

Quarterback On Fire

Stroud Makes Variety Of Throws Count During Blowout Victory Against IU

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

It takes some college quarterbacks three years to fully mature in the most polished version of themselves. Ohio State redshirt freshman C.J. Stroud has seemingly accomplished that task in a mere three games.

Stroud, just a month ago the scourge of social media and Buckeye Nation's favorite whipping post, continued his assault on opposing defenses as well as the program record book with a near-perfect performance Oct. 23 at Indiana. Despite a nuisance rain that went from mist to downpour and back again to mist, Stroud connected on 21 of his 28 attempts for 266 yards and four touchdowns as Ohio State ran away with a 54-7 victory.

Since Stroud rested his sore shoulder during a week-four win against Akron, he has been nothing short of sensational. His three-game ledger since his sabbatical features 62 completions in 84 attempts (73.8 percent) for 1,002 yards and 14 touchdowns with no interceptions.

It is quite a roll for a 20-year old freshman, numbers that would have been full-season stats not that long ago. Still, Stroud doesn't measure his success in quite that way.

"I don't look at what happened last week or the game before that," he said. "I come in with a clean slate every week. What happened last week, you have to throw that away. If you bank on that taking you through to the next game, you're just riding a roller coaster. You have to build your momentum."

The momentum Stroud has built over the last month resulted in what could have been his most complete performance to date. While the numbers against Indiana might not jump off the stat sheet during an era of video-game passing totals, the redshirt freshman showcased his talents in a variety of ways beginning with his first pass of the night, a simple roll to his right off play-action that netted an 8-yard gain to tight end Jeremy Ruckert.

Stroud followed on the next play by rolling to his right again, this time almost making it all the way to the sideline before finally flipping the ball to Ruckert, who turned the reception into a 15-yard gain.

On the next play, the QB rolled out again, this time to his left for a 4-yard sideline pass to Garrett Wilson. That was followed by a pair of running plays – including Stroud scrambling for 3 yards himself – before the first of only seven incompletions in the game. But it was a jump ball deep down the left sideline that barely eluded the grasp of Wilson.

Three running plays by Miyan Williams followed before Stroud connected again, this time for a modest 5-yard gain to Jaxon Smith-Njigba in the middle of the field on a crossing pattern.

Williams followed with an 11-yard touchdown run to cap the game's opening possession, one that saw Stroud complete a comfortable 4 of 5 attempts for 32 yards while leading the Buckeyes on a 12-play, 75-yard drive that consumed more than five minutes.

When the Buckeyes got the ball back for their second possession of the game, Stroud kicked things off with what might have been his best pass of the evening. Off a straight drop-back, the QB stood in the pocket and then stepped up against the Indiana rush before seeing Smith-Njigba, who was running a skinny post pattern in the middle of the field. Some quarterbacks might not have even attempted the throw, but Stroud dropped the ball into the tightest of windows – over the head of a linebacker, just out of reach of a cornerback and underneath a safety.

Smith-Njigba gathered in the football for a 32-yard gain in what



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOTTER THAN HOT – OSU redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud (7) turned in another superlative performance Oct. 23, throwing for 266 yards and four touchdowns during a 54-7 win against Indiana. Stroud has thrown for 1,002 yards and 14 TDs in just his last three games.

would be Stroud's longest – and prettiest – completion of the night.

Two plays later, Wilson dropped a ball on a crossing pattern, but Stroud went right back to the junior wideout on the next play, and Wilson responded with a 21-yard reception on a back-shoulder throw along the left sideline. That set up a 21-yard touchdown run by freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson, and the Buckeyes never looked back.

Stroud was just getting started, though. On the short, six-play touchdown drive that followed, the QB moved to his right in the pocket and found Smith-Njigba again over the middle for 9 yards, and then he finally got All-American Chris Olave involved with a 13-yard gain off a straight drop. One play after that, it was another straight drop and a quick flip to Henderson, who had circled out of the backfield to take the pass 14 yards for another touchdown.

Ohio State's fourth possession was undoubtedly Stroud's poorest of the first half, but it still resulted in a touchdown. He twice overthrew Olave but remained undaunted, spotting Olave with

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NIL No Good

The new laws permitting college athletes to profit from the sale and use of their name, image and likeness (NIL) will certainly bring about significant changes in college athletics, but will they be for the better? These changes will be very good for a relatively few athletes, but will they be better for college athletics as a whole? That remains to be seen. The issues raised by these changes are many and difficult.

For instance, an 18-, 19- or 20-year-old kid is in no position to negotiate with Nike, Coke, Wheaties or the local car dealership without the help of a lawyer. A lawyer is, practically speaking, an agent. The last time I checked, hiring an agent makes an athlete a professional and therefore no longer eligible to participate in college athletics. Has this changed?

Combined with the ease with which college athletes can now transfer, bidding wars will be inevitable.

"Come here, kid, and our school will guarantee that your name, image and likeness will be on at least 10 percent of the posters, programs and drink cups sold at our games."

"Well, that's great, but school A is offering me 12 percent."

"Yes, I know I've spent a year here at State U and it's been great, but Texas has all that oil and cattle money down there and Washington has all those high-tech companies. And how about USC and UCLA? I had lunch with George Lucas! He said he'd make me a movie star! Sorry, Coach, but these offers are too good to pass up."

Player X was a five-star recruit coming out of high school and got big NIL deals from the school and its backers. But now,

X has been beaten out by Y, who was a three-star coming out of high school and now Y wants the same deal X got. And if Y doesn't get it, maybe he or she will hold out. Human nature being what it is, plenty of players will be jealous of their teammates who are pulling in millions while they are getting no more than their scholarship money.

These new laws have stripped away the last flimsy vestiges of amateurism. College athletes are now professionals in name as well as fact. Sure, under the old system, some athletes suffered, but it was better for the whole. Under these new laws, a very few will benefit greatly, but the whole will suffer. The consequences of these laws have been poorly thought out. They will ruin college athletics. More than ever, cash is king.

**Terry Walrath
Hinckley, Ohio**

(FYI: Attorneys/agents are indeed allowed to represent college athletes for NIL deals. Former Ohio State basketball player Brandon Fuss-Cheatham runs an agency specifically for that, and it partners with a significant portion of current Buckeyes. Ed.)

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.

BUCKEYE SPORTS .COM

From The Message Board

Based upon another dominant showing from Ohio State against Indiana, and given Penn State's nine-overtime loss to Illinois, we asked the readers on Buckeye Sports Bulletin's Fan Forum which team they thought will be the biggest obstacle to the Buckeyes getting to another Big Ten Championship Game and why. Here are some of the responses:

"From the beginning, I have thought Ohio State should beat every team on the schedule by 2 TDs (including Oregon) and I still have that confidence, but if I had to pick one team as a threat, it would be That Team Up North, simply based on history. Since 1896, we've been defeated by inferior teams up there, occasionally."

– Terrier Buck

"Honestly there isn't a team on the remaining schedule I'm afraid of. Ohio State should beat them all convincingly. This is a team on a mission that has finally figured out their identity on both sides of the ball."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I don't think there is a team (including Georgia) that can stop the Buckeyes even in the Playoffs. The Buckeyes will empty their bench against all remaining B1G opponents in the 4th quarter of each game. The DL is playing lights out and that is bad news for all remaining opponents."

– AnthonyBuckeye

"The way our offense is rolling, the three home games (PSU, Purdue, MSU) should be big wins, and we'll crush Nebraska at Lincoln. So it has to be the Michigan game by default. We have better talent and a big mental advantage over them. Can the talented Buckeye freshmen

handle playing in front of a packed Big House? Stay tuned."

– Bucks89

"As the season moves on, it appears there is an old hack slowly bubbling up from the depths of disgust that it belongs to. However, that hack should remain nameless for now as there is much football to be played. The biggest obstacle to the Buckeyes getting to the B1G Championship is the Buckeyes themselves. We have the talent, the skill-sets, and the improving maturity to beat anyone on our schedule. It is up to the Buckeyes to remained focused and win one game at a time."

– BuckeyeScott

"TSUN is stirring up a lot of hype based on a fairly weak schedule so far. By default they are probably the biggest obstacle left on the schedule, especially in a rivalry game on the road. But I wouldn't take a wounded Penn State lightly."

– Poster That Harley Built

"The biggest obstacle is always the next game up. Don't underestimate any team. Beating the Buckeyes would make their season. Each team wants to deprive OSU of a championship. Win one, then worry about the next game in turn."

– John Lanning

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State played its starters for just over one half against Indiana on Oct. 23, providing plenty of chances to watch the Buckeye backups and present some Buckeye Leaves for members of the BSB staff and readers at the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum. Here are some of their picks.

Chase Brown, BSB: Let me start this by making a bold claim, a "hot take" if you will. TreVeyon Henderson is Ohio State's Heisman Trophy candidate. Many will point to C.J. Stroud, and rightfully so because he's been excellent since he rested his shoulder against Akron in week four. However, Henderson gives the Buckeyes the explosive plays, the home runs and the Heisman moments.

Against Indiana, the freshman running back put together another impressive performance. He rushed nine times for 81 yards and two touchdowns and added one reception for 14 yards and a score. Through the first seven games, here are Henderson's stats:

Rushing: 78 carries, 686 yards, 8.8-yard average, 11 TDs

Receiving: 8 receptions, 168 yards, 21.0 avg, 3 TDs

Whether or not Henderson becomes a Heisman finalist and winner of the acclaimed trophy, he still gets my Buckeye leaf, which is arguably a more distinguished honor to re-

ceive. That's certainly up for debate, but for now, let's agree to disagree.

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: I feel like I managed to draw the easy assignment here, and like a certain Buckeye quarterback looking at a wide-open receiver streaming down the field, I'm not going to turn down a freebie. C.J. Stroud is just fantastic. The early-season jitters are gone, the injury bug has cleared, and the California native is flashing the talent that earned him the five-star distinction as a recruit and won him the starting job this fall.

The signal-caller was 21 of 28 passing for 266 yards and four scores, delivering strikes with such consistency that it almost felt reminiscent of his predecessor, who so frequently made the absurd feel routine on throws down the field.

Stroud's best pass of the season came to Jaxon Smith-Njigba early in the game, hitting him right on the hands amid three defenders down the seam, but he was just as masterful on the easy ones, coordinating the offense to a win that was all but secured from the time Ohio State arrived in Bloomington. What a special talent he is.

Mark Rea, BSB: With all of the offensive output, I'm going to go outside the box a little and give some Buckeye leaves to the defensive line. They came up with all five sacks and,

with the exception of Indiana's first drive of the game, carried out good assignment football. Defensive end Zach Harrison might have played his best game of the season so far. He had only two tackles, but each went for loss, including a sack, and Harrison played from sideline to sideline when he was on the field. He also nearly got to the IU punter a couple of times.

AnthonyBuckeye: C.J. Stroud for improving further spectacularly with each game (was it really raining?). TreVeyon Henderson for making us say, "Zeke-who?" Evan Pryor for being another gem in the freshman class, Marvin Harrison and Emeka Egbuka for the glimpses of the future. The entire DL with so many sacks and shutting down both Indiana's run and pass games, especially sprinter-sacker Zach Harrison (he seemed faster than Indiana's QB). Tyreke Smith for his sack. Jack

Sawyer for more athletic tackles close to the line of scrimmage. Jaxon Smith-Njigba for another spectacular performance and yet fighting for more YAC. Tight end Jeremy Ruckert for so many TD catches. The OL for being the best in the country even when they substitute freely and all the coaches for such an enjoyable spectacle!

BuckeyeScott: Wow! Where do you start? Do I have enough Buckeye leaves to give them to Stroud, Henderson, Wilson, Egbuka, Ruckert, Smith-Njigba, the entire offensive line, the entire defensive line, the D-back group, and a linebacker or two? However, I have to hand out one to Ryan Day for his pregame pumping up of the Buckeyes that I saw on TV. From what I saw, if that didn't get you fired up, nothing would!

Poster That Harley Built: Stroud, Stroud and Stroud. Why did we doubt him?



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OPINION

Why Shouldn't QB Be Trophy Front-Runner?

No matter how much his head coach might want to downplay it, C.J. Stroud is on one hell of a three-game roll, and if the Ohio State quarterback isn't the Heisman Trophy favorite right now, I'd like to see who is playing better.

OSU head coach Ryan Day understandably doesn't want Stroud to get too full of himself, repeatedly using a roller-coaster metaphor so his quarterback makes sure his highs aren't too high and his lows aren't too low. But Stroud's ride right now seems to be one featuring a perpetual upward trajectory.

Quite frankly, the numbers are eye-popping. More than 1,000 yards, 14 touchdown passes and no interceptions in just the last three games only tell part of the story. It has been his transformation from being a first-year starter who looked lost at times to a quarterback in total control of an offensive machine that ranks first in the country in scoring and total yardage.

Detractors are going to point at Rutgers, Maryland and Indiana and underscore the fact those three teams were hopelessly outmanned by Ohio State. But it's not just that the Buckeyes are beating those teams. They are having their way with them, dictating what the final score will be almost from the outset, and one of the reasons they can do that is because of Stroud's almost-overnight maturation.

It seems cons ago that Ohio State was a struggling team with an iffy offense and leaky defense. But like cream before the milk is homogenized, talent rises to the top, and that is what has happened with Stroud. As he has gotten more comfortable running the offense, the attack has flourished, which in turn takes pressure off the defense and allows it to settle into a comfort zone. Day calls it a matter of having confidence in your teammates, allowing you to have confidence in yourself.

Confidence breeds success, which in turn breeds momentum, and the momentum Stroud has built from the last three games has formed a foundation for what should now be a full-fledged Heisman Trophy candidacy.

For the season, Stroud has connected on 125 of his 185 attempts, good for 1,965 yards and 22 TDs with only three interceptions. He is second in the country in pass efficiency (192.79), fifth in average per completion (15.7 yards) and tied for sixth with 22 touchdown passes.

Dig a little deeper past the stuff easily found with a laptop and an Internet connection and you'll find that Stroud has a current streak of 87 straight passes without being intercepted. He also has thrown at least four touchdown passes in three straight games, a feat accomplished only once before by an Ohio State quarterback – J.T. Barrett with six against Kent State, four vs. Cincinnati and four against Maryland in 2014.

Then there was the streak of 19 consecutive possessions in which Stroud had led the Buckeyes to a touchdown. I don't know if that's a record, but it certainly sounds like one.

His 22 touchdown passes in only six games is already tied for the 11th-highest single-season total in Ohio State history, and his 1,965 yards already ranks 24th on the program's career passing list (no, that's not a misprint).

That is the metadata, the stuff Heisman Trophy voters will use when they fill out their ballots about a month from now. Unfortunately, there is no way to quantify a player's actual value to his particular team, and that is likely one of the reasons that Stroud isn't a Heisman favorite right now.

Odds makers currently have Alabama QB Bryce Young as the front-runner with Ole Miss

quarterback Matt Corral as the second choice. Why? Well, perhaps it's because ESPN and its affiliation with the SEC still hold sway in college football.

Young threw for 371 yards and two touchdowns while Alabama was in the midst of a 52-24 blowout of Tennessee, while Corral continued to play through a knee injury, throwing

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

for a modest 185 yards and one TD as Ole Miss scored a 31-17 win against LSU. Good numbers for Young, pedestrian numbers for Corral, and neither of them is on the kind of roll Stroud is currently experiencing.

Then again, Ohio State isn't in the self-promotion business and really never has been. Troy Smith was the last OSU player to win the Heisman, and his candidacy really didn't take off until late in the 2006 season. Even then, it was more of an organic proposition than any kind of hype generated by the university.

One of the lesser-known quotes from legendary head coach Woody Hayes dealt with individual awards and how Hayes believed it led to the player getting a head filled with lofty ideas that he was somehow better than his teammates. As a result, Hayes rarely gave the go-ahead for the university to get any kind of Heisman Trophy campaign going. He reportedly only begrudgingly gave his consent to publicize Archie Griffin's second Heisman season, reasoning that Griffin could properly process the acclaim while the coach reaped the recruiting benefits of being home to the first and only two-time winner.

There are worse things than being a Heisman contender, but at least for now, Day is tamping down on talk about a Stroud candidacy, and the quarterback seems to have bought into that strategy.

"I don't look at what happened last week or the game before that," he said after the Indiana win. "I come in with a clean slate every week. What happened last week, you have to throw that away. If you bank on that taking you through to the next game, you're just riding a roller coaster. You have to build your momentum."

There's that roller coaster metaphor again, certainly an example that the young quarterback is not only listening to his head coach, but hearing what he is saying and taking it to heart.

Wacky Season Continues

One year after a global pandemic wreaked havoc with the college football landscape, college football teams are wreaking their own havoc with one another as the 2021 season continues on its unpredictable path.

Ranked teams have gone down at a record pace, including Appalachian State taking down No. 14 Coastal Carolina and its high-octane offense Oct. 20. It was only the second time in program history that Appalachian State had beaten a ranked FBS opponent, and you might remember the first time – the victory at No. 5 Michigan in 2007 when the Mountaineers were still playing at the FCS level.

That upset was followed three days later by a pair of top-10 teams getting knocked off by unranked opponents. Seventh-ranked Penn State dropped a 20-18 decision to Illinois in

a record nine overtimes, while previously unbeaten No. 8 Oklahoma State lost at Iowa State. That followed a weekend during which a left-for-dead LSU knocked off No. 20 Florida while Purdue rolled to a 24-7 win against second-ranked Iowa.

Three of the top five teams in the AP preseason poll – No. 1 Alabama, No. 3 Clemson and No. 4 Ohio State – each have at least one loss, while four members of the preseason top 10 – No. 3 Clemson, No. 6 Texas A&M, No. 7 Iowa State and No. 10 North Carolina – have at least two losses already. Clemson and UNC each have three.

Only nine teams remain unbeaten with another five weeks remaining in the regular season, and pundits are scrambling to make some sense out of what has become a the most capricious of college football seasons.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day acknowledged the volatility as his team heads into the meaty part of its schedule. After all, the Buckeyes are on that upset victims list of preseason top-five teams. A week-two loss to Oregon was followed by a shuffling of defensive coaching staff assignments as well as a midgame meltdown by OSU linebacker K'Vaughn Pope, who quit the team and entered the transfer portal.

The Buckeyes seemed to weather those early storms, and Day believes the wacky first half of the season will give way to a semblance of normalcy down the stretch.

"It has been a unique year so far," he said. "Why is that? I don't really know. Maybe it's coming off COVID, maybe it's the transfer situation. I don't really know, but it's been a strange year so far. But I think the teams that continue to get better week in and week out are the ones that are going to show up in November."

Before November arrives, however, Ohio State must take care of one more piece of business.

Things were supposed to get a lot tougher Oct. 30 when Penn State comes to town for a prime-time game with Big Ten championship implications. But the Nittany Lions are coming off back-to-back losses to Big Ten rivals, and they have had a litany of injuries, especially to their defensive unit.

History isn't exactly on Penn State's side, either. Ohio State has won each of the last four meetings in the series, including successive comeback victories by a single point in 2017 and 2018. Plus, there's the little factoid that Penn State hasn't beaten the Buckeyes in the Horseshoe since a 20-14 decision in 2011.

OSU's November run begins at Nebraska, continues with home games against Purdue and Michigan State, and concludes with the traditional regular-season finale at Michigan. The Wolverines are one of the nine remaining unbeaten teams, and their No. 6 poll position heading into the final week of October represents their best ranking since playing Ohio State in 2018 as the No. 4 team in the nation and getting waxed by a 62-39 final.

But Day says his team will worry about November when November gets here.

"You have to take care of right now," the OSU head coach said. "You can't worry about all that stuff. The good news for us is that we feel like we hold our own destiny in our own hands. We just have to continue to get better, and that's all you can ask for."

"I think the guys are starting to believe, but we have to go out and play really well and keep building from there. There are still a lot of things we need to get done before we consider what's coming next, but it has been a very unique year and I'm interested to see what these next few weeks look like."

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Ohio State Remains At No. 5 In Both Polls

Ohio State and Penn State looked poised for a top-10 matchup on Oct. 30, but a poorly timed loss from the Nittany Lions caused the Halloween weekend game to feel a little more lackluster.

Ohio State remained at No. 5 in both major polls after a 54-7 domination of Indiana

on Oct. 23. However, a 20-18, nine-overtime home loss to unranked Illinois sent the Nittany Lions tumbling 13 spots from No. 7 to No. 20 in The Associated Press writers' poll and nine spots from No. 8 to No. 17 in the AFCA coaches' poll.

The top six spots in each poll are the same. Georgia keeps the unanimous No. 1 spot in each, followed by Cincinnati, Alabama, Oklahoma, Ohio State and Michigan.

After jumping Oklahoma into the No. 3 spot, Alabama has now appeared in the AP top five for a record 69 consecutive weeks. The second longest active top-five streak is owned by Georgia with eight.

Oregon is seventh in the AP poll followed by Michigan State, Iowa and Ole Miss. The coaches have the same four teams in a different alignment. The Spartans are No. 7 in that poll followed by Oregon, Ole Miss and Iowa.

There are four undefeated teams sitting outside the AP's top 10 – No. 13 Wake Forest (7-0), No. 19 SMU (7-0), No. 21 San Di-

2021 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 2	at Minnesota	W, 45-31	Fox	5-2, 34-16 win over Maryland
Sept. 11	OREGON*	L, 35-28	Fox	6-1, 34-31 win over UCLA
Sept. 18	TULSA*	W, 41-20	FS1	3-4, 32-31 win over South Fla.
Sept. 25	AKRON	W, 59-7	BTN	2-6, 45-10 loss to Buffalo
Oct. 2	at Rutgers	W, 52-13	BTN	3-4, 21-7 loss to Northwestern
Oct. 9	MARYLAND	W, 66-17	Fox	4-3, 34-16 loss to Minnesota
Oct. 23	at Indiana*	W, 54-7	ABC	2-5, 54-7 loss to Ohio State
Oct. 30	PENN STATE	7:30	ABC	5-2, 20-18 loss to Illinois
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	TBA	3-5, 30-23 loss to Minnesota
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	TBA	4-3, 30-13 loss to Wisconsin
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE	TBA	TBA	7-0, 20-15 win over Indiana
Nov. 27	at Michigan	Noon	Fox	7-0, 33-7 win over Northwestern
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	Fox	

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

ego State (7-0) and No. 23 UTSA (8-0). In the coaches' poll, Wake Forest is 13th, SMU in 16th, San Diego State sits at No. 20 and UTSA in No. 22.

Purdue, which at No. 25 last week made its first appearance in the AP poll since 2007, fell back out of the rankings following a 30-13 loss to Wisconsin. The Boilermakers haven't been ranked for more than one week in any season since 2005.

Coombs Opens Up About Struggles With Demotion

Ohio State defensive assistant Kerry Coombs was not shy during his first meeting with media since his demotion from coordinator about how he's handled the change. He talked about wanting to do whatever it took to help his team and setting an example for his players.

"I would tell you that this has been obviously the hardest stretch of my professional career, which I would tell you means I've had a really good career," Coombs told media members on Oct. 13. "Because if this is the hardest stretch, then life's not going to be too bad. I would tell you that we serve a powerful and wonderful God, and that my friends and family have shared with me scriptures like James 1:2 or Philippians 1:27 or Romans 8:28, and have continued to lift me up and allowed me to try to be a worthy man and a man of strength. That has been invaluable. 'I have been bless-

ed. I've been blessed by people in this profession – the Mike Tomlins and the Mike Vrabels and the Dick LeBeaus of the world that have reached out and had great advice and great insight into this profession and this career. And so I would tell you that the handling of it is a work in progress."

For Coombs, the disappointment of losing what he considered one of his dream jobs could not outweigh the responsibility that he had within Ohio State's program and the lessons that he's attempted to provide for his entire coaching career.

"Handling it in a different fashion, picking up your ball and going home, kicking the can down the road, quitting, packing your stuff up, being a miserable human being – if I had done those things, that would make me a liar to every one of those young men that I've coached along the way that had tough times," Coombs said. "Those who got replaced on a given Saturday or a Friday night or a Sunday afternoon and had to have the conversation, 'Hey, hang in here. It's going to be OK.' Whether they agreed with the decision or not, it didn't matter. You have to battle and fight through."

"There are players and young men that have struggled with the public criticism and things that are out there in the world today. If you want to look them in the eye and tell them, 'Hey, you need to hang in there. Don't accept criticism from somebody you wouldn't accept advice from,' then you have to be willing to stand up and do the same thing or you're a liar to all those people along life's journey."

The move out of the limelight and even off the sidelines hasn't been all bad for Coombs, though. He said that he's having a good time in his new role and that he contributes wherever he can – both in hands-on coaching and in game-planning. But he does miss the fire of the sidelines.

"This was another blessing that comes out of tough times – I had not been in the press box for a long time," Coombs said. "And when I was, it was my first year at Cincinnati and it was a brief period of time. I have found being in the press box to be very valuable. It's been something that I think has enhanced my ability to see the game, communicate the game and I think that that's been a real strength over the last couple of weeks."

"I miss hugging people. I've got Kevin Wilson now and I have to be honest with you, it's not the same. And so that part, that's real. I miss that desperately, being on the sideline, but that's selfish, too. And so having the opportunity to go up there – which was my idea, by the way – and be able to see it, and I think, really, really see it and get a feel for the game, has been really helpful."

As for what Coombs actually does on a con-

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Instructions:

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

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sistent basis, he described it as a little tricky and vague to detail, but he can be seen on the field prior to games talking to both recruits and players, and as he tells it, he's still serving in the motivational role that he filled for so many years on so many sidelines.

"It's very hard to describe it," Coombs said. "I think that we were working as a collaborative unit prior to changing who was going to have the final say on the call on the sideline."

"I think that in some ways, those things are still true. I have tried to change my role a little bit, first of all, because I'm in the box. Second of all is because I'm spending some time on some other things relative to the game plan that I think is important. And so at the end of the day, there's an awful lot of conversation during the week, and then by Saturday, there's still a good bit of conversation and we will sit together and talk about this place on the field and this personnel grouping and this call vs. this down and distance situations so that by the time we get to Saturday, it feels like everybody can make the call."

Coach Takes Stock Of Quarterback Play

Despite starting a rookie quarterback who had never before throw a single pass as a college player and a rebuilt and reshuffled offensive line to protect him, Ohio State hit the midway point of the 2021 season with the No. 1 offense in the nation.

The Buckeyes were averaging a national-best 563.2 yards per game through six games and were third in the nation in scoring offense at 48.5 points. Each figure was on pace to beat the single-season program record – a Big Ten-record 535.6 yards in 2018 and 46.9 points in 2019.

The stats were even more lopsided where the Big Ten was concerned. Ohio State reached the midway point averaging a full 10 more points per game than second-place Michigan and was on pace to average the most points per game by any conference team since 1916.

At the controls is the previously mentioned rookie quarterback, whose sometimes-rocky debut had some fans questioning whether he was the right man for the job. No one seems to be questioning C.J. Stroud now, especially after his last three games when he complet-

ed 62 of 84 attempts (73.8 percent) for 1,002 yards and 14 touchdowns against zero interceptions.

In the space of a little more than a month, Stroud has gone from a sore-shouldered red-shirt freshman who at times appeared as if the bright-hot spotlight of being the starting quarterback at Ohio State was a little too bright for him to a more settled player who is beginning to feel confident in his No. 7 jersey.

When asked during the open week if there was anything that had surprised him about Stroud's first-half performance, OSU head coach Ryan Day shook his head.

"I don't know if there have been any super surprises," Day said. "I think there are really some good things in there that he's done. The last couple of games, he's made good decisions, he's seen (the field) pretty well, he's prepared at a really high level, he's showed some toughness along the way."

"But as these games get tighter and they get tougher, he's going to get challenged in different ways, so the focus just has to be on the

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.

process of getting better every day, preparing and taking one game at a time because certainly in this league, and what we're about to go into, every week is its own story. Nothing you did the week before matters at all, and understanding that is going to be important."

Stroud sat out the week-four matchup against Akron to rest his aching throwing shoulder. That was one game after Day decided to shake up the responsibilities of his defensive coaching staff, bringing secondary coach Matt Barnes out of the press box on game day to take over Coombs' play-calling duties.

While most of the spotlight still centered on the defense and its changes, it seemed a perfect time for true freshman Kyle McCord to ease into the starting quarterback role in place of Stroud.

Operating something of a watered-down attack, McCord overcame a shaky start and threw for 319 yards and a pair of touchdowns as the Buckeyes rolled to a 59-7 victory. Red-shirt freshman Jack Miller also got into the game and was 5 for 8 for 66 yards.

In the subsequent three weeks, as Stroud has come back better than ever, McCord and Miller have gotten a few more snaps. For the season, McCord has completed 21 of 30 passes for 399 yards, two touchdowns and one interception, and he has been sacked four times. Miller has connected on 7 of his 14 attempts for 101 yards with no touchdowns, interceptions or sacks.

That is an extremely small sampling of what either McCord or Miller could do should the need arise for them to play again. Still, Day said he has seen progress in both of his back-

up quarterbacks.

"I think they're much further along than they were six weeks ago," the OSU head coach said. "I know they all want to get more reps, and the more reps they get, the more progress they'll make. The good news is that they've been in some games and they've learned that you don't get a second chance in a game. You get that in practice where we can call it back and run the play again. When you're in a game, you either do or you don't."





"That's about competitive excellence, and that's part of playing quarterback that you have to understand. The challenge of being a backup is that you don't get as many reps as the starter. And so those mental reps we talk about and the preparation that way is important. You see it across the board whether it's in college or the NFL. Guys who step into that role know it's a unique situation. You have to prepare for that role. Some guys step in, and you can tell they're just not quite ready. And other guys you can tell have done a great job of preparing that week knowing they might never get into the game."

"But that's the unique situation they're learning about," Day added. "You just never know. You might be right in the middle of it. All it takes is one snap and you're the guy that we need. I think they understand that, but it's getting more and more real to them."

Ewers 'Not Quite Ready' To Take Meaningful Snaps

While Day gave an update on his top three

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quarterbacks at midseason, questions linger about true freshman Quinn Ewers, the five-star recruit from Southlake (Texas) Carroll who skipped his senior year of high school to join the Buckeyes.

The 6-3, 206-pound Ewers, who threw for 6,445 yards and 73 touchdowns in three high school seasons, became the sixth player to ever achieve a perfect rating in the 247Sports composite rankings. But when he decided to reclassify from the 2022 recruiting class, he joined a highly competitive and overcrowded quarterback room at OSU.

When Day answers questions about Ewers, he maintains a thoughtful approach, complimenting the freshman's work ethic and drive. However, the coach has also remained straightforward with the media, insisting Ewers has a long road ahead of him before playing college football.

During his Oct. 19 press conference, Day was asked again if Ewers would be ready if called upon in the near future.

"No, he's not quite ready yet," the coach replied. "He's going to be a little while."

Still, Day shared that Ewers is progressing as a Buckeye and hasn't let a lack of playing time keep him from improving as a player and teammate.

"He's doing a good job of starting to learn how to be a college football player, and there's a lot that comes with that," Day said. "I think he's starting to get more accustomed to the day-to-day grind and what it's like. He's starting to get some buddies and that type of thing."

Day emphasized the importance of mental

reps for his quarterbacks, especially for the backups. Even when they aren't taking snaps, they need to work on their fundamentals and preparation beyond physical ability.

According to Day, Ewers won't be in the running for in-game snaps anytime soon. However, if he continues to make strides in the right direction, he thinks the freshman quarterback can make an impact at the end of the year and in the early offseason.

"We'll continue to work with him and see because you never know," Day said. "But that's something that's probably going to happen more toward bowl practice in the winter and spring practice next year."

Ewers did not make the travel squad for the game at Indiana. Ohio State announced walk-on junior J.P. Andrade would have been the quarterback against the Hoosiers in an emergency.

Freshman Putting Juice Back Into Return Game

Freshman Emeka Egbuka has infused Ohio State with an electricity on kickoff returns that has been sorely lacking in recent years.

While it is true that kickoff returns have been greatly diminished in recent years as college football seeks ways to eliminate the violent nature of the play, the fact remains that the Buckeyes have not returned a kickoff for a touchdown since Jordan Hall went 85 yards vs. Michigan in 2010.

Egbuka returned four kickoffs against Maryland for 166 yards and then one more vs. Indiana for 42 yards. For the season, he has returned 10 kickoffs for 317 yards, an average of 31.7 yards per return. If he keeps up that pace, he could become the first Ohio State player to average better than 30 yards per kickoff return since the 1950s.

It has been increasingly difficult to sustain any kind of excellence in the kickoff return facet of the game as college football continues to tinker with the rules governing kickoffs. Kicks were moved up to the 35-yard line in 2012, and many teams chose to simply boom the kickoffs out of the end zone for a touchdown. Then, beginning with the 2018 season, the receiving team was permitted to fair-catch a

kickoff anywhere inside its own 25 to create an automatic touchback.

That was a strategy Ohio State employed throughout much of the 2020 season. But with the emergence of Egbuka, that strategy has changed.

"Kickoffs feature a lot of momentum on both sides," Day said. "It's one of those things we've looked at really, really hard. You know, last year, we didn't (return many kickoffs) and decided to take the ball at the 25."

"This year, we're picking and choosing our spots when we think it's appropriate, and a big part of that involves the guys who are on that unit. It's not just the returner. It's everyone on that unit who is involved."

The same is true for punt returns, although Day pointed out they are completely different beasts.

"Kickoff returns, as you know, and punt returns are very, very different," the OSU head coach said. "Nowadays, in college, they can hold up the punt a little bit and allow everyone to get downfield, which is different than the pros. That's why you see a lot of the Australian rules guys coming over and hold that punt up a little bit and kick it rugby-style. And you can have multiple gunners, so it's a little different to get those punt returns going."

Junior receiver Garrett Wilson serves as the team's primary punt return man, and he also had good games against Maryland and Indiana. He returned three punts for 36 yards vs. the Terrapins, including a 23-yarder early in the second quarter that set up Ohio State's third touchdown, and his only return against the Hoosiers went for 20 yards and set up a second-quarter TD.

Some have questioned the wisdom of having such a valuable player as Garrett exposed to the violence of a punt return. Ronnie Bell of Michigan and Dontay Demus Jr. of Maryland – each among the top wide receivers in the Big Ten – have been lost for the season due to knee injuries.

Still, Day believes the experience Wilson brings to the punt return unit is worth the risk.

"Garrett is our reliable guy back there, and it's very important to have a guy like that," Day said. "When you have somebody back there, somebody you believe in and who can take it back all the way, that motivates the guys on the entire unit to play and to give them a chance."

Michigan State wide receiver Jayden Reed leads the Big Ten in punt returns with an average of 23.3 yards on nine attempts. He has already returned two punts for touchdowns this season. Wilson currently ranks eighth in the conference at 5.3 yards per return.

The Buckeyes haven't returned a punt for a touchdown since Jalin Marshall ran one back 54 yards against Indiana in 2014.

"We were close – just a couple of blocks away (from breaking one against Maryland)," Day said. "That part, we feel like we're closer than we've been."

