

Offense Sputters In Tough Win

Ohio State Dodges Disaster In 26-17 Win At Nebraska

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The last time Ohio State redshirt freshman signal-caller C.J. Stroud threw 54 passes in a game, head coach Ryan Day spoke afterward of the need to pick up the pieces and look forward, of an unbalanced team, one that was still looking for its contributors and one that was nowhere near its goals and one that might never reach them.

Day took stock that day of a group that was severely outplayed even though the final score didn't reflect it and returned to his office the following week in such desperate need of fixes that he reworked his defensive staff and in turn the defensive scheme of his team in the middle of the season. That included passing the play-calling duties from coordinator Kerry Coombs to secondary coach Matt Barnes. Of course, the game in question is Ohio State's Sept. 11 loss to Oregon.

In Stroud's second game with 54 pass attempts this season, Day had far less to gripe about after the game, speaking instead about the depth of the Big Ten and the challenge that it provides in late-season road trips. He certainly wasn't pleased with Ohio State's 26-17 victory against Nebraska – yet another close scare for a team that many thought had moved past such outings – but this was no Oregon, even if the quarterback stat line was nearly identical.

The goal for the Buckeyes right now, as it had been a week earlier when they survived a similar scare from Penn State, is survival. And for another week, the Buckeyes staved off a second defeat and kept their hopes for postseason play alive.

"No," Day replied simply when asked if his team was getting tired of merely surviving. "It's great to see our guys win like this. I'm very proud of our defense, proud of the special teams – there were really a lot of great performances. When you play nine conference games, and your other game is Oregon, you have to bring it week in and week out.

"And we have a young team. We have to learn that it's every single week you show up, and the defense did that today. They played really well and it's hard to win in this conference, on the road, coming off of an emotional, late game two weeks in a row. Coming in here for an 11 a.m. (local) kick, it was going to be a challenge. We



SONNY BROCKWAY

INCREASED WORKLOAD — Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud (7) goes back to attempt one of his 54 passes at Big Ten rival Nebraska on Nov. 6. Stroud completed 36 of those attempts for 405 yards and two touchdowns, and he helped the Buckeyes secure a 26-17 victory against the Cornhuskers.

knew that. Certainly, we had too many penalties on offense, just shooting ourselves in the foot across the board.

"I thought the drive at the end was huge to go get a field goal and make it a two-score game," the OSU head coach continued. "Certainly, we're going to watch this and think, 'Boy, we could have won by three touchdowns or more if we clean some things up,' but this is a good team. They're a good defense. We knew that coming in. I said that, and I believe it. It's great to get wins on the road, but not easy to do."

Win or not, Ohio State would probably like to address the elephant in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center in the days following its trip to Lincoln. Things don't generally work very well for the Buckeyes when they can't run the ball, and for the second

straight week, they couldn't run the ball. Despite the return of spot contributor Master Teague and a clean bill of health for starter TreVeyon Henderson and backup Miyan Williams, the rushing attack was flatter than against the Nittany Lions, when Henderson at least had a 68-yard run upon which to hang his hat.

Against the Cornhuskers and their stout defensive front, Henderson mustered only 92 yards on 21 carries. He didn't find the end zone for the first time in his Ohio State career and averaged only 4.4 yards per carry, another season low for the Virginia product who had been next-to-perfect in his first sea-

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

It was another tough win for Ohio State, playing within a score of Nebraska all the way down to the wire. But the Buckeyes managed to escape Lincoln with another victory and some new Buckeye leaves, courtesy of the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff and posters at the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum.

Chase Brown, BSB: Noah Ruggles should come to Ohio State's next game wearing bright blue spandex, a red cape and a big "S" across his chest. The North Carolina transfer kicker replicated his perfect 4-for-4 performance against Penn State from the week previous against the Cornhuskers on Saturday afternoon, converting from 26, 46, 35 and again from 46.

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: Once again, Jaxon Smith-Njigba gets the nod from me for a Buckeye leaf, as he was just masterful in place of junior wideout Garrett Wilson in Lincoln. The sophomore from Texas hauled in a school-record 15 receptions for 240 yards, shattering the reception high mark previously set by David Boston and scoring a touchdown from 75 yards out to tie everything together nicely.

There was just no guarding this guy. On a day that saw nothing come easy for the Buckeye offense, Smith-Njigba looked effortless in demolishing the Cornhusker secondary, serving often as the only part of the Ohio State offense that seemed to be working as intended. The Buckeyes certainly shouldn't be throwing the ball 54 times in a football game again anytime soon, but with Smith-Njigba, the more targets the better as this season enters its final stages.

Braden Moles, BSB: Though Steele Chambers didn't play the whole game after a targeting penalty against Penn State last week, the linebacker still made himself a factor in the win over Nebraska.

The sophomore finished third on the team with six tackles despite only playing in the final 30 minutes and had his first career interception with a game-clinching pick of Nebraska quarterback Adrian Martinez. It was the only turnover forced by Ohio State in the game.

Ohio State's defense struggled throughout the contest, so the Buckeyes could be looking to bounce back next week with Chambers in the lineup for the whole game.

Mark Rea, BSB: Obviously, Jaxon Smith-Njigba deserves a helmet full of Buckeye leaves for his historic afternoon, but the rest of my leaves are reserved for Noah Ruggles and Jesse Mirco. Ruggles kicked four field

goals for the second game in a row, including a 46-yarder with 1:29 remaining that made it a two-score game and ended any possibility of a late Nebraska comeback.

Meanwhile, Mirco averaged 40.5 yards on four punts, including burying the Cornhuskers deep in their own territory twice in the second half. The OSU kickers also negated any kind of return game Nebraska might have had. NU got only 19 yards on the one kickoff it was able to return and just 2 yards on its only punt return. It's safe to say that without the contributions of Ruggles and Mirco, Ohio State's playoff chances would have evaporated.

bstu9: Noah Ruggles gets a bunch of leaves from me for saving us for the second straight week.

Terrier Buck: Honestly, I may have overlooked someone, but only JSN and Ruggles seemed to play well.

PeyoteBuck: Smith-Njigba was mighty, but Ruggles and Mirco with their flawless performances were once again the backbone of another Buckeye victory.

BuckeyeScott: Yes, Noah Ruggles is rock-solid and Jaxon Smith-Njigba is a work of art. Also give Jesse Mirco some leaves. I think he did fairly well today with a 40.5-yard average and a 52-yard-long punt. Make sure you give those Buckeye leaves to all the special teams dudes. Finally, we had five sacks today, so the defensive line gets some Buckeye leaves, too!

Mcarr: Why no love (or leaves) for Luke Wypler? If he doesn't fall on that fumble, this conversation might be completely different.

Poster That Harley Built: Good call on Wypler. Did you guys downgrade him because of the inconsistent play of the offensive line?

AnthonyBuckeye: Jaxon Smith-Njigba for his fabulous and gritty play and winning the game with Noah Ruggles for the Buckeyes, Chris Olave and TreVeyon Henderson for warrior-like performances, the entire DL for a dominating performance, especially Tyreke Smith for a great game, Jack Sawyer for playing with explosive energy from the get-go until he appeared to get hurt, and Zach Harrison, Ronnie Hickman, Cody Simon, Steele Chambers and all their defensive team mates for a great team performance and stifling an emotionally charged Nebraska QB, and the punter Jesse Mirco for downing so many punts inside the 10-yard line.

R1TBDBITL: A leaf for special teams, with an extra leaf for Ruggles.



From The Message Board

Giant-killer Purdue comes to the Horseshoe Nov. 13. The Boilermakers are winless in their last nine trips to Ohio Stadium and haven't won in Columbus since 1988, so are you worried at all about them pulling another upset and why? Here are some of the responses from the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum:

"They are Purdue. Upsets is what they do. Especially against Ohio State."

– Mcarr

"At this point in the season, every team on our schedule must be taken with absolute seriousness. But if Buckeyes play at their normal level with minimal mistakes, they should win by 2 TDs."

– Terrier Buck

"At some point, this Buckeye team needs to play a complete game, starting with this game. Purdue does not play the same when at The Shoe. The Buckeye DL and LBs must have a great day putting maximum pressure on the Purdue QB. The offensive line strategy of having the five best players on the field is not working. With four tackles, the pass blocking is very good but the run-blocking isn't working. A run-blocking line needs two guards to go with the tackles and center. Tackles can't/don't get upfield to the next level. Purdue will be a little flat after beating Michigan State. Ohio State needs to play a clean game. Thank heavens for Noah Ruggles."

– Byron McNutt

"The Buckeyes are the only team that will beat the Buckeyes. Play mistake-free football and they roll into the B1G Championship."

– BuckeyeScott

"My main worry is that many offensive players appear to be banged up. The three star wide receivers are visibly banged up. TreVeyon Henderson is obviously not full-go and Ryan Day doesn't seem to be calling as many run plays as he would like to. That we haven't seen much of Master Teague for several games and that Stroud

appears to be playing hurt like in the beginning of the season all add up to the same worry. Maybe the Buckeyes should rest Stroud again for a game to get him going for the stretch run."

– AnthonyBuckeye

"Isn't that 1988 game the one where the teenage quarterback threw the same screen pass to the fullback over and over again and it kept working? Kind of like the Oregon game this year. That wasn't a game that helped Coop get off on the right foot with Buckeye fans. I don't know that I consider the 2000 loss when the Boilermakers had Drew Brees an upset, but 2009 with Terrelle Pryor at the controls certainly was. 2018? What can I say?"

– Poster That Harley Built

"The run game must be established to set up the open passing routes. Stroud plays better when he knows the running backs will carry their share of the load. He looks more relaxed knowing the backs can get it done. He was forcing the pass against Nebraska. Set the run to open receivers."

– John Lanning

"Purdue has a head of steam after beating MSU, coming to the Horseshoe. The Bucks looked sketchy against Nebraska. That combo worries me."

– PeyoteBuck

"I am extremely worried about this game for a couple of reasons. The lack of execution in the red zone by the Bucks the last two games and the fact that Purdue can throw the ball effectively. Ohio State will have to bring their A-game to avoid the upset."

– bstu9

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Take A Cue From Tress

I never thought during the Tressel era that I would ever lobby for a Buckeye team to run the football more. Then, the Nebraska game happened. Ryan Day inexplicably forgot that we have a top-five running back and an NFL offensive line.

At several key moments during the game that screamed for a run, Day opted to pass (the most egregious being the first-and-10 from the Nebraska 34 inside two minutes to play that darn near cost us the game).

As we prepare for some cold-weather, smashmouth league games, Day had better find some sort of running rhythm or we won't be making the trip to Indianapolis on Dec. 4, much less to the CFP. A small dose of "Tressel-ball" seems to be in order, coach!

**Brian Copfer
Cincinnati**

Undisciplined Bunch

This year's team may be a bunch of

four- and five-star recruits, but it's also the dumbest, most undisciplined bunch I've ever seen. Holding, offsides, illegal receiver downfield, can't block worth anything on the line. Is it coaching, teaching or just, like I said, no discipline? Ohio State leads the country in flags, I think.

Or maybe Ryan Day is not the guy we thought. Kerry Coombs was revealed, who's next? Last but not least, which Stroud is going to show up? The future does not look too bright.

**Rich Foust
Troy, Ohio**
(FYI: Ohio State's 62 penalties this sea-

son place it tied for 88th in the nation. Ole Miss leads the country with 89. Ed.)

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Buckeyes Continue To Do What's Hard

During the final two minutes of its 26-17 victory against upset-minded Nebraska, Ohio State had several chances to lose the football game. And yet, the Buckeyes prevailed – again.

There are two ways to tell the story. In one, Ohio State – a double-digit favorite against every team it has played so far this year – failed again to comfortably put away an inferior opponent. The Cornhuskers entered the game with six losses and will probably fire their head coach at season's end. Meanwhile, the Buckeyes were fifth in the initial College Football Playoff rankings and presumably not only need to win the remainder of their games, they need to win them convincingly.

Beauty is always in the eye of the beholder, of course, but no one watching the herky-jerky way the game in Lincoln unfolded could call beautiful a nine-point victory against a team spinning its wheels in a Nebraska mudhole.

And that mudhole just as easily could have swallowed the Buckeyes. When C.J. Stroud fumbled inside the two-minute mark of the fourth quarter and the ball bounced backward toward midfield, Buckeye Nation suddenly developed a lump in its collective throat the size of a grapefruit.

First of all, why in the name of Pete Johnson was Ohio State throwing the ball in that situation? First-and-10 at the Nebraska 34, protecting a 23-17 lead, trying to either run out the clock or get within field-goal range for Noah “Mr. Perfect” Ruggles, and the Buckeyes are throwing the football?

Stroud got flushed from the pocket and stripped of the ball, and there it went, squirting away, Ohio State's championship hopes with it. All the Cornhuskers had to do was fall on the loose football, use the remaining time to drive for a touchdown and they would have had their first win against a top-10 opponent since 2015.

But OSU center Luke Wypler, using some technique he said he picked up watching (but not participating in) fumble recovery drills, managed to get to the loose football ahead of three Nebraska defenders. Disaster averted – at least for the time being.

The 11-yard loss on the play, and subsequent timeout taken by Nebraska at the 1:42 mark, meant the Buckeyes had to return to the air if they wanted to get Ruggles back to within his range. Stroud completed a 5-yard dink to Jaxon Smith-Njigba on second-and-21 and then dumped an old-fashioned screen pass to TreVeyon Henderson, who picked up 11 yards to get Ruggles in position to kick his game-clinching fourth field goal.

It was a second straight nine-point win against a team the Buckeyes were supposed to curb-stomp, proving perhaps that the team that pulverized the likes of Akron, Rutgers and Maryland wasn't as good as advertised. Several posters on BSB's Fan Forum offered that Ohio State “didn't deserve to win” – whatever that's supposed to mean – while one reporter actually had the temerity to ask Ryan Day if his team was getting tired of merely surviving. The coach's one-word answer: “No.”

A win is a win no matter how you criticize it, and one only needs to look at the rest of what was happening in college football to realize just how difficult it is to win a football game.

How hard must it be to pull an upset when nearly everyone is predicting that upset? And still, somehow Purdue did it again, rolling to a 40-29 victory against No. 3 Michigan State

for the Boilermakers' second win this year against a top-five opponent. As things turned out, the Spartans apparently used too much emotional capital against Michigan the week before. Winning is hard, after all.

North Carolina opened the season No. 10 in the rankings, but Mack Brown's team was a disappointing 4-4 when it hosted un-

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

defeated Wake Forest. The No. 9 Demon Deacons had 615 yards of total offense and their quarterback accounted for seven touchdowns, but the Tar Heels stormed back from a 14-point deficit late in the third quarter to win a 58-55 shootout. It marked the second year in a row that Wake had blown a big lead late to UNC, and I'm sure everyone connected with the Deacons would tell you that winning is hard.

Defending national champion Alabama discovered that just because a team has a coach finishing out the season after already being fired doesn't mean they're easy pickings. The Crimson Tide barely escaped a second loss this season to an unranked team with a 20-14 win against LSU, proving once again that winning is hard.

Fourth-ranked Oregon looked everything but the fourth-best team in the nation with a 10-point victory against a four-loss Washington team, but at least the Ducks won. Sixth-ranked Cincinnati nearly fumbled away its undefeated season against a five-loss Tulsa team, but the Bearcats somehow managed to prevail.

No. 12 Baylor, No. 13 Auburn, No. 17 Mississippi State and No. 18 Kentucky can't say the same because, you know, winning is hard.

Through 10 weeks of the 2021 college football season, there have been a record 42 teams ranked in The Associated Press writers' poll that have lost to unranked opponents. In other words, the rankings have meant little against upstart poll assassins.

There really isn't a team that steps on a field anywhere in college football that isn't prone to a subpar performance. That includes Georgia, which might make winning look easy with a gaudy average margin of victory at nearly 32 points. But the Bulldogs had an early-season scare against a three-loss Clemson team and will get their chance to once again prove their bona fides Dec. 4 against Alabama in the SEC Championship Game.

After Michigan State's loss to Purdue, it is presumable that Ohio State will move into the top four of the playoff rankings when they are revealed Nov. 9. Of course, that presumption might be presumptuous since OSU dropped a spot in the latest AP rankings. Whether or not the Buckeyes “deserve” to be in the final four of the College Football Player is a discussion for those who don't seem to understand just how difficult it is to win football games.

Apparently appreciating a win is hard, too.

Remembering A Prankster

Those of you who read this column with any regularity know that Rex Kern is my go-to

source for information about the late 1960s and early 1970s era of Ohio State football. The former quarterback is a fountain of insight and great stories regarding Woody Hayes, his teammates and the football program in general.

Unfortunately, it seems every time we visit on the phone these days, it is to get Kern's recollections of some former teammate who has passed away. This past week, it was former Ohio State quarterback and Baltimore Colts halfback Tom Matte, who died Nov. 2 at the age of 82.

I interviewed Matte a couple of times over the years – a pretty surreal experience for a kid who grew up watching the Colts halfback play in Super Bowl III and set a game record for most yards per carry, a mark that still stands. But as with Kern and nearly every other former player I have talked with over the years, Matte was patient, astute and extremely generous with his time.

It didn't take very long for Matte to reveal his fun-loving personality. About five minutes into our first phone conversation, I could hear his wife, Judy, call to him, asking who he was talking to.

“Just some writer from Ohio State,” Matte said. “Nobody, really.”

All I heard next was a hearty laugh followed by, “Now ... where were we?”

Apparently I was just the latest to fall victim to Matte's sharp wit. Kern said it was that sense of humor that sometimes got Matte in trouble with his teammates – although he really didn't seem to care.

“We were in training camp with the Colts one summer, and honeybees kept trying to get into our helmets through the ear holes,” Kern said. “Well, Matte gets the idea of walking up behind somebody and making a buzzing sound while sticking a long blade of grass in their ear hole. Of course, the guy would rip off his helmet only to find Matte rolling on the ground laughing.”

Kern would have the last laugh, however, although it was unintentional.

“We're getting ready to play the Oakland Raiders, and I'm walking off the field after practice thinking about what Kenny Stabler is going to do and whether or not I'm going to be able to cover Fred Biletnikoff,” Kern said. “Suddenly, I hear this buzzing sound and feel this thing in my ear. I had been walking with my head down, and as I raised up quickly, I caught Matte flush in the face with the back of my helmet.”

“I looked down and he's bleeding from the mouth with two chipped teeth. I thought, ‘Oh, no! I've killed Tom Matte!’ ”

Once Kern got to the locker room, some of his veteran teammates gave him a sour look before Hall of Fame defensive end Bubba Smith approached him. As a smile broke over Smith's face, he said, “Finally! Matte finally got what was coming to him.”

Kern said he called Matte at home later that evening to apologize. Expecting a firm chewing-out, Matte instead said with a chuckle, “Don't worry about it, Rex. I needed my teeth fixed anyway, and now the team is going to have to pay for it.”

There was another story Kern told about the time Matte threw a block against legendary Raiders defensive back Jack Tatum and the former Ohio State All-American's reaction to it. But that's another story for another time. Let's just say the ol' Assassin was not too pleased and leave it at that.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

WR Wilson Day-To-Day With Reported Concussion

OSU junior receiver Garrett Wilson did not play against Nebraska after the star wideout unexpectedly showed up on the pregame unavailability report.

Several OSU media outlets reported Wilson was suffering from a concussion, but Ohio State head coach Ryan Day did not reveal what caused Wilson to miss the game.

"We'll see on Garrett," Day said about the receiver's availability going forward. "I think it'll probably go to day-to-day starting (the day after the Nebraska game). Hopefully, we will get him back for next week."

Wilson took to Twitter before the Buckeyes took on the Cornhuskers, claiming that he is "all good" and indicating he is confident in his status for the Buckeyes' next few games.

"For those asking, I am all good! I appreciate the prayers," Wilson wrote. "Can't wait to watch them boys ball here soon against Nebraska. Go Bucks!"

Ohio State's other wide receivers stepped up in Wilson's absence, including sophomore Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who broke the program's single-game record for receptions. Smith-Njigba had 15 catches, breaking David Boston's record of 14 set during a 31-27 loss to Penn State in 1997, for 240 yards and a touchdown. He is the first Ohio State receiver to surpass the 200-yard mark in receiving since Santonio Holmes in 2004.

Chris Olave caught seven passes for

61 yards and scored his 10th touchdown of the season, bringing his career total to 32. Olave is just two touchdowns shy of Boston's program record of 34 career touchdown receptions.

Backup QB Miller Cited For OVI

Ohio State redshirt freshman quarterback Jack Miller was cited for operating a vehicle while intoxicated in Columbus on the night of Nov. 4. The initial police report provided no further details.

"Obviously, we are thankful nobody was hurt," Day told reporters the following day. "As you can assume, he is struggling a bit right now, but again, we're thankful nobody was hurt."

In recent cases, like that of quarterback J.T. Barrett in 2015 or safety Marcus Hooker this past offseason, Ohio State has moved to suspend a player similarly cited for a game or two. Barrett missed one game while Hooker early in the season appeared to be on a suspension that was never officially announced beyond the initial team release.

Miller has served as Ohio State's No. 3 quarterback behind starter C.J. Stroud and backup Kyle McCord. He has thrown 14 passes, completing seven for 101 yards with no touchdowns or interceptions. Those are the first passes Miller has thrown at the collegiate level after he didn't see any opportunities to attempt a pass as a freshman – though he did rush for one score in 2020.

