today politely hand the ball to a referee like it was an ostrich egg.

So instead of first-and-goal from the USC 9, the 15-yard penalty put the Buckeyes back to the 24 with goal to go. On second down at the 22, OSU was intercepted. The unnecessary penalty did not help.

Robert Stevenson
Columbus

Special Teams Concerns

I wish we would stop having our best athletes trying to return kickoffs and punts for two reasons.

First, to paraphrase Woody Hayes, four things can happen when you try to return a kick. Three of them are bad and the fourth isn't that great:

1. Injury: Michigan and Maryland have already lost their best receivers by having them return punts. OSU seems to regularly have 20 percent of its team unavailable due to injury, and it is probably fair to say that there is at least another 20 percent who would play better if they were less dinged up. Given how many snaps Garrett Wilson already has to play, I think he would be fresher without getting pummeled on punt returns.

2. Loss of yards: It seems that more often than not, the returner retreats and loses yards, there is a penalty, or in the case of a kickoff return, the returner fails to get to the 25-yard line.

3. Turnover: The biggest play that can happen on a kickoff or punt return is a turn-

over. If Oregon had recovered our fumble on the kickoff, the game would have been effectively over well before the fourth quarter. It could be argued that both recent losses to Clemson were due to punt-related turnovers (fumbled punt return and roughing the kicker). It seems that we almost always give Michigan a touchdown by mishandling a punt or kickoff.

4. The yardage gained on a kickoff or punt return is usually no more than a first down and is often in the area of the field where “bend but don't break” defenses practically concede a first down. As I look at OSU, good returns or punt blocks generally don't matter because we would have scored anyway. So, although I enjoyed watching Chris Olave block the kick against Michigan, does anyone think we wouldn't have scored on that drive if he hadn't? Indeed, on reflection, I think it might have been better if we hadn't blocked the punt because our defense could have rested while our offense continued to wear down Michigan's defense.

Secondly, practicing returns is unproductive because:

1. If the opponent's kicker kicks the ball out of the end zone or the punter has good hang time, the returner has no chance.

2. The refs could probably call a penalty on every kickoff and punt return.

3. The practice time wasted on the return game should be spent on the defense.

In short, Ohio State will generally be favored in its games, so there is no need to try to make big plays on kickoff returns, punt returns, or punt blocks – especially when doing so has seemed to result in losing rather than winning.

Mark Mitchell
Clarion, Pa.

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

deserved sticker from me.

Wyatt Crosher, BSB: TreVeyon Henderson has been a monster throughout his freshman season so far, and against Maryland, it was no different. Henderson scored a touchdown for the sixth straight game – every game of his collegiate career – and finished with three total scores, two the ground and one as a receiver. That dual-threat ability really shone for Henderson this time around, as he rushed 16 times for 102 yards and caught four passes for 67 yards. The 169 yards from scrimmage was a game high for either team.

Ohio State's offense has been firing on all cylinders the past three games, and Henderson has been a lot of the reason why it has worked. Whether it's as a rusher or as a receiver, the Buckeyes need to keep getting him the ball and let him make plays.

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: It's the easiest pick in the house, but I'm not opposed to taking layups when I can. C.J. Stroud is a new man. He was excellent against Rutgers a week ago, and he was even better against Maryland. His command of Ohio State's refined offense is improving with each passing week, and now fully healthy – or close to it – his arm talent is



From The Message Board

Ohio State extended its win streak to four with a 66-17 victory against Maryland. The Buckeyes have looked much improved during their past three wins, so we asked the readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum what they think is the main reason for the recent turnaround.

Here are some of the responses:

“Young team hitting its stride. I said it last week. The sleeping giant is now awake.”

– **Tiffin Buckeye**

“The first two reasons may be unbelievable QB play and the emergence of TreVeyon Henderson. If someone else is playing like either one, I would like to see him. The young defensive team is also picking up confidence having learned lessons early in the season. The coaching staff, both offensive and defensive, have obviously spent considerable time for improvements after the Oregon game and the improvements are there for everyone to see. The last but not the least is that the recruitment seems to be even better than in Urban Meyer's times (if that was possible) given the impact of freshmen on the team performances. An often overlooked but key contributor is strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti. It is a good time to be a Buckeye.”

– **AnthonyBuckeye**

“I think the play of the defensive backs has improved tremendously. And Denzel Burke is becoming a star right in front of us.”

– **bstu9**

“I never thought I would say this, but giving the game ball to Kerry Coombs may speak volumes – not about his defensive acumen, but about the ‘all for one and one for all’ attitude among the team and staff. Demoting him to the booth could have been humiliating, but it seems he and the team have made it into a positive.”

– **Terrier Buck**

“The linebackers look less bewildered and there are less of them running out there. Of course, there are less of them in the room.”

– **Poster That Harley Built**

“The biggest difference in the team now vs. earlier in the season is experience. I think almost everyone overreacted to the loss to Oregon, but let's understand that a quarterback with one game under his belt, mostly new O- and D-lines, new linebackers, a mostly new secondary, new RBs add up to a recipe for an early-season upset. The receiver room was the one anchor for this team. Does anyone seriously think that if the Buckeyes played Oregon again, it would end in anything but a beatdown?

“This team has freakish talent at every position, and it's always just been a matter of these young players getting ‘seat time.’ Not only are the starters looking better and better each week, but even the second- and third-team defensive units are starting to look like they are understanding where to go and what to do on plays. Young players are still out of position on occasion, and this team needs Chris Ash to come back and teach tackling, but it's starting to look to me like the 2014 team, where by season's end, an unstoppable weapon emerged out of the cauldrons of the early season's experiences. I am feeling great about this team right now, and if they keep improving each week, they are going to be hard to stop going forward.”

– **Michael Bauer**

“The loss to Oregon showed this young team that they are not invincible.”

– **R1TBDBITL**

really starting to flash on throws farther down the field.

The final stats, which are tremendously flattering, don't even tell the full story. Stroud was 24 of 33 passing for 406 yards and five scores against the Terps, but several of those incompletions were drops, and Stroud racked up only one or two questionable decisions all day.

Outside of those, he went about his reads like a pro, made the throws Ohio State needed him to make, and distributed the ball to his trio of ace receivers – as well as a new contender in the passing game in running back TreVeyon Henderson.

When Stroud is playing like this, it's hard to see any defense in the nation challenging Ohio State's offense. There's just too much firepower when Stroud is on. And on Saturday, he was as good as he's been in a Buckeye uniform.

Mark Rea, BSB: With the beating Ohio State administered to Maryland, pretty much anyone on the team deserves a Buckeye leaf including the guys who didn't get in the game. After all, they wore their uniforms well.

But since I have to decide, I'll go with Chris Olave, who turned in another 100-yard receiving game (ho hum) as well as two more touchdowns as he continues to track OSU's all-time record of 34 that has been held by David Boston since 1998. Olave now has 29 career TDs, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a better one than No. 29, a twisting, juggling

30-yarder late in the third quarter after which an exasperated Maryland cornerback Tarheeb Still simply raised his hands and shook his head in frustration.

AnthonyBuckeye: Emeka Egbuka for electrifying kickoff returns, C.J. Stroud for an unbelievable performance, the wide receiver trio of Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and Jaxon Smith-Njigba for performances we will remember for a long time, TreVeyon Henderson and Master Teague for performing like the best running back tandem in the country they are, Steele Chambers and Cody Simon for several tackles, Jack Sawyer (strip-sack) and J.T. Tuimoloau for showing up with sacks along with other interior linemen, the OL for being the best once again and the offensive coaching staff for an ultra-aggressive and enjoyable game plan.

Poster That Harley Built: I'll ride with C.J. Stroud until he proves me otherwise. But among “newcomers,” Steele Chambers is coming on strong and Emeka Egbuka has pumped a little electricity into an already electric ball club.

PeyoteBuck: Leaves for the silently deadly kick team, Ruggles and Mirco. They are part of the foundation on which the good things stand.

R1TBDBITL: Leaves to the starting rotation putting us in a position to give the reserves a chance for some much needed reps.

Buckeye Leaves

Another blowout for the Buckeyes means another full stack of Buckeye leaves to dole out from the BSB crew and the members of the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum. Here are their picks after a decisive victory for Ohio State over Maryland.

Chase Brown, BSB: Garrett Wilson made his 100th career reception as a Buckeye. It's hard to believe the junior wide receiver didn't reach the milestone sooner, given how much of a consistent threat he's been for Ohio State in two seasons and change.

C.J. Stroud targeted Wilson six times against Maryland, with the pair connecting for five receptions, 84 yards and two touchdowns. Their lone mishap came when Stroud placed a ball just outside the reach of Wilson in the back of the end zone at the end of the first quarter. For most receivers in college football, this is a breakout game, a career game or a standout game, but it was just another day at the office for Wilson.

Chris Olave and Jaxon Smith-Njigba gained more yards, and Olave surpassed Wilson for the team lead in touchdowns. Mark has more to say on Olave, so refer to his Buckeye leaf for more on his performance. All in all, Wilson did what he was supposed to do, and he gets a well-

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PUBLISHER
Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
Becky Roberts

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
Mark Rea

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Wyatt Crosher Patrick Mayhorn

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
Kevin Dye Josh Winslow

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

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
Jan Jager Ron Friedman

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College Football Excellence Hard To Sustain

Here are a few quotes from a football coach in the minutes following a surprising loss. See if any of it sounds familiar.

"Hopefully, we'll learn a lot from this. We still can accomplish everything we want to accomplish, but we have to do things better than we did tonight. We have to play better, we have to be more consistent, we have to finish drives, we have to get more turnovers on defense, we have to get more stops on defense. There are a lot of things we need to fix.

"And I'm responsible for all of it. We have to do a better job with our coaches. We have to do a better job with our players."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day after the loss to Oregon? Nope. That was seven-time national championship coach Nick Saban after Texas A&M shocked his top-ranked Alabama team on Oct. 9. The 41-38 win by the Aggies, courtesy of a walk-off field goal from A&M kicker Seth Small, broke the Crimson Tide's streak of 100 consecutive wins against unranked opponents, the longest such streak since The Associated Press began ranking college teams in 1936.

It's no different in Tuscaloosa than it is in Columbus. The respective Crimson Tide and Buckeye nations expect nothing less than perfection, and when the unthinkable happens – such as Oregon's upset win against Ohio State on Sept. 11 or defending national champion Alabama falling to Texas A&M for the first time ever at College Station – most fans rise early the next morning to make certain that the sun does indeed still come up.

College football has always been cyclical when it comes to greatness. Powerhouse programs have their time and then they fade away. For example, Minnesota won three national championships during a six-year period between 1936 and 1941. The Golden Gophers won their most recent national title in 1960 and haven't even won a Big Ten championship since 1967.

Nebraska won back-to-back national championships in 1970 and 1971 and then three more during a four-year period between 1994 and 1997. But the Cornhuskers struggle these days just to maintain relevancy. The same could be said for Notre Dame, the once-proud gold standard of college football whose most recent of the 11 national championships it claims came in 1988.

Clemson has enjoyed sustained success over the last decade with head coach Dabo Swinney in charge. The Tigers are working on a streak of 10 consecutive seasons with double-digit wins, including national titles in 2016 and 2018. But they have already lost twice this season, leading observers to wonder if the Clemson program is ready to recede back into the shadows.

Even Alabama has weathered its share of down periods through the years. Between the quarter-century when Bear Bryant retired after the 1982 season and Saban was hired in 2007, the Crimson Tide won exactly one national championship, and that 1992 title is considered tainted in the wake of NCAA sanctions that came later. In fact, Alabama was a something of a smoldering dumpster fire when Saban took over in Tuscaloosa.

Ohio State remains something of an outlier. With very few exceptions, the Buckeyes have maintained a string of success for the better part of the last century and beyond. Since 1913 when the program joined the Western Conference (now the Big Ten), Ohio State has won at least one conference championship in every decade. Likewise, in every decade since the 1940s, the Buckeyes have finished at least one season among the top five teams in the final AP poll.

The only deficiency where Ohio State is concerned is in national championships. The

university likes to claim eight titles, but championships from 1961 and 1970 are up for debate. One of the cold, hard truths for Buckeye Nation is that being a fan means having your heart broken come national championship time. The football bounces a different way, and maybe the Buckeyes have eight to 10 more national titles.

Still, with very few exceptions through the

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

years, Ohio State always seems to be in the conversation. Yes, there are times when the boat is leaking, the glass is more than half-empty and the sky is falling. But then you start watching a young team mature before your eyes. You watch them flex their muscles against the likes of Akron, Rutgers and Maryland, and you begin to wonder if they really can make another push toward the playoff tournament.

It's the kind of anticipation that most other college football programs get to experience every now and again. For Ohio State fans, it's a birthright.

Youth Vs. History

Iowa's come-from-behind victory Oct. 9 against Penn State puts the Hawkeyes firmly in the driver's seat for the Big Ten West's spot in the Big Ten Championship Game. The nation's No. 2 team faces a second half of the season against Purdue, Wisconsin, Northwestern, Minnesota, Illinois and Nebraska, teams that have combined for a 15-19 record this season.

The toughest of those games is likely against Wisconsin, although the Badgers have had more than their share of problems in 2021. Compounding those troubles is the fact the Hawkeyes will have an extra week to prepare for that game.

Contrast Iowa's second-half schedule with that of Ohio State. Indiana, Penn State, Nebraska, Purdue, Michigan State and Michigan are a combined 25-10 this season, and three of those teams are currently ranked among the top 10 in the nation.

The Buckeyes boast the nation's top-rated offense, but while the defense has played better in recent weeks, the likes of Akron, Rutgers and Maryland are never going to be confused for a college football Murderers' Row.

What Ohio State has going for it down the stretch is a healthy dose of favorable history. College football seasons have always been difficult to project, and with a complete roster turnover every five years, that practice is even more so. Still, since the beginning of the 2010 season, the Buckeyes are a combined 45-9 against the Hoosiers, Nittany Lions, Cornhuskers, Boilermakers, Spartans and Wolverines.

How utterly delicious would it be should Ohio State and Michigan continue to win and face one another for the East Division championship on Nov. 27 in Ann Arbor?

Drafting 50 Years Ago

While doing some research for the 1971 season flashback you can read on pages 30-31 of this issue of BSB, I rediscovered that full-back John Brockington and defensive back Jack Tatum were among five Buckeyes selected in the first round of the 1971 NFL draft.

Brockington was taken by the Green Bay Packers with the seventh overall pick that year while Tatum went to the Oakland Raiders at No. 19 overall, and both players went on to enjoy productive careers in the NFL.

Brockington was the NFL Offensive Player of the Year in 1971, the first of three straight 1,000-yard rushing seasons, while Tatum was a three-time Pro Bowler who, in addition to his reputation as a punishing tackler, was a ball hawk as evidenced by his 37 career interceptions and 10 fumble recoveries.

So, I got to wondering who was taken along with Brockington and Tatum in the first round of that 1971 draft a half-century ago.

As with so many other drafts before and since, quarterbacks dominated the first few picks. Jim Plunkett of Stanford went No. 1 to the Boston Patriots, followed by Archie Manning to the New Orleans Saints and Dan Pastorini to the Houston Oilers (who are now the Tennessee Titans). Each of them had decent NFL careers, but Plunkett is the lone member of that trio to win a Super Bowl, and that was only after he was traded by the Patriots to the 49ers, later released, and then signed by the Raiders.

In addition to Brockington and Tatum, only seven of the top 19 players drafted that year ever made the Pro Bowl. Just one made it to the Pro Football Hall of Fame – Kansas running back John Riggins, who was taken by the New York Jets with the No. 6 overall pick.

Riggins played five seasons with the Jets and then moved to Washington as a free agent and won MVP honors in Super Bowl XVII when the team that was then called the Redskins scored a 27-17 victory against the Miami Dolphins.

Only four other future Hall of Famers were part of that 1971 draft – Florida defensive end Jack Youngblood (first round to the Rams), Penn State linebacker Jack Ham (second round to the Steelers), Michigan offensive tackle Dan Dierdorf (second round to the Cardinals) and Southern University receiver Harold Carmichael (seventh round to the Eagles).

Researching Interceptions

It must have been my week to do research because I wondered about the last Ohio State defender to have two interceptions in the same game before third-year sophomore Craig Young did it against Maryland.

Turns out I didn't have to go back too far in the history books to find that Jeff Okudah had two picks against Nebraska in 2019. In fact, an OSU defender with two interceptions in the same game isn't all that uncommon. Counting Young and Okudah, no fewer than 13 Buckeyes have grabbed two interceptions in the same game over the last 25 seasons.

Three of those players did it twice during their careers – Mike Doss vs. Purdue in 2000 and Michigan in 2001, Derek Ross against Penn State and San Diego State in back-to-back games in 2001, and Kurt Coleman against Troy in 2008 and Michigan in 2009.

The official Ohio State record for most interceptions in a game is three, a mark originally set by Fred Bruney against Illinois in 1951 and equaled eight times since – once by Bruney himself vs. Michigan in 1952 and most recently by Damon Moore against Iowa in 1996.

The legendary Chic Harley totaled four interceptions against Michigan in 1919, but because records of that game can be accessed only through old newspaper microfilm and not any official statistical sheet (which didn't exist in those days), Ohio State has through the years steadfastly refused to recognize Harley's four interceptions as the official single-game record.

That has never sat well with OSU football historian Jack Park, who has told me on more than one occasion that Harley's record should definitely be recognized.

"I know what the media guide says," Park said, "and the media guide is wrong."

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Ohio State Helps Big Ten Make History In AP Poll

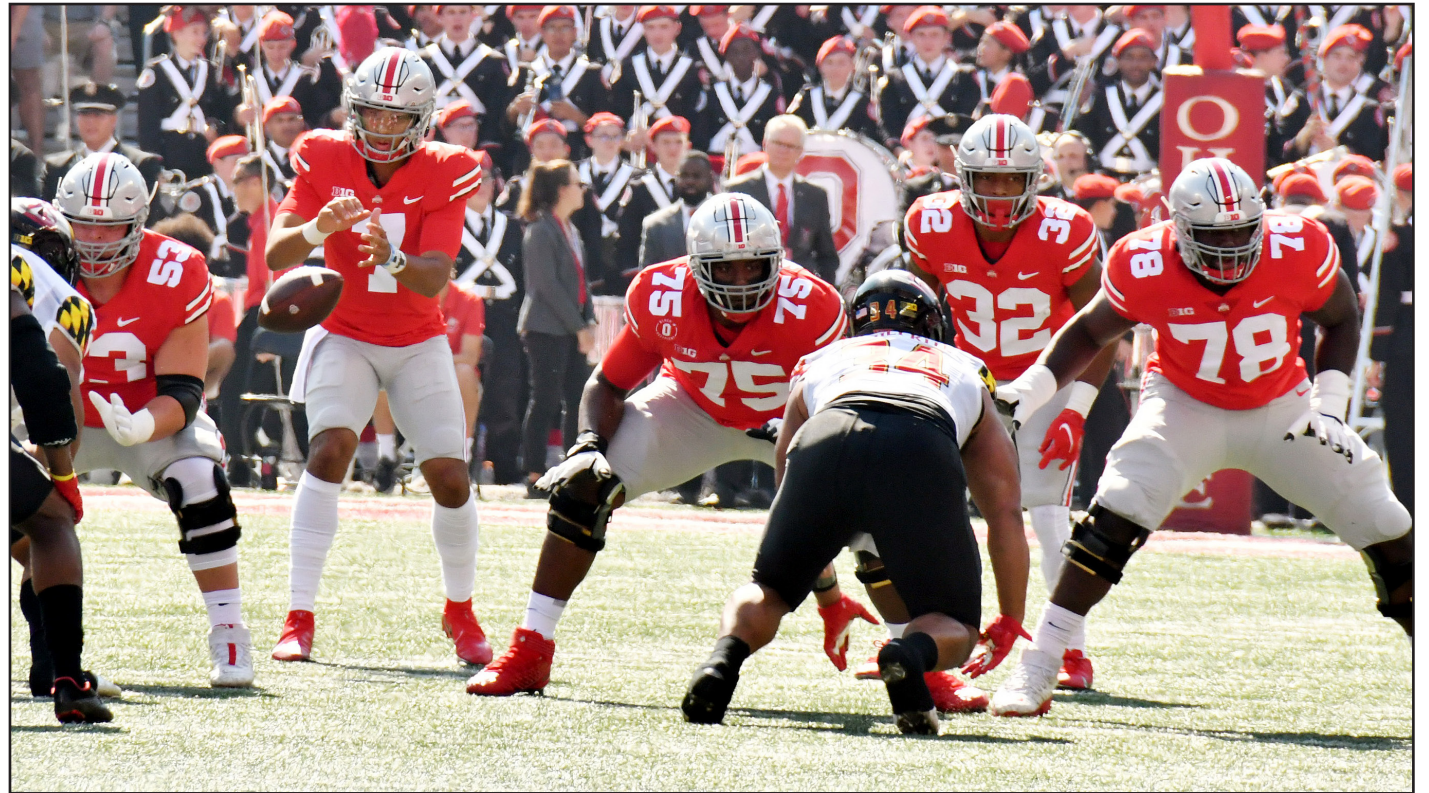
Ohio State's 66-17 rout of Maryland, coupled with numerous upsets in college football, allowed the Buckeyes to move up one spot to No. 6 in The Associated Press' rankings, joining Iowa, Penn State, Michigan and Michigan State to make the Big Ten the first conference in college football history to feature five teams in the AP's top 10.

Georgia received all 62 first-place votes to become the new top-ranked team in the country after previously top-ranked Alabama lost a 41-38 decision to unranked Texas A&M. The Bulldogs haven't been the nation's No. 1 team since the 2008 preseason poll, and they have never been a unanimous top pick.

The Bulldogs are followed by Iowa, Cincinnati, Oklahoma and Alabama to round out the top five, while Ohio State, Penn State, Michigan, Oregon and Michigan State fill the next five slots.

Iowa moved up to No. 2 after the Hawkeyes outlasted then-No. 4 Penn State, 23-20, at Kinnick Stadium in Iowa City. Iowa has its best ranking since reaching No. 1 in 1985.

Meanwhile, Cincinnati has its highest



SONNY BROCKWAY

ROTATING LINEMEN — Most college teams like to have a set five offensive line starters, but the combination of position changes and injuries has led Ohio State to install an offensive line rotation. Pictured here providing protection for quarterback C.J. Stroud (7) are center Luke Wypler (53), guard Thayer Munford (75) and tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere (78).

ranking ever.

Michigan moved in front of Oregon in this week's poll after a narrow victory at Nebraska, while Michigan State ascended one spot to No. 10, thanks in part to BYU's loss to Boise State. The Cougars had been the previous No. 10 team.

The AFCA coaches' poll had the same

teams in its top 10 with a slightly different order.

Georgia and Iowa are the top two teams, but the coaches had Oklahoma third and Cincinnati fourth. Alabama is fifth and Ohio State is sixth, followed by Michigan at No. 7 and Penn State at No. 8.

Michigan State is ninth according to the coaches with Oregon in the No. 10 position.

Georgia garnered 64 of the 65 first-place votes in the coaches' poll. Iowa got the other one.

Lurking at No. 11 in both polls is Kentucky, a 6-0 team enjoying its best ranking since 2011.

OSU Fills 2024 Slate With Western Michigan

Ohio State recently confirmed it will host Mid-American Conference member Western Michigan at Ohio Stadium on Sept. 21, 2024.

The Broncos fill out the 2024 schedule for the Buckeyes. OSU will kick off the season Aug. 31 against Southern Miss and then play at Washington on Sept. 14. The Big Ten portion of the season begins Sept. 28 against Illinois.

According to a report in The Detroit News, Western Michigan was originally scheduled to play Cincinnati in 2024 but will now play the Buckeyes instead. WMU paid a \$500,000 buyout to Cincinnati and

will receive approximately \$1.8 million for playing Ohio State.

The Buckeyes and Broncos have played only once before. OSU took a 38-12 win against Western Michigan in Columbus in 2015, with P.J. Fleck at the Bronco helm.

Ohio State's football schedules are now set through the 2025 season.

The 2022 season opens Sept. 3 with Notre Dame coming to Ohio Stadium for the first time since 1995. That is followed by home games vs. Arkansas State and Toledo before the Big Ten season opener Sept. 24 at Michigan State.

Conference play kicks off the 2023 season with a Sept. 2 game at Indiana. That is followed by home games vs. San Jose State and Western Kentucky before the Buckeyes travel to South Bend for the first time since 1996 for a Sept. 23 date at Notre Dame.

Ohio State hosts a pair of opponents from Power Five schools to open the 2025 season. The opener is set for Aug. 30 vs. Texas, and Washington comes to town Sept. 13. The Longhorns haven't paid a visit to Columbus since 2005, and the Huskies last played in the Horseshoe in 2003. The other nonconference game on the schedule is a midseason matchup against Connecticut set for Oct. 28.

The Buckeyes begin Big Ten play in 2025 at Indiana on Sept. 20.

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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	2-4, 35-29 win over Memphis
Sept. 25	AKRON	W, 59-7	BTN	2-4, 35-20 win over BGSU
Oct. 2	at Rutgers	W, 52-13	BTN	3-3, 31-13 loss to Michigan State
Oct. 9	MARYLAND	W, 66-17	Fox	4-2, 66-17 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 23	at Indiana*	TBA	TBA	2-3, 24-0 loss to Penn State
Oct. 30	PENN STATE	TBA	TBA	5-1, 23-20 loss to Iowa
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	TBA	3-4, 32-29 loss to Michigan
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	3-2, 20-13 loss to Minnesota
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE	TBA	TBA	6-0, 31-13 win over Maryland
Nov. 27	at Michigan	Noon	Fox	6-0, 32-29 win over Nebraska
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	Fox	

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

Depth Allows Buckeyes To Roll O-Linemen

Just when Ohio State offensive lineman Nicholas Petit-Frere thought he had found a home at right tackle, he was asked this season to move to the left tackle position.

The 6-5, 315-pound junior must have thought someone on the OSU coaching staff was joking. Not only did Petit-Frere help solidify a unit that had helped the Buckeyes rank seventh in the nation in total offense in 2020, but he won second-team All-Big Ten honors from conference coaches. What's more, according to Pro Football Focus, he allowed pressure on just 0.5 percent of Ohio State's total pass attempts, a figure that ranked No. 1 among all offensive tackles on Power Five teams.

Even so, when head coach Ryan Day and offensive line coach Greg Studrawa asked him to move to the left tackle spot – and its added responsibilities protecting the blind side of right-handed quarterback C.J. Stroud – Petit-Frere readily accepted.

"I looked at it as a challenge," Petit-Frere said. "The team needed me to move to left tackle, so I moved to left tackle. That was pretty much it."

It was a part of a complete overhaul for the offensive line in 2021. Along with Petit-Frere moving from right to left tackle, Thayer Munford switched from left tackle to left guard, Paris Johnson went from a tackle position to right guard, 6-8, 360-pound Dawand Jones was inserted into the lineup at right tackle, and redshirt freshman Luke Wypler moved into the starting lineup to replace ailing center Harry Miller.

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. Jones filled in again when Munford appeared to aggravate the injured ankle against Maryland.

And Miller is also on the way back, giving the Buckeyes the possibility of rotating

seven different players along the offensive line. It's something teams typically do not like to do.

"The good news is that we've built some depth there, so we have the ability to roll some guys," Day said. "We always take into consideration the chemistry factor, (and) the offensive line is somewhere 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."

Petit-Frere played nearly flawless football through the first four games after the switch. Then at halftime of the 52-13 win against Rutgers, Studrawa came to him again with another suggestion. In the midst of a blowout victory, would Petit-Frere be interested in a temporary move back to his old spot?

"Coach Stud asked if I wanted to swing back over to right tackle," Petit-Frere said, "and I was just like, 'Sure.' It's another new challenge. I had to go from playing a good amount of games at left tackle and switch back to right, but it was a nice feeling getting a chance to play again with Paris, who is an amazing player. That was fun."

"It's kind of telling about our offensive line as a whole, how talented we are and how we can put anyone in any position at any time."

Williamson Finds New Role In OSU Secondary

In 2020, defensive back Marcus Williamson joined defensive tackle Haskell Garrett, cornerback Sevyn Banks and linebacker Pete Werner as the only four Buckeyes on defense to start in all eight games.

Through this season's first five weeks, Williamson hadn't started a single game for the Buckeyes, and his snap count decreased drastically. The graduate defensive back played 67 snaps for the Ohio State defense and received limited opportunities on special teams.

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, iHeartRadio, Podbean, Spotify, Stitcher and anywhere else that podcasts are found. For those of you that are new to the podcast world, the show is also posted at 10 a.m. every Friday and Monday on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as in the BSB Fan Forum.

Williamson's circumstances were not uncommon for program veterans this season. In recent weeks, Ohio State decided to utilize its talented youth with more consistency. A lack of playing time led some to the transfer portal, including linebackers Dallas Gant and K'Vaughan Pope, but Williamson had no interest in leaving the team.

"It's human nature to have second guesses, second thoughts if things don't go your way," Williamson said. "Fortunately, I was able to just put my head down and work. I think I have too much love for this team to put myself first. I decided to keep working because that's what we do."

While there are other defensive backs who see the field more frequently – Denzel Burke, Bryson Shaw and Ronnie Hickman, among others – Williamson kept a level head, constantly asking himself how he could help his teammates succeed.

"This season hasn't gone how I envisioned for myself," Williamson said. "But I've always considered myself a team player, and sometimes you have to put your ego aside and your distractions aside – peo-

ple in your ear, people in your community back home, whatever it may be – and just put your best foot forward and focus on the team, and that's what I decided to do."

That mind-set helped Williamson in his approach before Ohio State's matchup with Rutgers. He worked hard in practice, pushing his teammates to earn their spots and reminding them of the importance of doing the little things right.

Day noticed his willingness to compete and knew that he would be ready when called upon. And when Williamson collected two tackles and a pass breakup against the Scarlet Knights and then added five stops vs. Maryland, the coach knew he was right.

"Marcus, in this past week, had his best week of preparation," Day said. "He gave himself for the team. His energy level was off the charts. His attitude was off the charts. It's a great example of when you get focused and you dedicate yourself to the team and you don't listen to all the noise

Continued On Page 6

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

how that can affect your performance. Hats off to Marcus.”

Williamson looked within to block out any distractions, which led him to think of how he can best take care of those around him before thinking about what he wants or needs.

“It comes down to humility, taking that servant mind-set,” he said. “I think there’s a lot of power in that. No matter what that guy’s role might be, maybe he makes a play – I explained this to the defensive back room – maybe the buddy next to you makes that play, maybe you thought that was your play to be made. But at the end of the day, you’re only hurting yourself when you try to put yourself above the team. Taking that servant mind-set, that love mind-set, and putting your best foot forward and help the team, that is having huge dividends for what we’re doing here.”

To put others first is challenging, but it is the mark of a great leader. Williamson said he wants to be a role model for those around him by inspiring his teammates to make sacrifices for each other. When the team learns to understand the expectations they have for each other, he thinks Ohio State will take even bigger steps of growth this season.

“It might be human nature to think, ‘I’m the guy,’ but for a lot of guys, it doesn’t go that way,” Williamson said. “Everybody has to find their role, their niche, what they’re good at, and then find their limitations and figure out where you fall in from there.”



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When you understand that role, it allows you to go that much farther to see how far you can get.

“I think what makes this team special is that a lot of guys have that mind-set. It’s all starting to come together.”

Young Moving To Cover Safety

When Ohio State recruited Craig Young, it was his versatility that convinced the Buckeyes to extend a committable offer. As the story goes, Young arrived at an Ohio State recruiting camp in June 2018 as a defensive back when he played for Wayne High School in Fort Wayne, Ind. He impressed scouts, but with a 6-3 frame, Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer saw an athlete who could add weight and asked Young to work out at linebacker and then on the defensive line.

He shone there, too. So much so that Young was reportedly asked to join OSU defensive staffers behind closed doors, where he was officially given the green light and, supposedly, committed to Ohio State.

A little more than three years later, Ohio State has yet to find a position for the nebulous athlete who flashed ability in so many spots but came to Columbus without an established spot on the field. Young slotted into a linebacker role upon his arrival, splitting some time at safety as well but playing primarily behind Pete Werner at the Sam linebacker spot during his early career.

This offseason, though, the Buckeyes made what almost felt like an inevitable move, sliding him into the oft-discussed but not-yet-deployed bullet position that Greg Mattison brought to Ohio State but never got the chance to use. Without three established linebackers and with a shaky pass defense to shore up, Ohio State turned to the safety/linebacker hybrid, placing Young, classmate Ronnie Hickman and redshirt freshman Kourt Williams into the new room.

Early on, Young looked like a natural fit. He played the majority of the bullet snaps in Ohio State’s spring game and was impressive, making several tackles and defending multiple passes to both tight ends and running backs – essentially the exact design for the position. But, when fall camp rolled around, he seemed to have lost ground. Instead, it was Hickman working his way into a starting role after a strong offseason.

Young, again, was left without a role on a defense that spent the first five weeks of the season desperately searching for contributors on what was a definitely disheveled defense. Now, as Hickman has cemented himself, and as the Buckeyes shift into more two-high looks to help solidify the passing



SONNY BROCKWAY

MINUS SEVEN — Ohio State recently announced it was trimming seven yards off TreVeyon Henderson’s freshman rushing record accomplished against Tulsa. One of the carries originally credited to Henderson was actually a 7-yard run by Master Teague, dropping Henderson’s total for the game from 277 to 270 yards.

defense, Young is on the move once more.

Day told media members Oct. 5 that Young and Hickman no longer play the same position, and while he did not elaborate on Young’s new spot in full, the third-year sophomore was lining up behind starter Cameron Martinez at the cover safety spot on Oct. 2 against Rutgers.