Jet Sweep/Pop Pass Making Comeback

It was early in the game against Akron, and McCord was struggling.

McCord had drawn the first starting assignment of his college career in place of the sore-shouldered Stroud, and his first series had featured three misfires including one that was so poorly thrown behind an intended receiver that it was officially recorded as a fumble and 6-yard loss.

On McCord's second series, however, Day

reached back into his playbook for a relatively safe call that he knew would jump-start his young quarterback's confidence.

Just before the snap, slot receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba sprinted into the backfield. As he crossed in front of McCord, the quarterback tossed the ball to Smith-Njigba as he raced past. Thanks to Smith-Njigba's speed, as well as a couple of downfield blocks from tight end Jeremy Ruckert and fellow receiver Chris Olave, the play went for a quick and easy 22 yards.

Call it a jet sweep or a pop pass, the play rejuvenated McCord on the way to a 319-yard, two-touchdown performance and a 59-7 blow-out win.

The play first came into vogue when J.T. Barrett and Curtis Samuel used it to their mutual advantage during the 2016 season, but it really made an impact when Day came to Ohio State in 2017 as quarterbacks coach and co-offensive coordinator.

During the 2018 season, when QB Dwayne Haskins rewrote the OSU record book, Paris Campbell totaled 90 receptions for 1,063 yards and 12 TDs, and a chunk of those stats came courtesy of the jet/sweep pop pass. One such example came early in the fourth quarter of the Michigan game that year when Campbell scored a 78-yard touchdown on the play.

Day said it is a play that remains in the OSU arsenal. The only question is when to employ it.

"The jet sweep is something that has really come into our game probably in the last three or four years," he said. "It's an opportunity where one of our guys is running full speed at the snap when everybody else is standing still, and he can get the ball either on a handoff or a quick toss and he's going full speed the minute the ball is snapped. That allows us to attack the perimeter, and we try to find as many ways as we can, whether it's with bubble screens, throwing the ball out there or the jet sweep, to attack the perimeter."

"Anytime you can force the other team to defend the entire field, now you're creating space for your players. At the same time, you have to push the ball vertically. That's the goal of our offense – how can we attack the perimeter and stretch the field vertically to create more and more space for our guys? We don't use that play a lot – we don't try to overdo it – but when appropriate, it's a great opportunity to get our guys the ball in space."

Count Olave as someone who enjoys getting his number called on the play. He scored a 5-yard touchdown on it to give the Buckeyes their first TD of the game against Akron.

"We all like it," Olave said with a smile. "Whenever we can get out there and get the ball, make some plays and have some fun, we're all about that."

Day said the coaching staff gets input from receivers as they talk through the game plan.

"There are certain plays that they really love – usually it's the ones down the field where they're touching it," the OSU head coach said with a big smile. "Then there are other ones that just don't fit. Usually, that's in practice when you can tell right away the first couple of times you run it. If it looks good, and guys like it, you keep it. If you have to run it a fourth and fifth time, and it just isn't working, you're probably better off just throwing it out."

"That's where you try to make a decision. You've invested meeting time, walk-through time and practice time on a play, and you have to ask do you keep it or do you throw it out."



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The meat of the Ohio State football schedule is finally here, starting with the Oct. 30 game against Penn State, and you do not need to wait a full week between papers to get news of the Buckeyes. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff posts news daily at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com website. You'll get the latest from head coach Ryan Day and the Buckeyes throughout the week, along with any breaking recruiting news.

Watch for staff predictions before each game, including the game against the Nittany Lions. The staff predictors slightly overestimated the Buckeye offense and underestimated the defense in the win over Indiana. Chase Brown called it 66-14 in favor of the Buckeyes, Patrick Mayhorn, 62-10, and Mark Rea, 59-14. 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.

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That's when you get into that Wednesday and Thursday and have to make that decision. We're always listening to the players to get their feedback and what they think and what they see on film and how they like certain plays."

Olave insists the receivers really don't care what plays are called.

"Not at all," he said. "I mean, as long as we're all out there making plays and having fun, we don't care about that. All we care about is winning."

OSU Linebackers Rebound After Loss Of Gant, Pope

Despite a rapidly dwindling number of scholarship linebackers – a number that shrank by two in September when Dallas Gant and K'Vaughan Pope each announced his intention to transfer – Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington declined Oct. 19 to say that he's concerned about his position group.

How is that, when the Buckeyes have only four established contributors in senior Terad-

ja Mitchell and sophomore trio Steele Chambers, Tommy Eichenberg and Cody Simon, two question marks with transfer Palaie Gao-teote IV and freshman Reid Carrico, and one long-term injury case in sophomore Mitchell Melton as the seven scholarship linebackers remaining in Columbus?

It comes back to quality, in Washington's estimation.

"You'd like to bolster yourself as much as you can, but to say that I'm concerned and worried, I can't say that," Washington said. "Who we have I feel real strong about, and it's just been a daily deal where we have to continue to grind away and improve, and that's what our mentality is. I feel very excited about those guys and very excited about the direction they're headed."

Improvement within his top four has been crucial for Washington's comfort, especially in the days and weeks after Gant's quiet departure and Pope's public and noisy split. After Ohio State's loss to Oregon, the linebacker room was the first group on the chopping

block in the public square, but Washington said that he's seen significant improvement in the weeks since, specifically from Chambers. Still, he was quick to note that there's no such thing as true comfort in college football and that the improvement needs to continue as the season progresses.

"The perception may have been one thing," Washington said. "The reality is understanding the foundation of the room, understanding the reality of everything. We held it together by just staying focused on what the objective was. It's tough to manage, but we just kept moving forward and continued to focus on what we can do to get better."

"We need to improve, we need to focus on the things we need to control, and that's been the narrative. It's never been negative. We've always been positive. We've got to take advantage of the time we have. That's been our message. And you just have to be persistent in that. You have to know who you are, you have to know what you stand for. And I think those things help in terms of how we keep it together

because tough times come. The challenging times come. But you have to persist. You have to stick to it. And I believe that."

Even the pair that didn't stick for a number of reasons drew no ill will from their coach, who said that he understood their qualms and doesn't hold their departures against them.

"I got nothing but love for those kids," Washington said. "I spent so much time with them. And I support them as they go forth and do what they need to do. It's never easy. And I completely understand their frustration. Both of those two young men are great people and really good players."

Stroud Wins Another B1G Freshman Award

After Ohio State's 55-17 win against Maryland in week six, Stroud earned the Big Ten's crown for Freshman of the Week while adding a co-Offensive Player of the Week nod for the first time in his career.

Stroud completed 24 of 33 passes for 406 yards and tied his career high for touchdown passes with five during a dominant 66-17 win against the Terrapins, leaving the game with the other starters halfway through the third period.


The Buckeyes won six consecutive Freshman of the Week awards – four for Stroud and one each for TreVeyon Henderson and McCord – before the team took the Oct. 16 weekend off.

Spielman To Be Added To Lions' Ring Of Honor

Former NFL and Ohio State linebacker Chris Spielman is rarely at a loss for words, but that is precisely what happened when the Detroit Lions sprang a surprise on the former All-American and All-Pro.

Spielman, who rejoined the Lions in 2020 as a special assistant to the president and CEO and chairperson, was set to make a video announcement on Oct. 21 about inducting a former player into the team's Ring of Honor. But when he realized the script he was reading contained his own career statistics, Spiel-

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man suddenly stopped.

"What are you guys doing here, man?" a puzzled Spielman said as Lions president and CEO Rod Wood and team principal owner Sheila Ford Hamp stepped from behind a curtain.

Ford Hamp continued reading Spielman's career accomplishments, including being named to four Pro Bowls and one All-Pro team while finishing with a franchise-record 1,138 tackles during his time with the Lions. Then, as the official announcement came that he would have his name added to the team's Ring of Honor at halftime of the team's Oct. 31 game against Philadelphia, Spielman was overcome by emotion.

"I can't wait to tell my ...," he said before his voice trailed off. After several seconds that included repeatedly wiping his eyes, Spielman said softly, "I was just thinking about Stef there for a second."

It was an obvious reference to Spielman's late wife, Stefanie, who died in 2009 following a courageous battle against breast cancer. The couple raised millions of dollars for breast cancer research, and the Comprehensive Breast Center at Ohio State bears her name.

After retiring from the NFL in 1997, Spielman became a color analyst for college and NFL games before joining the Lions' front office in December.

"The Detroit Lions could not be prouder of Chris Spielman's accomplishments on the field and in the community," Wood said in a news release. "He was pivotal to the success the team enjoyed during his time as a player,

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and his induction into the 'Pride of the Lions' cements his place in our history.

"We are thrilled Chris has rejoined the organization as a key member to build the future, and we are proud to present him with the highest individual honor we can give to a Lions legend."

Spielman becomes only the 19th player to join the team's Ring of Honor, joining such Pro Football Hall of Famers as Barry Sanders, Dick "Night Train" Lane, Lem Barney, Bobby Layne and Dick LeBeau.

"Anytime you are recognized for an individual award, as a part of a team-oriented pursuit, your immediate thoughts go to your family, teammates, coaches and all of the people in the organization," Spielman said. "My time as a player was defined by these great relation-

ships I forged, and I realize that they are the biggest reason for any success I may have had.

"It truly was an honor to represent Lions fans around the world, the city of Detroit and every Lions player past, present and future for eight great seasons. I was and always will be a part of 'One Pride.'"

OSU Looking For New Turf Designs From Buckeye Nation

Ohio Stadium's turf has been a hot topic of discussion throughout the 2021 season. Fans, media, players and even coaches have noted the fading and age showed by the field turf surface, which has caused both aesthetic and practical issues, with receivers and ball-carriers slipping and sliding all over the aging field.

"We've looked at our cleats to make sure

we have the right footwear," Day said. "We have had some guys go down."

Ohio State has said that replacing the turf in-season isn't feasible, but with its lifespan coming to an end after this year, the Buckeyes are planning a change in the upcoming off-season – and they're turning to the Ohio State fan base for some guidance regarding what that new field will look like. The school sent out an Oct. 15 release calling for fan-submitted field designs, which the university said will be accepted until Oct. 29.

"The Ohio State Department of Athletics (is) seeking fan-inspired design concepts for the new artificial turf that will replace the current turf in Ohio Stadium," the release stated. "Fans can submit their design concepts for what they'd like the new turf to look like. An internal department panel will review the submitted designs and ultimately create the new look of the field."

"Submissions ... can be in the form of photographs or PDFs. Children are also encouraged to have fun with the design and submit their ideas as well. ... Some fan submissions will be shared on social media from the official Ohio State athletics accounts: @OhioStAthletics on Twitter and Instagram and Facebook/buckeyes."

Ohio State has had its current scarlet end zone, white text, black stroke end zone design with a scarlet Block "O" at midfield since 2007 when the turf was installed.

For submissions, go to News.OSU.edu, click on the story and then the New Turf Design link.

Former Buckeye Bogard Dies In Apartment Fire

Former Ohio State linebacker De'van Bogard was killed during the early morning hours of Oct. 12 when fire engulfed his apartment in Elyria, Ohio. He was 27.

Interim fire chief Joe Pronesti told reporters the fire broke out inside Bogard's unit at an apartment complex in Elyria. While the flames

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were contained only to Bogard's unit, he was apparently unable to get out and was found dead by the door.

Pronesti said his department had not yet determined what caused the blaze, but foul play is not suspected. He added there were working smoke alarms in the hallway, but not in the apartment.

Bogard was a receiver and safety on Cleveland Glenville's Division I state runner-up team in 2009 before becoming one of the top recruits in the country. He signed with Ohio State and was a three-year letterman from 2012-14, but a litany of injuries – including three ACL tears – limited his impact.

After graduating from Ohio State, Bogard joined the Elyria football program in 2019 as linebackers coach on head coach Devlin Culiver's staff. The program had been down for several years but had already qualified for the playoffs at the time of Bogard's death.

"Our student-athletes and coaching staff are grieving his loss," said Elyria City School District communications director Amy Higgins. "The team is very connected. De'van was a valued member of the coaching staff. He held a pivotal role on the team and in the develop-

ment of the players as students and athletes."

Longtime OSU Trainer Succumbs To Cancer

Longtime Ohio State athletic trainer Mike Bordner died Oct. 21 following a lengthy battle with cancer. He was 76.

Bordner spent 33 years as a full-time athletic trainer at OSU, working primarily with the men's basketball program before his retirement in 2000.

Bordner, who was born in Columbus, graduated from Grandview High School and then attended Ohio State where he received a degree in education in 1969. In addition to working for five men's basketball coaches – Fred Taylor, Eldon Miller, Gary Williams, Randy Ayers and Jim O'Brien – Bordner served as the athletic trainer for the USA Basketball squad that competed at the World Cup Games in 1979. He was also the head athletic trainer for a Big Ten all-star team that toured Japan in 1995. He received an honorary Varsity "O" Hall of Fame award in 2000.

"I think I speak for many athletes when I say the team's athletic trainer is one of the most important staff positions in all of sports,"

former OSU guard Ron Stokes said. "When athletes are injured, it can be a vulnerable time as a player, especially mentally. I personally want to sincerely thank Mike Bordner for the four years of caring and instilling confidence in me as a player and most importantly for the relationship we developed and maintained after my OSU days. Love you, Bords."

Former OSU star and current CBS analyst Clark Kellogg recalled Bordner going above and beyond the call of duty during the 1980-81 season.

"I believe you tracked down my dislodged tooth in '81 and gave it a chance to be saved for a while," Kellogg said. "Other than that, and some knee tendinitis, I do not recall needing much care, but I do recall you always being there for us."

In addition to his work in athletics at Ohio State, Bordner taught and mentored countless athletic trainers and athletic training students who entered the profession.

Bordner is survived by his wife, Gale, two children and six grandchildren.

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From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1981

Earle Bruce was all smiles at his postgame press conference after Ohio State claimed a 34-27 victory against Illinois on Oct. 16 – made that much sweeter by the pair of losses to Florida State and Wisconsin that had preceded it, putting the Buckeyes in something of a must-win situation.

Bruce had reasons for joy beyond the win. His Buckeyes had shown a varied attack, mixing the run and the pass, getting superb play from their defense in the second half when the Illini actually took the lead for a while, and coming out victors to raise their season mark to 4-2 and their Big Ten record to 2-1.

It also served as Bruce's 70th career win, after the pair of failed efforts to claim it.

"I think the defense did a real fine job in the second half," the OSU head coach said. "It was an outstanding job against a tough offensive football team."

35 Years Ago - 1986

David Brown stood at the podium with a smile as wide as his shoulders. As he would say later, he was on cloud nine.

A second-year freshman from Utica, N.Y., was the center of attention after Ohio State had dealt Purdue a 39-11 loss on Oct. 18 in front of what started as a crowd of 68,737 fans in the first night game in the history of Purdue's Ross-Ade Stadium. An interception of a Doug Downing pass by Brown was turned into a 100-yard return for a touchdown in the third quarter.

According to the Big Ten record books, it was one of just seven 100-yard interception returns in conference history, and the first since 1919.

"When I saw my outside linebacker (Eric Kumerow) waving me on, I knew something was going on," Brown said. "I knew from that point on I was in good hands. He threw a nice block for me, and that just kept me going."

"We're taught to go down, but my momentum was carrying me out of the end zone and I just took off and ran. I saw all that green. I saw nothing but daylight."

30 Years Ago - 1991

The Big Ten announced Oct. 19 that it would send its co-champion or runner-up and No. 2 selection after the Rose Bowl participant was determined to the Holiday Bowl in San Diego beginning in 1991 and the Citrus Bowl in Orlando starting in 1992.

The bowl agreement sat well with Ohio State athletic director Jim Jones.

"We think it's great for the Big Ten," Jones told BSB. "We are assured of having at least three teams in bowls before the season begins, and not many leagues, if any, can say that."

"We believe it will give our conference good exposure because we are now aligned with two excellent bowls. We are also especially pleased about the tie-in with the Citrus Bowl because that provides ABC with a lead-in to the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day."

The Citrus Bowl would pair the Big Ten squad with a highly ranked foe from any league, while the Holiday Bowl was tied in with the champion of the WAC.

25 Years Ago - 1996

Ohio State rolled to a 42-14 win against Purdue on Oct. 19 but did so without half of its quarterback tandem during the final 17 min-

utes of play after quarterback Stanley Jackson's day was cut short when he was ejected from the game.

Referee Steve Pamon blew the whistle on Jackson with 2:26 left in the third quarter after he kicked Purdue linebacker Chris Koepfen following a sack.

"One of their players was down there twisting my ankle, so I retaliated," Jackson said. "That was a bad decision on my part. I have to be smarter than that."

"That's the first time I've ever been ejected out of anything anywhere. I'm still a young player. This is something I will definitely learn from."

OSU held a 28-14 lead at the time, and the Buckeyes had the luxury of using the experienced Joe Germaine to close the game.

"I wasn't happy to see our quarterback thrown out of the game," OSU head coach John Cooper said, though he did not elaborate on whether Jackson would be punished by the team for the incident. Because the penalty was for kicking rather than fighting, Jackson would still be eligible by rule for Ohio State's Oct. 26 matchup with Iowa.

20 Years Ago - 2001

Ohio State's season was hanging by a thread when the Buckeyes went into halftime amid a chorus of boos, trailing San Diego State by a 12-6 score on Oct. 20.

But the Buckeyes rebounded by forcing a flurry of turnovers and took a 27-12 victory.

"It's a win," concluded head coach Jim Tressel, whose first OSU team inched ahead to 4-2 overall. "That's good. We had a chance to come back and play after being disappointed with our performance a week ago (in a loss to Wisconsin)."

"And I don't think there is any misconception from anybody in our locker room that we're wonderful all of a sudden."

Ohio State intercepted four SDSU passes and recovered a fumble on the Aztecs' first five possessions of the second half, and the offense converted three of those miscues into points.

"That is the way we have to play all the time," Tressel said. "Our defense is designed to pressure the passer and force turnovers. We didn't do that early in the game."

"If we'll play every quarter like we played the last two, we'll have a chance to be a good team."

15 Years Ago - 2006

Throughout the week leading up to Ohio State's game with Michigan State, fears abounded that history would repeat itself. As it turned out, that was exactly what happened, if not quite in the way it was anticipated.

There was no punt hitting an unsuspecting Nate Clements, no disputed final rulings on the clock, no Joe Germaine fumbles, no Levi Jackson breaking free for 88 yards for a go-ahead score.

Instead of those moments from past Spartan upsets of No. 1-ranked Ohio State teams, Buckeye fans saw a familiar sight of a different type – Ted Ginn Jr. sprinting by helpless Spartan defenders for a long touchdown.

Ginn's punt return in the second quarter put Ohio State ahead, 17-0, and the Buckeyes cruised to their seventh win of the season by a final of 38-7 on Oct. 14.

"You hear all week about all the other teams that were No. 1 and lose to these guys, and we've been saying, 'Hey, this is a different

year. This is a time for us,'" linebacker James Laurinaitis said.

10 Years Ago - 2011

In a game that wasn't exactly the best advertisement for scintillating offense, Ohio State managed to go on the road Oct. 15 and steal a 17-7 victory away from 16th-ranked and previously undefeated Illinois despite completing only one pass during the entire game.

The Buckeyes avoided their first three-game losing streak since 2004 by taking advantage of three turnovers and surviving a furious fourth-quarter comeback attempt by the Fighting Illini, who scored their lone touchdown and totaled 134 yards in the final period. Illinois had only 151 total yards to show for the first three quarters.

Meanwhile, the OSU offense used a ground-based attack that likely would have made former head coach Woody Hayes very proud. Swirling, gusty winds at Memorial Stadium called for a more conservative approach anyway, but the Buckeyes took things to the extreme. They force-fed the Illini with a steady diet of off-tackle plays and draws – 51 rushing plays in all worth 211 yards.

"We had a game plan going in," said OSU head coach Luke Fickell. "I don't think they had seen as much running through their first six games. We knew it was going to be a big key."

Five Years Ago - 2016

Two keys to winning football games are controlling the line of scrimmage and executing on special teams, of which Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer was well aware.

Against Penn State on Oct. 22, the Buckeyes didn't control the line of scrimmage, and they certainly didn't execute well on special teams. That added up to a crushing 24-21 loss for the previously second-ranked Ohio State squad in State College, Pa., snapping an eight-game winning streak for Meyer's program. **DETAIL THE SPECIAL TEAM BOO-BOOS**

The Buckeyes were 6-0 overall and 3-0 in the Big Ten heading into the game, but the problems that had shown up in spots all season piled up, and Ohio State proved it had a long way to go to be a playoff contender.

"We're not a great team right now," Meyer admitted.

One Year Ago - 2020

Justin Fields waited a long time to state his case for the Heisman Trophy, but it was worth it with a nearly flawless performance when he threw and ran No. 5 Ohio State to a 52-17 victory against Nebraska at a nearly empty Ohio Stadium on Oct. 24. It was the long-delayed season opener for both teams because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The season was originally scheduled to start the first weekend in September but was canceled by the Big Ten on Aug. 11 only to be reversed a month later. The attendance was listed as 1,344 – mainly relatives of players and staff from each team in accordance with Big Ten protocol.

"I was looking up to the stands to celebrate with the fans, but there was nobody out there," Fields said.

In his second season after transferring from Georgia, Fields completed 20 of 21 passes for 276 yards and two touchdowns with sophomore Garrett Wilson his favorite target (seven catches, 129 yards, one TD). The only miss for Fields was when junior Chris Olave had the ball dislodged in the end zone in the second quarter.

Frosh RB Makes Most Of Limited Workload

Continued From Page 1

only single coverage in the right corner of the end zone and depositing the ball in the exact right spot for a 16-yard score.

After a short Indiana punt and solid return gave the Buckeyes a short field on their fifth possession – one they turned into a two-play touchdown drive – Stroud returned to his aerial acrobats late in the second quarter.

First, he found Olave on a short route that covered 8 yards before he led Wilson too much to set up a third-and-2 situation. But he followed that with a play-fake and roll to the right that resulted in an 8-yard gain to Ruckert. Then he connected with Wilson for 15 yards on a square-out pattern to the left.

As the first-half seconds ticked down, Stroud kept firing – first for 6 yards to Wilson on a cross over the middle and next for 13 yards to Smith-Njigba on a curl pattern.

Two plays after that, Stroud found Ruckert alone in the back of the end zone and flipped the ball to the tight end for a 14-yard touchdown with just 31 seconds remaining in the half. It put the finishing touches on a first-half explosion that saw the Buckeyes enjoying a 44-7 lead at intermission and their quarterback flashing a huge sideline smile.

In the second quarter alone, Ohio State scored 30 points – four touchdowns and a safety – and Stroud connected on 10 of 13 passes for 116 yards and three scores. He also completed a streak dating back to the Rutgers game of 19 consecutive possessions on which he had

led his team to a touchdown. That was a number that caught his head coach's attention.

"That's something," said OSU head coach Ryan Day. "Really, though, it's just a matter of going out there every single day in practice, trying to execute at a really high level and being really hard on ourselves. Our standard is high. If we don't complete a pass or we miss a protection, we're hard on ourselves. And that's what you want."

The touchdown streak ended with Ohio State's first possession in the third quarter, a possession that featured Indiana's lone sack of Stroud. But when the Buckeyes got the ball on their ensuing drive, the assault continued.

Stroud's third quarter included a 15-yard throw over the middle to Smith-Njigba, an 18-yard completion to backup tight end Cade Stover (who was the third choice in Stroud's read progression) and a stand-and-deliver strike worth 25 yards to Smith-Njigba crossing to the left on a simple square-out.

A 2-yard touchdown flip over two Indiana defenders to Ruckert brought Stroud's evening to a close as Day finally called off the dogs with a 51-7 lead.

"Everybody is doing their job – running backs, receivers, tight ends, the O-line," Stroud said. "The O-line had a great game. I only got touched once, I think. Everything was hitting, and when everything is hitting, we have a great offense. I think we have a lot of momentum right now."

"I think we all do a great job. The preparation we do beforehand is superb. All of the

coaches help me throughout the week. And then breaking down film, I watch all the little things just to know what I'm supposed to be doing at all times. And then that helps me take it out on the field."

Lightly Raced Frosh

Billionaire car aficionados might have something in common with Day. While the aristocratic elite walk into their climate-controlled garages and try to make the decision whether to drive their sleek Lamborghini or their faster-than-lightning Ferrari, Day is faced with a choice between Stroud or Henderson with which to blow past the competition.

The one-two punch of redshirt freshman quarterback and true freshman running back was much too much for a banged-up Indiana team, which hung on gamely for the first lap or two until the Buckeyes shifted gears and sped away. While Stroud was putting up his gaudy numbers through the air, Henderson added 95 yards of offense and three scores, and about all the Hoosiers saw after the opening quarter was the glow of the Ohio State taillights.

Perhaps the most remarkable part of Henderson's performance was that he amassed those numbers in just a few laps around the track. He rushed for 81 yards and a pair of touchdowns on nine carries and turned his lone pass reception into a 14-yard score.

While opposing defenses have gotten their fill of Henderson, Ohio State fans are eager to see more – much more. But perhaps like the luxury race car owners and their investments, Day prefers to keep the mileage down on his speedster.

"It was just caution with TreVeyon," he said after the game. "Again, it's a great problem to have, but these guys practice all week and they put a lot of work in. For he and Chris and Garrett, to take those guys out and to not play them, it's hard because they want to play."

"But at the same time, for me as the head coach, to put them in there and see something ever happen to them, I wouldn't be able to live with myself. I have to make that tough decision, even though they're competitive and they

want to be in there."

The Buckeyes have fought through some injury problems at the running back position, and neither backups Master Teague nor Marcus Crowley made the trip to Indiana. Williams has fought through his own adversity but returned against the Hoosiers to run for 60 yards and a touchdown in his first appreciable work since the early part of the season.

Still, the Indiana game represented the fourth time in seven games that Henderson has had 10 or fewer touches in a game. That from a guy who is averaging 8.8 yards every time he runs the ball – a figure that leads the entire nation – and 15.8 yards every time he catches the ball. Henderson is also the team leader in touchdowns with 14, and that is just four off the freshman record of 18 set by Maurice Clarett in 2002.

Still, keeping Henderson idling in the OSU garage has had something of a positive effect. Despite the ongoing injury problems at the running back position, the Buckeyes seem to still be creating some depth. Freshman Evan Pryor took advantage of the absences of Teague and Crowley to get 11 carries for 48 yards, both career-high numbers.

"Trey, Miyan and even Evan – I was impressed with how Evan ran down the stretch, and that's good," Day said. "We're going to need the depth. Across the board, you're starting to see that depth – a bunch of guys getting on the field – and that's what we're looking for."

In addition to Henderson's raw numbers, Day said he has been impressed by the freshman's ball security. Despite the less-than-ideal conditions against Indiana, the Buckeyes chalked up another game without a turnover. They have lost only one fumble through their first seven games, a consistency the head coach said will have to continue.

"I think he's running hard and he's playing through contact," Day said of Henderson. "For a freshman to do that, it's good. The No. 1 thing is that he's taking care of the football, and that's what has to continue. If we're going to make a run at this thing, we have to take

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'His Day To Ball'

You have to feel for Ruckert. The graduate senior tight end is the latest in a long string of hard-nosed, lunch-bucket types who have played the position for the Buckeyes, usually toiling in the anonymity of being an extra offensive lineman all the while waiting for the game in which they finally get their number called in the huddle.

For Ruckert, those days have been few and far between, but one came against Indiana and he made the most of it.

Targeted five times by Stroud, he gathered in each of the five passes thrown his way and turned them into 47 yards and a pair of touchdowns. The five catches established a new single-game career high, and the two scores matched a personal best set in 2019 against Florida Atlantic and matched last year against Penn State.

"Ruck is a great tight end," Stroud said after the game. "He's also a great teammate. He's the guy that is always getting me going, telling me to do the things he knows I can do. I was glad we got him more involved. Today was just his day to ball."

Ruckert now has 44 career receptions for 492 yards, and while that might not seem a lot for four years of work, he also now has 12 career touchdown catches, and that is only one off the all-time mark for Ohio State tight ends. Jake Stoneburner caught 13 TD passes during his career from 2009-12. John Lumpkin (1996-98) is the only other OSU tight end with as many as 10 career touchdown receptions.

"It's always fun when the ball comes your way," Ruckert said. "Everybody sees the stat sheet. But we worked on some things and had a great week of practice. I think we're coming together as a team whether it's in the run game or the pass game. Some days, you know the ball is not going to come your way, but when it does, it's your job to make the plays whenever your name is called."

Ohio State's passing game strength is obviously in its wide receivers with Olave, Wilson and Smith-Njigba among the elite three-

some in college football. But the Buckeyes have made a concerted effort to get others involved, including the tight ends. Stover had the aforementioned 18-yard catch against the Hoosiers, and tight ends have now combined this season for 26 catches, 308 yards and four touchdowns.

"I feel like we've been steady," Ruckert said of his position group that includes Stover, Gee Scott Jr., Mitch Rossi and Joe Royer. "We've just been putting our heads down, not forcing anything and playing free. We know eventually the ball is going to come our way, so we just try to rely on each other with the confidence we're going to make the play."

"We're always confident that C.J. is going to get it to us. We feel like we're in sync right now."



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Ohio State Defense Stonewalls Indiana Attack

It's been quite some time since an Ohio State defense put up a performance like the one it had on Oct. 23 during a 54-7 dismantling of Indiana. In fact, if pure yardage is to be believed, it's been nearly four seasons since the Silver Bullets so thoroughly dominated an opponent.

The 128 yards that Indiana gained is the lowest total allowed by Ohio State's defense since Nov. 18, 2017, when the Buckeyes hosted Lovie Smith and the Illinois Fighting Illini and surrendered only 105 total yards during a 52-14 win. That 2017 defense actually had a performance better than that one, allowing only 66 yards to Maryland during a 62-14 romp on Oct. 7.

In scoring output, Indiana's seven points are a bit less rare. Ohio State held Akron to only seven points a month ago, but the Zips still found 229 yards. That was a small fortune in comparison to the efforts of Indiana offensive coordinator Nick Sheridan's group.

Using a trio of quarterbacks, the Hoosiers managed 80 passing yards on 8-of-17 passing with one score on the first drive. The rushing attack fared no better, generating 48 yards on 37 carries, thanks in large part to five sacks that cost Indiana 19 yards and 14 total tackles for loss worth 55 yards.

For a defense that surrendered 471.3 yards per game and 28.7 points per game and tallied a countless number of blown assignments during its first three games of the season, to be in this stratosphere – even against a struggling Indiana offense – just four games later is almost difficult to process. It's certainly difficult to explain.

But Ryan Day was pressed for his explanation following the blowout victory, and the always diplomatic head coach delivered as strong a statement as he has offered on his once-tepid defense all season.

"I think this is a different team than it was," Day said. "When you practice well, you have confidence because you've already done it. Now, you have to go do it

GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Mayhorn

on the field – that only gives you a chance – but it does allow you that confidence to know that the guy next to you has done it before (because), you've seen him do it. You've played six or seven games together and you've seen what he can do. That's big. I think that the defense has confidence. The offense is getting confidence in the defense now. When you feel like that, when you're not on your own – you have a bunch of guys with you – that's when you have that confidence and I think that's what we're seeing.

"Early on, on the defense, a lot of those guys had never really played before. They weren't getting what a bunch of those guys were getting in the second half. We were coaching them really hard in the second half – our offense, our defense – because we know that's going to pay dividends down the road. We missed that last year, and because of that, it was bumpier early on and we didn't have a lot of confidence. Everyone kind of felt like they were out there on an island by themselves. We're building on it. We're still not there, we have a big one next week and we still have to get back and get ready for those guys."

Day is right on all counts. This is a different group, especially on that side of the football. Ohio State has handed the keys to younger players with more frequency in each passing week, finding future stars in Jack Sawyer, J.T. Tuimoloau and Tyleik Williams up front, Steele Chambers and Cody Simon at linebacker and Denzel Burke and Lathan Ransom in the secondary, among others.

Against the Hoosiers, those youngsters again shone bright. Chambers, Tommy

Eichenberg, Mike Hall Jr., Ty Hamilton, Ransom, Simon, Tuimoloau and both Williamses (Kourt and Tyleik) – underclassmen all – combined for eight of those TFL. The young secondary completely removed 2020 All-America receiver Ty Fryfogle from the picture, assigning him to Burke and surrendering only one reception for 30 yards on two targets. That was a far cry from his seven receptions, 218 yards and three scores against the Buckeyes a year ago.

The young defenders have been the story of the last month at Ohio State. What was new against the Hoosiers, however, and what Day seemed to allude to during his declaration of a different feeling, was the arrival of the old. For the first time all season, Ohio State saw consistent contributions from just about every veteran defender that it expected to be able to bank on for leadership and production this season.

Up front, junior Zach Harrison earned a pair of tackles for loss and a sack, just his second of the season. Opposite him, Tyreke Smith returned from the injury list to add a sack of his own, as did Haskell Garrett on the inside. Taron Vincent and Tuimoloau teamed up for one of their own.

Behind the line, linebacker Teradja Mitchell tied for the team lead in tackles, while cornerbacks Marcus Williamson and Sevn Banks played the most complete games of their seasons. Even Demario McCall, who has tenure at this point, got in on the fun and notched a beautiful open-field tackle late in the game. The new faces starring is familiar at this point. The elder statesmen getting involved? That's new, and it got a smile out of Day in his postgame press conference.

"It was great to see those guys running around. It looked like they were having fun out there," Day said. "That's good. That's part of the energy and the confidence that we want."

The OSU head coach chalked up a lot of the defensive improvements to the development that comes naturally with time spent playing together within a season, but he was also sure to compliment his formerly maligned defensive staff for the changes it has made – both overarching, such as a shift into far more two-high safety looks, and on a game-by-game basis.

"I attribute the changes to the guys on defense – Matt Barnes, Kerry Coombs, Larry Johnson, Al Washington, all the guys over there," Day said. "They're trying to identify how they're being attacked and then come up with the answers. That's what it comes down to as a coach. You

want to have answers when your guys come off the field. It's a matter of 'What happened?' and then, 'Here's how we're going to get it fixed,' in all three phases. And I think we did that tonight."

As mentioned, though, Day was correct in his description on both fronts. The defense has improved, objectively. The stats are better, the eye test is yielding far better grades and the Buckeyes are offering the sentiments publicly to back that up.

But as the coach said, the Buckeyes are not yet a finished product, and things are about to get quite a bit harder. Ohio State draws a wounded Penn State squad next in front of what should be the largest Ohio Stadium crowd of the season, for what Day called the biggest test so far.

After the Nittany Lions fell to Illinois in nine overtimes about three hours before the Buckeyes thrashed Indiana, that might be a tougher claim to support. But the schedule is ramping up, regardless of what Penn State did in its marathon with the Illini. Those Nittany Lions remain in the top 25, and Ohio State is set to close the season against a pair of teams currently in the top 10, hosting Michigan State on Nov. 20 before traveling to Michigan on Nov. 27. There's not a killer offense among the group, but an increase in difficulty is an increase in difficulty, nonetheless.