This season, he has played in four games, earning most of his snaps against Akron when Stroud sat out with a shoulder injury and McCord earned the starting nod. Miller went 5 of 8 against the Zips for 66 yards and rushed one time for 8 yards. His only other completions on the year came against Indiana when he was 2 of 3 passing for 35 yards.

OSU Slips In AP Poll, Debuts At No. 5 In CFP

Ohio State's nine-point win at Nebraska did not impress The Associated



SONNY BROCKWAY

MISSED YOU – OSU junior receiver Garrett Wilson (5) did not make the trip to Nebraska as he dealt with what was reported as a concussion. Head coach Ryan Day called Wilson's status day-to-day and was hopeful the receiver could return to action Nov. 13 at home against Purdue.

Press writers and did nothing to change the minds of those who vote in the AFCA coaches' polls. What the win means as far as the only rankings that matter – the one that determines placement in the College Football Playoff – was unclear until

those rankings were released Nov. 9.

The Buckeyes dropped a spot from No. 5 to No. 6 in the AP poll and remained steady at No. 5 in the coaches' poll, the same spot they occupied in the first CFP rankings of the year, released Nov. 2.

Who Is The Greatest Quarterback In Ohio State History?

Options:

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

Instructions:

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

Comments:



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2021 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	Record, Last Result
Sept. 2	at Minnesota	W, 45-31	Fox	6-3, 14-6 loss to Illinois
Sept. 11	OREGON*	L, 35-28	Fox	8-1, 26-16 win over Washington
Sept. 18	TULSA*	W, 41-20	FS1	3-6, 28-20 loss to Cincinnati
Sept. 25	AKRON	W, 59-7	BTN	2-7, 31-25 loss to Ball State
Oct. 2	at Rutgers	W, 52-13	BTN	4-5, 52-3 loss to Wisconsin
Oct. 9	MARYLAND	W, 66-17	Fox	5-4, 31-14 loss to Penn State
Oct. 23	at Indiana*	W, 54-7	ABC	2-7, 29-7 loss to Michigan
Oct. 30	PENN STATE	W, 33-24	ABC	6-3, 31-14 win over Maryland
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	W, 26-17	ABC	3-7, 26-17 loss to Ohio State
Nov. 13	PURDUE	3:30 p.m.	ABC	6-3, 40-29 win over Mich. State
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE	TBA	TBA	8-1, 40-29 loss to Purdue
Nov. 27	at Michigan	Noon	Fox	8-1, 29-7 win over Indiana
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	Fox	

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

It was another topsy-turvy week during which two more previously undefeated teams – Michigan State and Wake Forest – lost for the first time while several others in the upper echelon of the polls struggled.

Georgia remains the unanimous No. 1 team among the writers and the coaches. Cincinnati remained No. 2 in the AP poll with Alabama breathing down its neck at No. 3. Oklahoma and Oregon, which leapfrogged the Buckeyes, round out the top five.

Behind the Buckeyes is Notre Dame at No. 7 while Michigan State dropped three spots to No. 8. Michigan and Oklahoma State finish off the AP's top 10.

Meanwhile, the coaches have Alabama in the No. 2 spot followed by Cincinnati, Oklahoma and Ohio State. Oregon is sixth followed by Notre Dame, Michigan, Michigan State and Oklahoma State.

Three other Big Ten teams are also ranked. The AP has Iowa at No. 19, Wisconsin at No. 20 and Penn State at No. 23. The coaches ranked the Hawkeyes 14th, the Nittany Lions 23rd and the Badgers 24th.

On Nov. 2, the first College Football Playoff rankings were announced. Georgia held down the top spot followed by Alabama, Michigan State and Oregon.

The first two teams out of the four play-off spots were Ohio State and Cincinnati. Michigan was at No. 7 followed by Oklahoma, Wake Forest and Notre Dame.

Stroud Reveals Severity Of Shoulder Injury

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud told the Big Ten Network on Nov. 4 that a shoulder injury sustained in fall camp was exacerbated by a hit he took in the season opener against Minnesota.

"Fall camp, I had stressed my rotator cuff," Stroud told BTN. "In the Minnesota game, I got a hit right on my shoulder and separated my AC joint, so that one wasn't fun. It was kind of painful."

There was an open practice near the end of preseason when Stroud did not throw, but at the time, Day described it as a day of rest for his redshirt freshman.

Stroud then completed 63 of 101 passes (62.4 percent) for 863 yards, eight touchdowns and three interceptions in the first three games of the season, struggling with accuracy at times.

In week four, Day gave Stroud the week off and McCord started against Akron. He threw for 319 yards and two touchdowns during a 59-7 win against the Zips and won Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors in the process.

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.

Stroud returned against Rutgers and has since vaulted into Heisman Trophy contention after completing 120 of 172 passes (69.8 percent) for 1,712 yards, 17 touchdowns and two interceptions in five straight victories.

"That week of rest really helped me," Stroud said. "It helped me just really gain back my confidence and my strength in my shoulder."

Cage Coming Into His Own At Defensive Tackle

More than 700 unread text messages help define how much others think of Jerron Cage. The unselfish Ohio State defensive tackle, who experienced a highlight-reel moment when he returned a fumble 57 yards for a touchdown against Penn State, never seeks the spotlight but somehow that spotlight always seems to find the 6-2, 305-pound product of Winton Woods High School in Cincinnati.

After Cage became perhaps the largest player ever (in terms of weight, anyway) to score a touchdown for the Buckeyes, his defensive line teammates crowded around him on the sideline, waving towels and helping him cool down.

Cage quickly clarified that defensive ends Tyreke Smith and Zach Harrison, who knocked the ball loose from Penn State quarterback Sean Clifford, should be the ones receiving the credit.

"They made the play, I just finished it," Cage said.

The fifth-year senior has spent much of his career fighting for a spot on the field. He was listed as unavailable for the first two games of this season and slowly scratched his way back to a bigger role. Now, he's starting again and potentially establishing himself as a leader atop the defensive interior rotation.

"When you look at Jerron's career here, it's a tribute to him and his hard work," OSU Day said Nov. 2 during his weekly press conference. "It hasn't always gone exactly the way that he's wanted. He went through kind of a tough September and August."

"But to see him do what he did against Penn State, to have that opportunity in that game – that's something I'll definitely remember from this year. He came into that big spot and made that play."

It seems Cage is always ready to step up.

Last January, he received a phone call from fellow defensive tackle Tommy Togiai after the former Buckeye had tested positive for COVID-19, knocking him out of the national championship game against Alabama and giving Cage his first career start.

"He called me and he was crying," Cage said. "I felt the love, like, I felt like his pain. So I just knew, OK, come on, it's time to go. You really underestimate playing for your brothers until you actually do it. It was a great moment."

Continued On Page 6



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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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And so was the fumble return against the Nittany Lions.

"Whenever we can steal points, we want to do that," OSU safety Ronnie Hickman said after the game. "We talk about it before games. Who will get it? Who will be the one to score?"

Did anyone suggest Cage's name as a candidate prior to the win against Penn State?

"Nah," Hickman said with a smile.

Day Thinks Tweaks Needed On Targeting Rule

Ohio State linebacker Steele Chambers played only one snap during the second half of Ohio State's win against Penn State on Oct. 30. The third-year running back transplant tracked Clifford on a draw play to open the second half, meeting him at the line of scrimmage to force what would have been a 1-yard loss before the umpire behind the play tossed out a flag, penalizing Chambers initially for a late hit before upgrading the penalty to targeting and ejecting Chambers from the game.

It was one of those bang-bang plays for which the targeting rule has been so often maligned. Clifford slid as Chambers was coming in for the tackle, and though the intent did not appear malicious from the OSU linebacker, he technically led with the crown of his helmet and collided with Clifford's face mask. Upon further review, the targeting was confirmed, and Chambers' evening was over.

It was a call that got Day animated on

the sidelines, even though he said it was correct by the letter of the law.

"In real time, it's a very difficult call," the OSU head coach said. "If you're Steele in that spot, someone is running full-speed at you and then goes down on their knees, in real time that's very difficult. The rule is in place for the right reason – to protect our players. And for that I absolutely support it. But I also think there's a difference between what's going on in real time and what happens on a replay."

"That's the challenge that our refs are faced with and it's not easy. Don't get me wrong. Certainly, we're going to always advocate for our guys, and that's what I was doing (with my frustration on the sidelines)."

Because Chambers took his penalty in the second half – even though it was on the first play – he was forced to miss the first half of Ohio State's Nov. 6 trip to Nebraska, which Day felt underscored a need to change the targeting rule in terms of the length of the disqualification.

"First off, it was a unique situation because it was the first play of the second half," he said. "It's brought light in my eyes to the fact that there's some inequity in this rule. If it's the first play of the second half or the last play of the second half, that's significantly different. In my mind, the rule should be changed into a 30-minute penalty as opposed to the number of halves because when you do it shouldn't be the determining factor on how the penalty is assessed."

Despite missing the first half against Nebraska, Chambers managed six tackles and made the game-sealing interception with 56 seconds remaining.

OSU Linebackers Fighting Uphill Battle Of Attrition

With Chambers unavailable for most of the second half of the Penn State game as well as for the entire first half against Nebraska, Ohio State was down to only four scholarship linebackers – Teradja

Mitchell, Cory Simon, Tommy Eichenberg and USC transfer Palaie Gaoteote.

Most of the first half of the season had been a lost one for Gaoteote, whose arrival with the Buckeyes was delayed by late approval of his eligibility from the NCAA, and then his efforts were interrupted by what was described as a "nagging" injury.

Gaoteote played only six snaps against Penn State but did combine with defensive tackle Antwuan Jackson for an important third-quarter sack of Clifford.

Asked Nov. 2 if he thought Gaoteote was finally ready to make an impact, Day hedged, saying, "I don't know if we're there yet. I think this will be a big couple of weeks for him. He has a physical presence out there. He's strong, powerful, and he can run to the ball."

"He has all the physical skills of being a really good linebacker. It's about getting on the field and fitting into the scheme we have on defense."

Gaoteote was credited with four tackles (all assists) during the victory at Nebraska.

An ace in the hole for Day is sophomore Craig Young, who technically operates out of the bullet position and works in the safety room. However, he increasingly finds himself on the field as a linebacker in passing-down situations.

"He's played at the linebacker level, he can cover and he's played at the safety level," Day said. "Anytime you have versatility like that, it gives us a lot of options. Having athletes on the field against a mobile quarterback is important."

Young did not have a tackle against Nebraska, but he was credited with a quarterback hurry.

Buckeye WR Coach Not Looking To Move

Brian Hartline is in his fourth season as wide receivers coach at Ohio State.

He is a rising star in the coaching profession, or so says his biography on the football team's website. It is high praise, but not unearned. In a five-year tenure

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Road Gets Even Tougher For Buckeye Football Team

With wins over Penn State and Nebraska in the books, things don't get any easier for the Ohio State football team. Upset-minded Purdue is set to invade Ohio Stadium on Nov. 13, and then the Buckeyes will take on division rivals Michigan State and Michigan.

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 Boilermakers. The staff predictors were looking for a much bigger offensive output from OSU against Nebraska. Chase Brown predicted a 35-21 Buckeye victory, Patrick Mayhorn 38-21, newest staff member Braden Moles had it 38-17, and Mark Rea predicted the highest Buckeye score at 52-23.

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. As you can imagine, the discussion was once again spirited during the game with Nebraska.

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

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

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"I have a strong passion here. I loved seeing all the coach conversations and how coaches answer different questions because of all the speculations."

He mentioned that he pinches himself when it settles in that he is the wide receivers coach at Ohio State and that he gets to work with some of the best athletes in college football on a daily basis.

"That's pretty surreal to me more times than you probably think," Hartline said with a big smile. "I don't take it for granted. It hits me a lot when I'm coming off the field. I think sometimes in the hustle and bustle, you kind of lose track of that and you're more focused on execution and making sure everyone knows what's going on."

"But there's definitely times on game day or pregame and opportunities on Monday and through the week all the time when it kind of hits me in the face. It makes me smile as you can tell. So for me, it's not even about the group necessarily. It's about the opportunity I have every day to coach them."

Hartline struggled to keep a smile from his face for the duration of a scheduled 15-minute talk with the media Nov. 2 that stretched well past a half-hour. It's a smile he frequently wears when walking around the Woody Hayes Athletic Center throughout the week, according to multiple players and coaches.

The reason he smiles is quite simple.

Continued On Page 8

with the Buckeyes, including one as a quality control coach, Hartline has become one of the country's best recruiters, consistently finding the best high school wide receivers and bringing them to Columbus.

Hartline's work doesn't stop with recruiting. Once he brings talent to cam-

pus, he develops it. A former Buckeye and seven-year NFL veteran with the Miami Dolphins and Cleveland Browns, Hartline teaches Ohio State's receivers what it takes to be successful in college and in the pros.

His success is noticeable, which has led some to wonder if Hartline might con-

sider leaving Ohio State to pursue offensive coordinator or head coach opportunities at other schools. When asked if he would move on from the Buckeyes in the near future, Hartline took a firm stance, claiming there's a low chance he would look elsewhere to coach football.

"Ohio State's my home," Hartline said.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 7

He loves what he does.

"I would say that I love it here and it's a passion here and all I care about is this room. That's my main focus and my forever focus," Hartline said. "I'd be lying if I were thinking outside of that. But I am also not a person who's going to sit here and tell you, 'No, I'm never leaving Ohio State.' I'm not saying I ever will. You said, 'Go up the ladder.' Go where? This is the pinnacle of the ladder."

Hartline said he doesn't need the satisfaction of a more significant title or the power of calling plays. He also explained the difficulty he would experience in sharing the news of a potential departure with his wide receivers, especially freshmen Marvin Harrison Jr., Emeka Egbuka and Jayden Ballard.

"The conversations I have with my wife, we can't imagine leaving the guys in that room," Hartline said. "I can't even

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this day – it gives me chills thinking trying to walk in and tell them I'm not going to be in the room anymore. That would be really hard to do. I don't think I could do

that. Never say never, but it almost chokes me up now because I couldn't even imagine going in there and looking at Marvin, Meka and Jayden, and telling them I'm not going to be here anymore."

For now, one thing is certain. Hartline wants to be a Buckeye.

"All I know is I love Ohio State," he said. "My wife is from here, we live here, I love my house. It would be really hard to leave. I don't know if that's ever in the books."

Ruggles Earns Weekly Honor From Big Ten

One streak ended, but another continued.

For the eighth time this season, an Ohio State player earned one of the Big Ten weekly honors, but it wasn't Freshman of the Week this time.

Transfer kicker Noah Ruggles continued the streak for the Buckeyes, winning Big Ten co-Specialist of the Week honors for his efforts in Ohio State's 33-24 win against Penn State.

Ruggles contributed 15 points for the Buckeyes between three extra points and four field goals, including a pair of three-pointers in the final frame that helped to secure and then ice Ohio State's seventh victory of the year.

Ruggles became the first OSU kicker since Drew Basil against Michigan in 2012 to kick four field goals in a game. In the process, Ruggles improved to 11 for 11 in field goals this season with a perfect 47-for-47 mark on extra points.

Rutgers punter Adam Korsak joined Ruggles with the specialist honor. He punted six times for 282 net yards (a 47.0-yard average) during his team's 20-14 victory against Illinois.

Michigan State running back Kenneth Walker III earned the Offensive Player of the Week title for his 197-yard, five-touchdown performance on the ground during

a 37-33 win against Michigan. It was the second time Walker had won the honor this season.

Purdue linebacker Jalen Graham earned the Defensive Player of the Week distinction after he racked up six tackles, a pass breakup and two interceptions to lead the Boilermakers to a 28-23 win over Nebraska.

Breaking Ohio State's hold on Freshman of the Week honors were Michigan wide receiver Andre Anthony for his 153 receiving yards and two scores on six catches, and Minnesota halfback Mar'Keise Irving, who carried 19 times for 110 yards and two touchdowns.

NABC Names Liddell To POY Watch List

Ohio State junior forward E.J. Liddell has been named to the National Association of Basketball Coaches' annual Division I Player of the Year award watch list. The announcement was made Nov. 4.

Liddell is one of 20 players on the national list. He is also one of six players from the Big Ten on the list, which is the most of any conference in the country. In fact, no other conference has more than three players represented.

The Belleville, Ill., native is coming off a 2020-21 season that had him average 16.2 points and 6.7 rebounds per game and earn first-team All-Big Ten honors. He was also named to the Big Ten All-Tournament Team after helping lead the Buckeyes to the championship game.

Liddell is a College Hoops Today preseason All-American and has also been named to the Karl Malone Power Forward of the Year Watch List. The preseason All-Big Ten forward will serve as one of Ohio State's four captains this season.

The Buckeyes open their regular season Nov. 9 when they host Akron at Value City Arena.



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Joining Liddell on the NABC watch list were fellow Big Ten players Kofi Cockburn of Illinois, Hunter Dickinson of Michigan, Jaden Ivey and Travian Williams of Purdue, and Trayce Jackson-Davis of Indiana.

Other on the list are Max Abmas of Oral Roberts, Ochai Agbaji and Remy Martin of Kansas, Paolo Banchemo of Duke, Buddy Boeheim of Syracuse, Marcus Carr of Texas, Julian Champagnie of St. John's, Collin Gillespie of Villanova, Chet Holmgren of Gonzaga, Jaime Jaquez Jr. and Johnny Juzang of UCLA, Scotty Pippen Jr. of Vanderbilt, Jahvon Quinerly of Alabama and Drew Timme of Gonzaga.

OSU Transfer Mikesell Ruled Eligible To Play

The Ohio State women's basketball team announced Nov. 6 that senior guard Taylor Mikesell, who transferred to Ohio State from Oregon during the offseason,

is eligible to play this season for the Buckeyes.

Mikesell required a waiver from the NCAA due to this being her second transfer in her collegiate career.

Though Mikesell is new to the Buckeyes, the Massillon, Ohio, product has 86 collegiate starts under her belt in three seasons with Maryland and Oregon.

Mikesell had previously transferred to Oregon last season following a two-year stint with the Terps. During her time with the Ducks, she averaged 9.3 points, 2.4 rebounds and 1.8 assists per game while shooting 40.4 percent from the field and 33.3 percent from beyond the arc.

In the preceding years at Maryland, Mikesell started 66 consecutive games as the Terrapins won consecutive outright Big Ten regular-season championships in 2019 and 2020 and finished runner-up in the 2020 Big Ten tournament to Iowa. She averaged more than 11 points per game in both seasons and shot better

than 41 percent from three-point range.

"She's been a good older presence and leader and been able to come in and kind of grasp things really quickly and jump right into it," said OSU senior guard Braxtin Miller. "I think that's been really great. Obviously, her shooting ability has been great."

Mikesell figures to be an impact player for the Buckeyes given her shooting ability and experience. She was unable to participate in the team's Nov. 3 exhibition game win against Slippery Rock, but Mikesell knocked down numerous shots with the second team during a practice session available to the media.

"She's already had an impact in practices," head coach Kevin McGuff said. "Her work ethic is incredible. She's in great shape. She works incredibly hard. She's a really good teammate. She understands the game, so she communicates and she talks. Even in this scrimmage we had the other day, she couldn't play, but

she was really good on the bench just talking to her teammates."

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

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1981

Ohio State quarterback Art Schlichter and Purdue quarterback Scott Campbell traded blows in one of the most impressive aerial shows of the season Oct. 31 in West Lafayette.

When the air finally cleared, Schlichter, although on the short end of the comparative statistics, had aired it out enough to bring the Buckeyes a 45-33 triumph over the Boilermakers.

Coupled with Illinois' 24-7 victory over Iowa, the win was worth first place in the Big Ten for OSU.

Schlichter completed 19 of 33 passes for 336 yards while Campbell, just a sophomore, was even more spectacular – although in a losing cause. He connected on 31 of 52 tosses for a single-game school-record 516 yards.

However, it was Schlichter who made the most important connection of the day, hooking up with tight end John Frank on a 29-yard touchdown pass with 2:34 left in the game. The TD came at the most opportune time for the Buckeyes. It put to rest any hopes the Boilermakers might have entertained of knocking off their guests, delivering Ohio State its final 12-point margin.

35 Years Ago - 1986

TV cameras caught Earle Bruce wearing a grin on the sidelines late in Ohio State's matchup against Iowa – a rarity for the usually solemn head coach. It wasn't an ear-to-ear smile, but it was a smile, nonetheless.

He must have been thinking about something he had mustered in his mind earlier in the week. He would later say that although he never would have predicted a 31-10 final score against the Hawkeyes such as his team piled up on that day, he did know his Buckeyes were going to come out on top.

"Back about Tuesday or Wednesday, I knew our football team was ready to play," said Bruce, "and that the team we were going to play was going to be in trouble because I saw it coming on.

"We're getting more and more confidence – more togetherness – and that's what makes you good. A football team that plays that way always plays well."

30 Years Ago - 1991

Ohio State could look back at its 16-9 loss to Iowa on Nov. 2 and point out any number of plays that went against it and helped to determine the final score. Half of them were passes from Kent Graham that were catchable balls, balls that hit their prospective receivers in the hands but fell to the Ohio Stadium turf.

Late in a scoreless first quarter, facing third-and-8 at the Iowa 45-yard line, Graham tossed a pass to tight end Jeff Ellis about 20 yards downfield. The ball hit Ellis squarely in the hands, and the senior simply failed to make the catch.

"Those are the plays you have to make to win games like these," Ellis said. "That was a mistake on my part, one of several we made today."

25 Years Ago - 1996

Orlando Pace knew that he could count on at least one first-place vote in his race for the Heisman Trophy – and it was coming from the man he had helped to win the coveted award a year prior.