“We’re moving Craig into a little bit of a different role there, and so he’s kind of finding his way in that new role,” Day said. “We’re trying to find a way for us to get them both on the field because they’re both very talented.”

The cover safety spot, which was vacated by Lathan Ransom as he moved into more of a strong safety role to help cover for Bryson Shaw after Josh Proctor’s season-ending injury against Oregon, is a bit of a hybrid. It serves, in one-high looks, es-

entially as a slot corner, similar to the role that Shaun Wade filled under Jeff Hafley’s guidance in 2019.

But when the Buckeyes shift into a two-high look, it too can shift, sometimes dropping into a deep half of the field to keep Hickman comfortably in the box, rather than moving him into the deep half.

For the 6-3, 223-pound Young, it’s admittedly a bit of a strange fit, especially when comparing his body type to those of Ransom and Martinez. But it’s a role that Ohio State thinks he can fill, even if it’s not one that he looks entirely comfortable in yet.

Still, in the new spot against Maryland, Young had a career game, recording a pair of interceptions – one for a touchdown – and adding two solo tackles.

“I think what’s special about Craig is he’s such a versatile athlete,” Williamson said. “He’s probably the biggest DB in the room, but he moves like he’s a smaller guy. And so just having that versatility in him – his physicality, his foot speed, his hips, his long speed – Craig is a guy that can be used in a lot of roles, and we’re really glad to have him.”

Henderson Record-Setting Performance Pared By 7

Ohio State recently announced that university stat-keepers were off a bit while tracking TreVeyon Henderson’s record-setting rushing performance against Tulsa.

Originally credited with 277 yards on 24



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No Buckeye Sports Bulletin Week Of Oct. 17

There will be no print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin the week of Oct. 17 since the Ohio State football team has no game scheduled Oct. 16. The next issue of BSB will be mailed Oct. 26, following the game at Indiana. The Ohio State sports scene moves on, game or not, and there is no reason to miss any of the action, including any recruiting news, with the BSB staff posting stories daily.

Watch for staff predictions before each game, including the game with the Hoosiers, 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.

In addition to daily posts, we also offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Also, staff members man the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day.

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

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

Readers with delivery problems might also consider upgrading their existing subscriptions to first-class mail in an envelope. Subscribers can upgrade to first class through the end of the football regular season for \$16 and through the traditional recruiting season for \$26. Call (614) 486-2202 to order immediately by credit card or send your check or credit card information to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212.

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carries, Henderson's official line now shows 23 carries for 270 yards – still a single-game program record for an OSU freshman.

Four days before the Rutgers game on Oct. 2, buried on the third page of the weekly game notes produced by the university's sports information office, was the admission that one of Master Teague's runs against Tulsa was improperly credited to Henderson.

"Ooops," the note read. "A 7-yard carry early in the Tulsa game was incorrectly credited to TreVeyon Henderson, but the carry was actually a gain of 7 for Master Teague. TreVeyon's freshman rushing record is still the record. It is officially 270 yards, though."

Stroud Wins Third B1G Freshman Award

An Ohio State player won Big Ten Freshman of the Week for the fifth consecutive week. C.J. Stroud claimed the honor for the third time this season and the first time since week two.

Stroud went 17 of 23 passing for 330 yards and a career-high five touchdowns during Ohio State's 52-13 victory against Rutgers on Oct. 2. His 266.17 passer efficiency was the third highest from any quarterback this season.

Elsewhere, Illinois running back Chase Brown earned Offensive Player of the Week honors for his 257-yard rushing performance during a 24-14 win against Char-

lotte. It was the third-highest single-game total of the season in the Big Ten, behind Henderson's 270 yards against Tulsa and Michigan State's Kenneth Walker, who totaled 264 against Northwestern.

Michigan linebacker David Ojabo and Nebraska linebacker Jojo Domann were named co-Defensive Players of the Week. Ojabo had 2½ sacks and seven tackles in a win against Wisconsin, while Domann notched two sacks and nine tackles in a win over Northwestern.

Minnesota punter Mark Crawford and Penn State kicker Jordan Stout were named co-Special Teams Players of the Week.

Champions List Rises To 24 Against Rutgers

The Ohio State coaching staff named a total of 24 players – 12 on offense, seven on defense, two on special teams and three on scout team – as champions following the win against Rutgers.

Stroud and Hickman won offensive and defensive player of the week honors, while cornerback Demario McCall and linebacker Cade Kacherski claimed the same honor for special teams.

In addition to those players, offensive linemen Wypler, Munford, Petit-Frere and Matthew Jones earned champions distinction along with running backs Teague, Marcus Crowley and Henderson, tight ends Jeremy Ruckert and Mitch Rossi, and receivers

Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave.

Receiving the champion grade on defense were linemen Zach Harrison and Ty-leik Williams, linebacker Cody Simon, and DBs Burke, Shaw and Williamson.

The final group of players who graded out as champions were scout-teamers Ja-

kob James, Cayden Saunders and Jackson Kuwatch.

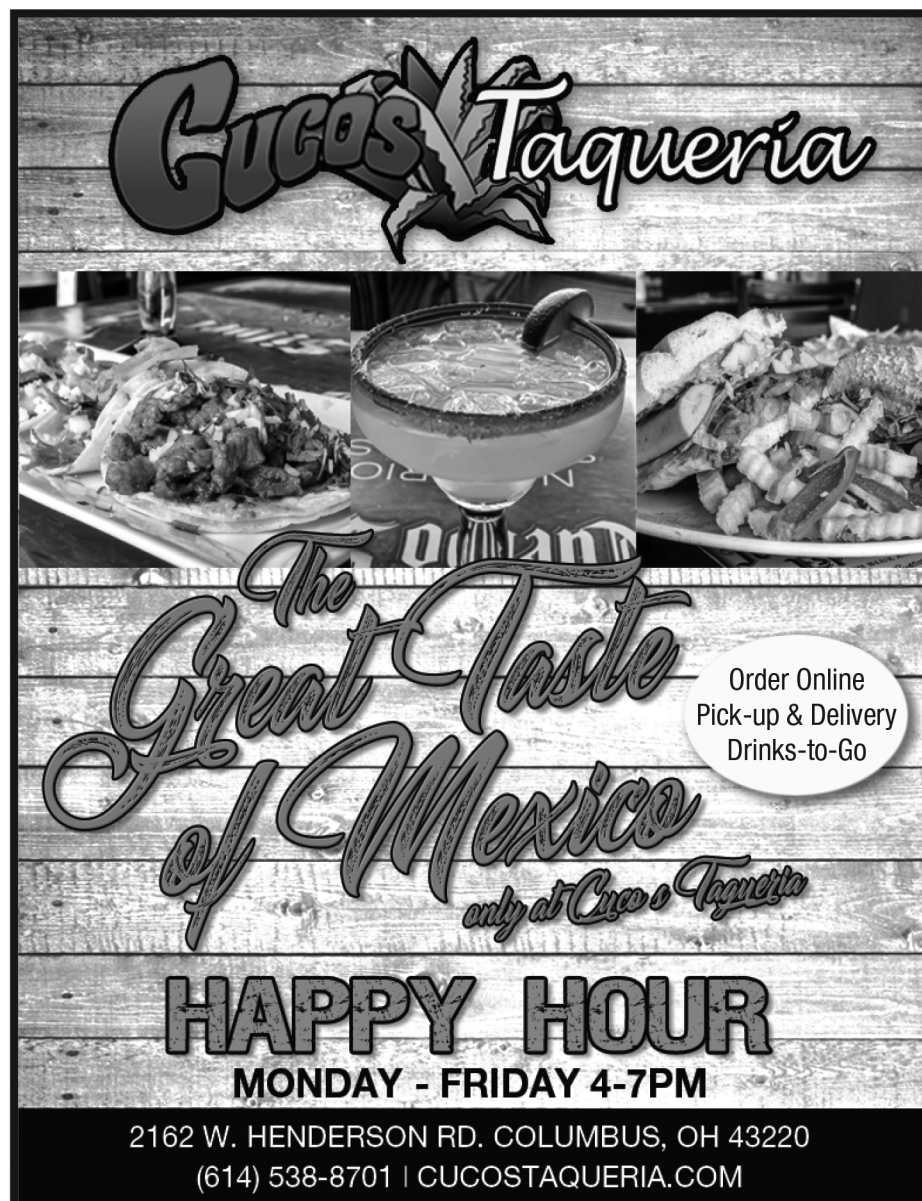
Big Ten Names Borchers Chief Medical Officer

The Big Ten Conference announced Oct. 7 that through the U.S. Council for Athletes' Health, Dr. James Borchers had been named the conference's first-ever Chief Medical Officer. Borchers most recently served as the head team physician for The Ohio State University athletics department and played for the Ohio State football team in the early 1990s.

In his new role, Borchers will serve as a consultant to all 14 Big Ten member institutions on matters of student-athlete health and safety and will lead all conference sports medicine programming and initiatives – including policy development, research, educational opportunities, and public outreach. Borchers will also provide advice and guidance to Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren, the Council of Presidents and Chancellors, athletics directors, faculty athletic representatives, senior woman administrators, team physicians, athletic trainers, coaches and the Mental Health and Wellness Cabinet.

"The physical and mental well-being of our student-athletes is our top priority," Warren said. "The addition of Dr. Borchers will further serve and protect the health and safety of our nearly 10,000 student-athletes. It will also ensure the conference is on the

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cutting edge of the latest medical advances and that we maintain strong interconnectivity to the best and brightest professionals in the medical community.”

Borchers will work closely with all key conference constituents to develop industry-leading practices and procedures. He also will serve as a conference spokesperson to effectively communicate health and medical matters to external stakeholders.

“It is an honor to be named chief medical officer for the Big Ten Conference, which has long been a leader in collegiate athletics,” Borchers said. “This will be a tremendous opportunity to collaborate with the talented medical professionals within the conference and across all levels of college and professional sports as we continue to provide a best-in-class environment of health, safety and wellness for our nearly 10,000 student-athletes.”

“Dr. Borchers has many years of experience in collegiate athletics as a student-athlete and as a medical professional,” said Dr. Chris Kratochvil, chair of the Big Ten Conference Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases. “He is very well-connected with trusted relationships within the medical community and is positioned for success as the chief medical officer of the Big Ten Conference.”

Fields Named Bears Starting Quarterback

Chicago Bears head coach Matt Nagy announced at a Oct. 6 news conference that former Ohio State quarterback and first-round pick Justin Fields would be the team’s starting quarterback moving forward. That was after Fields earned starts against Cleveland on Sept. 26 and Detroit on Oct. 3 in place of veteran Andy Dalton, who was dealing with an injury.

“(Justin has) done everything to show us that he’s ready for this opportunity,” Nagy said. “He’s grown to this point. He’s earned it. He’s worked hard, and now he has this opportunity.”

Fields had a difficult start to his career as the starter against the Browns, a game in which he was sacked nine times for minus-67 yards and completed just 6 of 20 passes for 68 yards. Despite that slow start, Day gave Fields a vote of confidence.

“Not a great start,” the OSU head coach said, “but there’s a lot of young quarterbacks that haven’t had great starts. You think about Peyton Manning’s rookie season and everything he went through there. The hardest thing in that league is just pulling yourself off the canvas and continuing to work through. (Justin) and I talked about that after the Northwestern game (last year). When you go to the NFL, you’re going to have several days like this – days you’ll wake up and you have to go figure it out again.

“I think what survives in that league is the resilience of young quarterbacks that identify what went wrong and get better and fix it. One thing I know about him is that he’s competitively tough. He’ll fix the problems and he’ll be back.”

Fields earned his first career win Oct. 3 against the Detroit Lions. He completed 11 of 17 attempts for 209 yards with an interception.

Starting against the Raiders on Oct. 10,



FILE PHOTO

BEARS STARTER — Former OSU quarterback Justin Fields has been named the starter moving forward for the Chicago Bears, the team that selected him in the first round of the 2021 NFL draft. Fields got the nod after a Bears victory in his third start, a 20-9 win Oct. 10 at Las Vegas against the Raiders.

Fields had a 12-for-20 performance worth 111 yards and his first career touchdown pass in a 20-9 win/loss in Las Vegas.

Meyer Apologizes After Being Caught On Video

Former Ohio State and current Jacksonville Jaguars head coach Urban Meyer spent a good portion of early October apologizing to his Jaguars team, his family and Jacksonville owner Shad Khan after a viral video surfaced Oct. 2 that showed a young woman dancing close to his lap at his restaurant in Columbus, Ohio.

Meyer apologized in an Oct. 4 team meeting and also stated multiple times it was stupid to put himself in such a compromising position Oct. 1, one day after the Jaguars lost a 24-21 decision at Cincinnati.

“I just apologized to the team and staff for being a distraction,” Meyer told reporters Oct. 4. “Just stupid, and so I explained everything that happened and owned it. Just stupid. I should not have put myself in that kind of position.”

Meyer did not fly back to Jacksonville with the team after the loss to the Bengals, instead choosing to visit his grandchildren in Columbus. Meyer said he and family members went to the Dublin restaurant that bears his name – Urban Meyer’s Pint House – on the evening of Oct. 1 and then moved on to Urban Meyer’s Chop House, located in the Short North district of Columbus. Meyer said people at a nearby event asked to take photos with him, and he admitted he should have left when people tried to get him to dance with them.

“There was a big group next (to) our restaurant and they wanted me to come over and take pictures, and I did,” Meyer

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

said. “They were trying to pull me out on the dance floor, screwing around, and I should have left.”

Meyer said his family was understandably upset after the nine-second video showing the coach sitting at the bar while the young woman danced close to his lap was posted to social media on Oct. 2 and quickly went viral.

Roughly an hour after Meyer’s Oct. 4 news conference, another video emerged on social media that appeared to show Meyer touching a woman’s bottom while he was sitting at the bar. The woman appeared to be the same as in the first viral video.

Meyer said his players and owner Shad Khan were receptive to his apology.

Others were not so sure. According to NFL Network’s Michael Silver, the apologies only went to “position groups individually,” and did not go over well to a “highly skeptical” audience.

“We looked at him like, WTF?” an unnamed player told Silver. “Right when he left, everyone started dying laughing. And he knew it. It’s bad. I don’t know how he’s going to function.”

Meanwhile, Khan issued a statement Oct.

u5 that termed Meyer’s behavior inexcusable.

“I have addressed this matter with Urban. Specifics of our conversation will be held in confidence,” Khan said. “What I will say is his conduct last weekend was inexcusable. I appreciate Urban’s remorse, which I believe is sincere.

“Now, he must regain our trust and respect. That will require a personal commitment from Urban to everyone who supports, represents or plays for our team. I am confident he will deliver.”

Meyer is in his first year with the Jaguars after leading Florida and Ohio State to three national college football championships. The slogan he has chosen for the rebuild of one of the league’s worst franchises is “Own it,” and he admitted that he’s not sure how this incident will impact his leadership with the team.

“I am concerned about that,” Meyer said. “I have a very good relationship with our players. I’ve dealt with this, not on the other side but with staff members and with other things, and I’ve dealt with it.”

The incident is the latest controversy involving Meyer since he was hired in January.

In February, Meyer hired former Iowa

strength coach Chris Doyle, who was accused of making racist remarks as well as belittling and bullying players while with the Hawkeyes. Doyle resigned a day later after the organization was criticized for the hire.

Meyer also had No. 1 overall pick Trevor Lawrence alternate days with the first-team offense with Gardner Minshew to earn the starting quarterback job. Meyer eventually announced Lawrence as the starter Aug. 25, and the team traded Minshew to the Philadelphia Eagles three days later. Minshew has yet to be active on game day this season.

The Jaguars lost the season opener to a Houston Texans team that many regarded as the worst in the NFL. Jacksonville appeared unprepared, had several illegal-formation penalties and gave their best offensive player – running back James Robinson – just five carries in the game.

The team played well against Cincinnati and had a 14-0 lead at halftime. The lead could have been bigger, but Meyer called for a fourth-and-1 quarterback run on the goal line that failed, and the Bengals outscored the Jaguars by a 24-7 margin in the second half to win the game.

Following a 37-19 loss to the Tennessee Titans on Oct. 10, the Jaguars were 0-5 and had lost 20 consecutive games dating to a victory against the Indianapolis Colts in the 2020 season opener. The Jaguars have the second-longest losing streak in NFL history. Tampa Bay lost 26 consecutive games during the 1976-77 seasons.

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Chase Brown, Wyatt Crosher, Patrick Mayhorn and Mark Rea contributed to this report. For up-to-the-minute Ohio State coverage, be sure to check out BSB online at BuckeyeSports.com and on Twitter @Buckeye_Sports.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago – 1981

“I thought Wisconsin played well,” Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce said after the Badgers had put a 24-21 notch in his Buckeyes’ loss column. “They really did an outstanding job. They were physical.

“For the second week in a row, you just can’t make major mistakes in the kicking game, and that’s very costly. I thought Ohio State blocked well, tackled and played good defense. It was a good football game. But a few mistakes were very costly.”

It was a special teams disaster that helped to down the Buckeyes – a fumbled punt right before the end of the first half that led to a Wisconsin touchdown. Another fumble on the following possession, this time on an option play, led to a late Wisconsin field goal, flipping a 14-6 lead with 1:34 to play in the half into a 17-14 deficit entering the locker room.

“I don’t have any idea (where the fumbles came from),” Bruce said. “I guess you do that every once in a while. It’s not what you’d like to do.”

35 Years Ago – 1986

Legendary OSU head coach Woody Hayes made a vow after a 32-10 loss to Indiana in 1951 that the Buckeyes would never again lose to the Hoosiers.

In the 31 meetings after, Woody’s word was still gospel.

Ohio State made it 30 wins and one tie since that 1951 contest when it nipped the Hoosiers by a 24-22 final score in front of 51,641 Memorial Stadium fans Oct. 11 in Bloomington.

“Well, I guess we ran into a hornet’s nest,” said Bruce after his team survived a late touchdown and a last-minute scare by Indiana to post its fourth straight victory and up its Big Ten record to 2-0.

“We knew coming over here that they were going to be ready,” Bruce said. “It was their homecoming game, and they were going to be fired up.”

The Hoosiers certainly were, but Ohio State matched it, with linebacker Chris Spielman stepping in front of a Dave Kramme pass and intercepting it with two seconds remaining in the game to secure the victory.

30 Years Ago – 1991

Playing Northwestern in Cleveland Stadium might not have qualified as a home game on Ohio State’s 1991 football schedule, but for several members of the Buckeyes, it was more of a home game than playing in Ohio Stadium.

Nine members of the OSU team who made the 150-mile trip up Interstate-71 to help the Buckeyes defeat Northwestern, 34-3, on Oct. 19 were going home, natives of the Greater Cleveland Area.

It wasn’t a homecoming for Tennessee native head coach John Cooper, but it was still special for OSU’s head man.

“As a kid, I used to listen (on radio) to the Cleveland Indiana,” Cooper said. “I grew up listening to players like Bob Feller, Early Winn, Mike Garcia, Jim Hegan, Larry Doby, Luke Easter, Lou Boudreau and all the great Cleveland baseball teams.

“And it was the same way with the Cleveland Browns football – Jimmy Brown, John Wooten and Otto Graham. There is a lot of tradition up here, and I really felt good about getting the opportunity to come up here and see our football team play in Cleveland.”

25 Years Ago – 1996

Despite three turnovers and losses in the trenches all game, the second-ranked Buckeyes rallied to topple upset-minded Wisconsin, 17-14.

“I think we dodged a bullet today,” said Cooper, whose team improved to 5-0 overall and 2-0 in Big Ten play with the win. “Sometimes you’ve got to win like that.

“Maybe the mark of a good football team is to win when you don’t play your best ballgame, but I’m disappointed with the way we played today.”

A 48-yard touchdown pass from Joe Germaine to Dimitrios Stanley sealed the win for the Buckeyes in the fourth quarter, though the pass had little to do with Germaine, according to the signal-caller.

“It was just a little short hitch pattern and they were playing off him,” Germaine said. “We were just trying to get the first down, but he made a great play and scored.”

20 Years Ago – 2001

Jim Stone had seen a lot in his 20 years as the Ohio State women’s volleyball coach, but even he admitted to some surprise at his team’s start in 2001.

The Buckeyes were ranked 10th in the nation and sitting on a 15-1 record, including 7-1 in the Big Ten, with the only loss coming at Wisconsin on Oct. 6. The Badgers were ranked sixth at the time.

OSU was getting it done with a united and top-heavy team, leaning heavily on its best players with a seven-player rotation.

“Our starters are very good, and barring any sort of catastrophe, we’re going to go with them,” Stone said. “It’s not optimum, but it’s what we have.”

The Buckeyes were finding their rhythm off the floor, too.

“We hang out away from practice, and we all get along great,” OSU’s Anne Botica said. “These guys are all my best friends, and I think that helps when we get to practice and have games. We know how each other thinks and where everyone is going to be.”

15 Years Ago – 2006

The new grass surface installed in Ohio Stadium the previous week got its first public inspection and physical test Oct. 7 when Ohio State took on Bowling Green.

While the color was a much healthier green, the seams between the strips of sod were easily visible, and the players said they could feel them as they were running on it as well.

“The sideline was extraordinary,” head coach Jim Tressel said. “It was pretty. I thought the color was quite nice.”

He suggested that the players would have a better perspective, though.

“I thought the field was a lot more durable,” defensive lineman Quinn Pitcock said. “In past games, I was slipping and falling, tearing it up. I think with the sod being newly laid down, I think it’s going to take some time to even it out, but other than that, I’m happy with the field so far.”

10 Years Ago – 2011

To say the Ohio State football program had seen better weeks would have been an understatement.

On the heels of more bad news from the NCAA – further suspensions for running back Dan “Boom” Herron and receiver DeV-

er Posey – the Buckeyes suffered an epic second-half collapse Oct. 8 during their first-ever trip to Nebraska.

OSU lost freshman quarterback Braxton Miller to an ankle injury late in the third quarter and then watched helplessly as the Cornhuskers roared back from a 21-point deficit to snatch away a 34-27 victory in front of 85,426 rain-soaked fans at Memorial Stadium.

“I don’t know that I’ve ever been involved in one like that,” OSU head coach Luke Fickell said quietly. “I’m sure there are a lot of lessons out there. We just have to figure out what they are and learn to grow from them.

“Football is a game of momentum, and when the momentum shifts the other way, you’ve got to make a play. You’ve got to have something good go your way, and we just didn’t do it.”

Five Years Ago – 2016

For the second week in a row, the Ohio State football team wasn’t at its best. But for the sixth straight game to begin the 2016 season, the Buckeyes found a way to win.

Facing No. 8 Wisconsin, second-ranked Ohio State found itself in an early hole – down 10-0 in the first quarter and trailing 16-6 at halftime.

After the break, though, something clicked into gear. The Ohio State defense buckled down, and the offense – led by junior quarterback J.T. Barrett – came up with big plays when it had to on the road at Camp Randall Stadium on Oct. 15.

Eventually, the turnaround on the field led to a turnaround on the scoreboard, and the Buckeyes completed the comeback win with a 30-23 overtime victory.

The ability of his team to play poorly yet still make the plays necessary to beat a top-10 foe left head coach Urban Meyer gushing after the game. When he sat down for his postgame press conference, the first word out of his mouth was a simple, “Wow.”

“I’m very proud of our guys, and when I say that, I mean like really proud,” Meyer said after the game. “We did not play well in certain areas, but man, did they play hard.”

One Year Ago – 2020

Quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis wasn’t ready to name an official backup quarterback with the start of the pandemic-postponed 2020 season just a little more than a week away on Oct. 13.

“I think that’s something that we’d evaluate,” Dennis said. “Coach Day, myself, Coach (Kevin) Wilson, we’d all go in and we’d talk about it, but let’s just hope that we get to keep Justin Fields.”

Dennis did speak positively about all three quarterbacks – Gunnar Hoak, Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud – and specifically of the growth that the freshmen had in the understanding of the playbook since their arrival in January.

“Jack and C.J., they’re just pedal to the metal, trying to learn everything they can and just soak it in, and they’re both doing an unbelievable job,” Dennis said. “They’re both doing really well. They both have good days and they both have bad days, but those guys are grinders. They’re both extremely talented. They’re both really diving in, want to know the offense, and in our reality, they have a great guy to look up to in Justin Fields.

“So they know (if they aren’t preparing as hard as Fields) they truly can’t be where he is in the future. Justin is a great example, and those guys are trying to do everything he does.”

QB Stroud Electric As He Hits His Stride

Continued From Page 1

grown, just as the Buckeyes have shown on the field.

"I think he is executing at a fairly high level," Day said. "He's still got a long way to go and keep building, but you can see it in his preparation, which has been excellent. He is seeing the field well, his timing has been right ... he's making good decisions. That's allowing us to be more efficient. I've been very encouraged with what I've seen the last two weeks.

"Early on, it was hard to tell because everything was so new. The more he's playing, the more reps he's getting, the better he's playing. But he can't ride the roller coaster. He's going to have good plays and bad plays. He knows that and he knows he has to play through both."

In the two games since Stroud's return from his brief injury sabbatical, the good plays have far outnumbered the bad for the California native, who entered the season as easily the least experienced quarterback to

ever suit up as a starter in Day's offense.

Stroud was 41-of-56 passing (73.2 percent) for 736 yards and 10 touchdowns to zero interceptions in those two contests. On ESPN's QBR stat, which rates quarterbacks on a 1-100 scale, Stroud averaged a 73.2 score after his first three games, seeing a decrease in each matchup. In his last two games? Stroud has an average QBR of 98.9 – almost as perfect as a quarterback can get.

He credits an increased confidence in his own ability and in his comfort within the offense for the jump.

"I'm just getting more comfortable, being myself and relaxing back there," Stroud said. "My teammates have really helped me. My offensive line does a great job of keeping the pocket clean, receivers do a great job of creating separation, tight ends do a great job with both, running backs run the ball well. I just have to do my job and my part, and I feel like we're starting to roll. We're finally getting used to how each other play.

"We have a lot more work to do, though.

We're putting up the numbers and doing the right things and it just comes back to practice. We practice harder than anybody. We grind and it just feels good to have it pay off. I think we can be the best offense in the country if we keep on the same momentum and keep practicing well."

Against the Terrapins, Ohio State again flashed the kind of lethal-from-anywhere passing attack that it had hoped to be able to tout when it entered the season with a pair of potential first-round receivers in Olave and Garrett Wilson, a slot receiver in Jaxon Smith-Njigba who is well on his way to his star teammates' level, one of the nation's top tight ends in Jeremy Ruckert, a top-tier pass-catching running back in TreVeyon Henderson and a veteran offensive line. Stroud's passes found the end zone in just about every possible way.

To open the scoring for the Buckeyes, he connected with Wilson from just 2 yards out on fourth-and-goal, capping a 17-play drive, Ohio State's longest since 2015.

Stroud began the second quarter with a 36-yard strike to a wide-open Olave on that skinny post that he's found much success with, putting the senior receiver in sole possession of the No. 3 all-time receiving touchdowns spot in the Ohio State record books with 29, trailing only Devin Smith (30) and David Boston (34). With six regular-season games remaining and likely at least two postseason matchups, Ohio State can likely begin the preparations for crowning a new touchdown receiving king.

Less than six minutes later, Ohio State involved Henderson in the passing attack – one of four receptions for the suddenly viable receiver out of the backfield – with a wheel route attached to a Y-Cross play-action look that saw Maryland leave the freshman tailback completely unaccounted for on his way to a 26-yard score.

Stroud opened the second half the same way he did the first, connecting with Wilson, this time from 26 yards out, before finding Olave again on a great snag for the senior, closing the day for both players on a high note in a game filled with high notes. The Buckeyes finished just short of a 100-yard receiving trifecta, but Olave's 120 receiving yards, Smith-Njigba's 103, Wilson's 84 and even the 67 for Henderson served as a strong reminder of the sheer amount of weaponry these Buckeyes have in their arsenal.

"I think that's the great thing about our passing game," Stroud said. "On every play, everybody has a route that they can turn into a big play. It's fun getting everybody the ball, everybody is happy, nobody is trying to mean mug you. No one does that on our team, but it wouldn't be a good feeling. I'm pleased that all of my receivers ate today.

"I just take what the defense gives me. If it's there, I'll rip it, but I just have to be smart with the football. My game has never changed. I've never felt like the game sped up. The game is the game. It's just about how you can be more comfortable and relaxed out there and have your coaches lean on and trust you. That was a biggest thing for me these past few weeks."

Curiously absent from that balanced attack, at least in the first half, was the running game. Maryland sold out to bottle up Henderson on the ground during the first

30 minutes and put up an admirable effort, but Ohio State was able to quickly turn into a pseudo-air raid team, spreading the Terrapins defense out before it was able to find more room on the ground in the final 30 minutes.

Despite a slow start, Henderson still gained 102 yards and scored a pair of rushing touchdowns on 16 carries. His 6.4 yards per carry, the lowest of his career, would still be good for second on the entire team among rushers with more than one carry in the season stats.

"That's the thing about being a great offense – you can't be one-dimensional," Stroud said. "We have really good ways to run or throw the ball. If they want to stop the run, we have things in the passing game that we can work. If they want to stop the pass, we can run the ball. The run game opens up the pass game and vice versa. It's just all about balance, and I think the better we can keep rolling, the better balance we'll have."

Entering an off week, with an under-achieving Indiana team on deck before what could be a top-10 matchup against Penn State, Ohio State's offense has flashed two straight looks at what could be a historically great group. The next step, as Olave said, is to build consistency atop that foundation.

"That's the type of offense we have," Olave said. "We have a lot of talent on that side of the ball, and when everything is going, we're unstoppable. When we get the passing game going early, it opens it up for the run game and we just keep building on that."

Historically Speaking

Ohio State has been more successful against new additions to the Big Ten than any other program in the league. Since 2011, when the conference added Nebraska from the Big 12, and then again in 2014 when it picked up Rutgers and Maryland, the Buckeyes are now a near-perfect 21-1 against the expansion squads.

The lone loss during that span came in 2011 with Ohio State's first matchup against the Cornhuskers. Led by freshman quarterback Braxton Miller, the Buckeyes traveled into Lincoln hoping to upset the No. 14 Cornhuskers. Miller buoyed Ohio State's offense with his ability as a runner and led the Buckeyes to a 27-6 lead in the third quarter, but he suffered a leg injury on a scramble and had to leave the game with just under 20 minutes to play, his squad still nursing a 14-point lead.

In his stead, game-one starter Joe Bauserman returned to the field and went just 1-of-10 passing for 13 yards.

After three straight punts, a Bauserman interception and another three-and-out capped by a punt, Nebraska stormed all the way back, claiming a 34-27 lead with just over five minutes left that it would not relinquish.

Without Miller at the helm, Ohio State ran 18 plays, gained 49 yards and surrendered 21 points in just over one quarter of football.



TreVeyon Henderson



SONNY BROCKWAY

BETTER AND BETTER — OSU quarterback C.J. Stroud threw for 406 yards and five touchdowns during his team's 66-17 drubbing of Maryland. In his last two games, the redshirt freshman has connected on 73.2 percent of his pass attempts for 736 yards, 10 touchdowns and no interceptions.

"I don't know that I've ever been involved in one like that," OSU interim head coach Luke Fickell said after the game. "I'm sure there are a lot of lessons out there. We just have to figure out what they are and learn to grow from them."

"Football is a game of momentum, and when the momentum shifts the other way, you've got to make a play. You've got to have something good go your way, and we just didn't do it."

Ohio State's next 21 excursions would not be quite so excruciating. With a fully healthy Miller a year later, the Buckeyes rattled off a 28-point second quarter on their way to a dominant 63-38 victory against No. 21 Nebraska. The Cornhuskers wouldn't match up again with Ohio State until 2016, the first of a pair of laughers under head coach Mike Riley – 62-3 in 2016 and 56-14 in 2017.

Scott Frost tried to level the series during his first year in town, coming up just short of an upset in 2018 before falling, 36-31, but he's been unable to find any traction against Day. Ohio State claimed the 2019 and 2020 matchups easily, winning by respective 48-7 and 52-17 margins.

The East Coast additions are without any wins on which to hang their hats and have just one legitimate bid at an upset against the Buckeyes since 2014. Ohio State easily handled both squads during their first seasons of Big Ten play, dismantling Maryland, 52-24, in College Park on Oct. 4 before returning home to do the same to Rutgers, taking a 56-17 win the following week.

The meetings from 2015 through 2017 were no different. Ohio State toppled Rutgers by an average winning margin of 51 points and allowed just one touchdown in three matchups as the Scarlet Knights sifted through the end of the Kyle Flood era and into the disastrous Chris Ash tenure. Ash's teams scored just three total points against the Buckeyes, hitting a field goal to cut the deficit to 39 in what would become a 52-3 victory for Ohio State in 2018.

Maryland had slightly more luck during that stretch, though not by much. Under the guidance of Locksley, who was serving as the interim head coach at the time, the Terps managed 28 points in Columbus but surrendered 49 as Ohio State improved to 6-0 in 2015. His replacement, D.J. Durkin, didn't fare well against his former boss Urban Meyer, falling 62-3 and 62-14 in back-to-back seasons.

It wasn't until the Terrapins turned to another interim coach – Matt Canada in 2018 – that it seriously challenged Ohio State. The Buckeyes came to town with one of the nation's strongest offenses but a defense that had been badly wounded in a 49-20 loss to Purdue less than a month prior. A pair of get-right games against Michigan State and Nebraska did little to get the Buckeyes untracked, and Canada's motion-heavy attack caught Ohio State's defense sleeping on several occasions.