As Ohio State enters what it's calling the final run, though, it has the confidence and the production of a team hitting its stride. The offense is rolling at a historic level. The defense forced three-and-outs, held a bad Hoosiers offense under water for four quarters and gave its offense reason to feel confident that even if it doesn't score, it will be covered for. With five games remaining in the regular season, there are far worse places to be.

"To me, you can play with the ultimate confidence when you're getting the ball back at midfield like that," Day said when asked about the defensive stops that set his offense up in excellent field position. "That's the way it felt in 2019, and it felt again like that tonight. You feel it on the sideline. There's so much confidence, and then the minute we get the ball back, we feel like we're going to score. You get a three-and-out or you get a turnover and the offense just steamrolls. That's a great feeling as a coach. When we can get stops like that, it's great for the whole team."

Hoosiers' Woes Continue

The Ohio State matchup has not been kind to Indiana in recent years. Or decades. Or ever, really. With its win, the Buckeyes extended their winning streak



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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Ohio State's offense is just unbelievable. The Buckeyes extended their touchdown streak to 19 consecutive drives that ended in points with C.J. Stroud as the starter before finally sending Jesse Mirco back onto the field for a punt early in the second half.

Stroud has 14 touchdowns and zero interceptions since returning from his sabbatical during Akron week. Chris Olave has pulled even with Devin Smith in the career receiving touchdowns category with 30 and will undoubtedly break David Boston's mark of 34 before the season ends. TreVeyon Henderson is up to 14 touchdowns on the season, just four short of Maurice Clarett's OSU freshman season record, and he's done it in basically two full games, having hardly played against Minnesota and finding quick exits in each of the last four games.

Even tight end Jeremy Ruckert is approaching the record books with 12 career touchdowns, one short of Jake Stoneburner's leading mark for an Ohio State tight end.

The offense can score almost literally at will. It's working behind the nation's best offensive line in a system that its star quarterback is growing more comfortable in every week.

What Didn't Work

Not a single thing. It was a near-perfect performance from the Buckeyes from wire to wire. Indiana's opening drive could be the only flaw, traveling 75 yards and spanning nearly seven minutes, but Ohio State responded to it by allowing just 53 yards for the rest of the game, without forcing a single turnover to juke the stats.

Play Of The Game

There are more important plays, but none was more impressive than Stroud's pass to Jaxon Smith-Njigba on a skinny post on first-and-10 from the Buckeye 25-yard-line late in the first quarter. Stroud sat in the pocket, felt the rush around him, stepped up and delivered a ball into triple coverage that Smith-Njigba caught – right over a linebacker, away from a cornerback, and under a safety. It was the kind of pass that requires some level of madness to even attempt, and Stroud made it look easy in his sixth career start.

Smith-Njigba twisted to reel it in and even managed to avoid a big hit from that safety, perhaps the biggest compliment that can be paid on a pass over the middle of the field.

– Patrick Mayhorn

against the Hoosiers to 26 games, spanning all of the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. The last IU victory was a 41-7 thrashing in Bloomington in 1988 under the guidance of the late Bill Mallory.

That victory earned quite the screaming headline from the Chicago Tribune: "INDIANA BEATS DAYLIGHTS OUT OF OHIO STATE." It was fitting, too. Indiana jumped out to a 35-0 lead early in the third quarter behind a powerful rushing attack, led by tailback Anthony Thompson, who rushed 32 times for 190 yards and four touchdowns. Quarterback Dave Schnell threw the ball only 13 times but hit on 10 of those attempts for 151 yards and another two scores – quite a bit better than Ohio State's effort as quarterback Greg Frey spent the day running for his life, completing only 7 passes in 22 tries, with four interceptions and 101 yards.

Jaymes Bryant scored the lone touchdown for the Buckeyes in the third frame, converting on an 8-yard scamper to cut the Indiana lead to 35-7 – albeit well after Indiana's starters had left the field.

"Bill was nice to us," said John Cooper, then in his first season as head coach of the Buckeyes. "He took the first team out. This is the best team we've played so far. I told Bill afterward I hope he goes to the Rose Bowl."

For an Ohio State team that had already suffered a pair of blowout losses to Pittsburgh and Illinois within its first four games of the season, it wasn't a particularly surprising defeat. The Hoosiers entered the matchup with three wins and a tie and had their eyes set on a Rose Bowl berth after an eight-win season and Peach Bowl appearance the year before. Indiana didn't quite reach that mark, dropping Big Ten matchups to Michigan (which represented the league in the Rose Bowl), Illinois and Michigan State during a span of four weeks, but it still managed a Liberty Bowl win as well as that clobbering of the Buckeyes.

"Going in, we thought we could dominate," Mallory said. "I'm not surprised by the score. We thought we could pound on them."

Perhaps Mallory's confidence was sparked in part by his status as quite possibly the most successful Indiana coach of all time – at least against Ohio State. He's one of only four IU coaches with more than one win against the Buckeyes, joining James H. Horne, who went 3-0-1 at the turn of the 20th century, Bo McMillan who did it three times during his 14 seasons in charge in the 1930s and 1940s, and James M. Sheldon, with two victories during his tenure that lasted from 1905 to 1913.

Mallory's first win against his former employer came just a year earlier, against the final squad that Earle Bruce put together while donning the scarlet and gray. Again bolstered by a strong performance from Thompson, who carried 34 times for 134 yards and a touchdown, Indiana snapped a 31-game losing streak in the series with a 31-10 win.

Unlike in the second matchup, the Buckeyes did manage to put up a bit of a fight in the 1987 version, knotting the score at 10 entering the second half but falling flat in the final frames, mustering just 10 rushing yards during the final 30 minutes of play.

It was a performance, while not quite as disastrous as its successor, that drew

quite the quote from Bruce after the final whistle.

"I've known about Ohio State football since I was a freshman here in 1949," Bruce said. "This is the darkest day in Ohio State football since I have been associated with it."

"You saw an Ohio State football team that in the second half got the devil knocked out of them. Indiana did whatever they wanted to on offense and defense in the second half. I give all the credit to Indiana – they were well-prepared and everything they tried was successful."

Mallory, well aware of the losing streak headed into that matchup, was having none of it from his one-time coworker.

"You tell Earle I've had a couple of dark days, too, and I don't want to hear that," Mallory said with a chuckle. "We didn't come in here to lose, and this is a great confidence-builder. Now the people will understand that Indiana plays some great football."

The final Indiana win before that brutal cold spell? It came all the way back in 1951, during Woody Hayes' first season in Columbus. Head coach Clyde B. Smith cruised to a 32-10 win, his only success against the Buckeyes in four seasons.

For Ohio State, meanwhile, the series with Indiana is rich with blowout victories, stat-padding performances and colorful quotes from proud coaches who felt they should have toppled the Hoosiers by 100 points, rather than the standard 50.

Since 1951, Hayes is the leader in the clubhouse with a 22-1-1 mark against Indiana, followed by Cooper at 9-1-1 and Bruce at 8-1. Jim Tressel, Urban Meyer and Day are all perfect against Indiana with 8-0, 7-0 and 3-0 marks respectively. This year's win wasn't quite the most emphatic in school history, but it was almost as roundly dominant as just about any on the list. That distinction still likely belongs to a 56-0 romp in 1957.

Galen Cisco (160 yards), Jimmy Roseboro (157) and Don Clark (112) rushed for a combined 429 yards of Ohio State's 465 on the ground during a matchup that saw Hayes take far less mercy on his foe than Mallory would extend 31 years later.

"I left our first string in because I thought it would do them more good to

work against Indiana than to scrimmage next week," Hayes said. "They had their scrimmage today."

Day might be the owner of the No. 2 and No. 3 performances against IU, though, adding this year's win to an impressive 51-10 victory in Memorial Stadium in 2019. Those Buckeyes didn't keep their foot on the gas to quite the same extent, nor did they grind the Hoosiers' run defense into pure dust, but J.K. Dobbins rushed for 193 yards and a score while Master Teague

added 106 and another score. Day's post-game refrain then may be familiar to readers of this issue of BSB.

"We think we should be able to win the line of scrimmage," Day said two years ago. "That's where all the battles are won, and I think today was an example of that. But this is just one week. It has to continue to build as we go because we're going to start to see teams down the road that have really good offensive and defensive lines, and we'll have to keep building on it."



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Ohio State Buckeyes Overpower Hoosiers, 54-7

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State broke a 7-7 tie and never looked back, scoring 47 unanswered points to pound Indiana 54-7 on a rainy night in Bloomington, Ind., on Oct. 23.

C.J. Stroud threw for four touchdowns, and TreVeyon Henderson scored three times for the No. 5 Buckeyes (6-1, 4-0 Big Ten) to the delight of the many OSU fans among the crowd of 52,656 in Memorial Stadium.

Henderson ran for a 21-yard TD and caught a 14-yarder from Stroud as the Buckeyes took a 21-7 lead early in the second quarter and rolled to a 44-7 halftime score against the overwhelmed Hoosiers (2-5, 0-4).

Tight end Jeremy Ruckert had five catches for 47 yards and two TDs, the last a 2-yard toss on Stroud's last play of the game with 1:15 left in the third quarter to make it 51-7.

Stroud was 21 of 28 for 266 yards. In the past three games he has 14 touchdown passes with no interceptions.

"It starts with protection and trust in the guys to catch it," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said of Stroud. "He's got a lot of confidence right now."

Unstoppable

After a touchback on the opening kickoff, the Buckeyes drove 75 yards in 12



SONNY BROCKWAY

DRIVING THOUGH — Ohio State freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson (32) motors through a gaping hole in the Indiana defense during Oct. 23 action at Memorial Stadium in Bloomington, Ind. Henderson rushed for 81 yards and two touchdowns on just nine carries and added a 14-yard TD catch during OSU's 54-7 blowout win.

plays and 5:10 off the clock for a 7-0 lead when Miyan Williams rushed for an 11-yard TD at 9:50.

After missing the past two games for an undisclosed reason (the ABC TV crew reported he had a concussion), Williams had five carries for 38 yards to open the game.

Ruckert had two catches for 23 yards to jump-start the series. Later, Williams

had runs of 6, 10 and 6 yards to move the ball to the 16. After a 5-yard pass to Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Williams scored on the next play.

Indiana responded with its own 75-yard scoring drive, using 6:52 and 15 plays, the

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OHIO STATE VS. INDIANA

last being a Jack Tuttle 7-yard pass to Peyton Hendershot at the 2:58 mark to make it 7-7. Tuttle was playing for injured starter Michael Penix.

Hendershot had three catches for 29 yards while Tuttle went 4 for 7 for 41 yards. Miles Marshall had a 12-yard grab to the OSU 28, and Donovan McCulley added a 15-yard rush to the 7. Indiana was 4 for 4 on third downs, including the TD. The Hoosiers went 1 for 10 the remainder of the game.

Unfortunately for the Hoosiers, Tuttle was hurt on the scoring play and did not return, leaving McCulley and Grant Gremel as ineffective replacements.

Henderson scored the next two TDs to give the Buckeyes a 14-point lead.

He capped an efficient 5-play, 75-yard, 1:33 series on a 21-yard run with 1:25 left in the first quarter. The drive began with a laced 32-yard strike to Smith-Njigba to the Indiana 43. Three plays later, Stroud found Garrett Wilson for 21 to set up the TD run on the next snap.

Following a Hoosiers punt, the Buckeyes started at their 49, and Henderson ran for 3 on the final play of the quarter. Smith-Njigba had a reception for 9, Stroud scooted out of the pocket for 9 more, and Wilson had a grab of 13 to the 17. Henderson then gained 3 before reaching the end zone on a 14-yard pass from Stroud at 12:47 to make it 21-7.

The defense made it 23-7 at 10:11 on a safety when Indiana punter James Evans couldn't handle the snap from the 14 and fell on it in the end zone. On the previous play, Ty Hamilton sacked Gremel for a 6-yard loss.

Emeka Egbuka returned the ensuing free kick 42 yards to the Indiana 39. Henderson rambled 25 yards to the 14, but two plays later the Buckeyes were flagged for an ineligible lineman (Matt Jones) downfield to negate a TD pass to Ruckert.

With the ball at the 19, Henderson got 3 yards back before Stroud connected with Chris Olave for a 16-yard TD to make it 30-7 at 8:24. The drive used five plays and 1:35. The catch was Olave's 30th TD to tie

him with Devin Smith for second all-time at OSU, four behind David Boston.

Henderson upped the count to 37-7 at 5:45 before the half with a 6-yard run. The Buckeyes needed two plays to go only 30 yards thanks to a 20-yard punt return by Wilson. Henderson racked up 17 yards, and a personal foul at the end of the play moved the ball to the 6.

The final score of the first half came with 31 seconds left when Ruckert got open for a 14-yard catch. The series covered 66 yards in eight plays and 2:56 for a 44-7 advantage. Ruckert also had an 8-yard catch during the drive, Wilson made catches for 15 and 6, and Smith-Njigba added a 13-yarder.

Ohio State outgained the Hoosiers 334 (201 passing, 133 rushing) to 54 (44, 10) in the first half and led 20-5 in first downs.

"We're hitting. We have momentum, we're just rolling," Stroud said. "All these things are hitting."

In the third quarter, Ruckert's second TD at the 1:15 mark to make it 51-7 put the cap on a 10-play possession that used 5:04 and went 78 yards. Smith-Njigba had a 15-yard reception, and tight end Cade Stover had a catch for 18 before the Stroud to Smith-Njigba connection clicked again for a 25-yard gain to the 2, and Ruckert scored from there.

OSU made it 54-7 at 8:49 of the fourth quarter. With Kyle McCord taking the snaps, he guided the Buckeyes on an 11-play drive that ended with a 26-yard field goal by Noah Ruggles. Evan Pryor had a 30-yard catch and a 16-yard run, and Marvin Harrison Jr. had 34 yards on two catches.

Jack Miller took over for the Buckeyes' final drive from their own 8 with 7:32 left. He took them to the IU 49 with the aid of an 11-yard pass to Chris Booker and a 24-yard reception by Egbuka, but the series stalled and Jesse Mirco placed a 35-yard

punt at the 17.

That's where Trent Howland had five carries for 17 yards to end the game.

Game Notes

Ohio State had 539 total yards with 352 through the air and 187 on the ground. The Buckeyes went 6 of 9 on third-down conversions and had six TDs and a field goal on seven trips to the red zone. ... Henderson had 81 yards on nine carries, all in the first half. Williams rushed eight times for 60 yards, and Pryor had 11 carries for 48 yards. ... Smith-Njigba had six catches for 99 yards. Wilson's five catches totaled 59 yards. ... Indiana had just 128 yards of offense, 80 of it passing. ... Gremel was 3 of 4 for 9 yards, and McCulley connected on 1 of 6 for 30 yards. ... OSU had five sacks for 19 yards. ... Ohio State running backs Master Teague and Marcus Crowley were among those unavailable to play.

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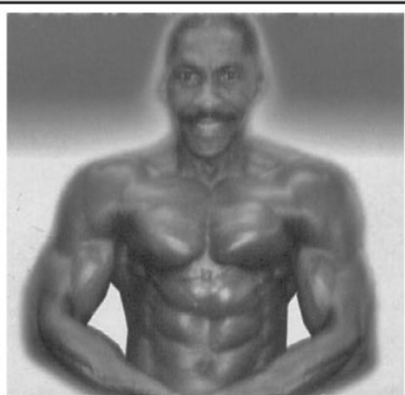
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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 54, Indiana 7

Oct. 23, 2021 – Memorial Stadium, Bloomington, Ind.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	14	30	7	3	54
INDIANA	7	0	0	0	7

First Quarter

- OSU** – Williams, 11-yard rush (Ruggles kick), 9:50; 12 plays, 75 yards, 5:10 TOP.
- IND** – Hendershot, 7-yard pass from Tuttle (Campbell kick), 2:58; 15 plays, 75 yards, 6:52 TOP.
- OSU** – Henderson, 21-yard rush (Ruggles kick), 1:25; 5 plays, 75 yards, 1:33 TOP.

Second Quarter

- OSU** – Henderson, 14-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 12:47; 6 plays, 51 yards, 2:43 TOP.
- OSU** – Safety (fumbled snap, Harrison recovery), 10:11.
- OSU** – Olave, 16-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 8:24; 5 plays, 39 yards, 1:35 TOP.
- OSU** – Henderson, 6-yard rush (Ruggles kick), 5:45; 2 plays, 30 yards, 0:29 TOP.
- OSU** – Ruckert, 14-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 0:31; 8 plays, 66 yards, 2:56 TOP.

Third Quarter

- OSU** – Ruckert, 2-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 1:15; 10 plays, 78 yards, 5:04 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

- OSU** – Ruggles, 26-yard field goal, 8:49; 11 plays, 67 yards, 5:53 TOP.
- Att.** – 52,656

Weather – 58 degrees, rain, wind NE 3 mph

Team Statistics		
	OSU	IU
First Downs	31	10
Rushing	9	4
Passing	21	5
Penalty	1	1
Rushes-Yards	32-187	33-48
Passing Yards	352	80
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	28-37-0	8-17-0
Offensive Plays	69	54
Total Net Yards	539	128
Third Down Efficiency	6-9	5-14
Punts-Avg.	2-40.0	6-42.0
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	3-0
Penalties	5-40	1-7
Time of Possession	32:01	27:59

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Henderson 9-81; Williams 8-60; Pryor 11-48; Stroud 3-1; Miller 1-(-3). **IU:** Howland 5-17; Carr 10-13; Childers 2-10; McCulley 11-9; Ervin-Poindexter 1-7; Hewitt 1-6; TEAM 2-(-1); Gremel 1-(-6); Tuttle 4-(-7).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Stroud 21-28-0-266-4; McCord 5-6-0-51-0; Miller III 2-3-0-35-0. **IU:** Tuttle 4-7-0-41-1; McCulley 1-6-0-30-0; Gremel 3-4-0-9-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Smith-Njigba 6-99; Wilson 5-59; Ruckert 5-47; Harrison Jr. 2-34; Egbuka 2-29; Olave 2-24; Pryor 2-8; Stover 1-18; Henderson 1-14; Booker 1-11; Royer 1-9. **IU:** Henderson 5-35; Fryfogle 1-30; Marshall 1-12; Swinton 1-3.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Mirco 2-40.0. **IU:** Evans 6-42.0.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Wilson 1-20. **IU:** Fryfogle 1-0

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) OSU: Egbuka 1-42. **IU:** Hewitt 2-33.

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

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

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

INTERCEPTIONS – OSU: None. **IU:** None.

SACKS – OSU: Williams 1.0-7; Hamilton 1.0-6; Harrison 1.0-3; Smith 1.0-3; Garrett 1.0-2; Tuimoloau 0.5-5; Vincent 0.5-5. **IU:** McFadden 1.0-11.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – OSU: Harrison 2.0-8; Eichenberg 2.0-3; Williams 1.0-7; Hamilton 1.0-6; Chambers 1.0-5; Cage 1.0-4; Smith 1.0-3; Garrett 1.0-2; Williams 1.0-1; Tuimoloau 0.5-5; Gaoteote 0.5-5; Hall 0.5-5; Vincent 0.5-5; Ransom 0.5-3; Simon 0.5-3. **IU:** McFadden 3.0-14; Ziemba 1.0-3.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU: Shaw 3-1-4; Eichenberg 3-1-4; Mitchell 2-2-4; Williams 3-0-3; Sawyer 3-0-3; Ransom 2-1-3; Simon 1-2-3; Cage 1-2-3; Harrison 2-0-2; Williamson 2-0-2; Hamilton 2-0-2; Jackson 1-1-2; Hickman 0-2-2; Garrett 1-0-1; Jean-Baptiste 1-0-1; Martinez 1-0-1; Chambers 1-0-1; Williams 1-0-1; TEAM 1-0-1; Banks 1-0-1; Smith 1-0-1; McCall 1-0-1; Batsch 1-0-1; Kacherski 1-0-1; Cowan 1-0-1; Tuimoloau 0-1-1; Vincent 0-1-1; Hall 0-1-1; Gaoteote IV 0-1-1. **IU:** Williams 5-2-7; Pierre 6-0-6; Layne 5-1-6; McFadden 5-1-6; Fitzgerald 3-2-5; Jones 4-0-4; Matthews 2-0-2; Casey 2-0-2; Sanguinetti 2-0-2; Miller 2-0-2; Ziemba 2-0-2; Kramer 1-1-2; Hendershot 1-0-1; Bryant 1-0-1; McCrary-Ball 0-1-1; Elliott 0-1-1; Person 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, Cage, Garrett, McCall, Williams, Cavazos, Vincent, McCord, Stover, Miller III, Martinez, Smith, Ransom, Egbuka, Young, Watts, Harrison Jr., Pryor, Gaoteote IV, Chambers, Hooker, Johnson, Brown, Williams, Mirco, Sawyer, Rossi, Eichenberg, Robinson, Batsch, Tuimoloau, Kacherski, Hall Jr., Jackson, Wilson, Jones, Hamilton, James, Leroux, Fryar, Jackson, Hamilton, Royer, Booker, Williams, Cowan, Ruggles.

IU – Fryfogle, Carr, Marshall, Tuttle, Katic, Haggard, Powell, Bedford, Jones, Hendershot, Barner, Layne, Matthews, Jones, Anderson, Pierre, Williams, Fitzgerald, McFadden, Bryant, Elliott, Kramer, McCulley, Hewitt, Mullen, Burgess, Head Jr., Miller, McCrary-Ball, Handy, Gremel, Swinton, Sanguinetti, Holt-Bennett, Daniels Jr., Ervin-Poindexter, Howland, McCullough, Cohen, Jusevitch, Childers, Wise, Williams, Robbins, Allen, Casey, Nofaogatoto'a, Carpenter, Person, Rafferty, Holtz, Weaver, O'Connor, Harris, Ray, Ziemba, Bjorson, Smolar, Wyatt, Campbell, Evans, Wracher.

Season Statistics

2021-22 Game-By-Game			
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Spt. 2	(4) at Minnesota	W, 45-31	50,805
Spet. 11	(3) OREGON (12)	L, 35-28	100,482
Sept. 18	(9) TULSA	W, 41-20	76,540
Spet. 25	(10) AKRON	W, 59-7	95,178
Oct. 2	(11) at Rutgers	W, 52,13	51,006
Oct. 9	(7) MARYLAND	W, 66-17	99,277
Oct. 23	(5) at Indiana	W, 54-7	52,656
Oct. 30	(5)PENN STATE (20)	7:30 p.m.	
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE (8)	TBA	
Nov. 27	at Michigan (6)	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	184	143
Rushing	74	48
Passing	106	79
Penalty	4	16
Average Per Game/Rush	207.1	119.4
Average Per Game/Pass	352.1	230.9
Total Offense	3915	2425
Total Plays	473	504
Average Per Game	559.3	350.3
Average Per Play	8.3	4.8
Penalties-Yards	44-440	30-250
Fumbles-Lost	5-1	8-2
Third Down Efficiency	45-78	44-110
Percentage	58%	40%
Fourth Down Efficiency	4-9	6-13
Percentage	44%	46%
Sacks-Yards	25-176	9-75
Time Of Possession Avg.	27:16	32:44

Score	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
By Quarters							
Ohio State	76	116	91	62	0	345	49.3
Opponents	26	38	35	31	0	130	18.6

Individual Statistics				
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
	Long			
T. Henderson	79	693	8.8	11
Miyan Williams	40	309	7.7	2
Master Teague	43	245	5.7	3
Marcus Crowley	20	103	5.2	0
Evan Pryor	21	98	4.7	1
C.J. Stroud	17	18	1.1	0
Garrett Wilson	1	13	13.0	0
Jack Miller III	5	-1	-0.2	0
Kyle McCord	7	-25	-3.6	0
OSU Totals	235	1450	6.2	17
OPP Totals	260	836	3.2	6

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	125	185	67.6	1965	22-3	192.8
Kyle McCord	21	30	70.0	399	2-1	197.1
Jack Miller III	7	14	50.0	101	0-0	110.6
OSU Totals	153	229	66.8	2465	24-4	188.3
OPP Totals	144	244	59.0	1616	11-9	122.9

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	36	605	16.8	6	57
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	29	551	19.0	3	42
Chris Olave	32	518	16.2	8	61
Jeremy Ruckert	16	186	11.6	3	21
TreVeyon Henderson	8	168	21.0	3	70
Emeka Egbuka	6	145	24.2	0	85
Cade Stover	4	69	17.3	0	25
Gee Scott Jr.	4	43	10.8	0	16
Marvin Harrison Jr.	3	43	14.3	0	20
Miyan Williams	3	38	12.7	0	17
Chris Booker	2	27	13.5	0	16
Julian Fleming	2	17	8.5	0	10
Master Teague	2	12	6.0	0	7
Evan Pryor	2	8	4.0	0	10
Marcus Crowley	1	21	21.0	0	21
Joe Royer	1	9	9.0	0	9
Jayden Ballard	1	4	4.0	0	4
Mitch Rossi	1	1	1.0	1	1
OSU Totals	153	2465	16.1	24	85
OPP Totals	144	1616	11.2	11	75

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
T. Henderson	14	–	–	–	–	84
Noah Ruggles	–44-44	–	–	–	7-7	65
Chris Olave	8	–	–	–	–	48
Garrett Wilson	6	–	–	–	–	36

Jeremy Ruckert	3	–	–	–	–	18
Master Teague III	3	–	–	–	–	18
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	3	–	–	–	–	18
Miyan Williams	2	–	–	–	–	12
Haskell Garrett	1	–	–	–	–	6
Craig Young	1	–	–	–	–	6
Ronnie Hickman	1	–	–	–	–	6
Cameron Martinez	1	–	–	–	–	6
Evan Pryor	1	–	–	–	–	6
Mitch Rossi	1	–	–	–	–	6
Denzel Burke	1	–	–	–	–	6
Marvin Harrison Jr.	0	–	–	–	–	2
Dominic DiMaccio	0	2-2	–	–	–	2
OSU Totals	46	46-46	–	–	7-7	345
OPP Totals	17	16-17	–	–	4-5	130

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	2-2	3-3	2-2	0-0	7-7
OSU Totals	2-2	3-3	2-2	0-0	7-7
OPP Totals	1-1	1-1	2-3	0-0	4-5

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	16	698	43.6	0	62
OSU Totals	16	698	43.6	0	62
OPP Totals	39	1676	42.9	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	13	69	5.3	0	23
OSU Totals	13	69	5.3	0	23
OPP Totals	4	22	5.5	0	9

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	9	317	35.2	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	13	386	29.7	0	67
OPP Totals	17	276	16.2	0	23

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Ronnie Hickman	32	20	52	–	–
Teradja Mitchell	16	21	37	4.0-10	–
Cody Simon	13	19	32	2.5-16	1.0-11
Bryson Shaw	15	9	24	–	–
Tommy Eichenberg	11	13	24	2.5-6	–
Lathan Ransom	12	8	20	0.5-3	–
Steele Chambers	13	7	20	3.0-13	1.0-7
Haskell Garrett	11	8	19	6.0-25	4.5-23
Denzel Burke	9	7	16	–	–
Marcus Williamson	8	7	15	0.5-3	–
Zach Harrison	11	4	15	5.0-17	3.0-10
Antwuan Jackson	7	8	15	3.0-16	2.0-15
Kourt Williams	9	4	13	1.0-1	–
Tyleik Williams	8	5	13	5.5-49	4.0-41
Cameron Martinez	7	5	12	0.5-4	–
Dallas Gant	4	6	10	–	–
Josh Proctor	3	7	10	–	–
Cameron Brown	7	3	10	–	–
Craig Young	5	5	10	–	–
Jack Sawyer	8	2	10	2.0-20	2.0-20
Cade Kacherski	6	4	10	–	–
Tyreke Smith	4	4	8	1.0-1	–
Lejond Cavazos	7	1	8	–	–
J.T. Tuimoloau	4	5	9	2.5-19	1.5-16
Marcus Hooker	2	5	7	–	–
Ryan Batsch	4	4	8	–	–
Taron Vincent	3	4	7	1.0-3	0.5-2
Ryan Watts	5	1	6	–	–
Ty Hamilton	4	2	6	2.0-7	2.0-7
Demario McCall	3	3	6	–	–
J. Jean-Baptiste	2	4	6	0.5-5	–
Jaden McKenzie	2	3	5	–	–
Xavier Johnson	1	4	5	–	–
Jerron Cage	2	3	5	2.5-11	1.0-6
OSU Totals	256	230	506	50.0-254	25.0-176
OPP Totals	260	154	414	18.0-93	9.0-75

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 54, Indiana 7

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on his team's performance against Indiana: "I think it's always been about us, and that's what we have to focus on. We knew as we headed into this game that we had no record. We were 0-0. This is the first win in the second half of the season, and that's the way we're looking at it. I thought we came out and played well. We didn't expect any rain, but we got some rain, and I felt we handled that well."

Indiana head coach Tom Allen on the Buckeyes: "It's a pretty special football team that we played tonight, offensively. I've been here for several years, and with that quarterback playing the way he is right now, man, it's impressive. They have a lot of talent without question, and you saw a lot of it tonight."

Day on the efficiency of the Ohio State offense against Indiana: "I think just across the board we're being more aggressive. You saw us run the ball early on, and we were aggressive throwing the football – we're always aggressive throwing the football – but we also ran the ball. I thought the offensive line moved the line of scrimmage and the defensive line stopped the run, and anytime we go and play in these conference games, that's the first thing we have to do."

Allen on some of Indiana's defensive struggles: "To me, the biggest problem was the tackling. I was most disappointed in our tackling in the first half. That was really what I didn't expect at all. That, and our run defense. And I do get it. When you do some things trying to create pressure and not give up the explosive plays in the pass game – if I went back and looked at it, I think we put too much emphasis on that."

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud on the running backs: "Trey (Henderson) did a great job tonight. Miyan (Williams), too. And Evan (Pryor). You're expected to make plays when your number is called, and all of those guys did tonight. When you have three great backs, that just kind of makes our job that much easier. And then the O-line. I can't say enough about the O-line. When the gaps get as big as they were tonight, we just get rolling."

Stroud on finding confidence through his teammates: "I just feel like our momentum is really going right now as a team. It's not about me. It's about my team and my teammates. Earlier in the season, when I was down in the dumps, it was my teammates that lifted me up. They lift me up every time. (Tight end Jeremy Ruckert) always says, 'Just do what got you



SONNY BROCKWAY

ONE OF FIVE — Ohio State receiver Garrett Wilson (5) goes up for a catch along the sideline against Indiana cornerback Jaylin Williams (23). Wilson caught five balls for 59 yards during a 352-yard passing performance by the Buckeyes during their 54-7 victory against the Hoosiers.

here,' and that's what I try to do."

Day on Ruckert having a career day that included five catches, two of which went for touchdowns: "We have so many weapons, and that's a great thing to have. But at the same time, guys have to be unselfish and that's part of the game. Jeremy has done a lot of the dirty work, blocking inside, and there have been times where the ball hasn't come his way. But when you stay positive and you stay at it, things work out. And that's playing team football."

Day on Stroud's pinpoint throw to Jaxon Smith-Njigba over the middle in the first quarter: "It starts with the protection and it starts in the trust in his guys to catch it. He does see the field – that's one of his strengths. He's got a lot of confidence right now, and that's a good thing. But we can't ride the roller coaster either. We have to stay on it, but he made some very good throws tonight."

Day on having patience with Stroud and watching him build confidence at quarterback: "Again, we're six games in with C.J. We don't want to ride the roller coaster on this. He's going to stay humble, we're going to stay humble and just keep working it one game at a time. Certainly, you see those things out there and it excites you. It's fun, but it takes everybody. When something doesn't go well, you look at what went wrong and it's a little bit of everything. When things go well, it's a little bit of everything as well, but certainly he has the talent to make those throws, and if he continues to prepare the way he does and show toughness, then we'll have a chance here as we make this run."

Stroud on handling criticism early in the season: "I don't know. At the end of the day, if it ain't about God, my family or my teammates, I really don't care. I mean, I know that comes with the job of being quarterback at this great university. You have to know that comes with the job."

Allen on Indiana's long list of injured players: "Sometimes you just have to live with it, but I was definitely very concerned about the injuries we have. I felt like we could maybe hold up and not give up those explosive plays and still stop the run, and I think that's where the problem was created. If you can't stop the run and they're still getting those pass plays, it gets ugly. And it was ugly. It was painful, especially that second-quarter window. It was just not good. We have to be more aggressive."

Allen on being without starting cornerbacks Reese Taylor and Tiawan Mullen: "Not having Reese and Tiawan, it makes a major difference in our defense, especially against the receivers. We knew we weren't going to have Reese at all, and we were hoping to have Tiawan more, but that ended up not being the case. Without a doubt, that has a major impact on what you can do schematically against these guys. It really compounded the problem in my opinion. Still, it really came down to not getting pressure on C.J. I think that caused the biggest issues. You try different ways to get to him, and we felt like that would give us a chance, but they picked a lot of those things up."

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After Early Bumps, Offense Rolls Behind Stroud

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With Ohio State enjoying an open Saturday on Oct. 16, it was the perfect time to analyze where the Buckeyes stand on offense at the midpoint of the season.

The Buckeyes were coming off a 66-17 shellacking of Maryland on Oct. 9, so six games were a large enough sample to determine that head coach Ryan Day had the offense humming despite a 35-28 loss to Oregon on Sept. 11 in the second career start for redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud.

Ohio State was No. 1 nationally in total offense at 563.2 yards per game, second in scoring with 48.5 points per contest and second in yards per play at 8.6.

What follows are BSB's midterm grades for the offense, with statistics through the Buckeyes' first six games.

Quarterbacks

Stroud has proved Day made the correct choice when he won the position battle with redshirt freshman Jack Miller and true freshman Kyle McCord. Stroud had thrown for 1,699 yards and 18 touchdowns with just three interceptions in five games.

He was second nationally in QB efficiency (191.66) and fourth in passing yards per game (339.8), and his TD total was tied for eighth, even though he had played only five games whereas all quarterbacks ranked above him had played at least six games.

Stroud prefers to spread the plaudits to his teammates in the same manner he distributes the ball to his talented receiving corps or hands off to his backs.

"It's just all about balance," the OSU quarterback said. "I think the better that we can just keep rolling, keep this momentum going, the better balance that we'll have."

"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."

Stroud came under criticism following the week-two loss to Oregon and struggled during the following game vs. Tulsa. Day wisely allowed him to rest his bothersome sore shoulder for the fourth game against Akron, and in the games vs. Rutgers and Maryland, Stroud was a combined 41 of 56 (73.2 percent) for 736 yards and 10 touch-

downs with no interceptions.

"When someone gives criticism or praise, you have to treat it the same way," Day said. "Early on, there was plenty of criticism going around. Now there's praise."

The OSU head coach likes the way Stroud has taken command of the offense through his actions and words.

"I think he communicates well," Day said. "His relationships with the players on offense are strong."

McCord is clearly the second choice behind Stroud. He started the 59-7 win against Akron and completed 13 of 18 attempts for 319 yards and TD throws of 5 yards to Chris Olave and 34 to Jaxon Smith-Njigba. He also threw one interception.