"I am going to vote for Orlando," said 1995 Heisman winner Eddie George, who – as all past Heisman winners were permitted – had a vote for the award. "There is no doubt in my mind that Orlando Pace is the best player in the country."

A number of other people felt the same way, including long-

time Boston Globe sportswriter Bob Ryan, using the "Parting Shots" segment on ESPN's "Sports Reporters" show to make a case for Pace as well.

"I had received a T-shirt in the mail from Texas Tech touting Byron Hanspard," Ryan said. "I just needed a parting shot for the show, so I decided to have some fun with it.

"I held up the shirt and said, 'I like the shirt, I'll probably even wear it, but I'm not voting for your guy. I'm voting for Orlando Pace.'"

20 Years Ago - 2001

Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel and Minnesota head coach Glen Mason spoke publicly ahead of their teams squaring off against the idea of any personal rivalry between the two as a result of Ohio State's coaching search the prior offseason. Famously, the two coaches were the final two candidates for the vacancy in Columbus, and the Buckeyes opted for Tressel over Mason.

The potential drama was so spicy that ESPN even picked up the matchup several weeks in advance for the 7:45 p.m. broadcast, but there was no such bad blood on the field or in the media. Mason said that he would dismiss any questions on the matter as a distraction.

"Those interviews will be ended as soon as they're asked," Mason said. "It's only a distraction."

Likewise, Tressel – who served alongside Mason at Ohio State from 1983-85 – said that he had nothing but respect for his opponent.

"I coached with Mace and I know, outside of the University of Minnesota, he loves Ohio State second-best," Tressel said. "But I know where he loves best. I know he will have his team prepared to go.

"The team that does not allow those type of things to distract them will win the game."

15 Years Ago - 2006

It took 10 games for a team to make Ohio State sweat. Ten games until a team held the powerful OSU offense under 20 points. Ten games until a team had the ball in the fourth quarter with a chance to send the game into overtime – or possibly with a chance to win in regulation.

Ten games until the Buckeyes faced their stiffest challenge of the season from arguably the best 2-8 team in the country – or at least that's how OSU made the Fighting Illini look.

For the first time all season, the Buckeyes were outgained by their opponent for an entire game and showed an almost baffling lack of ability to move the ball forward in the second half.

But rather than focus on the negatives, the Buckeyes took the "glass half-full" approach after a 17-10 win that had Illinois in possession of the ball trailing by just a touchdown to end the game – though Ohio State left it with only four seconds on the clock at its own 2-yard-line, which wasn't exactly prime real estate.

"A win is a win any which way you cut it, whether you score 50 points or you score 17," QB Troy Smith said. "We won today, and we'll continue to grow."

10 Years Ago - 2011

Ohio State gave up the game's first 10 points, was tied 13-13 at halftime and did not take the lead for good until freshman quarterback Braxton Miller broke a 20-20 deadlock with a 20-yard touchdown run with nine seconds left in the third quarter to help separate his squad from Big Ten Leaders division cellar-dweller

Indiana.

The Buckeyes went on to beat Indiana, 34-20, in a game that could have been easily described as an ugly win for an Ohio State squad that seemed to be dealing with some sluggishness after its dramatic victory over Wisconsin the week before. Fortunately for Ohio State, style points did not matter for the sake of the conference race – the primary focus in Columbus.

"In the end, we got the win," said sixth-year senior defensive back Tyler Moeller. "We're happy about that. We're not happy about how we played. We have to do a better job. But we got the win, and that's what we came out to do."

Head coach Luke Fickell admitted that his team lacked intensity to open the game.

"I thought the key was for us to come out with some poise after a big game, some energy," he said, "and I'm not sure that showed to start with.

"Maybe our youth showed up a little bit in that, and you try and stay after them as much as you can, but we needed to come out with a little bit more energy, have some poise because you know on that offense they're going to make some plays and continue to battle."

Five Years Ago - 2016

After four weeks of Big Ten battles that included Ohio State's first loss of the season, head coach Urban Meyer admitted he was ready for his offense to click.

The thing was, the No. 6 Buckeyes were getting ready for a game against No. 10 Nebraska, and Meyer made sure to keep his expectations in check.

"I'm ready if you are," he said Nov. 2 when asked if he felt a breakout game was coming for the Ohio State offense. "Unfortunately, we're playing a very good defense."

Very good defense or not, an offensive explosion was exactly what happened for Ohio State against the Cornhuskers during a 62-3 win Nov. 5 in Columbus. Once it was all said and done, Meyer could hardly believe what had just happened.

"Wow," the coach said when he stepped to the lectern after the game. "I didn't see that one coming."

One Year Ago - 2020

The first half of Ohio State's Nov. 7 game against Rutgers played out in typical fashion. The Buckeyes jumped out to a 35-3 halftime lead thanks in large part to another Heisman-worthy performance from junior quarterback Justin Fields, who started the game 15-of-17 passing for 232 yards and three touchdowns.

It figured to be just a matter of time before he gave way to one of the highly touted freshmen who would likely battle to be his successor the next season. But that didn't happen until C.J. Stroud took one snap on the final play of the game.

The Scarlet Knights, who gained just 83 yards in the first half, racked up 290 yards and scored touchdowns on four consecutive second-half possessions to make things a little too close for comfort late. And though his team ultimately won the game, 49-27, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day attributed the second-half struggles to missed tackles and penalties.

"It was a tale of two halves," Day said after the game. "It was a really dominant first half and the guys played well, but then the second half, we didn't play great. We had some penalties and allowed some big plays. We didn't close them out. We should have really dominated in the first five or six minutes of the second half and allowed some of our other guys to get in the game. That didn't happen."

Offensive Line Not Paving Way For Buckeyes

Continued From Page 1

son as a Buckeye.

Although Henderson has not been quite his usually springy self in recent weeks, many of the team's rushing-game woes seem to come back to Ohio State's offensive line, which has struggled to generate space up front against the three best defenses on the schedule – Oregon, Penn State and Nebraska. And there are still a pair of tough groups left on the slate in Michigan State and Michigan.

"Obviously, the run game hasn't been what it was earlier in the season," said OSU center Luke Wypler. "As a unit, we know the ball is going to try to be run behind us and that we have to get some movement and get some yards per carry. We probably didn't play our best today, but we know going into this next week what we need to improve on."

For Day, even though the Buckeyes ran only 30 times for 90 total yards to the 54 passes, the play-calling felt right relative to what the defense was showing him. The Cornhuskers were loading the box to blitz throughout the game, and that created space downfield for receivers to operate.

"I don't know (about the running game)," Day said. "I'll have to go back and see exactly what it was. I think we can do a better job with the runs. Right now, we're not getting as much as we'd like on it, and we'll go back and figure that out. But also, when they blitz a lot, there's going to be an extra guy in the box and that opens up opportunities for the pass game, and I thought we did a good job with that. We just got ourselves out of whack with a couple of penalties, a sack, a few things in there that were big plays that got us off-schedule. That happened a little bit last week, too."

"But we're moving the ball. We're doing a good job that way, but we're just not clean in that area. I mean, anytime we're talking about this after a nine-point win on the road, that's a good thing. We're playing really well on defense, stopping the run against a good team that took Michigan State to overtime, they had The Team Up North beat, they played well against Oklahoma. This is a quality team. We knew that coming in. We have a lot of respect for these guys."

Although Day had his concerns about rushing into a heavy box, BSB's data tells a slightly different story. Box counts can be somewhat subjective and varied by how a team defines its box, but by BSB's count, which includes two plays that were negated due to penalty, Ohio State faced a "heavy" box only 23 times against the Cornhuskers, drawing a seven-man box 21 times and an eight- and nine-man box once

each, both in the red zone.

Instead, it was a standard-issue, six-man box that Ohio State matched up against the most in Lincoln, seeing six defenders – usually four linemen and two linebackers – in the box on 54 snaps, with seven instances of a five-man box (usually on long-distance passing downs) and a pair of four-man boxes in extreme instances.

For a team that lines up almost exclusively with at least one tight end on the field, and sometimes two, a six-man box would usually present even numbers in the rushing attack for the Buckeyes (meaning six blockers for six box defenders), leaving a potential runner unaccounted for barring a mistake up front.

Therein lies the issue. Day didn't outright criticize his running game during his post-game press conference, but he surely alluded to issues up front causing some hesitation in his play-calling. Even when the Buckeyes ran into friendlier boxes, they found themselves missing on blocks or just coming up slow in attempts to get to the second level, and that left Nebraska's linebackers free to meet Henderson or any other ball-carriers within only a few yards of the line of scrimmage.

"If you're running the ball well, it's probably not as many (passes), but there were some situations in there where I felt like we needed to push the ball down the field," Day said. "I thought we were doing a decent job in the throwing game. You look at what Jaxon (Smith-Njigba) did – and that's where our big plays were coming from. That's what you have to do. There are going to be times where you have to run the ball a little bit more and other times when we have to throw a little more. But we always want balance."

Translation: If the rushing offense were trustworthy, Day would be happy to trust it.

That's not a comfortable spot for Day or for this Ohio State program at large. To call it a run-based program under Day might not be as accurate as it was under each of his predecessors, as the former quarterback coach has proved himself more than willing to air it out. But Ohio State's track record with pass-heavy performances even under Day's guidance is not glistening.

Since his arrival as offensive coordinator in 2017, Ohio State has tasked its starting quarterback with at least 40 attempts in a game only seven times. In that bunch, the Buckeyes have a 4-3 record, knocking off the Cornhuskers this year as well as Northwestern, Minnesota and Indiana in 2018 on the strength of Dwayne Haskins' right arm. The losses? Purdue in 2018, Clemson in 2019 and Oregon this past September – three of Ohio State's four losses since 2018.

Perhaps luckily for the Buckeyes, Stroud's 36 completions, 405 yards and two scores – paired with another perfect day for kicker Noah Ruggles and another strong defensive showing – were enough to overcome that history.

And Stroud, to his credit, wasn't quite so shy about saying the quiet part out loud.

"Some things weren't clicking in the run game and they put it on me to execute in the passing game, and I felt we did that well," Stroud said. "Of course, we had two turnovers that were blatantly my fault. Other than that, I felt we played really well. Definitely, we have to start executing better and finishing drives. But for the most part, I felt like the

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offense played well.”

Record-Setting Day

No one, short of the quarterback himself, was more important in that 405-yard passing performance than Smith-Njigba, the sophomore wide receiver who was tasked with serving as Ohio State's top possession receiver in place of Garrett Wilson, who dealt with concussion symptoms that landed him on the list of unavailable players and kept him in Columbus over the weekend. The slot receiver from Texas couldn't have been more up to the task.

Smith-Njigba broke David Boston's school single-game receptions record of 14, set against Penn State during a losing effort back in 1997. Boston converted his 14 receptions into 153 yards and held onto the school record for 24 years before Smith-Njigba snapped it in Lincoln, hauling in 15 receptions for a whopping 240 receiving yards and a score, nearly shattering the single-game yards record as well. That one still belongs to the late Terry Glenn for his 253-yard romp against Pittsburgh in 1995 – a performance that sparked perhaps the understatement of the century.

“It was a mismatch to say the least,” Pitt head coach Johnny Majors said at the time. “The few times our cornerbacks were isolated one on one because we had a blitz on – the bad news is the blitz didn't put pressure on.”

Though Smith-Njigba couldn't quite sweep the record books, he still put on a spectacular performance in his first starring role within the Buckeye offense, which he's expected to become extremely familiar with in 2022, assuming the departures of Wilson and senior Chris Olave to the NFL draft this offseason.

To his teammates, though, this was just more of the same from Smith-Njigba, who has flashed his ability all season and flourished into a slot expert but had yet to be tasked with such a workload in one game.

“He was amazing today, but he's always been amazing,” Stroud said. “This doesn't surprise me. Jaxon is the reason I'm here at Ohio State. He was the main one who recruited me, so just to see him prevail and have a great game, I'm really happy for him.”

Focusing on Smith-Njigba wasn't in the game plan heading into the matchup, but it was obvious from the start that Nebraska was without a reliable answer for the speedster in the slot. The Cornhuskers assigned 6-1, 230-pound nickel JoJo Domann to account for Smith-Njigba for much of the game – a role for which Domann was not particularly suited. Stroud confirmed that the targets for Smith-Njigba were a direct result of what the defense was showing and that any receiver in such a mismatch would see a similar influx of

opportunities.

“That's kind of our scheme,” Stroud said. “Whoever is open, they get the ball. It's not really something where you're picking on one person to get the ball or the ball goes to this guy here just because he wants the ball. Whatever I see that the defense is giving us as far as the coverage, that's who gets the ball.

“(He) could have (gotten it) 100 times. It could be Chris 3,000 times. It could be Garrett, it could be (Jeremy Ruckert), it could be the running backs. Our players are amazing. I mean, our O-line battled today. Like Coach Day said, we had a lot of guys down early on and we stepped up as an offense. Of course, we don't have Garrett, so this is the type of win you need as a football team. It's not always going to be pretty, and I don't expect it to always be pretty.

“Jaxon did a great job all week communicating to me what he likes and what I like. Chris did a great job today. When we all come together, and we have all three phases of football coming together, I feel like we're a great team.”

It might not have been entirely pretty for the Buckeyes, especially on offense, but it was downright gorgeous at times for Smith-Njigba. He sliced, diced, darted and toe-tapped his way through the Blackshirts, highlighted by a 75-yard touchdown scamper in the second quarter that saw Smith-Njigba misdirect his defender on a quick hitch route off the line, snare the pass from Stroud and break into the secondary with a great move on NU cornerback Cam Taylor-Britt. Then he followed a pair of downfield blocks from Olave to pay dirt. And perhaps even more impressive than that was the revelation after the game that he played the second half on a cramping leg.

“I thought Jaxon played well,” Day said. “On the big play – and it was one heck of a play and an amazing play by Chris Olave – the effort there was tremendous. I think Jaxon was gritty. In the third quarter, he was cramping up and he came out at one point, so we had Chris in there in the slot, Julian (Fleming) on the outside, Marvin (Harrison) on the outside and we were a little out of whack there for a little while.

“But then he got himself going again and came back. He was still kind of cramping on the field, so not only did he perform but he was gritty out there. He worked through some things and did a good job in the punt return game as well.”

The sophomore pass-catcher said he just did his job.

“Honestly, I don't really know until I'm in the game,” Smith-Njigba said when asked if he thought before the game that he was in for a

big afternoon. “I just try to do my job. I got a lot of targets today, and I just tried to make things happen. I felt really good.

“I want to thank my teammates. I'm just a little piece in this offense, and I got to see a lot of opportunities like (back in high school) and I just tried to cherish every single one of them.”

Playoff Path Clear

Ohio State isn't new to College Football Playoff-related drama. The Buckeyes have been the target of it more than any other team in the nation. They served as the focal point of the biggest debates around in the playoff during its inaugural 2014 season, again in 2016 as the first conference non-champion to make the field and then in the exact opposite way in 2017 (missing out on a berth as a league winner). OSU was also the first one-loss league champion since 2014 to miss the field when it was left out in 2018, and it was a squad with only six games under its belt a year ago, making the playoff much to the dismay of Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney.

This season, barring a second defeat, the Buckeyes could likely expect a much quieter debate, if any at all. Thanks to chaos throughout the sport on Nov. 6 and all season, Ohio State, which premiered at No. 5 in the College Football Playoff rankings following week nine, seems to be next to a shoo-in if it takes care of business against Purdue, Michigan State, Michigan and the Big Ten West champion to end the regular season.

Just within those first rankings, No. 3 Michigan State will dip behind the Buckeyes in the next poll released Nov. 8 after a 40-29 loss to Purdue in West Lafayette. No. 2 Alabama, No.

4 Oregon and No. 6 Cincinnati were all seriously challenged on Nov. 6, while No. 9 Wake Forest dropped from the ranks of the undefeated with a loss to North Carolina that effectively eliminated the ACC from playoff contention.

Elsewhere, No. 12 Baylor fell to unranked TCU, No. 13 Auburn came up short against No. 14 Texas A&M, and No. 17 Mississippi State fell to Arkansas.

Assuming Ohio State wins out, the Buckeyes would have only five other teams to compete with for the four playoff spots – top-ranked Georgia, Alabama, Oregon, Cincinnati and Oklahoma. One-loss teams such as Notre Dame and Oklahoma State would appear to be in need of major chaos to contend seriously for a spot.

Georgia and Alabama will likely square off in what could be an elimination match in the SEC Championship Game, just as Oklahoma and Oklahoma State might have to do twice – first for their annual rivalry matchup on Nov. 27 and then again a week later in the Big 12 Championship Game.

That leaves just four or five true contenders outside of Columbus, with the fourth and fifth contingent upon a sweep for either the Sooners or Cowboys or an Alabama upset of Georgia in the SEC title game. That final group comprises Georgia, Oregon, Cincinnati, Ohio State and then potentially either Oklahoma or Oklahoma State, and Alabama with the upset.

With the strength of schedule advantage over every one-loss team on that board when factoring in wins over a pair of top-15 foes in the Mitten state pair, Ohio State would likely be able to rest easy on selection day.

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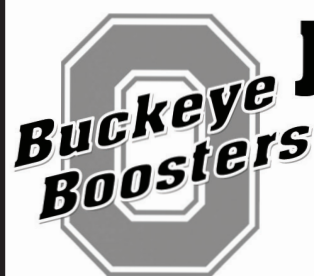


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Record-Setting Kicker Becoming Lethal Weapon

Ohio State kicker Noah Ruggles is a man of few words. Fortunately for the Buckeyes, he is also a man of big deeds.

The transfer from North Carolina kicked four field goals for the second week in a row and helped his team keep an upset-minded Nebraska at bay long enough to record a 26-17 victory Nov. 6 at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln.

Ruggles converted three-pointers from 26, 46, 35 and 46 yards, becoming the first OSU kicker in program history to make four field goals in back-to-back games. Only one other Ohio State kicker had made at least four field goals in two games in the same season – Mike Nugent with five against North Carolina State and four vs. Oklahoma State during the 2004 season.

GAME NOTEBOOK MARK REA

Each of the Odessa, Fla., native's field goals against the Cornhuskers seemingly came at crucial intervals of the game. The first was the shortest in length, but the 26-yarder broke a scoreless tie early in the second quarter and gave Ohio State the first lead of the game.

The second came from 46 yards – Ruggles' longest so far in a scarlet and gray uniform – and provided a 20-10 lead for the Buckeyes at the 9:42 mark of the third quarter. That was followed by a 35-yarder with 2:05 to go in the third period that increased OSU's lead to 23-10.

But it was his fourth field goal that carried with it the most importance, not to mention a powder keg packed with pressure. Ohio State was trying to protect a 23-17 lead heading into the final minute and a half of the game, and Ruggles was asked to make it a two-score affair. Unfortunately, it was another attempt from 46 yards into a freshening breeze.

But the OSU kicker trotted out to the field and calmly put the ball right between the uprights with plenty of distance to make it 26-17 in favor of the Buckeyes with just 1:29 remaining in the game. Thirty-three seconds later, linebacker Steele Chambers salted away the victory with an interception of Nebraska quarterback Adrian Martinez.

"Every kick is the same to me," Ruggles told reporters after the game. "Even in those pressure situations, I just try to make it seem like any other kick. I think that's why it works."

In addition to his four field goals, Ruggles added a pair of PATs and ran his personal streak with the Buckeyes to 15 consecutive field goals without a miss and 49 straight conversion kicks, also without a miss. Ohio State kickers have now made 152 consecutive PATs dating back to September 2019.

In sharp contrast, kicking has been one of the problem areas this season for Nebraska, which fell to 1-6 in the Big Ten and 3-7 overall for the season. Sophomore kicker Chase Contreras missed field-goal attempts of 45 and 31 yards in the game, and the Cornhuskers are now only 8 of 16 on three-point tries



SONNY BROCKWAY

LINING IT UP — Ohio State kicker Noah Ruggles (95) booted four field goals against Nebraska, running his streak to 15 three-pointers without a miss as a Buckeye. Ruggles also became the first OSU kicker in history with at least four field goals in back-to-back games.

this year.

Although Ruggles tried to downplay the importance of his kicks, the smile on his face during postgame interviews told a different story. That was probably because his teammates got wind of the fact that he had become the first Buckeye ever with back-to-back games of four field goals.

"They were hyping me up after the game," he said. "That was fun. You know, it's weird because during the first seven games, I probably had seven field goals total, and in these past two games, I've had more field goals than the whole season combined. It's definitely interesting."

"I didn't expect it, but also there have been some games when I didn't have any – like against Oregon. I only had one at Minnesota, so it's good to be out there for a couple more."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day mentioned the wind when asked about Ruggles' final attempt, but the kicker insisted it didn't bother him.

"It's just like you get what you get on that day," Ruggles said. "That last one was obviously into the wind, but I had been staring those flagpoles down since the beginning of the day in warmups, talking to my guys on the sideline trying to figure out what it was doing. It had been going right to left all day, but you have to just trust it."

Ruggles might have been guilty of understating his role in the victory, but his head coach had no such reservations.

"When you kick four field goals and you win by nine, it's obviously huge," Day said. "He's become a weapon for us, and when your defense is playing well, you can play a little bit to that (strength). It's a good feeling when you have a guy like that, who you feel strongly about, and he's come through for us

in the last couple of games."

Ruggles wasn't the only specialist who played a significant role in the win against the Cornhuskers. Freshman punter Jesse Mirco averaged 40.5 yards on four attempts, including burying Nebraska deep in its own territory twice in the second half.