Maryland rattled off a pair of breakaway touchdown runs on its first two drives of the game and led by as much as 14 points early in the second half after a pick-six to open the third quarter, but Ohio State rallied behind Dwayne Haskins and its offense, rattling off 28 second-half points and knotting the game at 45 with a late touchdown pass to Binjimen Victor to send the game to overtime.

There, Ohio State struck first and survived the Maryland upset bid by mere inches



FILE PHOTO

LONE SLIP-UP — Ohio State has been extremely successful against new additions to the Big Ten, fashioning a 21-1 record since 2011 against the likes of Nebraska, Rutgers and Maryland. The lone blemish during that stretch was a 34-27 loss at Nebraska in 2011 under interim head coach Luke Fickell (middle).

when, after a Terps touchdown in response, Canada dialed up a two-point try that saw quarterback Tyrrell Pigrome narrowly miss an open receiver in the end zone.

"You know, I thought we broke the rock a little bit the last couple of weeks with the limitation on big plays," Meyer said. "Look against Michigan State (a 26-6 OSU win), we gave up other than the (long) quarterback run, I think 18 or 20 yards rushing for the whole day. Alarming is the right word, but we won and let's go back to work and get ready for the next game."

"It's the players and coaches together. If it's a missed tackle, then we're not teaching tackling enough. If it's a scheme issue, then it's a coaching issue. I can't give you the answer right now. It's very alarming."

The most recent affairs, though, were nowhere near as spicy. Ohio State shredded the two in succession in 2019, beating Rutgers, 56-21, and Maryland, 73-14.

The Buckeyes and Terrapins didn't play in 2020, but Ohio State did take care of business against the Scarlet Knights in Greg Schiano's first season back in Piscataway, 49-27.

If that history didn't give Maryland enough to work against, Ohio State's recent history in Big Ten home openers all but completely closed the door on an upset before kicker Noah Ruggles opened the 2021 rendition.

Since the turn of the millennium, the Buckeyes are now 20-2 in Big Ten home openers, with an average margin of victory of more than four scores, 42.0 to 13.4. It's been a decade since Ohio State's last loss in such a matchup, which came in 2011 against Michigan State, a 10-7 loss in Miller's second career start. The only such loss of the Jim Tressel era came in 2004 to No. 15 Wisconsin, 24-13, while Meyer had a perfect record in Big Ten home openers as does Day.

In those 20 wins, the Buckeyes have topped six ranked squads – No. 14 Northwestern in 2001 (38-20), No. 24 Iowa in 2005

(31-6), No. 24 Penn State a year later (28-6), No. 21 Nebraska in the aforementioned 2012 beatdown, No. 23 Wisconsin in 2013 (31-24) and No. 25 Michigan State in 2019 (34-10). Ohio State has opened its home

conference slate against the Terrapins three times now – 2015, 2017 and 2021.

And as a capper? The contest served as Ohio State's 99th homecoming game. In the previous 98, the Buckeyes were 74-19-5.

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Defense, Coombs Rise From Ashes Of Oregon Loss

Following the aftermath of a mistake-riddled Sept. 11 performance against Oregon, the odds of the Ohio State defense establishing a program record – at least one of which the unit would have been proud – were fairly astronomical. Likewise, about the only way Kerry Coombs was going to get a game ball was to go to his neighborhood sporting goods store and buy one.

Yet, just two days shy of a month later, the Buckeyes celebrated a fourth straight game during which they returned an interception for a touchdown – something that had never before happened in the 132-season history of the program – while head coach Ryan Day presented the game ball to Coombs, his beleaguered defensive coordinator who had his gameday play-calling duties stripped after the loss to Oregon.

Maryland was no offensive slouch by any means. Despite turning the ball over seven times against a nasty Iowa defense the week before, the Terrapins were still ranked 13th in the nation in pass offense and 23rd in total yardage. But while the Buckeyes yielded some chunk plays throughout the game, the defensive unit seemed much more in tune with one another.

As a result, Maryland was limited to 335 total yards, including a season-low 56 on the ground. Toss out a 30-yard gain by running back Challen Faamalau in the second quarter, and the Terrapins ran for only 26 yards on their other 35 attempts, an average of 0.7 yards per attempt.

Then, sophomore linebacker Craig Young put a ribbon around the performance by returning a fourth-quarter interception 70 yards for a touchdown.

The contrast between the hand-wringing after the Oregon game and the high-fiving that followed the Maryland game was stark.

“I see confidence out there,” Day said when asked what was different from the Ohio State defense of just a month ago. “I see a defensive staff that is working together. Kerry Coombs got the game ball today

GAME NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

because of everything that he’s been through the last couple of weeks. He just continues to show up every day, and he’s a huge part of the defense. We reconstructed a few things, and now we’ve got a little rhythm going.”

Coombs was squarely in the crosshairs after his defense surrendered 505 yards during the loss to the Ducks, who used the same basic formation to score three touchdowns. After the game, the hyperactive Coombs was relieved of his defensive play-calling duties in favor of soft-spoken secondary coach Matt Barnes.

The success of any changes was not readily apparent because the Buckeyes gave up 501 yards of offense to Tulsa the following week. But there were some subtleties, including a few new alignments as well as a simplification of assignments. That 41-20 victory also kicked off the streak of pick-sixes when redshirt freshman cornerback Cameron Martinez returned his first career interception 61 yards for a touchdown.

In subsequent weeks, sophomore safety Ronnie Hickman ran one back 46 yards against Akron, true freshman Denzel Burke returned one 23 yards against Rutgers, and then Young got the linebackers into the return game vs. Maryland. The last time Ohio State had pick-sixes in three consecutive games was in 2016 when the unlikely trio of Rodjay Burns, Malik Hooker and Jerome Baker turned the trick against Bowling Green, Tulsa and Oklahoma.

In addition to his interception for a score, Young picked off Maryland QB Taulia Tagovailoa on the preceding possession, returning that one 18 yards. As a result, the Fort Wayne, Ind., product became the first OSU linebacker to record a pair of interceptions



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN COVERAGE — Ohio State linebacker Craig Young (15), shown here in coverage against a Maryland receiver, grabbed his first career interception early in the fourth quarter. Young apparently enjoyed the sensation so much that he grabbed another INT on the Terrapins’ next possession and returned it 70 yards for a touchdown.

in the same game since James Laurinaitis during a 33-14 win at Washington in 2007.

Tagovailoa was chased, hurried and harassed for much of the game by an Ohio State pass rush that had been almost as maligned as the rest of the unit. The Maryland QB completed 28 of 39 attempts for 279 yards and two touchdowns, but he was sacked five times and pitched those two interceptions.

Running back-turned-linebacker Steele Chambers recorded his first career sack while sophomore tackle Cormontae Hamilton did the same. Freshmen Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimololau each had one, and the

other was split between junior end Javontae Jean-Baptiste and super senior tackle Haskell Garrett.

Day said he thinks the improvement in all phases of the defense is twofold. His younger players such as Young, Martinez, Burke, Sawyer and Tuimololau are maturing right before his eyes, and his defensive coaches have embraced their new roles.

“I think Kerry is doing a great job of seeing things from the box and Matt’s doing a great job of calling the plays,” Day said. “I think Larry (Johnson)’s doing a great job with his guys up front, and Al Washington is starting to build some stability at linebacker. With those guys all working together, we’re starting to see it through one lens now, and you can feel it out there. The confidence is there and it’s strong.”

But the head coach was quick to point out the good performances during the last three games remains the product of a work in progress.

“We still have some football to play and a lot of really good opponents coming up in the second half of the season,” Day said. “We haven’t done anything just yet, but we’re building on it.”

As for Coombs, he seems largely unaffected by what most observers see as a demotion. He was seen on the sidelines during pregame warmups, glad-handing prospective recruits and chatting up their parents – just as he would have been doing before the Oregon game.

“I would say he’s been through a lot,” said OSU linebacker Cody Simon, “but nothing has changed with him. Every day, he comes in with the most energy. He’s always ready to go, always ready to help the defense out 24/7.”

“I appreciate that because it proves that while not everything goes your way, you still have to do your thing. And Coach Coombs is



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still doing his thing, so we really appreciate him.”

Chambers Beginning To Feel Like A Linebacker

He says all the right things, makes all the right moves and generally goes with the flow. But there has always been something about Chambers’ move from running back to linebacker that makes you think it wasn’t exactly his idea.

Not that he hasn’t embraced the position switch and worked hard to make the change. No one could perform at the level he has performed and not be all in on the decision. Maybe after his performance against Maryland, though, Chambers will begin feeling less like a former running back and more like a bona fide linebacker.

The 6-1, 225-pound sophomore tied for the team lead with seven tackles vs. the Terrapins, including six solo stops. Each of those numbers were career highs for the former four-star athlete out of Blessed Trinity Catholic High School in Roswell, Ga.

And it’s not like he’s completely unfamiliar with the defensive side of the ball. When his high school team won the Georgia 4A championship his senior year, not only did Chambers run for 98 yards, he also registered five tackles.

“I’m definitely starting to get a lot more comfortable on defense,” he said after the Maryland game. “I’m just trying to do my job, just trying to get on the field and make a difference.”

His teammates have noticed.

“Every day, he inspires me,” Simon said. “Every day, he’s going full speed no matter what. He’s a great player, and I’m just happy you get to see what a great player he is. Offense, defense, special teams – he’s done it all, and I’m just happy he’s on our team.”

Chambers’ best work vs. the Terrapins came in the third quarter. During a three-and-out series – one of only three such possessions Maryland had in the game – the junior linebacker stopped Terrapins receiver Rakim Jarrett after just a 1-yard gain on first down and then joined teammate Marcus Williamson to drop receiver Carlos Carriere after a 5-yard reception on third-and-8.

On Maryland’s next possession, Chambers ended it with a 7-yard sack of Tagovailoa on third-and-11.

“That felt pretty good,” Chambers said of his first career sack. “It came on a third down, so that was good, too.

“Football is all about adapting. Every practice is about working and grinding to get better. That’s what I’m trying to do.”

Chambers isn’t the first Ohio State player to switch from running back to linebacker. Zach Boren switched from fullback to a linebacker spot early during the 2012 season and helped lead the Buckeyes to an undefeated season.

Boren ran for 33 yards and two touchdowns and also caught five passes for 42 yards during the early part of the season before switching to linebacker and registering 50 tackles, the sixth-highest total on the team.

A menacing Boren hovering over fallen quarterback Devin Gardner from the 2012 Michigan game remains one of the most iconic Ohio State football photos of the last decade.

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

C.J. Stroud might want to bottle whatever “supernatural” remedy he used on his aching shoulder during the week he was sidelined. The redshirt freshman hasn’t looked like the same frightened player, and the maturation continued against Maryland.

Before this season, exactly two individuals – Art Schlichter in 1981 and Dwayne Haskins, who did it five times in 2018 – had thrown for 400 or more yards in a single game for the Buckeyes, and Stroud has now done it twice in his first five starts.

The fact that he compiled a 24-of-33 line worth 406 yards and five touchdowns barely scratches the surface of the way Stroud commanded the field against the Terrapins. Yes, his receivers were getting separation – and lots of it – from Maryland defenders, but Stroud relied less and less on his primary receiver and several times took an easier throw on a check-down. That was something he wasn’t doing at all in the early stages of the season.

For any quarterback to have a 400-yard game, the offensive line must first keep him clean – Stroud didn’t seem in danger of being sacked at any time during his two-plus quarters of work – and receivers have to get open. That wasn’t a problem for the likes of Chris Olave, Jaxon Smith-Njigba or Garrett Wilson, who came close to giving Ohio State a trio of 100-yard receivers for the second time this season.

Even running back TreVeyon Henderson got into the pass-catching act, reeling in all four of his targets for 67 yards and a touchdown, a nice supplement to 102 yards and two other scores on the ground.

What Didn’t Work

There were still some defensive gaffes that led to more than a dozen chunk plays by the Terrapins. They had a 30-yard run in the

second quarter as well as a 43-yard touchdown pass in the third period. Meanwhile, despite all but abandoning their running game in the second half, 13 Maryland receivers were credited with at least one reception, and 215 of their 279 yards through the air came after the catch.

Seventeen of Maryland’s 75 snaps from scrimmage netted double-digit gains, and while the Ohio State defense has taken steps toward improvement these past few weeks, they remain baby steps. Allowing that many big gains might be acceptable against Akron, Rutgers and Maryland, but what happens when Penn State comes to town at the end of October?

Additionally, the penalty situation began to show itself again early in the game. Within the first 8½ minutes, Ohio State roughed the passer, committed a holding call on a kickoff return and had a false start. To their credit, the Buckeyes immediately cleaned that up and were flagged only once more the entire afternoon.

Play Of The Game

It was still a game when Maryland quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa marched his team 75 yards in 12 plays to pull within 21-10 at the 7:37 mark of the second quarter. During the drive, Tagovailoa completed 6 of 8 pass attempts for 66 yards, including a 7-yard touchdown toss to wide receiver Carlos Carriere, and likely produced more than a few “uh-oh” moments on the OSU sideline. Those were quickly put to rest when freshman Emeka Egbuka returned the ensuing kickoff 67 yards, allowing the Buckeyes to set up shop at the Maryland 29. Two plays later, Stroud connected with Henderson on a 26-yard touchdown pass, and Ohio State never looked in the rearview mirror again.

— Mark Rea

Egbuka, Wilson Breathe Life Into Return Game

Ohio State fans have been waiting a long time to get excited about the team’s return game. The Buckeyes haven’t returned a punt for a touchdown since Jalin Marshall ran one back 54 yards against Indiana in 2014. They haven’t returned a kickoff for a touchdown since Jordan Hall went 85 yards vs. Michigan in 2010.

Those droughts might be coming to an end, however, with junior Garrett Wilson fielding punts and freshman Emeka Egbuka returning kickoffs.

Wilson returned three punts for 36 yards against Maryland while Egbuka piled up 166 yards on four returns, including a 67-yarder in the second quarter. It came after Maryland had pulled within 11 points at 21-10 with 7:37 remaining until halftime. But Egbuka gave the Buckeyes such good field position that they scored two plays later and never looked back.

Kickoff returns have been greatly diminished in recent years as college football seeks ways to eliminate the violent nature of the play. Kicks were moved to the 35-yard line in 2012, and the receiving team was permitted to fair-catch a kickoff anywhere inside their own 25 to create an automatic touchback beginning with the 2018 season.

The result might have been a safer game but a slightly less exciting one.

Egbuka doesn’t seem to mind the danger inherent with returning kickoffs. In fact, he explained that it’s a relatively simple process.

“The first thing is securing the catch, rocking into it and getting momentum with that catch,” he said. “Then you have to hit it downhill, full speed, read out the blocks and then trust in your off-returns. We have

great off returners in Steele Chambers and Xavier Johnson, and I just trust and follow them through the holes to try to make something happen.

“Our mind-set is to return every kick if we can. We know we have the best kickoff return unit in the nation, and we’re here to prove that.”

Egbuka has now returned nine kickoffs for 275 yards this season, an average of 30.6 yards per return. If he keeps that up, he could become the first Ohio State player to average better than 30 yards per kickoff return since the 1950s.

“I’m going to have to figure out a way to finish one of those off,” Egbuka said. “The blocking is great.”

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:

Buckeyes Click In All Facets To Pound Maryland

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The maturation of redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud would seem to mirror that of the rest of the team as No. 7 Ohio State continued to move past an early-season loss to Oregon.

Stroud threw five touchdown passes for the second game in a row and true freshman TreVeyon Henderson added three touchdowns Oct. 9 as the Buckeyes pounded out a 66-17 win against Big Ten rival Maryland before a homecoming crowd of 99,277 at Ohio Stadium.

It was at that same Horseshoe four weeks earlier that the mistake-prone Buckeyes (5-1, 3-0 Big Ten) were dispatched, 35-28, by Oregon.

There was little resemblance to that neophyte team when Stroud tossed three of his TDs by halftime against Maryland. He then went on to match his career high of five scoring passes that he set Oct. 2 against Rutgers.

Henderson ran for two scores and had another receiving, and the defense added its weekly touchdown against the overmatched Terrapins (4-2, 1-2) when sophomore Craig Young returned an interception 70 yards with 2:58 to play in the game for the final points. It was a program-record fourth straight game with a pick-six for the Ohio State defense.

Sluggish Start

Maryland received the opening kickoff

and marched from its own 25 to the Ohio State 18, but the 10-play drive stalled when Terrapins QB Taulia Tagovailoa was sacked for a 12-yard loss by OSU defensive linemen Haskell Garrett and Javontae Jean-Baptiste, the latter of whom made up for an earlier roughing-the-passer penalty.

On a second-and 6 from the OSU 40, Tagovailoa overthrew an open Darryl Jones at the goal line but was hit late by Jean-Baptiste to gain a first down at the 25. Later, it was on third-and-3 from the 18 when the rush got to the quarterback. As a result, the Terps had to settle for a 3-0 lead at the 10:20 mark of the opening period following a 48-yard field goal from Joseph Petrino.

The Buckeyes responded by holding the ball for 17 plays and 6:10 while going 88 yards, almost exclusively through the air. Stroud completed a fourth-down, 2-yard scoring pass to Garrett Wilson with 4:03 left to give Ohio State a 7-3 lead.

"It felt like a 25-play drive," OSU head coach Ryan Day said. "We just couldn't get going. We couldn't get anything going on first and second down. ... It was one of those ugly first drives."

Stroud went 9 of 12 for 88 yards, but Henderson managed only 5 yards on five carries during the drive. The crucial play was a third-and-13 at the OSU 48 after a false-start penalty. Jaxon Smith-Njigba had a 14-yard grab to convert the first down, and from there Chris Olave followed with a



SONNY BROCKWAY

TIGHTROPING — Thanks to an escort from teammates Craig Young (15) and Cade Stover (8), OSU freshman Emeka Egbuka (12) tiptoes along the sideline during a 67-yard kickoff return in the second quarter. The long return came after Maryland had closed to within 21-10 and set up Ohio State's fourth touchdown of the afternoon.

13-yard reception to the 25. Facing another third down, Olave made a 17-yard catch to the 5, and the Buckeyes scored four plays later.

After a Maryland punt, Henderson capped a five-play, 74-yard series when he rushed for a 4-yard score and a 14-3 lead with 17 seconds left in the first quarter.

Olave had started the drive with a 10-yard reception, and Wilson had another for 29 yards to the Maryland 34. On the ensuing play, Henderson caught a swing pass and went 30 yards to the 4 before getting the touchdown on the next play.

Stroud was 12 of 15 for 157 yards in the first quarter alone as he took apart a depleted Terrapins secondary that was missing starting cornerbacks Jakorian Bennett and Kenny Bennett due to injuries.

That was evident when broken coverage allowed Stroud to find Olave for an easy 36-yard TD to up the lead to 21-3 at the 12:12 mark of the second quarter. OSU needed only three plays to go 62 yards after Wilson's 23-yard punt return. The first was a 4-yard run by Henderson, the second a 22-yard catch by Smith-Njigba.

Maryland had its best possession of the afternoon to pull within 21-10 with 7:37 remaining until halftime.

Needing 10 yards on third down from the Terrapins' 37, Chigoziem Okonkwo had an 11-yard catch. Jones then caught a 20-yarder, and Okonkwo moved the ball to the OSU 17 with a 15-yard catch. On third-and-goal from the 7, Tagovailoa then connected with Carlos Carriere for the TD at the end of a 12-play, 75-yard possession

that consumed 4:29 of second-quarter clock.

Freshman Emeka Egbuka electrified the noontime crowd with a kickoff return of 67 yards on the ensuing kickoff, and then two plays later, it was 28-10 after Stroud found an open Henderson for 26 yards. The two-play drive covered 29 yards and lasted all of 31 seconds.

On Maryland's next series, it had a fourth-and-1 at the OSU 41 when running back Challen Faamataua slipped through the left side of the Ohio State line for 30 yards to the 11. Three plays got the ball to the 5, but on fourth-and-4, Tagovailoa bobbled the snap, retreated under pressure and then fell to the turf at the 18 to turn the ball over on downs.

Back came the Buckeyes to quickly extend the margin to 35-10 with 47 seconds remaining in the half. On the fifth play of the drive, Smith-Njigba gathered in a 42-yard pass to the 13, setting up an 8-yard touchdown run from Master Teague three plays later. Teague rushed three times for 25 yards during the eight-play, 82-yard drive that took only 63 seconds.

By the time intermission had come, Stroud was 17 of 22 for 293 yards and three touchdowns to three different receivers. Olave had one of them among his six first-half catches for 90 yards.

Staying The Course

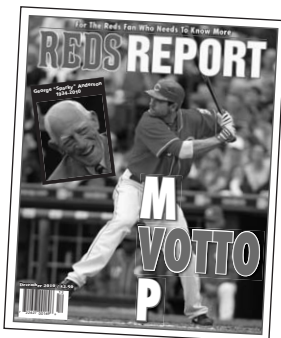
The Buckeyes received the ball to start the second half and followed a familiar and successful pattern. Egbuka had a 33-yard return to his own 34, and from there,

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OHIO STATE VS. MARYLAND

Henderson, who had just 17 yards on nine carries during the first half, equaled his yardage on his first carry of the third quarter.

Smith-Njigba had a 15-yard reception to the Maryland 31, and after a 5-yard toss to Egbuka, Wilson added to the TD parade with a 26-yard reception at the 12:26 mark to increase the Ohio State lead to 42-10. The 2:27 drive went 66 yards in seven plays.

Olave made it 49-10 less than five minutes later when Stroud darted a 30-yard pass on a post pattern despite tight coverage (and a subsequent pass-interference call) from Maryland defensive back Tarheeb Still, who threw up his hands in despair after Olave managed to make the catch.

During the drive that covered 75 yards and seven plays, tight end Cade Stover had a catch for 9 yards, Smith-Njigba pulled in a throw for 10 and Henderson had another 17-yard rush.

Henderson ripped off another 17-yarder on the next series, and he passed the century mark with a 14-yard TD with 2:31 to go in the third to make it 56-10. He finished with 102 yards on 16 carries with two touchdowns, 85 of those yards coming on just seven second-half totes. Henderson also had four catches for 67 yards and a score.

Maryland finally made it back in the scoring column on a 43-yard pass from Tagovailoa to Rakim Jarrett with 47 seconds left in the third quarter to make it 56-17.

Noah Ruggles added to the tally, making it 59-17 with a 32-yard field goal for the Buckeyes at 10:37 of the final quarter on the first series for backup QB Kyle McCord. Marcus Crowley carried six times for 24 yards on the drive. Jack Miller then took over for McCord for the Buckeyes' last series, which lasted only four plays and ended with Miller's incompletion on fourth-and-5 from the Maryland 33.

Ohio State's 11 possessions produced eight TDs, a series to end the first half, a field goal and the final one ending on downs.

Punter Jesse Mirco had the afternoon off.

After Young's pick-six to close out Ohio State's scoring, Maryland ran four times for 23 yards to the OSU 40 to end the game.

Game Notes

Stroud finished 24 of 33 for 406 yards and five touchdowns. ... Olave made seven catches for 120 yards and two TDs. ... Smith-Njigba had 103 yards on five catches ... Wilson's five receptions went for 84 yards and two TDs. ... The 17-play drive in the first quarter tied Ohio State's longest since the Hawaii game in 2015. That series went 91 yards in 8:05 and ended with an Ezekiel Elliott 1-yard TD run. ... Egbuka had four kick-off returns for 166 yards. ... Tagovailoa went 28 of 39 for 279 yards, two TDs and two fourth-quarter picks, both by Young. ... The Buckeyes are 7-0 against Maryland, all since the Terrapins joined the Big Ten in 2014, and averaged 58.3 points per game in the previous six games.



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN THE DUST — OSU receiver Chris Olave (2) leaves Maryland defender Nick Cross (3) far behind on a 36-yard touchdown reception during the second quarter of the Buckeyes' 66-17 victory against the Terrapins. It was the first of two TD catches for Olave in the game to give him 29 for his career.

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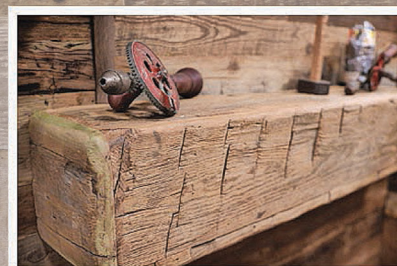


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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 66, Maryland 17

Oct. 9, 2021 – Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters

	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	14	21	21	10	66
MARYLAND	3	7	7	0	17

First Quarter

UMD – Petrino, 48-yard field goal, 10:20; 10 plays, 45 yards, 4:40 TOP.

OSU – Wilson, 2-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 4:03; 17 plays, 88 yards, 6:10 TOP.

OSU – Henderson, 4-yard rush (Ruggles kick), 0:17; 5 plays, 74 yards, 1:51 TOP.

Second Quarter

OSU – Olave, 36-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 12:12; 3 plays, 62 yards, 1:02 TOP.

UMD – Carriere, 7-yard pass from Tagovailoa (Petrino kick), 7:37; 12 plays, 75 yards, 4:29 TOP.

OSU – Henderson, 26-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 6:54; 2 plays, 29 yards, 0:31 TOP.

OSU – Teague, 8-yard run (Ruggles kick), 0:47; 8 plays, 82 yards, 1:03 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Wilson, 26-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 12:26; 7 plays, 66 yards, 2:27 TOP.

OSU – Olave, 30-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 7:47; 7 plays, 75 yards, 2:41 TOP.

OSU – Henderson, 14-yard rush (Ruggles kick), 2:31; 6 plays, 66 yards, 2:16 TOP.

UMD – Jarrett, 43-yard pass from Tagovailoa (Petrino kick), 0:47; 5 plays, 75 yards, 1:44 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Ruggles, 32-yard field goal, 10:37; 12 plays, 37 yards, 5:02 TOP.

OSU – Young, 70-yard interception (Ruggles kick), 2:58.

Att. – 99,277

Weather – Cloudy, 73 degrees

Team Statistics		
	UMD	OSU
First Downs	22	29
Rushing	7	8
Passing	14	21
Penalty	1	0
Rushes-Yards	36-56	33-166
Passing Yards	279	432
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	28-39-2	26-38-0
Offensive Plays	75	71
Total Net Yards	335	598
Third Down Efficiency	5-15	7-11
Punts-Avg.	5-51.6	0-0.0
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	0-0
Penalties	2-15	4-40
Time of Possession	34:44	25:16

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – UMD: Faamatau 9-71; Boone 9-41; Fleet-Davis 8-7; Jarrett 2-(-2); Tagovailoa 8-(-61). **OSU:** Henderson 16-102; Teague III 4-31; Crowley 7-26; Stroud 2-8; Pryor 2-5; TEAM 1-(-1); McCord 1-(-5).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – UMD: Tagovailoa 28-39-2-279-2. **OSU:** Stroud 24-33-0-406-5; McCord 2-3-0-26-0; Miller 0-2-0-0-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – UMD: Okonkwo 5-56; Carriere 5-35; Cobbs 3-24; Fleet-Davis 2-31; Jones 2-24; Faamatau 2-19; Dyches 2-15; Fleming 2-10; Jarrett 1-43; Tomlin 1-12; Jones 1-6; Jacobs 1-4; Boone 1-0. **OSU:** Olave 7-120; Smith-Njigba 5-103; Wilson 5-84; Henderson 4-67; Egbuka 3-31; Ruckert 1-18; Stover 1-9.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – UMD: Spangler 3-48.7; Pecorella 2-56.0. **OSU:** None.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – UMD: None. **OSU:** Wilson 3-36.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) UMD: Ellis 1-23; Fleming 1-22; Jarrett 1-20. **OSU:** Egbuka 4-166.

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

FORCED FUMBLES – UMD: None. **OSU:** Sawyer.

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

INTERCEPTIONS – UMD: None. **OSU:** Young 2-88.

SACKS – UMD: Nasili-Kite 1.0-5. **OSU:** Sawyer 1.0-17; Tuimoloau 1.0-13; Hamilton 1.0-9; Chambers 1.0-7; Garrett 0.5-6; Jean-Baptiste 0.5-6.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – UMD: Nasili-Kite 1.0-5; Okuayinonu 1.0-1. **OSU:** Sawyer 1.0-17; Tuimoloau 1.0-13; Hamilton 1.0-9; Chambers 1.0-7; Mitchell 1.0-3; Banks 1.0-2; Harrison 1.0-2; Garrett 0.5-6; Jean-Baptiste 0.5-6; Eichenberg 0.5-3; Williamson 0.5-3.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – UMD: Still 5-2-7; Cross 5-1-6; Gater 5-0-5; McCullough 4-1-5; Mosley 3-2-5; Okuayinonu 2-2-4; Rose 3-0-3; Mosley 3-0-3; Nasili-Kita 3-0-3; Finau 2-1-3; Hazel 2-1-3; Thomas 1-1-2; Johnson 1-1-2; Bunyun 1-0-1; Coley Jr. 1-0-1; Cobbs 1-0-1; Holt 1-0-1; Dickerson 1-0-1; Robinson 1-0-1; Fleming 1-0-1; Nchami 0-1-1; Hyppolite II 0-1-1. **OSU:** Chambers 6-1-7; Simon 4-3-7; Eichenberg 4-3-7; Hickman 5-1-6; Mitchell 2-3-5; Williamson 2-3-5; Williams 4-0-4; Shaw 2-2-4; Banks 3-0-3; Sawyer 2-0-2; Young 2-0-2; Jean-Baptiste 0-2-2; Egbuka 1-0-1; Williams 1-0-1; Ransom 1-0-1; Harrison 1-0-1; Tuimoloau 1-0-1; Stover 1-0-1; Burke 1-0-1; Martinez 1-0-1; Cavazos 1-0-1; Hamilton 1-0-1; Kacherski 1-0-1; Watts 1-0-1; Hamilton 1-0-1; Batsch 1-0-1; Garrett 0-1-1; Brown 0-1-1; Jackson 0-1-1; Cowan 0-1-1.

Players In The Game

OSU – Olave, Wilson, Stroud, Smith-Njigba, Henderson, Wypler, Munford, Johnson Jr., Petit-Frere, Jones, Ruckert, Mitchell, Williamson, Banks, Jean-Baptiste, Harrison, Hickman, Shaw, Burke, Simon, Jackson, Garrett, Williams, Cavazos, Vincent, McCord, Stover, Miller III, Martinez, Ballard, Ransom, Egbuka, Scott Jr., Hancock, Young, Watts, Harrison Jr., DiMaccio, Pryor, Chambers, Hooker, Crowley, Johnson, Brown, Carrico, Mirco, Teague III, Sawyer, Turrentine, Rossi, Eichenberg, Robinson, Cope, Batsch, Tuimoloau, Kacherski, Hall Jr., Wilson, Jones, Hamilton, Prater, Prater, Vimahi, Leroux, Fryar, Jackson, Miller, Wiglusz, Hamilton, Royer, Kutscher, Cage, Booker, McKenzie, Williams, Cowan, Ruggles, O'Shaughnessy.

UMD – Tagovailoa, Jarrett, Jones, Fleet-Davis, Okonkwo, Jones, Anderson, Branch, Harris, Duncan, Lunsford, Cross, Coley Jr., Hyppolite II, Still, Mosley, McCullough, Nchami, Nasili-Kite, Gater, Finau, Okuayinonu, Fleming, Robinson, Jacobs, Felton, Baylor, Boone, Hazel, Cobbs, Tomlin, Dippre, Trader, Najarian, Brade, Petrino, Dickerson, Faamatau, Mosley, Thomas, Miller, Holt, Johnson, Fleming, Beattie, Rose, Greely, Bunyun, Berard, Moran, Glaze, Carriere, Dyches, Ellis, Jackson, Wilmot, Rogers, Pecorella, Spangler.