Through six games, McCord was 16 of 24 (66.7 percent) for 348 yards, two TDs and the one pick. Miller had thrown 11 times, completing five (45.5 percent) for 66 yards.

Stroud is growing more confident with each game, but he will need to be far better as the competition improves over the final six games of the regular season.

Based on his past two games, he earned an A+, but his first three starts can't be discarded.

BSB Midterm Grade: A-

Running Backs

As Stroud said, the passing offense is effective because of the run game, and no one has been better than freshman TreVeyon Henderson. His 8.8 yards per carry was the highest in the nation among running backs with 40 or more carries.

Henderson's breakaway abilities make him a threat every time he touches the ball, and his four rushes of 40 yards or more was second nationally. He was also tied with three other players for the second-most runs of 30 or more yards. He had six of those.

It all came together against Tulsa when Henderson broke Archie Griffin's 49-year-old single-game freshman rushing record at Ohio State with 270 yards on 24 carries.

While he ranked just 21st in yards per game at 100.8, that was only because those ranked above him had significantly more carries than his 69. But that's just fine with Day, who knows he's going to need Henderson to be as fresh as possible down the stretch.

"It's a long season," the coach said. "He's in a pretty good place leading up to the last six games."

Of course, the Buckeyes have more than just Henderson in the backfield. Junior Master Teague had rushed for 252 yards on a 5.7 average, and redshirt freshman Miyan Williams, the starter in the season opener



FILE PHOTO

ROTATING THE LINE — Ohio State offensive line coach Greg Studrawa began rotating his offensive linemen this year because of necessity but has continued to do so because of his players' versatility. Line play has been one of the Buckeyes' strengths so far in 2021.

vs. Minnesota, peeled off a 71-yard TD run in that game among his 249 yards for the season. His per-carry average was a gaudy 7.8. Williams did not dress for the Rutgers and Maryland games for undisclosed reasons.

Redshirt sophomore Marcus Crowley (103 yards, 5.2 average) and freshman Evan Pryor (50 yards, 5.0 average) have flashed in mop-up duty.

Overall, the Buckeyes were third in the country with a 6.2 yards-per-carry average.

There is more to the running back position than simply running the ball, of course, and a couple of missed blocking assignments during the first half prevent the grade from being higher.

BSB Midterm Grade: B+

Offensive Line

This has been a season of change for the offensive line, yet the beef up front has consistently provided protection for its young

quarterback and holes for its even younger star runner.

There isn't a lot to complain about when your QBs combine to rank fifth nationally in yards per completion (16.9) and fourth in yards per attempt (11.0) while the eight sacks allowed were tied for 20th fewest out of 130 Football Bowl Subdivision schools.

"One of the things our guys have done a good job of in pass protection is handle the twists, getting their hands on guys and getting a good pocket," Day said. "If you look back on the past six weeks, we've done a good job of that."

"Now again, some better rushers are coming and more pressure's coming. But overall, that part's been well-done, and a lot of it has to do with how (offensive line coach Greg Studrawa) coaches it and practices it and the way we challenge each other in practice."

The gravel-voiced Studrawa has engineered personnel switches at several posi-

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MIDTERM EXAMS: OFFENSE

tions to create depth and versatility.

Nicholas Petit-Frere moved from right tackle, where he was second-team All-Big Ten last season, to left tackle. Thayer Munford went from left tackle to left guard, tackle Paris Johnson became a right guard, Dawand Jones earned the right tackle spot, and when center Harry Miller became unavailable for the first four games, redshirt freshman Luke Wypler took over. Miller is back and taking snaps at left guard.

Add Matt Jones to the mix whenever Munford has been sidelined with a bad ankle, and the makeshift line has forged a new identity under fire.

All of that reorganizing came amid Studrawa missing the Tulsa game after back surgery. His assistants ably filled in just as the players are expected to do.

"I think it's an important factor of our O-line," Matt Jones said. "I think it's good for everybody just knowing that if one person goes down, the next person is up. The coaches, next coach up, just the same way."

The pass protection previously benefited from veteran quarterback Justin Fields, who was more mobile and better experienced at releasing the ball under pressure. The goal this season was to make the pocket as comfortable as possible for Stroud.

"When it shrinks around the quarterback, Justin maybe didn't have a problem," Studrawa said. "But if a freshman young guy's back there, then you have a problem. I wanted to work on the firmness of the pocket and keeping that clean, so it's been a big emphasis for us all the way through. I think they've taken it really, really seriously, trying to help that kid grow. As long as we can keep him clean, you see what he can do."

The other aspect of the offensive line is run blocking. With the emergence of Henderson, the Buckeyes were averaging the previously mentioned 6.2 yards per carry, while their 211.0 rushing yards per game ranked No. 22 in the nation.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

Wide Receivers

The preseason hype about having the best receiving corps in the country may be a reality as Olave, junior Garrett Wilson and Smith-Njigba had combined for 84 receptions, 1,492 yards and 16 touchdowns. The group also was averaging 17.8 yards per catch.

Wilson, who had at least one catch in 27 straight games, was leading the team in receptions (31), yards (546) and yards per game (91.0), the latter figure ranking 17th nationally. He also had six touchdowns while averaging 17.6 yards per catch.

Olave opted to return for his senior season rather than enter the 2021 NFL draft and is having another big year even though he had back-to-back games against Tulsa (no catches) and Akron (two for 12 yards and a TD) when he seemed to be a forgotten man. He had 494 yards with a 16.5-yard average and was leading the OSU receivers with seven scores to give him 29 TDs for his career, third on the program's all-time list.

After having been on the receiving end of throws by Dwayne Haskins and Fields his first three seasons, Olave is impressed by Stroud.

"I had a lot of confidence in him and his arm talent," the OSU receiver said. "He's a rare breed. I've never seen a guy throw the ball like that. That's one of the reasons why

I came back – to play with him.

"To see his shoulder get healthy, and to see him keep building on his performances, getting better every day, not only on the field but off the field and in the film review and preparation and all that, he's good. I can't wait to see him ball the rest of the year."

Smith-Njigba, a sophomore, averaged 19.7 yards every time he made a catch, good for 452 yards and three touchdowns.

"All three guys, we all compete throughout the week to try to get better every day," Olave said. "We all want each other to get the ball and have fun, make some plays. We're all happy for each other. We've just got to keep going."

There are others itching to contribute such as freshman Emeka Egbuka, who had an 85-yard catch-and-run vs. Akron, as well

as Julian Fleming and Marvin Harrison Jr.

If that weren't enough, Stroud has been utilizing his backs, and Henderson turned a screen pass into a 70-yard TD against Minnesota.

BSB Midterm Grade: A+

Tight Ends

While the tight ends are often an afterthought in the scheme of things, the group has made its share of contributions beyond their blocking assignments.

Graduate senior Jeremy Ruckert was fourth on the team with 11 catches for 139 yards, an average of 12.6 yards per reception. He had four catches for 40 yards against Rutgers as well as his lone TD of the season and the 10th of his career, three behind Jake Stoneburner's program record

for tight ends.

Sophomore Gee Scott Jr. had four catches for 43 yards in his first season at the position after switching from a wide receiver spot. Third-year sophomore Cade Stover, a converted linebacker, was continuing to develop with 51 yards on three catches, including a 25-yarder.

And then there's graduate senior and former walk-on Mitch Rossi, a sometime fullback who grabbed his first career TD reception, a 1-yarder vs. Rutgers.

Aside from Ruckert, there's not a lot of experience, but Day sees promise not only for the tight ends but the entire offense.

"I think we're in a lot better place than we were at the beginning of the season," he said.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

OSU Defense Hopes 'Worst Times' Are In Past

By MARK REA
BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Charles Dickens' 1859 novel "A Tale of Two Cities" opens with the line, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Invert the best and worst scenarios, and there could be no better description of the Ohio State defense during the first half of the 2021 season. It was truly "A Tale of Two Defenses" that began with the worst of times but incrementally got better and better.

The Buckeyes began the season with an uneven performance at Minnesota, one in which they surrendered 31 points and 408 total yards. That was followed by an almost total collapse against Oregon, a 35-28 loss during which the Ducks scored three touchdowns on essentially the same play against a defensive unit that looked equal parts dazed and confused. After that defeat, OSU head coach Ryan Day relieved defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs of his play-calling duties on game day and gave them to secondary coach Matt Barnes.

No one would call the change an immediate success since the Buckeyes gave up 501 total yards the following week during a 41-20 win against Tulsa, the first time in program history an Ohio State defense had been gashed for 500 or more yards in back-to-back games.

But slowly, as the defensive game plan was simplified and the younger players in the lineup began to rely more on talent than schematics, things gradually improved.

After three games, Ohio State was allowing bloated averages of 28.7 points and 471.3 yards per game. In the subsequent three games against Akron, Rutgers and Maryland, those averages were shaved to 12.3 points and 303.3 yards per game.

In terms of overall numbers at the midway point of the season, the Buckeyes still ranked a lowly ninth in the Big Ten and No. 32 nationally in scoring defense at 20.5 points per game, and their average of giving



FILE PHOTO

VETERAN COACH — After a shaky start that saw the OSU defensive line register only four sacks in the first three games, line coach Larry Johnson had his unit playing much better as the team hit the midway point of the season.

up 387.3 yards per game was good enough only for 11th in the conference and 77th nationally.

Akron, Rutgers and Maryland would never be confused with the elite teams of college football, yet the defensive performances against those teams gave Day and his staff reason for optimism.

"I trust (the defensive staff)," Day said after the Maryland game, a statement the head coach might have had trouble uttering earlier in the season. "They're preparing at

a high level. They're also getting the guys ready and identifying what their guys can do better now, so because of that, there's a lot of rhythm. And also because of that, I think there's just a rhythm in the game right now for them."

Barnes agreed that his move out of the press box and onto the field allowed him to get a more hands-on approach during game day.

"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 added that as he becomes more comfortable in his ability as a play-caller, the defense will become more comfortable — and confident — as well.

"I think it's like anything else," he 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."

Day said the switch has had the desired effect on the defense in particular and the team as a whole.

"Kerry's upstairs now, and he's sees it very well up there," the OSU head coach said. "The information is coming down to Matt, and Matt is doing a great job of calling it."

What follows are BSB's midterm grades for the defensive units, with statistics through the Buckeyes' first six games.

Defensive Line

With so much roster attrition throughout the back seven, Ohio State went into the 2021 season planning to rely heavily on the defensive front to lead the unit. Everything seemed to be going according to that plan during the opener against Minnesota when junior end Zach Harrison executed a third-quarter strip-sack on Gophers QB Tanner Morgan and super senior tackle Haskell Garrett returned Morgan's fumble 32 yards for a touchdown.

But that was about all the production the defensive line could muster throughout the first three games. The unit totaled just four sacks — two each against Minnesota and Tulsa, and none during the loss to Oregon — despite a veteran presence that included fourth-year junior Taron Vincent and super senior Antwan Jackson as well as Harrison and Garrett.

Shortly after the shakeup in the defensive staff, however, the line began getting an infusion of youth, including a trio of true freshmen — Tyleik Williams, J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer. The result was nothing short of remarkable.

In week four against Akron, the Buckeyes registered nine sacks — more than double their total for the previous three games — and they totaled another five vs. Maryland. Part of the reason is the scheme as Ohio State is showing more blitz packages and it's impossible for opposing linemen to account for everyone. But another part of it is talented youngsters with perpetual motors.

Another reason is depth. Thanks to a heavy rotation utilized by veteran line coach Larry Johnson, everyone seems to be getting in on the fun. Williams was leading the team through six games with four sacks followed by Garrett with 3½, but they were among 11 different OSU defenders with at least one sack. Eight others have been credited with at least one-half of a tackle for loss.

"We've played some young guys up front, and that's been a good thing for our future,"

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MIDTERM EXAMS: DEFENSE

Day said. “But we need those veteran guys to play well for us in the second half of the season. Anytime you make a run in October and November, you need your veteran players to play like veterans.”

“We’ve created some depth there, which is good, but you know the expectations we have for the D-line. I’m looking forward to seeing that progress that’s being made. You can see the last couple of weeks, we’re creating more sacks and more disruption in the backfield. But as the competition increases, we’re going to have to get even better at that.”

In addition to getting more pressure on the opposing quarterback, the defensive line is also doing a better job against the run. Minnesota running back Mohamed Ibrahim piled up 163 yards and two touchdowns in the opener, a performance nearly matched by Oregon tailback CJ Verdell, who rushed for 161 yards and a pair of scores.

After just two weeks of the season, the Buckeyes were giving up an average of 235.0 yards per game. Since then, they have allowed only 316 total rushing yards in four games, an average of 79.0 per game. Their overall average of 131.3 per game still ranks only eighth best in the Big Ten and No. 52 nationally, but it’s worth considering how far the unit has come during the last month.

Still, Day is eager to see the defensive line build upon its improvement throughout the last half of the season.

“While we’ve played well the last couple of weeks, that wasn’t really the case in the early going,” the OSU head coach said. “We just have to continue to focus on the fundamentals and winning the wars up front on the defensive line – stopping the run and playing situational football.”

BSB Midterm Grade: B

Linebackers

To say the Buckeyes were lacking in experience at linebacker to begin the 2021 campaign was a gross understatement. When the 2020 season ended with a 52-24 loss to Alabama in the College Football Playoff championship game, it signaled the end of the college careers of Pete Werner, Tuf Borland, Justin Hilliard and Baron Browning.

For some fans, it was goodbye and good riddance, especially with the last image in their minds one of Borland being asked to cover Heisman Trophy winner DeVonta Smith as the Crimson Tide speedster racked up 12 receptions for 215 yards and three touchdowns. But the departure of Borland and his linebacker compadres was a double-edged sword. The quartet had combined for 35 of the 75 tackles the Buckeyes made in the title game, and when they walked out the door of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for the final time, 186 combined games of experience (including 84 starts) walked out with them.

To be fair, the scheme employed by the Buckeyes in the national championship game was virtually the same one that contributed to the loss to Oregon and the subsequent shuffling of defensive staff duties. But the relative youth at the position was also a huge factor as to why Ohio State was getting outflanked on edge plays during the early part of the season.

“I didn’t have many expectations because there were so many unknowns going into

the season,” Day said of his linebackers. “There were so many guys that had – and we talked about this in the spring and in the preseason and now here we are – of guys that just hadn’t played. You do the best you can in practice to prepare them, but until they’re actually in a game, you just don’t know. So I didn’t know what this year would bring.”

The season began with the Buckeyes operating out of an unusual 4-2-5 alignment with senior co-captain (but relatively inexperienced) Teradja Mitchell starting alongside third-year sophomore Tommy Eichenberg. Mitchell responded with a career-high 10 tackles against Minnesota while Eichenberg chipped in five stops and a fumble recovery.

But as the season has continued, with bullet/safety Ronnie Hickman playing almost as much in the linebacker space as he is in the defensive backfield, the unit seems on more solid footing.

Sophomore Cody Simon and converted running back Steele Chambers have been pleasant finds, but there is still an issue of depth – or more accurately, a lack of depth. With the departures of veterans Dallas Gant and K’Vaughn Pope to the transfer portal, the Buckeyes have only six healthy scholarship linebackers heading into the final half of the season.

“A lack of depth is always concerning,” said OSU linebackers coach Al Washington Jr. “We have six, but we feel really good about those six. Obviously, you’d like to bolster yourself as much as you can, but I feel really strong about who we have. We just have to continue to grind away and improve. That’s our mentality.”

There has been improvement, but there was a long way to go. For example, only two of the team’s 19 sacks through the first six games were registered by linebackers – Simon in the opener against Minnesota and Chambers during week six against Maryland. Part of that low number was because of the no-blitz mentality utilized by Coombs, but OSU linebackers recorded only one sack in the four games after Barnes took over the defensive play-calling.

One area where the Buckeyes have improved is in medium-range pass defense. Oregon QB Anthony Brown tossed a pair of 14-yard touchdown passes on virtually the same play, while Tulsa and Akron used almost the same exact play to score touchdowns of their own. Rutgers receiver Aron Cruickshank also turned a short pass in the middle of the field into a 75-yard touchdown romp.

But while the OSU linebackers still seem susceptible to such plays, they have been fewer and farther between. For example, opposing tight ends – who have pretty much had their way with the Ohio State defense the last couple of years – continued that trend in the early going when Minnesota and Oregon tight ends combined for eight catches for 118 yards and a touchdown.

In the subsequent four games, however, opposing tight ends had only 11 receptions for 113 yards and no scores.

As with many other aspects of his team, Day knows the linebackers remain a work in progress, but he likes the improvement he has seen in recent weeks. He just wants to see more.

“I feel solid about it,” Day replied when asked for his opinion of the position group. “I don’t know if I can stand here and tell you

I feel great about that position right now. But I feel solid about it.

“Midway through the season, I think we’re better than we were six weeks ago, but overall we’re still looking for more consistency and more production from that spot.”

BSB Midterm Grade: C

Secondary

Ohio State’s defensive backfield has progressed in six short weeks from the chaos of a kindergarten class trying to execute a fire drill to a unit that established a new program record with interception returns for a touchdown in four consecutive games.

It has been a quick maturation process for a secondary that last year ranked No. 122 in college football against the pass. It’s a remarkable turnaround, too, considering free safety Josh Proctor was lost for the season with a leg injury in week two, cornerbacks Sevn Banks and Cam Brown were sidelined at different parts of the early season, and projected starter Marcus Williamson was passed on the depth chart.

But such youngsters as true freshman Denzel Burke, redshirt freshman Cameron Martinez, second-year sophomore Latham Ransom and third-year sophomores Bryson Shaw, Craig Young and Hickman have suddenly given the defensive backfield an injection of raw talent as well as some newfound depth.

The Buckeyes still have a long way to go in terms of statistics. After six games, they ranked only 11th in the Big Ten and No. 102 nationally in pass defense, but they were second in the conference and tied for 10th in the country with nine interceptions, and their 261 return yards led the Big Ten

and ranked second in the nation. The four pick-sixes – one each by Martinez, Hickman, Burke and Young – led the nation.

Hickman has become a force at the bullet position. In addition to leading the team with 50 tackles through the first half of the season, he also had two interceptions and shared the team lead with Young. Meanwhile, Burke has perhaps become the breakout star in the defensive backfield. He had 16 tackles to go with his pick-six and was credited with a team-best six pass breakups.

The bottom line is that the Buckeyes already had nine interceptions while breaking up another 34 passes in just six games. Through last season’s pandemic-reduced schedule of eight games, the Buckeyes had only seven interceptions and 31 PBUs.

“As far as the backfield is concerned, we’ve been better,” Day said. “We’re better than we were last year, but there are still a lot of things to improve on. Still, it’s exciting to start hearing those names. You’re starting to see Ronnie make plays. You’re starting to see him with multiple games where he has 10 or more tackles. You see Denzel get an interception, and then Cam Martinez getting an interception. You see some guys making plays, and I think that’s going to go a long way heading into the meat of the schedule because now they know they can do it because they’ve done it.”

“I’m hopeful we can keep working, and when we look back here in a few weeks, we can see a lot of growth – that we did a lot of good coaching and building guys up and teaching, and that we stuck together when those first few weeks weren’t ideal.”

BSB Midterm Grade: B

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Buckeyes Get Solid First-Half Special Teams Play

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State entered the 2021 season with numerous questions looming around its special teams units, particularly regarding how the Buckeyes would replace stand-out punter Drue Chrisman and dependable kicker Blake Haubeil.

Through six games, Ohio State's special teams units have exceeded expectations in replacing Chrisman and Haubeil with freshman punter Jesse Mirco and transfer kicker Noah Ruggles. But while certain units have excelled, others have left more to be desired.

What follows are BSB's midterm grades for each special teams unit, with statistics through the first six games.

Punt Block, Field-Goal Block

After failing to block a single kick throughout the entire 2020 season, Ohio State recorded its first of the 2021 campaign at Rutgers on Oct. 2. Following the Scarlet Knights' first touchdown that cut the Buckeyes' lead to 24-6 with 2:23 left in the first quarter, defensive tackle Haskell Garrett swatted down the point-after attempt.

That was the only blocked kick through the first six games of the season. In 2019, Ohio State blocked three.

It may not be a staple of their special teams units, but with Garrett in the middle, they pose the threat of blocking more kicks down the stretch.

BSB Midterm Grade: B-

Punt Team

Chrisman played a pivotal role in Ohio State's success on special teams during his tenure in scarlet and gray, and he left big shoes to fill upon his departure. Head coach Ryan Day and his staff turned to ProKick Australia – the same program that developed former punter Cameron Johnston – in search of Chrisman's replacement and found Mirco, a 24-year-old freshman from

Fremantle, Australia.

Mirco was excellent through six games, averaging 44.1 yards per punt on 14 attempts, including seven downed inside the 20-yard line and a long of 62. The Australia native does not look like a freshman on the field, confidently pinning opponents deep in their own territory with consistency.

"It definitely has lived up to my expectations," Mirco said. "Obviously, it's a pretty big decision to come and play football here. But it's like the best fans in the country, one of the biggest stadiums in the country, and one of the best teams in the country, so it was a pretty easy choice."

Ohio State's punt coverage has worked well with Mirco's strong leg. The Buckeyes were tied for No. 22 in the country in net punting at 42.6 yards per punt through six games. Only three of Mirco's punts had been returned, totaling just 22 yards, and the 7.3 yards allowed per punt return tied for No. 70 in the nation.

Mirco's first two punts in Ohio Stadium could not have gone any better. After averaging 43.0 yards on two attempts during the season opener at Minnesota, he pinned Oregon at its own 1-yard line on back-to-back kicks. The first-year punter was pleased with the help he received from gunners Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Julian Fleming to down the Ducks deep in their own territory.

"It was a great job by Jaxon on the first one to get there in a good position and help out there. And the second one, Julian did a good job to get down there and cover it," Mirco said. "I was obviously pretty happy with both of them."

BSB Midterm Grade: A-

Kickoff Return Defense

A strength for the past several years of the Ohio State special units has been its kickoff return defense. Through six games, the Buckeyes ranked No. 16 in the country by allowing only 16.2 yards per return on 15 returns.



SONNY BROCKWAY

KICKING PERFECTION – Ohio State kicker Noah Ruggles (85) was the embodiment of perfection during the first half of the season. In addition to converting all 37 of his PATs, the North Carolina transfer was a perfect 6 for 6 in field-goal attempts with his longest a 44-yarder against Tulsa.

Ruggles averaged 62.3 yards per kick-off on 49 attempts with 15 touchbacks and one kick that went out of bounds. Graduate senior walk-on Dominic DiMaccio kicked off twice for the Buckeyes, averaging 57.0 yards per kickoff.

Due to the team's ability to score points frequently, the kickoff unit saw plenty of opportunities and rose to the occasion throughout the first half of the 2021 campaign.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

Punt, Kick Return

The kick return unit is the most improved group at Ohio State from the 2020 season. After ranking next-to-last in the country with a paltry 13.3 yards per return last season, the Buckeyes more than doubled that average to 28.7 yards per return (12 attempts for 344 yards) to rank No. 18 in the nation through six games.

Freshman wide receiver Emeka Egbuka gave a charge of electricity to the unit as an elusive returner, leading the team with 34.4 yards per return. That was second in the nation through six games as Egbuka trailed only Kansas State junior Malik Knowles (39.3).

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

Walk-on receiver Xavier Johnson returned two kickoffs with an average of 18.5 yards per return, freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson had one return for 19 yards, and running back-turned-linebacker Steele Chambers had one return for 13 yards.

The Buckeyes' blocking on their kick return unit has been exponentially improved

from last season, opening more creases for the speedy Egbuka to use to his advantage.

While Ohio State enjoyed success in the kick return game, it struggled on punt returns. Through six games, the Buckeyes averaged just 4.1 yards per return on 12 punt returns to rank No. 108 in the nation. Garrett Wilson has returned each punt for Ohio State, with his long return of 23 yards standing out. He has averaged a mere 2.4 yards on his other 11 returns.

Overall, the unit has significant room to grow, needing to open more lanes for Wilson to make plays.

BSB Midterm Grade: B

Field Goals, PATs

Haubeil had shown such solid consistency during his time as a Buckeye, but Ohio State lacked depth behind him, so Day turned to the transfer portal to find his replacement. The Buckeyes brought in Ruggles from North Carolina as a graduate transfer to bolster a room that featured only redshirt freshman Jake Seibert.

"It's awesome," Ruggles said. "I think the brotherhood is great. I love the family atmosphere here, and I really like this team."

Through six games, he was flawless on field goals and extra-point attempts. In addition to hitting all 37 of his PATs, Ruggles connected on each of his six field-goal attempts, with his longest a 44-yarder against Tulsa. Additionally, DiMaccio drilled his only two point-after attempts, keeping Ohio State's streak of 140 consecutive PATs intact. The Buckeyes last failed to convert a point-after kick when DiMaccio missed on the final attempt during a 76-5 win against Miami (Ohio) in September 2019.

The kicking team was one of the biggest question marks entering the season, but Ruggles' first-half perfection was a bright spot for the Buckeyes.

BSB Midterm Grade: A

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Tigers, Tide Facing Similar Adversity To Buckeyes

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Ohio State lost to then-No. 12 Oregon in week two, head coach Ryan Day had a difficult time rationalizing defeat. The team's fans did, too. Buckeye Nation took its frustration to social media as well as radio call-in shows, calling for defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs to be fired and redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud to be benched.

It appeared the sky was falling in Columbus.

Five weeks later, the program's shortcomings seem like an afterthought. The defense improved with changes to the scheme and play-calling. Matt Barnes, Al Washington, Larry Johnson and Coombs found a way to right the ship.

Stroud was in Heisman Trophy contention after completing 41 of 56 passes (73.2 percent) for 736 yards and 10 touchdowns against Rutgers and Maryland – the two games played immediately after he rested his ailing shoulder when Ohio State hosted Akron in week four.

Meanwhile, high-profile programs such as Clemson and Alabama are in the midst of trying to figure out how to handle the same kind of adversity the Buckeyes faced after the loss to Oregon. The Tigers suffered a season-opening loss to Georgia and fell to North Carolina State three weeks later before suffering a third loss Oct. 23 to Pitt. The Crimson Tide, which looked poised for another Southeastern Conference championship and College Football Playoff berth, will now fight an uphill battle after an unexpected Oct. 9 loss to Texas A&M.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin interviewed journalists familiar with the programs to learn if the same sky-is-falling chaos seen in Columbus has occurred in Clemson and Tuscaloosa.

Life After Lawrence

On Oct. 13, 2008, Tommy Bowden resigned after leading Clemson to a disappointing 3-3 record at the midpoint of the regular season. Before the season began, the Tigers had been an almost unanimous pick to win



FILE PHOTO

TOUGH TIMES — Several of the college football's elite programs over the past several years have run into trouble during the 2021 season. Defending national champion Alabama was upset by unranked Texas A&M, while Clemson and head coach Dabo Swinney's six-year reign as ACC champions might be coming to an end.

their first Atlantic Coast Conference title under Bowden, entering the season as the nation's ninth-ranked team.

When Bowden resigned, an energetic 38-year-old Dabo Swinney became the interim coach and went on to win four of the final seven games of the season. On Dec. 1, 2008, Swinney took over as full-time head coach of the program. Now in his 14th season with the team, Swinney is a two-time national champion and seven-time ACC champion. Perhaps best of all for Tiger Nation, he's brought Clemson into the conversation with Alabama and Ohio State as one of the best college football programs in the country.

Joseph Hastings, senior reporter at On3

Sports in Greenville, S.C., said Swinney's track record as head coach is what makes Clemson's early-season struggles this year so significant to the team's fans.

"The expectation was that Swinney would keep the success going this year," Hastings told BSB. "Even without Trevor Lawrence, they thought this team would keep going downhill with a full head of steam."

Lawrence left Clemson after the end of last season, eventually becoming the No. 1 overall pick in the 2021 NFL draft to the Jacksonville Jaguars. Travis Etienne, the No. 24 overall pick in the draft, joined his college teammate in Jacksonville, while wide receiver Amari Rodgers heard his name called by the Green Bay Packers in the third round.

Still, Clemson recruited at a high level and felt confident in its ability to make another national title run this season. When Lawrence contracted COVID-19 last year, he missed games against Boston College and Notre Dame. Then-freshman quarterback D.J. Uiagalelei threw for 342 yards and two

touchdowns in a 34-28 win against the Eagles before he tossed for 439 yards and two scores during a 47-40 overtime loss to the Fighting Irish.

"After seeing what D.J. did against Boston College and Notre Dame and what he did in those games, people felt optimistic about him leading their team this season," Hastings said. "They felt like they were going from Deshaun Watson and Trevor Lawrence to the next great quarterback. He signed endorsement deals with Bojangles, Dr. Pepper and all those big companies. With those endorsement deals came big expectations, and he hasn't lived up to them yet this year."

Through his first six games this season, Uiagalelei had completed 55.7 percent of his passes for 974 yards and four touchdowns along with three interceptions. With the sophomore quarterback's pedestrian numbers, the Clemson offense took a significant drop in efficiency from last season – the Tigers ranked in the bottom third of college football in total offense through mid-October – and struggled to move the ball down the field.

Still, Hastings doesn't think the offensive ineptitude is entirely Uiagalelei's fault, mentioning that Clemson needs to address more than the quarterback play to start turning things around.

"Uiagalelei has not been performing to his capabilities, but the offensive line hasn't looked great, the wide receivers have dropped a lot of passes and a lot of calls have been miscommunicated," he said. "Also, without Lawrence, I think fans are realizing some of the offense looks outdated and the play-calling has not been to their standard."

Because of the struggles, Hastings thinks Clemson will have its hands full the rest of the season. Although the ACC is weaker than most conferences in college football, the Tigers aren't the same team as they've been in recent years, and Hastings said the fans attribute that to Swinney's failure to demand accountability from his players and staff.

"Dabo didn't call out the offense after the loss to Georgia, which is understandable because Georgia is a really good team and probably the best in the country," Hastings said. "But when they had issues with Georgia Tech and then lost to N.C. State, and they still didn't hear anything from him, they started to worry. That's when the worry got to an all-time high in the Dabo Swinney era."

"There are even questions about his recruiting because Dabo is pretty old-school in his approach. He holds back on offering players until after their sophomore year in high school and he settles for in-state guys,

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL

so there's been a lot of questions from fans about this being the end of the dynasty."

Hastings isn't as convinced as some of the fans might be. He primarily works for On3.com as a recruiting analyst and mentioned that Clemson is still targeting and securing some of the top high school recruits in the country. While the Tigers likely won't have as many commitments as Alabama, Ohio State, Georgia and others, they will still have a solid class.

"If I had to give a prediction, they will finish between No. 9 and No. 11 in recruiting for the class of 2022," Hastings said. "That's because they aren't going for the sort of quantity approach but quality. They have a solid network of talented players, and I expect them to be near the top at the end of the year."

"The performances haven't been great this year, but I think better days are coming for Clemson. With all the talent they've accumulated, I think you're going to see some guys that can turn things around quickly."

Tide On The Rebound

While Clemson fell into a tailspin after its losses to Georgia and N.C. State, Alabama is in far less trouble than the Tigers. Despite a shocking 41-38 loss to then-unranked Texas A&M in week six, the top-ranked Crimson Tide dropped only to No. 5 in The Associated Press top-25 poll.

With only one currently ranked team on the remaining schedule and a potential matchup with Georgia in the SEC Championship Game, Alabama is in a prime position to make another run at the playoff.

Still, former Alabama football beat reporter and publisher Kirk McNair said that the Crimson Tide's fans are frustrated with the team's performance.

"Alabama fans are entitled," McNair told BSB. "The fans think Alabama is supposed to win every game. There's no doubt that they didn't play their best game against Texas A&M, but I don't think anyone wants to blame them for playing poorly."

"Whenever they lose a game, none of the fans ever gives credit to the team that beats Alabama. I think it's all right to say that they didn't match the other team or that the other team played better that day, but I don't think the fans are ever ready to go there. Losses here have been rare for so long, so whenever Alabama loses, it gets exaggerated a little bit."

During the loss to the Aggies, Alabama outgained Texas A&M by 143 yards but ran 24 more plays with seven more minutes of possession. The Crimson Tide also committed eight penalties for 82 yards compared to the Aggies' six penalties for 50 yards.

Alabama quarterback and Heisman Trophy candidate Bryce Young completed 28 of 48 passes for 369 yards, three touchdowns and an interception in that game. Running back Brian Robinson Jr. rushed 24 times for 147 yards, while former Ohio State wide receiver Jameson Williams caught 10 passes for 146 yards and two scores for the Tide.

Meanwhile, the Crimson Tide defense allowed Texas A&M backup quarterback Zach Calzada to complete 21 of 31 passes for 285 yards, three touchdowns and a pick. But they held Aggies running back Isaiah Spiller, a top prospect for the 2022 NFL draft, to only 46 yards and a score on 17 carries.

"After the game, the fans were pleased with the offense to some extent, but I also think they wished Alabama could have

scored more points on Texas A&M," McNair said. "The fans took issue with the defensive coordinator (Pete Golding). They didn't see a way that the Aggies could score 41 points on their defense. They decided that the defensive coordinator didn't know what he was doing."

McNair said he can't blame a coach for missed tackles or misjudged passes, claiming there's more that goes into wins and losses than game plan and scheme. He admitted that the coach is ultimately responsible for the team's performance, but he still believes players should be held accountable for their performance, too.

"But even with the loss, Alabama is still Alabama," McNair said. "They're going to

win a lot of games. They might need other things to happen, and they might be fighting an uphill battle, but I think the fans will take Nick Saban and his team to bounce back and get to where they should be."

Alabama traveled to Mississippi State the week after its loss, and there were no slip-ups as the Crimson Tide made quick work of the Bulldogs and claimed a 49-9 win on the road.

McNair said Saban reminded Alabama fans and the rest of the college football world that his team isn't going anywhere. Although some might view Mississippi State as an inferior opponent – and the Bulldogs had lost two of their first three SEC games under second-year head coach Mike Leach – the Crimson Tide defense used the opportunity to get

things right and correct course.

"If you look at Saban's track record, he's won four championships with teams that have had one loss. That's impressive," McNair said. "He's only had two undefeated teams in his time at Alabama, so fans should feel comfortable that Saban can bounce back from a loss and take this team to a championship."

"Fans need to remember that this team lost a lot of first-round draft picks from last season – Mac Jones, Najee Harris and those guys – not to mention the Heisman Trophy winner in DeVonta Smith. But Saban will continue to develop guys like that. There might be panic, but I don't think that it will last. There's light at the end of the tunnel for this team."

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Banged-Up Nittany Lions Serve As Top-20 Test

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Only two Big Ten programs have competed with Ohio State consistently since the conference expanded in 1993. The first is obvious and almost inherent to both programs. Even with a 17-2 record in the last 19 games between the two archrivals, Ohio State is only 19-8 against Michigan since that expansion, the lowest winning percentage (.704) against a conference foe for the Buckeyes during that time period.