Mirco got off a 49-yarder just past the midway point of the third quarter and pinned the Cornhuskers at their own 4-yard line. Nebraska followed with a punt of its own after a three-and-out series, helping to set up Ruggles' third field goal of the afternoon.

In the fourth quarter, Mirco was at it again, this time pooching a 26-yarder that resulted in a fair catch at the NU 10. The Huskers got one first down but were again forced to punt the ball away, and the Buckeyes converted that possession into Ruggles' game-clinching three-pointer.

The Ohio State kickers also negated any kind of return game from Nebraska. The Huskers got only 19 yards on the only one of seven Ruggles kickoffs they were able to return and just 2 yards on their lone punt return.

Defensive Effort Lauded

The stat sheet reads that Ohio State surrendered 361 total yards to Nebraska, including 248 through the air. But elsewhere on that same sheet shows the Cornhuskers went just 2 of 13 in third-down conversions while the Buckeyes recorded eight tackles for loss, including five sacks.

Perhaps those other numbers are a reason that several members of the OSU coaching staff lauded the defensive effort on a day when the offense fell just 5 yards shy of a program-record seventh 500-yard performance of the season.

"We're still a work in progress," OSU secondary coach Matt Barnes said. "We're just trying to get a little better each day. But I thought we had a great Tuesday and Wednesday practice this week, so we're not surprised that our kids played really well."

The Buckeyes contained Nebraska dual-threat quarterback Adrian Martinez for the most part. He managed to throw for 248 yards but completed only 16 of 31 attempts (51.6 percent) with one touchdown and one interception. Martinez also rushed for 51 yards and a touchdown, but those came on 18 carries, good for an average of only 2.8 yards per attempt.

"Adrian is a really good player," said OSU senior defensive end Tyreke Smith, who registered one of his team's five sacks against Martinez. "The biggest thing for us preparing for him was just having good rush lanes and making sure we weren't rushing wild and letting him have any lane he wants. That was because as much throwing ability as he has, he has running ability, too, so we had to respect that and make sure we stayed in our lanes."

Smith recorded a late second-quarter sack against Martinez, throwing the QB for a 9-yard loss back to his own 11. It began a three-and-out series that turned out to be the final possession of the first half for the Cornhuskers. It was also the third game in a row that Smith had recorded at least one sack, the longest streak for an OSU defender since Chase Young had at least one sack during a seven-game stretch that began with the final two games in 2018 and continued through the first five contests in 2019.

"Tyreke feels like he's finally 100-percent healthy," said OSU defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs. "We talked this week that he had an opportunity to have a great game, and he worked really hard on some individual stuff. I was really excited to see that happen today."

Smith finished the game with five tackles, including the sack. He was also credited with a quarterback hurry and pass breakup. Defensive ends Zach Harrison, Jevontae Jean-Baptiste and Jack Sawyer joined safety Ronnie Hickman with the other sacks. Meanwhile, linebacker Tommy Eichenberg missed out on the sack party, but he did have two tackles for loss.

"We've just got that mind-set in our heads – that relentlessness and that motor to rush the quarterback," Smith said. "That's what you have to have. You can't stop your feet or your hands. You always have to be moving and trying to make an impact. I think everybody just has that mentality in their head right now, and the results are showing."

"We can't take all the credit. We've got a really great O-line that we go against in practice every day, and it only makes us better. Iron sharpens iron as we always say."

While the defensive line was padding its sack total, the OSU secondary was the focal point of two busted coverages that accounted for 125 of Martinez's 248 yards through the air. Both plays were turned in by Nebraska senior receiver Samori Toure – a 72-yard touchdown romp late in the second quarter, and a 53-yard reception late in the third period that set up a 1-yard touchdown run by Martinez.

"In my opinion, Larry Johnson is the best defensive line coach in the history of college

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Although the Ohio State defense allowed 361 total yards to Nebraska, it bottled up the Cornhuskers for much of the afternoon and got crucial stops when it needed to most.

Two pass plays accounted for more than one-third of Nebraska's total – a 72-yard catch-and-run by wideout Samori Toure that scored Nebraska's first touchdown, and a 53-yard reception by Toure late in the third quarter that set up the Cornhuskers' second TD. After the game, OSU defensive play-caller Matt Barnes took responsibility for both calls, saying, "We didn't put our kids in position to be successful on those plays."

Perhaps best of all for the Ohio State defense was the fact that Nebraska converted just 2 of 13 third downs and the Cornhuskers managed only 113 yards on the ground, a little more than half of the 203.4 they had been averaging over their first nine games.

As for what else worked well, a couple of guys made history. Jaxon Smith-Njigba caught 15 passes in the game, something no other Ohio State receiver has ever done in a single game. And Noah Ruggles kicked four field goals for the second game in a row, a feat no other OSU kicker has ever accomplished.

What Didn't Work

Ohio State managed only 90 net yards on the ground against a good but not great Nebraska defensive line. The Cornhuskers entered the game allowing an average of 137.2 yards on the ground, a number good enough only for eighth in the Big Ten. But their front seven seemed a step quicker than the Buckeyes, leading to five tackles for loss.

Freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson did about all he

could, totaling 92 yards on 21 attempts. But the rest of the team accounted for minus-2 yards on nine carries.

The week before against Penn State, OSU head coach Ryan Day refused to abandon the running game, and that paid off late when Henderson broke off some meaningful runs in critical situations. But late in the game against Nebraska, especially when the Buckeyes were trying to manage the clock while clinging to a six-point lead, Day seemed to lose confidence in his rushing attack.

In the words of Fox play-by-play man Gus Johnson, "You have to wonder if Ohio State can win the big games throwing the ball 54 times."

Play Of The Game

Rare is the occasion when a center makes the play of the game, but Ohio State redshirt freshman Luke Wypler saved the day when he pounced on C.J. Stroud's late fourth-quarter fumble at the Nebraska 45-yard line. With the Buckeyes protecting a 23-17 lead and trying to get into field-goal range for Ruggles, Stroud went back to pass on first-and-10 at the NU 34 and was promptly flushed from the pocket. As Cornhuskers linebacker Garrett Nelson closed in to make the sack, the OSU quarterback lost control of the football. It squirted away into the open field until Wypler managed to arrive and corral it just before a trio of Nebraska defenders arrived. The recovery kept the Cornhuskers from seizing possession near midfield, down by just six points with 1:42 remaining in the game, and allowed the Buckeyes to keep the football and get into range for Ruggles' game-clinching field goal just 13 seconds later.

– Mark Rea

football," said Barnes, who has taken over the defensive play-calling duties from Coombs. "I think in some cases, if we can just make the quarterback hold the ball for an extra count, then those rushers really get to show up. Defense isn't played in a vacuum. The front helps the secondary, the secondary helps the front, and the last couple of games we've had a chance to work in chorus with each other and make some plays.

"But the two big plays we got hit on were two bad calls. We didn't put our kids in position to be successful on those plays, so we have to do a better job as coaches."

Coombs was quick to add that the Nebraska attack presented some unique problems for the Buckeyes.

"They have a very, very good and talented offense, and I think they are very challenging to prepare for," Coombs said. "They give you an awful lot of looks – in the option game, in the throw game, the quarterback is a talented player. They have great speed on the outside, and on those two occasions, we were in man-to-man coverage. We had done some things coverage-wise related to the quarterback run game ... that made things challenging for those kids in those man-to-man situations.

"They got two good ones on us. They really did. We have to play those two plays better, obviously, going forward. But that was a situation where you take away this, you take away this, you take away this, and all of a sudden you're giving away something. And that was problematic obviously."

Sellout Streak Intact

The announced Memorial Stadium attendance of 84,426 represented the 381st consecutive sellout at the facility that opened in October 1923. The longest active sellout streak in college football, it began in 1962 before the first of seven expansion projects that have occurred in 1964, 1965, 1966, 1972, 1998, 2006 and 2013.

According to several members of the Buckeyes, it is one of the Big Ten's most difficult venues in which to play.

"This was an amazing atmosphere," red-shirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud said. "I was like, 'Wow! This is crazy.' It was loud – probably the loudest stadium we've been to in the Big Ten. I thought it was a fun game, though."

Maybe not so much fun for the guy tasked with hearing Stroud's signals, especially while in shotgun formation.

"Last week against Penn State, I had a few penalties, had a few snap infractions, and those are something that you never want to do," OSU center Luke Wypler told reporters. "But I think it was just a matter of focus and getting more dialed in. The stadium was really going today, so I just listened to C.J. and made that extra effort to lock in and get my job done."

Memorial Stadium is an old-style facility with fans filling the tunnels leading to both

locker rooms. Those walkways also feature reminders of the championship players and coaches who have passed through them.

"This is an incredibly hard place to play," Barnes said. "Just walking through the hallway to the visitor's locker room, you see how many great teams they've had here over the years. Anytime you go on the road in the Big Ten, you're thankful to win."

Game Notes

- The game marked the 10th overall meeting between Ohio State and Nebraska, and the Buckeyes now enjoy a 9-1 advantage. That includes a 7-1 record against the Cornhuskers since they joined the Big Ten for the 2011 season.

- OSU has a 3-1 record in Lincoln vs. Nebraska, and that includes victories in each of the last three meetings at Memorial Stadium.

- Nebraska's lone victory in the series came in Lincoln in 2011 when it overcome a 27-6 deficit in the third quarter and won a 34-27 decision.

- Before the Cornhuskers joined the Big Ten, Ohio State and Nebraska faced off against one another only twice. The Buckeyes scored a 28-20 win against the Huskers in Columbus in 1955, and OSU won again the following year, taking a 34-7 victory when the game was again played at Ohio Stadium. Nebraska was coached by Lancaster, Ohio, native Bill Glassford in 1955 and by Pete El-

liott in 1956. Elliott would go on to become head coach at Illinois from 1960-66.

- Day is now 3-0 against Nebraska, including a 2-0 record in Lincoln. Cornhuskers head coach Scott Frost fell to 0-4 all-time against Ohio State.

- Day upped his career record to 7-0 in November games. Meanwhile, Frost fell to 10-11 lifetime during the month. He is 4-9 in November games at Nebraska after going 6-2 during the month in two seasons at Central Florida from 2016-17.

- Day is now 20-0 against unranked opponents during his three-plus years at Ohio State. In four seasons at Nebraska, Frost is now 0-12 against ranked teams and 0-6 against top-10 opponents.

- The Cornhuskers haven't beaten a ranked opponent since a 35-22 victory against No. 22 Oregon in 2016. They haven't notched a win against a top-10 opponent since a 39-38 win against sixth-ranked Michigan State in 2015.

- OSU was held scoreless in the first quarter for only the fourth time in 34 games with Day as head coach. The Buckeyes were also held scoreless in the opening quarter of their 35-28 loss to Oregon earlier this season, and twice against Wisconsin in 2019 – first during a 38-7 win in the regular season

and again during the 34-21 win against the Badgers in the Big Ten Championship Game.

- Ohio State ran its all-time record to 11-5-1 in games played on Nov. 6. The first game in program history played on that date was a 10-9 win against Indiana in a game played at Ohio Field in 1915.

- Ohio State has now won 25 consecutive regular-season conference games.

- Before beating Penn State by a 33-24 final score, Ohio State had won a Big Ten-record 11 consecutive games by double digits. The Buckeyes have now won two conference games in a row by a margin of nine points.

- Nebraska and Ohio State are in the final year of a six-year stretch of meeting every season as cross-division foes. The next meeting between the schools is currently scheduled for 2024 in Lincoln.

- Quarterback Adrian Martinez is just the third player in Nebraska program history to amass 10,000 yards of total offense. With 299 yards against the Buckeyes, he upped his career total to 10,418 yards and jumped past Taylor Martinez (10,233, 2010-13) for second all-time at NU. Tommy Armstrong (10,690, 2013-16) is the career leader in total offense for the Cornhuskers.

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Ruggles Negates Red-Zone Struggles In Win Over NU

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State once again struggled to cross the goal line, and for a second week in a row the reliable foot of Noah Ruggles bailed out the No. 5 Buckeyes (8-1, 6-0 Big Ten).

The graduate transfer from North Carolina made all four field-goal tries, including a 46-yarder with 1:29 left for the final margin in a 26-17 win over Nebraska at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Neb., on Nov. 6.

He also had kicked four field goals in the 33-24 victory against Penn State on Oct. 30 as the OSU offense continues to misfire, leading the Cornhuskers (3-7, 1-6) only 17-10 at the half.

Ruggles has made all 15 field-goal attempts this season.

"When you kick four field goals and you win by nine, that was huge," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "He's become a weapon for us."

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud was 36 of 54 for 405 yards with two touchdowns and two interceptions.

While the Buckeyes had a TD and two field goals in three forays to the red zone, the lack of production mimicked the 5 for 6 (TD, four field goals) in the red zone vs. Penn State.

Stroud was missing leading receiver Garrett Wilson, who was announced as unavailable before the game, but sophomore Jaxon Smith-Njigba had a monster game. He had one TD catch while setting a school record with 15 receptions that totaled 240 yards, the second-most yardage for an OSU receiver.

The Buckeyes' defense yielded two big plays but recorded five sacks and kept the Cornhuskers off the board the final 15:22, long enough for Ruggles to add an insurance three-pointer.

Bogged Down

The Buckeyes took the opening kickoff and moved from the 25 to the Nebraska 43, but a fourth-and-1 pass to tight end Jeremy Ruckert was broken up and the Cornhuskers on their first play flipped the field when Adrian Martinez connected with Samori Toure for 24 yards to the 33.

However, three runs by Rahmir Johnson gained a total of 6 yards, and Chase Contreras missed a 45-yard field goal.

OSU marched across midfield again



SONNY BROCKWAY

RECORD-SETTER — With a downfield escort from teammate Chris Olave (2), Ohio State's Jaxon Smith-Njigba (11) motors into the end zone for a 75-yard touchdown against Nebraska. It was a part of a big afternoon for Smith-Njigba, who established a new single-game OSU record with 15 receptions.

but for a second time came up empty when C.J. Stroud was intercepted for the first time in four games (142 passes) when linebacker Jojo Domann picked him off at

the 9. Stroud earlier had completions of 16 yards to Chris Olave and 19 to Smith-Njigba to the 22.

Ohio State, scoreless in the opening quarter for the first time since the 35-28 loss to Oregon in the second game, finally got on the board at 11:25 of the second quarter with a 26-yard field goal by Ruggles for the 3-0 lead as their red-zone woes continued.

OSU started from its 34 after a punt, and the drive continued with a third-down completion of 11 yards to TreVeyon Henderson to the Buckeyes' 48 to start the quarter. Marvin Harrison Jr. made a catch for 13, and a pass interference penalty placed the ball at the 24.

From there, Henderson ran for 6, as did Stroud to the 12. Henderson then rushed

for 3, but that was followed by an incomplete and a pass for no gain to Henderson, stalling the drive at the 9 to force Ruggles' kick.

The Buckeyes defense got a stop, and the Nebraska special teams failed one more time when William Przystup's punt traveled 13 yards to the Cornhuskers' 49.

A 3-yard TD pass to Olave at the 6:41 mark to make it 10-0 completed the seven-play, 3:24 drive. It began with a 12-yard catch by Olave. Later, a Smith-Njigba catch netted 17 yards to the 14. Henderson then ran three times for 11 yards to the 3 before Olave grabbed his 32nd career TD, two behind tying David Boston for the OSU record.

The Huskers bounced back with Martinez tossing a 26-yarder to Austin Allen



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and a 14-yarder to Omar Manning to the OSU 25. A pair of runs sandwiched an incompletion, and Contreras made a 39-yard field goal at 3:52 for a 10-3 score.

The teams then exchanged explosive scores. After an Emeka Egbuka 24-yard kickoff return to the OSU 25, Stroud found Smith-Njigba down the left sideline and he did the rest of the work for a 75-yard TD to make it 17-3 with 3:34 left in the half.

If the Buckeyes thought they had breathing room, they were wrong. On Nebraska's second snap, Toure had a 72-yard TD catch for a 17-10 score at 2:53.

OSU had a final chance before halftime following a Nebraska punt, but Olave was unable to get out of bounds on a 6-yard catch at the Huskers' 40 and the clock ran out.

The Buckeyes outgained the Huskers 278 to 182 with 219 of the yards coming through the air as Stroud went 19 for 30.

More Of The Same

A 46-yard field goal by Ruggles made it 20-10 at 9:42 of the third quarter.

The series began at the OSU 48 with Smith-Njigba gaining 18 yards on a first-down catch. A holding penalty put the Buckeyes in a third-and-19 predicament at the 43, and Henderson was able to gain back only 14 on a catch to set up the three-pointer.

Punter Jesse Mirco later pinned the Cornhuskers at their 4, and they punted it back to the Buckeyes, leading to a 35-yard field goal by Ruggles for a 23-10 lead at 2:05 of the third.

The drive started at the OSU 47 because of an illegal block in the back on the 4-yard return by Olave. Stroud then went to Olave for 14 and Smith-Njigba for 13 to the 26. Henderson ran for 2 and Ruckert had a catch to advance the ball to the 18, but a third-and-2 pass was incomplete.

Nebraska roared back on an electric 53-yard catch by Toure to the 1, slipping three would-be tacklers along the way. Martinez kept the ball on the next play at the end of the five-play, 75-yard drive in 1:43 to close the gap to 23-17 with 22 seconds left in the third.

Martinez was 16 for 31 for 248 yards, a touchdown and one interception. Toure finished with four catches for 150 yards.

On OSU's next possession, Stroud was intercepted by Myles Farmer at the Nebraska 10 on the first play of the fourth quarter. He returned it 14 yards, but an illegal block in the back penalty backed Nebraska up by 10 before 15 more were added to the 29 on a personal foul on Ruckert.

Johnson gained 12 on the ground, and Martinez scrambled for 9 to the 50. Martinez followed with three runs for 23 yards to the 27. After another first down, the defense stiffened and the junior QB missed a pass on third-and-4 from the 13, leaving Contreras to shank a 31-yard field-goal try with 9:47 left.

Ohio State began from the 20 and faced a third down needing 4 yards at the 40. Olave (seven catches, 61 yards, one TD) came through with a catch for 6 yards, and Smith-Njigba had a 19-yard reception. An intentional grounding pushed the Buckeyes back to the Nebraska 44.

On second down and needing 19 yards, video review confirmed an incompletion at the 18-yard line to Julian Fleming. Henderson got 8 yards back on an a third-down catch, and Mirco punted to the 10 with 6:11 remaining in the game.

Martinez ripped off a 21-yard run on the first play, but three incompletions followed and the Buckeyes took over at their 13 after a punt with 5:17 to play.

After a 4-yard pass to Olave, Henderson gained 11 and 22 yards to the Nebraska 45 on two runs sandwiching a Husker off-sides penalty.

Three plays later from the 34, Stroud was strip-sacked by Garrett Nelson, but

fortunately for OSU, center Luke Wypler recovered it at the Nebraska 45 with 1:42 remaining. It was second-and-21 when Stroud went 5 yards to Smith-Njigba and 11 yards to Henderson, placing the ball at the 29 to set up the Ruggles field goal and the nine-point advantage.

"Every kick is the same to me. Even when there's pressure situations," Ruggles said.

Four plays later, Martinez was intercepted by linebacker Steele Chambers at the OSU 45 with 56 seconds left. Chambers was suspended the first half after having been ejected in the second half of the Penn State game for targeting.

Two kneel-downs later the Buckeyes had their victory.

Notes

Henderson rushed 21 times for 92 yards. He also had six catches for 44 yards. ... Ohio State had 495 yards of offense (405 passing, 90 rushing) with 25 first downs. Nebraska gained 361 yards (248 passing, 113 rushing) with 18 first downs. ... The Huskers were 2 of 13 on third downs. OSU was 9 of 19. ... The five Ohio State sacks were for 31 yards. OSU had eight tackles for loss totaling 37 yards. ... Ohio State was penalized eight times for 65 yards. Nebraska had 60 yards on six penalties.

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 26, Nebraska 17

Nov. 6, 2021 – Memorial Stadium, Lincoln, Neb.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	0	17	6	3	26
NEBRASKA	0	10	7	0	17

Second Quarter

- OSU – Ruggles, 26-yard field goal, 11:25; 11 plays, 57 yards, 4:52 TOP.
- OSU – Olave, 3-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 6:41; 7 plays, 49 yards, 3:24 TOP.
- NEB – Contreras, 39-yard field goal, 3:52; 8 plays, 54 yards, 2:49 TOP.
- OSU – Smith-Njigba, 75-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 3:34; 1 plays, 75 yards, 0:12 TOP.
- NEB – Toure, 72-yard pass from Martinez (Contreras kick), 2:53; 2 plays, 75 yards, 0:41 TOP.