Season Statistics

2021-22 Game-By-Game			
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Sept. 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	W, 66-17	99,277
Oct. 23	(6) at Indiana	TBA	
Oct. 30	PENN STATE (7)	TBA	
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE (10)	TBA	
Nov. 27	at Michigan (8)	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	153	133
Rushing	65	44
Passing	85	74
Penalty	3	15
Average Per Game/Rush	211.0	131.3
Average Per Game/Pass	352.2	256.0
Total Offense	3379	2324
Total Plays	395	450
Average Per Game	563.2	387.3
Average Per Play	8.6	5.2
Penalties-Yards	39-400	29-243
Fumbles-Lost	5-1	5-2
Third Down Efficiency	39-69	39-95
Percentage	57%	41%
Fourth Down Efficiency	4-9	6-11
Percentage	44%	55%
Sacks-Yards	20-157	8-64
Time Of Possession Avg.	26:31	33:29

Score								
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.	
Ohio State	62	86	84	59	0	291	48.5	
Opponents	19	38	35	31	0	123	20.5	

Individual Statistics						
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long	
T. Henderson	69	605	8.8	9	54	
Master Teague	44	252	5.7	3	17	
Miyan Williams	32	249	7.8	1	71	
Marcus Crowley	20	103	5.2	0	22	
Evan Pryor	10	50	5.0	1	12	
C.J. Stroud	14	17	1.2	0	15	
Garrett Wilson	1	13	13.0	0	13	
Jack Miller III	4	2	0.5	0	8	
Kyle McCord	7	-25	-3.6	0	7	
TEAM	2	-3	-1.5	0	0	
OSU Totals	203	1266	6.2	14	71	
OPP Totals	223	788	3.5	6	77	

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	104	157	66.2	1699	18-3	191.2
Kyle McCord	16	24	66.7	348	2-1	207.6
Jack Miller III	5	11	45.5	66	0-0	95.9
OSU Totals	99	154	64.3	1681	15-4	187.8
OPP Totals	136	227	59.9	1536	10-9	123.4

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	31	546	17.6	6	57
Chris Olave	30	494	16.5	7	61
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	23	452	19.7	3	42
Jeremy Ruckert	11	139	12.6	1	21
TreVeyon Henderson	7	154	22.0	2	70
Gee Scott Jr.	4	43	10.8	0	16
Emeka Egbuka	4	116	29.0	0	85
Cade Stover	3	51	17.0	0	25
Miyan Williams	3	38	12.7	0	17
Master Teague	2	12	6.0	0	7
Julian Fleming	2	17	8.5	0	10
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
Mitch Rossi	1	1	1.0	0	1
OSU Totals	125	2113	16.9	20	85
OPP Totals	136	1536	11.3	10	75

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
T. Henderson	11	–	–	–	–	66
Noah Ruggles	–37	–	–	–	6-6	55
Chris Olave	7	–	–	–	–	42
Garrett Wilson	6	–	–	–	–	36
Master Teague III	3	–	–	–	–	18

Jaxon Smith-Njigba	3	–	–	–	–	18
Haskell Garrett	1	–	–	–	–	6
Jeremy Ruckert	1	–	–	–	–	6
Craig Young	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	2-2	–	–	–	2
OSU Totals	39	39-39	–	–	6-6	291
OPP Totals	16	15-16	–	–	4-5	123

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	1-1	3-3	2-2	0-0	6-6
OSU Totals	1-1	3-3	2-2	0-0	6-6
OPP Totals	1-1	1-1	2-3	0-0	4-5

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	14	618	44.1	0	62
OSU Totals	14	618	44.1	0	62
OPP Totals	33	1424	43.2	0	67

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Craig Young	2	88	44.0	1	70
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	9	261	29.0	4	70
OPP Totals	4	34	8.5	0	23

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	12	49	4.1	0	23
OSU Totals	12	49	4.1	0	23
OPP Totals	3	22	7.3	0	9

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	8	275	34.4	0	67
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	12	344	28.7	0	67
OPP Totals	15	243	16.2	0	23

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Ronnie Hickman	32	18	50	–	–
Teradja Mitchell	14	19	33	4.0-10	–
Cody Simon	12	17	29	2.0-13	1.0-11
Tommy Eichenberg	8	12	20	0.5-3	–
Bryson Shaw	12	8	20	–	–
Steele Chambers	12	7	19	2.0-8	1.0-7
Haskell Garrett	10	8	18	5.0-23	3.5-21
Lathan Ransom	10	7	17	–	–
Denzel Burke	9	7	16	–	–
Marcus Williamson	6	7	13	0.5-3	–
Zach Harrison	9	4	13	3.0-9	2.0-7
Antwuan Jackson	6	7	13	3.0-16	2.0-15
Tyleik Williams	7	5	12	4.5-42	4.0-41
Cameron Martinez	6	5	11	0.5-4	–
Kourt Williams	6	4	10	–	–
Dallas Gant	4	6	10	–	–
Josh Proctor	3	7	10	–	–
Cameron Brown	7	3	10	–	–
Craig Young	5	5	10	–	–
Cade Kacherski	5	4	9	–	–
Tyreke Smith	4	4	8	1.0-1	–
Lejond Cavazos	7	1	8	–	–
J.T. Tuimoloau	4	4	8	2.0-16	1.0-13
Jack Sawyer	5	2	7	2.0-20	2.0-20
Marcus Hooker	2	5	7	–	–
Ryan Batsch	3	4	7	–	–
Taron Vincent	3	3	6	0.5-1	–
Ryan Watts	5	1	6	–	–
Demario McCall	2	3	5	–	–
J. Jean-Baptiste	1	4	5	0.5-5	–
Jaden McKenzie	2	3	5	–	–
Xavier Johnson	1	4	5	–	–
OSU Totals	219	214	453	36.0-199	20.0-157
OPP Totals	219	144	363	14.0-76	8.0-64
Fumbles Forced:	3 –Harrison, Ransom, Sawyer.				

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 66, Maryland 17

OSU head coach Ryan Day on the difference between his team after the Sept. 11 loss to Oregon and his team after four straight wins: "There were a lot of guys who just didn't have a lot of experience and maybe not a lot of confidence that they could do it themselves or confidence in the guys next to them. It just took some time to get some reps, and you see the results. We're still nowhere in terms of where we want to be, but you can see that this is a different team with a different walk and a different look in our eye."

Wide receiver Chris Olave on what he's seen from his team after falling to the Ducks: "I think we're still building with this offense and starting to build more chemistry, especially on game day. It can be scary and unstoppable. We just have to keep getting better. We had a couple of mistakes the first few weeks of the year, but last week and this week, we were damn near perfect. We just have to keep having fun with it."

Ohio State cornerback Marcus Williamson on how the Buckeyes have bounced back from the loss: "I think we all know that we took one on the chin early this season. To show up every day and go to work after that, it takes a lot of heart to do that and it means a lot to us as a team. We love the game. We love to play together and to be able to put that on the field every day in practice. Then to be able to show it on Saturday is putting the world on notice."

OSU quarterback C.J. Stroud on his performance against Maryland: "I just have to get a rhythm going to start the game. They had some looks that we didn't think we were going to get, and we had some specific play calls that we thought were going to clear out a safety or a linebacker and they did the opposite. So I just had to do my job, being careful and checking the ball down. I take what the defense gives me. When you try to force it, that's when bad things happen."

Day on what he saw from Stroud vs. the Terrapins: "He threw the ball away a couple of times, extended a few things, kept his eyes downfield and made some plays. We'll just keep coaching him up in the knowledge that everything you're investing now you're going to get on the back end. He just has to know that the same things are out there when things are going good as when they're going bad. It's all about staying hungry."

Maryland head coach Mike Locksley on Ohio State's wide receivers: "Our coverage



SONNY BROCKWAY

JUGGLING ACT — Ohio State receiver Chris Olave (2) had seven catches for 120 yards and two touchdowns against Maryland. The second was a 30-yard reception Olave made despite the fact the ball appeared to bounce off the arm of Terrapins defender Tarheeb Still (observed in the photo by Olave).

technique was obviously poor. It looked like guys were falling out of airplanes, they were that wide open. Again, as a coaching staff, we've got to do a better job calling (plays) that the guys we have can execute. We made that adjustment at the end of the half and started playing Cover 2, which took away the deep ball. We needed to stop the deep ball. We gave up too many yards. It was like seven-on-seven out there in the first half."

Olave on his second touchdown catch, a 30-yarder under duress: "It was good coverage, but the ball was behind me a little. I just wanted

to make a play. C.J. has been playing great, the offense has been great, and I just wanted to make a play for the team."

Day on how Olave, Garrett Wilson and Jaxon Smith-Njigba make Stroud look good: "The personnel certainly helps, and those guys around him are very talented, very gifted. They do a great job of getting open. The plays always look better when you have those kinds of players out there."

Stroud on if his shoulder injury causes a timidity to run the football: "I'm past it. Out there, you really don't think about an injury while you're playing. If I can run the ball I will. I feel like I'm getting more inclined to do so. They're trying to use me in the run game, and I'm willing to do it."

Stroud on who influences him while playing quarterback: "Last week shot my confidence up, but all my confidence comes from God. He has a plan for my life. If I keep going with him, he's going to lead me, and it doesn't really matter what the outside world said. If it's God or my family or my teammates talking, then I'll listen. But if it's not one of them, then I tune it out."

Stroud on what it's like to play quarterback at Ohio State: "I feel blessed. I'm in a great program, a great university with great fans and a great band. I don't think after week one I really knew the environment I was in. I didn't know about the support we would get, and it really took those first few games to feel the love, and sometimes to feel the hate – which I love. You have to. You have to love the good and the bad."

Williamson on what changes to the defensive coaching staff have done for the team: "I think we have a great coaching staff. We're able to plug and play guys because they teach so well. You learn the concept, the position and the whole defense. To be able to plug and play so many great players that you see flash week in and week out, it's helping us a lot as a defense and as a team."

Locksley's final assessment of the game: "Credit to Ohio State. I felt we could have executed better, but you know, when you looked at this, we just played the No. 5 and No. 7 (teams in the country with back-to-back games against Iowa and Ohio State). We're obviously not there yet. We have a lot of work to do as a program. But it's good to see just how far we've come."

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Assistant's Coaching Career Reaches Crossroads

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Immediately following Ohio State's 49-28 win against Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal last season, several Sugar Bowl staff members moved a mobile stage to the east 20-yard line of the New Orleans Superdome.

Before head coach Ryan Day, Justin Fields and Tuf Borland could hoist the game's trophy, a handful of machines shot red and white confetti into the air, which slowly fluttered to the green turf lined with white.

While Fields spoke with ESPN anchor Rece Davis about his performance – a remarkable one that included 22 completions in 28 attempts, 385 yards and six touchdowns – Kerry Coombs laid on the turf making snow angels in the thin Ohio State-colored paper. He laughed as Cameron Brown, Cam Martinez and Marcus Williamson unsuccessfully threw the confetti in his direction.

Coombs had lots to celebrate, although it wasn't necessarily because the Ohio State defense had played especially well. The Tigers scored 28 points and gained 444 yards of total offense with 400 of that coming through the air courtesy of Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence.

The Buckeyes struggled to stop the pass throughout last season, possessing the No. 122-ranked pass defense of 127 eligible Football Bowl Subdivision teams. When Ohio State faced Alabama in the national championship, Crimson Tide quarterback Mac Jones exposed OSU's deficiencies even more when he completed 36 of 45 passes for 464 yards and five touchdowns. He connected with Heisman-Trophy-winning wide receiver DeVonta Smith 12 times – all in the first half – for 215 yards and three scores.

At times, the Ohio State defense looked lost, unable to keep Smith or fellow wide receivers John Metchie and Jaylen Waddle from getting open. The Buckeyes also struggled to contain running back Najee Harris from breaking free.



FILE PHOTO

EXCITABLE COACH — Ohio State defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs (center) has had a mercurial ride up the coaching ladder since his first job as an assistant at a Cincinnati high school in the early 1980s. Coombs' second stint as an Ohio State assistant, however, has not been as successful as his first when he was defensive backs coach and produced five first-round NFL draft selections.

"Obviously, we didn't play our best game," Coombs said of the team's performance. "And it's up to us to learn from it, to let it drive us and motivate us and for us to go to work tomorrow morning and every day on making sure that doesn't happen again."

Coombs didn't shy away from taking responsibility, claiming Ohio State's defensive shortcomings fell at his feet. He also said he would fix the mistakes during the spring, summer and fall, mentioning that Ohio State would find a way to use its championship

game loss to motivate its improvement.

"I feel very responsible we didn't play our best in that environment," Coombs said in the spring. "It makes you rethink how you do things. There's no question that this entire offseason has been a great process of exactly that – rethinking how we do things and how we're going to do things in the future."

Ohio State went through its offseason, making tweaks and changes to the defense. Coombs wanted the secondary to thrive in man coverage, the linebackers to relentlessly pursue the football, and the defensive line to cause havoc for opposing backfields.

The Buckeyes' first opportunity to reveal their changes came during a 45-31 road win

against Minnesota on Sept. 2, but Ohio State looked sluggish on defense and allowed 408 yards to the Golden Gophers offense.

The following week, Coombs faced scrutiny for the Ohio State's defensive performance – or lack thereof – during a 35-28 loss to then-No. 12 Oregon. The Ducks compiled 505 yards of total offense with 236 yards through the air and 269 yards on the ground.

Ohio State couldn't reach Oregon quarterback Anthony Brown, failing to register a sack in the contest, and it couldn't stop running back C.J. Verdell, who took 20 carries for 161 yards and two touchdowns.

"Anytime you're in that situation," Day said after the game, "you're asking yourself, 'Is it

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personnel, it is scheme or is it coaching?" If it's scheme, we need to get that fixed. And if it's coaching, we need to do it better. If it's personnel, we have to make some changes."

Coombs said he remained confident in the scheme, admitting that lack of execution was the main culprit for Oregon's statistic-filled day.

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

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

In the end, Coombs said the defensive troubles, no matter what their reason – scheme, personnel or execution – were his responsibility.

"That's my job," he said. "We have to play better. And when I say we have to play better, I'm not blaming our players. The standard for our defense is one of excellence. I have to do a better job. I think our kids played hard. They practiced well. They prepared.

"I'm disappointed. I hate losing with a passion. You don't come to Ohio State to get beat in the Horseshoe. Everything that happens on Saturday that could happen better is going to be my responsibility. We are actively working every series when we come off the field to make adjustments. That's my responsibility. It's frustrating when that doesn't get done."

Ohio State football beat reporter Tony Gerdeman noticed the red flags from last season and correctly guessed the Buckeyes would move on from Coombs as defensive coordinator.

"Last year, Ohio State chalked up its issues to the pandemic," Gerdeman said. "It was difficult to practice, excel and get better. Then, you see what happened in the Oregon game and you hear Ryan Day talking about making bad assumptions. One of those assumptions was Kerry Coombs as the defensive play-caller and coordinator.

"When you look at the issues, you see the simplicity with which opposing offenses were able to take advantage of Ohio State. It became hard to continue blaming the players because they weren't being put in a position to succeed. They looked slow off the bat and continued to allow simple, repetitive offensive plays to go for big gains. It left me thinking, 'Why did it not work out for Kerry Coombs?'"

What Went Wrong?

Gerdeman's question is valid, but the answer is complicated.

There aren't many football coaches in America with Coombs' résumé. He grew up in Cincinnati and graduated from Colerain High School in 1979 before attending the University of Dayton, where he was part of the 1980 Division III national championship team.

In 1983, Coombs returned to Cincinnati to become an assistant coach at Greenhills High School and later moved to Lakota High School. He charged through the high school ranks, taking his first head coaching job at Loveland High School in 1989. Two years later, in 1991, Coombs took over at his high school alma mater.

In 16 seasons at Colerain, Coombs' teams made 10 playoff appearances, including five state semifinal berths. He won a Division I

state championship in 2004 with a perfect 15-0 record. During his tenure with the Cardinals, Colerain won seven consecutive Greater Miami Conference championships from 2000-06, and Coombs had a 161-34 record as the head coach.

Scott Springer of The Cincinnati Enquirer covered most of Coombs' coaching career in the Queen City. During his time reporting high school sports in the area, Springer said he hadn't seen anything quite like what he saw with Coombs.

"He was so energetic and he was like that all the time," Springer told BSB. "I think that led to a lot of his success. He was always so confident in his approach, and that worked in high school because he needed to motivate kids where he was. He coached a hard-nosed defense that was athletic, and he ran the triple-option. His players were faster, tougher, meaner and hungrier than everybody else because they had a chip on their shoulders."

When Brian Kelly became head coach at the University of Cincinnati in 2006, Springer said Kelly immediately sought Coombs to be a part of his staff, knowing that his name carried a lot of weight at local high schools. Coombs accepted an offer to be the defensive backs coach for the Bearcats, leaving the high school ranks for the first time.

"Kerry was one of Brian Kelly's first hires," Springer said. "He wanted to get every high school player in town, and he knew that Coombs would help with recruiting. By keeping some of the local kids in Cincinnati, Coombs could continue to make an impact."

Like in high school, Coombs quickly climbed the ranks at the collegiate level. He coached at UC for four years, working under Kelly and then Butch Jones. During his first two seasons, Coombs worked exclusively with the defensive backs before adding the roles of associate head coach and special teams coordinator for his remaining tenure.

"Kerry was so good in his role that Kelly asked him to go to Notre Dame when he took the head coaching job there," Springer said. "But Kerry elected to stay. He was hungry and he wanted to advance in the profession. Eventually, Ohio State came calling."

After Jim Tressel resigned as Ohio State head coach in 2010, the Buckeyes had one season with Luke Fickell as the head coach before bringing in Urban Meyer to lead the program. When Meyer arrived in Columbus, he needed a trustworthy staff to surround him and help him build a program that could compete with the dominant Southeastern Conference.

"What's interesting is that Urban Meyer didn't have Kerry Coombs as his first choice," Gerdeman said. "He originally signed Bill Sheridan to be his defensive backs coach, but two months after, Sheridan left to take a job in the NFL, so he went with Coombs.

"Right away, Kerry made an impact on Meyer's team. The players responded well and loved to talk about him. It was an acquired taste for some. I remember watching him tear into (former linebacker) Tyvis Powell in practice but then encouraging him and cheering him on during the next play."

Coombs' first stint at Ohio State produced impressive results. His first tenure produced five first-round NFL draft selections – Bradley Roby (2014), Eli Apple (2016), Marshon Lattimore (2017), Gareon Conley (2017) and Denzel Ward (2018).

Every starting cornerback during Coombs' six-year tenure reached the NFL. During

that span, the Ohio State secondary ranked second nationally with 101 interceptions and first with 17 interceptions returned for touchdowns. In 2017, Ward became the first consensus All-American at cornerback for the Buckeyes since Malcolm Jenkins in 2008.

"When you look at the results of what Ohio State produced while he's been the defensive backs coach, he's developed some of the best in the game," Gerdeman said. "The number of cornerbacks he's produced and developed – I think his track record is undeniable that he is one of the best assistant coaches in college football."

Coombs left Ohio State for two seasons when he joined Mike Vrabel's staff with the Tennessee Titans. In those two years under Vrabel, he helped the Titans produce one of the league's top secondary units. In 2018, it ranked sixth in passing defense (216.9 yards per game), eighth in opponent passer rating (88.4) and ninth in opponent completion percentage (63.2).

Despite that kind of success, Coombs returned to Ohio State in 2020 as the defensive coordinator, which has resulted in something of a mixed bag.

So the question remains unanswered. With such an impressive coaching career, what went wrong for Coombs as a defensive coordinator?

"It takes a certain person to be a coordinator, and I don't know if that's him," Gerdeman said. "Some guys are coordinators and some guys are position coaches, and I feel like the latter is more comfortable for him."

Springer agreed. While Coombs found success as a head coach in high school, he found an even better calling as a position

coach in college. When he took a step onto the bigger stage at Ohio State, Springer thinks the lights might have been a bit too bright.

"He's had an amazing career," Springer said. "But when you're in Columbus and the spotlight is on you for everything you do – I mean, look at how much he's getting paid, it pays well – you're either a hero or you're a bum."

As for Coombs' role moving forward, he has taken a less hands-on role with the team. After the loss to Oregon, Day elected to rely on the entire defensive staff for play-calling and schematics.

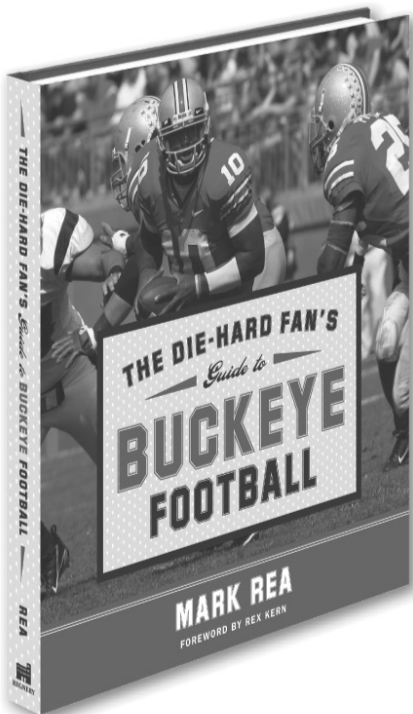
While not the most glorifying move for Coombs, Gerdeman thinks he's responded well to the changes. He even received the game ball following the Buckeyes' 66-17 win against Maryland as a token of his willingness to accept whatever role Day wanted him to fill. It was just another example of the character and identity he's created for himself in his almost 40 years of coaching.

"In dealing with Coombs over the years, I've heard him say many times that defensive coaches can't have egos," Gerdeman said. "He has responded well, and he's shown that he's the same person he's always been – a good soldier with a brave face. I'm sure he's disappointed in how things are going, but I don't think he blames Ryan Day for making changes. The defensive lapses fall at his feet.

"I think Kerry can be back next year because he's a tremendous recruiter. He's proven that he can develop players and he's an Ohio guy. I think he's humble, but this season will put that ego to the test."

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Barnes Play-Calling Takeover Paying Dividends For OSU

By **WYATT CROSHER**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The major talking point for Ohio State after its Sept. 11 loss to Oregon was the defense, which had been led by defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs. As overall leader of the unit, Coombs was also the chief play-caller for the defense, but that 35-28 defeat at the hands of the Ducks sparked the need for a change moving forward.

Secondary coach Matt Barnes took over the duty of calling plays from Coombs, who is still labeled the defensive coordinator but now sits in the press box instead of being on the sideline for game days.

After Barnes' first outing on calling the defensive plays for the Buckeyes – a 41-20 victory against Tulsa – OSU head coach Ryan Day said he expected Barnes to remain in a play-calling capacity for the remainder of the season. He also said that, despite it being primarily Barnes calling the plays, there is plenty of input from everyone on that side of the football.

"That's kind of the way I see it moving forward," Day said after that game. "(Defensive line coach) Larry Johnson is obviously very, very involved and has a lot of input on the game plan as well. It's a team effort over there. But I think the way the things went today was pretty smooth, and hopefully we can build on it."

And build on it, Ohio State has.

Despite the final score, Tulsa put up 501 total yards of offense, 428 of which came through the air during a 21-point defeat that was a one-score game until 3:07 to go in the fourth quarter.

But since then, Barnes and the Buckeyes have made major improvements. Those were on full display during the 59-7 blowout of Akron the following week. While the Zips are among the worst statistical teams in the Football Bowl Subdivision, it was still major progress for Ohio State to hold any team to 229 yards of offense and just 3.1 yards per play.

The big test came Oct. 2 against a Rutgers team that came into the contest with a 3-1 record, its sole defeat being to Michigan by a single touchdown. But the Buckeyes jumped out to a 24-0 lead, and just one slip-up – a 75-yard touchdown reception by Scarlet Knights wide receiver Aron Cruickshank with 2:23 left in that period – stopped it from being a shutout that lasted until deep in the fourth quarter.

In the end, Ohio State won a 52-13 decision and held the Scarlet Knights to 346 yards (235 passing, 111 rushing) and 4.9 yards per play while forcing three interceptions, including a pick-six by freshman cornerback Denzel Burke. Take out Cruickshank's long TD catch, and Rutgers averaged only 3.9 yards on its other 70 offensive snaps.

Barnes said the move out of the press box and onto the field has allowed him to feel more involved with everything the defense is doing.

"You get a little bit more of a feel for the game, particularly tempo," he said. "Sometimes you get lost in the box. You're up there, it's heated or it's air-conditioned, and you're kind of just watching. But when you're down on the field, you feel the urgency of the situation. On the field, you can really be hands-on with how you adjust the game from series to series."

Barnes also spoke of performances yet to come, saying his ability as a play-caller, as well as the defense overall, should improve over time.

"I think it's like anything else," Barnes said. "The best way to get better at playing football is to play football. The best way to improve calling defense is to call defense. So, hopefully, we'll continue to see improvement as we go, but I learned some valuable lessons that year in 2018, and I'm learning with every play right now."

The 2018 season to which he referred came at Maryland, where Barnes was linebackers and special teams coach. But, just like the Buckeyes have done this year, the

Terrapins struggled on defense early that season, sparking the need for change moving forward. Just as Ohio State swapped out Coombs for Barnes on the play calls this year, Maryland substituted Barnes for defensive coordinator Andy Buh on the gameday calls.

While the timing of that move has not been specified, Inside MD Sports publisher Jeff Ermann told BSB that he believes it came around the time of head coach D.J. Durkin's firing on Oct. 31. Despite the team losing its final four games that year and playing all season under the cloud of the preseason death of Terrapins offensive tackle Jordan McNair, Ermann said he thought the defense made small steps forward with Barnes at the controls.

"They got a little better, and then the wheels fell off at the end because they had just been through so much on and off the field," Ermann said. "I think they were a little bit better, but it was just such a mess of a season that it was hard to take a lot away from it."

Barnes was with Maryland for three seasons, starting in 2016 after stints as a graduate assistant at Florida and as a defensive analyst at Michigan. Joining the Terrapins marked Barnes' first full-time job as a position coach, and Ermann said he was considered an important piece in Maryland's rebuilding project under Durkin.

"Matt wasn't there for that long, but he was definitely regarded as a young up-and-comer," Ermann said of Barnes, who was just 30 at the time. "You could tell that he had a bright future ahead of him because he was pretty young, already calling plays, and he seemed to be a better recruiter than several of the older guys on the staff. It was viewed as a real loss when he left."

Barnes was hired by Day in January 2019 to coach the safeties and be Ohio State's special teams coordinator. Less than three years later, Day has now turned to Barnes to help salvage a defense that had such a lackluster start to the season.

But, as Day also said, Barnes knows it is not on him alone to improve the defense. And that mentality is also what has helped the OSU assistant transition back into a play-calling mind-set.

"It's really been a group effort, particularly on game day," Barnes said. "We help one another sorting through adjustments. We're all in the meetings together throughout the week, and we put a call sheet together of what we like in certain situations, so in a lot of ways, the game calls itself. During the game, on the sideline and on the headsets, we get things adjusted and see what calls we like."

"I've been very fortunate to be around a lot of great football coaches, and there are a ton of great football coaches in our defensive staff room right now."

On Oct. 9, Barnes faced his toughest task yet, going against his former team led by star quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa. Ohio State's defense held up well, allowing 335 yards in a 67-17 victory against the Terrapins to move to 4-0 since Barnes has taken over the defensive play-calling.

Prior to the game, when asked if he was surprised how quickly Barnes has moved up the college coaching ranks, Ermann said he was not.

"That's not surprising at all," he said. "That was the scouting report on him, so to speak, that he was going to be a rising star in the profession. It doesn't surprise me at all."

In his first major coaching role at Maryland, it took Barnes partially through his third season to help a struggling Big Ten defense with its play-calling. Now, in his second major coaching role at Ohio State, it took Barnes partially through his third season to help another struggling Big Ten defense with its play-calling.

Only this time around, Barnes' improvements are leading to wins – dominant ones – and it is helping to push Ohio State back into the thick of the College Football Playoff race.

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Former Walk-On Rossi Proving To Be Indispensible

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Anyone who has ever seen the 1993 film “Rudy,” the story of Notre Dame football player Daniel “Rudy” Ruettiger, knows a little bit about what it is to be a walk-on at a major college program. It’s an endless, glamourless, thankless job that has to be done, but youngsters fresh out of high school keep showing up to do those jobs.

Most of them wash out sometime during their first year, but there are a select few who stick it out and continue to chase a dream against the long odds of actually getting a chance to pull on a jersey on game day.

Mitch Rossi is one of those select few. The graduate senior from Franklin, Tenn., first walked on to the Ohio State football team in 2017, hardened by four years of high school experience in football and rugby. After beginning as just another faceless non-scholarship player on the roster, Rossi has become a force on special teams as well as a backup tight end – one whose number was called on the goal-line against Rutgers. He responded with the first pass reception and first touchdown of his career.

The Buckeyes held a 24-6 lead early in the second quarter against the Scarlet Knights when an 8-yard Master Teague touchdown was overruled by replay that appeared to show the Ohio State running back down by contact just before he reached the goal line.

On second-and-goal inside the 1, OSU lined up in an I-formation with Rossi manning a fullback position in back of quarterback C.J. Stroud (who was under center) and in front of Teague. Stroud fumbled the snap and fell on the loose ball for what would have been a 2-yard loss except for the fact Rutgers defensive tackle Ifeanyi Maijeh jumped offside to nullify the play.

With Ohio State featuring the same alignment on the ensuing play, Stroud faked a handoff to Teague that allowed Rossi to sneak out of the backfield and reel in a 1-yard touchdown pass.

The Buckeyes used the I-formation for the better part of four decades until Urban Meyer came to town in 2012 and installed a spread offense. But that alignment has pretty much been mothballed around college football – until OSU trotted it out on the goal line against Rutgers.

“They didn’t line up in any different formation, so I imagine they were looking for an inside run,” Rossi said. “I’m sure they weren’t looking for us to line up in the I-formation. I’m pretty sure they hadn’t practiced against that, and we just caught them.”

The touchdown was the culmination of the hard work and dedication Rossi has brought to the program over the past five years, contributions that have not gone un-

seen by his teammates.

“He is one of the hardest working players and one of the most unselfish players on our team,” said OSU offensive tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere. “Not only is he such a good player on the field in terms of doing his job and doing anything he can to help the team win, but also off the field, he’s one of the better ‘glue guys’ that we have here.

“Mitch has always been someone you can go to if you need anything or need someone to talk to. He’s not the kind of person that would let things go by the wayside. He’s very upfront with people. He’s always very honest, but he’s also very caring. He’s just a good person overall.”

Head coach Ryan Day added that Rossi got a chance to score a touchdown against Rutgers because he had earned that opportunity. The coach went on to say he would never hesitate to give Rossi a similar chance in the future.

“He’s gone through offseasons, he’s gotten himself stronger, he’s very intelligent, and he’s really developed as a football player,” Day said. “He plays with a really great pad level, and he’s got a unique skill set. He’s a converted high school running back and made the move to tight end, so he can do some different things for us.

“He’s got good ball skills, has a good football IQ, and understands how we’re trying to attack defenses. He does a good job in the pass games and the run games, so he gives us a lot of versatility there. And he gives us a mature guy there, a little bit older guy, and that’s helping us.”

Scoring one’s first career touchdown is an emotional moment for any college player. But when that player is a former walk-on whose playing time has been limited mostly to special teams, crossing the goal line with the football in your hands has to make it that much sweeter.

“You just think about the journey,” Rossi said. “It was really huge just to get onto the travel squad because the coaches ask, when they’re making that list, ‘Does this guy add value? Can we find someone else to do this job?’ So, you know, if you’re someone they trust and you’re irreplaceable on those units, then you’re going to get on the (team) bus and eventually your role is going to continue to grow more and more.

“Every week, it seems like my role is growing a little bit. I’m just trying to prove myself. It’s good to be trusted and be thrown in there earlier in the game these days. I’m still trying to be as good as I can be on special teams – all the units I play on there – and whatever fullback/tight end role I seem to fit in is awesome.”

After the Rutgers game, Rossi found his parents – who attend every Ohio State game – and shared what had to be the culmination of their many sacrifices.

“I gave my dad a big hug after the game, and he had a couple of tears in his eyes,” he said. “My mom was pretty emotional, too. That was a really special moment seeing them after the game. It was the accumulation of a lot of stuff. They’ve seen everything I’ve been through. They know all the late-night texts that read, ‘Man, this is so hard and I’ve got to go back in the morning,’



SONNY BROCKWAY

CAREER MILESTONE – Former walk-on Mitch Rossi (34) tallied his first career reception during Ohio State’s 52-13 win at Rutgers on Oct. 2. Rossi’s catch went for just 1 yard, but it also went for a touchdown, the first of the graduate senior tight end’s career as a Buckeye.

but they’re my support system. That’s who I do it for.”

Rossi said the only thing that might have eclipsed the euphoria of scoring that touchdown was the day a few months ago when he was told he was being put on scholarship.

“That was such an awesome feeling,” he said. “It was kind of a testament to all the people who helped me get there. It was really big for me and my parents. They made so many sacrifices just to get me here. They’re here for every game, and they’ve done so much for me. It was a really special moment calling them after that and telling them I got put on scholarship.”

It was something of a do-or-die moment for Rossi. The four-time OSU Scholar-Athlete and two-time Academic All-Big Ten selection had already graduated with a degree in finance, but returning to the Buckeyes for a fifth season in 2021 would have been too much of a financial burden for him and his family.

That’s when Day and offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson called Rossi into a meeting room in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

“I graduated last year in May,” Rossi said. “I was done with school, so I needed to be on scholarship in order to come back

or else I would have had to pay extra on top of the tuition for four years. But I had the meeting with them and they told me I was being put on scholarship. It’s really hard to describe how that felt other than to say it was awesome.”

Although Rossi attended high school in Tennessee, he is very much a product of Ohio. His mother, Deb, is from Tiffin, while his father, Tom, grew up in Bay Village near Cleveland, and Rossi still has lots of family in the Buckeye State. He went to high school with former OSU offensive lineman Max Wray (who has since transferred to Colorado) and could have accepted a scholarship offer from several other schools.

“It’s actually kind of a crazy story,” Rossi said. “This was a dream that I’ve had my whole life. Both of my parents are from Ohio, I grew up a huge Ohio State fan, and this was just kind of an opportunity that you just can’t let go.

“I was just happy to get the opportunity just to come here. I could have chosen a lot of other paths, a lot of easier routes where I would have played sooner or maybe even have been just a normal college student. I was thinking about that, too. But I just wanted to do something that I would be proud of, that would make me a better person, and make my parents proud. That’s how I’ve been rolling ever since.”



Mitch Rossi

IU’s Mythical Boulder Back Near Bottom Of Hill

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

There are a lot of parallels between the punishment of Sisyphus with regard to his boulder as it was written in Greek mythology and the head football coaching job at Indiana. Well, really, it's just the big one. No Hoosiers head coach has successfully cheated death – as far as we know – but several have managed to string together multiple solid seasons in Bloomington, and their punishment is the same as the one Sisyphus faced in Hades – a return to the bottom of the mountain with the boulder that is Indiana football.

There are a number of contributing factors, both modern (playing in a division with four consistent contenders) and historic (playing in the shadow of the basketball program), but it's still one of the more baffling dynamics in the sport.

“Right now, I'd say it comes back to playing in the Big Ten East,” Bedford Times-Mail reporter Auston Matricardi told BSB. “For years you were guaranteed four Ls before the season even started with Ohio State, Penn State, Michigan State and Michigan, and that's without potential crossovers against Wisconsin or Iowa or whatever. That really, really limits the wiggle room for getting to a bowl game and that extra month of practice/national exposure you get from it.