The second-lowest winning percentage, though? That one comes against Penn State, the expansion squad in the early '90s and a more consistent thorn in Ohio State's side than any other Big Ten team short of the Wolverines. The two have played every season since 1993, and Ohio State's 20-8 record (and .714 winning percent), while strong, is filled with tight matchups and heartbreaking losses for both sides. The average scoring margin is just 27-19 in favor of the Buckeyes during that time (second again to 29-22 against Michigan) with 12 one-score games in the 28 matchups and five within the last seven meetings.

If the pregame rankings are any indication, expect more of the same, with four straight top-20 matchups between the two, three of which came down to the final possessions of the game. Penn State heads to Columbus as the nation's No. 20 team, wounded after a second straight loss, this time in nine overtimes to Illinois.

The Nittany Lions can claim poor injury luck, though. Quarterback Sean Clifford remains dinged up after suffering an injury against Iowa, and it showed on Oct. 23 when Penn State hosted the Illini.

In fact, were it not for that injury to Clifford during the battle with the Hawkeyes, the Nittany Lions looked to be on the way to a huge top-five victory. With the senior signal-caller in the game, Penn State rushed out to a 17-3 lead in the second quarter, but a hit from Iowa linebacker Jack Campbell knocked Clifford out of the contest and all but ended Penn State's chances.

The Nittany Lions scored just three more points with struggling backup Ta'Quan Roberson completing only 7 of his 21 passes for 34 yards and two interceptions. Meanwhile, the rushing attack flatlined and the defense struggled to defend a consistently short field. Head coach James Franklin said the game fell to more than just the loss of Clifford, though it was obvious that it seriously impacted Penn State's game plan.

"We talk about all of the important statistics all of the time, and we didn't do a good job on any of them," Franklin said. "We did not win the field position battle, we did not win the turnover battle, we did not win the penalty battle, and we didn't win the explosive play battle."

As Penn State heads to Ohio State, much of its ability to compete with the Buckeyes will likely rely on the health of its veteran quarterback.

Clifford had a career year so far, completing 137 of 212 attempts for 1,647 yards and 12 touchdowns against only five interceptions. He is rapidly approaching several of Penn State's career passing records, and he's served as a big part of the offensive approach for offensive coordinator Mike Yurcich as Penn State continues to search for a consistent No. 1 running back.

"(Sean's greatest strength is) his ability to absorb the information," Yurcich said. "He takes the game plan, and he really studies it hard. He does a great job preparing. That's something that you don't know about any individual until

you actually get to work with them on a real game-by-game basis, and he's been very consistent.

"His mentality has been very even-keeled and poised. I mean, he's a fiery person by nature, but he's able to stay calm and adjust. With as much experience as Sean has, I think the biggest attribute that he has is that poise. He can regroup if things aren't going great and get back into rhythm. That's something that I think is unique about him, and it is a really good quality that any quarterback should have."

Clifford has benefited both from Yurcich's offense and a talented receiver room, led by All-American candidate Jahan Dotson. Through Oct. 23, Dotson sat atop the stat sheet in receptions (49) touchdowns (six) and yards (552) on Penn State's roster after deciding to return for another season in college despite interest from the NFL following a strong 2020 campaign – including a dominant 144-yard, three-touchdown performance against Ohio State a year ago.

"The first thing is that Jahan's good," Franklin said. "That helps. Then, it's the combination of Jahan's talent and the time that Sean and Jahan have spent together, whether it's on the practice field, whether it's watching film, whether it's in meetings. The two have played a lot of games together.

"I also think Sean's ability to extend plays and make plays with his feet puts the defense in conflict. He steps up in the pocket, and you've got to decide, 'Am I going to stay with my man or am I going to cover Sean?' Jahan really has got a good feel of how to get open in those situations, and the thing I love about him is he's always working toward the sideline."

Dotson isn't alone at the receiver position, though. Outstanding 2020 freshman Parker Washington is back for his second season and serves as a consistent threat underneath for Clifford with 32 receptions for 374 yards and two TDs, while slot wideout KeAndre Lambert-Smith and tight end Brenton Strange are solid third and fourth options. The latter is a focus for Franklin, who seems to be going through the same kind of struggle with which Ohio State frequently deals – trying to get tight ends more involved in the passing game.

"I think our tight ends had 130 yards as a group," Franklin said after a 28-20 win over Auburn. "I don't want that to be one week on, one week off. I think we have a really talented tight end room. We want to keep them involved.

"But it's really difficult when you've got receivers making plays and you're able to run the ball. It's difficult when you've got that type of balance."

Finding a rushing attack to complement the passing game has been an even larger concern through seven games. Noah Cain easily leads the team in carries with 78, but he's averaging only 3.1 yards per carry and struggles to generate explosive plays. Keyvone Lee hasn't been much more explosive, but he has averaged 5.1 yards per carry on 45 attempts, despite working largely as Penn State's short-yardage back.

Baylor transfer John Lovett is an option, and Clifford helps out in the running game as well, but Penn State has struggled to find a workhorse after the departures of Saquon Barkley and Miles Sanders, and especially after Journey Brown's diagnosis with a heart condition that ended his career in 2020. A pair of new starters in the guard spots on the offensive line has played a role, too.

"Obviously, we're not putting up as many (rushing) yards as we want," Clifford said. "But at the same time, we're just a block or two away, and it's just getting an enhanced focus in the run game like we've done all year – focusing on all

Get To Know ... Penn State

2020 Record: 5-2.
Team Information: Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-3; Starters Returning – Offense 7, Defense 8, Specialists 1.
Head Coach: James Franklin, 8th year at Penn State, 65-30.
Series History: 36th meeting; Ohio State leads 21-14-0.
School Facts: Location – State College, Pa.; Enrollment – 98,783; Nickname – Nittany Lions; Colors – Blue, White; Conference – Big Ten (East Division); Stadium – Beaver Stadium (Surface, Grass; Capacity – 106,572)..

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Noah Cain	78	245	3.1	4
Keyvone Lee	45	228	5.1	0
Sean Clifford	49	145	3.0	2

Passing	Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Sean Clifford	137-212	64.6	1647	12-5
Ta'Quan Roberson	11-28		39.3	85
1-2				

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jahan Dotson	49	552	11.3	6
P. Washington	32	374	11.7	2
K. Lambert-Smith	21	334	15.9	2

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 26.9
Rushing Yards Per Game – 118.9
Passing Yards Per Game – 253.6
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 372.4

2021 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 4	at Wisconsin	W, 16-10
Sept. 11	BALL STATE	W, 44-13
Sept. 18	AUBURN	W, 28-20
Sept. 25	VILLANOVA	W, 38-17
Oct. 2	INDIANA	W, 24-0
Oct. 9	at Iowa	L, 23-20
Oct. 23	ILLINOIS	L, 20-18
Oct. 30	at Ohio State	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 6	at Maryland	TBA
Nov. 13	MICHIGAN	TBA
Nov. 20	RUTGERS	TBA
Nov. 27	at Michigan State	TBA
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yards	Sacks
Ellis Brooks	22	22	44	1.5-19	1.0-18
Brandon Smith	23	18	41	6.0-22	2.0-15
Arnold Ebiketie	14	23	37	11.0-48	5.5-36
Jaquan Brisker	18	15	33	4.0-7	–
Jesse Luketa	21	6	27	5.0-14	0.5-2
Joey Porter Jr.	12	13	25	–	–
Ji'Ayir Brown	12	9	21	1.0-2	–
Curtis Jacobs	8	8	16	3.0-13	2.0-11
T. Castro-Fields	4	10	14	–	–

Interceptions

Def. Leaders	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Ji'Ayir Brown	3	25	8.3	0
Jaquan Brisker	2	39	19.5	0
Jesse Luketa	1	16	16.0	1

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 14.7
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 145.6
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 178.0
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 323.6

the things we need to correct. I have all the trust in the world in the offensive line, the running backs, the tight ends, everybody involved, and that goes for me as well. I've got to make sure my reads are on point when I'm taking the ball and getting positive yards."

The strength of this year's Penn State team lies on the other side of the ball with defensive coordinator Brent Pry's defense.

That's in spite of a tremendously inexperienced defensive line. For a group that already lost three starters from the 2020 season, the Nittany Lions took two more hits when projected defensive tackle starter Adisa Isaac suffered a season-ending injury in August and fellow tackle Hakeem Beamon was ruled by Franklin in late September "unavailable this season."

The Nittany Lions received further bad news when senior tackle PJ Mustipher, the lone returning defensive line starter from last year, sustained a season-ending injury in the Iowa game.

In a scramble to replace those losses, Penn State is relying heavily on a pair of transfers – defensive end Arnold Ebiketie and defensive tackle Derrick Tangelo – as well as former linebacker Jesse Luketa.

That patchwork group, as well as Nick Tarburton, has resulted in a line that, while not perfect by any means, has seen improvement as the season has gone on. But Penn State is still looking for depth as it scrapes by with a short rotation.

"I like the play of those three guys (Ebiketie, Luketa and Tarburton) right now," Pry said. "We need a fourth guy to step up. I don't know that we can go through the season with those three guys getting the amount of reps they're getting. When you talk about losing a guy like Adisa Isaac, who for a lot of us was probably penciled in as our No. 1 defensive end, and for these guys to step up and Jesse's role as a defensive end to grow like it did with the injury to Adisa, it's a testament to them.

"All three of them are motor guys. They just

play hard at one speed. They're all pretty instinctive guys. They're mature guys. And those three guys work their butts off every day."

The back seven is where Penn State makes its hay. Returning starters Brandon Smith and Ellis Brooks are the leaders in the linebacker room, joined by newcomer Curtis Jacobs. Brooks leads the team in tackles with 55.

"I'm always looking for the 'backers to play better," said Pry, who also coaches the Penn State linebackers. "I think Ellis is playing his best football right now and leading the defense. Curtis is a work in progress every day. He's still a first-year starter. He's growing and he's shown improvement each week. He's a really talented guy that I think has a lot of plays in him, plays that we're going to need to help us win down the stretch here. And then Brandon is playing the toughest position mentally in the defense. It has the most adjustments, and Brandon has embraced it. He's doing a very nice job.

"And just like all these guys, I keep looking for their best game."

The secondary is the most experienced group on the team, bolstered by two of the Big Ten's best defenders – super senior cornerback Tariq Castro-Fields and safety Jaquan Brisker. They are joined by returning starter Joey Porter Jr. opposite Castro-Fields and the new man in the lineup, senior safety Ji'Ayir Brown.

The corners have been as lockdown as any group in the conference early in the season, and Pry is gaining more confidence in his safety pairing, which allows Penn State to bring extra pressure on nearly 50 percent of its defensive snaps.

"Those guys work very well together," Pry said. "They both have a similar approach. They're great communicators. I think (Brown) gaining some experience last year and being involved (was key). They're kind of following each other. Brisker had a nice year last year, but obviously this year he's made great strides and I think (Brown) is getting better all the time as well."



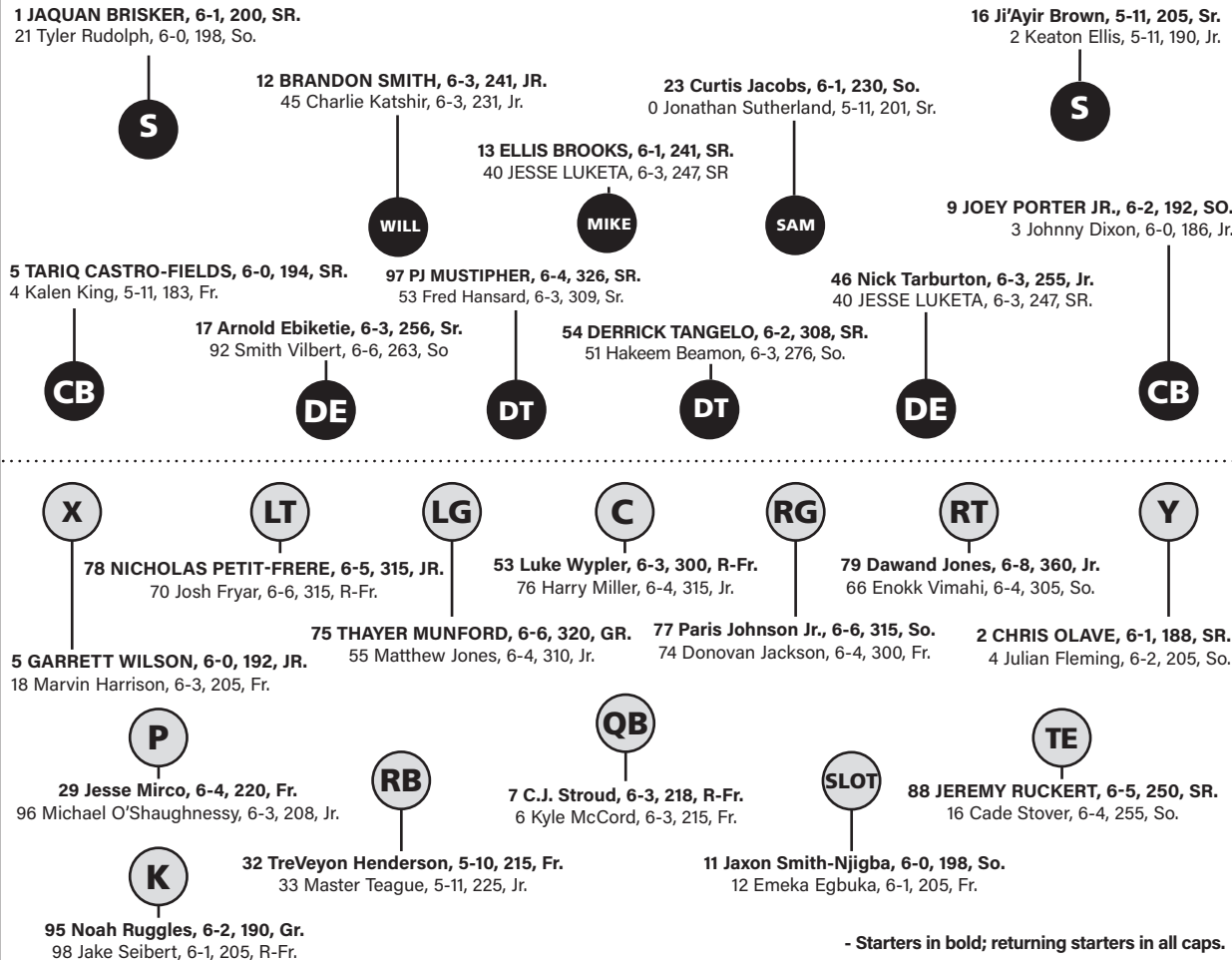
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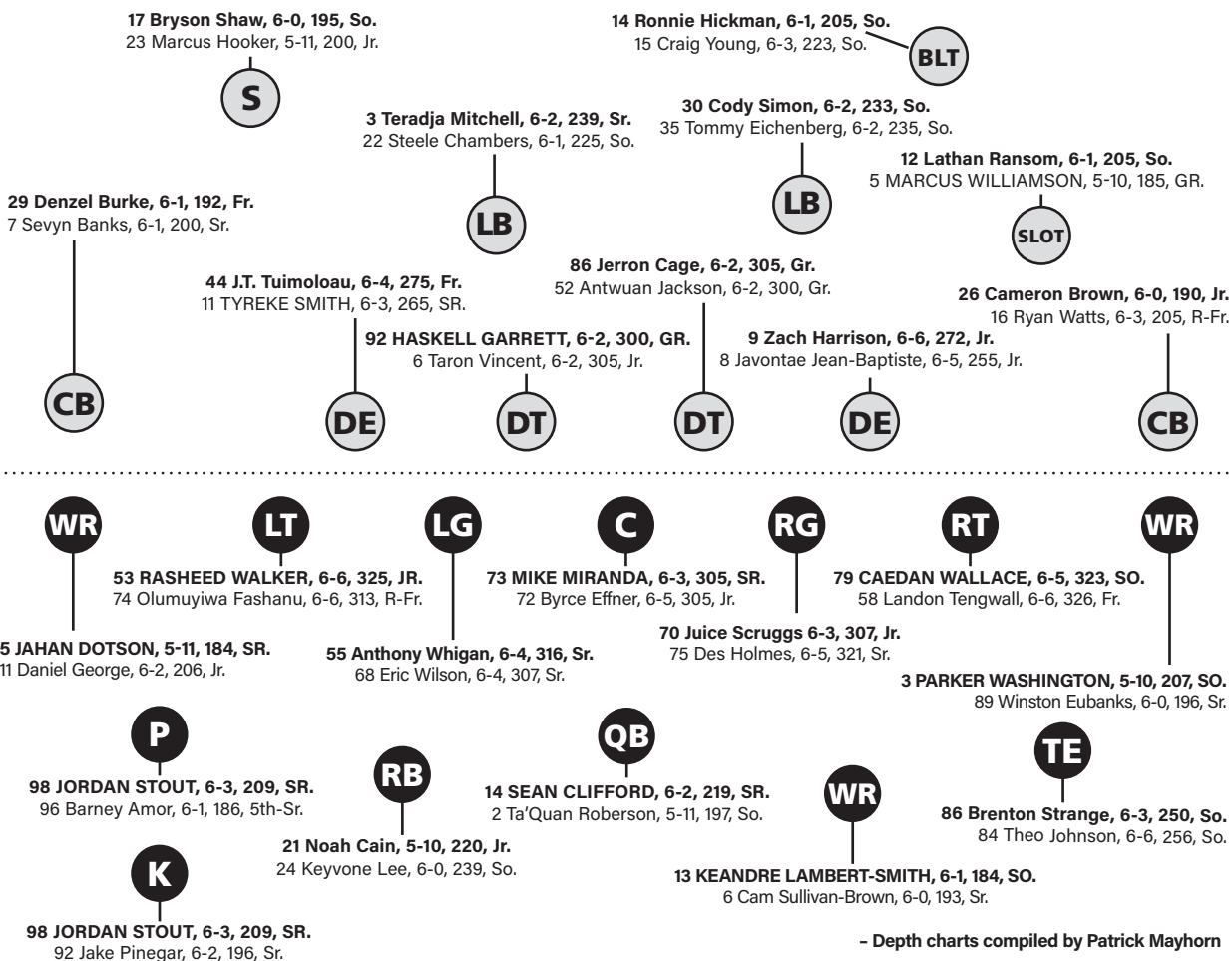


Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



WHEN PENN STATE HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. PENN STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes can run the ball. We all know that. What we don't know is which backs will be doing the work. If you're Penn State, that's a problem. Freshman TreVeyon Henderson is the starter, and while he had only nine carries vs. Indiana, he turned them into 81 yards and two touchdowns while also notching a receiving score. Just as Miyan Williams returned from a two-game absence, Master Teague and Marcus Crowley were unavailable for the game. As long as the Buckeyes have at least two healthy backs, though, they should be in good shape against a beaten-down Nittany Lions defense.

Illinois gutted them for 357 rushing yards on a school-record 67 carries for a 5.3 yards-per-attempt average. It's 50-50 whether to credit the PSU defense or criticize an otherwise lame offense that the Illini had only one rushing TD in their epic and seemingly endless 20-18 nine-overtime win at Happy Valley on Oct. 23. Illinois had 395 yards of total offense, led by Chase Brown's 223 rushing yards and another 142 on the ground from Josh McCray. As the game wore on it, was clear the Nittany Lions missed defensive tackle PJ Mustipher, who sustained a season-ending knee injury Oct. 9 at Iowa. PSU ranks 62nd nationally against the run, allowing 146.4 yards per game. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PENN STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Nittany Lions have struggled all season to develop a running game and are 100th of 130 teams with 118.9 yards per game. They were able to get away with it early in the season, but with back-to-back losses heading to Columbus, they are in trouble. Penn State averaged 2.8 yards a carry against Wisconsin, 2.7 vs. Auburn, 3.2 against Iowa and 2.1 vs. the Illini when the Nittany Lions netted 62 yards on 29 attempts. Noah Cain led the way with 43 yards on a 3.9 average, and he is their season leader with 245 yards. The Buckeyes have the No. 28 rush defense (119.4) in the country. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. PENN STATE PASS DEFENSE

Redshirt freshman C.J. Stroud is red-hot with 14 touchdown passes and no interceptions in the past three games. In fact, he has 97 consecutive passes without being picked off, a big reason the Buckeyes have scored 50 or more points in four consecutive games. OSU has the top scoring offense nationally (49.3 points per game) and is also first in total offense (559.7), having reached the 500-yard mark in six consecutive games. Stroud has 22 TDs against three interceptions for the season with a completion rate of 67.6 percent. But here's where it gets interesting. Penn State is 15th in pass defense at 178.0 yards a game and has allowed only four TDs through the air while making nine interceptions. The Nittany Lions' nine TDs allowed overall are the second fewest to top-ranked Georgia's five. But Stroud has so many options to throw to, Penn State will be stressed to the limit. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PENN STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

When quarterback Sean Clifford was injured against Iowa on Oct. 9, the Nittany Lions fell apart without a suitable backup. After an open week to heal, Clifford by all accounts did not look comfortable taking all the snaps during the loss to Illinois. He was just 19 of 34 for 165 yards and a TD. Notably, he was sacked four times, and he will face a rapidly improving Ohio State defense that allowed only 128 total yards to Indiana while recording five sacks. Clifford has completed 64.6 percent of his throws for 1,647 yards with 12 touchdowns against five picks this season. OSU has given up 13 passing TDs but made nine interceptions, four of which have been returned for scores. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Penn State's Jordan Stout downed six punts inside the Illinois 20, had four punts of 50-yards plus and averaged 46.9 yards on eight attempts. He also made three field goals, and 35 of his 38 kickoffs this year have been touchbacks. The Buckeyes will counter with the excellent return tandem of Garrett Wilson and Emeka Egbuka and the reliability of punter Jesse Mirco and kicker Noah Ruggles. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

Penn State is smarting from consecutive defeats, and like so many teams that face the Buckeyes, a victory would salvage what will be another disappointing season. The losses have taken some luster off the prime-time matchup, but the Buckeyes are eager to put their setback to Oregon even further in the rearview mirror as they continue the march toward a possible College Football Playoff berth. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PREDICTION

The Nittany Lions have two chances to pull the upset. Clifford is fully healthy and can control the possession battle, and the Penn State defense, which is sixth in scoring with 14.7 points allowed, has a huge effort in containing what has been an unstoppable OSU offense. But we don't envision much of either happening. **OHIO STATE 42, PENN STATE 17**

Illinois Outlasts Penn State In Record Nine OTs

Illinois knocked off No. 7 Penn State in the longest game in college football history, a 20-18 decision Oct. 23 that lasted nine overtimes. Backup Illini quarterback Brandon Peters stepped up in place of an injured Artur Sitkowski and connected with receiver Casey Washington in the end zone for the game-winning two-point conversion to secure the upset win.

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

The victory marked No. 100 in Illinois head coach Bret Bielema's career, and the Illini did it with a physical running game. Sophomore tailback Chase Brown, a Western Michigan transfer, dominated the Lions to the tune of 222 yards and a touchdown on 33 carries before exiting with an injury. Freshman tailback Josh McCray picked up where Brown left off, gaining 142 yards on 24 carries.

Meanwhile, Minnesota took care of business during its 34-16 win against Maryland behind a stellar running game despite the fact the Gophers have lost their top two tailbacks Mohamed Ibrahim and Trey Potts to season-ending injuries.

Redshirt freshman Ky Thomas and true

freshman Mar'Keise Irving became the fourth and fifth different 100-yard rushers for the Golden Gophers in 2021. Thomas totaled 139 yards and one touchdown on 21 carries against the Terrapins, while Irving added 105 yards and a score on 15 carries as well as a 28-yard reception. Fourth-year junior tailback Bryce Williams, a Youngstown Cardinal Mooney product, added 48 yards and a score, and backup quarterback Cole Kramer ran for 30 yards and a score as part of a 326-yard rushing effort that included four touchdowns on the ground.

The victory marked the third straight for the Gophers, moving them into a first-place tie with Iowa in the Big Ten West.

Wisconsin dominated No. 25 Purdue on the ground on its way to a convincing 30-13 win in West Lafayette. Junior tailback Chez Mellusi, a Clemson transfer, carved up the Boilermakers for a career-high 145 yards and one touchdown on 27 carries.

Wisconsin freshman tailback Braelon Allen took advantage of his opportunities, tallying a career-high 140 yards and two scores on 12 carries.

No. 6 Michigan led by only three points at halftime against Northwestern before rallying to a 33-7 victory behind a dominant running game at home. The Wolverines secured the George Jewett Trophy in the first game played for the new trophy, which is named after Jewett, who was each program's first African-American football player.

Michigan's running backs dominated the game in Ann Arbor, led by Blake Corum, who gashed the Wildcats for 119 yards and two touchdowns on 19 carries, along with four receptions for 23 yards. Fellow tailback Hassan Haskins added 110 yards and two scores on 23 carries in the 26-point victory.

Howard Commits To U-M To Play For His Father

It was never a foregone conclusion that Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy forward Jett Howard would play college ball for his father, Michigan head coach Juwan Howard.

"It was really hard – harder than most people think," Howard said. "I took visits and really liked the places and coaches. As of a few days ago, I was unsure. My mom and aunt played a big role as they came on the visits. They helped put things into perspective."

Howard, who is the No. 11 small forward and No. 37 overall prospect in the country for 2022, also took visits to North Carolina State, Tennessee and Georgetown.

In the end, however, Howard wound up issuing a verbal commitment Oct. 13 to Michigan.

"My mom would tell me my dad told her the same things that he was telling me," the younger Howard said. "He told me how much he believes in me as a player (and) that he will put me in the best position to succeed. What my dad said that really got my attention was, 'We need you from day one. I know your game better than anyone else. If you were not my son, I would still recruit you.'"

"And, of course, I trusted him the most. He has developed me my whole life. Opportunities like this do not come around often."

Howard, a 6-7, 220-pound wing, played 12 games in July with the Nightrydas Elite in the Nike EYBL program and posted averages of 11.8 points, 4.8 rebounds and 2.9 assists per contest.

Howard is the third commitment for the Wolverines' 2022 class, joining four-star center Tarris Reed of Branson (Mo.) Link Academy, Fairfax (Va.) Paul VI Catholic four-star point guard Dug McDaniel, and four-star power forward Gregg Glenn of Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Calvary Christian Academy.

Michigan's 2022 class ranks fourth in the country and second in the Big Ten, behind only Ohio State. The Wolverines boasted the nation's best class in 2021.

Hawkeyes Land Four-Star Power Forward For 2023

Iowa men's basketball coach Fran McCaffery earned a big win on the recruiting trail by securing the Oct. 11 commitment of four-star power forward Owen Freeman of Bradley (Ill.) Bradley-Bourbonnais for the 2023 class. Freeman picked the Hawkeyes over a large list of programs that included Butler, Illinois, Indiana, Marquette, Michigan State, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Purdue, Wake Forest, Western Illinois, and Wisconsin.

"I loved the campus and the feel," Freeman said. "I can definitely see myself playing there and playing for (McCaffery). I loved the fans and the electricity they bring into the games and around campus."

The 6-10, 220-pound Freeman is ranked the No. 12 power forward and No. 88 overall

BIG

2021 Standings

East Division

	Conf.		All		Pct.
	W	L	W	L	
Michigan	4	0	7	0	1.000
Michigan State	4	0	7	0	1.000
Ohio State	4	0	6	1	.857
Penn State	2	2	5	2	.714
Maryland	1	3	4	3	.571
Rutgers	0	4	3	4	.429
Indiana	0	4	2	5	.400

West Division

	Conf.		All		Pct.
	W	L	W	L	
Iowa	3	1	6	1	.857
Minnesota	3	1	5	2	.714
Purdue	2	2	4	3	.571
Wisconsin	2	2	4	3	.571
Illinois	2	3	3	5	.375
Northwestern	1	3	3	4	.429
Nebraska	1	4	3	5	.375

Oct. 23 Games

Illinois 20, Penn State 18 (9 OT)
Minnesota 34, Maryland 16
Michigan 33, Northwestern 7
Wisconsin 30, Purdue 13
Ohio State 54, Indiana 7

Oct. 30 Games

Indiana at Maryland, Noon
Michigan at Michigan State, Noon
Iowa at Wisconsin, Noon
Rutgers at Illinois, Noon
Purdue at Nebraska, 3:30 p.m.
Minnesota at Northwestern, 3:30 p.m.
Penn State at Ohio State, 7:30 p.m.

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

Nov. 20 Games

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



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prospect nationally as well as the overall No. 3-ranked recruit in Illinois.

Terrapins Go International Again For Latest Verbal

Maryland basketball coach Mark Turgeon locked up his first commitment of the 2022 class with an Oct. 13 commitment from small forward Bobi Klintman of Bel Aire (Kan.) Sunrise Christian Academy.

Klintman, who is a native of Sweden, chose the Terrapins over Kansas, Loyola-Chicago, Rutgers, Texas A&M and Virginia. He holds a four-star rating and ranks as the No. 30 small forward and No. 111 overall prospect, according to 247Sports.

Klintman (6-9, 200) will be the fifth international player on the Maryland roster next season, joining forward Pavlo Dziuba (Ukraine), guard Ian Martinez (Costa Rica), forward Arnaud Revaz (Switzerland), and Georgetown transfer forward Qudus Wahab (Nigeria).

Turgeon has enjoyed success recruiting international prospects. Former Maryland centers Alex Len (Ukraine) and Bruno Fernando (Angola) thrived with the Terrapins before becoming NBA draft picks.

Iowa Flips Ohio RB Prospect Away From Cal

When Iowa came back for a 23-20 win against Penn State in a top-five showdown at home on Oct. 9, the Hawkeyes hosted more than 80 recruits, including several high-profile prospects.

One recruit whose presence came as a surprise was three-star running back Kaleb Johnson of Hamilton, Ohio. Johnson was one of the Hawkeyes' top priorities at tailback early in the 2022 cycle before he chose to commit to Cal.

Johnson, who is the No. 40 tailback and No. 520 overall recruit nationally, left Kinnick Stadium impressed with what he saw and two days later flipped his commitment to Iowa.

Head coach Kirk Ferentz and his staff have been impressed with the 6-1, 225-pound Johnson's combination of size and speed. He has posted a time of 4.4 seconds in the 40-yard dash. Through his first six games as a senior at Hamilton, Johnson ranked fifth in the Greater Miami Conference with 767 rushing yards on 92 carries for an 8.3 yards-per-carry average, along with nine touchdowns.

Johnson became the Hawkeyes' second running back commitment in the class of 2022, joining three-star tailback Jaziun Patterson of Deerfield Beach, Fla.

Rutgers Lands Dual-Sport Standout From Buckeye State

Lyndhurst (Ohio) Brush big man Antwone Woolfolk issued an Oct. 4 commitment to the Rutgers basketball program, joining unranked guard Derek Simpson of Lenape, N.J., and three-star forward Braeden Moore of Nashville (Tenn.) Christ Presbyterian Academy in the 2022 class.

Woolfolk (6-7, 250) drew interest from Cal State Bakersfield and Cleveland State, but Rutgers was the only high-major program to offer the unranked forward.

Woolfolk picked up his offer from Scarlet Knights head coach Steve Pickell after a solid showing at Nike's EYBL, where he averaged 2.6 points on 44.0-percent shooting from the floor (11 of 25) and 66.7 percent shooting from the free-throw line (8 of 12). He also averaged 3.6 rebounds in 12.4 min-

utes per game in 12 appearances for the Indy Heat, his AAU team.

The Ohio native played a backup role behind Kebba Njie, a four-star center from La Porte (Ind.) La Lumiere School, who is committed to Penn State.

The addition of Woolfolk likely means the Scarlet Knights are out of the running for center Favour Aire of Forestville (Md.) Bishop McNamara, who visited Piscataway twice in the past four months.

Pickell might not be finished with his 2022 class just yet, however. He continued to pursue four-star forward Chris Bunch of Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy and four-star point guard Desmond Claude of New Haven (Conn.) Putnam Science Academy. Both are scheduled to take official visits to Rutgers this fall.

Three-Star DL Decommits From Illinois Football

Three-star defensive lineman Brian Allen of Oakdale (Conn.) St. Thomas More committed to Illinois in August, which at the time gave the Fighting Illini a big head-to-head recruiting win against Big Ten West division rival Iowa, which was the other team in Allen's top two.

But now Allen has begun to rethink his decision and has withdrawn his commitment to Illinois.

"First off, I would like (to thank) the University of Illinois coaching staff for providing me with an opportunity to compete at the next level," Allen posted on Twitter. "I am extremely thankful for the relationships that were built and the hospitality that was shown toward my family and me. With a lot of thought and consideration, I have decided that it would be best for me to reopen my recruitment process and make the decision that is best for me."

Allen initially chose the Illini over power-five offers from Iowa, Iowa State, Kansas, Purdue and Virginia Tech as well as several MAC offers. He first played at Woodstock (Ill.) Marian Central Catholic but transferred to the St. Thomas More School in Connecticut last year.

Bielema and his staff extended a scholarship offer to Allen after a stellar showing at a

North Central College camp with six Illinois assistant coaches in attendance. At the camp, Allen showed off his length and mobility at 6-3 and 259 pounds, boasting a 79-inch wingspan and notching a 4.96-second 40-yard dash time. He then dominated the competition during one-on-one drills, including wins against multiple power-five offensive line prospects.

Allen's decommitment marks the first for

Bielema in the 2022 recruiting class. He was one of just three defensive commits for Illinois, along with three-star outside linebacker Jared Badie of Oswego (Ill.) East and Joliet Catholic three-star linebacker Malachi Hood.

Allen was the sixth-highest ranked player in Illinois' recruiting class, ranking No. 119 among defensive lineman and No. 884 among all recruits.

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Schlichter's Final Season Eventful One For OSU

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 1981 season, the final one in the four-year career of quarterback Art Schlichter.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Ohio State would be hard-pressed to find a more eventful season than the one it experienced in 1981. There was a record-breaking run on the first play of the season, the Ohio Stadium return of a legendary head coach, back-to-back regular-season losses for the first time in a decade and a scheduling quirk that contributed to a shared championship.

The 1981 season also marked the end of an era. It was the fourth and final season in the career of Art Schlichter, one of only four true freshmen to start at quarterback for Ohio State and still the only one to hold that starting job throughout his entire college career.

Since he played his final game in scarlet and gray, Schlichter has been largely reduced to a caricature, condemned and ridiculed because of a gambling addiction that cost him his professional career, most of his friends and untold millions of dollars. The list of felonies, frauds and forgeries committed to fuel his addiction is longer than that of most career criminals, and he has paid a heavy price for his scams and swindles with lengthy prison terms.

Yet the story of Schlichter cannot be told – the entire story, at least – without mentioning the God-given talent and improvisational artistry he displayed at the quarterback position during his four years at Ohio State.

Four decades ago, he was a transformative quarterback who played the position with guts and guile. He possessed a cannon of an arm that could find blanketed receivers with pinpoint accuracy, and he had the elusiveness of an escape artist, able to evade oncoming pass-rushers in the blink of an eye.