Third Quarter

- OSU – Ruggles, 46-yard field goal, 9:42; 5 plays, 23 yards, 2:44 TOP.
- OSU – Ruggles, 35-yard field goal, 3:05; 6 plays, 35 yards, 2:21 TOP.
- NEB – Martinez, 1-yard rush (Contreras kick), 0:22; 5 plays, 75 yards, 1:43 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

- OSU – Ruggles, 46-yard field goal, 1:29; 9 plays, 58 yards, 3:48 TOP.
- Att. – 84,426

Weather – 50 degrees, sunny, wind SW 7 mph

Team Statistics		
	OSU	NEB
First Downs	25	18
Rushing	6	8
Passing	18	8
Penalty	1	2
Rushes-Yards	30-90	34-113
Passing Yards	405	248
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	36-54-2	16-31-1
Offensive Plays	84	65
Total Net Yards	495	361
Third Down Efficiency	9-19	2-13
Punts-Avg.	4-40.5	8-43.1
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	1-0
Penalties	8-65	6-60
Time of Possession	33:52	26:08

Individual Statistics
RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Henderson 21-92; Teague 2-8; Williams 1-4; TEAM 2-(-1); Stroud 4-(-13). **NEB:** Johnson 16-62; Martinez 18-51.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Stroud 36-54-2-405-2. **NEB:** Martinez 16-31-1-248-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Smith-Njigba 15-240; Olave 7-61; Henderson 6-44; Ruckert 3-13; Harrison Jr. 2-25; Fleming 2-22; Rossi 1-0. **NEB:** Toure 4-150; Manning 3-26; Vokolek 3-14; Allen 2-33; Betts 2-15; Johnson 2-10.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Mirco 4-40.5. **NEB:** Przystup 8-43.1.
PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Smith-Njigba 3-28; Olave 1-4. **NEB:** Martin 1-2.
KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) OSU: Egbuka 1-24. **NEB:** Brown 1-19.
MISSIED FIELD GOALS – OSU: None. **NEB:** Contreras (45, 31).
FORCED FUMBLES – OSU: Harrison. **NEB:** Nelson.
FUMBLE RECOVERIES – OSU: None. **NEB:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS – OSU: Chambers 1-0. **NEB:** Farmer 1-14; Domann 1-0.
SACKS – OSU: Smith 1.0-9; Harrison 1.0-7; Jean-Baptiste 1.0-7; Hickman 1.0-4; Sawyer 1.0-4. **NEB:** Nelson 1.0-11; Tannor 1.0-9.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – OSU: Eichenberg 2.0-4; Smith 1.0-9; Harrison 1.0-7; Jean-Baptiste 1.0-7; Hickman 1.0-4; Sawyer 1.0-4; Mitchell 0.5-2; Vincent 0.5-2. **NEB:** Tannor 1.5-10; Nelson 1.0-11; Domann 1.0-2; Stille 1.0-2; Rodgers 0.5-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU: Simon 3-5-8; Hickman 4-3-7; Chambers 3-3-6; Smith 1-4-5; Shaw 3-2-5; Harrison 3-1-4; Gaoteote IV 0-4-4; Eichenberg 3-1-4; Vincent 1-2-3; Ransom 1-1-2; Jackson 2-0-2; Mitchell 0-1-1; Williamson 1-0-1; Jean-Baptiste 1-0-1; Martinez 1-0-1; Johnson 0-1-1; Brown 1-0-1; Sawyer 1-0-1; Tuimoloau 0-1-1; Kacherski 1-0-1; Hamilton 0-1-1; Cage 1-0-1. **NEB:** Newsome 7-3-10; Reimer 6-4-10; Domann 6-3-9; Henrich 3-5-8; Farmer 5-2-7; Tannor 2-3-5; Dismuke 2-3-5; Taylor-Britt 3-1-4; Daniels 1-3-4; Stille 1-1-2; Rogers 0-2-2; Payne 0-1-1; Allen 1-0-1; Clark 1-0-1; Weinmaster 0-1-1; Kolarevic 0-1-1; Bullock 1-0-1; Nelson 1-0-1; Liewer 0-1-1; Robinson 1-0-1.

Players In The Game

OSU – Olave, Fleming, Stroud, Smith-Njigba, Henderson, Wypler, Jones, Munford, Johnson Jr., Petit-Frere, Ruckert, Mitchell, Williamson, Vincent, Harrison, Smith, Hickman, Shaw, Brown, Burke, Simon, Jackson, McCall, Williams, Banks, Stover, Jean-Baptiste, Martinez, Ransom, Egbuka, Young, Watts, Harrison Jr., Gaoteote IV, Chambers, Hooker, Johnson, Brown, Williams, Carrico, Mirco, Teague III, Sawyer, Rossi, Eichenberg, Robinson, Tuimoloau, Kacherski, Hamilton, James, Fryar, Jones, Hamilton, Cage, Booker, Williams, Garrett, Ruggles.

NEB – Martinez, Toure, Manning, Allen, Johnson, Jurgens, Benhart, Nouli, Corcoran, Sichterman, Falck, Tannor, Farmer, Taylor-Britt, Newsome, Dismuke, Domann, Reimer, Henrich, Nelson, Daniels, Stille, Payne, Yant, Brown, Hannah, Clark, Buford Jr., Betts, Weinmaster, Pola-Gates, Mauga-Clemnts, Gifford, Gunnerson, Jewett, Stepp, Kolarevic, Bullock, Contreras, Sanford, McCallum, Tagge, Hutmacher, Bando, Feist, Vokolek, Liewer, Martin, Przystup, Pieper, Riley, Franke, Mueller, Thomas, Rogers, Robinson.

Season Statistics

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)	W, 33-24	102,951
Nov. 6	(6) at Nebraska	W, 26-17	84,426
Nov. 13	(6) PURDUE	3:30 p.m.	
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE (8)	TBA	
Nov. 27	at Michigan (9)	Noon	
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m..	

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

Team Statistics		
	OSU	Opp
First Downs	231	188
Rushing	85	61
Passing	137	106
Penalty	9	21
Average Per Game/Rush	189.3	109.1
Average Per Game/Pass	352.8	247.2
Total Offense	4879	3207
Total Plays	616	650
Average Per Game	542.1	356.3
Average Per Play	7.9	4.9
Penalties-Yards	62-579	43-366
Fumbles-Lost	7-2	11-4
Third Down Efficiency	59-111	57-140
Percentage	53%	41%
Fourth Down Efficiency	5-12	6-14
Percentage	42%	43%
Sacks-Yards	34-229	11-95
Time Of Possession Avg.	28:19	31:41

Score							
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	79	147	107	71	0	404	44.9
Opponents	33	51	56	31	0	171	19.0

Individual Statistics					
Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	127	930	7.3	12	68
Miyan Williams	44	327	7.4	2	71
Master Teague	46	261	5.7	3	17
Marcus Crowley	20	103	5.2	0	22
Evan Pryor	21	98	4.7	1	16
Garrett Wilson	1	13	13.0	0	13
C.J. Stroud	21	5	0.2	0	15
Jack Miller III	5	-1	-0.2	0	8
TEAM	6	-7	-1.2	0	0
Kyle McCord	7	-25	-3.6	0	7
OSU Totals	299	1705	5.7	18	71
OPP Totals	323	982	3.0	9	77

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	183	273	67.0	2675	25-5	175.9
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	211	317	66.6	3175	27-6	175.0
OPP Totals	195	327	59.6	2225	13-11	123.2

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	50	888	17.8	4	75
Garrett Wilson	43	687	16.0	6	57
Chris Olave	42	623	14.8	10	61
Jeremy Ruckert	22	256	11.6	3	30
TreVeyon Henderson	15	219	14.6	3	70
Emeka Egbuka	6	145	24.2	0	85
Cade Stover	5	76	15.2	0	25
Marvin Harrison Jr.	5	68	13.6	0	20
Miyan Williams	4	49	12.3	0	17
Gee Scott Jr.	4	43	10.8	0	16
Julian Fleming	4	39	9.8	0	17
Chris Booker	2	27	13.5	0	16
Master Teague	2	12	6.0	0	7
Evan Pryor	2	8	4.0	0	10
Mitch Rossi	2	1	0.5	0	1
Marcus Crowley	1	21	21.0	0	21
Joe Royer	1	9	9.0	0	9
Jayden Ballard	1	4	4.0	0	4
OSU Totals	211	3175	15.1	27	85
OPP Totals	195	2225	11.4	13	75

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Noah Ruggles	–	49-49	–	–	15-15	94
T. Henderson	15	–	–	–	–	90
Chris Olave	10	–	–	–	–	60

Garrett Wilson	6	–	–	–	–	36
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	4	–	–	–	–	24
Jeremy Ruckert	3	–	–	–	–	18
Master Teague III	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
Jerron Cage	1	–	–	–	–	6
Marvin Harrison Jr.	0	–	–	–	–	2
Dominic DiMaccio	0	2-2	–	–	–	2
OSU Totals	51	51-51	–	–	15-15	404
OPP Totals	22	21-22	–	–	6-8	171

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	6-6	5-5	4-4	0-0	15-15
OSU Totals	6-6	5-5	4-4	0-0	15-15
OPP Totals	1-1	2-2	3-5	0-0	6-8

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	23	959	41.7	0	62
OSU Totals	23	959	41.7	0	62
OPP Totals	51	2218	43.5	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
Cameron Brown	1	25	25.0	0	25
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
Steele Chambers	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	11	286	26.0	4	70
OPP Totals	6	38	6.3	0	23

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	14	68	4.9	0	23
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	3	28	9.3	0	21
Chris Olave	1	4	4.0	0	4
OSU Totals	18	100	5.6	0	23
OPP Totals	5	24	4.8	0	9

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Emeka Egbuka	10	341	34.1	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	14	410	29.3	0	67
OPP Totals	18	295	16.4	0	23

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Ronnie Hickman	42	32	74	1.0-4	1.0-4
Cody Simon	18	26	44	2.0-13	1.0-11
Teradja Mitchell	18	24	42	4.5-12	–
Bryson Shaw	19	14	33	–	–
Steele Chambers	17	12	29	2.0-8	1.0-7
Tommy Eichenberg	15	14	29	2.5-7	–
Lathan Ransom	15	10	27	1.0-7	1.0-7
Marcus Williamson	14	8	22	0.5-3	–
Zach Harrison	16	5	21	4.0-12	3.0-10
Antwuan Jackson	11	9	20	4.5-20	2.5-16
Haskell Garrett	11	8	19	6.0-25	4.5-23
Tyreke Smith	9	10	19	4.0-19	3.0-18
Denzel Burke	11	7	18	–	–
Cameron Brown	12	3	15	–	–
Kourt Williams	9	4	13	–	–
Tyleik Williams	8	5	13	4.5-42	4.0-41
Taron Vincent	6	7	13	2.5-6	0.5-2
Cameron Martinez	8	5	13	0.5-4	–
J. Jean-Baptiste	5	6	11	2.0-18	1.5-13
Jack Sawyer	9	2	11	3.0-24	3.0-24
J.T. Tuimoloau	5	6	11	3.5-27	2.5-24
Cade Kacherski	7	4	11	–	–
Dallas Gant	4	6	10	–	–
Josh Proctor	3	7	10	–	–
Craig Young	5	5	10	–	–
OSU Totals	349	288	637	56.0-282	34.0-229
OPP Totals	340	208	548	26.0-121	11.0-95

Fumbles Forced: 9 – Harrison (2), Chambers, McKenzie, Ransom, Sawyer, Smith, Williams, Williamson.

Fumbles Recovered: 4 – Garrett (2), Cage, Eichenberg.

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 26, Nebraska 17

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on what it's like to have Noah Ruggles as a consistent kicker for the Buckeyes: "I probably didn't expect to need him that much. But you have to have that in big games when it gets tight. You like to think you're going to blow out every team, but it doesn't work that way. These teams are too good. Every point counts, every possession counts, and to get three points is huge, especially when your defense is playing well like they did today."

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud on his two interceptions: "I feel like I played well, but of course, you always want plays back. I feel like that every game, but I feel like this one is getting to me a little bit more. I'm not sure why. I know I'm not smiling right now because I wanted to do more and felt like I shouldn't have forced the ball in those plays. But I'm happy that we won. You win and move on. It's like March Madness. I'll definitely enjoy the win, but we have to play a lot better."

OSU receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba on his record-setting 15 receptions, breaking the program single-game mark held by David Boston since 1997: "I just try to be there when they need me. C.J. and me, we have a nice little chemistry going now. The offensive line protecting him just getting me the ball, that's been working out, so hopefully we can build on that."

Smith-Njigba when asked if he even knew who Boston was: "I've heard of him, yes sir."

Smith-Njigba when asked to describe his 75-yard touchdown reception: "I was open, C.J. put it on me, the O-line protected very well. I made one cut, Chris (Olave) did a great job blocking downfield. I just tried to pick my knees up and go."

Ohio State secondary coach Matt Barnes on the challenge of winning: "In college football, you have to be able to win in a 55-54 game and you have to be able to win in a lower-score game. We're glad we got a win any way we can."

Day on what it takes for Ohio State to play its best football: "When all three phases are playing together efficiently, that's when we'll be at our best football. We've played some games where we've done all that. But when you're playing nine conference games and getting into November, there are going to be times where the other side is going to pick it up. But what we're striving for is to get all three phases working together."

Stroud on criticism that he doesn't run with the ball enough: "If my job is to run the ball, I'd be

a running back or something. I throw the ball for a living. It might look obvious when you throw the ball and everybody runs to the ball and people say, 'Oh, he should have run it.' But I feel like I do my job when my number is called."

Ohio State defensive end Tyreke Smith on battling through missed holding calls: "You have to just keep playing. You're not going to get the call sometimes, but I just keep playing. I just keep rushing. I don't want to let that affect me or make me stop rushing or something like that because that will be the one rush I'm not locked in on. I might say something to the ref one time, but then I just let it go. I just play my game. If it's not going my way, I'm fine as long as I'm still making an impact."

OSU defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs on linebacker Steele Chambers and his importance to the defense: "I thought he did fantastic. He had like six tackles and of course the interception at the end of the game. The very first series, I thought he was a little rusty and that was concerning because he had to sit out for half a game (for targeting against Penn State). But to come into a game like that and really have to go, I thought he played well. The thing about Steele – and I said this earlier in the year – when he sees it, he goes, and that's probably one of his greatest qualities. He doesn't hesitate; he doesn't wait. He goes."

Barnes on defensive back/linebacker Craig Young's talent and football ability: "He's got a knack for finding his way to the quarterback in those critical situations. He's a guy who has played exceptional for us on special teams, and you go back to the Maryland game where he had an interception for a touchdown. He's a guy we are constantly trying to create roles for. He's done a great job."

Coombs on the value of each defensive position making plays: "That whole thing about picking stars, it takes 11 guys. It takes 11 guys and it takes 11 guys every play. One guy falls short of his assignment and we've got a problem. I think Bryson (Shaw) is quietly becoming better and better and better every week, and Marcus (Williamson) has played a very valuable role, particularly the last three weeks in some of the more split-safety stuff that we're doing. I thought they made big plays, but I thought it was team defense today. This is a tough place to play, and this was a tough game. I'm really proud of the way they played – all of them."

Barnes on getting the best players on the field: "It's a little bit week to week. Part of it is

injuries, part of it is the plan that week and how we make that (opposing) offense left-handed, but we'll always be in pursuit of trying to get the right guys on the field to help us win."

Coombs on the consistency of defensive personnel and schematic changes: "There are a lot of guys moving around because a lot of parts are changing. That's because of health, because of skill set, because of a variety of things. What we're trying to do every series is put the best 11 guys on the field while continuing to develop all these young players that are talented. The only way you can become great is to play in games. We're moving pieces around trying to find all the right spots for all the kids and the best spots to help us win that week. They may be here this week. They may be somewhere else next week."

Coombs on if he thinks the offense is relying too heavily on the defense to make plays: "I don't feel like (the offense) is relying on us in any way. I feel like we are relying on each other. We prepare every Tuesday and Wednesday. We go against each other, and we're trying to make them better and they're trying to make us better. We've seen improvement, and we're excited about that, but we're always excited about our offense because we know what our offense can do. Every time they trot out there, we know they've got a great chance to score. We're fired up about that, and we try to give them as many opportunities as we can."

Smith on the defensive effort against Nebraska: "We came here to play football. That's why we came here – for these types of moments, for these types of games. When it's time to be on the field, whether it's a touchdown, interception or whatever, we're out there with the mentality of getting a three-and-out or a turnover. That's our mentality and the chemistry has definitely been paying off. The defense has been jelling. We still have more work to do, but it's definitely showing in our performance."

Stroud on being without star wideout Garrett Wilson for the game: "A player like Garrett, of course you're going to miss him. I definitely hope he comes back as soon as possible. But Julian (Fleming) did a great job, Marvin (Harrison Jr.) did a great job. I definitely tried to give those guys some touches and get them rolling. I thought that was a catch at the end (on Fleming's sideline catch), but it's all good. Julian made a hell of a play. A player like Garrett, you want him back, but we'll be fine because the other guys do great things, too."

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Ohio State 'Rushmen' Hitting Stride At Right Time

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's defensive line, affectionately called "The Rushmen" by the players, hardly lived up to that lofty nickname through the first two weeks of the season.

During the season opener at Minnesota, the pass-rush produced two sacks, with only one of the takedowns coming from a defensive lineman – defensive end Zach Harrison's strip-sack leading to a Haskell Garrett touchdown.

Harrison's game-changing play covered up what had otherwise been a lackluster performance for the defensive line vs. the Golden Gophers. The unit struggled to create consistent pressure on Minnesota quarterback Tanner Morgan and had difficulty stopping running back Mohamed Ibrahim.

It wasn't until Oregon came to Columbus on Sept. 11 that the defensive line's shortcomings became glaringly obvious. The Buckeyes failed to sack Oregon quarterback Anthony Brown and let running back CJ Verdell explode for 161 yards and two rushing touchdowns.

In its first two games of the 2021 season, Ohio State recorded just two sacks and allowed 472 yards and six scores on the ground. The inconsistency caused OSU head coach Ryan Day to shuffle his defensive coaching staff, leading to then-defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs moving to the press box and secondary coach Matt Barnes taking over as lead play-caller.

While difficult to believe that swapping Coombs for Barnes on the sideline was the sole reason the Buckeyes are suddenly making life miserable for opposing quarterbacks, the numbers don't lie. After the team's 33-24 win against Penn State on Oct. 30, the OSU defense was seventh nationally in total sacks with 29 and its 106.9 rushing yards allowed per game was 16th-best in college football.

When asked for the difference over the past month and a half, sixth-year defensive tackle Antwan Jackson had a simple answer.

"We're just dialed in more," he said. "We just came closer."

Apparently, it's that simple for the Ohio State defensive line. A new mind-set and mentality have led to consistent improvement for the unit. Even with injuries and absences – either season-long in the instance of senior defensive end Tyler Friday or multi-game with classmate and fellow DE Tyreke Smith – the Buckeyes are finding a way to get better each week.

The OSU front hit its stride at the right time, making the prime-time matchup with Penn State the latest example of its significant growth.



SONNY BROCKWAY

COMING FOR YOU — Ohio State defenders registered five more sacks Nov. 6 against Nebraska, moving their total to 34 for the season and tying them with Marshall and Troy for the most at the FCS level. Pictured here are OSU defenders Teradja Mitchell (3), Denzel Burke (29), Zach Harrison (9), Haskell Garrett (92), Ty Hamilton (58), Sevyn Banks (7) and Ronnie Hickman (14).

The Nittany Lions entered the game with deficiencies running the football, but Ohio State still held an opponent to less than 100 rushing yards for the fifth time in the last six games. Penn State rushed the ball 29 times for 33 yards, an average of 1.1 yards per attempt.

"Well, first, it makes (defensive line coach Larry) Johnson very happy, so that's what that does," Jackson said of the stingy run defense. "And then after that, we just pin our ears back and try to get some sacks."

The pass rush looked strong as well, finishing with four sacks and five quarterback hurries. One of those sacks, credited to Smith but certainly aided by Harrison, caused Penn State quarterback Sean Clifford to fumble. Defensive tackle Jerron Cage picked up the loose ball and ran 57 yards for a touchdown.

"I'm not going to sit here and glorify it," Cage said. "Shout-outs to Zach and Tyreke for getting the ball out. They made the play, and I just finished it. Moments like these, you just have to stay humble. You can't let it get to your head too much because it's not just about me. It's about my team. It's exciting, but it's nothing to dwell on. It's something to recognize that you did and move on. We have more plays to

do, more teams to play, and more opportunities to be better."

Later in the game against the Nittany Lions, Smith recorded a quarterback hurry by pressuring Clifford to escape the pocket, leading to an errant throw that cornerback Cameron Brown intercepted and returned into Penn State territory.

"Tyreke is a great player," Jackson said. "He plays fast, and he's been injured, so that sucked for us. But we've got him back now, and we're just trying to keep him healthy and trying to keep him playing great."

"He gets to the quarterback – everybody sees that – he just gets to the quarterback. He messed up the quarterback, and that's how Cam got the ball the last time, so Tyreke affecting the quarterback helps us as a defense."

Smith and Harrison's impact was of obvious importance against Penn State and stood as a clear benchmark to the improvement of both players in recent weeks. Although both missed games because of different ailments, the defensive end duo is coming into excellent form heading into the season's final stretch.

With only two sacks from the pair through the first six games, Smith and Harrison failed to meet their preseason expectations. Both needed to produce more frequently as Ohio State's starting defensive ends, especially the former five-star Harrison, who entered the year on multiple award watch lists and with All-America expectations.

But as the weather has turned cooler, the pair has heated up considerably. Smith recorded sacks against Indiana and Penn State, and the coaching staff named Harrison the team's defensive player of the game after Ohio State's road victory against Indiana on Oct. 23.

Through Oct. 30, the duo had a combined four sacks, seven tackles for loss and two forced fumbles.

"It's great to have everybody back, honest-

ly," Cage said. "I mean, from the beginning of the season, we've been dealing with injuries and all this extra stuff. But the fact that we're all jelling together, you can see it on the field."

At defensive tackle, Johnson uses a deep rotation to keep each player healthy and ready. It has led to the position seeing an uptick in production, with several players standing out alongside preseason All-American Haskell Garrett. This season, Garrett leads the bunch with 4½ sacks, followed by Tyleik Williams (four) and Jackson (2½).