“Before the divisions existed, though, you could easily say that playing in the shadow of Assembly Hall in a basketball state didn't help, and Indiana isn't exactly a recruiting hotbed, though you'll get some decent kids coming through.

“Since Fred Glass took over as AD, though, there's been a more firm commitment to football, and as you can tell by looking at the roster, Tom Allen took his recruiting pitch to Florida to get like half the team.”

Since 1965, Indiana has employed 10 full-time head coaches. Four of them – Sam Wyche (1983), Cam Cameron (1997-2001), Gerry DiNardo (2002-04) and Terry Hoepfner (2005-06) – either never successfully moved the big stone or were immediately crushed under it when they tried to move it up the mountain. They combined for a 38-86 record and zero winning seasons. Bill Lynch (2007-10) narrowly avoided that distinction with a 7-6 record during his first season, but he was 19-30 overall and never reached bowl-eligibility again.

The remaining five coaches have each suffered through college football's version of the eternal punishment, with varying extents of severity.

John Pont (1965-72) struggled through his first two seasons in town before breaking through with a 9-2 team and a Rose Bowl berth in 1967. The reward for his efforts? A 6-4 season in 1968 and four losing seasons before his departure.

Lee Corso (1973-82) spent six years racking up losing records as he worked to install his own players and systems, and he finally saw his vision realized in year seven with an 8-4 campaign. That was followed by a 6-5 year, two more losing seasons and his departure.

Bill Mallory (1984-96) put up the longest fight, building from a winless opening season to back-to-back eight-win seasons – including rare victories against Ohio State – in 1987 and '88. He stumbled to 5-6 in 1989, rattled off two more bowl berths, stumbled again, returned to 8-4 in 1993 and then succumbed to the inevitable, dropping to 6-5, then 2-9 and 3-8 to end his tenure.

Kevin Wilson (2011-16) never moved especially high up the hill, but he did manage a pair of six-win seasons before player abuse allegations ended his tenure.

Allen is the newest man to take on the task, and he seems to be suffering one of those returns

to the bottom of the mountain in 2021. After an 8-5 finish in 2019, the Hoosiers leaped into Big Ten contention and the national conversation in 2020, riding an aggressive defense to a 6-2 campaign that nearly saw Indiana claim its first victory over Ohio State since 1988, when Mallory's squad bludgeoned the Buckeyes during John Cooper's first season in Columbus.

With quarterback Michael Penix Jr. set to return, along with more than a dozen other starters, Indiana hoped to again contend for the conference title in what looked like a more-open-than-usual Big Ten East. Seven weeks later, and Indiana is set to host Ohio State as a team nursing its wounds, not a serious challenger.

As with the structural issues that keep Indiana on a constant incline, the struggles on the field this season have a number of causes. First and possibly most important is staff turnover. Indiana returned 17 starters from the 2020 team but lost the architect of its strong 2019 offense when offensive coordinator Kalen DeBoer took the Fresno State head coaching job ahead of the 2020 season.

Then, following the 2020 season, they lost defensive coordinator Kane Wommack, a coach whom the defensive-minded Allen worked with closely, to the head coaching position at South Alabama.

“I cannot say enough great things about Kane Wommack,” Allen said at the time. “I appreciate him so much and all that he has brought to our program. He took over our defense and made it better, which is what you want when you hire someone.

“I am so excited for him and the opportunity that he has been given. South Alabama is a place that he is familiar with and has done a great job previously as a defensive coordinator.”

That's two new coordinators in as many years, and the early returns on both replacements have been mixed. New OC Nick Sheridan came to Indiana with no experience as a play-caller and has struggled to find the same offensive creativity that has helped DeBoer build a Mountain West contender at Fresno State. Meanwhile, the Hoosiers have fallen from 31.8 points per game in 2019 to 28.9 in 2020 and now 23.8 through five games in 2021. The offensive success rate has fallen significantly as well, from 46.4 percent (meaning that the Hoosiers were successful, based around the down and distance, on 46.4 percent of their offensive snaps) in 2019 to 39.7 percent in 2021, which is bad news for an offensive scheme built largely around efficiency.

Defensively, Allen tabbed Georgia assistant Charlton Warren, another first-time play-caller who seems to be struggling within Indiana's systems in his first season at the helm.

Defensive success rate allowed is up from 41.6 percent in 2020 to 43.1 percent through the first five games of the 2021 season, but more importantly, the havoc rate (percentage of plays with a tackle for loss, sack, interception or deflection) has dipped significantly from 19.1 percent to 14.4 percent. The Hoosiers loved to blitz under Wommack and are still bringing heat frequently, but they have managed to get home to the quarterback significantly fewer times than they did under the previous leadership. That makes for a difficult task for the IU secondary. Look no further than the 223.0 passing yards allowed per game through the first five games.

The defensive personnel itself is roughly the same. Safety Jamar Johnson departed for the NFL as did defensive lineman Jerome Johnson, but nine starters returned. However, the numbers in general are down. Indiana has allowed 28.2 points per game through five contests and has forced only six turnovers, and its sack leaders, linebacker Micah McFadden and defensive lineman Ryder Anderson, have two and three sacks respectively.

Get To Know ... Indiana

2021 Record: 2-3.

Team Information: Offensive Formation – Pistol; Defensive Formation – 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 9, Defense 8, Specialists 1.

Head Coach: Tom Allen, 5th year at Indiana, 26-25.

Series History: 94th meeting; Ohio State leads 76-12-5.

School Facts: Location – Bloomington, In.; Enrollment – 32,986; Nickname – Hoosiers; Colors – Red, White; Conference – Big Ten (East Division); Stadium – Memorial Stadium (Surface – FieldTurf; Capacity – 52,626).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Stephen Carr	102	386	3.8	3
Tim Baldwin Jr.	28	103	3.7	0
D. Ervin-Poindexter	8	57	7.1	1

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Michael Penix Jr.	87-162	53.7	939	4-7
Jack Tuttle	8-18	44.4	168	1-1

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 – 23.8

Rushing Yards Per Game – 122.2

Passing Yards Per Game – 221.4

Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 343.6

2021 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 4	at Iowa	L, 34-6
Sept. 11	IDAHO	W, 56-14
Sept. 18	CINCINNATI	L, 38-24
Sept. 25	at Western Kentucky	W, 33-31
Oct. 2	at Penn State	L, 24-0
Oct. 16	MICHIGAN STATE	Noon
Oct. 23	OHIO STATE	TBA
Oct. 30	at Maryland	Noon
Nov. 6	at Michigan	TBA
Nov. 13	RUTGERS	TBA
Nov. 20	MINNESOTA	TBA
Nov. 27	at Purdue	TBA
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	FFL-Yards	Sacks
Ryder Anderson	18	11	29	6.5-22	3.0-15
Cam Jones	18	9	27	2.0-9	1.0-6
Micah McFadden	16	11	27	6.5-56	2.0-18
Raheem Layne	15	11	26	1.0-2	–
M. McCrary-Ball	12	8	20	–	–
Tiawan Mullen	15	3	18	–	–
Weston Kramer	7	9	16	1.0-4	–
Jaylin Williams	8	8	16	–	–

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Raheem Layne	1	23	23.0	0
M. McCrary-Ball	1	0	0.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 28.2

Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 126.8

Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 223.0

Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 349.8

“Right now,” Allen said Oct. 4, “we feel confident the rehab process will allow him to heal and get back to where he can be effective.”

If Penix is healthy enough to take the field against the Buckeyes on Oct. 23, he will still be without his top slot receiver. Florida State transfer DJ. Matthews was lost for the season after an ACL tear against Western Kentucky. In an already depleted receivers room following the early NFL departure of slot expert Whop Philyor, Indiana is without an obvious replacement for Matthews.

“As far as replacing his role, I think it's a group effort, and not just at the wideout position,” Sheridan said. “Other positions – tight ends, running backs, linemen – everybody's going to have to elevate their play and find a way to make up for some of the production we expected DJ. to provide.”

Against WKU, Indiana turned to 2020 All-American wideout Ty Fryfogle, moving him inside in hopes of finding more space for him since defenses have focused more and more on the 6-2, 205-pound speedster, who torched Ohio State last year for seven catches, 218 yards and three touchdowns. Fryfogle moved between the two roles against the Nittany Lions as Indiana has looked to find a more long-term replacement.

“I give Ty Fryfogle a ton of credit,” Sheridan said. “He basically played a position (against Penn State) that he didn't play all week in practice. DJ. was unavailable. Ty stepped into our slot receiver spot and did phenomenal.”

Tight end Peyton Hendershot, who caught four balls for 32 yards last year against the Buckeyes, has also been asked to contribute more without Matthews in the lineup, seeing the second-most targets on the team through five games while pulling in 21 receptions.

With the top three running backs from 2020 departed – Stevie Scott to the NFL and Tim Baldwin and Sampson James to the transfer portal – Indiana is leaning on USC transfer Stephen Carr to lead what has been a woeful rushing attack through five games. He's averaging just 3.8 yards per carry on 102 attempts.



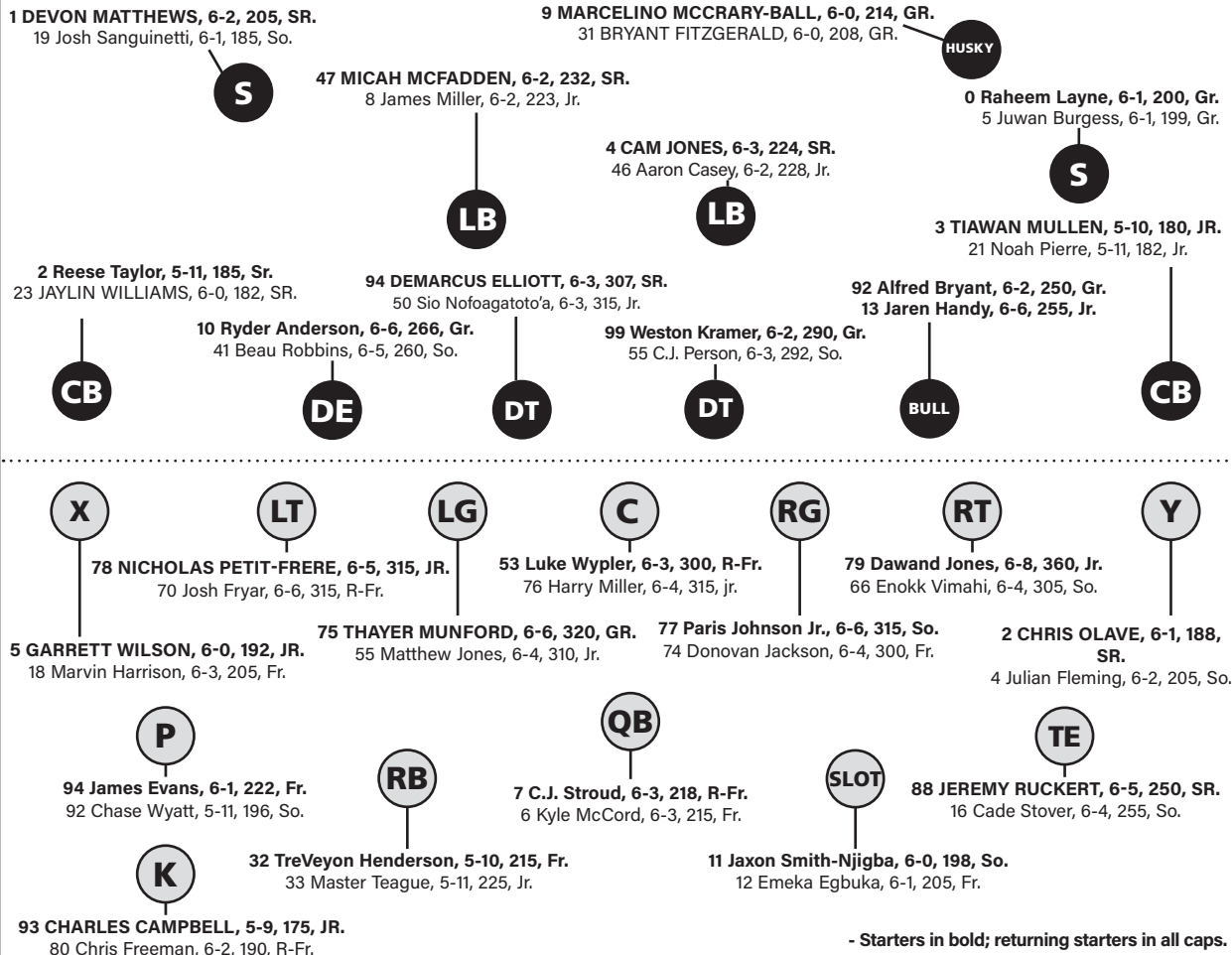
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Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. INDIANA RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes faced a Maryland team Oct. 9 determined to slow down the OSU running game, particularly freshman sensation TreVeyon Henderson. The Terrapins did an admirable job in the first half, limiting Henderson to just 17 yards on nine carries. The problem was the score was 35-10 at halftime of an eventual 66-17 victory for the Buckeyes. Henderson rushed for 85 yards on seven carries in the second half as Maryland learned it can't focus on everyone in the Ohio State lineup. Indiana must pick its poison in trying to slow the Buckeye Express that rolled to 598 total yards vs. the Terrapins. The Hoosiers are allowing 130.6 yards rushing per game to rank 53rd of 130 FBS schools, one spot ahead of Ohio State. They've allowed 41 yards per carry and yielded six rushing touchdowns in five games. Ohio State will likely try to establish the run earlier to quiet whatever home support shows up for the Hoosiers, but it would take a total team effort to corral Henderson and Master Teague.

EDGE: OHIO STATE

INDIANA RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Hoosiers aren't much of a running threat at 122.2 yards per game and 3.4 yards per carry. They could be hampered even further if quarterback Michael Penix Jr. remains unavailable. He sustained a separated AC joint in his left throwing shoulder against Penn State on Oct. 2, and his status for the Buckeyes is unknown since the Hoosiers were idle Oct. 9. What rushing attack the Hoosiers have relies on Penix moving the ball through the air to set up the ground game. The Maryland game did wonders for the OSU rush defense. By allowing only 56 yards on 36 carries (a 1.6-yard average), the Buckeyes dropped from allowing 146.4 yards per game to 131.3 while the yards per carry fell to 3.5 from 3.9.

EDGE: OHIO STATE

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. INDIANA PASS DEFENSE

In his past two games, C.J. Stroud has completed 41 of 56 passes (73.2 percent) for 736 yards and 10 touchdowns with zero interceptions. Now, the competition from Rutgers and Maryland wasn't very good, but one can't discount the confidence riding in the rejuvenated right arm of Stroud. He's zipping throws in the red zone, making reads against zone coverage and checking down when the original target isn't open. Just as importantly, he's gotten Chris Olave back in the mix at an All-American level and used Henderson efficiently, targeting him four times vs. Maryland that resulted in four catches for 67 yards and a TD. The Hoosiers are giving up 223.0 yards through the air and have allowed nine TDs with only two interceptions.

EDGE: OHIO STATE

INDIANA PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

It's hard to predict how the Hoosiers will try to go after the OSU defense without knowing who will take the snaps. As impressive as Penix was last season in giving Ohio State a scare, he's been equally disappointing this season, completing just 53.7 percent of 162 passes for 939 yards, four touchdowns and seven interceptions. Backup Jack Tuttle is only 8 of 18 for 168 yards with a TD and an interception. The improving Ohio State defense has regained its swagger by establishing a new school record by returning INTs for TDs in four straight games. Add a fumble recovery and return by Haskell Garrett in the opener at Minnesota, and the defense has scored in every game except the loss to Oregon. By the way, Ohio State had five sacks vs. Maryland, too.

EDGE: OHIO STATE

SPECIAL TEAMS

Freshman Emeka Egbuka is close to taking a kickoff return all the way. He had a 67-yarder among four returns for 166 yards (a 41.5 average) vs. the Terps. Opponents are averaging 31.9 yards in nine kickoff attempts vs. the Hoosiers. Indiana has a dangerous kickoff returner in Jacobly Hewitt, who averages 27.0 yards per attempt.

EDGE: EVEN

INTANGIBLES

The Hoosiers' records of 2-3 overall and 0-2 in the Big Ten going into their Oct. 16 home game against Michigan State are deceiving but brutally honest. Indiana played like a program about to break out the past two years, but this season they've been unable to keep up with the big boys and suffered losses to top-10 opponents Iowa, Cincinnati and Penn State. The unbeaten Spartans are ranked 10th this week, so if Indiana is looking for a break when the Buckeyes come rolling into Bloomington, they're going to be disappointed.

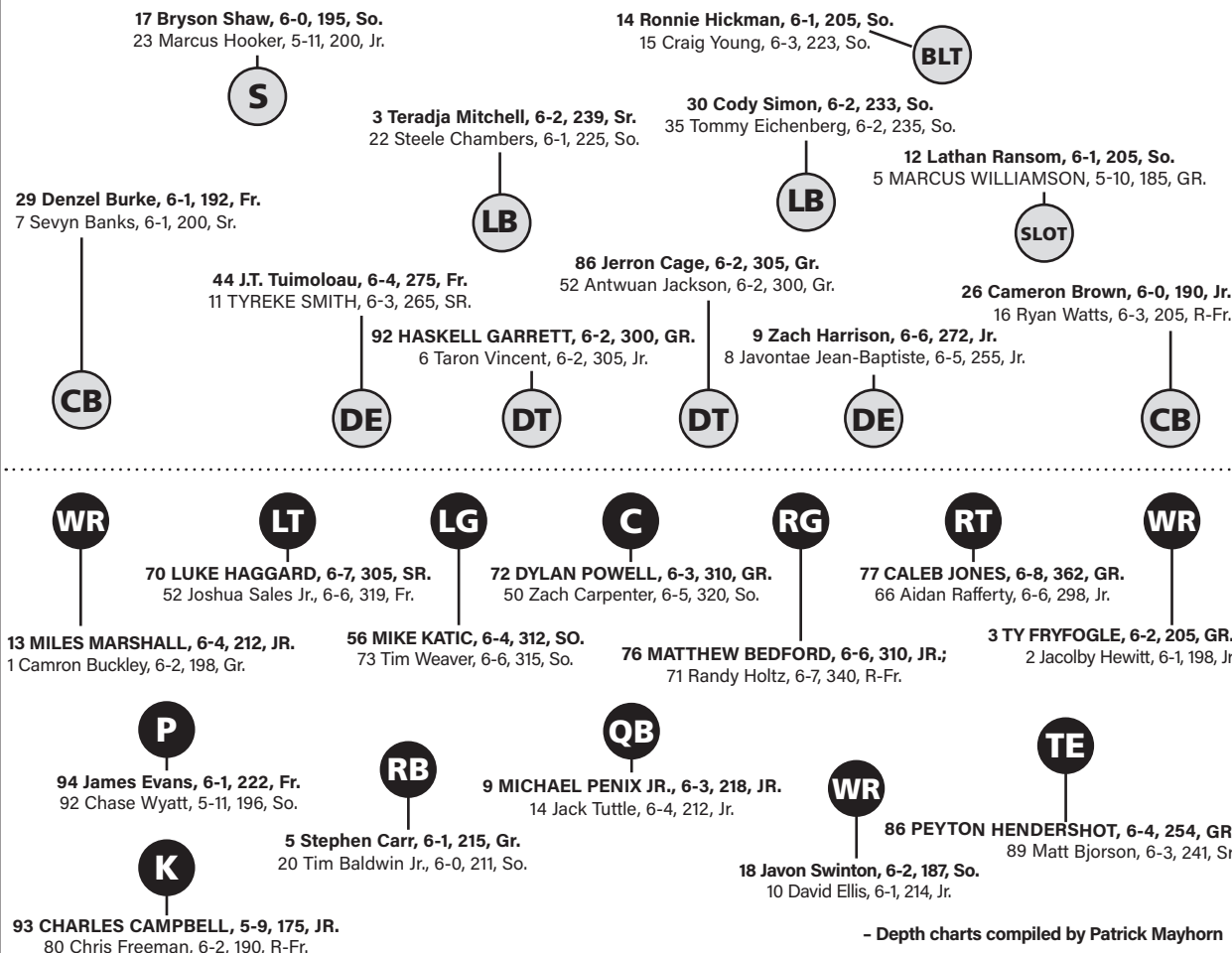
EDGE: OHIO STATE

STAFF PREDICTION

Indiana has a recent history of making things tough for the Buckeyes. Witness last season's game in an empty Ohio Stadium when OSU rolled to 35-7 lead and then held on for a 42-35 victory. Penix was fabulous, throwing for 491 yards and five touchdowns. The Hoosiers can only hope to re-create that magic. OSU is clicking on both sides of the ball and is capable of a 40-point win despite playing on the road. However, this will be Indiana's last chance to salvage the season, and the Hoosiers should play with some kind of desperation. This one looks both promising and intriguing for the Buckeyes.

OHIO STATE 53, INDIANA 21

WHEN INDIANA HAS THE BALL...



Hawkeyes Rally Late In Battle Of League Titans

The weekend of Oct. 9 got under way with five Big Ten teams ranked among the top 11 in The Associated Press writers' poll, the first time that had happened since 1961.

In the marquee game of the weekend, No. 3 Iowa recovered from a 20-10 deficit late in the third quarter to rally for a 23-20 victory against visiting No. 4 Penn State.

The Hawkeyes got field goals from Caleb Shudak late in the third quarter and early in

verines defensive back Brad Hawkins forced Cornhuskers quarterback Adrian Martinez to fumble, returning it 19 yards to the Nebraska 18 to set up the game-winner.

"We practice pushing out the ball, stripping the ball, hitting the ball," Hawkins said. "That moment just touching the ball, striking the ball came through."

Martinez said he thought the play was over when Hawkins took the ball away from him.

"I'm not going to stand up here and make excuses for myself," Martinez said. "I thought the play was over. I was standing like I am now and thought the play was over. I've got to take care of the ball. That hurt our team."

Elsewhere in the Big Ten, No. 11 Michigan State remained unbeaten with a 31-13 win at Rutgers while Wisconsin shut out Illinois, 24-0, in a get-well game for the Badgers.

The Spartans got huge performances from running back Kenneth Walker, quarterback Payton Thorne and receiver Jalen Nailor. Walker ran for 232 yards and a touchdown, while Thorne threw for 340 yards and three scores. Nailor was on the receiving end of all three touchdowns from Thorne for scores of 63, 63 and 65 yards. He finished the day with five catches for 221 yards.

Michigan State is 6-0 and off to its best start since it won its first eight games in 2015, when it reached the College Football Playoff.

Meanwhile, the Badgers played keep-away from the Fighting Illini, holding the ball for 42:43 to just 17:17 for Illinois. As a result, Wisconsin piled up 491 yards of total offense to just 93 for the Illini, who were 1 for 12 on third downs and 1 for 3 on fourth-down tries.

Chez Mellusi and Braelon Allen combined to rush for 277 yards and two touchdowns for the Badgers, who won for the first time in three conference games this season.

Four-Star QB Prospect Commits To Purdue

Purdue had an open date on the schedule for Oct. 9, but the Boilermakers still won big during the weekend, securing the commitment of four-star quarterback Rickie Collins.

Collins is a four-star recruit from Baton Rouge (La.) Woodlawn, who ranks No. 15 in the nation among quarterbacks and No. 274 overall.

The 6-4, 185-pound signal-caller held scholarship offers from Arkansas, Louisiana Tech, Louisville, LSU, Memphis and TCU, among others.

A dynamic three-sport athlete, Collins earned all-district honors in football and basketball as well as second-team all-district accolades in baseball. On the gridiron, Collins accounted for 1,449 yards of offense and 16 total touchdowns in five games as a sophomore.

Collins marks the first commitment for Purdue head coach Jeff Brohm's 2023 class, and special teams coordinator Marty Biagi has been credited with helping secure the pledge due to his ties in Louisiana.

With his commitment, Collins became the third consecutive four-star quarterback to pledge his services to Purdue, joining 2020 commit Michael Alaimo and 2022 commit Brady Allen.

Michigan Corral Pair Of Basketball Commits

Gregg Glenn, a four-star prospect from Calvary Christian Academy in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., recently committed to Michigan from a top five that included Georgia, Iona, South Florida and Virginia Tech.

A 6-7, 215-pound power forward, Glenn also held offers from Alabama, Arkansas, Florida and Florida State, among others.

Glenn is rated the No. 20 power forward and No. 109 overall prospect in the country for 2022 as well as Florida's No. 21 recruit. He averaged 13.8 points, 6.6 rebounds, 2.2 assists and 1.7 steals per game last season for Calvary Christian Academy, shooting 58 percent from the floor, 17 percent from beyond the arc and 63 percent from the free-throw line.

His pledge made Glenn the third commitment in Michigan's class of 2022, joining fellow four-star prospects center Tarris Reed of Branson (Mo.) Link Year Prep and point guard Dug McDaniel of Fairfax (Va.) Paul VI Catholic.

U-M head coach Juwan Howard did not stop his recruiting efforts with Glenn, securing his first commit in the 2024 class as well. Howard and his staff locked up Atlanta Lovett School point guard Christian Anderson, who is a sophomore in high school.

Anderson, who is listed at 5-8 and 125 pounds, picked up an offer from Michigan in the summer and visited Ann Arbor in late September. Following his visit, Michigan assistant coach Saddi Washington appeared to have visited Anderson in Atlanta within the next several days.

Anderson said no other programs had yet offered him a scholarship, but he had told coaches he was not interested because he preferred to be a Wolverine.

"I chose Michigan because of the relationship I made with Coach Juwan," Anderson said. "His staff is great and the school felt like a family. I really like the campus and the whole atmosphere at Michigan. They also have a great reputation – not just their sports, but their academics too. I think I fit their culture perfectly."

While Anderson's pledge marks the first of the Wolverines' 2024 class, they do not hold a commitment for the 2023 cycle.

BIG

2021 Standings

East Division

	Conf.		All		
	W	L	W	L	Pct.
Michigan	3	0	6	0	1.000
Michigan State	3	0	6	0	1.000
Ohio State	3	0	5	1	.833
Penn State	2	1	5	1	.833
Maryland	1	2	4	2	.667
Indiana	0	2	2	3	.400
Rutgers	0	3	3	3	.500

West Division

	Conf.		All		
	W	L	W	L	Pct.
Iowa	3	0	6	0	1.000
Minnesota	1	1	3	2	.600
Purdue	1	1	3	2	.600
Wisconsin	1	2	2	3	.400
Nebraska	1	3	3	4	.429
Illinois	1	3	2	5	.286
Northwestern	0	2	2	3	.400

Oct. 9 Scores

Ohio State 66, Maryland 17
Michigan State 31, Rutgers 13
Wisconsin 24, Illinois 0
Iowa 23, Penn State 20
Michigan 32, Nebraska 29

Oct. 16 Games

Rutgers at Northwestern, Noon
Michigan State at Indiana, Noon
Nebraska at Minnesota, Noon
Purdue at Iowa, 3:30 p.m.
Army at Wisconsin, 8:00 p.m.

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

Oct. 30 Games

Indiana at Maryland, Noon
Iowa at Wisconsin, Noon
Purdue at Nebraska, TBD
Michigan at Michigan State, TBD
Penn State at **Ohio State**, TBD
Minnesota at Northwestern, TBD
Rutgers at Illinois, TBD

Nov. 6 Games

Ohio State at Nebraska, TBD
Indiana at Michigan, TBD
Iowa at Northwestern, TBD
Illinois at Minnesota, TBD
Penn State at Maryland, TBD
Wisconsin at Rutgers, TBD
Michigan State at Purdue, TBD

Nov. 13 Games

Maryland at Michigan State, TBD
Minnesota at Iowa, TBD
Purdue at **Ohio State**, TBD
Michigan at Penn State, TBD
Rutgers at Indiana, TBD
Northwestern at Wisconsin, TBD

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

the fourth period before quarterback Spencer Petras fooled the Penn State defense by rolling right and throwing back to his left, finding receiver Nico Ragaini for a 44-yard touchdown that was the game-winner.

Fans rushed the field after the victory in what was considered the biggest game at Kinnick Stadium since No. 1 Iowa squeezed out a 12-10 win against second-ranked Michigan in 1985. Iowa beat a top-25 team for the third time this season and has won six in a row against ranked opponents for the first time since 1960. It was also Iowa's first win against a top-five team since a 55-24 win against then-No. 3 Ohio State in 2017.

As the Hawkeyes took a stranglehold on the Big Ten West, No. 9 Michigan kept its eyes on the Big Ten East prize by holding off upset-minded Nebraska in a wild 32-29 finish.

The Wolverines enjoyed a 13-0 halftime lead but then watched as the Cornhuskers roared back with three third-quarter touchdowns to take a 22-19 lead.

That set the stage for a seesaw fourth quarter that saw one tie and three lead changes before Michigan kicker Jake Moody's 39-yard field goal with 1:24 left provided the winning margin.

Moody's fourth field goal came after Wol-



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California Wing Gives Pledge To Cornhuskers

Denim Dawson, a three-star small forward from California, recently committed to Fred Hoiberg and the Nebraska men's basketball program.

A 6-5, 180-pound wing, Dawson chose the Cornhuskers over other offers from Georgia Tech, Iona, Murray State, UC-Santa Barbara and Virginia Tech, among others.

"Coach Hoiberg and Coach Matt (Abdelmassih) flew out to see me, and they really liked how I play," Dawson said. "Then seeing their play style and how they play, I see myself fitting in a perfect match."

Hailing from Castaic (Calif.) Southern California Academy, Dawson is the No. 53 small forward and No. 251 overall prospect nationally as well as California's No. 27 prospect. His decision closely followed his Oct. 3 official visit to Lincoln.

"The fan base is crazy," Dawson said. "It's like a town but every day, everyone is wearing Nebraska gear whether it's Nebraska football, Nebraska basketball – it's literally just red all over the town."

Dawson's athleticism and ability to create shots in space made him an attractive recruit for the Huskers, who finished 7-20 overall and 3-16 in the Big Ten in 2020-21.

"I will be bringing in a lot of confidence from the defensive side, a lot of energy and just a winning mentality," he said.

Dawson became the third commit of Nebraska's 2022 class, joining Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon three-star wing Ramel Lloyd and the nation's No. 1 overall JUCO prospect in center Blaise Keita.

Minnesota RB Potts Home From Hospital, "Doing Well"

Minnesota running back Trey Potts was discharged Oct. 8 from an Indiana hospital where he spent six days after an unspecified medical condition developed during the Golden Gophers' game at Purdue.

According to Minnesota's athletic department, Potts returned to Minnesota for follow-up care and was "doing well."

The Gophers thanked the public for their concern, but did not reveal any details about why Potts was sent to the hospital after leaving the game against the Boilermakers in the fourth quarter. Potts took his final carry for 6 yards on third-and-3 near the three-minute mark with Minnesota running out the clock on the way to a 20-13 victory.

Potts finished with 78 yards rushing and scored the go-ahead touchdown before exiting. There was no apparent issue with Potts on the field, but the situation was serious enough for athletic director Mark Coyle, head athletic trainer Mike Sypniak and team physician Dr. David Jewison to stay overnight in Indiana in support of Potts.

Potts was ranked second in the Big Ten with 110.4 rushing yards per game after taking over for Mohamed Ibrahim, who suffered a season-ending Achilles injury during the opener against Ohio State.

Wildcats Extend WBB Head Coach McKeown

Northwestern head women's basketball coach Joe McKeown has signed a contract extension to continue to lead the Wildcats through the 2024-25 season.

McKeown first arrived in Evanston in 2008 after leading George Washington to six straight NCAA tournament appearances as well as nine consecutive postseason appearances.

Although Northwestern finished with a 7-23 record in McKeown's first season at the helm, the program improved quickly and the Wildcats went 18-15 in his second season, qualifying for the WNIT.

The Wildcats returned to the WNIT the next season, but then McKeown's squad faltered for two years by failing to earn a postseason appearance in the 2011-12 and 2012-13 campaigns.

McKeown led Northwestern to its first NCAA tournament since 1997 during the 2014-15 season, and even though the Wildcats fell to Arkansas in the first round, that season marked a turning point for the program.

In his last five seasons, McKeown has led Northwestern to a 95-59 record, including an exceptional 26-4 season to win the Big Ten championship in the pandemic-shortened campaign of 2019-20. McKeown was named Big Ten Coach of the Year for that season.

Michigan Center Keeps Feud With Illini Going

The fire fueling the feud between the Michigan and Illinois men's basketball programs is not going away anytime soon, and Wolverines center Hunter Dickinson made sure of that at the annual Big Ten Media Days.

The bad blood began when the Wolverines were crowned Big Ten regular-season champions in 2020-21 even though they did not play all their games due to COVID-19. The Fighting Illini finished percentage points behind Michigan in the standings, and they routed the Wolverines by a 76-53 final in Ann Arbor.

Michigan ended the season with a 14-3 conference record (an .824 winning percentage) while Illinois finished 16-4 in Big Ten play (.800). The Illini felt they rightfully deserved at least part of the conference regular-season title due to two more league wins, and Illinois guard Trent Frazier even held up a sign after the last regular-season game that read, "B1G Champs."

Then, after Illinois won the Big Ten Tournament title, athletic director Josh Whitman asked the conference to name the Illini co-Big

Ten champions and wrote an open letter to the fans after the conference did not oblige.

The beef between the two programs has not ceased, with Dickinson garnering attention with his comments about Illini fans at Big Ten Media Days, held Oct. 7 and 8 in Indianapolis.

"The players aren't that bad (and) I'm cool with Kofi (Cockburn)," Dickinson said. "I don't really know (Andre) Curbelo too much, but he seems pretty cool. It's really the fans. They just act like they're some powerhouse in the Big Ten and they're really not."