George Chaump, a longtime high school head coach in Pennsylvania as well as Schlichter's quarterback coach at Ohio State, told *BSB* in 2014 that Schlichter was the best high school quarterback he had ever seen.

"And I've seen a lot of them," Chaump said. "Everybody would just shake their heads when they saw what that kid could do. Running, throwing – there wasn't anything he couldn't do. There was no question in my mind that he was going to be a star."

But did Schlichter fall victim to his own seemingly endless potential? Was he pushed too far too fast by an overbearing father and an aging head coach desperate to keep up with a game that was threatening to pass him by?

Woody Hayes had recruited countless athletic quarterbacks during his long tenure with the Buckeyes, but some of the best at that position during the Hayes era before 1978 were little more than option-style players whose chief duty was to hand off to a stable of running backs. Even three-year starters such as Rex Kern and Cornelius Greene became known more for their slashing run-

ning styles than the strength of their arms.

But when Hayes scouted Schlichter at Miami Trace High School about 40 miles southwest of Columbus, the old coach had to be thinking of his own future. Schlichter set records by the truckload in high school as his team piled up victory after victory. And he was a natural-born athlete, running track and leading the Panthers to the state championship game in basketball.

Football was his true calling, though, and some of his early exploits were legendary. He won the state Punt, Pass and Kick competition and could throw a football 50 yards from the seat of his pants. Nearly every major-college coach from coast to coast mapped their way to the Schlichter farm, including Bo Schembechler of Michigan and Joe Paterno of Penn State. But he had grown up in the shadow of Ohio Stadium and eventually followed his heart to Ohio State.

Schlichter admitted he had a lot of trepidation as he embarked upon his first fall training camp at Ohio State.

"Don't get me wrong," he told *BSB*. "I wanted to be there. It was a dream come true to be able to play for Woody Hayes. But the one thing I remember is driving away from home on the day fall camp started. I cried my eyes out. I remember thinking, 'Wow, my life's getting ready to change. I've got to be a man now.' I was going from being a big fish in a little pond, and there are qualities of that kind of life that are nice."

Schlichter's freshman season in 1978 was disastrous. He threw five interceptions in his first game – a single-game program record that still stands – and his interception late in the Gator Bowl indirectly led to Hayes' dismissal after the OSU head coach punched Clemson middle guard Charlie Baumann on the sideline.

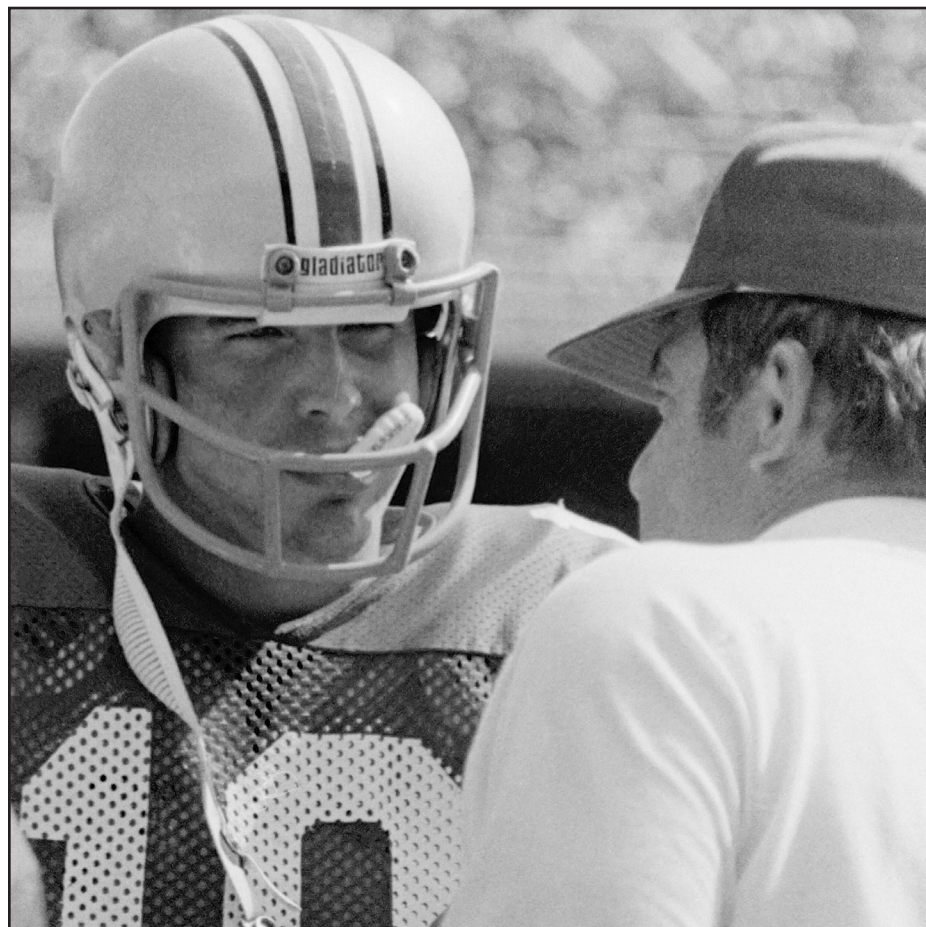
Schlichter led the Buckeyes to within a whisker of a national championship as a sophomore in 1979 but then had some hiccups along the way in 1980 when Ohio State squandered a preseason No. 1 ranking into a three-loss season.

But the 1981 season began with renewed enthusiasm fueled by the university's high-profile promotion of Schlichter for the Heisman Trophy.

It had been six years since Archie Griffin won the second of his two Heismans, and longtime OSU sports information director Marv Homan and top assistant Steve Snapp pulled out all the stops to make sure their star quarterback was in the forefront of the minds of trophy voters.

Posters with Schlichter's likeness began to pop up throughout Columbus along with "King Arthur" buttons complete with the quarterback's smiling face. Sportswriters and sportscasters throughout the country were also inundated with promotional material featuring Schlichter's career stats as well as a testimonial from Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce that read, "Art has all the basic ingredients for a great quarterback: size, speed, toughness, leadership qualities, courage, intelligence and great, great desire. He can throw deep with accuracy, has quick feet and can run the option. He can drop back, he can roll out and he can read defenses. And let me tell you this: Art Schlichter is a winner."

But while the OSU publicity machine was running on all cylinders, there was trouble



MARK REA

SIDELINE TALK – Ohio State quarterback Art Schlichter (10) goes over strategy with head coach Earle Bruce during a 1981 game at Ohio Stadium. The '81 season, Schlichter's fourth and final one as OSU's starting quarterback, featured a little bit of everything including an upset win against archrival Michigan.

behind the scenes.

Schlichter had become something of a loose cannon. He had made the Ohio State basketball team but found very little playing time on a 1980-81 squad that featured such stars as Herb Williams and Clark Kellogg. Schlichter wouldn't even make it through the season, however, leaving the team in late January on doctors' orders because of exhaustion.

Then in late July, on his way home from attending an NCAA-sanctioned trip to promote college football, Schlichter was arrested in Columbus for speeding. It wasn't the first time the quarterback had been stopped for exceeding the speed limit, but it was the first time during his Ohio State career that he had been cited. The ticket was ultimately dismissed, but the accompanying publicity resulted in an embarrassing court appearance and \$100 fine.

"It was probably the first time in my life that I was truly on my own, and I just went off the rails," Schlichter said. "I didn't have basketball anymore, and we were experiencing a lot of disappointment on the football field. We had gone from having no expectations two seasons earlier to within one play of winning the national championship during my sophomore year to having the ultimate expectations and then losing three games in '81. Gambling started to creep into my life, and I lost my edge."

Schlichter's gambling addiction, which led to the quarterback spending most of the last 25 years in prison, never seemed to affect his performance on the field. In his 2009 autobiography, "Busted – The Rise & Fall of

Art Schlichter," he claimed never to have wagered on any game in which he was playing.

"I never, ever considered compromising the integrity of a game that I played in – college or pro," Schlichter wrote. "I just wouldn't do it. I've done a lot of things I couldn't stomach, but that would've been the ultimate sin to me because I respected the competition and the game too much, and I knew I could never cross that line."

"And I never did."

After Schlichter left Ohio State and his gambling addiction came to light, Bruce was accused of exacerbating his quarterback's problem by repeatedly taking him to Scioto Downs, a harness racetrack in southern Columbus. It is an allegation the coach always denied.

"I have always been able to look anyone right in the eye who asked me that question and respond with a no," Bruce said in 2017. "Art was a very private person. He was very much a loner, and he would never have gone to the track with me. If he would have asked, yeah, I probably would have taken him. But he would never have asked."

The coach added that he still felt some responsibility in Schlichter's downward spiral.

"When he was a student, he was supposed to live in a dorm, but was living in a condo in Upper Arlington," Bruce said. "I tried to put my foot down, but I finally decided it wasn't worth the problem. In retrospect, that was a huge mistake. I should have hammered him. Instead, I tolerated a lot I shouldn't have."

"Art was a high-profile player, but he should have been kicked in the ass about 14 times. And I should have been the one to do

it. But I didn't want to cause any problems with his family. Coming down hard on Art would have affected recruiting and caused all kinds of problems for our program. Instead, I tried to talk to him about his behavior. But I never got through."

Up-And-Down Season

Despite the off-the-field distractions, Ohio State wasted little time flexing its muscle when the 1981 season began. The Buckeyes rolled to a 34-13 victory against Duke, a game that was over almost as soon as it began.

Junior tailback Tim Spencer took a hand-off on OSU's first play from scrimmage and raced 82 yards down Ohio Stadium's east sideline for a touchdown. At the time, it was the third-longest running play in program history, and it remains the longest season-opening play from scrimmage in Ohio State history.

Spencer finished the game with 172 yards and three touchdowns, while Schlichter threw for 194 yards and one score. The QB added another 33 yards and a touchdown on the ground.

Watching from the Ohio Stadium press box were Hayes and his wife, Anne, attending their first game since the coach's dismissal following the 1978 season. Hayes had repeatedly declined invitations to attend games the previous two seasons, insisting his presence would have been a distraction for Bruce and his players.

The following week featured a 27-13 win against Michigan State, but it was almost a costly one. Late in the third quarter, Schlichter and fullback Vaughn Broadnax collided with one another in the OSU backfield. The 6-3, 208-pound quarterback was flattened by the 6-3, 243-pound fullback and turned his ankle as he went to the ground.

Schlichter missed the rest of the game with what was diagnosed as strained ligaments. But he was somehow on the field the following Saturday when the Buckeyes visited Stanford.

"We were playing Stanford and (future Hall of Fame quarterback John) Elway," Schlichter said. "I'd been waiting two years for that game. There was no way I was missing it."

The game was billed as an East-West shootout between two of college football's most famous gunslingers. Schlichter had already reset his school's record book for passing while Elway, then in his junior year, was doing the same at Stanford. In the end, Schlichter somehow hobbled his way to a better afternoon while leading the Buckeyes to a 24-19 victory.

The OSU quarterback completed 16 of 32 passes for 240 yards and two touchdowns while Elway had 42 attempts with 28 completions for 248 yards and a pair of scores.

Much of Elway's damage came after the Buckeyes mounted a 24-6 lead after three quarters. In the fourth quarter alone, the Stanford QB connected on 15 of 20 throws for 140 yards and both scores, but his final completion was fumbled near midfield where it was recovered by OSU middle linebacker Marcus Marek with just 44 seconds left in the game.

"We hung in there for a victory as a team when we needed to, and that could be a turning point for us," Bruce told reporters after the game. "A lot of people said we couldn't

beat Stanford. A lot of people said we couldn't win on the West Coast. Well, we did."

The big road victory, coupled with upset losses the same day by No. 2 Oklahoma and No. 6 UCLA, catapulted the 3-0 Buckeyes to the No. 7 spot in the national rankings and feeling good about their prospects as they returned home to face unranked Florida State.

The Seminoles were coming off a 34-14 loss at No. 17 Nebraska, but they'd had an extra week to prepare for their first-ever trip to Columbus, and sixth-year head coach Bobby Bowden had a few tricks up his sleeve.

While Schlichter set a new single-game program record by throwing for 458 yards – the only 400-plus day ever turned in by an Ohio State quarterback until Dwayne Haskins came along in 2018 – Florida State used a quick and withering defense to stuff the OSU running game and engineer a 36-27 upset victory.

With Schlichter playing on a still-gimpy ankle and the Seminoles employing a variety of stunts and slants, the Buckeyes managed only 38 yards on the ground.

"I can't ever remember an Ohio State team that rushed for 38 yards and passed 52 times," Bruce said after the game. "They controlled the line of scrimmage both offensively and defensively, and I think that ultimately won them the football game. There has to be a lot more discipline and a lot more physical toughness on our part when we start league play."

The game marked Bruce's first loss to an unranked team in 28 games as Ohio State head coach and the team's first home defeat to an unranked opponent since a 22-21 loss to Missouri in 1976.

Things were supposed to get back to normal the following week with a trip to Wisconsin, a team that hadn't beaten Ohio State since 1959. Even so, Bruce felt a little pregame speech was in order during the coin flip.

"I heard about it later from a couple of assistant coaches," said Schlichter, who was at midfield with fellow co-captain Glen Cobb for the coin toss. "Earle had given this rip-roaring speech using my situation – senior captain who was playing injured – to rally the troops."

"He said, 'C'mon, guys! Let's win this one for Art! He's playing hurt and he deserves better than what you are giving him. Let's play this one for him!' It was an inspiring speech, but I guess it wasn't inspiring enough."

Wisconsin erased an early 7-0 deficit to grab a 17-14 halftime lead – scoring 11 points in the final 18 seconds of the first half – and then held on for a 24-21 victory.

The Buckeyes made mistakes in bunches, including gift-wrapping points on the Badgers' doorstep. Punter Bob Atha fumbled a snap to set up a Wisconsin field goal, and another three-punter was the direct result of a fumbled pitch from Schlichter to Spencer. Punt returner Jeff Cisco made another special teams miscue when he muffed a fair catch to set up Wisconsin's first touchdown, and Marek made an uncharacteristic mistake when his late-hit call sustained the Badgers on what would be their second touchdown drive.

Add to that a trio of Schlichter interceptions that thwarted would-be scoring drives and the Buckeyes had lost back-to-back games during the regular season for the first time since 1971.

Pass Defense Exposed

Ohio State rebounded during its next three games with a couple of shootout wins – 34-27 against Illinois and 45-33 at Purdue – sandwiched around a 29-10 home victory over Indiana. But the games exposed a glaring weakness in the OSU defense. Fighting Illini quarterback Tony Eason threw for 368 yards and two touchdowns, and Boilermakers QB Scott Campbell totaled 516 yards and three touchdowns through the air.

The following week, however, the dam broke. Minnesota quarterback Mike Hohensee attempted 67 passes and completed 37 of them for 444 yards and five touchdowns as the Gophers overcame a 21-7 halftime deficit and scratched out a 35-31 victory at old Memorial Stadium.

It was the third loss of a season that had begun with such promise, and Ohio State had suddenly disappeared from the college football landscape.

The Buckeyes returned home the following week for a 70-6 pounding of winless Northwestern, setting up the traditional regular-season finale. No one gave them much of a chance as they rolled into Ann Arbor as double-digit underdogs to seventh-ranked Michigan, but the unranked Buckeyes managed to carve out a 14-9 victory.

The Wolverines rolled up a 367-257 advantage in total yardage, but they were forced to settle for three field goals by the OSU defense that kept Michigan out of the end zone for the first time in the series since 1962.

Meanwhile, Schlichter scored a pair of touchdowns – the first on a 1-yard plunge to stake the Buckeyes to a 7-3 halftime lead, and the second with just 2:50 remaining in the game, a short 6-yard scamper that became a play for the ages.

With the Wolverines protecting a 9-7 lead, Schlichter took a third-and-6 snap and executed a play-action fake to Spencer, but the Michigan defense wasn't fooled. The QB rolled to his right where four defenders began to close in on him. Out front was Broadnax, who earlier in the game had whiffed on an important block on a similar play.

This time, though, the OSU fullback was ready.

"When you're out front blocking like that, you really don't know what's happening behind you," Broadnax told BSB. "But I heard the roar of the crowd and I knew Art was in trouble. So, I took the guy I was blocking and just tried to drive him into the other one to cause some confusion."

"I didn't know whether that was going to make or break the play, but I knew I had to get those guys out of there."

Schlichter initially tried to duck inside Broadnax's block on Michigan outside linebacker Carlton Rose, but with the hole quickly collapsing, the quarterback cut back to his right and around his fullback, who by this time had taken on two more Michigan defenders – inside linebacker Mike Boren and safety Keith Bostic. As Broadnax pushed Rose backward into Bostic, Boren made a desperate lunge at Schlichter at the 4-yard line, but the Ohio State QB squirted away.

Schlichter's 6-yard touchdown run capped a 13-play, 80-yard drive and gave the Buckeyes a 14-9 lead with 2:50 remaining in the game. After the much-maligned defense held, Ohio State had its hard-earned victory and Bruce enjoyed a triumphant ride from the field atop the shoulders of his players.

Unrealized Promise

The victory allowed the Buckeyes to tie Iowa for the Big Ten championship, but because of a scheduling quirk, the teams didn't play one another in 1981. The other teams in the conference each played a nine-game, round-robin league schedule, but the Buckeyes and Hawkeyes played only eight conference games. And because they didn't square off against one another, and because they tied for the title with identical 6-2 records, the Hawkeyes were awarded the conference's Rose Bowl berth since it had been longer between trips to Pasadena for Iowa. While the Buckeyes had played in the New Year's Day bowl just two years earlier, the Hawkeyes hadn't appeared in a Rose Bowl since a 38-12 win against California in the 1959 game.

Ohio State was shuffled off to the Liberty Bowl, where it played a strong team from the U.S. Naval Academy and wound up with a 31-28 victory. In his final game as a Buckeye, Schlichter turned in a less-than-stellar performance, completing just 11 of 26 pass attempts for 159 yards, two touchdowns and an interception and rushing six times for a net loss of 22 yards.

The 1981 Buckeyes, a team that began the season with national championship aspirations, finished with a 9-3 record, the second of seven consecutive three-loss seasons that earned Bruce the derisive nickname of "Ol' Nine-and-Three Earle."

Shortly after the bowl game, Bruce decided to address the issues with his pass defense and fired defensive coordinator Dennis Fryzel, defensive line coach Steve Szabo and defensive backs coach Nick Saban. In their stead, Bruce hired Purdue defensive line coach Randy Hart and Tennessee secondary coach Dom Capers, while graduate assistant Fred Pagac was promoted to full-time linebackers coach.

Meanwhile, Schlichter's Heisman candidacy ended with a fifth-place finish behind USC running back Marcus Allen, Georgia running back Herschel Walker, BYU quarterback Jim McMahon and Pitt QB Dan Marino.

In the spring of 1982, Schlichter became a first-round NFL draft selection of the Baltimore Colts, but not long after that, his addiction to gambling came to light and NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle suspended him from the league twice. He played briefly in the Canadian Football League and Arena Football League before being reinstated by the NFL. He caught on with the Buffalo Bills in 1986 but was waived when the Bills signed future Hall of Famer Jim Kelly shortly after the United States Football League had folded. Schlichter never played professional football again.

Now 61, Schlichter was paroled in June after serving 10 years in prison following his 2011 conviction on federal fraud charges related to a massive ticket scam that bilked millions of dollars from his victims. He will be under the supervision of the Adult Parole Authority for the next five years and must agree not to own guns, use illegal drugs or leave Ohio without notifying his parole officer.

Shortly before his death in 2018, Bruce offered perhaps the perfect summation of Schlichter with regard to what might have been vs. what is reality.

"Art wasn't a bad kid," Bruce said. "He is someone with a very serious problem. Art Schlichter playing football with no distractions was something to behold. But the outside influences working on Art were too great. What a waste."

DE Jackson, OT Henry Snap OSU Verbal Drought

Ohio State landed a pledge from four-star defensive end Kenyatta Jackson of Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep on Oct. 19, snapping one of the longest class-wide commitment droughts in several years for the Buckeyes in the process.

Jackson becomes OSU's first verbal commitment for the 2022 class since July 9 when

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Patrick Mayhorn

Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek four-star offensive tackle George Fitzpatrick joined the group. Ohio State did land a commitment for its 2023 class on Aug. 19 when four-star tight end Ty Lockwood of Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence committed.

The 6-5, 235-pound Jackson became the 15th member of Ohio State's 2022 class, which has jumped back into the No. 4 spot in the team rankings after falling as far as No. 8. He is the first defensive lineman to join the class in what could be another four-man group up front for longtime defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

Jackson's commitment is not expected to impact the recruitments of other major defensive end targets such as five-star Omari Abor (6-4, 240) of Duncanville, Texas; five-star Shemar Stewart (6-5, 260) of Opa Locka (Fla.) Monsignor Prep; or Philadelphia Imhotep Institute four-star Enai White (6-5, 230). The Buckeyes could also look to move four-star linebacker Gabe Powers (6-4, 230) of Marysville, Ohio, to an edge position.

"I don't think (Jackson's commitment impacts the others)," Buckeye Scoop analyst Bill Greene told BSB. "I think they're going to take five defensive linemen in this class. I think they would take both (Abor and Stewart).

"I don't think they know what they have with Gabe Powers. Is he going to be at the end or at linebacker? He's kind of looked at as a swing

guy. I think they want him to play linebacker. He may be too big to play linebacker, so we'll see there. But they're full-bore on Omari Abor and Shemar Stewart. Jackson's commitment doesn't change a thing."

The Buckeyes would like at least one more defensive end and then two from a defensive tackle group that includes four-star prospects Caden Curry (6-3, 250) of Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove, Hero Kanu of Rancho Santa Margarita (Calif.) Catholic and Christen Miller of Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove. OSU also continues to check in with five-star tackle Mykel Williams of Columbus (Ga.) Hardaway, who has committed to Georgia.

As for the Buckeyes' latest commitment, Jackson is one of the nation's top edge rushers and overall players. He is a consensus four-star prospect, ranked the No. 68 overall player, No. 8 edge rusher and No. 10 prospect in the state of Florida in the 247Sports composite player rankings.

Jackson, a longtime OSU target as well as a teammate at Chaminade-Madonna Prep of fellow commitment and four-star cornerback Ryan Turner, cited his relationships with Ohio State players and coaches, along with multiple strong trips to Columbus, as the deciding factors behind his choice.

"It was just the relationships I've built with the coaching staff, especially Larry Johnson," Jackson said. "My family loves him. You know his track record, what he puts into the NFL. I believe that he'll develop me as a great pass rusher and a great man.

"My mind was made up Oct. 12. Me and my dad had a talk about the schools, and just shortly after, something just told me that Ohio State was the best decision."

Jackson's decision came down to Alabama, Ohio State and Oklahoma, with the Sooners hoping to earn the final visit but missing out on that opportunity when Jackson had to deal with what he described as a family issue.

It's been a dominant senior season for the edge rusher, who had 32 tackles and eight sacks through just five games – drawing high praise from his coach in the process.

"He's long. He's smart. He's athletic as hell

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
Jyair 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
Avery Henry	OT	6-7	305	★★★	St Clairsville, Ohio
C.J. Hicks	LB	6-3	220	★★★★★	Kettering (Ohio) Archbishop Alter
Kenyatta Jackson	DE	6-5	235	★★★★	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna
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 his size," Chaminade-Madonna Prep head coach Dameon Jones told 247Sports. "Ohio State (is) going to be getting a hell of a football player. He has made so many plays since he has been here. There have been times when he just takes over games and make plays for me."

Henry Makes It Two In A Week

When it rains, it pours. Just one day after snapping its dry spell with the commitment of Jackson, Ohio State added another verbal in the trenches, this time with a player who could find himself lining up opposite Jackson in practice for years to come. The Buckeyes received a verbal commitment Oct. 20 from Avery Henry (6-7, 305), a three-star offensive tackle from St. Clairsville, Ohio. He hails from the same hometown as former OSU running backs Tim and John Spencer.

Henry, the 16th member of Ohio State's class, didn't take long in making up his mind on the Buckeyes. He received an offer from offensive line coach Greg Studrawa after his high school game on Oct. 15, and less than a week later, he jumped on that opportunity and committed to Ohio State.

"First off, I would like to thank my biggest supporter, my mother, for always being there when I needed her," Henry posted. "(Even with) the uncertainty of the future, (she) always (knew) we could do it. Next, I want to personally thank all the people that believed in me. With this being said, I would like to announce that I will be continuing my football and academic career at the Ohio State University."

Henry is ranked the No. 1,220 player in his class and the No. 123 offensive tackle. He becomes the third offensive lineman in the 2022 class along with Fitzpatrick and four-star tackle Tegra Tshabola (6-6, 350) of West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West. Henry picked Ohio State

over Iowa State, Syracuse, West Virginia and a host of offers from MAC schools.

With three offensive linemen – each ostensibly tackles at the next level, unless Fitzpatrick or Henry are earmarked to be very big guards – in the 2022 class, Studrawa will likely focus on just a pair of interior linemen to finish the class.

Ohio State certainly wouldn't turn down commitments from a pair of five-star offensive tackle prospects – Zach Rice of Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy or Kiyunta Goodwin of Charlestown, Ind., who still plans to take official visits despite his pledge to Kentucky.

However, four-star guards Earnest Greene (6-4½, 330) of Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco and Kam Dewberry (6-4, 313) of Humble (Texas) Atascocita are now atop the board for the Buckeyes up front. Next up beyond them is four-star guard Carson Hinzman (6-4, 280) of Hammond (Wis.) Saint Croix Central, long considered a Wisconsin lean but a prospect for whom Ohio State is ramping up its efforts.

Nwankpa Sets Decision Date, Names Top Three

Ohio State's top remaining target in the defensive secondary for the 2022 class has set a commitment date. Four-star safety Xavier Nwankpa (6-2, 190) of Altoona (Iowa) Southeast Polk announced Oct. 18 that he'll be choosing from Iowa, Notre Dame and Ohio State on Dec. 8 – his 18th birthday.

"I'm going to take my time, take my visits, and then I'll take November to do like the pros and cons," Nwankpa told the Des Moines Register. "Then I'll settle on a decision on Dec. 8, my birthday."

Those visits will come in short order for the Iowa native. He stayed home Oct. 9 to take in Iowa's 23-20 come-from-behind victory against

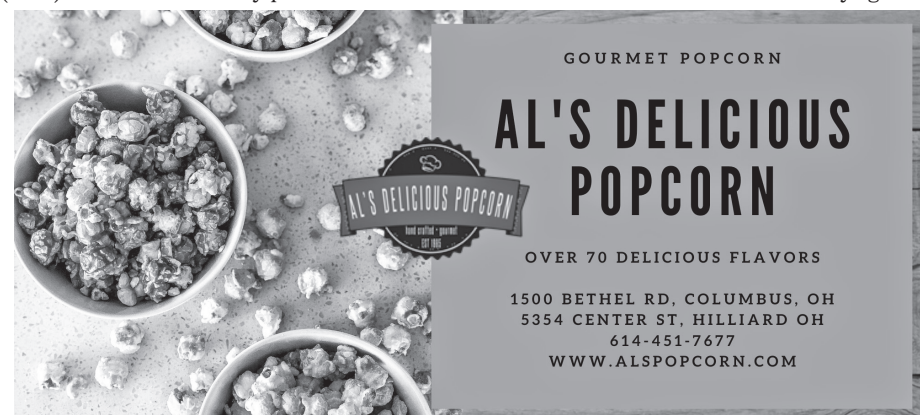


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Penn State and headed to Notre Dame on Oct. 23 to watch the Fighting Irish take on USC. He'll complete his visits Oct. 30, traveling to Columbus to join the huge contingent of visitors for Ohio State's prime-time matchup with top-10 rival Penn State.

Given his proximity to the Hawkeyes, Nwankpa is no stranger to Iowa's campus, but his visits to South Bend and Columbus weren't his first trips to those destinations, either. He visited both campuses when the dead period was lifted in June, taking a trip to Ohio State from June 4-6 and to Notre Dame two weeks later. It was that early June trip to Ohio State that catapulted the Buckeyes into the lead for his pledge, an atmosphere the OSU staff is hoping to replicate on the 30th since the Fighting Irish and Hawkeyes have both worked to close the gap over the summer and fall.

"It was great," Nwankpa told 247Sports about that first Ohio State visit. "They set the bar pretty high. The experience, vibe and atmosphere there was great. It was definitely a place I could see myself. I sat down with Coach (Matt) Barnes, Coach (Kerry) Coombs and Coach (Ryan) Day at the end. Coach Barnes and Coach Coombs talked about the defense and how I would fit in. Coach Day was talking about the program and getting to know him a little better."

In breaking down each of his final three schools, Nwankpa sees plenty of positives. At Iowa, the opportunity to stay home and play for an experienced coaching staff is valuable to the safety, who ranks as the nation's No. 43 player and No. 5 safety in the 247Sports Composite rankings.

"I feel the love (at home). I get a bunch of DMs and texts every day from a bunch of random people and people I know," Nwankpa told Rivals. "It's exciting to feel the love."

For Ohio State, the relationships and connections are less based around location and have more to do with his ties to players within the program and commitments who are set to soon join it.

"It's been pretty good. (Barnes and Day) came to watch my game this week, and I'm super-close with some of the commitments and some of the players on that team, so I've just been building that bond," Nwankpa said.

"(2022 commits) C.J. Hicks and Kyion Grayes (recruit me the hardest). It's just, 'Come do what we did.' I played with Kiyon in 7-on-7 all spring, and he's been excited to work on that bond and is always saying how we could go win a championship together."

As for the Fighting Irish, the appeal is similar with the added benefit of a closer trip from home.

"I've built that relationship," Nwankpa said. "I'm friends with a lot of their guys. One of my crosstown rivals (three-star West Des Moines Valley tight end Eli Raridon) is committed there, so I've just been building that bond with a bunch of commits there."

Ohio State is still largely considered the leader and could potentially pull away with a strong showing in that Oct. 30 visit, but Iowa and Notre Dame did impress in their showings – enough that Iowa actually picked up a pair of 247Sports crystal ball predictions on Oct. 10. However, lead analyst Steve Wiltfong still has Ohio State as his projection for Nwankpa, and Wiltfong has hit on 308 of his 321 projections during this cycle.

Buckeyes Eyeing USC QB Commit Brown

Ohio State is on the hunt for a new quarterback in the class of 2022. After five-star signal-caller Quinn Ewers of Southlake (Texas) Carroll surprised many by enrolling a year ahead of schedule, packing up and moving to Columbus in August to join the 2021 Buckeyes, OSU is without a quarterback with 2022 eligibility – something it would like to avoid.

That's especially true after Ewers' early enrollment gave Ohio State back-to-back recruiting classes in 2020 and 2021 with a pair of quarterbacks in each, usually not great business in the era of the transfer portal.

With at least two of the four scholarship quarterbacks on the roster considered by observers as possible transfer candidates, a true freshman to round out the depth chart in case of departures next season is one of the more pressing issues for Day and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis.

The immediate and obvious answer to that problem could have been four-star Drew Allar (6-4½, 228) of Medina, Ohio, a fast-riser in the

recruiting world who has popped into the top 100 for his big arm and impressive running ability. The interest from Ohio State was apparently not reciprocated by Allar, though, and he committed to Penn State in March and told Lettermen Row that while he respects Ohio State, he's solid with the Nittany Lions.

With the in-state solution seemingly out, Ohio State has again expanded its scope, going back out west as it did with current starter C.J. Stroud and backup Jack Miller and extending an offer Oct. 12 to four-star Devin Brown (6-3, 189) of Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon.

Brown, like Allar, has a relatively long-standing commitment to a power program in USC. But, unlike his Ohio counterpart, the Arizona native and Utah transplant is seemingly not so wedded to the Trojans, thanks in large part to the firing of head coach Clay Helton in September. With uncertainty at USC, Brown has been open to exploring his options elsewhere, picking up offers from Ole Miss and UCLA just days after Helton's ouster before visiting BYU in late September and Ole Miss on Oct. 8.

It appears that Ohio State could be on that visit list as well. He told Sports Illustrated that he felt very good about the offer (which came in-person from Dennis, who traveled to Utah to watch Brown practice) and that he will probably take an official visit to Columbus, along with a November visit to Texas.

"I was talking to the running backs coach (Tony Alford) a little bit," Brown said. "Then they actually flew out their quarterbacks coach, Coach Dennis, and he watched my Monday practice during the week. It was actually a rainy practice, the weather sucked, so he was out there freezing, watching me throw. He called me the next day, and him and Coach Day offered me a scholarship right there."

"It was surprising, a really cool moment. Not many can say they have an Ohio State offer. It's a big honor and it's very cool. They want me to take an official visit, and I think I probably will."

However, Brown said that he's still leaning toward USC and will need to see something special on a visit to change his mind.

"It's pretty much the same," he said of his pledge to USC. "I lean there, but you just don't know what is going to happen with coaches."

We really just have no idea who they're going to hire. I just have to be smart, look at all my other options and look at what schools are the best fits for me.

"With COVID, we committed on Zoom calls. Now I get to go on visits and it's been really helpful. Seeing coaches face to face, getting to talk to them in person, seeing the facilities and what the gameday experience is like – I'm just doing my due diligence and getting to know about every single school to make the right decision for me."

Ranked the No. 59 player and No. 5 quarterback, Brown has been the most prolific high school passer in the country this season. Through 10 games, he was leading the nation with 3,557 yards on a 65.9-percent completion rate with 40 touchdown passes to 11 interceptions. He has impressed analysts with his play beyond stats, too, starring at the Elite 11 Finals over the summer and earning a significant bump in the rankings in recent months.

"After seeing him in person, I was so impressed," 247Sports analyst Greg Biggins said. "And for me – and obviously on our rankings call, he's not going to be rated among the top five quarterbacks because he doesn't have the body of work, which means his film and all that other stuff – but for me, he's a top-five talent."

Coombs' Recruiting Efforts Remain Important

Coombs had trouble defining his specific role with the Buckeyes while speaking to the media Oct. 12, a month removed from the week-two loss to Oregon that led to the stripping of his gameday play-calling duties. Coombs said he does a little bit of everything for the Buckeyes now, floating through practices to help with hands-on coaching while contributing plenty to defensive game plans as well.

"It's very hard to describe it," Coombs said. "I think that we were working as a collaborative unit prior to changing who was going to have the final say on the call on the sideline. In some ways, those things are still true. I have tried to change my role a little bit, first of all, because I'm in the (press) box."

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

How legitimate is the interest between Ohio State and four-star quarterback Devin Brown of Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon, who has been committed to USC since September 2020?

"That's a tough one for me. From Ohio State's point of view, I'm sure they're open. You fight it out. You fight it out and see where it leads. He is a heck of a player. I mean, he really is. We'll see where it goes. A lot depends on what USC does – who they hire, how they go about things and their process with him."

Is Ohio State still the favorite to land four-star safety Xavier Nwankpa of Altoona (Iowa) Southeast Polk, or do you think his visit to Iowa helped the Hawkeyes?