"Coach J does a good job of keeping everybody fresh," Jackson said. "Whoever goes in, they've got to do their job and take it very seriously. If they don't, then somebody else has got to go in and do it."

Garrett, Jackson, Cage, Williams and Ty Hamilton have combined for 21½ tackles for loss this season. After allowing 236.0 yards and three touchdowns per game on the ground in the first two contests, the OSU defense shored up its front, limiting opposing offenses to 397 total rushing yards and two scores in the next six matchups.

Ohio State again had success rushing the quarterback against the Cornhuskers, who entered the game 86th in the nation this season in sacks allowed per game. The Buckeyes generated five sacks and four hurries and caused one turnover.

The defensive line also kept the 27th-ranked Nebraska run offense in check, holding quarterback Adrian Martinez and company to 150 yards and one touchdown on the afternoon. The Huskers entered the game averaging 203.4 yards per game.

Another game proved that Ohio State's defensive line continues to play a significant role in the Buckeyes' overall performance each week – an encouraging sign for the final stretch of regular-season games against Purdue, Michigan State and Michigan.

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Ohio State, Baltimore Star Matte Left Rich Legacy

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Tom Matte, the Ohio State and Baltimore Colts running back who kept being pressed into duty as an emergency quarterback, died Nov. 3 at his suburban Baltimore home from complications of leukemia. He was 82.

Matte was recruited to Ohio State as a running back but wound up playing quarterback during his junior and senior years. Then after five years in the NFL with the Baltimore Colts, he was pressed back into service under center during the 1965 post-season and led the Colts to the conference title game where they lost a 13-10 decision in overtime to the eventual NFL champion Green Bay Packers.

"There was no one like Tom Matte," former OSU quarterback Rex Kern told BSB. "When I was drafted by the Colts, Tom was one of the first guys to welcome me. He just kind of took me under his wing, and I can truly say he was like a big brother to me. He was a mentor, a prankster and someone who was a friend to everyone he ever met. I dearly loved Tom Matte."

Born in Pittsburgh on June 14, 1939, into an athletic family that included his grandfather, who was the decathlon champion of Canada, and his father, who played professional hockey for 17 years, Matte moved with his family at a young age to Cleveland Heights, Ohio. It was a rough-and-tumble neighborhood that apparently shaped Matte's inner drive since he was drawn to such contact sports as football and ice hockey.

He was a star player on the gridiron at Shaw High School in East Cleveland and was recruited by legendary head coach Woody Hayes to play running back at Ohio State. But early in the 1959 season, when the Buckeyes were suddenly without a capable quarterback, Hayes turned to Matte. The results were remarkable.

"In my opinion, one of the best running quarterbacks Ohio State has ever had was Tom Matte," OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "He came to Ohio State as a halfback and proved what kind of a runner he was in the NFL with the Baltimore Colts. Of course, Tom wasn't really a quarterback, and he would have probably told you that. I don't think he really ever wanted to play quarterback, but in 1959 the team really had no depth at that position."

During the first game of that season against Duke, starting quarterback Jerry Fields was knocked out of the game in the first half. Then at halftime, Hayes left the locker-room strategizing to his assistant coaches and took Matte and three other players to the practice field behind the south bleachers to get him ready to play quarterback.

"Woody went with (backup QB) Jack Wallace in the third quarter," Park said, "but when Duke was leading 13-7 in the fourth quarter, Woody put Matte in at quarterback, and Tom drove the team for a touchdown. Ironically, the first pass he threw went for a touchdown to Chuck Bry-



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME

TRUE LEGEND — Former Ohio State and Baltimore Colts star Tom Matte, shown here at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, made a positive impact on the teams and teammates with which he played over the years. Matte died Nov. 2 at the age of 82 after a battle with leukemia.

ant, and Ohio State wound up winning, 14-13.

"From that day on, and through the 1960 season, Matte was the quarterback, and he did a fine job. But he was truly a running back playing the quarterback position."

Matte told BSB in 2020 that his versatility and willingness to try just about anything on the football field led to the position switch.

"I was a jack-of-all-trades and master of none," he said. "My main job during the 1960 season was to hand the ball off to Bob Ferguson. Bob ran for about 900 yards and a bunch of touchdowns, so I'd like to think I did a pretty good job."

Matte barely got the last part of that sentence out before erupting in a hearty laugh, showing the kind of self-effacing humor that endeared him to his teammates and fans. But while he often claimed to be just a complementary player, he was voted by his teammates as Ohio State's most valuable player in 1960, earned third-team All-America honors and finished seventh in that season's Heisman Trophy balloting.

"I've never met anyone like him," veteran Baltimore sportscaster Bruce Cunningham told The Baltimore Sun. "You couldn't be within five feet of Tom Matte and not smile. He was just that guy. He just

bounced through life, and he knew that he lived a charmed life, and he loved the fact that he lived a charmed life. Everywhere he went, there were hundreds of fans in his wake. He was just that guy."

Despite the fact he played the majority of his college snaps at quarterback, Matte was taken by Baltimore with the seventh overall pick in the 1961 NFL draft.

"I had no idea what they were thinking," Matte said. "They had John Unitas for (bleep's) sake. I didn't know what in the hell they wanted with me."

Matte turned out to be one of the important pieces for the Colts as they developed one of the most potent offenses in the NFL. With Matte teaming with such future Hall of Fame players as Unitas, running back Lenny Moore, receiver Raymond Berry and tight end John Mackey, Baltimore won five division championships, two league titles and Super Bowl V following the 1970 season.

Matte spent his entire 12-year NFL career with the Colts as a gritty running back who earned the nickname "Garbage Can" after Detroit Lions defensive tackle Alex Karras described him as "nothing but a garbage-can runner." That was after a game in 1967 when Matte rushed for 110 yards and two touchdowns during a 41-7 blowout of the Lions.

"I remember he said something like, 'How can a garbage-can halfback like Matte beat us?' We laughed about it," Matte remembered in 2020. "Alex and I were really good friends. He gave me that nickname, 'the garbage can.' And of course, the team loved it. I came into the locker room after the first game I had played (at quarterback), and in my locker, what was there? A garbage can."

Matte is perhaps best remembered in Baltimore for his time at quarterback late in 1965, when the Colts lost Unitas and backup Gary Cuozzo to injuries on successive weeks. Matte, who hadn't taken a snap since college, led Baltimore to a 20-17 upset of the Los Angeles Rams, rushing for 99 yards. Then, in a playoff for the Western Conference championship, he completed 5 of 12 passes for 40 yards and ran for 57 more, but the Packers prevailed in overtime, 13-10.

The Packers went on to win the NFL title while the Colts flew home to Baltimore where it took Matte 25 minutes to get through an airport crowd that finally hoisted him on their shoulders and carried him out.

"The fans just about tore the clothes off my back while they passed me down the aisle on top of their shoulders," he said. "But how could I complain?"

While operating at quarterback in 1965, Matte wore a wristband listing plays for him to call. He called it a "cheat sheet," but over the years, it has become a standard piece of equipment for many NFL quarterbacks, including Tom Brady and Peyton Manning.

The actual wristband Matte used in 1965 is on display at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton.

"If I'd have known that wristband was going to be so popular," Matte once said with a laugh, "I'd have patented the damned thing."

Matte was a two-time Pro Bowler, earned first-team All-Pro status in 1969 when he led the league with 11 rushing touchdowns, and finished his career with 4,646 rushing yards, 2,869 receiving yards and 57 total touchdowns.

"Tom truly could have played any position he wanted," Kern said. "But he and Unitas really had something special between them. Anytime it was third-and-4 or third-and-5, they went to that halfback pass. I pitied any linebacker that went against them because they pulled that thing off like clockwork."

After retirement from the NFL following the 1972 season, Matte worked briefly as an analyst on CBS coverage of football games, and from 1996 to 2005, he provided color analysis on Baltimore Ravens radio broadcasts. For a time, Matte also provided analysis for college football games involving the University of Maryland.

He was elected to the OSU Athletics Hall of Fame in 2003 in a class that included fellow former football players Cris Carter and Korey Stringer.

Matte is survived by his wife of 59 years, Judith, two children and four grandchildren.

Purdue Aims To Play ‘Spoilermakers’ Role Again

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Purdue has managed to beat Ohio State five times in 13 tries since the turn of the century – a seemingly high number for a program that cracked The Associated Press’ top 25 rankings for the first time in 14 years earlier this season and has finished with a record above .500 only eight times since 2000.

Ohio State’s 40-15-2 record in the series is dominant, but nowhere near as dominant as the Buckeyes have been against just about every other mid- to bottom-tier Big Ten team. The Boilermakers have managed eight of their 15 wins against the Buckeyes as the lower-ranked team, and four times they have come into the game unranked and upset a top-10 ranked OSU team.

More impressive is that there never seems to be much in the way of rhyme or reason to determine Purdue’s victories against the Buckeyes. Joe Tiller snatched two in the early 2000s, once in 2000 and once in 2004. His 8-4 group in 2000 was probably better than John Cooper’s final Ohio State squad, but the 2004 rendition finished with a 7-5 record and had lost four straight before playing the Buckeyes, who had seemingly hit something of a groove in winning three straight. Ohio State would finish with five wins in its last six games, with the only blemish a 24-17 loss to Purdue.

Five years later, in Danny Hope’s first season at the helm in West Lafayette in 2009, an otherwise insignificant Purdue squad that finished the year with just five wins managed one of them with a 26-18 decision against the No. 7 Buckeyes, an outcome that knocked Ohio State out of national title contention. That OSU squad did not lose again, knocking off Penn State and Iowa to earn a spot in the Rose Bowl and besting Oregon in Pasadena, but it could not overcome those pesky Boilermakers.

“We just didn’t get it done,” sophomore center Michael Brewster said at the time. “We had five turnovers and lost the rushing battle. If you do that, you’re not going to win.”

The 2011 victory for Purdue, like Tiller’s in 2000, was a case of the better team winning as Ohio State trudged through a lost season with interim head coach Luke Fickell.

Perhaps the worst loss of the bunch for the Buckeyes – both in talent gap and in the actual result – came on Urban Meyer’s watch in 2018 when a three-loss Boilermakers team removed Ohio State from the ranks of the unbeatens with a shocking 49-20 victory. It was a game that never had the Buckeyes seriously contend against an opponent that would finish the season with a 6-7 record that included getting blown out by a 63-14 final to a mediocre Auburn team in the Music City Bowl.

Entering the 2018 game in West Lafayette, Ohio State was the No. 2-ranked team in the nation, a ranking that Purdue also has something of a history handling well. This season, the Boilermakers – often dubbed the “Spoilermakers” over the years – knocked off then-No. 2 Iowa on Oct. 16, notching their ninth victory as an unranked team against a second-ranked opponent, more than twice as many as the next highest total during the poll era.

Purdue might not be a consistently dangerous squad, but any team (especially a ranked team) that it approaches it must do so with the utmost caution.

The good news for Ohio State as it enters its Nov. 13 matchup with college football’s whammy wizard is twofold. First, the Buckeyes are not the No. 2 team. Since their week-two loss to Oregon, they’ve remained firmly on the cusp of the

all-important top four and sit at No. 6 in the AP poll following their Nov. 6 win against Nebraska.

Second, Ohio State is getting Purdue at home for this edition of the series. The Boilermakers haven’t beaten the Buckeyes in Columbus since 1988 – John Cooper’s first season in town – and have won in Columbus only five times in 34 trips. The fact is that Purdue hasn’t pulled off one of its major upsets on the road since 1974, when it stunned No. 2 Notre Dame in South Bend, 31-20.

But the history can only say so much about a future result. Ohio State and Purdue have almost completely turned over their rosters from the last time the two squads faced off in that 2018 game at Ross-Ade Stadium. Much of the coaching staffs from that battle remain – Ohio State has six assistants from that game still on staff with Tony Alford, Ryan Day, Brian Hartline, Larry Johnson, Greg Studrawa and Kevin Wilson, while Purdue’s group is nearly identical – but the majority of the ingredients within that especially putrid humble pie that Buckeyes were force-fed are no longer in town.

All but one member of the defensive coaching staff that helped to engineer that loss for the Buckeyes are gone (Johnson remains) as are Purdue quarterback David Blough, halfback D.J. Knox, wideout Rondale Moore and linebacker Markus Bailey, along with every other starter from that game.

In their places at Purdue, head coach Jeff Brohm has built a roster that looks, admittedly, somewhat similar to that group. The Boilermakers sit with a 6-3 record after a 40-29 win over Michigan State, touting an explosive, pass-first offense and an all-or-nothing defense led by a powerful front seven but featuring a struggling secondary.

This season’s answer to Blough is fifth-year senior quarterback Aidan O’Connell. The starter for the Boilermakers to open 2020 before an injury sidelined him for the remainder of the season, O’Connell has managed to hold off surging backup Jack Plummer (no relation to Jake, of Arizona State fame) and secure the starting job through the season. Through Nov. 6, O’Connell had completed a league-leading 71.6 percent of his passes for 2,086 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Brohm likes to rotate Plummer in at times, utilizing something of a multi-quarterback system. He did so successfully during the upset against Iowa but didn’t do much in that area against Nebraska on Oct. 30 or Michigan State on Nov. 6.

“Aidan is our starter, but we have other quarterbacks capable of going in and they will continue to do that,” Brohm said. “Right now, we’re limited at the running back position, and we’ve gotten some extra yardage utilizing (multiple quarterbacks). Obviously, each week will be a little bit different. We’ve got to be as efficient as we can and be able to do multiple things with each (quarterback) if and when they go in. But we’ll prepare to play anybody that we need to help us win.”

Part of Purdue’s move away from the two- or even three-quarterback system has been the return of Zander Horvath at running back, bumping the number of scholarship players at the position to two. Horvath suffered an injury early in the season against Connecticut and yielded his starting job to junior King Doerue, who has been serviceable in relief, rushing for 395 yards and two touchdowns through Nov. 6.

In several of Purdue’s three losses without Horvath, Brohm was frustrated with his offense’s inability to consistently gain short yardage with the rushing attack. It struggled mightily with that specifically Oct. 23 during a 30-13 loss against Wisconsin in which Purdue finished

2021 Record: 6-3.

Team Information: Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 5, Defense 5, Specialists 0.

Head Coach: Jeff Brohm, 5th year at Purdue, 25-28.

Series History: 68th meeting; Ohio State leads 40-15-2

School Facts: Location – West Lafayette, Ind.; Enrollment – 49,639; Nickname – Boilermakers; Colors – Black, Gold; Conference – Big Ten (West Division); Stadium – Ross-Ade Stadium (Surface, Grass; Capacity – 57,236).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
King Doerue	105	395	3.8	2
Zander Horvath	44	137	3.1	2
Dylan Downing	40	137	3.4	0

Passing

Comp-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Aidan O’Connell	194-271	71.6	2086 12-8
Jack Plummer	86-126	68.3	862 7-0

Receiving

Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
David Bell	64	1003	15.7 5
Payne Durham	36	356	9.9 4
Milton Wright	36	368	10.2 3

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 24.8

Rushing Yards Per Game – 77.1

Passing Yards Per Game – 332.4

Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 409.6

2021 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Sept. 4	OREGON STATE	W, 30-21
Sept. 11	at UConn	W, 49-0
Sept. 18	at Notre Dame	L, 27-13
Sept. 25	ILLINOIS	W, 13-9
Oct. 2	MINNESOTA	L, 20-13
Oct. 16	at Iowa	W, 24-7
Oct. 23	WISCONSIN	L, 30-13
Oct. 30	at Nebraska	W, 28-23
Nov. 6	MICHIGAN STATE	W, 40-29
Nov. 13	at Ohio State	3:30
Nov. 20	at Northwestern	TBA
Nov. 27	INDIANA	TBA
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL	Yds	Sacks
Jaylan Alexander	39	29	68	4.5	19	1.0-9
Marvin Grant	34	14	48	2.5	3	–
Kieren Douglas	28	13	41	2.0	4	–
Jalen Graham	32	8	40	3.0	19	1.0-8
Cam Allen	30	10	40	–	–	–
George Karlaftis	20	9	29	7.5	27	3.0-13
Dedrick Mackey	21	6	27	2.0	4	–
Lawrence Johnson	15	11	26	4.5	11	1.0-7
Kydran Jenkins	14	10	24	6.0	33	3.0-27

Interceptions

No.	Yds	Avg TD
Cam Allen	4	31 7.8 0
Jalen Graham	2	45 22.5 1
Dedrick Mackey	2	4 2.0 0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 18.4

Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 144.3

Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 185.3

Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 329.7

with minus-13 net yards rushing and just 3 of 12 on third-down conversions. It has struggled all season in the red zone, too.

“We’ve got to pound it in there and figure out ways to get points,” Brohm said. “When you move the ball and you get down there, you have to get seven points – bottom line. We’re not doing that, and it’s cost us. It’s cost us a great deal.”

The more physical of the two backs, Horvath hopes to solve some of those woes as his health improves.

“It’s great to have him back,” Brohm said. “He’s a big, physical back. You feel comfortable giving him the ball that even if there’s not a whole lot of yards there, he’s going to knock some people back and fall forward and do a good job with it. I think he’ll continue to improve, and he definitely is a boost to our running game.”

The real strength of the offense is out wide, though, with star receivers David Bell and Milton Wright leading the show. Bell leads the Big Ten with 1,003 receiving yards on 64 catches, and he has scored five times. Meanwhile, Wright has 36 catches for 368 yards and three TDs as the two take turns tormenting defenses. When Bell is the focal point, it’s Wright’s turn to shine. However, in losses, Purdue has struggled in supporting those two, which wideout Broc Thompson said is a focus for the group moving forward.

“We have to take some of the pressure off David,” Thompson said. “We’ve got to do a better job of executing as receivers.”

The star of the show, when he is not being double- and triple-teamed, is as excellent as advertised, though.

“He is as cool as the other side of the pillow,” offensive coordinator JaMarcus Shepard said of Bell. “He is a smooth, silky runner. There’s no herky-jerky to anything. Man, he’s like a hot knife through butter. That’s what is deceptive – the speed that he has and the quickness of some of his movements. That’s why some people sort of underestimate him. They think, ‘This guy can’t really run past me, can he?’ And then all of sudden he’s running by you.”

Tight end Payne Durham is another pass-catching threat for Purdue. Through Nov. 6, he had caught 36 balls for 356 yards and four TDs.

Defensively, Purdue is led by another superstar in the form of defensive end George Karlaftis. His stats don’t jump off the sheet, racking up 29 tackles and three sacks after nine games, but his impact goes beyond the numbers. He’s been consistently drawing multiple blockers throughout the season and catches the eye of just about every offensive coach who has to scheme against him with his athletic ability and power.

“They have a special player with Karlaftis,” said Nebraska offensive coordinator Matt Lubick. “They’re good across the board, but Karlaftis is a difference-maker. He’s every bit as good, I think, as (projected All-American Aidan Hutchinson) from Michigan.”

Behind him, linebacker Jalen Graham has come into his own after spending years as an athletic marvel without the production to support his hype. He has 40 tackles, a sack and two interceptions on the season and has garnered attention from opposing coaches as well as his own.

“Even when the scouts come in (for George), I talk about Jalen quite a bit because this is a young man to keep an eye on,” Brohm said. “He’s really played good football for us, and he practices well. He doesn’t miss any action. He’s a competitor. He wants to win. He’s had some really good games this year.”

The Buckeyes will also have to account for fellow linebacker Jaylan Alexander, who leads Purdue with 68 tackles.

In the secondary, Purdue is without a star but has found solid contributions from fifth-year cornerback Dedrick Mackey and safety Cam Allen as returning starters and new faces in safety Marvin Grant and cornerback Jamari Brown. Allen leads the Boilermakers with four INTs and also has a fumble recovery.