"They're one of the best teams in the Big Ten now, but I don't know too much history about Illinois basketball. I don't know if they were really that good before. Coach (Brad) Underwood has done a great job of getting them up to the powerhouses in NCAA basketball. But I think their fans are kind of annoying."

"Obviously some fans, like Michigan State, you're going to get some hate from them. Ohio State, it's not so bad. Illinois fans are pretty annoying – not going to lie."

Michigan and Illinois are expected to com-

pete again for the Big Ten crown in 2021-22. Their matchup lacked fans last season due to the pandemic, so each showdown this season is expected to include a raucous environment with serious conference-champion implications.

"It's going to be a great game," Dickinson said. "Hopefully, there will be two highly ranked teams when that comes. Me and Kofi, that's going to be a really good matchup. Eli Brooks and Curbelo is going to be a really good matchup. I'm definitely excited for that game."

Underwood did not shy away from the idea that other Big Ten teams might not like his team.

"I think you have to play the game with some fire in your belly and maybe it means we've arrived a little bit," the Illinois coach said. "People want to talk about us that way and not like us. Maybe it's because we stepped on toes, I don't know. I'm never going to apologize for coaching with passion, having our guys play with passion, play with fire, being competitive as hell – that's who I am."

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Wait For D-Line Commitments Has No Timetable

Ohio State's 2022 class has been at a standstill for more than three months, with its most recent commitment coming July 9 from four-star offensive tackle George Fitzpatrick of Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek.

But what was true then, and remains true today, is that the Buckeyes still have zero commitments in one specific area – the defensive line.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Wyatt Crosher

That is a position Ohio State has recruited very well since the arrival of defensive line coach Larry Johnson, bringing in such big names as Nick Bosa, Chase Young and Zach Harrison, each of whom was a five-star talent.

But the commitments have not yet come for Johnson and company for the 2022 class, although Lettermen Row recruiting writer Jeremy Birmingham told BSB he doesn't think it's quite time to panic. That's because most of Ohio State's major defensive line targets remain uncommitted heading into the final months before the early signing period.

"They're in good shape for a handful of them," Birmingham said. "Generally speaking, it's going to take as long as it takes. It certainly sounds silly to say that, but they're

not in a position right now where they're going to go chasing any other players to try to fill up on kids just because someone wants to commit. They've invested a lot of time, a lot of personal capital in getting to know these kids, and they're going to continue to be patient."

Those big names include 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; Rancho Santa Margarita (Calif.) Catholic four-star defensive lineman Hero Kanu; and four-star defensive lineman Chris McClellan of Owasso, Okla.

All five of those players rank among the top 100 in the 247Sports composite rankings, and Birmingham said there is reason to be optimistic about Ohio State's chances for almost each one of those defensive line prospects.

"Caden Curry from Indiana remains the guy that I think is maybe the most important remaining player on the recruiting board for Ohio State considering the amount of time they've invested into him and his versatility as a defensive lineman able to play on the edge or the inside," Birmingham said. "You have a guy like Curry, you have Kenyatta Jackson down there in the Miami area, who's a teammate with (OSU commit) Ryan Turner – they are very involved there. I think the Buckeyes continue to be probably the team to beat

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
George Fitzpatrick	OT	6-6	285	★★★★	Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek
Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	235	★★★★	Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona
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

for Omari Abor in Texas, the defensive end from Duncanville.

"Hero Kanu, a three-tech type defensive tackle from California by way of Germany, I think the Buckeyes are in good shape there as well. They're fading a little bit with some of the other guys like Chris McClellan who might now be leaning toward staying home in Oklahoma."

The Buckeyes did very well at the position in the 2021 class, bringing in a pair of top-five overall prospects in defensive ends Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau. The depth was also strong, with Ohio State signing defensive tackle Mike Hall and defensive tackle Tyleik Williams, the Nos. 53 and 166 prospects in the class.

Buckeyes Continue To Pursue O-Linemen

The defensive line might have no current commitments for 2022, but the offensive line also remains a large concern for the Buckeyes, and the concern might continue to grow.

Ohio State has two offensive tackles but no interior linemen committed in the class – the previously mentioned Fitzpatrick and four-star Tegra Tshabola of West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West. The difference between the offensive and defensive lines is that many of the team's top OL targets are no longer on the board and committed to other programs.

Along with that, Birmingham also said

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that the prospects still uncommitted seem to be trending less and less in Ohio State's favor.

"I don't know if it's the biggest area of concern, but it is definitely concerning," Birmingham said. "They once had a pretty firm grasp on players like Earnest Greene from St. John Bosco in California or Kam Dewberry at Atascocita in Humble, Texas. These are kids that, when they left Ohio State in the middle of June after their first visit, the Buckeyes were in great shape. It seems like they have just fallen off."

Greene is rated the second-best interior offensive lineman and No. 61 overall prospect in the class. Dewberry is the 10th-best offensive tackle and No. 108 prospect. Greene has a crystal ball prediction in favor of Georgia, and while Dewberry has three predictions for Ohio State, the most recent one is from July 21.

But the Buckeyes are not out of the running for either prospect and have a few others still on the board, players such as four-star interior offensive lineman Carson Hinzman of Hammond (Wis.) Saint Croix Central and four-star offensive tackle Aamil Wagner of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne. Past them, Ohio State might have to expand its look to prospects who were lower on its initial list.

"Greene is one that still has to make an official visit to Ohio State, and that might happen for the Penn State game, so they can get back involved there," Birmingham said. "But it's really just those two. Carson Hinzman, who's down to Ohio State and Wisconsin, he's also trying to get back for that game against the Nittany Lions. And then there's in-state offensive tackle Aamil Wagner. The Buckeyes have never really made him a priority in this class. They've continued to recruit him, but I think that the interest and energy that Kentucky, Notre Dame and others have shown him kind of has him leaning elsewhere. So those are the four real guys."

"If they don't land any of those, it's go-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ZACH RICE VIA TWITTER

READY TO PLEDGE — Five-star offensive tackle Zach Rice of Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy is scheduled to announce his verbal commitment on Oct. 21. Rice will reportedly choose from a list of five schools that features Ohio State, Alabama, North Carolina, Notre Dame and Virginia.

ing to be an interesting discussion between (offensive line coach) Greg Studrawa and (head coach) Ryan Day about whether or not they look at Plan B-type players around the state or around the region because there's not a lot of them out there."

Five-Star Offensive Tackle Sets Date For Commitment

Another one of the big offensive line names Ohio State is still going after is five-

star offensive tackle Zach Rice of Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy, and the Buckeyes will get an answer soon.

Rice posted Oct. 10 on Twitter that he will announce his commitment Oct. 21. He has narrowed his prospective list to five – Alabama, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Virginia.

The 6-6, 282-pound Rice is ranked the top offensive tackle and No. 7 overall prospect in the 2022 class. He made visits to

each of his top five schools in June after the end of the recruiting dead period. His first visit was Ohio State, followed in order by Virginia, Alabama, North Carolina (on an unofficial visit) and Notre Dame.

There are no crystal ball predictions currently for where Rice will wind up later this month. Ohio State has had recent success in the state of Virginia, where it signed running back TreVeyon Henderson and Williams, the Nos. 2 and 6 prospects, respectively, in the state in 2021.

OSU Class Tumbles In Recruiting Rankings

In the three months since the Fitzpatrick commitment, Ohio State has seen its 2022 class fall to No. 7 in the 247Sports team rankings. That is mostly due to the size of the class, with its 14 commitments being fewer than the six teams in front of them. The Buckeyes still have a 93.97 average recruit ranking, and that is second best in the country.

Alabama sits at the top of the rankings, both in overall points (277.13) and average recruit ranking (94.11). The Crimson Tide currently have 16 commits in the class, two of whom are five-star prospects – defensive end Jeremiah Alexander of Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson and running back Emmanuel Henderson of Hartford (Ala.) Geneva County, the Nos. 11 and No. 28 prospects in the class, respectively.

The No. 2 class is also the top class in the Big Ten, and that distinction goes to Penn State. Unlike the Buckeyes and Crimson Tide, the Nittany Lions' lofty ranking can be attributed to sheer numbers with 26 commitments already in the class.

That doesn't mean Penn State is without some top-end talent, though, with 14 members of the class being four-stars. Two of those top players come from Ohio with Westerville South wide receiver Kaden Saunders and Medina quarterback Drew

Continued On Page 28

ASK AN ANALYST

With Jeremy Birmingham of Lettermen Row

Where does Ohio State currently sit with four-star safety Xavier Nwankpa of Altoona (Iowa) Southeast Polk, who took an official visit to Iowa for its Oct. 9 game against Penn State?

"He had the official visit to Iowa and he's already visited or watched them play twice this year, so I think there's some real smoke to a building fire there with the Hawkeyes. But Xavier will be back at Ohio State the weekend of the Penn State game. For a long time, Ohio State has been the presumptive leader there, and this may be a situation where Iowa could sneak up on him. I think it's really Ohio State and the Hawkeyes fighting with Notre Dame on the periphery there, but certainly the game visit that he makes to Columbus at the end of the month will be very important.

"The relationships he has with four-star wide receiver Kyion Grayes of Chandler, Ariz., Kettering (Ohio) Alter five-star linebacker C.J. Hicks, and the guys in the Ohio State class still carry a lot of weight, and that ultimately is why I still believe he ends up at Ohio State. But the way Iowa has been playing, the plans they have for him, the impact of name, image and likeness on a kid playing in his home state, it all has to be weighed pretty seriously."

Which players currently committed in Ohio State's 2022 class have impressed you during their senior seasons at their respective high schools?

"I've always been a big fan of Dallan Hayden, the four-star

running back at Christian Brothers in Memphis, Tenn. He's one of those kids that I think just doesn't get a lot of attention. Bennett Christian, the four-star tight end from (Allatoona, Ga.) continues to be a very well-rounded tight end, probably one of the best blocking tight ends in the country. I know that's not always sexy in the recruiting rankings, but at 6-6 and 235 pounds, he is developing as a pass catcher, too. I think Bennett is one of those guys performing well.

"And certainly, Hicks is a highlight-reel guy every single week. His team is not particularly very good, and that puts him in a position, unfortunately, where maybe some of his appearances and his performances get overlooked. But C.J. is a difference-maker in every sense of the word for Alter. Those are the guys that really stand out for me."

Defensive backs coach Matt Barnes has received a lot of attention recently since he has taken over for the defensive play-calling. How has he been on the recruiting trail in his time with Ohio State?

"He's pretty much the same as he is as a football coach which is why I think people like him. He's a very energetic guy, a very good teacher. He isn't rah-rah-rah like (defensive coordinator) Kerry Combs is when it comes to that energy he brings to conversations, but he's genuine. He's a younger guy, has young kids. He

understands how to interact with the guys, and as his coaching profile continues to rise, he'll have a bigger impact on recruits.

"Barnes definitely connects with kids very well. He was integral in the recruitment of Jantzen Dunn, Andre Turrentine and Jordan Hancock. He's very involved right now in the recruitment of Xavier Nwankpa – that's sort of his guy. And he's certainly becoming more and more of a key cog in the Buckeyes' recruiting efforts."

The next home game on Ohio State's schedule is a pivotal matchup against Penn State on Oct. 30. How important will that game be from a recruiting standpoint for the Buckeyes?

"You see it every week around the country. These huge games are drawing 40-50 kids in, and the Buckeyes had a lot of them come in for the Oregon game. That obviously did not go as they wanted it to, but it was a big weekend on the recruiting front.

"I think the likelihood is that the Penn State game ends up at night with those all-scarlet uniforms. The Buckeyes need to go out and win, they need to have a crowd that's insane, almost – I don't want to say it – but almost like a Penn State White Out crowd that just keeps the energy going.

"For Ohio State, it's sort of the last big recruiting weekend of the year at home. They'll have a handful of kids in for the Michigan State game, but Penn State matters more than any."

Continued From Page 27

Allar ranking No. 58 and No. 92 in the class. Allar specifically has been a name on Ohio State's radar after the reclassification of Quinn Ewers, though a flip there does not appear to be in sight.

Even without a full season under his belt as head coach, Steve Sarkisian has Texas up to the No. 3 overall recruiting class in 2022. He has done that by recruiting well in the Lone Star State. The top three commits for the Longhorns – safety Bryan Allen Jr., running back Jamarion Miller and defensive lineman Justice Finkley – all come from the state of Texas.

Notre Dame holds the No. 4 class, led by a pair of top-100 prospects in Hilton Head, S.C., four-star linebacker Jaylen Sneed and four-star wide receiver C.J. Williams of Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei. They are the respective Nos. 51 and 91 players in 2022. Ohio State's big competition with the Fighting Irish currently is ongoing for the 2023 class with Pickerington (Ohio) Central five-star safety Sony Styles at the top of the board for both programs.

Another staple at the top of recruiting rankings, head coach Kirby Smart currently has Georgia at the No. 5 class. Linebacker Malaki Starks of Jefferson, Ga., the No. 21 overall prospect for 2022, is the Bulldogs' lone five-star so far, but they also have four-star linebacker Jalon Walker of Salisbury, N.C., the No. 43 overall prospect who

picked them over Ohio State back in late March.

Oregon not only handed the Buckeyes a loss on the field in September, the Ducks are currently beating them in the recruiting rankings as well. Oregon ranks sixth with a class headlined by five-star offensive tackle Kelvin Banks of Humble (Texas) Summer Creek. Banks is one of two top-100 prospects committed to Oregon for 2022. The other is Anaheim (Calif.) Servite four-star wide receiver Tetairoa McMillan, who ranks 57th.

OSU Gives Out Pair Of Offers For 2023

Ohio State recently issued offers to a pair of highly ranked prospects in the 2023 class, a class in which the Buckeyes still have just one commitment in four-star tight end Ty Lockwood of Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence.

The first of those was given Oct. 4 to four-star athlete Nyckoles Harbor of Archbishop Carroll High School in Washington, D.C. Harbor ranks as the top player from D.C. and is the 10th-best athlete and No. 82 prospect overall in the class.

Harbor has received attention from a variety of schools, earning offers from Florida, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Texas A&M and Wisconsin to name a few.

The 6-5, 225-pounder has seen playing time at wide receiver, tight end and defensive end during his high school tenure. There are currently no crystal ball predic-



PHOTO COURTESY OF NYCKOLES HARBOR VIA TWITTER

OFFER RECEIVED — Ohio State recently offered a pair of 2023 prospects, including four-star athlete Nyckoles Harbor of Archbishop Carroll High School in Washington, D.C. Harbor is fielding offers from such programs as Florida, Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame and Oklahoma as well as the Buckeyes.

tions on where he will wind up.

The other offer also went out Oct. 4, and it was to Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star offensive lineman Knijeah Harris, who is ranked the eighth-best interior offensive lineman and No. 182 overall prospect in the 2023 class.

Harris also has a large list of offers which includes Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Miami (Fla.), Michigan,

Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State and Texas A&M. The 6-3, 305-pound Harris, who has been playing primarily at left guard since transferring to IMG Academy in 2020, also has no crystal ball predictions at this time.

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

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

The one player in the nation who was on the list of every major school was Pensacola (Fla.) Escambia running back Emmitt Smith.

Smith, a 5-11, 192-pounder with 4.6 speed in the 40-yard dash, was looking to be the second-most prolific high school ground gainer in history. When the 1986 season began, Smith already had 6,877 yards after picking up 2,928 in 14 games the year before.

Before the 1986 campaign was over, Smith would almost certainly wind up second only to Ken Hall, who rushed for 11,232 yards at Sugar Land, Texas, in the 1950s.

Ohio State definitely wanted Smith, but he looked likely to stay in his home state, meaning that the Buckeyes would likely have to look at a pair of in-state running backs – Carlos Snow of Cincinnati Academy of Physical Education and Mike Delwiche of Troy.

"Wherever I go," said Smith, "it's going to be someplace where they run the football."

30 Years Ago – 1991

When Robert Smith quit the Ohio State football team just before the 1991 season began, many experts believed that some of the allegations he leveled at the program might hurt recruiting.

In reality, Smith's departure looked like it could actually help the Buckeyes' recruiting efforts, especially when it came to running backs.

With Smith gone and senior co-captains Carlos Snow and Scottie Graham exhausting their eligibility after 1991, Ohio State's well-stocked stable of running backs was suddenly looking a little thin.

That was good news for the top tailbacks within the state of Ohio, a weaker batch than usual but still filled with talent.

The top prospects in the state included Louis Willard of Grove City, Ty Douthard of Cincinnati La Salle, Chris Jaquillard of Toledo Woodward and John Williams of Cleveland Holy Name. Willard had been the top back in the state prior to 1991, but he tore ligaments in his knee during his opening game of the season and would require surgery.

Douthard was next and had elevated himself into the top spot, followed by the workhorse Jaquillard and bruising fullback convert Williams.

25 Years Ago – 1996

Cypress (Calif.) Brethren Christian quarterback David Priestley visited the Ohio State campus the weekend of Oct. 12 and had a good experience.

"I met up with (quarterbacks coach Walt) Harris and sat in on

the quarterbacks meeting," Priestley said. "I was sort of surprised at how in-depth everything was.

"Obviously, I don't know their calls and their terminology, but I was there as they went over some film. It was interesting and also surprising to see how much you have to know."

The 6-4½, 195-pound prospect had made a verbal commitment to the Buckeyes in September.

20 Years Ago – 2001

Ohio State began its official visit schedule during the weekend of Oct. 6-8 by welcoming two of the top prospects in the country.

Huntersville (N.C.) North Mecklenberg offensive lineman Derek Morris and wide receiver Richard Washington of Fort Myers, Fla., arrived in Columbus for the weekend, and both enjoyed their trips.

"It was sweet," Morris said. "I got so excited, I wanted some pads."

Washington was similarly thrilled about his visit.

"It's amazing there," he said. "I liked it a lot. The game was exciting. The field, the stadium, that's what I liked best. And I talked to Justin Zwick and Maurice Claret. They have the quarterback and running back."

Even with his excitement, Washington did not commit to the Buckeyes.

"I'm not ready to do that yet," he said, "but Ohio State is my leader."

15 Years Ago – 2006

Greg Little was hours away from making his final decision. The linebacker/tailback/wide receiver out of Hillside, N.C., had to decide between North Carolina, Notre Dame, Ohio State and USC.

"Basically, Florida (is out)," Little said. "I don't think I could see myself excelling in their system. I'm not trying to down the school. It's a great school. They score a lot, the offense is great, but I don't think it's the right situation for me."

Little said that despite his approaching deadline, he had not yet picked a school.

"Not really," he said. "I wouldn't say that (my decision is already made). I think it's still up in the air."

10 Years Ago – 2011

Se'Von Pittman couldn't have been much clearer when he said his verbal commitment to Michigan State was solid, but after visiting Ohio State on Sept. 24 for its win against Colorado, rumors had begun to swirl during the weeks that followed.

"I am hearing a lot of rumblings and rumors that Ohio State is

still very much in the running," Scout recruiting analyst Allen Trieu said. "You have to take the kid's word right now that he is committed, but the old adage says that actions are louder than words, and he was on Ohio State's campus recently."

The 6-4, 260-pound defensive end out of Canton (Ohio) McKinley was one of Ohio State's top targets in the 2012 class, but its situation with the NCAA was a large part of the reason for his decision to look elsewhere.

As the dust began to clear on that, Pittman seemed to have a renewed interest in staying at home despite what he said publicly about the Spartans.

Five Years Ago – 2016

Las Vegas Bishop Gorman safety Bubba Bolden enjoyed a strong start to October, finding success on the field with his team and in the recruiting world, earning a bump in the player rankings.

The OSU target also announced that he had scheduled an official visit to Columbus.

"I'm going to visit Ohio State (Nov. 5)," Bolden told Scout. "I'll also visit UCLA and USC after the season but don't have any other dates locked in. I'm still looking to Arizona State, Colorado and Florida as well, and I'll figure out my other trip dates later in the year."

Three of Bolden's teammates – five-star quarterback Tate Martell, four-star defensive tackle Haskell Garrett and four-star wide receiver Tyjon Lindsey – were already committed to Ohio State. Martell announced on his Twitter account Oct. 13 that he, Garrett and Lindsey would be joining Bolden for his official visit to Columbus to watch the Buckeyes take on Nebraska.

Ohio State hoped that the pull of playing with his teammates could help in Bolden's recruitment, and he was seen doing an "O-H" gesture with Lindsey after recording an interception during a game against Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas earlier in the season.

One Year Ago – 2020

Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau included Ohio State in his mid-October top seven along with Alabama, Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, USC and Washington.

The 6-5, 277-pounder was considered the second-best strong-side defensive end and No. 2 prospect overall in the class of 2022.

Tuimoloau had never been to Columbus, but the Buckeyes were widely considered the favorite in his recruitment thanks to his relationship with defensive line coach Larry Johnson and freshman wide receiver Gee Scott Jr., his former high school teammate.

Saints Have Steady Pipeline From Ohio State

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since fullback Tom Barrington was selected by the New Orleans Saints in the 1967 NFL expansion draft, the Ohio State pipeline to the Big Easy has grown larger and stronger over the years.

There are seven Buckeyes on this season's roster, and according to the Saints' official media guide, more than 25 ex-Ohio State players have appeared in at least one game for New Orleans throughout its history.

"Part of the reason, I think, is there's just a certain kind of player that they know what to expect out of Ohio State," said Luke Johnson, who covers the Saints for the New Orleans Advocate/Times-Picayune. "In particular, they put a huge premium on football intelligence."

This season's crop of Buckeyes includes defensive end Jalyn Holmes, safety Malcolm Jenkins, cornerback Marshon Lattimore, cornerback Bradley Roby, receiver Michael Thomas, tight end Nick Vannett and linebacker Pete Werner.

"They were all really productive college football players," Johnson told BSB. "Mike Thomas was a really productive college football player. Marshon Latimore in his time at Ohio State was pretty productive, especially his last year."

"They know what they're getting out of those guys. They're not just like a five-star athlete who's not really a great football player. They have the whole combination with those guys."

Werner is the latest success story for the Saints. The second-round pick (60th overall) in the 2021 NFL draft played on special teams during the season opener, a 38-3 win against Green Bay, but by the fourth game of the season, he had 10 tackles, including one for loss, in 40 defensive snaps during a 27-21 overtime loss to the New York Giants.

Werner missed part of training camp with an injury and injured his hamstring against Green Bay, causing him to sit the second game against Carolina. But he has come back to earn more playing time.

"Right now, he's played a pretty big role for them," Johnson said. "The last few weeks, he started at Will linebacker. He's been where he's supposed to be. I think that's kind of what they anticipated with his football intelligence."

"When they drafted him they're like, 'OK, this is a guy who's not going to blow assignments and he's a really good athlete.' They really like him. They like his athleticism, especially in coverage. He shores up a weakness for them."

Shortly after he was drafted, Werner talked on the team's YouTube channel of the number of ex-Buckeyes on the Saints' roster.

"You talk about the last few years – they love the Buckeyes," he said. "Coach (Sean) Payton, he seems to like the tradition and culture at Ohio State, and I think that correlates with how they do it in New Orleans. So you might as well say there's (a Saints) office in Columbus, Ohio."

Since becoming Saints head coach in 2006, Payton has drafted six Buckeyes.

"One thing about an Ohio State football



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

MAKING THE LEAP — Former Ohio State linebacker Pete Werner has made the New Orleans Saints happy they spent a second-round pick on him in April's draft. Werner has quickly made the transition from special teams contributor to starting linebacker on a team filled with former Buckeyes.

player, man, they come ready," Payton said during a visit to campus for the 2017 pro day. "You know you're getting somebody who has been battle-tested. They're accustomed to winning. They're accustomed to competing."

Another recent success story is Holmes, who on Oct. 6 was signed to the active roster from the practice squad. He spent his first three seasons with the Minnesota Vikings after being drafted in 2018.

Holmes has played in 26 regular-season games with nine starts through Oct. 2, posting 48 tackles (including 24 solos) and one sack.

However, it's not all rosy for the former OSU contingent.

Notably, Thomas has been on the physically unable to play (PUP) list because of ankle surgery in June. The timing of the procedure so close to the start of training camp in July caused a rift between Thomas and management, although that seems to be healing.

Thomas, who played at Ohio State from 2010-13, was also briefly on the COVID-19 reserve list in September after testing positive. He is expected to return for the Monday Night Football game Oct. 25 at Seattle.

Thomas has experienced medical setbacks since earning his third consecutive Pro Bowl selection in 2019 when he set an NFL single-season record with 149 receptions. He sustained the ankle injury during the first week of the 2020 season and missed eight weeks before returning.

"I think they're really ready for him to come back," Johnson said. "Last time we saw him fully healthy, he was the best wide receiver in the NFL – one of the best players in the NFL, period. But he hasn't been fully healthy since week one of the 2020 season."

Johnson said Thomas' competitiveness is his best trait.

"He absolutely wants to crush the guy opposite him every single play," Johnson said. "It really legitimately does not matter if it's a game or a walk-through practice. Thomas is 100-percent full-speed all the time. And they really need that right now. They're really, really anxious to get him back."

Vannett, an offseason free-agent signing after spending last year with the Denver Broncos, has yet to play in the regular season after incurring a knee injury during the preseason. He played for Ohio State from 2011-15 and had a touchdown pass against Oregon in the College Football Playoff final when the Buckeyes captured the 2014 national championship.

While Vannett works his way back from injury, Roby had to learn a new system on short notice after being acquired in a trade with the Houston Texans four days before the Sept. 12 season opener. He had to sit that game to serve the last of a six-game suspension for violating the NFL's performance-enhancing drug policy.

Roby, who was at Ohio State from 2010-13, is expected to serve as the No. 2 cornerback behind Lattimore.

Lattimore was the top-rated cornerback in the 2017 draft despite playing only 20 games for the Buckeyes the previous two seasons. He turned the Saints' faith into being named the AP Defensive Rookie of the Year, and he made his third Pro Bowl in 2020.

"When Roby got here he was like, 'Hell, yeah, I've got all these Ohio State guys with me,' " Johnson said. "And not only are there some of the guys he knows, he also trains with some of them. He trained with Michael Thomas and Alvin Kamara in the offseason."

"That's a benefit the Saints have – that a bunch of these guys are from one program. They all know each other. None of these guys played with Malcolm Jenkins way back in the mid-2000s, but everybody knows who Malcolm Jenkins is up there in Columbus."

Jenkins is in his second go-round with the Saints, having signed a four-year contract in March 2020 after playing for the Philadelphia Eagles from 2014-19.

Following an All-America senior season at Ohio State in 2008, he was the 14th overall pick by New Orleans in the 2009 draft. He is one of two safeties in team history to be named AP All-Pro, and entering this season his six interception returns for touchdowns were tied for third in the NFL since 2009.

"He's such a smart player back there," Johnson said. "I think he might be the oldest player on their roster right now, but somehow he's still got it athletically."

"He's a stud athlete, but he's also the guy with 12 years of NFL experience at this point. He knows where he's supposed to be. He knows where everyone else is supposed to be. He knows how to communicate it and he's really good at this point."

Jenkins is also well-known for his community outreach program and advocacy for civil rights.

"Everybody around the league respects him for so many things that are just beyond what he is as a football player," Johnson said. "When he talks, people listen. That's absolutely true in the Saints locker room. He's only been with this version of the Saints in his second season, but he's hugely respected."

While receiver/returner Ted Ginn Jr. played for the Saints from 2017-19, the recent run of Buckeyes leans toward the other side of the ball with defensive backs Eli Apple (2018-19), Vonn Bell (2016-19) and Kurt Coleman (2018) also having been with the franchise.

One player who won't be found on the list of ex-Buckeyes playing for the Saints, but who spent a lot of time around the team, is former Ohio State quarterback J.T. Barrett (2014-17), who had numerous stints on the practice squad in 2018 and '19 after going undrafted. In fact, Barrett was part of 23 transactions that first season.

He was waived by the Saints in August 2019, signed and then waived by Seattle a few weeks later, and then went back to New Orleans briefly before being released in October 2019.

"What I like about him is he was such an interesting case because he was a guy that they kept around but never really had plans to play him," Johnson said. "They'd cut him and bring him back, cut him and bring him back."

"They really liked the way he approached the mental side of the game. It was good for J.T. to be in the quarterback room with Drew Brees and Teddy Bridgewater and Taysom Hill. It wouldn't surprise me to see J.T. in some sort of coaching capacity."

Finally, the presence of the late Will Smith is still felt in New Orleans. The former Ohio State defensive end died at age 34 after being shot in his car on April 9, 2016.

The 18th overall pick of the 2004 draft played nine seasons with the Saints, was named to the Pro Bowl in 2006, played on the Super Bowl XLIV championship team and remained a popular figure in the city after his retirement in 2012.

"There's a handful of guys who were teammates of Will Smith, including Cam Jordan, and his name gets brought up at least once a year," Johnson said.

The practice facility has giant murals at each end showing some of the best Saints of all time running onto the field.

"Will is featured pretty prominently in one," Johnson said. "There's probably a couple of other Ohio State guys in there. He's still a part of the organization. For a lot of people, it's still really hard for them to process it."

'71 Season Caught Between Eras Of OSU Greatness

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 1971 season, one that landed between two ultra-successful eras of Ohio State football.

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Most members of the 1971 Ohio State football team realize their season fell smack dab between two of the greatest eras in program history.

The "Super Sophomores" won 27 of 29 games, countless All-America and All-Big Ten awards, three conference titles or co-titles and one undisputed national championship between 1968 and 1970. Two years later began a four-year stretch that produced a Big Ten title every year as well as an unprecedented four consecutive trips to the Rose Bowl. Archie Griffin also became the first (and still only) two-time Heisman Trophy winner in 1974 and '75.

Meanwhile, the 1971 season featured a 6-4 record and third-place finish in the Big Ten standings, the only time during the decade-long period between 1968 and 1977 that the Buckeyes failed to win or tie for the conference championship. The 1971 team also suffered the program's first home loss in 19 games and experienced its first three-game losing streak since 1966.

The season was so nondescript, head coach Woody Hayes gave it only brief mention in his 1973 bestseller, "You Win With People!" While full chapters were devoted to championship seasons, the 1971 season rated only two pages in the 248-page book. Even then, the coach seemed overly dismissive of the season, writing, "Our record for the year was six wins and four losses. Throughout this book, there have been no alibis or excuses given on any of our losses, and none will be given here."

The indignity even stretched to the football program's official 1971 media guide featuring two-time All-America middle guard Jim Stillwagon on its cover. The only problem with that was that Stillwagon wasn't on the '71 team. He was a member of the "Super Sophs" and already headed to a pro career with the Toronto Argonauts in the Canadian Football League.

"I guess you could say we were 'tweeners,' " said former OSU assistant coach and recruiting coordinator Bill Conley, an offensive lineman on the 1971 team. "We'd had so much success the previous couple of years with those Super Sophs, but we'd lost all those guys to graduation. It wasn't that we didn't still have good players – we certainly did – but those guys had played so much ahead of us the previous three years, we didn't have much experience at a couple of key positions.

"We still had a pretty good season, though. Not up to the standards of what came before us or after us, of course, but out of our four losses, none of them were by more than seven points. It wasn't like we were getting blown out. The football just didn't bounce our way at times."

Very few programs could withstand the

roster hits the Buckeyes took following the 1970 season and even come up with a winning record.

A then-record 13 Ohio State players were selected in the 1971 NFL draft, including four in the first round – fullback John Brockington, defensive back Jack Tatum, cornerback Tim Anderson and running back Leo Hayden. That was compounded by a number of injuries to key players in 1971, including future All-America offensive tackle John Hicks. He tore knee ligaments during fall camp and was lost for the season.

Still, the Buckeyes had a nucleus of experienced players with just the right mix of up-and-coming youngsters that should have kept them in contention for the Big Ten title.

Elected team captains were cornerback Harry Howard and center Tom DeLeone, each of whom had broken into the starting lineup with the talented 1970 team. The same was true of linebacker Stan White, who was going to be joined at the position by sophomores Vic Koegel and Randy Gradishar. Meanwhile, senior Tom Campana was moved early in the season from a wingback/tailback spot to a defensive halfback position.

The Buckeyes seemed to have plenty of speed with halfbacks Morris Bradshaw and Rick Galbos as well as more than enough power with tight end Dick Wakefield and fullbacks John Bledsoe and Randy Keith. What the team didn't have in 1971 was an established quarterback.

Finding A New QB

Hayes had enjoyed the services of Rex Kern as his starting quarterback from 1968 to 1970, a player the veteran coach trusted implicitly with his offensive game plan. Kern had earned All-America honors in 1969, the only quarterback from Ohio State to be so honored during a span of 36 years.

Kern was also a heady player. He was only the fourth Ohio State recipient of a National Football Foundation and College Football Hall of Fame scholarship, and he was named an Academic All-American during his senior year in 1970.