"I think his visit to Iowa moved the needle a little bit. He's a home-state kid, but if I had to pick a favorite, I would go with Ohio State here. I don't think Notre Dame's in it. If Ohio State can get him on campus for the Penn State game – they are amazing on official visits. Iowa had him on an official and they impressed him. Still, I think he's going to see a big difference between Ohio State and Iowa. It will come down to what he wants, but there's a difference between the programs in a lot of ways."

Ohio State sent out a lot of offers in recent weeks, including some in the 2022 class. Why do offers come out in

bunches like this?

"At this time of year, it's not just Ohio State doing this. It's happening around the country. You have those summer official visits now, and then once you get through the summer officials, a lot of those guys go ahead and commit – or they pretty much know where they're going. So, about this time of year, you're looking at your board asking, 'Where are we? Who do we have a shot at? Do we have a shot at this kid?' The coaches remake the board and that's why I think you're seeing more 2022 offers going out right now. The Avery Henry offer came about because of where they stand with five-star tackle Zach Rice of Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy, four-star guard Billy Schrauth of Fond Du Lac (Wis.) St. Mary's Springs, and all those guys they've been chasing. I don't know if they feel too good about those."

"And then four-star Kam Dewberry of Humble (Texas) Atascocita and four-star Earnest Greene of Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco are guys they thought they pretty much had, but I don't know if they feel that way anymore. I think it's more a resetting of the board in the fall and looking at where they are right now. I think that that's why you're seeing a flurry of offers coming out right now for the class of 2022."

Do you see four-star linebacker Jimmy Rolder of Marist

High School in Chicago joining Henry, the three-star tackle from St. Clairsville, Ohio, as one of the previously unknown prospects who becomes a member of this class?

"Ohio State would not have offered Henry if they didn't know he was going to take it. They wouldn't have risked that embarrassment. Jimmy Rolder is interesting. I didn't know of him more than 10 days ago, and now he's got offers from everybody. His film was good. It kind of reminds me of (current OSU linebacker) Tommy Eichenberg. He's committed to play baseball at Illinois, so we'll see with him because that could be an interesting one. If he goes to Illinois, he could play both (baseball and football)."

"I hate to sound like a broken record, but if he takes that official visit to Ohio State, that will be something to watch. You know he's interested if he comes to Columbus. When he's here, he's going to see things that he just won't see at Illinois. He would be in the same boat as other guests on campus. I think if they get you enrolled or on campus, it's done. Now, with five-star DE Shemar Stewart of Opa Locka (Fla.) Monsignor Prep and four-star DE Marvin Jones of Plantation (Fla.) American Heritage, I don't feel that way. I think that's the first step, and then you've got a few more steps to go through."

Continued From Page 33

His role off the field is a lot clearer. Coombs has long been considered an ace recruiter for Ohio State and one of the nation's best, going back to his first stint in Columbus when he helped to secure commitments from such future first-round NFL draft picks as Eli Apple, Gareon Conley, Marshon Lattimore and Denzel Ward. Whether he's calling the plays or not, Coombs' effort on the recruiting trail has remained a clear focus for the OSU assistant, who said that his demotion is not even a topic of discussion among recruits.

"No," Coombs told media when asked if he talks to recruits about the change. "You know what I talk to recruits about? Playing ball at Ohio State, playing ball in an unbelievable environment, being a part of something really special. I think recruiting to Ohio State is not nearly as hard as some people would like you to believe. This is an unbelievable place, and so I've had a great opportunity to have great conversations with young people all over the country about it."

For what it's worth, Coombs' job in Ohio State's class of 2022 is just about finished. Two of his three primary targets – cornerbacks Terrance Brooks (5-11, 190) of Little Elm, Texas, and Jyaire Brown (6-0, 178) of West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West – are already committed to Ohio State, as is Turner, one of his two secondary targets. The other remaining secondary target, cornerback Jaheim Singletary of Jacksonville (Fla.) Riverside, decommitted from Ohio State over the summer.

That leaves only one primary target left on Coombs' board – four-star safety Zion Branch of Las Vegas Bishop Gorman, the No. 2 safety

on the board for the Buckeyes behind Nwankpa, who is being recruited primarily by Barnes.

With most of the job finished in the secondary for the 2022 class, Coombs has shifted his focus to 2023, where his position on the OSU staff could become more of a concern for potential recruits. Coombs is at the forefront of several key 2023 recruitments for the Buckeyes, primarily top cornerback targets such as AJ Harris (6-2, 180) of Phenix City (Ala.) Glenwood School, Cormani McClain (6-1½, 165) of Lakeland (Fla.) Lake Gibson and Tony Mitchell (6-2, 180) of Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson.

Sampson Includes Buckeyes In Top 10

Four-star 2023 defensive tackle Keith Sampson Jr. of New Bern, N.C., included Ohio State among his top 10 schools on Oct. 13, along with Alabama, Duke, East Carolina, Florida State, Georgia, North Carolina, North Carolina State, South Carolina and Virginia.

Considered the No. 217 player and No. 33 defensive tackle in the class of 2023, Sampson is a fairly new player on the OSU recruiting board. The 6-3, 285-pounder visited Columbus over the summer for a recruiting camp to back up the scholarship offer that Ohio State extended during his sophomore season – though he didn't officially report it until April.

"When I first found out I was getting an offer from Ohio State, it was really crazy because they're a powerhouse program and it proved to me that my hard work hasn't gone unnoticed," Sampson told Cleveland.com. "They offered me early in my sophomore season. I just have to keep working, and my work ethic isn't going unknown."

Given Ohio State's status as the only north-

ern school on Sampson's list and his frequent trips to in-state programs ECU, UNC and N.C. State during the 2021 season, plucking the big man out of North Carolina might be a tall task for the Buckeyes. However, they have had recent success there on the recruiting trail.

Former 2022 tight end commitment Benji Gosnell hailed from Pilot Mountain, N.C., while the Buckeyes have signed three other Tar Heel State products in the last four classes – 2021 four-star halfback Evan Pryor from Cornelius, 2020 defensive tackle Jacobbe Cowan from Charlotte and 2019 defensive tackle Jaden McKenzie from Wake Forest.

Buckeyes Extend Offers To Pack Of Standouts

It's been a busy couple of weeks on the recruiting trail since Buckeye Sports Bulletin went to press with Ohio State coaches hitting the road over their off weekend and extending quite a few offers to new targets as a result.

Leading the way Oct. 16 was 2023 four-star quarterback Jackson Arnold (6-1, 195) of Denton (Texas) Guyer, who picked up his offer with Dennis in attendance for his Oct. 15 game.

"I didn't know they were going to offer," Arnold told 247Sports. "I was really surprised. (Dennis) said I had a great game. He was talking through the game with me and said he wants to get me on the phone again with Coach Day and get me out for a game."

"I've watched them on TV. They look really impressive on offense. They pass the ball really well. I think I could fit in. I'll definitely visit Ohio State. If I don't get to a game, I'll go up there in the spring."

Arnold is the No. 233 player and No. 14 QB in the 247Sports composite rankings for

his class. Ohio State has offered a few other QBs in his class, including five-star Nicholaus Iamaleava of Downey (Calif.) Warren, four-star Dylan Loneragan of Snellville (Ga.) Brookwood and five-star Dante Moore of Detroit Martin Luther King, but a favorite is yet to emerge.

Next up, in an Oct. 18 flurry, Ohio State extended offers to 2022 three-star Chicago Marist linebacker Jimmy Rolder (6-2, 220), 2024 four-star wide receiver KJ Bolden (6-0, 180) of Buford, Ga., and 2024 New Rochelle (N.Y.) Iona Preparatory School four-star cornerback Ellis Robinson IV (6-0, 175).

Rolder is another late riser. A new four-star in the 247Sports composite, the Chicago product has starred during his senior season, earning offers from Cincinnati, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Purdue and now Ohio State all within the month of October.

His recruitment is a bit up in the air, because of both the influx of offers and his status in another sport. Rolder is considered a top baseball prospect and has been committed to Illinois in that sport since the summer of 2020. With the guidance of his father, Scott Kehoe – who was a four-year starting offensive lineman for Illinois from 1983-86 – he'll likely look to take visits and work toward a final decision.

The pair of 2024 prospects is likely a case of hoping to get in on the ground floor. Bolden and Robinson are the respective Nos. 3 and 4 players in the 247Sports rankings for 2024, and each claims a number of top offers. Bolden referred to the Ohio State offer as a special one for him.

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

Cincinnati Academy of Physical Education star running back Carlos Snow was on pace to surpass the likes of Eric Dickerson and Herschel Walker in career scoring and rushing.

Through eight games in his senior year, Snow had recorded 1,461 rushing yards on 110 carries. Ohio State was fully aware of the talented back.

"We have him listed as the top (prep) running back in Ohio," said OSU assistant coach Tom Lichtenberg in a preseason magazine article. "He's a game-breaker. He's a hard runner with super speed, and he's got good hands, too. He's a lot like Archie Griffin with a little more speed."

Snow said he wasn't leaning toward any particular school, but those on his list of favorites were Georgia, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio State, Penn State and Tennessee

30 Years Ago – 1991

D.J. Jones split time as a tight end and inside linebacker throughout his career at Lebanon (Ohio) High School. Through nine games in his senior season, he had 21 catches for 281 yards and two touchdowns while recording 91 tackles, including four for losses and two sacks.

"It's about half and half," Jones said of where coaches want him to play in college. "Some of the coaches say tight end, but a lot of them are saying they want me at defensive line."

The 6-5, 251-pound prospect had Florida, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Penn State all interested in him.

25 Years Ago – 1996

As Ohio State rose to the No. 2 spot in The Associated Press poll – rolling over powers Notre Dame and Penn State in the process – it was starting to hear from top-rated players across the country who wanted to get a foot in the door.

"We are getting a lot of calls from players and coaches across the country," said OSU recruiting coordinator Bill Conley. "Obviously with the exposure we've had on television and the games we've played against Notre Dame and Penn State, everybody knows about Ohio State now."

Among the group of interested out-of-state players were Hampton, Va., wide receiver Ahmad Hawkins and Casselberry (Fla.) Lake Howell offensive lineman Tam Hopkins. The former had set a Dec. 7 official visit date with the Buckeyes, while the latter said that Ohio State was hoping to get him penciled in for one of his own.

"They said they want me to come in for a visit," Hawkins told

BSB. "I really like their balanced attack on offense. They produce good receivers."

20 Years Ago – 2001

Nick Mangold of Kettering (Ohio) Alter was down to two options – Ohio State and Notre Dame. After visiting both schools, the center set a decision date for late June and decided on the Buckeyes. In October, he explained his decision to BSB, saying that the home-state draw was just too much to overcome.

"I think it was an issue of I've always liked Ohio State as a little kid, growing up with the Buckeyes," Mangold said. "It was an overall better fit for me because I've had that love for the team and the school for as long as I can remember. I never really had any connection with Notre Dame or even Clemson, so going to Ohio State just seemed like the more natural thing to do."

Mangold's father agreed with him.

"The family was a little bit torn," Alter head coach Ed Domsitz said. "His dad always wanted Ohio State, but his mom's side of the family sort of liked Notre Dame, too, so there was a little bit of a tug-of-war there for a while."

15 Years Ago – 2006

Racine Park, Wis., running back John Clay had one more game remaining in his junior year before shifting his focus to college recruiting.

"I've got one more game, then I'm going to start going on all my visits," Clay told BSB.

Clay was unsure of which schools he was going to visit, but he did have a top-five list of schools he liked. They were Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio State, Tennessee and Wisconsin, but in no particular order.

Though OSU was waiting for Clay's commitment, two other tailbacks were already committed to the Buckeyes' 2007 class – Brandon Saine of Piqua, Ohio, and Daniel Herron of Warren (Ohio) Harding. The slightly crowded running backs room, however, didn't deter Clay.

"It's a great campus to be on," he said. "It's a wonderful school."

10 Years Ago – 2011

Cornerback prospect Eli Woodard, a four-star 2013 prospect out of Voorhees (N.J.) Eastern, reiterated that while he had no favorites, Ohio State was near the top of his list of programs.

"I would have to say the school I'm most interested in right now is Ohio State," he said. "We talk a lot and I want to try to make a

couple of visits after the season to there. I also want to see Alabama and Notre Dame."

Five Years Ago – 2016

Long considered an Ohio State lean, five-star athlete Jeffrey Okudah (6-1, 190) seemed to have his options narrowed down to four schools. The Grand Prairie (Texas) South prospect told Scout that he was planning to take just four official visits instead of the five he was allowed.

Two of those visits had already taken place. Okudah was at Oklahoma when the Buckeyes downed the Sooners in September, and he visited Georgia at the end of that month.

He was set to take an official visit to Florida State for the weekend of Oct. 29 before taking his fourth (and likely final) visit to Ohio State for either the Nebraska game Nov. 5 or the Michigan game Nov. 26.

Okudah, who planned to enroll early, had previously listed Clemson and USC in his top six.

One Year Ago – 2020

Members of Ohio State's 2021 recruiting class took it upon themselves to organize an unofficial gathering of commits and top targets during the weekend of Oct. 24.

The Buckeye Bash, as it was being referred to, was hosted by Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer and included nearly every Ohio State commitment, along with several uncommitted targets, including Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway four-star safety Derrick Davis.

Sources told BSB most of the players stayed overnight at Sawyer's house on Friday night. The group then watched Ohio State's season-opening win over Nebraska at Buffalo Wild Wings, checked out the campus and then hung out for the rest of the evening, playing video games and watching other college football games.

However, the players were unable to visit the Woody Hayes Athletic Center or meet with any coaches while on campus.

"We just have to stay out of all that," OSU head coach Ryan Day said. "If we ever hear of anything, we immediately call (associate athletic director for compliance) Justin Kume and make sure everything's being followed – first off, from NCAA compliance protocol, but also from COVID and other things like that."

"We can't really get involved with that, but at the same time we understand that some of these guys really want to be a part of this thing."

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2021 FOOTBALL (6-1)

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, W 54-7; **30** PENN STATE.

Nov. 6 at Nebraska; **13** PURDUE; **20** MICHIGAN STATE; **27** at Michigan.

Dec. 4 Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis.

2022 FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 NOTRE DAME; **10** ARKANSAS STATE; **17** TOLEDO; **24** at Michigan State.

Oct. 1 at Penn State; **8** Rutgers; **15** IOWA; **29** INDIANA.

Nov. 5 at Northwestern; **12** WISCONSIN; **19** at Maryland; **26** MICHIGAN.

2023 FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 at Indiana; **9** SAN JOSE STATE; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY; **23** at Notre Dame.

Oct. 7 MARYLAND; **14** at Purdue; **21** PENN STATE; **28** at Wisconsin.

Nov. 4 at Rutgers; **11** MICHIGAN STATE; **18** MINNESOTA; **25** at Michigan.

CROSS COUNTRY

Sept. 3 Evansville Opener at Indiana, Men: 1/6; Women: 1/7; **10** Spiked Shoe Invitational at Penn State, Men: 6/6; Women: 5/6; **23** Bill Dellinger Invite (Women Only) at Eugene, Ore., 9/17.

Oct. 1 Joe Piane Invitational at Notre Dame, Men: 6/21; Women: 9/24; **15** FSU Invite/Pre-Nationals at Tallahassee, Fla., Men: 33/40; Women: 14/33; **29** Big Ten Championships at University Park, Pa.

Nov. 12 NCAA Regional Championships at Evansville, Ind.; **20** NCAA Championships at Tallahassee, Fla.

FIELD HOCKEY (7-9, 1-6)

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, L 3-0; **17** at Iowa, L 3-0; **22** PENN STATE, L 4-0; **24** RUTGERS, L 1-3; **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., 15/19.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (3-1)

Oct. 8 at Bentley, L 2-1; **9** at Bentley, W 7-1; **15** UCONN, W 4-3 (OT); **16** UCONN, W 3-0; **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 (6-2)

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, W 7-0, **16** BEMIDJI STATE, W 3-1; **23** at Wisconsin, L 3-1; **24** at Wisconsin, L 2-1 (OT); **29** ST. CLOUD STATE, 6 p.m.; **30** ST. CLOUD STATE, 3 p.m.

Nov. 5-6 at St. Thomas, TBA; **19** MINNESOTA STATE, 6 p.m.; **20** MINNESOTA STATE, 1 p.m.; **26** DC Tournament at Washington, D.C., vs. St. Lawrence, 1 p.m.; **27** DC Tournament at Washington, D.C., vs. Penn State, 4 p.m.

Dec. 3-4 at Minnesota Duluth, TBA.

Jan. 7 LINDENWOOD, 6 p.m.; **8** LINDENWOOD, 3 p.m.; **14-15** at St. Cloud State, TBA; **21** MINNESOTA DULUTH, 6 p.m.; **22** MINNESOTA DULUTH, 3 p.m.; **28** MINNESOTA, 6 p.m.; **29** MINNESOTA, 3 p.m.

Feb. 4-5 at Minnesota State, TBA; **11-12** at Bemidji State, TBA; **18** WISCONSIN, 6 p.m.; **19** WISCONSIN, 3 p.m.; **25-27** WCHA Quarterfinals, TBA

MARCH 5-6 WCHA Championships.

MEN'S SOCCER (5-8-1, 1-5)

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, L 3-0; **17** at Michigan State, L 1-0; **22** PENN STATE, W 2-1; **26** MICHIGAN, 6 p.m.; **31** at Rutgers, 1 p.m.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (9-7-2; 4-4-2)

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, L 1-0 (OT); **17** MICHIGAN, W 2-1; **20** at Wisconsin, T 0-0; **24** at Northwestern, W 2-1

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (16-4, 6-4)

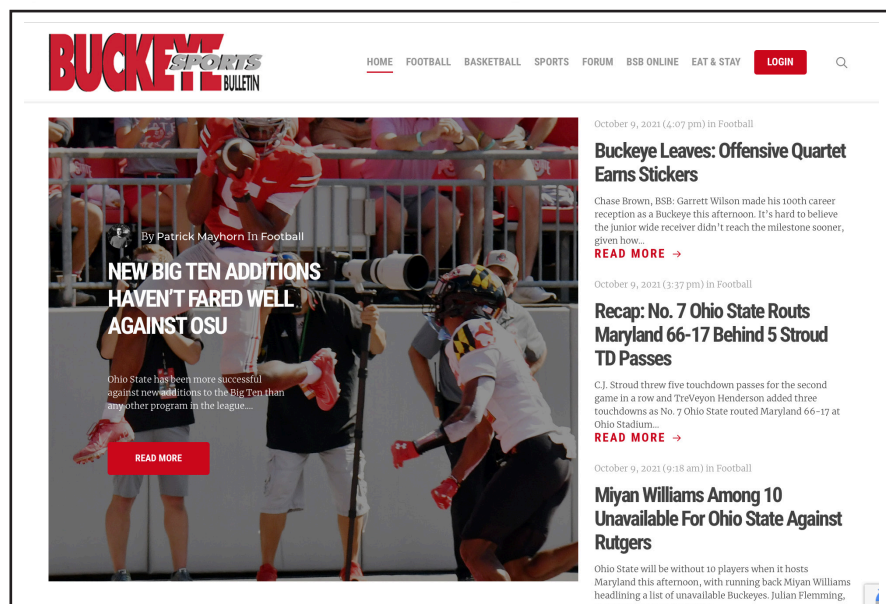
Aug. 27 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 3-0; **28** WASHINGTON, W 3-1.

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, W 3-1. **16** Rutgers, W 3-0; **22** at Wisconsin, L 3-1; **24** at Minnesota, L 3-1.; **29** at Michigan, 7 p.m.; **31** MICHIGAN STATE, 1 p.m.

Nov. 4 MINNESOTA, 7 p.m.; **6** NEBRASKA, TBA; **13** at Northwestern, 2 p.m.; **14** at Illinois, TBA; **19** IOWA, 7 p.m.; **21** PENN STATE, 3 P.M.; **24** at Rutgers, 7 p.m.; **26** at Maryland, 7 p.m.

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Defense Hot Topic For Bucks At Big Ten Media Days

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann, forward E.J. Liddell and forward Kyle Young represented Ohio State in Indianapolis on Oct. 7-8 for the annual Big Ten Media Days, fielding questions varying from offseason changes and improvements to favorite albums and even the fashion choices of their coach (more on that later).

The story of the day, though? Defense, defense and more defense. Ohio State's talking point throughout the offseason has been on the defensive side of the court, from landing specialists Jamari Wheeler from Penn State and Joey Brunk from Indiana to an increased focus on getting

going to call it out and we do the drill over again."

That doesn't just mean a shift in message, though. With scorers all over the roster and de facto coordinator Ryan Pedon returning as well, Ohio State is spending less time developing its offense this off-season, while looking to work into a new defensive system, coordinated by assistant Jake Diebler, who assumed the role after the departure of Terry Johnson to Purdue.

"It's a lot of competing, drill work, early preseason stuff," Young said. "We're just starting to get our feet under us, getting our wind back. We're excited, really focusing on defense. Defense has been our mind-set, and that's what we want to focus on throughout this year because we lacked it a little bit last year. We think, for our success this year, that's going to be important."

That new-look defense will need to be ready early for Ohio State to find success. The Buckeyes have, according to BartTorvik.com, one of the most difficult nonconference slates in the country – and one loaded with offensive talent. Duke (No. 10), Kentucky (No. 12), Xavier (No. 16), Seton Hall (No. 31) and one of either Florida or Cal (Fort Myers Tip-Off) are each projected by Torvik to have top-40 offenses, giving Ohio State's defense multiple early tests before entering a conference loaded with offensive firepower.

"Having a nonconference schedule

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

that's going to be tough like that is exciting because it's going to make us better," Young said. "As competitors, we want to play good teams. We want to be challenged. For us, it's exciting. We're excited to get into that and to show what we've got."

Perhaps the most pressing questions, though, came from a new face on the Buckeye basketball beat – albeit one who certainly knows his stuff.

His first question: "Chris Holtmann from the Columbus News. Kyle, could you talk about the crazy swagger and style of your head coach?"

"Yeah, I can a little bit," Young replied. "We've actually been asked that a few times. Me and E.J. have both commented on Coach Holtmann's drip – not just on the court, but off it, too. He's walking in the gym, he's got some new kicks on. He always has an icy suit on."

Liddell was not immune to the tough

questions, either.

"E.J., could you talk about what you like least about your head coach?"

Always the diplomat, Liddell was sure to choose his words carefully, gathering his thoughts for several seconds and taking a deep breath before delivering a response that would keep him out of the doghouse.

"I have to be very careful here," Liddell said. "He doesn't get me hip to his fashion style. I wish I had the same as him. Says he has drip."

That, apparently, was the answer the smiling Holtmann was looking for.

Four Captains Named

For the first time since 2007-08, Ohio State has announced team captains ahead of its upcoming season – a move that seems directly related to the sheer amount of experience on a team that features seven fifth- or sixth-year seniors, a pair of true

COURT REPORT

Patrick Mayhorn

more stops and forcing turnovers. A year removed from fielding the No. 82 group in adjusted defense according to KenPom, the Buckeyes are hoping to field a more competent group, especially as they expect to have one of the nation's best offenses.

"We're focusing more on the details and little things about defense," Liddell said. "They don't let anything go by them. If I get out of my stance on defense, they're



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seniors and one junior, giving Ohio State a majority upperclassman roster (66.7 percent) for the first time in Holtmann's tenure.



E.J. Liddell

Two of those super seniors, one true senior and the lone junior will represent the Buckeyes as guard Justin Ahrens (senior), Liddell (junior), Justice Sueing (fifth-year senior) and Young (fifth-year senior) earned the captains' nod, though Ohio State has not announced if they will don a "C" patch on their uniforms, a rarity in the sport. Jamar Butler, Othello Hunter, David Lighty and Matt Terwilliger were the last officially recognized Ohio State captains, though the Buckeyes have named captains internally in the past. They just never announced or documented them.

The two Buckeyes representing the team in Indianapolis were perhaps the most obvious picks. Young has been a leader for Ohio State for several years and serves as one of the tone-setters in both facets of the game with his energy levels. Meanwhile, Liddell has grown into a similar role during the last year after taking over as one of the top scorers for OSU in 2020.

"When both of those kids returned, it was a huge thing for our program," Holtmann said. "If they'd have made the decision to move on and thought it was best

for them, I'd have completely understood, but I think hopefully in some ways you're talking about guys who really invested a lot in the program and it validated that they believe in what we're doing and want to move it forward.

"Those are two of the best kids I've ever coached in a lot of ways. They embody everything you want, and they're talented players."

Ahrens is a bit of a surprise given his lack of consistency on the floor, but Holtmann has complimented his work ethic all offseason, and it seems likely to pay off both in being a captain and in more playing time this season.



Justin Ahrens

"It took me a little bit longer than some other guys, but I made it and I live to fight another day," Ahrens said at Ohio State's media day in September. "I'm doing what I can to reach my max potential. I'm an old hand now. I've got a lot of experience."

Sueing is the lone former transfer to earn the nod, though he's been in the program since 2019, sitting out his first season before averaging 10.7 points and 5.5 rebounds per game on 49.1-percent shooting from the field as a junior in 2020. His approach to leadership is a tad different from his counterparts, working more as the voice of reason and calm than the fiery spark plug like Young or Wheeler.

"He's a great kid and a really good player, really talented, but he's got a really laid-back, island approach," Holtmann said of Sueing. "It's taken a little bit of time for me to figure out the best way sometimes to challenge him, but he had a really good junior season."

All Sold Out

For the first time in nearly a decade, Ohio State has successfully sold out of its 2,400 available student tickets for the season, doing so in a record time as the Buckeye Nuthouse, as it's come to be known, was sold out within an hour of the sale window's opening. The last student ticket preseason sellout came in 2012 when Ohio State was considered one of the nation's top title contenders.

"What a day," the official Nuthouse Twitter account shared on Oct. 11. "No doubt this section is about to be built different. We miss you, and we can't wait to see you."

Several Buckeyes were actively involved in pitching the tickets to their fellow students, including sophomores Zed Key and Meechie Johnson, each of whom has a major following online, especially on the popular video-based social media TikTok.

Holtmann, who has pushed for greater ticket sales with his own efforts since arriving in 2017 – including multiple giveaways and student events around campus – was delighted to see that rewarded.

"Love ya and see you soon!" Holtmann shared.

2021-22 OSU Men's Basketball Schedule

Date	Opponent
Nov. 1	Indianapolis (Exh.)
Nov. 9	Akron
Nov. 12	Niagara
Nov. 15	Bowling Green ^
Nov. 18	at Xavier #
Nov. 22	vs. Seton Hall ^
Nov. 24	vs. Florida/Cal ^
Nov. 30	Duke*
Dec. 5	at Penn State
Dec. 8	Towson
Dec. 11	Wisconsin
Dec. 18	vs. Kentucky \$
Dec. 21	Tennessee Martin
Dec. 28	New Orleans
Jan. 2	at Nebraska
Jan. 6	at Indiana
Jan. 9	Northwestern
Jan. 13	at Wisconsin
Jan. 16	Penn State
Jan. 22	Nebraska
Jan. 27	at Minnesota
Jan. 30	at Purdue
Feb. 3	Iowa
Feb. 6	Maryland
Feb. 9	at Rutgers
Feb. 12	at Michigan
Feb. 15	Minnesota
Feb. 19	Indiana
Feb. 24	at Illinois
Feb. 27	at Maryland
March 3	Michigan State
March 6	Michigan
^ - Fort Myers Tip-Off	
# - Gavitt Tipoff Games	
* - Big Ten/ACC Challenge	
\$ - CBSSports Classic at Las Vegas	

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Buckeyes Hope Speed Overcomes Size Deficiency

By **WYATT CROSHER**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The Ohio State women's basketball team has enjoyed two straight solid seasons after a difficult one in 2018-19. Both teams featured rosters worthy of making the NCAA tournament, and yet, neither did.

The 2019-20 season finished with a Big Ten tournament final before COVID-19 shut down the NCAA tournament, and a self-imposed postseason ban from the Patrick Klein investigation left the 2020-21 version of the Buckeyes without either a conference or national tournament in which to compete.

That's been the story of Ohio State the last two seasons – good but unable to truly prove how good because of circumstances outside of basketball. With any luck, the team gets to change that this year, with a roster that includes five players who have been there for each of the last two difficult endings.

"We definitely want to be (in the NCAA tournament), especially with COVID the first year and not being able to go, and then our postseason ban," junior guard Jacy Sheldon said. "You always want it, but we want a little more because of that. We're excited to just go out and compete and play with each other and show everybody what we're all about. It's going to be fun."

Showing everyone what Ohio State is all

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

about will be a little different thanks to transfers from two players who dealt with the heartbreak of the past two seasons – Dorka Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty, who went to women's basketball powerhouses Connecticut and Texas A&M, respectively.

Those players were Ohio State's starting forwards the past two seasons, and the Buckeyes did not make any additions at forward through the transfer portal. That has left four forwards on the roster with a total of six starts in scarlet and gray. While that could be considered a detriment, the talk from the team this offseason has been how it can be used as a plus.

"Overall, we're definitely going to have to play faster and use our speed, quickness and strength against other opponents that will probably be taller than us," junior guard Madison Greene said. "We don't see that as a weakness or as something that will bring us down. If anything, it could make us better and harder to guard. So I'm excited about the season. I don't feel like it will hold us back at all."

For Ohio State to play faster than it has, it will have to modify what was already a souped-up engine. Last year, the Buckeyes averaged 76.3 possessions per 40 minutes, an average that ranked No. 15 in the nation according to Her Hoops Stats. If the goal is to go even quicker than what was already faster than 328 Division I teams, it might make for some high-octane offensive performances.

That is something ninth-year head coach Kevin McGuff believes Ohio State is built to do.

"I think we'll be deep and certainly talented with our perimeter players," McGuff said. "It should allow us to play a pretty aggressive up-tempo style, and all the while maintaining fresh legs."

Despite not playing in the last two NCAA tournaments, there have been outstanding moments for the Buckeyes, including an upset of No. 2-ranked Louisville in 2019 and the stretch of ranked wins against Michigan, Maryland and Indiana in 2021. But it is what happens in March that people remember.

Sophomore forward Gabby Hutcherson has been with the team for only one of those seasons, but she said she and the rest of the team are coming in with a chip on their shoulders after everything they went through during last year's campaign.

"I feel like we have something to prove now," Hutcherson said. "Going into last season ranked and then moving up in the ranks, and then at the end of the season falling down and losing so many games at the end, I feel like we have to come back and prove that we still are the team that we said we

were at the beginning of the season."

Here is a position-by-position breakdown for the 2021-22 Buckeyes.

Forward

Tanaya Beacham, 6-1, 6th-Sr. (4.1 points per game, 3.7 rebounds per game) – Beacham joined the Buckeyes last season after a four-year stint at Toledo. Her first year with Ohio State had her taking more of a role off the bench with both Juhasz and Patty the clear-cut starting forwards whenever they were available to play.

But every time one of them was out, Beacham was the one to jump into the starting five, doing so on five occasions. With Juhasz and Patty now gone for good, there's plenty of reason to think Beacham will become the team's season-long starter.

Because of how the OSU roster is built, it is also possible Beacham slots in as the team's starting center despite standing just 6-1. There may be some size disadvantages in Beacham's future, but she is also the team's most tenacious returning rebounder.

Her three-point shooting was an issue last season (just 2 of 7 for 28.6 percent), but she did most of her work inside, getting to the rim with strong post play to score the easier two, which she shot much more efficiently (47.5 percent).

Beacham had the option to leave after last year but opted to return to the Buckeyes for a sixth collegiate season.

Gabby Hutcherson, 6-2, Soph. (3.1 ppg, 2.1 rpg) – In her true freshman campaign, Hutcherson saw an average of only 11.8 minutes per game, but she made sure to use all of those effectively.

Hutcherson led the team by shooting 41.7 percent from deep on 24 attempts, and McGuff said that he was impressed enough by her performance in limited action last year that she should see the floor more as a sophomore.

"She's a really long, rangy type player with a great stroke from the three-point line,"

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OHIO STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL PREVIEW

2021-22 Ohio State Women's Basketball Projected Starting Lineup

0 • Madison Greene • G

Ht.: 5-8 • Class: Jr.



Third on the team in scoring (13.4 points per game) while leading Ohio State with a 2.32 assists-to-turnovers ratio.

4 • Jacy Sheldon • G

Ht.: 5-10 • Class: Jr.



Led the Buckeyes with 16.7 points per game on 48.6-percent shooting. Also led OSU with 35 steals.

10 • Braxtin Miller • G

Ht.: 5-11 • Class: 5th-Sr.



Averaged 11.5 points, 3.7 rebounds and 3.1 assists as the team's leader in minutes at 34.4 per game.

2 • Gabby Hutcherson • F

Ht.: 6-2 • Class: So.



Played just 11.8 minutes per game as a true freshman, but led Ohio State in three-point efficiency (41.7 percent).

0 • Tanaya Beacham • F

Ht.: 6-1 • Class: 6th-Sr.



Started five games during her first season after transferring from Toledo and was third on the team with 3.7 rebounds per game.

the OSU coach said. "She's worked pretty hard in the offseason, and hopefully we'll see her on the floor a little bit more. I thought she contributed in really positive ways last year, and I'm looking forward to even more of that this year."

How much more is yet to be known, but the door is open for Hutcherson to not only expand her role, but become a starter. And it wasn't just her shooting that impressed as a freshman. She also led the team with an 87.8 defensive player rating, according to Her Hoops Stats.

But as one of four forwards, Hutcherson knows she has to become even more of a complete player this season to overcome the roster losses during the offseason.

"Just rebounding a little bit more and just getting in there and being a little bit more physical," Hutcherson said on which facets of her game she needs to improve. "This summer, I feel like was important for me to put on size, strength, muscle and stuff like that so I can be a little bit more aggressive."

Rebeka Mikulasikova, 6-4, Jr. (4.0 ppg, 2.5 rpg) – Mikulasikova followed a very promising freshman year with a less memorable sophomore season.

After leading the team and ranking No. 16 in the NCAA by shooting 46.3 percent from deep during her first year with Ohio State, Mikulasikova shot just 18.2 percent from three-point land in 2020-21, lowest on the team and No. 1,879 in the country.

It was a difficult season for the Nitra, Slovakia, native, who also saw her minutes decrease from 16.3 to 12.8 per game. But not all hope is lost for Mikulasikova. At 6-4, she has size over everyone on Ohio State's roster and is also the longest-tenured forward the Buckeyes have, and McGuff expects her to see more playing time this season.

"I think there are going to be a lot of opportunities for some people to step up this year," the OSU coach said.

When she's on her game, Mikulasikova is a unique weapon who is incredibly difficult to guard thanks to her combination of size and shooting prowess. But turning the switch back on is not a given considering her performance last season.

Taylor Thierry, 5-11, Fr. – Thierry is listed as a guard/forward on the roster, but she is expected to fill more of a forward role, at least early on with Ohio State's lack of depth at the position.

The Shaker Heights (Ohio) Laurel product stands 5-11 but has shown ability as a rebounder, averaging 8.0 per game as a high school junior. She tallied 16.6 points, 3.1 assists and 3.7 steals per contest as a junior and then was named Division II Player of the Year as a senior when she led her team to a state tournament appearance.