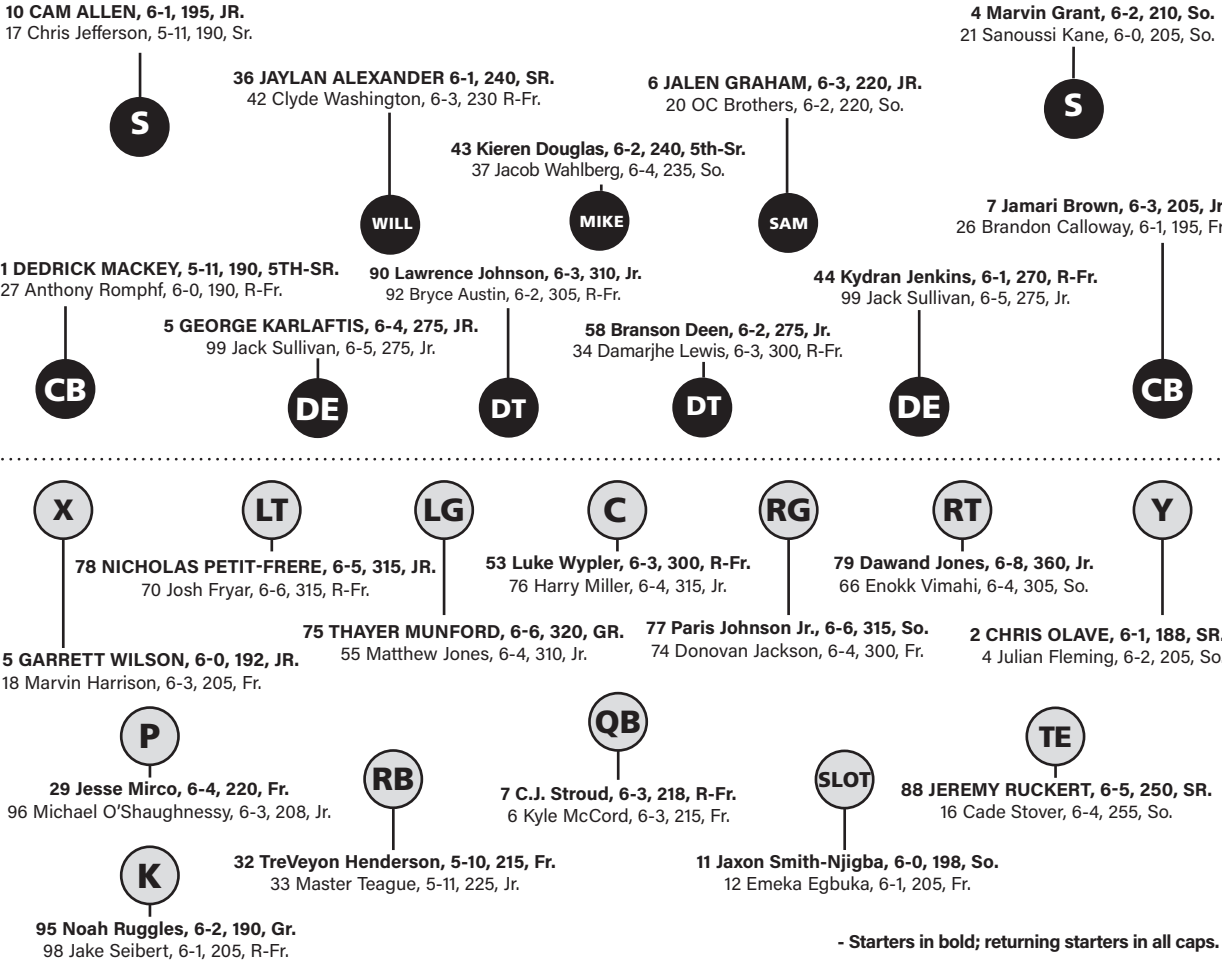
Ohio State vs. Purdue

Saturday, Nov. 13 • 3:30 p.m. • ABC
Ohio Stadium; Columbus, Ohio



Projected Depth Charts

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...



How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE vs. PURDUE RUSH DEFENSE

When the going got tough, OSU head coach Ryan Day elected to pass the ball 54 out of 84 plays during the 26-17 win at Nebraska on Nov. 7. It's clear the offensive line is struggling, and it's a testament to freshman back TreVeyon Henderson that he netted 92 yards on 21 carries (a 4.4-yard average). As a team, the Buckeyes rushed for 90 yards on 30 carries for an unflattering 3.0 average. The Buckeyes are sixth in the Big Ten with an average of 189.0 rushing yards per game, but Purdue's rush defense is 10th (144.3). **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PURDUE RUSH OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Running is an afterthought for the Boilermakers. They are last in the conference with a 77.1-yard average and gained just 58 yards on a 1.9 yards-per-carry average against Michigan State on Nov. 7. And guess what? It didn't matter as Purdue knocked off the No. 3 Spartans. King Doerue had 32 yards on 13 attempts (2.5 per carry) with one TD. For the season, he is averaging only 49.4 yards a game. Ohio State's rush defense is fourth best in the conference (107.6). **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE vs. PURDUE PASS DEFENSE

C.J. Stroud padded his stats (36 of 54 for 405 yards, two TDs and two interceptions) but the bottom line is touchdowns, and for the second week in a row, the Buckeyes were deficient in that department in the red zone. OSU had just one touchdown in three red-zone trips vs. the Cornhuskers after going 1 for 6 against Penn State. Star receiver Garrett Wilson might return after not making the trip to Lincoln, but in his absence, Jaxon Smith-Njigba set a school record with 15 catches for a career-high 240 yards that included a 75-yard TD. It's a bonus that Chris Olave had seven catches for 61 yards and a TD and nobody noticed. Ohio State leads the Big Ten in scoring (44.9), total offense (541.8 ypg) and passing (352.8), yet Stroud was not sharp against Nebraska and his decision-making is in question again. Purdue is third in the Big Ten in pass defense (185.3) with 11 interceptions. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PURDUE PASS OFFENSE vs. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Aidan O'Connell lit up the conference's worst pass defense, going 40 of 54 for a career-high 536 yards with three TDs against the Spartans. Boilermakers head coach Jeff Brohm even pulled off what was described by those covering the game as a "a reverse, flea-flicker screen pass" or a "double-triple reverse, jet sweep, trick play" for a 39-yard touchdown. No matter what it's called, the Buckeyes will have to keep an eye on Brohm and his bag of tricks. Purdue is second only to OSU in passing (332.6) and may have the best receiver in college football outside Columbus. David Bell had 11 catches for 217 yards and a 53-yard TD against the Spartans, and he tops the Big Ten with 125.4 yards per game. He gains 15.7 yards per catch and has five touchdowns in eight games. **EDGE: PURDUE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Noah Ruggles is 15 of 15 in field-goal attempts for the Buckeyes. In his career, which includes North Carolina before transferring this season, he has made 24 consecutive kicks inside 50 yards, including two 46-yarders against Nebraska. Purdue's Mitchell Fineran isn't shabby, either. He went 4 for 4 vs. MSU – although each was less than 30 yards – and has made 14 of 18 this season with a long of 48. Ohio State has the conference's best kickoff returner in freshman Emeka Egbuka, who averages 34.1 yards on 10 returns. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

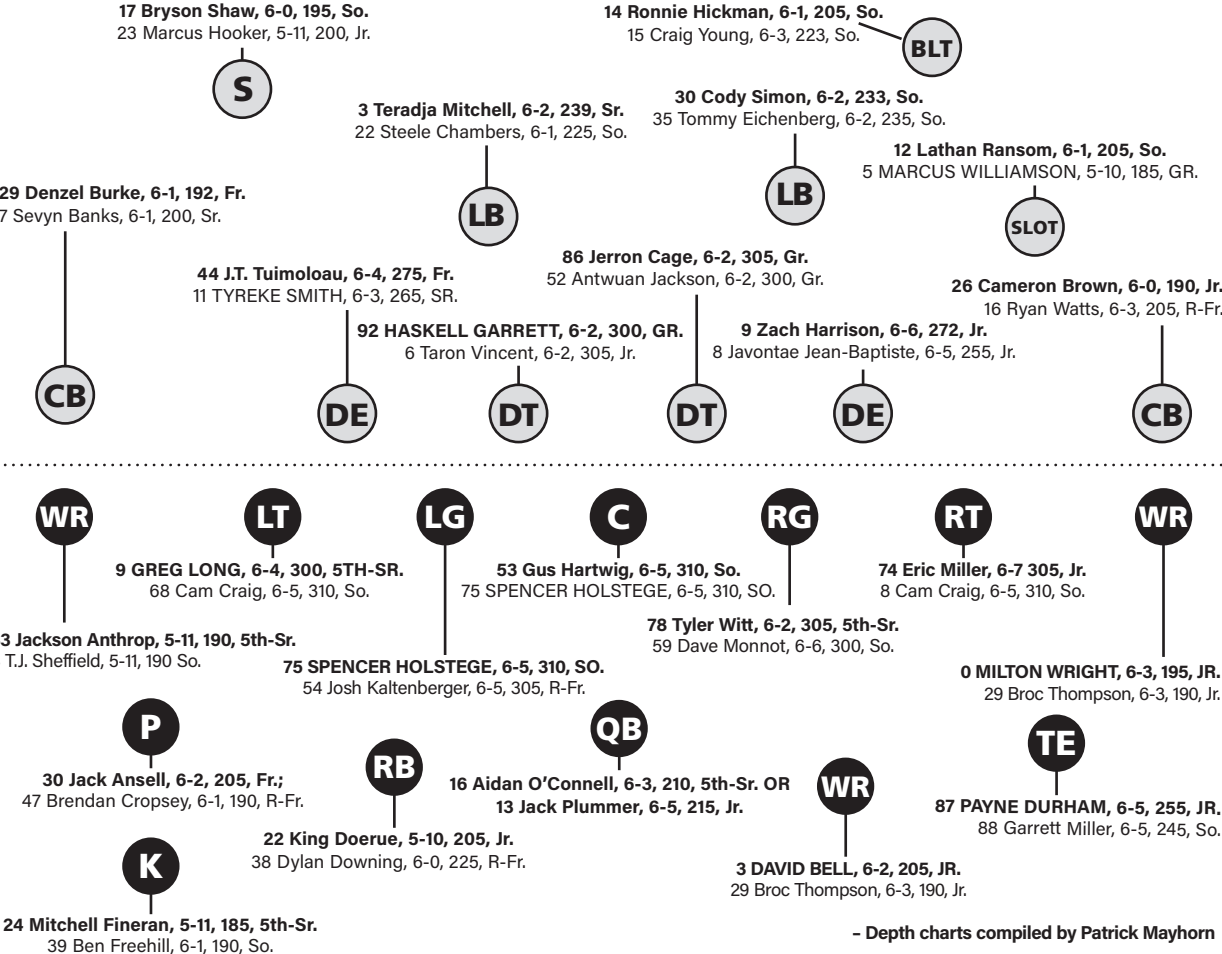
INTANGIBLES

They don't call them the Spoilermakers for nothing. In addition to knocking off the Spartans, they went on the road to hand then-No. 2 Iowa a 24-7 beatdown on Oct. 16. The Boilermakers own the FBS record with 17 wins by an unranked team over a top-five opponent, and Brohm has three of them. Of course, OSU fans want to forget the last time the teams played when the No. 2 Buckeyes were embarrassed 49-20 in West Lafayette in 2018. But the Boilermakers haven't won at Ohio Stadium since 1988. **EDGE: EVEN**

PREDICTION

This will be way more fun than predicted when the schedule came out. It's hard to imagine that Purdue has not been to Columbus since the Buckeyes prevailed with a 29-22 win in overtime during Urban Meyer's first season in 2012. Despite the gaudy passing numbers for each team, the game could be decided by how well OSU runs vs. how much pressure the Buckeyes can put on O'Connell. The Buckeyes seemed to have regressed offensively the past two games, and eight second-half penalties against Nebraska are unforgivable. Purdue has lost three times this season, but wherever the Boilermakers go, they bring an uneasy feeling with them. **OHIO STATE 34, PURDUE 31**

WHEN PURDUE HAS THE BALL...



Another Purdue Upset Throws West Into Chaos

For the second time this season, Purdue defeated a top-three team in the country, upsetting third-ranked Michigan State by a 40-29 final in West Lafayette on Nov. 6.

The Boilermakers now have 17 victories against top-five teams when they are unranked. That is six more than any other program since The Associated Press began ranking college football teams in 1936.

Purdue also has now beaten two teams ranked in the AP top five or the first time in the same season since 1960, when it knocked off No. 3 Ohio State and No. 1 Minnesota.

QB Aidan O'Connell led the aerial assault on the Spartans, throwing for 536 yards – the third-highest total in Purdue history – and three scores. Standout wide receiver David Bell broke the program record for 100-yard receiving games with his 15th in a dominant, 11-catch outing for 217 yards and a score.

Purdue jumped out to a 21-7 lead, but Michigan State battled back to tie the game at 21 in the third quarter following a Boilermakers fumble. But Purdue responded with 16 straight points to lead 37-21 in the fourth quarter. Michigan State cut the deficit to 37-29 with 5:03 remaining, but Purdue put the game out of reach with a field goal with only 41 seconds left.

Standout tailback Kenneth Walker III led Michigan State with 166 yards and one touchdown, but his fumble on the Spartans' first possession led to Purdue's first touchdown and set the tone for the game.

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

QB Payton Thorne threw for 276 yards and two touchdowns and added 37 yards and a score on the ground.

Purdue didn't engineer the only upset in the Big Ten on Nov. 4. Unranked Illinois went on the road to hand No. 20 Minnesota a 14-6 loss, leaving the Big Ten West standings in a jumble. The Illini win came just two weeks after they scored a 20-18 upset win against No. 7 Penn State in nine overtimes.

The Illinois defense dominated the Golden Gophers, who entered the game averaging more than 200 rushing yards per game. Minnesota managed only 89 yards on the ground while the Illini tallied nine tackles for loss, including six sacks. Tarique Barnes also picked off Minnesota quarterback Tanner Morgan on the opening drive, which led to an Illini touchdown.

Isaiah Williams scored Illinois' first touchdown with a 2-yard run, and the Illini went up 14-0 in the second quarter on 15-yard TD reception by Tip Reiman on a pass from Brandon Peters. Minnesota didn't score until the 4:49 mark of the fourth quarter.

Chase Brown continued to dominate on the ground for Illinois, rushing for 147 yards on 32 carries. Peters was only 7 for 9 for 80 yards and a touchdown, but each of his seven completions went to a different receiver.

Morgan completed only 15 of 28 attempts for 180 yards, no touchdowns and two picks.

Elsewhere in the league, Penn State receiver Jahan Dotson joined Bell and Ohio State's Jaxon Smith-Njigba with record-setting days. Dotson set a new single-game school record with 242 receiving yards during his team's 31-14 win against Maryland.

While breaking Deon Butler's record of 216 set in 2006 against Northwestern, Dotson also tied career highs with 11 receptions and three touchdowns.

Penn State QB Sean Clifford tallied his third 300-yard game of the season, totaling 363 passing yards and three touchdowns. Clifford and Dotson also connected for the Nittany Lions' longest pass play of the season, combining for an 86-yard touchdown early in the fourth quarter to break a 14-14 tie.

PSU then put the game away with an 87-yard interception return for a touchdown by Ji'Ayir Brown with 2:39 to go. Brown also had nine tackles (eight solo) and a fumble recovery in the game.

Maryland quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa threw for 371 yards and one touchdown. He also completed a two-point conversion on a pass to Okonkwo Chigoziem, who posted 12 receptions for 85 yards, including 54 yards after the catch.

Michigan cruised to a 29-7 win against Indiana behind a career-best rushing performance from Hassan Haskins and shutdown defense highlighted by standout linebacker David Ojabo.

After Michigan tailback Blake Corum went down with an ankle injury in the first quarter, Haskins stepped up to the tune a career-high 168 rushing yards and a score. QB Cade McNamara completed 10 of 18 passes for 168 yards and two touchdowns for Michigan, while wideout Cornelius Johnson led the team with five catches for 108 yards.

Ojabo recorded his eighth sack of the season and forced his fourth fumble, both of which lead the Big Ten.

The Hoosiers struggled to generate any offense, totaling just 195 yards. Third-string quarterback Donaven McCulley completed 10 of 24 passes for only 88 yards.

Iowa and Northwestern engaged in an old-fashioned defensive battle before the Hawkeyes emerged with a 17-12 victory.

In addition to stellar defense, Iowa got strong performances from tailback Tyler

BIG

2021 Standings

East Division

	Conf.		All		Pct.
	W	L	W	L	
Ohio State	6	0	8	1	.889
Michigan	5	1	8	1	.889
Michigan State	5	1	8	1	.889
Penn State	3	3	6	3	.667
Maryland	2	4	5	4	.556
Rutgers	1	5	4	5	.444
Indiana	0	6	2	7	.222

West Division

	Conf.		All		Pct.
	W	L	W	L	
Iowa	4	2	7	2	.778
Minnesota	4	2	6	3	.667
Purdue	4	2	6	3	.667
Wisconsin	4	2	6	3	.667
Illinois	3	4	4	6	.400
Northwestern	1	5	3	6	.333
Nebraska	1	6	3	7	.300

Nov. 6 Games

Ohio State 26, Nebraska 17
Illinois 14, Minnesota 6
Penn State 31, Maryland 14
Wisconsin 52, Rutgers 3
Purdue 40, Michigan State 29
Michigan 29, Indiana 7
Iowa 17, Northwestern 12

Nov. 13 Games

Michigan at Penn State, Noon
Rutgers at Indiana, Noon
Northwestern at Wisconsin, Noon
Minnesota at Iowa, 3:30 p.m.
Purdue at **Ohio State**, 3:30 p.m.
Maryland at Michigan State, 4 p.m.

Nov. 20 Games

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

Nov. 26 Game

Iowa at Nebraska, 1:30 p.m.

Nov. 27 Games

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

Goodson as well as second-string quarterback Alex Padilla. Goodson ran for 100 yards in the first half and finished with 141 yards on 21 carries. Meanwhile, Padilla entered the game late in the first quarter and led Iowa to touchdowns on his first two possessions. He finished the day 18 of 28 passing for 172 yards.

Northwestern quarterback Andrew Marty threw for 270 yards in his first career start, but he was intercepted three times. The Wildcats also struggled to establish their running game, totaling only 93 yards on 31 attempts.

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Wisconsin piled up 24 points in the second quarter on its way to a 52-3 trouncing of Rutgers.

QB Graham Mertz completed 11 of 16 passes for 240 yards and three touchdowns as the Badgers won their fifth straight game. Freshman tailback Braelon Allen rushed for 129 yards and one touchdown, and Chez Mellusi added 75 yards and a score.

The Badgers' win, coupled with Iowa's win and Purdue's upset of Minnesota, put the Big Ten West standings into a four-way tie for first place with Wisconsin, Minnesota, Purdue and Iowa each with 5-2 records.

Illinois Lands Important Basketball Commitment

Illinois head coach Brad Underwood picked up a substantial win on the recruiting trail, recently securing the commitment of 2024 Chicago St. Rita forward Morez Johnson.

Johnson, who is listed at 6-8 and 205 pounds, impressed the Fighting Illini staff at Pangos All-Midwest Camp in LaGrange, Ill. The sophomore forward posted the announcement of his verbal commitment to Illinois on Twitter.

"It has always been a dream of mine to represent my hometown," Johnson wrote. "With that being said, I am committing to the University of Illinois! I know people are going to look at it and think, 'He's too young.' No, I know what I want, and this program can help me get there."

Johnson is not the only highly coveted prospect at the renowned St. Rita. His teammate, 6-9 sophomore center James Brown, is a main contender to be the No. 1 recruit in the state for 2024. While Brown has been ranked the nation's No. 18 overall prospect by Rivals, Johnson has yet to receive a ranking.

"I've visited more than a few high-level programs," Johnson tweeted. "But the feeling I got when I put on the Illinois jersey

was like no other. It's about winning, development and culture. This is home."

The athletic forward from Chicago chose the Illini over offers from Florida, Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio State and Texas.

Maryland Women Get Verbal From 4-Star Guard

Maryland women's basketball head coach Brenda Frese continued her success in recruiting, recently locking up the second commitment for her 2023 class in South Bend (Ind.) Washington four-star guard Amiyah Reynolds.

Reynolds' commitment came several months after Frese and her staff extended the offer on April 24. The talented 6-0 guard drew strong interest from many elite programs but ultimately chose Maryland over offers from more than 15 other programs, including Ohio State, Iowa, Michigan and North Carolina State.

"100% of the glory goes to God, so thankful for every huge opportunity He has provided me with and every single small blessing along the way," Reynolds posted to Twitter. "Excited to be a Terp!"

As a sophomore at Washington, Reynolds averaged 9.9 points, 7.4 rebounds, 6.7 assists and 3.8 steals per game. She is ranked ESPN's No. 21 recruit in the 2023 class, with a 95 scouts grade.

Reynolds' ability to handle the ball and create opportunities for teammates helped make her a top target for numerous schools. She also plays with strength and toughness, allowing her to navigate in the paint and finish at the rim.

With her commitment to Maryland, Reynolds followed in the footsteps of her older sister Mila, who committed to the Terps in July 2020. Mila was also considered a four-star prospect by ESPN, and the duo will have three years to play to-

gether in College Park.

Minnesota Women Lose Guard For Upcoming Season

Minnesota head women's basketball coach Lindsay Whalen recently announced that sophomore guard Katie Borowicz will miss the remainder of the season after undergoing surgery to repair a non-athletic related injury.

Borowicz was an early enrollee for the Golden Gophers in 2020-21, playing in 14 games with one start. Known for her ability to shoot, Borowicz boasted the highest three-point percentage on the roster with at least 20 attempts at 37.5 percent. She also shot a team-high 40.0 percent from beyond the arc in Big Ten play.

Coming out of Roseau, Minn., Borowicz was a four-star recruit according to ESPN. The 5-7 guard was rated the No. 98 overall prospect in the 2020 class.

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Ohio State Adds 4-Star OL Padilla To 2023 Class

Offensive lineman Joshua Padilla of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne issued a verbal commitment Nov. 4 to Ohio State and became the second member of the Buckeyes' 2023 recruiting class. He joins four-star tight end Ty Lockwood of Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Patrick Mayhorn

Padilla plays guard and tackle for Wayne, but he profiles as a guard at the next level. The 6-4, 265-pound lineman received an offer from Ohio State in March and said he first knew the Buckeyes were interested when OSU offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson retweeted one of Padilla's wrestling highlights after he won his district championship in the 285-pound class.

According to 247Sports' composite rankings, Padilla is ranked the 194th-best prospect in the 2023 cycle and the 10th-best interior offensive lineman.

Padilla attended the OSU home opener against Oregon in September and most recently was on campus Oct. 30 for the Penn State game.

"My visit was great," Padilla told Eleven Warriors. "Finally going to a game feels good knowing I couldn't go to any games last year."