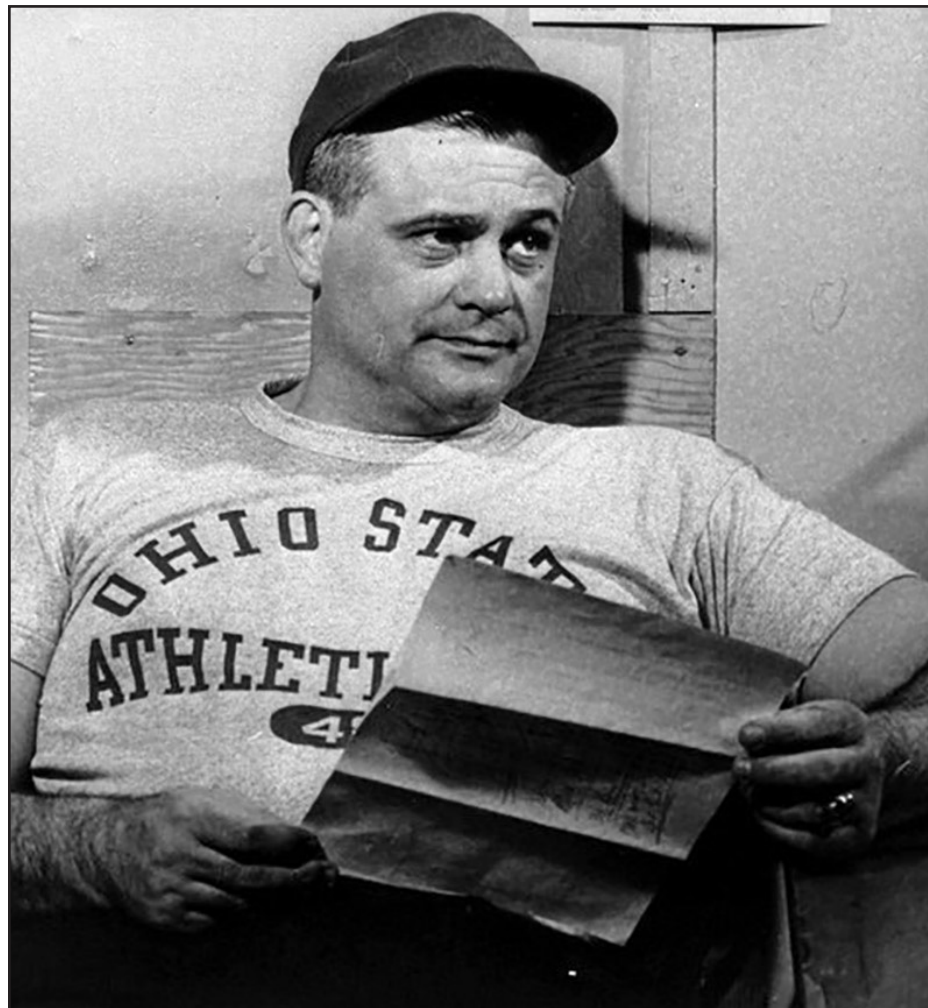
But Hayes also had a secret weapon in reserve. Because Kern's devil-may-care approach to quarterbacking sometimes led to injury, classmate Ron Maciejowski was often called upon in relief. He even started two games in Kern's absence – one each in 1968 and '69 – and guided the Buckeyes to victory in each contest.

But the talent and efficiency of the Kern-Maciejowski duo was a double-edged sword for the Buckeyes heading into the 1971 season.

The 1970 roster had featured backup quarterbacks Ken Zetts and Ross Moore. The left-handed Zetts (6-3, 192) was an All-Ohio product at Struthers High School, while Moore (5-11, 188) had come from Dieruff High School in Allentown, Pa., where he had broken most of Joe Namath's state prep records. Zetts was the better passer of the two, Moore the better runner.

But by the time the 1971 season had rolled around, Zetts had left the program and Moore couldn't seem to stay healthy.

"I'm not sure either of them was ready for what was thrown at them," Kern told BSB. "Ross missed his freshman year with knee



FILE PHOTO

UNHAPPY CAMPER — The look on the face of Ohio State head coach Woody Hayes matched his mood during much of the 1971 season when the Buckeyes finished with a 6-4 record. The final game that year, a 10-7 loss to Michigan, was especially infuriating to the coach.

surgery, and that set him back, and Gary had some trouble grasping the system. It wasn't easy making the move from high school to college even in those days, and some guys just aren't ready for it."

Moore saw mop-up action in three games during the 1970 season and attempted two passes. Only one was caught, and unfortunately that was by the opposing team during a 56-13 win against Texas A&M in the season opener.

After Zetts left the team following the 1970 season, Moore would likely have been the odds-on favorite to take over the starting position in 1971. But a concussion kept him out of the spring game, and that made the Buckeyes look elsewhere on the roster, where they found a former all-state quarterback from South High School in Cleveland.

The only trouble was that former All-Ohio quarterback Don Lamka had been switched to defense two years earlier. He spent the 1969 season as a backup linebacker before moving to a cornerback position for his junior year.

But Hayes and his coaching staff had remembered Lamka from his days as a starting quarterback of the OSU freshman squad in 1968. The frosh played only twice that season, but Lamka threw for three touchdowns against Pittsburgh and ran for three scores vs. Indiana. He followed that with a spring game performance in 1969 that included 173 yards through the air and another 69 on the ground.

Then, when Lamka completed 10 of 15

passes for 190 yards and two touchdowns in the 1971 spring game, the Buckeyes figured they had their heir apparent to Kern.

"I really can't tell you much about Don because we didn't see that much of him after he got switched to defense," Kern said. "I do know that he had a pretty good spring game before they switched him, and he was very highly recruited out of high school as a quarterback and defensive back.

"And I'll tell you this. If Woody and (quarterbacks coach George Chaump) thought he was the man for the job, he must have been pretty good."

Early Success, Late Stumbles

Having won a four-man battle against Moore as well as sophomores Greg Hare and Bill Boyle to become the starting quarterback for the Buckeyes, Lamka led the team to a 52-21 drubbing of Iowa in the '71 season opener, the most points scored by OSU against the Hawkeyes since an 83-21 win in 1950.

The team rushed for 402 yards behind Bledsoe and Lamka, who did their best to make fans forget about Brockington and Kern. Bledsoe carried 27 times for 151 yards and two touchdowns while Lamka had exactly 100 yards and scored four times on 15 attempts. The QB also added 60 yards through the air on 5-for-7 passing.

As well as the game played out, it didn't start anywhere close to perfect for Lamka, who fumbled on Ohio State's first play from scrimmage. Luckily, the quarterback fell on

the ball himself to avoid disaster. But bad times would come soon enough.

After an open week early in the schedule, the Buckeyes hosted No. 20 Colorado, and the teams put on quite a show. The Buffaloes enjoyed a 13-0 lead midway through the fourth quarter, six of those points courtesy of a 68-yard punt return by Cliff Branch, who would go on to an All-Pro career as a receiver for the Oakland Raiders.

Colorado's lead would have been even larger had the Buckeyes not stopped the Buffaloes with an interception in the end zone and a fumble recovery on the 1-yard line.

Lamka scored on a 1-yard sneak with 4:28 remaining in the game to cut Ohio State's deficit to 13-7, but Colorado took the ensuing possession 55 yards in just three plays to go back out in front at 20-7.

Back came the Buckeyes as Lamka connected on 4 of 5 pass attempts during the next possession, culminating in a 14-yard touchdown toss to end Rich Middleton to pull Ohio State back within six at 20-14 with 2:11 remaining in the game.

OSU appeared to have recovered the ensuing onside kick, but the officials got together, decided the kick had not gone the required 10 yards, and the ball stayed in Colorado's possession.

The Buffaloes managed to run the clock down to 1:02 before punting and pinning the Buckeyes back at their own 5-yard line. Lamka valiantly tried to lead a last-second rally, but his final pass intended for tight end Fred Pagac fell incomplete near midfield.

Lamka was brilliant in defeat, breaking the single-game program record with 315 yards of total offense. He completed 20 of 33 attempts for 255 yards and added a team-high 60 rushing yards on 23 attempts, eclipsing the OSU record of 313 total yards set by John Borton against Washington State in 1952.

The performance was even more remarkable in light of the fact Hayes later revealed that Lamka had sustained a separated left shoulder on the third play of the game and refused to come out of the lineup.

"I remember being at practice with the Colts when Tom Matte came over," Kern said, referring to his Baltimore teammate who had been the starting quarterback for the Buckeyes in 1959 and 1960. "Matte says to me, 'Did you see what Lamka did last Saturday? He had more yards than you and me combined – for a whole season.'"

Unfortunately for Lamka, a litany of injuries would conspire to prevent him from ever coming close to the performance he enjoyed against Colorado.

During a 35-3 rebound romp against Cal the following weekend, the senior QB was forced to exit the game with a strained right shoulder midway through the second quarter. Hare came on in relief and looked especially sharp, directing Ohio State's final three scoring drives that included a 40-yard touchdown run of his own.

By week four, the injury bug began to erode what little depth the Buckeyes enjoyed. Neither Bledsoe nor Pagac made the trip to Illinois, while defensive tackle Shad Williams suffered a knee injury and was lost for the remainder of the season.

Somehow, Ohio State still managed to pull off a 24-10 win in Champaign. Galbos and Bradshaw combined to rush for 207 yards while Keith tallied a pair of short touchdown runs. Hare went the whole way

at quarterback, running nine times for 39 yards and a score. But he went just 2 for 7 in the passing department for only 8 yards.

Lamka returned the following Saturday and shared quarterbacking duties with Hare during a 27-17 win against Indiana. The QBs combined for 17 completions and 263 of the team's 384 total yards.

Probably the team's best showing of the season came during a 31-6 win against Wisconsin. A homecoming crowd of 86,559 looked on as the Buckeyes ran out of a wishbone-T formation for the first time all season, an alignment that apparently suited Bradshaw. He scored on an 88-yard run in the first quarter and then matched that distance in the final period with an 88-yard kickoff return for a touchdown.

Bradshaw finished with 123 yards on just 10 carries while Galbos added 100 yards and a touchdown on 27 attempts. Also, Lamka was back at the controls, throwing for 93 yards and adding 30 on the ground.

The Buckeyes were also relentless on defense against the Badgers, creating seven turnovers – four interceptions and three fumbles. Gradishar was credited with 18 tackles, including 11 solos, and he recovered two of Wisconsin's fumbles. White chipped in with 14 tackles and a fumble recovery, and Koegel added 12 stops and a pair of interceptions.

A narrow 14-12 victory during a dark and rainy afternoon followed at Minnesota, giving Ohio State a 6-1 record, a national ranking of ninth in The Associated Press writers' poll and a tie with archrival Michigan for first place in the Big Ten standings.

Little did anyone know that would be as good as things got in 1971 for the Buckeyes.

'Not Close Enough'

The offense that had been so explosive for much of the preceding month suddenly fell silent. In front of 86,616 fans at Ohio Stadium on the first Saturday in November, the Buckeyes managed only 185 yards of total offense during a 17-10 loss to Michigan State.

Galbos generated most of that attack with 91 yards on 18 carries, but Lamka had what was by far his most ineffective performance. He rushed for only 3 yards on three carries and completed just 1 of 9 pass attempts for 3 yards with an interception.

That was followed by a 14-10 loss to Northwestern, one of only two OSU losses to the Wildcats over the last 40 meetings between the two teams.

Again, the Buckeyes couldn't seem to get untracked on offense, managing only 210 total yards. Bradshaw missed the game with a leg injury, and the Ohio State running attack was limited to just 153 yards on 55 carries, a paltry average of 2.8 yards per attempt.

That set up the traditional season finale against heavily-favored Michigan. The Wolverines were still undefeated and ranked No. 3 in the nation, but an 85-yard punt return from Campana gave Ohio State a 7-3 lead late in the third quarter.

The Buckeyes continued to protect that lead into the final minutes before Michigan running back Billy Taylor took a pitchout 21 yards for a touchdown to give the Wolverines a 10-7 lead with 2:07 to play.

Ohio State began one last drive with Lamka and Wakefield immediately hooking up for 25 yards on first down to push the ball to the Michigan 45-yard line. Two plays

later, Lamka tried to go to Wakefield again, but U-M cornerback Thom Darden went up and over the OSU tight end to make what proved to be a game-winning interception. News photos later appeared to show Darden climbing over intended receiver Wakefield's back to make the play, but no interference was called.

Hayes didn't need to see any photo. He immediately erupted, roaring to the middle of the field to voice his displeasure with the no-call. That immediately drew a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty from veteran referee Jerry Markbreit, a flag that only served to further infuriate the OSU head coach. When his protests to other officials fell upon deaf ears, Hayes reluctantly retreated to the sideline.

Two plays later, when the Buckeyes were flagged again for unsportsmanlike conduct, Hayes' temper boiled over. He grabbed one of the sideline yard markers and ripped the orange-striped cloth from the pole. When that didn't satisfy him, he stomped 10 yards and grabbed the other marker and did the same thing, this time tearing the cloth to shreds.

By the time another unsportsmanlike penalty was marked off, the game had been delayed some 10 minutes after which Michigan ran the final two plays to clinch its 10-7 victory.

Hayes refused to talk to members of the media after the game, the first time in his 21 seasons at Ohio State he had done that. Meanwhile, Michigan head coach Bo Schembechler told reporters that he figured Hayes had an ulterior motive for his histrionics.

"Woody knew exactly what he was doing," Schembechler said. "He knew the game was over, so he was just setting up the refs for next year."

A week or so after the game, Hayes wrote to Michigan athletic director Don Canham and offered to pay for the down markers he had destroyed. Canham didn't accept the offer, perhaps in part because Canham owned the company that manufactured them. In fact, the company later used an advertising photo of Hayes dismantling them with the tagline, "Our down markers are (almost) indestructible."

Conley said the Michigan game was a microcosm of the entire 1971 season.

"We were so close so many times," he said. "Just not close enough."

Life After Ohio State

The loss to Michigan officially ended Ohio State's 1971 season on Nov. 20. According to some, however, it had ended much sooner.

"That was the last year of the Big Ten's no-repeat rule, meaning you couldn't go to the Rose Bowl in back-to-back years," Conley said. "We'd been to the Rose Bowl the year before, so we knew we couldn't go again. And in those days, the Big Ten had a rule that you couldn't go to any other bowl game except for the Rose Bowl."

"So maybe – and I'm not saying this is what happened – but maybe we knew there really wasn't much to play for by the end of the regular season. After all those close losses that we'd had, and all the injuries that we'd had, realistically we knew the Michigan game was going to be our last game of the season."

Had the Buckeyes been more fortunate

where injuries were concerned, or had the ball bounced a different way in a handful of games, perhaps the 1971 team would have been more successful.

"Of course, that team fell between two of the greatest eras in Ohio State football history," OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "When you're talking about the Super Sophomores and then the Archie Griffin era that came right afterward, that's a pretty difficult legacy you're trying to live up to."

"But that 1971 team had more than its share of talent. And while it lost four games, those four games were lost by a total of only 20 points. They played Colorado tough, and Colorado finished the 1971 season as the No. 3 team in the nation. They played a very fine Michigan team right down to the wire, and Michigan finished No. 6 that year."

"Ohio State had a good team in 1971 – just not a great one."

DeLeone was named to the All-America first team and he earned first-team All-Big Ten honors as well. He was also voted team MVP – not bad for a center and a player who suffered his own knee injury in week nine and was sidelined for the Michigan game.

DeLeone was joined on the all-conference first team by White, Gradishar, offensive tackle Rick Simon and defensive tackle George Hasenohrl.

Six seniors from the team wound up as NFL draft picks although none was selected higher than the fifth round. That fifth-rounder was DeLeone, who went to the Cincinnati Bengals and wound up being a steal. He played two seasons with the Bengals before moving to Cleveland and playing 11 seasons with the Browns. He made two Pro Bowls and anchored the Cleveland offensive line for many years, including the Kardiak Kids team in 1980 that lost to the eventual Super Bowl champion Oakland Raiders during the divisional playoffs.

DeLeone retired from the NFL following the 1984 season and then enjoyed a successful law enforcement career with the U.S. Treasury Department. He retired from that career to Park City, Utah, where he died in 2016 following a five-year battle with brain cancer. He was 65.

Howard was also drafted in 1972, a ninth-round selection by the Los Angeles Rams. He declined to sign with the Rams, however, accepting a more lucrative offer to play with the Chicago franchise in the fledgling World Football League. Howard played with both the Chicago Fire in 1974 and the Chicago Winds in 1975 before finally making his NFL debut in 1976 as a member of the New York Jets.

Meanwhile, for the 1971 season, Lamka completed 54 of 107 attempts for 718 yards, two touchdowns and five interceptions, and he added 308 yards and a team-best eight TDs on the ground. Those seem like modest numbers compared to the offensive outputs of today's game, but at the time, the passing yardage and total offense figures ranked as the eighth-best single seasons in program history.

Yet as time went on, as was the case with his 1971 team, Lamka faded into obscurity. He graduated from Ohio State with a science degree and later was president of his own construction equipment access business for many years in Hilliard, Ohio. He eventually settled in Florida where he fought the effects of dementia – perhaps as a victim of CTE – before his death in 2018 at the age of 69.

Crunch-Time Shooter Open To Debate For Buckeyes

The 2020-21 Ohio State men's basketball team seemed to have a bit of a flare for the dramatic as well as an affinity for tight matchups. Almost regardless of competition, the Buckeyes attracted close games like a magnet, playing in 16 games that were within two scores at the end of regulation. Ohio State, to its credit, held its own in those close games, putting up a 9-7 record.

In those spots, the Buckeyes were open about who they wanted to take the ball. Junior point guard Duane Washington was the high-leverage situation closer for the squad, be it as a shooter from downtown or a strong penetrating dribbler.

COURT
REPORT
Patrick Mayhorn

Washington was only a 41.0- percent shooter from the field, but he was 37.4 percent from three-point range and served as a confident shooter, even with the pressure on. That didn't always work out for Ohio State – look no further than the first-round loss to Oral Roberts during the 2021 NCAA Tournament – but Washington's presence was calming during the late stages of the game, even for head coach Chris Holtmann.

"I'll be telling (Coach Holtmann) he's

acting crazy," Washington said during his final season with the Buckeyes. "He's yelling and screaming and stuff, and I'll be laughing at him and be like, 'Coach, I got you.' He told me (at the end), 'I know you've got me, Duane.' That's what he pulled me over to say. I told him, 'I love you, Coach,' and he gave me a hug and then we ran it in there."

That safety blanket, however inconsistent it was at times, is gone. Washington will suit up for the Indiana Pacers – and its G-League affiliate – this season after forgoing his final seasons of eligibility to declare for the NBA draft this past summer. That means Ohio State is entering the season without a returning starter at either of the guard spots after losing C.J. Walker to graduation (although Jamari Wheeler and Cedric Russell do have plenty of starting experience elsewhere).

For a team that likes to lean heavily on dribble-drive penetration from that guard spot late in games, finding the next Washington – or at least the next player to fill his spot in those high-leverage situations – could be the difference between a win and a loss for Ohio State several times during the upcoming 2021-22 campaign.

The obvious answer is Russell, who is considered to be the team's direct replacement for Washington as a high-volume shooter who is strong from the outside and at the rim. He's taken those shots for four years with Louisiana and certainly isn't lacking for confidence, telling BSB in September that scoring just comes naturally



FILE PHOTO

WHO'S NEXT? — With the loss of junior point guard Duane Washington (4) to the NBA, the Ohio State men's basketball team will need to find a new option for high-leverage situations late in games. A number of Buckeyes are lobbying for the job, including Louisiana transfer Cedric Russell.

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

to him and that he's in Columbus to score. The two are similar in their percentages at the rim, too.

Washington was more comfortable driving than Russell. The former Buckeye took 92 shots at the rim to Russell's 77, and Washington was a bit more efficient, converting on 54.3 percent to Russell's 53.2 percent. The Louisiana product was better on other two-pointers (38.0 percent to 36.8 percent to Washington) as well as from downtown (40.3 percent). But he also was assisted on far more of his three-point tries than Washington was – 71.8 percent to 64.0 percent.

Washington was a tremendous shot creator with his dribbling ability, and Russell simply hasn't done as much of that.

That can be worked around, of course, with plays designed to get Russell open off the ball on final possessions, but that hasn't been Ohio State's style in recent years. The Buckeyes like their best scorer to take the ball up, call an iso, and make a play.

If not Russell, then who? Who takes the last shot or gets the ball to make a play in that situation? BSB set out to find the solution during Ohio State's annual media day on Sept. 28 during which all members of the team were available to the press.

The answer? Inconclusive. Every Buckeye polled picked himself when asked who he wanted taking the last shot. Most did it without a second thought. Some took it a step further, including sophomore forward Zed Key, who told BSB that any answer beyond him was both incorrect and disrespectful.

"Pass me the rock," Key said. "You'd better pass me the rock. I'm getting down low and I'm scoring. If anyone else says anyone but me, there's going to be a problem. Get me the ball. They're going to try to shoot a three, and I know how to get the bucket. Even if I miss, I'm getting the rebound. Even Meechie (Johnson) would pick me. He'd better. Anyone says anything but me, that's disrespectful."

Johnson, who was seated right next to Key at their shared table, disagreed.

"Of course, it's me," Johnson said. "Every clutch moment I've been in, I've never failed."

"Say the right answer," Key interjected. "Say it right."

"Beyond me it's probably ... Justice (Sueing)," Johnson continued, much to the

chagrin of his teammate.

Why not Key? "I just haven't seen in him that type of situation," Johnson said.

Key was incredulous. "Down in the post?" he said. "I get the ball in the post and I'm not scoring the ball? When have you ever seen that?"

"I mean, I'm not saying that," Johnson responded. "You'll score. But who wants to go into the post for a game-winner?"

"If we're down two, it's the right play," Key said. "That's the high-percentage shot."

"You're not wrong! I've just never seen you in a situation where we had to do that," Johnson said as a despondent Key rose from the table and began to walk away. "Last year when we're in tight situations, Duane had the ball and he would try to get to the rim, so I would assume that's what the coaches want to do. That's usually what you see – a guard getting to the rim. How many times have you seen, down two, a team give it to the big down on the block? Even if it's (Philadelphia 76ers All-NBA



Cedric Russell

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 Maryland
Feb. 12	at Rutgers
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	

center) Joel Embiid? I've never seen it."

By that point, Key had returned to the debate after a brief pacing session behind the table.

"I'm already around the rim, though," he said. "If I miss, I'm getting the rebound."

"We have never practiced getting the ball into the post for the game-winner," Johnson espoused. "Have we ever practiced that?"

"Yes," Key answered.

"Have we ever run a play to get the ball to any big in the post for a game-winner?" "Yes."

Ultimately, it was a debate that only a coach can solve, and Holtmann won't be available to media again until Oct. 15 – though Key was nearly perturbed enough

to dial him up ahead of time. He stopped short, though, so the mystery will have to go unanswered at least until then.

Still, star forward E.J. Liddell doesn't think it's much of a debate at all.

"Those two are at it all the time," Liddell said. "All the time. They're characters, for sure. (At the end of the game), I'm definitely shooting. Now, if it was between those two? It depends on the situation. If there are just two seconds, Zed is not going to be able to get the ball unless it's just a hook shot."

"There aren't a whole lot of plays that don't give me the ball in that situation."

Metrics Like OSU

The majority of the preseason polls have not been released, but Ohio State is popular at BartTorvik.com, an analytics site in the same vein as KenPom, which has released its season projections and rankings. In Torvik's "T-Rank" metric, which looks to quantify opponent-adjusted team efficiency and turn it into a power ranking, Ohio State checks in as the No. 11 team in the nation. The Buckeyes are the fourth-highest rated team in the Big Ten behind No. 5 Illinois, No. 7 Michigan and No. 8 Purdue. Maryland, at No. 22, is the only other team in the league in the top 25.

The Buckeyes, who have the projected No. 3 offense and No. 53 defense in Torvik's metric, are slated to match up this year with seven teams in the preseason top 25 – Illinois, Michigan (twice), Purdue, No. 10 Duke, No. 17 Kentucky, No. 19 Xavier and Maryland (twice). That makes OSU good enough for the No. 10 overall strength of schedule.

With that schedule on the docket, Torvik projects Ohio State as a 21-9 squad (13-7 in conference play) and a No. 2 NCAA Tournament seed, along with Memphis, Purdue and Texas, while Illinois, Gonzaga, Michigan and UCLA are the projected top seeds.

In those ranked matchups, it projects Ohio State with a 4-5 record, earning wins against Duke, Kentucky, Maryland at home and Michigan at home to close out the season. The four unranked projected losses are to Indiana on the road, Nebraska on the road, Seton Hall at the Fort Myers Invitational and Wisconsin on the road.

Game Times Released

The Big Ten announced TV assignments and tip times for its men's basketball teams on Oct. 5, and as usual the Buckeyes will be easily found on the dial this season.

Ohio State will play 10 regular-season games on the Big Ten Network as well as the first round of the Big Ten tournament. The next most frequent outlet will be the ESPN-affiliated networks nine times, seven times on the Fox networks, and CBS four times. The only non-televvised game of the season is the Nov. 1 exhibition against Indianapolis, which will be available behind the BTN-Plus pay wall.

Notably, Ohio State will open its season

on ESPN2 against Akron, a Nov. 9 match-up scheduled to tip at 6 p.m. Both games of the Fort Myers Tip-Off will air on FS1, as will the Gavitt Games battle against Xavier at 6:30 p.m. on Nov. 18. Ohio State-Seton Hall will tip at 6 p.m. on Nov. 22 on FS1.

The Nov. 30 game with Duke has yet to draw a starting time but will be on one of the ESPN channels, potentially as part of the Tuesday night doubleheader if both teams remain in the top 25 entering the game.

The Big Ten opener against Penn State on Dec. 5 will tip at 7:30 p.m. on BTN.

Looking for the toughest tip time? Look no further than Dec. 8, a 9 p.m. start on ESPNU against lowly Towson. That's the

latest start of the regular season, along with a Feb. 24 games against Illinois on FS1. Minnesota is the next latest, a Feb. 15 contest starting at 8:30 p.m. on the Big Ten Network, while Nebraska (Jan. 2) and Iowa (Feb. 3) both draw 8 p.m. starts on BTN and FS1, respectively.

Ohio State's Dec. 18 battle with Kentucky (5 p.m.), the Jan. 30 tilt against Purdue (noon) and both games against Maryland are the quartet of CBS matchups, while the pair of Michigan games will air on ESPN (Feb. 12) and Fox (Mar. 6). The full schedule is available at OhioState-Buckeyes.com.



Zed Key

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Greene, Sheldon Set To Lead Buckeye Backcourt

By **WYATT CROSHER**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State women's basketball's 2019 recruiting class was rated one of the best in the country, but a lot of that was thanks to the top get in the class – five-star guard Kierstan Bell.

Bell was ranked the eighth-best prospect in the country, and the Canton (Ohio) McKinley product was a three-time Miss Ohio Basketball winner, the first high school athlete to win the state's top honor three years in a row since LeBron James.

As part of the many accolades Bell achieved during her senior season at McKinley, she was named to the Ohio Prep Sports-writers Association first team. Two of the other nine players who made the cut for the first team were Pickerington Central guard Madison Greene and Dublin Coffman guard Jacy Sheldon.

While Bell has found loads of success at Florida Gulf Coast after transferring from the Buckeyes following her freshman season, Greene and Sheldon are entering their third year with Ohio State as the two stars of the team.

The guards are the top two returning scorers from an OSU team that finished with a 13-7 record in 2020-21. Sheldon led all scorers last season with 16.7 points per game, while Greene averaged 13.4 points per contest, third behind Sheldon and forward Dorka Juhasz (14.6), who is now at

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

Connecticut.

The duo has become increasingly reliable over time, and head coach Kevin McGuff told BSB he loves the progress that both of them have made through two seasons with the team.

"As they became more acclimated with what we do and how we play, you could see them just fit in more," McGuff said. "What that looked like was Jacy became more efficient as a scorer and really provided a great spark offensively. Then Madison became way more efficient at just making everybody else around her better. She did that really well."

While Greene and Sheldon have played with each other as teammates for only two full seasons, their shared experiences started before they came to Ohio State. Sheldon told BSB the two faced off in high school and scrimmaged together.

After those battles, Sheldon said she is just glad the two can share the court as teammates instead of as opponents.

"Jeez, I've known Madison since high school, and playing with her is way better than playing against her," Sheldon said.

"She's a great point guard. She sees the floor well – anyone would love to have her on their team. She's a great teammate. Playing with her has been awesome. She's a great player but an even better person."

Sheldon was ranked the No. 42 overall prospect in the 2019 class, and Greene was ranked 59th. Those high rankings proved accurate early on with Greene and Sheldon entering the starting lineup for the Buckeyes less than halfway into their freshman season.

Combined, the duo enters the 2021-22 season with 80 total starts, a surprising amount of experience for two players just entering their junior years.

"It is crazy," McGuff said. "It feels like they've been here for a while, but at the same time it's gone kind of quick. I do love the fact that they've gotten great experience in the last couple of years, and I'm pretty optimistic that it will be impactful for us as well this year."

While Greene and Sheldon have not shared every minute on the floor together, many of the duo's combined 2,852 minutes has been with one another. All that time on the floor has paid dividends in building synergy between the two.

"It's been amazing – just having that chemistry all the way from freshman year to now, it has really been great," Greene said. "It's been really awesome just being able to play with somebody who pushes me in practice, and it just feels so good to be on a team with somebody like her that really impacts me and helps make the team better."

Greene and Sheldon may have spent the majority of those nearly 3,000 minutes of floor time together, but the two have spent even more time together off the floor. They have been roommates for just more than a year, something Greene said has only helped improve chemistry when playing together.

"It definitely helps," she said. "We don't only spend time with each other on the court, we spend time with each other outside of basketball. I feel like it definitely helps with the chemistry, and just getting to know each other better and just being able to grow with each other these past couple years, it's really been amazing."

Part of that chemistry has come with, as mentioned, shared floor time. And despite the fact that both players are guards, and neither is particularly tall (Greene is 5-8 and Sheldon stands 5-10), the two have not had to compete for playing time for a significant chunk of their collegiate careers.

That is because, as McGuff said, the pair complement each other very well on the floor with the type of skills they each possess.

"I think Jacy really has a knack for scoring the ball, and she's great in transition," the OSU coach said. "And Madison, she can score the ball, but as much as anything, she really understands what we're doing, how we're doing it and how she can make every-

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

body else around her better."

Because neither is vying for the other's position on the floor or in the starting lineup, Greene said that has made it that much easier for her to build chemistry with Sheldon over the past two seasons.

It also helps that the two share the same level of drive to improve each time they are on a basketball court.

"I feel like we really feed off each other's energy," Greene said. "We're not really competing for each other's spot. I'm a true point guard, she's a really good shooter, and we know our roles on the team, and I feel like we just work off each other. I know if there's an outlet that she'll be up ahead of the court. I know she's super, super fast, and she'll be ahead of everybody else that's trying to get back on defense. That is one of the ways that we just really work well with each other. I feel like I always know where she'll be."

Ohio State has a very similar roster to what it has had the past two seasons, but the loss of Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty (transferred to Texas A&M) leaves the Buckeyes more guard-heavy than ever before.

That could have been more of a problem if not for Greene and Sheldon, who have been part of the core for this team almost immediately since arriving on campus in 2019. The duo consists of two of the most experienced juniors in the Big Ten, both of whom have shown incredible synergy that should continue to grow in their third seasons.

"With us both being guards, I think we both pass the ball really well," Sheldon said. "I think now having some time to play with each other, we know where each other is on the floor. And I think our games complement each other. We can both shoot a little, we can both drive, so it's fun. We're kind of a double threat out there, so it's fun."

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Hockey Newcomer Riedell Joins Captains' Club

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When the four captains for the Ohio State men's hockey team were announced Oct. 6, three were obvious choices in the voting by the players.

Senior forward Gustaf Westlund was tabbed to wear the captain's "C" after having the alternate "A" patch last season. Senior forward Quinn Preston will be an alternate for the second season in a row, and junior forward Jaedon Leslie, a first-time alternate, has been active in community and humanitarian activities throughout his career at every level.

Then there's the newest captain, Will Riedell, who in March was wearing blue and gold for a Michigan school. No, not that one. The graduate defenseman was even farther north, playing for Lake Superior State in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., near the Canadian border and the twin city of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

"It speaks volumes of his character, how he's shown up here since August," said Ohio State head coach Steve Rohlik. "For a team to vote him into this position, for being here two months, it kind of tells you what kind of individual he is."

Riedell played four seasons for the Lakers and last season was an alternate captain when they won the Western Collegiate Hockey Association tournament to earn their first NCAA tournament appearance since 1996.

"It's hard to put into words being named a captain," Riedell said. "I'm really excited to lead this team. I was able to get here early in August and get in with the guys and jell with them. They were really accepting right away, and obviously it felt like I fit right in."

Riedell, originally from Greensboro, N.C., played 138 games for Lake Superior State with 51 points on 17 goals and 34 assists and was a steadying influence on the blue line.

Rohlik doesn't see numbers when it comes to Riedell (6-1, 205) but instead heaped about as high praise as the coach gives.

"How he trains reminds me in a lot of ways of Tanner Laczynski," the OSU coach said. "He shows up every day to be a pro. That's how he goes about his business."

Laczynski was a 2018 second-team All-America forward for the Buckeyes who made his NHL debut with the Philadelphia Flyers earlier this year. Rohlik often mentions him as an example of a great leader.

That's why Rohlik feels Riedell was chosen as a captain.

"This has nothing to do with whether he's the greatest player or the worst player or anything like that," the coach said. "I think it's all about his presence and what he brings on the ice and off the ice."

Riedell embraces his role.

"I work hard and try to lead by example," he said. "That's my thing and I try to step in where I can, say the right things and be positive."

He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration at Lake Superior State but decided to take advantage of the NCAA's

COVID-related rule that gives athletes an added year of eligibility. He will be working on a graduate degree in public management at Ohio State.

Riedell is excited about not only having the opportunity to play in the Big Ten but experiencing the cultural shock of going from Michigan's smallest public university with an enrollment of about 2,000 to a campus with a school-record high of 61,677 students this fall.



Will Riedell

"It just felt like an immediate fit here," Riedell said. "You know these guys, this program, are top of the level and it was kind of a no-brainer for me."

Having experienced the NCAAs once, he wants to get back there with the Buckeyes, who would have made a fourth straight trip until the 2019-20 postseason was canceled because of the pandemic.