Thierry might not have made a large impact on the court during her first season in a more traditional roster breakdown, but that

is not what the Buckeyes have this season. She is listed as the fourth forward on the roster, but Thierry can be a hybrid player who could see some time at a guard position.

Guard

Hevynne Bristow, 6-1, Jr. (1.3 ppg, 0.3 rpg) – Bristow transferred from Providence last season with the intention to sit out for one season and start her career at Ohio State during the 2021-22 campaign.

But when the NCAA gave every player a free year of eligibility due to the COVID situation, Bristow began to see action and played in four games for a combined total of 15 minutes. While she tallied just five points, a rebound, an assist, a block and a steal, it was valuable experience for a player who had been expected to stay on the bench until this upcoming season.

At 6-1, Bristow possesses more size at guard than anyone else on the OSU roster, and because of that she could see some time at forward. It's hard to tell exactly what the Buckeyes have with Bristow at this point in her collegiate career, but her added size could be of importance if the third-year guard can build on a strong offseason.

Kaitlyn Costner, 5-8, Fr. – Costner comes to Ohio State after a four-year varsity career at two different high schools in Indiana. The 5-8 guard led Elkhart Central to its first sectional title in 27 years when she was just a freshman and then helped lead Penn Harris Madison to Class 4A sectional and regional titles following a transfer.

Costner will get the opportunity to learn and develop behind a deep, experienced group of guards and likely will see her role increase in upcoming seasons. But she is a scorer and has plenty of experience in both the prep and AAU ranks, so there could be a spot on the floor for the daughter of Indiana Basketball Hall of Famer Rod Creech.

Madison Greene, 5-8, Jr. (13.4 ppg, 3.5 rpg) – Greene is one of three returning starters and should continue to man the starting point guard position.

In the 15 games Greene played last season, Ohio State posted a 12-3 record, and she was third on the team in scoring at 13.4 points per game while leading with 4.3 assists.

The Buckeyes went just 1-4 with Greene out of the lineup, showing she is an essential piece to Ohio State's success. Knowing her importance, and feeling more and more capable in her role, has the junior looking forward to the upcoming season.

"I would say the biggest step that I've made is probably just with my confidence," Greene said. "In the beginning, I was really trying to figure out how to make an impact and trying to find my place and purpose on the team. But now I feel more comfortable and just more confident in my abilities to be

a point guard and help lead the team."

Greene finished last season with an offensive rating of 117.4, the highest on the team according to Her Hoops Stats. That was thanks to efficient shooting across the board – 42.7 percent overall, 35.1 percent from deep and 85.7 percent at the line – but also because of her efficiency as a passer.

Those 4.3 assists per game came with just 1.9 turnovers for an assist-to-turnover ratio of 2.32, best on the team and No. 55 in the nation. But while those numbers are stellar, her coach is looking for Greene to take over as a scorer rather than a distributor.

"As much as I love her making other people better," McGuff said, "she needs to be mindful to continue to be really aggressive and create opportunities for herself along with other people."

Rikki Harris, 5-10, Soph. (3.4 ppg, 2.0 rpg) – Harris saw her first action as a college player last season after redshirting in 2019-20 to recover from a shoulder injury. Injuries have played a big part in Harris' basketball career, but there's still a reason she was considered a five-star prospect coming out of North Central High School in Indianapolis.

Ohio State saw brief glimpses of her talent last season. Harris played just 190 minutes, third fewest on the team, but she was impactful, leading all non-starters with a 17.0 player efficiency rating. Harris shot 44.7 percent from the field and 31.0 percent from deep but struggled mostly from the free-throw line, where she hit just 11 of 19 attempts for a 57.9 percentage, lowest on the team for returning players.

There is still plenty of room to grow for Harris, and so far her potential has only been seen in spurts. But simply getting a near-full season of games in without any major injuries was almost victory enough.

Anyssa Jones, 5-10, Soph. (0.6 ppg, 0.1 rpg) – Jones saw action in seven games for a total of 30 minutes as a true freshman but struggled to make an impact, even in mop-up duty.

Jones was just 1 of 6 from the field and committed seven fouls during those 30 minutes. But like Costner, Jones still has time to learn and develop. Another offseason could spark something in the Westerville (Ohio) South product, who came to the Buckeyes with Hutcherson, her high school teammate.

While Jones is not expected to make the same impact as Hutcherson, it is also only year two of her career, and an improvement could be in store.

Taylor Mikesell, 5-11, Sr. (9.3 ppg, 2.4 rpg) – Mikesell was the only addition Ohio State made through the transfer portal in the offseason, but it could be a big one.

To be more accurate, Mikesell's presence will be a big one for the Buckeyes, but it might not come this year. This is Mikesell's second transfer, with the Massillon (Ohio)

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

Jackson product first committing to Maryland, then transferring over to Oregon in the 2020 offseason.

Because it is her second transfer, she does not have the free one-time transfer eligibility and will have to file a waiver request in order to earn immediate eligibility.

Whenever she does get to play, Mikesell will help the Buckeyes immensely in terms of scoring. She is a career 40.0-percent shooter from beyond the arc, knocking down 224 of 560 career attempts from deep. That volume and efficiency should fit right into what Ohio State wants to do on offense.

Mikesell is also a veteran. She brings 90 games (including 86 starts) of collegiate experience as a member of three teams that have made the NCAA tournament. That includes two seasons with the Terrapins that ended with regular-season Big Ten titles.

Regardless of whether she will see the floor this season or the next, Mikesell is ready to make a difference with her home-state Buckeyes right away.

"Just being vocal (will make a difference)," she said. "I've seen two different sides of the Big Ten now, and just having so many different experiences, I think being able to come in and just lead where I need to lead and just to be vocal. I can push people to work hard."

"I think the talent is there, the mind-set

Continued On Page 40

Continued From Page 39

is there, and the work ethic is there. I think just being that leader on the side will help."

Braxtin Miller, 5-11, 5th-Sr. (11.5 ppg, 3.7 rpg) – Miller was the first senior from last season to decide upon a return thanks to the free year of eligibility. She will be entering her third year with the Buckeyes after spending her first two at Oklahoma State.

Since arriving in Columbus, Miller has played a major role, starting all but one of her 52 games played while averaging 32.5 minutes in those contests. But from year one to year two at Ohio State, Miller made a big jump in her efficiency.

As a junior, she averaged 8.2 points per

game while shooting 32.6 percent from the field and 25.0 percent from three-point territory. Those numbers improved last year to 11.5 points, 38.6 percent overall and 38.5 percent from deep, and she will likely be asked to play extensive minutes once again – unless Mikesell is eligible right away.

Kateri Poole, 5-8, So. (6.6 ppg, 2.6 rpg) – Poole was the highest-rated member of Ohio State's 2020 class but got less of a chance to showcase her talent because of the stable starting backcourt of Greene, Miller and Sheldon.

But Ohio State got a good taste of the things Poole can do when Greene was out of the lineup down the stretch. The team might have lost four of Poole's five starts, but she

certainly had her moments in scoring and finding the open player for some of the flashiest assists the Buckeyes had all season.

Flash is a lot of Poole's game, and it is something she is proud of because of her New York roots. Reeling that in will be a major key for her as a sophomore, and she figures to be the sixth man off the bench again.

There will be more opportunities the longer Poole is a Buckeye, and she could serve as a major jolt of energy whenever the team needs it.

Jacy Sheldon, 5-10, Jr. (16.7 ppg, 3.7 rpg) – Despite Juhasz's presence last season as the top producer on the team, it was Sheldon who led the team in scoring with 16.7 points per game, good for 12th in the Big Ten.

Those numbers should go up in a faster-paced offense, especially considering that Sheldon does most of her work from three-point territory (a team-high 33 makes in 2020-21) or with layups in transition.

"She's really made great progress since she's been here," McGuff said. "She's an incredibly hard worker and I think this style really suits her well, so I think you'll continue to see her make strides."

Sheldon agrees with her head coach but thinks that the impact of this year's roster will go past her own play and improve everyone on the team.

"Not only me, but the majority of our guards can shoot it," Sheldon said. "I think it's all going to jell really well together. We have played really well together so far, and we're only going to grow in that aspect. It's going to be great for a lot of our guys to thrive and I'm excited."

That is not a surprising answer from Sheldon, who seldom answers a question without first giving credit to her teammates. That mentality has seemed to help her become one of Ohio State's most consistent players, one who can score in a variety of ways to avoid a slump from a cold shooting night.

Her 34.4 percent three-point shooting is serviceable, but it is Sheldon's 48.6 overall percentage that makes her Ohio State's most difficult player to guard. That should continue during her junior season, and it could truly be her time to shine with no Juhasz or Patty to share in the scoring. But where McGuff wants to see continued improvement with his budding star is on the opposite side of the court.

"Jacy has taken some positive steps on the defensive end because of her speed and quickness," McGuff said. "I think she could really be effective for us on that end of the floor."

Ohio State has spread the ball around well each of the last two seasons to avoid having one player attract all the attention from the opponents. That will likely be the case again this season, but Sheldon will be more of the focus than she ever has been, both for the Buckeyes and their opponents.

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Czech Mate: Frosh Goalie Dobeš Leads Sweep

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Time and outcomes will tell if the defining moment of the 2021-22 season for Ohio State occurred at 6:17 of the second period in the third game.

That was the point Oct. 15 when Connecticut scored a power-play goal for a 3-0 lead at Value City Arena and had dominated the Buckeyes not only on the scoreboard but in physicality. The Huskies forechecked the home team into turnover after turnover, and it appeared the Buckeyes were headed for their second loss in three games.

Same old Ohio State, the same team that was 7-19-1 last season, could barely average two goals a game, and was shut out eight times. Sure, head coach Steve Rohlik had brought in nine new players but, really, nothing had changed, right?

Enter freshman goalie Jakub Dobeš to replace junior Ryan Snowden. While Snowden was hung out to dry at times when OSU was falling behind by three goals – he stopped 13 of 16 shots – Dobeš made several key saves and the team gained confidence in front of him.

Then something remarkable happened. Dobeš stopped all 55 shots the remainder of the series, and the Buckeyes outscored the Huskies by a 7-0 margin for a sweep to improve to 3-1-0 in nonconference action.

First came a 4-3 overtime victory in the opener when graduate transfer defenseman Will Riedell scored with 3.6 seconds left.

After saving 23 shots in that game, Dobeš made 32 saves the next night during a 3-0 win.

"Right now, we're all confident in each other, battling each day in practice," sophomore forward Travis Treloar said. "The work is put in between Monday and Thursday. It's almost easier to step on the ice."

Five times last season, the Buckeyes won the first game of series and five times they failed to sweep.

"It's so hard to win at this level on any given night," Rohlik said. "It's so competitive across the board. Anytime you get one win, it's huge. But when you can put two in a row and sweep on the weekend, it's something to hang your hat on."

Dobeš, a native of Ostrava, Czech Republic, who played junior hockey for the Omaha (Neb.) Lancers in the United States Hockey League last season, has been sensational.

In his college debut at Bentley on Oct. 9, he made 17 saves and came within 3:08 of a shutout in the 7-1 victory.

He is 3-0-0 with a 0.38 goals-against average and .986 save percentage. His outings against Connecticut earned him the Big Ten's third star of the week.

Dobeš was unflappable on and off the ice.

When asked following the overtime victory what his mind-set was entering in relief with a 3-0 deficit, he matter-of-factly said, "This is my job, so I was ready. I mean, this is Ohio State. You always need to be ready and everyone has high expectations, so just jump in and do my job."

He made six saves during the three-on-three, five-minute sudden death overtime, including a breakaway. He kept the Buckeyes in the game long enough for Riedell, the former Lake Superior State defenseman, to skate up

the ice and crash the net to take a pass from senior transfer Jake Wise for his first goal as a Buckeye.

"I knew there wasn't much time," Riedell said. "I think there was like 15 seconds left, so I just tried to go to the net and see what happens."

Rohlik hopes a comeback like that can put aside any talk of repeating the miserable 2020-21 season.

"Last year was a tough year for all of us," he said. "We've got a lot of new guys over the last couple of years, and it's just a different feeling. I like our group. I like the mojo we bring every day, and it showed."

"That's the one thing I'm most proud of. I know it's early in the year, but not a lot of times have you seen where you're down three-zip and you come back and win a game like that. That, to me, is the most important thing that's come out of this. Never give up."

While Dobeš was a major reason the Buckeyes were able to win the opener against Connecticut, he still needed his teammates to score in order to pull off the rally, although it should be noted that he did get an assist on the goal by senior Quinn Preston that made it 3-1.

"You score that first goal, and all of a sudden, you have life. I think that's what happened with us," Rohlik said. "Once we finally scored that first goal, it was kind of like, 'All right, we've got this.'"

Freshman Cam Thiesing cut the deficit to 3-2 at 17:27 by roofing a backhand from the left circle for his first goal.

The Buckeyes killed 63 seconds of a Connecticut two-man advantage early in the third period and then got the equalizer at 13:37 when freshman Georgii Merkulov scored with a snap-shot from between the circles for his first goal as well.

During the second game, Dobeš made 12 saves in the first period before sophomore Patrick Guzzo made it 1-0 at 4:45 of the second period by converting a pass from junior Matt Cassidy for his first goal of the season.

"I thought it was a good team performance," Rohlik said afterward. "Certainly (Dobeš) looked comfortable and confident. I think he just rode the momentum from (the previous night). You can kind of see when someone has that confidence and swagger, which he does. I give our team a lot of credit, too. They were there helping him out."

The teams were skating four-on-four due to coincidental penalties in the third period when Preston dished to Treloar for his second goal of the season at 12:10 to make it 2-0. Junior Tate Singleton got an empty-net goal at 17:24 for his team-high third goal.

Singleton had to be relieved to score after getting called for a crosschecking early in the period that led to a Connecticut power play.

"One minute you want to grab him and tell him, 'We don't need that.' The next minute you want to pat him on the back. I guess that's kind of how it goes," Rohlik said. "He brings it every day. He works extremely hard, and certainly it was a nice goal for him to get there at the end."

Working Overtime

Rohlik admitted after the overtime game that his team had not practiced three-on-three

much during the weeks prior to the series.

"We haven't done a lot of that actually," he said. "Unfortunately, all of a sudden earlier in the year as a coach, you think you've got a lot of things covered. Then sure enough, you get thrown into a three-on-three like that."

He said picking the right combinations, which almost always involves two forwards and a defenseman, is based on how the players performed during the game. Rohlik also relies on assistant coach JB Bittner for input on the forwards.

"It's really a feel thing for us up front and then try to rotate through," Rohlik said.

Time Off

It wasn't ideal to have an open weekend Oct. 22-23 because it came so early in the season compared to a later point when a break from the schedule might be more welcome.

Still, Rohlik planned to take advantage of it, noting that with the Oct. 2 exhibition game against Western Michigan followed by four regular-season games, he had plenty of video to review.

"I think we're going to turn it into a positive," he said. "It was good that we ended up playing Western. Playing that game, playing two more weekends and having a bye weekend, it gives you a month into it to see where are we and as coaches we can go, 'OK, what are the top three things we've got to continue to harp on and look at?' It's going to be a good reset."



FILE PHOTO

OFF AND RUNNING – Ohio State men's ice hockey coach Steve Rohlik has to be pleased with his team's start to the 2021-22 season. The Buckeyes boasted a 3-1-0 record following a sweep against nonconference opponent Connecticut.

A Look Ahead

The Buckeyes open Big Ten play by hosting Michigan State on Oct. 29 (at 6 p.m.) and 30 (at 2 p.m.). The homestand continues Nov. 5-6 vs. Penn State at 7 p.m. and 5 p.m., respectively.

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Offensive Juggernaut Makes IU Latest Casualty

Remember that time when people said C.J. Stroud wasn't the guy for Ohio State? That he didn't have the arm talent or mental makeup to thrive at the position? That the Buckeyes were doing themselves a disservice by not starting Kyle McCord or even Quinn Ewers? Good times, those were.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Looking back, it's pretty comical that people were making judgments on the kid two games into his career as a starter – even after he threw for nearly 500 yards against Oregon. Yes, he missed some open throws during the first few contests, and it did appear that maybe things were moving a tad too fast for him. But he just turned 20, and he is manning one of the most demanding roles in college football – Ohio State quarterback. The spotlight is bright and often unforgiving, and Stroud was in the heat early.

That was then.

And now? Stroud is the top quarterback in the nation according to ESPN's Total QBR formula and is making a weekly Heisman Trophy statement for himself with wildly consistent play. Gone are the hiccups, and in their place are confident throws almost always placed where only his guy can catch them, as well as a much better command of the offense.

During the first couple of games, Stroud looked confused and often held the ball too long. Now, it's smooth as a newborn's bottom as he distributes the football to whoever is open. A shoulder injury played a role in his somewhat erratic early play, but with a week of rest he's looked like a new man.

Take a five-minute look at Ohio State's offensive design and you'll see that it's almost impossible to stop. Ryan Day has devised a

simple yet complex array of pass routes that put a lot of pressure on defenses to be almost perfect in execution. Day is also very good at devising game plans that change weekly, based on the personnel of opponents. It may be personnel groupings or flipping the side of the field for the X and Y receivers, but one thing is certain – it's the best offense in college football at this moment.

Fans have sometimes wondered why the backups don't shine in OSU's offense – and that's justified considering how much talent the Buckeyes have amassed in recent seasons. Day believes in using his best players, which means that there will be limited touches. If Chris Olave doesn't get you, Garrett Wilson will. If both are neutralized, Jaxon Smith-Njigba can work his magic out of the slot. And if you commit wholeheartedly to stopping the pass, the rushing attack will gash you to death.

It works because Day recruits players to fit his basic scheme. OSU is by nature a tight inside zone team, so runs are generally designed to go between the tackles. The interior line play is paramount in that scheme, which is why Thayer Munford was moved inside and why Paris Johnson Jr. is serving a year at guard before a likely move to tackle in 2022.

That's not to say Day won't go with a dose of outside zone if the matchup dictates. There was actually more of that against Indiana, which allowed TreVeyon Henderson to get to the edge and explode through the massive holes the O-line was opening.

In the passing game, Day looks for a quarterback who can get the ball out quickly and to the proper spot. Stroud fits that to perfection, as his accuracy has been uncanny (73.8 percent since his return to the lineup). He's not afraid to throw over the middle, as one particular first-quarter throw between three defenders to Smith-Njigba showed. The play was worth 32 yards and set up Ohio State's second touchdown.

Day also isn't afraid to change things once the game begins, as he did in designed plays to tight end Jeremy Ruckert. The senior came

into the game with just 11 receptions but ended the night with five catches for 47 yards and two scores. The first was a simple 2-yard grab that was out of Stroud's hand almost before Ruckert was ready, and the second was a great display of athleticism as Ruckert went up and snagged it from IU defender Aaron Casey in the end zone.

It's not a stretch to say this offense could put pressure on any defense in college football, though I will admit that it could be a bit tougher against a team such as Georgia, which has a dominating defensive line and young guys in coverage who love to press and play tight man coverage.

It seems like a lot for players to digest, which is why Day puts such a premium on practice during the week.

"It's just a matter of going out there every single day in practice and trying to execute at a high level and being really hard on ourselves," he said. "If we don't complete a pass or we miss a protection or something like that, we're hard on ourselves. And that's what you want."

The repetition may seem mundane to many, but it has turned Ohio State into a finely tuned offensive machine.

Stroud said that games are almost easy after the practices Ohio State goes through. There isn't a lot he isn't ready for, and that's a big reason he looks so much more relaxed at this point in the season.

"When you see things like that, I just think we're hitting and we have the momentum," Stroud said. "Everybody does a great job."

As good as Stroud has been, Henderson has been even better.

The Virginia product came into the Indiana game averaging almost 9.0 yards per carry and left the same way after churning out 81 yards on just nine totes. He also caught a 14-yard touchdown pass and is about as explosive as anyone in the college game.

"He's running hard," Day said. "I think he's playing through contact, and for a freshman to do that, that's good. The No. 1 thing is, he's taking care of the football, and that's what has to continue. If we're going to make a run at this thing, we've got to take care of the football. We cannot turn the ball over."

It's looking more and more like the Oregon loss was a speed bump for the Buckeyes, who have hit the throttle and zoomed their way back into contention for a College Football Playoff berth. Take a gander at some eye-popping numbers:

- OSU has won five straight overall, 25 in a row against conference foes (including Big Ten championship game victories), an FBS-leading 12 consecutive true road games and a conference-record 11 straight road games against league foes by double digits.
- Henderson has scored 14 TDs this season, four short of Maurice Clarett's school record for a freshman. He moved past Art Schlichter and Joel Payton – there's a blast from the past – for second after his tallies against Indiana.

The offense has gotten the headlines, but it's the defensive turnaround that has been a huge catalyst in Ohio State's improvement.

The Buckeyes have steadily climbed up the defensive rankings, ranking 21st in yards per play (4.9) after holding four straight opponents to less than five yards per play. OSU allowed at least five yards per play in each of the

first three games and more than six against Oregon and Tulsa.

After allowing an opening scoring drive against Indiana, OSU's stop unit stifled the Hoosiers, allowing just 128 yards on the night. Sure, there were injury issues with the Hoosiers and their quarterbacks, and the weather conditions didn't help. But it wasn't raining on only Indiana's side of the field. The Buckeyes were repeatedly in the IU backfield and made the Hoosiers look like a Pop Warner outfit on offense.

The play of the defense has spurred the offense to do its thing.

"That, to me, is where you just play with the ultimate confidence," Day said. "When you're getting the ball back at midfield like that, that's kind of the way it felt in 2019, and that's the way it felt again tonight. You feel it on the sideline. There's just so much confidence. And then the minute we get the ball back, we feel like we're going to score. When you get a three-and-out or you get a turnover, it steamrolls, and that's a great feeling as a coach. When we can get those stops like that, it makes a huge difference."

"I think the defense has confidence in the offense, the offense is getting a lot of confidence in the defense, we feel like we're playing pretty good on special teams. When you feel like that, when you're not on your own, you have a bunch of guys with you, that's when you have that confidence."

And a confident Ohio State is a very dangerous Ohio State.

Big Ten Overload

The SEC makes the headlines most seasons, but it's not a stretch to say that as a single division, the Big Ten East could just be the best in all of college football.

Sure, Penn State stubbing its toe against Illinois didn't help the cause, but both Michigan and Michigan State are unbeaten, and Ohio State has regained its footing and looks like one of the best three or four teams in college football. All of that power residing in one division is pretty impressive, though it's likely to change down the stretch as those four teams face off against each other.

Dandy Dozen

This week's rankings after the games of Oct. 23:

1. Georgia (7-0)
2. Cincinnati (7-0)
3. Alabama (7-1)
4. Ohio State (6-1)
5. Michigan (7-0)
6. Oklahoma (8-0)
7. Michigan State (7-0)
8. Oregon (6-1)
9. Pittsburgh (6-1)
10. Ole Miss (6-1)
11. Kentucky (6-1)
12. Wake Forest (7-0)

The ranks of the undefeated could thin very soon as Michigan takes on Michigan State on Oct. 30, the same day OSU hosts Penn State and Georgia resumes its annual showdown with Florida at the World's Largest Cocktail Party in Jacksonville.

It should be the beginning of a very interesting stretch run to the college football season.



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Buckeyes Turn Potential Land Mine Into IU Rout

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Remember back before the 2021 football season started, when everyone had the Indiana game circled as a potential test and pitfall for the Ohio State football team? By the time the Oct. 23 game with the Hoosiers finally rolled around, IU was a disappointing 2-4 and 0-3 in the Big Ten. Worse, the Hoosiers were without quarterback Michael Penix Jr., who – based on his performance against the Buckeyes last season – might have given the Hoosiers a glimmer of hope.

The Buckeyes quickly knocked new starting quarterback Jack Tuttle out of the game, and IU was left fielding a pair of inexperienced QBs. The result was a 54-7 Ohio State road victory.

Tuttle impressively marched the Hoosiers 75 yards on 15 plays, capping IU's first possession with a 7-yard touchdown pass to tight end Peyton Hendershot to tie the score at 7-7 with 2:58 to play in the first quarter. Indiana converted four third downs during the drive, each of seven yards or more. I suffered a brief moment of concern following the lengthy drive and score, not so much because I feared the Hoosiers, but because of how bizarre this season has been so far, with upcoming and highly-ranked opponent Penn State having already lost to lowly Illinois in nine overtimes earlier in the day.

Ohio State immediately responded with a quick five-play, 75-yard scoring march of its own. C.J. Stroud completed a pair of passes for 53 yards, and freshman phenom TreVeyon Henderson went the final 21 yards on the ground to make it 14-7. With Tuttle in the medical tent, the rout was on.

With Penix and Tuttle unavailable, it was difficult to tell what kind of strides the improving Ohio State defense made after the off-week, but I think it is safe to say the stop troops didn't take a step backward. IU gained only 53 yards after that initial drive, and while the defense was aided by the void at quarterback, that doesn't explain the Buckeyes' ability to hold IU to 48 net rushing yards on 37 attempts, a figure aided by five sacks for minus-19 yards. It also didn't hurt that the Buckeyes held Ty Fryfogle, who burned Ohio State for seven catches and 218 yards during last season's 42-35 scare, to just one catch for 30 yards this time around.

Had the Buckeyes only stayed static on defense, and even if the most difficult part of the schedule remains ahead, Ohio State is going to be a tough out based on its offense alone. Against Indiana, and despite a sometimes pouring rain, the Buckeyes racked up another 539 yards with 187 yards on the ground and 352 through the air.

Remember way, way back, when Buckeye fans were clamoring for coach and quarterback guru Ryan Day to bench C.J. Stroud? Raise your hand if you were one of them. It's OK to raise it because you know you were not alone. All Stroud has done in the three games since he took a Saturday off to rest his shoulder and regroup is complete 62 of 84 passes for 1,002 yards and 14 touchdowns without an interception and only one sack.

As I wrote last issue, that's getting into Dwayne Haskins/Justin Fields territory, and suddenly those favorable Heisman Trophy odds don't seem so far-fetched.

The thing that impressed me most about Stroud on the damp evening in Bloomington was his ability to see the whole field and all of his receivers. During the first half, when the outcome might have been considered still in doubt with OSU's first team still in, Stroud completed 16 of 21 passes. He hit Garrett Wilson five times for 59 yards, Jaxon Smith-Njigba four times for 59 yards, tight end Jeremy Ruckert four times for 45 yards and a touchdown, Chris Olave twice for 24 yards and a score, and Henderson once for 14

yards and another six points. That's spreading the wealth.

My only complaint – and it's not against Stroud because it's not his call – is that he wasn't taken out until the end of the third quarter with his team leading 51-7. There are still ranked teams to beat as well as Big Ten and national championships to be won, and Stroud is the man to lead the Buckeyes on that quest. On a rainy evening, there was no reason for him to still be out there and potentially taking his own trip to the medical tent.

In his two-plus years on the job, Day's reluctance to remove his starting quarterback in games that are under control remains one of my few complaints. The Buckeyes had already won the battle. Why lose the war?

Quick Hitters

- As has been chronicled in my weekly tight end watch, the tight ends have caught some passes this season. Nothing overwhelming, but they have catches from time to time.

The game with Indiana was the first time I felt that the tight ends were really part of the passing game plan. Ruckert took advantage of that and had one of the most productive games of his career, finishing with five catches for 47 yards and two scores. Cade Stover and Joe Royer added a reception each.

I wouldn't get used to it, though. It might have all been a ploy to make Penn State and the other upcoming teams on the schedule have to prepare for yet one more thing. We'll see if the big guys are put back on mothballs.

- As if opposing teams don't have enough to worry about when facing Ohio State, now they have to worry about Emeka Egbuka, who has injected an element of excitement and – more importantly – production into the kick return unit. He took a kick back 42 yards against the Hoosiers and had another 166 yards on four returns the game before against Maryland, including bursts of 67, 46 and 33 yards. For the last two games, he has averaged 41.6 yards on five returns.

That's a lot more exciting, and on average more than 16 yards of additional production, than that annoying fair catch.

- Just a few months ago, in the eyes of some Buckeye observers, Quinn Ewers was going to jump right from his junior year in high school to being the starting quarterback at Ohio State, leapfrogging older but also inexperienced quarterbacks such as Kyle McCord, Jack Miller and, of course, Stroud.

Fast-forward to the actual football season and Ewers isn't even found on the Ohio State depth chart. Read between the lines of this recent quote from Day: "He's doing a good job of starting to learn how to be a college football player, and there's a lot that comes with that. I think he's starting to get more accustomed to the day-to-day grind and what it's like. He's starting to get some buddies and that type of thing."

Sounds to me like a kid who should be a senior in high school rather than adjusting to college life – college life as a member of a big-time college football team.

To Vote Or Not To Vote

I love reading old BSBs because I always find something interesting that I had forgotten. While doing some research on another matter, I came across the fact that then-OSU head coach Jim Tressel created a bit of a mini-controversy

because he did not vote in the final 2006 USA Today coaches' poll, citing a potential conflict of interest.

Tressel's top-ranked Buckeyes had just defeated No. 2 Michigan in a "Game of the Century." That guaranteed Ohio State a spot in the BCS championship game since the BCS used a combination of polls and computer selection methods to determine its participants, a system that left the Wolverines and Florida just behind the Buckeyes with one loss each. The Gators had lost to No. 11 Auburn in week seven.

Tressel believed that his vote might have an impact on which team the Buckeyes faced.

"I thought it wasn't appropriate for us to cast a ballot with the circumstances as they were," Tressel said. "I thought Florida was deserving as was the University of Michigan."

"We felt it was somewhat of a conflict of interest given that we were going to be participating in the game, especially since it was narrowed to two teams."

Michigan head coach Lloyd Carr was not impressed with Tressel's non-vote.

"I thought it was real slick," Carr said.

Florida head coach Urban Meyer, on the other hand, understood the Ohio State coach's decision.

"I can understand exactly why Jim decided not to vote," Meyer said. "It's an imperfect system where if you can have someone's opinion, then all of a sudden things get spun and turned and talked about, and that's really a tough system to be involved in."

"That's why I'm never going to vote in the USA Today coaches' poll."

In light of the controversy he had created, Tressel was asked if he thought the coaches' poll should be eliminated from the BCS equation.

"I hope that I didn't infer that," he said. "It's a highly unique situation that Ohio State was in. I think everyone would agree to that. I happen to think coaches have a pretty good handle on who good football teams are."

As any Buckeye fan knows, Florida got the nod and upset the Buckeyes, 41-14, to win the 2006 national championship. Meyer's first of three titles as a college coach.

In a loosely related side note, Meyer posted a 12-3 record in bowl games. His losses were to Michigan in the Capital One Bowl (41-35) while with the Gators following the 2007 season (yes, he has actually lost to the Wolverines) and twice to Clemson at Ohio State following the 2013 (Orange Bowl, 40-35) and 2016 (Fiesta Bowl, 31-0) seasons.

Former Contributor Passes

Former Columbus Dispatch columnist Dick Fenlon passed away Oct. 11. I have always been proud of the fact that after his retirement from the Dispatch, Fenlon contributed several of his unique style of columns to BSB.

While his offerings to BSB were generally upbeat and historical in nature, during his lengthy career as a columnist, he could also hurl the barbs. Or as it said in his obituary, "Dick was never afraid of taking on the local sacred cows, whether they be college or pro. He chuckled when disgruntled fans mailed him a bus ticket and his column between two slices of bread."

I was able to track down four of Fenlon's pieces for BSB, which we posted Oct. 14 as part of our popular Reprint Thursday. Included were a story on longtime Ohio State team physician Dr.

Bob Murphy, a piece on OSU's 1957 national championship football team, a look back at Dick Beltz, the "goat" (and I don't mean greatest of all time) of the 1935 loss to Notre Dame, another so-called Game of the Century, and a story on Heisman Trophy winner Hop Cassidy playing both ways for the Buckeyes in the 1950s.

I always liked the story with Cassidy, who not only won the Heisman Trophy in 1955 but played on a national championship team for Ohio State in 1954. The story idea came up when the Buckeyes suddenly became a national championship contender in 2002 after Chris Gamble started playing both his original receiver position and in the defensive secondary as well.

Hop told Fenlon he loved the move.

"I think he's great," Cassidy said of Gamble. "He's a tough player. He's involved in everything. He goes after the ball. He tackles. For a player, it's a lot more fun to play both ways than just one way. If you're a good athlete, you should be playing both ways."

Cassidy knew a bit about being a great player because he was one.

"How can you call someone a great player when they never made a tackle, never intercepted a pass, never returned a punt, never returned a kickoff?" Hop, who did all those things, asked Fenlon. "You've got to play both ways in judging the great, great, great players."

I had forgotten about the story on Beltz, which ran upon his passing in October 2002.

Beltz had lost a fumble to give the Fighting Irish the chance to score the winning touchdown in the epic 18-13 victory against the Buckeyes in 1935. But to make matters worse, he had a shot to get Ohio State the ball back and protect the win, but he could not hold on to a potential interception just seconds later. And then Beltz was on coverage when Bill Shakespeare hit Wayne Milner for the game-winning touchdown.

I wish I could reprint Fenlon's story in this space because it is so well-written. Instead, you will have to go to BuckeyeSports.com and click on the "BSB Online" tab to read the well-crafted story.

But I did want to leave you with wisdom Beltz gave Fenlon in 1995, when Ohio State met Notre Dame for the first time since the 1930s.

"One thing I learned from that was not to blame," Beltz said. "I would never blame a boy for losing a game."

And what would Beltz tell that boy, Fenlon asked.

"Be unhappy that you didn't win," Beltz responded. "But remember, this is only four or five seconds in a lifetime. Don't let it bother you. Know what the value of it is and don't let it ruin your life."

Keels Will Be Signing

If you are in Columbus for the Penn State game, you might want to stop by the Barnes & Noble bookstore on North High Street on Oct. 29. Paul Keels, the radio voice of the Buckeyes, will be signing his book, "The Best in the Land: The Story of Brutus Buckeye," from 6 to 7:30 pm.

The book tells the story of Brutus Buckeye from nut to beloved mascot. Young Brutus dreams of one day playing football for his favorite team, the Ohio State Buckeyes. He works hard, but when his chance arrives, it's not as a player.

It's a story of team spirit and perseverance that will appeal both to young readers and life-long fans.

Barnes & Noble is located at 1598 North High Street (at the corner of 11th and High) with a parking garage available off Ninth or 11th. For more information, call Barnes & Noble at (614) 607-6200.

FOR ATHLETES

HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that causes your brain to rapidly move inside your skull.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

- Headache, nausea, vomiting,
- balance problems, dizziness,
- double or blurred vision,
- sensitivity to light or noise, feeling
- sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy,
- just not "feeling right" or
- "feeling down," memory
- problems, confusion, and
- trouble sleeping.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?



REPORT IT. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

GET CHECKED OUT. If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL. A concussion can make it harder to do everyday activities, such as concentrating at school. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH AND PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain and can even be fatal.

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>

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Ohio Department of Health