Ohio State was 7-19-1 overall and just 6-16 in the Big Ten last season and was picked to finish last in the conference in the 2021-22 coaches' preseason poll.

"We have a really good team," Riedell said. "We've worked really hard the last three weeks, and I think we're going surprise a lot of people."

Leading The Way

Westlund last season was the first European player ever named to the captaincy at Ohio State, and the native of Stockholm, Sweden, looks forward to helping international players get acclimated to college life in Columbus.

"I like to think that I have relationships with everybody on team," he said. "I like to be open with who I am, and I like to build relationships with everybody on the team. With having so many international guys on the team, they have me as a good way in."

Two-thirds of the 28-player roster are Americans, three are from Canada, and Westlund is joined in the European contingent by Swedish sophomore forward Travis Treloar, freshman goalie Jakub Dobeš from the Czech Republic and freshman forward Georgii Merkulov from Russia. Another Russian forward, Evgeny Fadyeyev, graduated last season.

Westlund said it's a priority of his to make the foreign players feel welcome.

"I think it's a big part, to be honest," he said. "Canadians are fine usually, but the guys coming from overseas, it's tough. It's hard to adjust. This is my seventh year here (in the United States), so I kind of know the drill. It's also my fourth year in school, so I think I help all the guys."

Rohlik is not surprised by Westlund's attitude.

"He's such a good teammate," the OSU coach said. "Guys respect him because he goes out and gives it his all and he shows respect for every other individual on this team."

"Every guy in that locker room knows that he would give anything to anyone of those individuals. That's why he's a two-time

captain."

The same goes for Preston, the Trenton, Mich., native who is a preseason honorable-mention All-Big Ten selection. He has 54 career points (26 goals, 28 assists) in 97 games through Oct. 9.

"It's crazy to think it's my senior year already," he said. "It went by fast, but I love being someone that guys can look to because I'm experienced and I know what's going on. I like helping out the other guys, so I really enjoy it personally. It's sad to see that I'm getting close to the end, but I'm ready to finish it off."

Rohlik knows the character Preston brings to the team.

"He cares deeply about this program and about these individuals," the coach said. "He wants nothing more than to win as a team."

Leslie, from St. Albert, Alberta, had three goals and three assists in 21 games last season. As a freshman, he scored the overtime winner to clinch the Big Ten quarterfinal series vs. Wisconsin. It turned out to be the final goal of the pandemic-shortened season.

"Jaedon is all about values, and it starts, I'm sure, with his family and how he's been raised, how he presents himself, and what he does for this team and for the community," Rohlik said.

The coach cited Leslie's efforts as co-director for a memorial charity tournament for the Humboldt Broncos junior team. On April 16, 2018, 16 people, the majority of

them players, were killed in a collision between their bus and a semitrailer truck in Saskatchewan en route to a game. Another 13 passengers were injured.

Leslie received the Community Spirit Leadership Award from the city of St. Albert for his work.

"You can see what he's done up north with Humboldt as an 18-, 19-year-old kid," Rohlik said. "This is not all about hockey and wins and losses. It's about how you handle yourself. It's about what you do in good times and bad times, and he's just a tremendous individual."

Ice Breaker

The Buckeyes opened the season with a split of nonconference games at Bentley, losing 2-1 on Oct. 8 before a 7-1 victory the next night. Freshman defenseman Mason Lohrei had the lone goal in the opener. In the rematch, Dobeš stopped 17 of 18 shots in his debut and junior forward Tate Singleton had two goals and an assist.

Ohio State hosts Connecticut at Value City Arena on Oct. 15 and 16 in a pair of nonleague games. After an open weekend Oct. 22 and 23, the Buckeyes begin Big Ten play by hosting Michigan State on Oct. 29 and 30.

For recaps of all series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.



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

OSU vs. Nebraska-Nov 4-7 -5-night motorcoach trip with 1 overnight in each direction with accommodation for 1 night at Jumer's Rock Island Hotel and Casino in Rock Island, Illinois and 3 nights at the Embassy Suites in Omaha, Nebraska with breakfast daily and city tour of Lincoln, game tickets in Ohio State section with transportation and 1 night on return at the Pair of Dice Hotel and Casino in East Peoria, Illinois on the return. Also offering air package or land only package from Thursday, Nov. 4-Sunday, Nov. 7 at

the Embassy Suites in Omaha with breakfast daily, game tickets in Ohio State section with transportation and city tour of Lincoln. Air packages on Southwest Airlines roundtrip from/to Columbus to/from Omaha, Nebraska.

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

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

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Moldovan Leads Golfers In Successful Fall Season

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State men's golf team is heading indoors for the winter, hoping to use a strong finish to the fall season as a catalyst for spring competition.

OSU head coach Jay Moseley felt encouraged by his team's performance this fall, claiming small yet consistent growth as the reason for the Buckeyes' success.

"I think we got stronger and better with each outing," Moseley said. "With each tournament, we improved. One tournament to the next, we found our stride."

Ohio State started its fall season at the Marquette Intercollegiate in Erin, Wis., against a talented field including five Big Ten opponents – Northwestern, Purdue, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin.

"We didn't come out of the gate with our best performance at Erin Hills," Moseley said. "We struggled in the first round, but we had a really good second round and rallied a little bit after a rough start."

The Buckeyes finished 12th in the 17-team field with a final score of 1-over par 865. Individually, JonErik Alford and Maxwell Moldovan each finished 1-under par for 54 holes. Alford claimed the first under-par tournament of his college career, while Moldovan earned his fifth under-par event and his second round of 67 or lower in his career.

The following week, the team traveled to

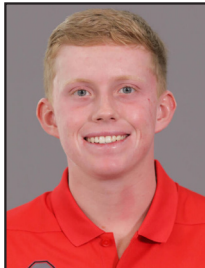
Dallas for the Maridoe Invitational – a tournament that included five of the top 10 teams in the country – and finished seventh in a 15-team field. The Buckeyes improved in each round, carding 298, 295 and 291 in three days of competition.

"At Maridoe, we played better each day," Moseley said. "We had some solid performances in each round. Patrick Schmucking stood out and had a strong event, and Maxwell performed well again. We probably had the best field in all the fall (season), and we moved up the board quite a bit in the final round. We were really encouraged with that finish."

Schmucking, a junior from Wiesbaden, Germany, fired eight birdies during the tournament and finishing tied for 18th at 3-over par. Moldovan made five birdies and finished in a tie for seventh at even par.

Ohio State ended its fall season with the Windon Memorial in Glencoe, Ill., and the Barbara Nicklaus Cup at Muirfield Village in Dublin, Ohio.

At Windon, Moldovan and Schmucking posted identical 4-under scores of 67 to help their team jump five spots on the final day of the tournament. That allowed the Buckeyes to finish seventh in a 14-team field. Ohio State



Maxwell Moldovan

then ended its fall season at the unique Barbara Nicklaus Cup, a mixed men's and women's match-play event featuring Auburn, Arizona State and Florida State. The Buckeyes finished third in the two-day event behind the Seminoles and Sun Devils.

"I thought it was a really good fall season for our team in terms of building confidence and knowing that we can compete with some of the best teams," Moldovan said. "We had some really good weeks, and we feel like we can play even better than that in the future."

Moseley was impressed with his team's resilience in its four tournaments. While many golfers performed well in his mind, he thought Moldovan proved himself to be a leader within the program. As Ohio State's best performer in all three tournaments, he became one of Moseley's most consistent and reliable golfers.

Moldovan earned Moseley's confidence after a tremendous season as a freshman, leading the team with a 71.50 scoring average and tying Chris Wollmann for the lowest single-season scoring average since 1996-97. He played in eight events last season and finished in the top 20 six times, including three top-10 finishes.

Moldovan said he felt at home during his first year at Ohio State. The Uniontown, Ohio, native always wanted to be a Buckeye, so playing college golf at the university is living a dream come true.

"I grew up in Ohio and I was used to the two- or three-month break from playing in the outdoors, so coming to Ohio State wasn't really foreign to me," Moldovan said. "I was used to it and felt comfortable. The golf we have in Columbus is second to none. We have so many awesome courses that allow us to see different kinds of play and travel from course to course."

"I've been an Ohio State fan my whole life. Growing up, my friends and family were all big Buckeye fans. I felt like coming here was always supposed to happen – like I was always supposed to be here. It's been great so far, and hopefully I can continue to get better."

This fall, Moldovan built upon the solid start to his Ohio State career, playing in nine rounds and totaling a 70.89 round average. His low score for the season was 67, and he finished in the top 10 twice in Ohio State's three events.

"I felt like I had a pretty strong fall season," Moldovan said. "A big goal I had coming into

my sophomore year was to win a college golf tournament, and I had a lot of opportunities to do that in the spring. That's what I'll be working for this season. In the fall, I had some great leaps. I feel like I'm in a good spot with my game, and if I continue to work hard and get better every day, then I think the spring could be pretty special."

Moseley mentioned Alford as the golfer who might have taken the biggest step forward during the fall season. In three events, Alford played in eight rounds, compiling 588 strokes for a 73.50 average. His best finish came in the Marquette Intercollegiate, where he shot a 1-under 215 and finished 34th overall.

"He had been challenged with some health problems in previous years, and he is back for his fifth season, so he was excited to contribute, and he's done that in a big way on and off the course," Moseley said. "He was a bright spot for our team and performed well this fall."

Moldovan agreed, naming Alford as his most improved player from a season ago. He couldn't help but smile when thinking about Alford's success and the growing momentum for him heading into winter training.

"He's one of the guys on the team that I'm closest with, and I know he's battled over the years to be on the course," Moldovan said. "I'm very happy for JonErik. I've been impressed with what he was able to do this fall."

While Alford stood out with his improvement, Moldovan made it clear he thinks each golfer on the team makes a significant impact in training and events. He feels strongly that college golf, though primarily an individual sport, still relies on having a foundation rooted in unity with teammates.

"I'm excited to see what this team can do in the future," Moldovan said. "Everyone on this team can do special things. I try to push them to be better, and they push me back. We will work as hard as we can this offseason to improve until we can compete again in the spring."

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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2021 FOOTBALL (5-1)

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, W 66-17; **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** Maryland; **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 Maryland; **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 Plane 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 (7-5, 1-2)

Aug. 27 at Ball State, W 1-0; **31** at Kent State, L 3-1.

Sept. 3 BUCKEYE INVITATIONAL vs. LAFAYETTE, W 4-3 (2OT); **6** BUCKEYE INVITATIONAL vs. MIAMI, W 1-0; **10** at Wake Forest, W 2-1; **12** at Appalachian State, W 2-0; **17** at Michigan State, W 4-3; **19** Virginia, L, 2-1; **27** LOUISVILLE, L 2-1 (2 OT).

Oct. 3 MICHIGAN, L 1-0; **8** INDIANA, L 3-1.; **10** OHIO, W 4-3; **15** at Northwestern, 4 p.m.; **17** at Iowa, 1 p.m.; **22** PENN STATE, 3 p.m.; **24** MARYLAND, 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, 3/4.

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, 3/4; **15-17** Tar Heel Invitational at Chapel Hill, N.C.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (1-1)

Oct. 8 at Bentley, L 2-1; **9** at Bentley, W 7-1; **15-16** UCONN, 7 p.m.; 3 p.m; **29-30** MICHIGAN STATE, 7 p.m.; TBD.

Nov. 5-6 PENN STATE, 7 p.m.; 5 p.m.; **12-13** at Minnesota, 7:30 p.m.; 6 p.m.; **26-27** MERCYHURST, 5 p.m.; 5 p.m.

Dec. 3-4 at Notre Dame, 7:30 p.m.; 6 p.m.; **10-11** MICHIGAN, 7 p.m.; 8 p.m.; **16** BOWLING GREEN, 7 p.m.; **17** at Bowling Green, 7:07 p.m. **31-Jan. 1**, LIU, TBD.

Jan. 7-8 at Wisconsin, 8 p.m., 7 p.m.; **14-15** NOTRE DAME, 7 p.m., 8 p.m.; **21-22** at Michigan State, TBD; **28-29** at Penn State, TBD.

Feb. 4-5 WISCONSIN, 7 p.m., 8 p.m.; **11-12** MINNESOTA, 6:30 p.m., 6 p.m.; **18-19** at Michigan, 7:30 p.m.; 8:30 p.m.

March 4-6 Big Ten Quarterfinals; **12** Big Ten Semifinal; **19** Big Ten Championship.

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, 6p.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 (4-6-1, 0-3)

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, L 2-0; **12** at Indiana, 7 p.m.; **17** at Michigan State, TBA; **22** PENN STATE, 7 p.m.; **26** MICHIGAN, 6 p.m.; **31** at Maryland, 1 p.m.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (7-6-1, 2-3-1)

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, L 1-0; **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, T 0-0.; **2** THOMAS MORE W 12-1 **3** PITTSBURGH (DH), 1 p.m., **10** at Akron, 3 p.m.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (14-2, 4-2)

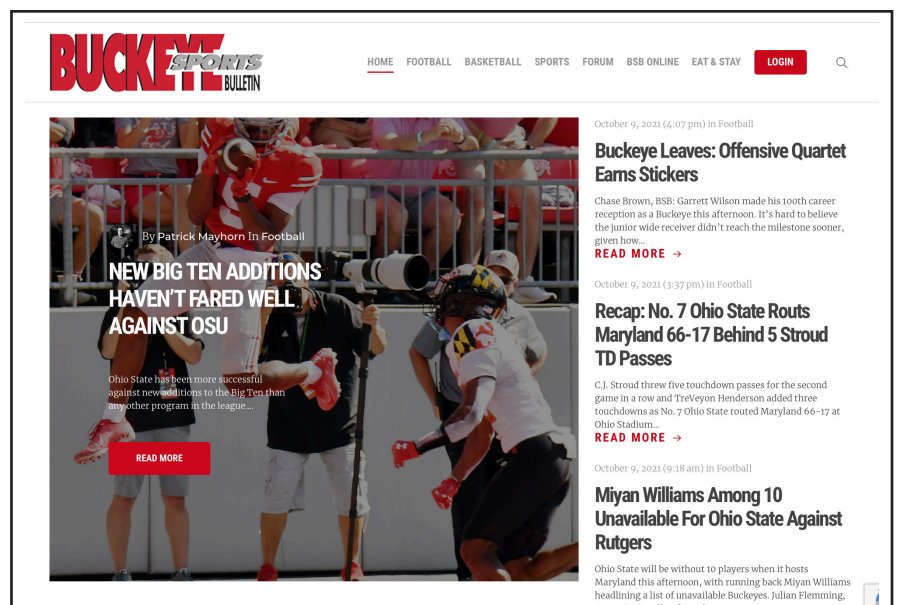
Aug. 27 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 3-0; **28** WASHINGTON, W 3-1.

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, W 3-0; **10** MICHIGAN, W 3-0.; **15** PURDUE, 6 p.m. **15** Maryland, 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 Maryland, 7 p.m.; **26** at Maryland, 7 p.m.

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Buckeyes Remain In Chase For Playoff Spot

What a difference a few hours can make on an exciting college football Saturday.

Ohio State wrapped up its annual thrashing of Maryland, this time by a 66-17 final, around 4 p.m. to put the wraps on the first half of the regular season without clearly leaving an impression on where it stood in the Big Ten race.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

After all, the Buckeyes and their still-suspect defense were 5-1 overall in the toughest division in college football with undefeated Penn State, Michigan State and Michigan awaiting in the second half of the season.

Beyond that, where did Ohio State really stand in the race for the playoffs behind the likes of Georgia, Alabama, Oklahoma, the rest of the Big Ten and Oregon?

By midnight, the answer was quite different.

Alabama fell. The Crimson Tide snuck by Florida earlier in the season, 31-29, but this time couldn't hang on against Texas A&M. No longer should there be a worry about Alabama getting into the College Football Playoff with a loss to Georgia. Just like Ohio State, the Tide very likely needs to win out for playoff consideration.

Oklahoma didn't lose but once again looked shaky, rallying for a 55-48 win against Texas in the league that doesn't play defense. An undefeated Oklahoma team is in the play-off, but should the Sooners lose, there could be an argument against a team that got off to a 6-0 start with wins by a touchdown or less in five of those games.

Of less concern to Ohio State than Alabama or Oklahoma is getting out of the Big Ten East unscathed. Michigan is undefeat-

ed, but wins by seven points against Rutgers and three points vs. Nebraska (two teams with losing records) makes you wonder – at least at this point of the season.

As for Penn State, its collapse at Iowa after quarterback Sean Clifford was sidelined seemed to make it clear. The Nittany Lions are solid with Clifford, not so much without him. Witnessing their 17-10 half-time lead evaporate without Clifford should make Buckeye fans appreciate the quarterback depth at Ohio State this year. Expect little change in the game-calling should C.J. Stroud go down. Clifford's future health will mean a lot to Penn State's chances.

Put all this together, and one has to consider Ohio State a serious contender to make the playoffs once again this year. The road remains tough, given the loss to Oregon already on the books. And the schedule is no cakewalk with the Nittany Lions, Spartans and Wolverines as well as a possible date with Iowa in the Big Ten Championship Game ahead.

But the smart money at this point has to be on the Buckeyes and Hawkeyes playing for the Big Ten title on Dec. 4 in Indianapolis. Given OSU's track record in those games, the four-time defending champion Buckeyes would be the betting favorite in that title game.

That Iowa-Ohio State game, should it happen, could be and likely would be for a playoff spot.

What Could Go Wrong?

Upsets can happen. No doubt. Remember Ohio State's last Big Ten loss, a 49-20 embarrassment at unranked Purdue in 2018? Or how about an equally embarrassing 55-24 loss to Iowa in 2017?

Both those games were on the road. Fortunately for OSU this season, the Penn State and Michigan State games are at home. And should the Buckeyes play Iowa in the Big Ten title game, that will be in what has become OSU's December home away from

home in Indianapolis, where Buckeye fans seem to take over the city for those games.

More importantly, what could go wrong is the failure to continue to improve what has been a suspect defense.

The offense is the best in the country, or near it. The defense remains shaky, even while facing just one high-powered offense in Oregon. Time should help, with all the young players gaining experience. But it's also clear halfway through the regular season that improvement to championship level is no guarantee.

What Could Go Right?

The offense is so good that it could force any opponent, even the best in the country, into a shootout decided by who has the ball last. There's never been a better receiving group at Ohio State. It's so deep that it could afford an injury and still hold that standing.

Stroud looks better since his return, and the coaching staff seems to be doing a better job of asking him to make throws that he can make. The deep balls downfield still seem like a 50-50 proposition, even when the receivers are wide open. But he's looking better on the safer, shorter throws. Count on Stroud to get better, but don't expect him to reach Justin Fields levels. That's unrealistic.

What really is encouraging about the offense going forward is freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson, not just because of what he's shown (averaging 8.8 yards per carry). What to like in a season that could stretch to 15 games is that Henderson has carried the ball only 69 times through the first half of the season (an average of 11.5 carries a game).

What that means to me is that Henderson will be fresh – really, really fresh – late in the season during the games that matter. Remember Ezekiel Elliott's postseason games of 220, 230 and 246 yards en route to the 2014 national title? Those were Elliott's first 200-yard games.

Henderson, who already has had a 270-yard game, has the talent to post those kind of numbers in big games. And I like his chances to do so even more because he has carried the ball so few times en route to his first 605 yards rushing as a Buckeye.

Serving What Purpose?

I never liked the addition of Maryland and Rutgers to the Big Ten because it meant fewer games against traditional Big Ten schools such as Iowa, Wisconsin and others.

Beyond missing out on those games, Maryland and Rutgers year after year are boring spots on the schedule.

Ohio State has a combined 15-0 record against Maryland and Rutgers since their entry in 2014, outscoring the two schools by a margin of 844-239.

The average margin of victory over Rutgers has been 43 points. Maryland has been slightly closer, losing to OSU by an average of 38 points. It's only that close because the Terrapins almost pulled off an upset in 2018 before falling 52-51 in overtime.

If you think Ohio State has been just as dominant against some of the older Big Ten teams, you'd be wrong. Rutgers, Maryland and the other most recent addition, Nebras-

ka, have been on the losing side by wider margins to Ohio State than any other school since the league expanded to 14 teams.

Here's how it breaks down since that expansion in 2014, based on OSU's average margin of victory (some numbers don't appear to exactly add up because of rounding):

Plus-43 (54-11) in going 8-0 vs. Rutgers.
Plus-38 (59-22) in going 7-0 vs. Maryland.
Plus-36 (51-14) in going 5-0 vs. Nebraska.

Plus-35 (45-10) in going 3-0 vs. Illinois.
Plus-23 (38-14) in going 5-0 vs. Wisconsin.

Plus-22 (36-14) in going 4-0 vs. Northwestern.

Plus-20 (44-23) in going 7-0 vs. Indiana.

Plus-20 (34-14) in going 6-1 vs. Michigan State.

Plus-18 (44-26) in going 6-0 vs. Michigan.

Plus-13 (34-21) in going 4-0 vs. Minnesota.

Plus-8 (32-23) in going 6-1 vs. Penn State.

Minus-29 (20-49) in going 0-1 in the only game against Purdue during this time period.

Minus-31 (55-24) in going 0-1 in the only game against Iowa.

Weights & Measures

Have you gotten a look at Ohio State offensive lineman Dawand Jones, all 6-8 and 360 pounds of him?

You don't have to check the roster details to know he's huge. But get this. At 360 pounds and the biggest Buckeye, he's as heavy as two of the smallest players on the roster combined.

In fact, there are three players listed at 180 pounds, exactly half the size of Jones. They are kicker Garrison Smith, cornerback Lloyd McFarquhar and receiver Joop Mitchell.

Eleven Buckeyes are listed at 189 pounds or lower. Twenty are listed at 300 pounds or above. Second to Jones is offensive lineman Thayer Munford, who is 6-6 and 320 pounds. Heights range from several players at 5-10 to Jones at 6-8.

Chambers Watch

I remain fascinated by how former running back Steele Chambers has been able to make the successful switch to linebacker this season. He led the Buckeyes with six solo tackles, and he also had an assist against Maryland.

For the season, he's tied for third on the team in solo tackles with 12.

On consecutive plays at the end of the first quarter and the beginning of the second, Chambers shed a big blocker to stop what could have been a big screen play for just a 4-yard gain and then made a nice cross-field pursuit for a tackle on the next play.

Later, his late charge from coverage toward scrambling Maryland quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa resulted in a 7-yard sack as he forced Tagovailoa out of bounds in the third quarter.

What was common about all the plays was Chambers' speed and decisiveness in using that speed to chase down the Maryland ball-carriers.



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Day Decision To Rest Stroud Has Desired Effect

If Ohio State goes on to another Big Ten championship or the College Football Playoff, some will point to head coach Ryan Day's in-season decision to shuffle his defensive staff, moving defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs into the press box and handing the defensive play-calling, if not the title of defensive coordinator, to Matt Barnes – a bold move indeed. But a more significant decision by Day might actually have been the one to give quarterback C.J. Stroud the week of the Akron game off.

With the ability to throw “and not feel like my shoulder was going to fall off,” Stroud has come back with a vengeance. In the two games since his sabbatical – both all-important Big Ten contests – Stroud has completed 41 of 56 passes, good for a 73.2 completion percentage, and 736 yards. More eye-popping to me are his 10 touchdown passes thrown vs. Rutgers and Maryland against no interceptions and without a sack. And for those who think he doesn't run with the football, he even added four carries for 21 yards to boot.

Those numbers might be even higher if Day hadn't called off the dogs against both the Scarlet Knights and the Terrapins. In fact, I thought against Maryland, Day kept Stroud in longer than necessary, especially after I saw defensive lineman Haskell Garrett helped off the field with the game already well in hand. Regardless, Stroud's numbers are starting to get into Dwayne Haskins/Justin Fields territory, though granted, the redshirt freshman has yet to face the Big Ten's best defenses.

But with Stroud at the controls, the Ohio State offense has looked unstoppable during convincing 52-13 and 66-17 conference victories against the Knights and Terrapins, respectively. In fact, despite any defensive frailties the Buckeyes might continue to have, you have to wonder if Ohio State can't just outscore opponents the rest of the way. There are just so many weapons, with Stroud knowing how to use all of them.

One need only look to the first half of the Maryland game when the Terps impressively bottled up freshman running back sensation TreVeyon Henderson, holding him to 17 yards on nine carries. No problem. Stroud just completed 17 of 22 passes for 293 yards, including four for 67 yards and a TD to Henderson, before the half ended. And just so you don't think the running attack was completely negated, Master Teague keyed one first-half scoring drive with three carries for 25 yards and Henderson came back in a big way after intermission with seven carries for 85 yards, good for a 12.1-yard average.

That outpouring of Ohio State offense made me look back to the Oregon game.

As I said, it seems the Buckeyes should be able to just outscore teams. So what went wrong against the Ducks? After all, they scored only 35 points – a lot by most standards, but not insurmountable for the OSU offense. Oregon might have a better defense than Rutgers or Maryland, but Ohio State's offense should be able to move the ball against anyone.

A quick look back at the stats shows that Ohio State *did* move the ball against Oregon. In fact, the Buckeyes racked up 612 yards against the Ducks, a number bettered only by the 622 put up against hapless Akron. But Ohio State could convert those 612 yards (128 rushing, 484 passing) into only 28 points.

I look to two key spots in that game.

In the first quarter, when the embattled defense held the Ducks scoreless, Ohio State marched into Oregon territory twice but failed to score a single point. The Buckeyes failed on a fourth-and-7, turning the ball over on the Oregon 31, and also marched from their own 5 to the Ducks' 34 before being forced

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

to punt. On the first drive, Stroud missed on third- and fourth-downs pass attempts, and on the second, he threw an incomplete pass on third-and-11 after a false-start penalty threw the Bucks off-schedule.

Then, in the fourth quarter, Stroud marched the Buckeyes 75 yards to bring Ohio State within a touchdown at 35-28 with 7:55 to play before the embattled defense stopped the Ducks on consecutive drives. But again, the offense came up with nothing. A holding penalty negated a first-down run by Stroud, and the quarterback could only find Chris Olave for a mere 2-yard gain on third-and-20. On the next possession, Stroud was picked off, and for all intents and purposes, the game was over.

I just don't see that many offensive failures happening anymore.

For one thing, the loss was before Henderson had established himself as one of the most dangerous backs in the country, and that puts a whole new burden on opposing defenses. We also don't know how much Stroud's shoulder affected the outcome of that game. And let's give the quarterback his due. He appears to be seeing the entire field much better now than he did in the early going.

But, oh, those penalties. That's still something that could use some cleaning up.

The defense continues to improve, but so does the competition. I think offense will remain the team's calling card for the remainder of the season.

Wouldn't it be fun to have the Buckeyes match up again against the Ducks in the post-season?

Quick Hitters

- Maryland did something you don't always see these days. They won the toss and elected to receive. If you have a good offensive football team, I don't understand why you don't just take the ball and try to take the early lead.

If I were Ohio State, given its unstoppable offense and still-evolving defense, if I won the toss, I would take the ball and try to take an early lead rather than defer. But I am sure there is some computer program that says otherwise.

- I am confident the OSU defensive coaching staff has noticed this, but they need to look at their fourth-and-short defense. Maryland running back Challen Faamatau ripped off a 30-yard run on fourth-and-1 in the second quarter, moving the ball to the Ohio State 11. Fortunately, the defense held.

That came after Mohamed Ibrahim stunned the OSU defense for a 56-yard dash on another fourth-and-1 during the season opener at Minnesota. That set up a TD to pull the Gophers to within three points at 10-7 during the second quarter.

- In the traditional tight end watch, it wasn't a particularly good day for the big guys receiving-wise, especially Jeremy Ruckert. The senior was targeted five times but reeled in just one for 18 yards. Meanwhile, Cade Stover and Joe Royer each had one pass thrown their way with Stover grabbing his for a 9-yard gain.

With the Buckeyes racking up 598 total yards, I am going to assume the tight ends were handling their blocking.

Fickell Subject Of Reprint

After Cincinnati's historic win Oct. 2 against Notre Dame under former Ohio State player and coach Luke Fickell, we honored the head coach of Ohio State's 2011 team by reprinting his interview from BSB's 2017 In-

terview Issue. It was posted Oct. 7 as part of Reprint Thursday at BuckeyeSports.com.

Fickell had just been hired as the Bearcats head coach when then-BSB editor Tim Moody drove to Cincinnati to conduct one of the more candid interviews we have had in this popular annual issue.

As any Buckeye fan knows, Fickell was thrown into the head coaching position at Ohio State after Jim Tressel was thrown out following Tattoogate. The Buckeyes struggled through a 6-7 season, leading to the hiring of Urban Meyer.

Moody asked Fickell if he made any mistakes during that 2011 season that he could learn from now that he was head coach at Cincinnati.

“Holy s***, there's a lot of things,” Fickell said. “I could write a book about the mistakes we made or I made. But I think the No. 1 mistake was trying to be somebody you weren't, and that's hard as a leader. In the midst of how you go about it, I thought I had to be like Jim Tressel, and in reality you can't be like Jim Tressel. Nobody can. But I thought that was what was best to give us an opportunity to be successful and not have a bunch of different changes on people, whether they were the players or the coaches. That was just the conscious decision that I made, and it was probably the one that is detrimental because you can't be consistent being somebody that you're not.”

One thing Fickell said about that 2011 season might be relevant to this year's club, the turmoil surrounding Kerry Coombs and how the players have reacted to it. He was talking about his team having to adjust to the departure of Tressel and the other distractions created by the memorabilia-for-tattoos scandal and how his players soldiered on.

“I think 18- to 22-year-olds handle things a hell of a lot better than 45- and 50-year-olds,” Fickell said. “Just because they're more resilient. They're not set in their ways nearly as much.”

Also from that 2011 season, the coach talked about the critical game with Nebraska, which probably sealed Fickell's demise and helped pave the way for Meyer's hiring, and he shared the type of buddy moment that the average fan never hears about.

“That will be the one you never, ever forget,” Fickell said of the loss to the Cornhuskers. “That was truly – I don't know that we ever recovered from that. We were in pretty good shape, we were doing pretty well, we were coming on and we never, ever as a team recovered from that. And I can't exactly tell you – yes, we can say that Braxton (Miller) went out with a twisted ankle and they rattled off maybe 30 unanswered points (actually 28).

“All I can tell you is I walked and ran to the locker room afterward and I couldn't talk, couldn't speak, barely could stand up. I just remember my best friend (then-OSU assistant) Mike Vrabel just kind of grabbing me at the coach's locker and saying, ‘Hey, this is when they need you the most. You've got to be at your best.’ And I couldn't tell you what was really said or whatever, but that's one of those memories that you'll never forget and one of those things I could never thank him enough for grabbing you, picking you up.”

All of that is just from the 2011 season part of Fickell's interview. Be sure to check it out. The Fickell interview reprint is archived at BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers. It is well worth reading.

Fickell obviously took his own lessons learned to heart, and now he is one of the darlings of the college coaching ranks, linked to most major job openings, including the open position at USC. It seems like everyone and his brother acts like he is Luke's brother and assures all of us that Fickell is staying in Cincinnati.

“The only jobs he would take are Ohio State or Notre Dame,” they assure us. “He and his family love it in Cincinnati, and they would be uncomfortable in Southern California,” those in the know explain. “Now that Cincinnati is going to be in the Big 12, there is no need for him to look elsewhere,” we are told confidently.

Well, one person who disagrees with what is probably wishful thinking on the part of Bearcats fans is Fickell's college coach.

“I keep telling him that Cincinnati is not a destination, that you've got to move on,” John Cooper told J. Brady McCollough of the Los Angeles Times. “I spent seven years in the Pac-10, and I personally think Southern Cal is the best coaching job in football. I've heard people say that Luke may not want to live in California, but to me, it's a no-brainer. I would go to Southern Cal in a heartbeat.”

Anniversary Year Flashbacks

We have gotten a lot of positive feedback about Mark Rea's series marking the various Ohio State anniversary seasons this year, starting with 1921, the final year the Buckeyes played at Ohio Field. I have enjoyed the stories as well and actually find the one in this issue, recalling the 1971 team, perhaps the most interesting.

When I mentioned that to Mark, he reminded me, “You probably haven't read a lot of stories about the 1971 team.”

That's true. With a 6-4 record, it is one of the few “nondescript” teams in the modern era of Ohio State football. But its place in Buckeye history is an intriguing one, with the team falling squarely between two of the greatest eras in the program's storied history – one featuring the Super Sophs and the other dominated by Archie Griffin.

The 1971 team actually jumped out to a 6-1 start but collapsed down the stretch.

Former Ohio State assistant coach and current BSB contributor Bill Conley, who played on that team, offered an interesting theory on the outcome.

“That was the last year of the Big Ten's no-repeat rule, meaning you couldn't go to the Rose Bowl in back-to-back years,” Conley said. “We'd been to the Rose Bowl the year before, so we knew we couldn't go again. And in those days, the Big Ten had a rule that you couldn't go to any other bowl game except for the Rose Bowl.

“So maybe – and I'm not saying this is what happened – but maybe we knew there really wasn't much to play for by the end of the regular season. After all those close losses that we'd had, and all the injuries that we'd had, realistically we knew the Michigan game was going to be our last game of the season.”

Conley also made a point about the 1971 team that might have a parallel with the current squad.

“We'd had so much success the previous couple of years with those Super Sophs, but we'd lost all those guys to graduation,” he recalled. “It wasn't that we didn't still have good players – we certainly did – but those guys had played so much ahead of us the previous three years, we didn't have much experience at a couple of key positions.”

It kind of reminds me of the back seven, especially the linebackers, on this year's Ohio State squad.

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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