The Dayton-area product has long been one of Ohio State's top targets on the offensive line for 2023. The Buckeyes would love to pair Padilla, considered a top-five player within Ohio, with another top-five in-state standout in the form of Findlay's Luke Montgomery, who, like Padilla, is expected to line up as an interior blocker at the next level. To secure a pair of guards within their own state would be a huge boost for the Buckeyes, who

could shift their attention earlier than expected to the tackle market, which is far more open in 2023.

Leading that market for Ohio State is Des Moines (Iowa) Southeast Polk five-star Kadin Proctor (6-7, 330) who ranks as the nation's No. 5 player and No. 1 tackle – though plucking him out of Iowa could prove difficult against the Hawkeyes, who rarely miss on in-state targets. Chase Bisontis (6-5, 290) of Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep is the No. 42 prospect in the nation and has drawn plenty of interest from the Buckeyes too, as have Orlando Dr. Phillips four-star Payton Kirkland (6-5, 330) and Brockton (Mass.) Thayer Academy four-star Samson Okunlola (6-5, 295).

Ohio State would like another full offensive line class in 2023, meaning two tackles, another guard to join Padilla and, if possible, a center. Unfortunately, the center group isn't especially strong for 2023, so a third guard or just a four-man class could be in the cards.

Branch Cancels Alabama Visit

Las Vegas Bishop Gorman 2022 four-star safety Zion Branch (6-2, 195) will not be taking an official visit to Alabama as previously planned, according to a brief report from Bama Online insider Hank South. Branch was expected to be in Tuscaloosa on Nov. 6 for Alabama's matchup with LSU but did not make the trip.

That comes on the heels of Branch's first visit to Columbus since June. He took in Ohio State's 33-24 victory against Penn State alongside a number of uncommitted prospects including fellow four-star safety target Xavier Nwankpa (6-2, 190) of Altoona (Iowa) Southeast Polk and Branch's younger brother, Zachariah (5-9, 172), a 2023 four-star receiver out of Bishop Gorman. Long considered an Ohio State lean, Branch said that the trip to Columbus exceeded his expectations.

"It was a great experience," Branch told Buckeye Scoop. "I got to meet with academic advisors and professors that gave us a better understanding on the academics and school itself. I really learned a lot. I spoke with Coach Day, Coach (Matt) Barnes and Coach (Kerry) Coombs as well. I had meetings with Day and Barnes, which went great. We talked about a bit of everything. The atmosphere at the game was electric from the fans to the game in general. It was awesome."

"I got to hang with some of the commits on the visit. I spent time with guys like C.J. (Hicks), Kyion (Graves) and Caleb Burton at the game. I definitely made a connection with those guys. Ohio State definitely remains in my top few schools left."

Joining the Buckeyes on Branch's final list are Alabama, Clemson, Oklahoma and USC, though the Trojans continue to look like the top competition to the Buckeyes for his signature. He has a strong relationship with defensive backs coach and interim head coach Donte Williams, and if Williams is retained on USC's next staff, the Trojans could become a real threat.

Branch is slated to visit Clemson on Nov. 12 but has yet to return to Los Angeles or Norman this season. He's scheduled to visit

OSU Football Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2022 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Kojo Antwi	WR	6-0	190	★★★★	Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert
Terrance Brooks	CB	5-11	190	★★★★	Little Elm, Texas
Jyaire Brown	CB	6-0	178	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West
Kaleb Brown	WR	5-11	177	★★★★	Chicago St. Rita
Caleb Burton	WR	6-0	165	★★★★★	Del Valle, Texas
George Fitzpatrick	OT	6-6	285	★★★★	Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek
Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	235	★★★★	Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona
Kyion Graves	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

USC from Nov. 19-21, and Alabama will need to find a way to reschedule his trip to make a serious run for his commitment. South did not list him among Alabama's realistic defensive back targets in early November.

As for Ohio State's pursuit, Zion wasn't the only member of the Branch family who came away impressed over the weekend. His father, Sheva, told 247Sports that he was thrilled with the trip.

"We had a great time visiting Ohio State," the elder Branch said. "This trip allowed us to meet with a few college professors and experience the gameday atmosphere. It was exciting and definitely a lot of Buckeye support."

"What stood out most was that the players seemed to be pretty focused and dialed in. We enjoyed our time in Columbus."

He also noted the stylistic fit for both players within Ohio State's program. The Buckeyes have been selling Branch as one of two safeties who would fit within their new-look defense, alongside Nwankpa, who also said that he had a great visit and seems to be favoring the Buckeyes. Meanwhile, Zachariah Branch had an extended meeting with wide receivers coach Brian Hartline and told On3Sports that it cleared up a lot of questions he had about his potential role within the OSU offense.

"Athletically, I think it's a good fit for them both as far as the system they're going to run," the elder Branch continued. "Defensively, I think it's a good fit for Zion, and offensively, I think it's a good fit for Zach."

"We got a chance to meet with a few counselors again and some of the professors to get an idea of how to balance the schedule. What makes sense for us with any program is having that support all the way around academically and athletically, holding them accountable. That's the biggest thing for us to be the right fit."

Day spoke specifically about the role of smaller receivers in his offense prior to the Oct. 30 visit and seemed to be talking specifically about Chicago St. Rita 2022 four-star WR commit Kaleb Brown (5-11, 177) as well as the younger Branch – though, according to NCAA rules, he cannot do so by name. In a system that has been ruled largely by receivers at or around the 6-0 mark, Day said that Ohio State is open to talent of any size.

"If (those receivers are) available, (we'll

take them)" Day said. "We won't just fit someone into that role just because we need someone in that role. They have to be the best available. Now, they have to be within certain specifications, but we know how to adapt and that's something we're proud of here on offense."

"Based on who we have, we've been able to put those guys in the right position, and that's what coaching is. When you have a great one who's built to be a certain way, and you want him to be a Buckeye, you'll figure out ways to get him the ball and how to adapt from there within reason."

Zion Branch is considered the No. 44 overall player, No. 6 safety and No. 1 Nevada prospect in the class of 2022. He would be the fifth defensive back to join Ohio State's class and the second safety if he does decide on Columbus as his destination – with a decision date slated for Dec. 16, right ahead of the early signing period. His younger brother, Zachariah, is the No. 44 player and No. 7 receiver in the class of 2023 and has no scheduled decision date.

Wagner Includes OSU In Top Group

Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star 2022 offensive tackle Aamil Wagner (6-6, 265) announced his final five schools and set a commitment date on Oct. 30 – which is not good news for the Buckeyes. Wagner named Ohio State to his list of top programs along with Kentucky, Maryland, Notre Dame and Penn State but announced a Nov. 11 commitment date.

For frequent readers of Recruiting Outlook, the issue there for Ohio State isn't exactly secret. Wagner, despite his status as a top-150 player from within Ohio State's territory (No. 134 in the 247Sports composite), fell from the top of Ohio State offensive tackle recruiting board as the Buckeyes keyed in on several higher-rated out-of-state prospects.

As the two sides drifted apart, Wagner took an interest in Kentucky, thanks to the Ohio recruiting connections within that staff based largely around head coach Mark Stoops, recruiting coordinator/tight ends coach Vince Marrow and Wagner's brother, Ahmad, who joined the UK staff as a graduate assistant in September, as well as his

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relationship with several Wildcat commits, including Charlestown, Ind., five-star offensive tackle Kiyaunta Goodwin, another former Buckeye lean.

That, paired with the timing, makes Wagner unlikely to land Ohio State's way. He is fresh off a weekend visit to Notre Dame, and with trips to Kentucky and Penn State already under his belt and one last trip to Maryland as a tentative possibility, it seems that he has seen enough – and enough does not appear to include a return visit to Ohio State. Barring a surprise at Maryland, he seems to be down to Kentucky and Notre Dame.

Wagner told 247Sports that his familial ties to Kentucky will play only a small role in his decision and that his visit to South Bend was excellent, but it would be a major surprise if Wagner doesn't don the blue and white on Nov. 11.

"I feel my brother being at Kentucky does play a small role in it," Wagner said. "I think I already have a deep connection with Kentucky with him playing there for two years and him being recruited since high school. But him being there as a coach now, as a graduate assistant, he's been there since the start of the season and it kind of gives me more of a support system if I do choose to go to Kentucky. It's more as though I'd have support if I do go there, but not any more of a draw as anywhere else. I do think that it plays a role, but I don't see it as a deciding factor if he's there or not."

Assuming Wagner doesn't shock the recruiting world, he would be the 11th of the top 15 recruits from the Buckeye State in 2022 to land with a school other than Ohio State as well as the second to join Kentucky's class, following West Chester Lakota West four-star athlete Alex Afari.

However, of national top-200 players in the state, he would be one of only three to depart, joining Westerville South wideout Kayden Saunders and Medina QB Drew Al-lar (both pledged to Penn State). No. 1 C.J. Hicks of Kettering Alter, No. 2 Gabe Powers of Marysville, No. 5 Tegra Tshabola and No. 7 Jyaire Brown of West Chester Lakota West

are each in the OSU class.

Day Has No Complaints About O-Line Recruiting

Ohio State has developed something of an affinity for developmental offensive line prospects under the guidance of OL coach Greg Studrawa. Since his arrival in 2016, Studrawa has been one of Ohio State's more eclectic recruiters, landing one more three-star prospect (six) than he has five-star recruits since the class of 2017 and averaging a 0.9272 recruiting ranking (which would be good for No. 176 in the 2022 class) and an average composite ranking well below that at No. 329.

That can be attributed partially to the margins being much smaller in the ratings (even the top recruit and some of the lowest players rated are only split by about .2 in the ratings system) than they are in recruiting, but the numbers still reflect a pretty significant split between the best- and worst-case scenarios for Ohio State in recruiting offensive linemen. When Studrawa hits on his top target, odds are very good that the Buckeyes are securing a four- or five-star prospect.

But when he shifts to his next group, the ratings and rankings drop significantly. His three-star prospects average a 0.8606 rating and 873rd in the rankings. He's dipped beyond the top 1,000 three times, pulling St. Clairsville three-star Avery Henry (6-7, 305), Dawand Jones and Trey Leroux in despite their modest rankings.

Of those three-star prospects, one has found significant playing time (Jones), four (each from the class of 2020) have yet to crack the two-deep (Josh Fryar, Jakob James, Leroux and Grant Toutant), and Henry hasn't yet enrolled. Conversely, Donavan Jackson is the lone five-star without a start to his name in Columbus, but he's a true freshman projected to crack the lineup in 2022. The four-stars have produced four starters (Harry Miller, Thayer Munford, Josh Myers and Luke Wypler) in 11 tries, with two yet to arrive on campus.

Despite that hit-rate disparity, Day praised

Studrawa's recruiting and developmental practices when asked about the team's offensive line recruiting shortly after Henry's pledge.

"When you look at where our tackles are right now, and what we have in the program, I've been very impressed with the way our tackles have played," Day said. "That's really the true gauge. You have some guys with us like Thayer Munford and Dawand Jones and a couple others that weren't highly recruited, but they were developed and they're playing at a high level.

"Then you have some other guys who were really highly recruited that maybe didn't work out. The bottom line is finding the right guys for Ohio State and developing them at a high level. And then, what is the ultimate evaluation? How they play when they're here. When you grab a guy and say, 'This is the guy we want,' we want to look at him and say, 'What's he going to look like in three or four years?' That's the most important thing, not how many stars they have."

Ohio State usually sits near or at the top of the recruiting rankings, but Day said that the development of those lesser-known players is the cornerstone of the Buckeye program – that the higher-profile players are crucial as a bedrock, with higher floors than their counterparts and in some cases less room for development.

"You do have to be smart about how many of those guys you take, and that's part of the puzzle," Day said, expounding on his comment about the importance of fit. "Just in general right now, you really have to recruit guys that want to be at Ohio State, guys that want to be Buckeyes and understand what being a Buckeye is. Because the minute something doesn't go well, they could walk out the door.

"So we're really taking that to heart and evaluating all these guys and what we think, not trying to look at the stars or who's recruiting them. What do we think, and what do we think is the right fit for Ohio State? I think we've done a good job of that. There are certain situations where you see traits and then think, 'Can we develop him?' Dawand is an example of that."

Ohio Pair Earns Offers From OSU

Ohio State extended a pair of scholarship offers to in-state prospects since BSB last went to print, reaching out to 2023 Middletown Lakota East offensive lineman Austin Siereveld and 2025 Findlay quarterback Ryan Montgomery to add them to the board in their respective classes.

Siereveld has yet to draw a national ranking from 247Sports, but at 6-5 and 315 pounds as a junior, he offers prototypical size and has impressed several recruiters with his play for the Thunderhawks this season. He earned scholarship offers from Cincinnati, Illinois, Kentucky and Michigan State, as well as Ohio State, all within a week from Oct. 27 to Nov. 4.

He earned his OSU offer during a meeting with Day on Oct. 30 as part of his visit to campus for the Penn State game, calling it a dream offer when speaking to Eleven Warriors.

"I was really honored to be offered by them," Siereveld said. "The fact that they offered me in person with Coach Day was really awesome, too.

"I watched every game (growing up). You could say it's my dream offer. Everyone in my community is Ohio State fans. Having them potentially supporting me would be great."

Meanwhile, Montgomery (6-3, 180) has long been a staple in the Buckeye recruiting world, despite another three years between now and his time to sign on the dotted line. The brother of Luke Montgomery (6-5, 260), a 2023 four-star OL/DL with significant Ohio State interest, Ryan earned the starting nod at Findlay this season as a freshman and led the team to its first playoff win in 16 years.

In the process, he earned offers from Michigan, Notre Dame, Penn State, Tennessee and now the Buckeyes, which extended a scholarship offer during his visit to campus as well, during a separate meeting with Day. He, too, called it a dream offer and referred to Ohio State as his childhood school.

He is Ohio State's first offer for the class

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Zack Carpenter of Lettermen Row

As Ohio State recruits Las Vegas Bishop Gorman again with the Branch brothers – four-star safety Zion for 2022 and four-star receiver Zachariah for 2023 – is there a reason the Buckeyes were so involved there in 2017 but seemed to back off for a few years, or is it a matter of available talent?

"I would say it's probably available talent. Let's look to the state of Washington as a reference point. Ohio State signed one player from Washington in history until the 2020 class with Gee Scott Jr. Then, boom, they got Emeka Egbuka and J.T. Tuimoloau. And now they haven't offered anyone from Washington in 2022, 2023 or 2024. Washington's not known for having that much talent. Those were three of the top five highest-ranked players in the history of the state. I think that shows how cyclical recruiting can be. They have good inroads and ambition at Bishop Gorman, so I think it's just preference with their recruits and available talent."

Cleveland Glenville sent so many players to Ohio State in the 2000s and early 2010s. Will the Tarblooders ever produce another Buckeye?

"Well, they had Ted Ginn Jr., Troy Smith and Cardale Jones, but I don't know. They're going to prioritize in-state guys as much as they can. Ryan Day has talked about getting to see these kids in person and shaking their hands – all that stuff. I know that they would prefer

to bring in a little nucleus from Ohio in each class. They prefer to have those guys wrapped up in a class early to start building. They want to have those four, five or six in-state guys be the class leaders and get them in early so they can shut the door and not worry about them. They'll still recruit them, though. To zero in on the Glendale area – I'm sure they would love to bring in more guys from Cleveland as well as from that school just as a nucleus."

Ohio State debuted its all-scarlet jerseys against Penn State on Oct. 30. Does that sort of thing excite recruits and help the Buckeyes land talented players?

"Yes, 1 million percent. I know a lot of the older heads didn't like them. They want the traditional stuff. But if you want your team to keep winning, you want to keep accumulating bigger and better talents, that's one way to do it. You have to adapt or die. Within an hour after they announced that they were going to be debuting those new uniforms, Day was already on the phone with prospects asking, 'Did you see the new uniforms?' They were sending out those graphics, and it was very much a recruiting push by trying to switch things up for the players and have a cool look."

Pickerington (Ohio) Central five-star safety Sonny Styles was just on campus for the Buckeyes. Is it still a two-team race between Ohio State and Notre Dame, and where do you think he

ultimately lands?

"He has his final five out. It's Ohio State, Notre Dame, Ole Miss, Florida and Clemson that are competing. If we're being honest and realistic, this is a two-team race with Ohio State and Notre Dame. I still think Ohio State lands him. He's the biggest, most important recruit in Ohio in the last five years. Jeremy Birmingham (of Lettermen Row) says the most important recruit of all time or the last decade. He is definitely the most important recruit in recent times. Ohio State has prioritized him throughout his recruitment. It's going to hurt if another school lands him because he's been a guy they've talked about for years. I still feel good about him winding up at Ohio State, and I wouldn't be surprised if they landed him sooner rather than later. His brother being at Notre Dame is a factor, but I don't think that matters at all. Notre Dame is selling him on being the next Kyle Hamilton, while Ohio State is selling him on being a defensive weapon. The Buckeyes would use him almost like Isaiah Simmons at Clemson a few years ago. He could play safety, cornerback, linebacker, and when he worked out with Larry Johnson over the summer, he put his hand in the dirt and took reps at defensive end. He could be used all over the place. Ohio State's plan is to structure its defense around him because he's that talented. He is no doubt a three-year-and-gone type of player."

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of 2025 and one of only a few quarterbacks to draw Day’s interest so far in advance. Ohio State has offered just six 2023 QBs, four from the 2024 class and Montgomery as the lone 2025 signal-caller.

OHSAA Playoffs Feature Several OSU Targets

Here are results from the second round of Ohio high school playoffs with notable prospects competing.

No. 7 Cleveland Heights at No. 2 Medina – It was a dominant performance for the Battling Bees of Medina behind Penn State quarterback commit Drew Allar, who accounted for six touchdowns on the way to a 45-14 victory over Cleveland Heights to advance to the third round in Division I’s No. 1 region, where Medina will meet St. Ignatius.

Allar tossed for 304 yards and four scores, adding another two touchdowns and 139 yards on the ground, but he complimented the play of his defense after the game to Cleveland.com, after it shut down Cleveland Heights completely in the second half, holding it scoreless following a 21-14 halftime mark.

“We were only up seven going into half-time, and they were getting the ball,” Allar said. “The defense did a great job of coming out and swinging the momentum back to the offense.”

No. 8 Perrysburg at No. 1 Marysville – Ohio State linebacker pledge Gabe Powers and the Marysville Monarchs again looked the part of a No. 1 seed on Nov. 5, rattling

Perrysburg early and often on the way to a dominant 42-6 victory, led by Powers and an electric defense. Perrysburg’s lone touchdown came with just over a minute to play on a 19-yard scamper, which served as nearly half of the 54 rushing yards Perrysburg was able to gain all game.

“It’s not just stopping the run, but their defense is something special,” Perrysburg head coach Dirk Conner told the Sentinel-Tribune in Marysville. “It really is. In 17 years as a head football coach, it is one of the best defenses I’ve ever seen.

“We just have to bow down to those guys. I want to get to this point as a program. They are the No. 2 team in the state and No. 1 seed for a reason. We were going to have to come in here and play super-clean and almost perfect to have a chance of winning.”

No. 14 Dublin Coffman at No. 6 Findlay – The Montgomery brothers forced a second-half running clock against Dublin Coffman on the way to a 38-8 victory.

“Phenomenal performance,” first-year Findlay head coach Stefan Adams told The (Toledo) Blade. “I was very proud of the guys for their effort, their ability to finish, and to understand what was asked of them.”

The younger Montgomery wasn’t pressed into action a whole lot through the air, but he was excellent when he did get the chance, completing 14 of 18 passes for 189 yards and two touchdowns. The elder Montgomery helped to keep his brother upright on the offensive line and led the way for halfback Isaac James, who rushed for 189 yards and three touchdowns on 13 carries.

No. 7 Hilliard Bradley at No. 2 Pickerington Central – Sonny Styles Jr. and Pickerington Central took care of Hilliard Bradley, 28-10, to set up a rematch against Pickerington North in the third round, presenting an opportunity for the Tigers to avenge their lone loss of the season.

Styles, who added an interception to his career total, helped hold the Bradley offense to only 135 total yards of offense, though it did lose starting quarterback Bradyn Fleharty to injury in the first quarter.

“They are really good, and when you lose your quarterback it’s really, difficult,” Bradley head coach Mike LoParo told The Columbus Dispatch. “It was tough, but our kids fought back and played hard.”

No. 6 Milford at No. 3 Lakota West – It was a quiet day for Ohio State’s pair of Lakota West commitments, Jyaire Brown and Tegra Tshabola, but the Firebirds still had more than enough for a 49-14 blowout of Milford to advance to a huge third-round matchup against No. 2-seeded St. Xavier at a neutral

site yet to be announced.

No. 15 Kettering Alter at No. 7 Tipp City Tippecanoe – Five-star linebacker commit Hicks managed to will his 15th-seeded Alter squad to a first-round victory on Oct. 29, but the luck ran dry on Nov. 5 against Tippecanoe, as Alter’s season came to a close with a 37-28 defeat.

Hicks can now shift his focus in full to recruiting for the Buckeyes, an effort in which he has been tremendously active since his pledge in 2020.

No. 7 Carrollton at No. 2 St. Clairsville – For the second time this season, Henry and St. Clairsville took care of business against Carrollton, 38-9 this time, to advance to the third round. St. Clairsville won the first matchup of the season between the two in a season-opening 42-35 battle but had nowhere near as much trouble this time, riding a dominant rushing attack to a matchup next week with No. 6-seeded Meadowbrook.

OHSAA Matchups To Watch, Round Three

- No. 2 Medina (12-0) vs. No. 6 Cleveland St. Ignatius (7-4)
- No. 1 Marysville (11-0) vs. No. 4 Toledo Whitmer (10-2)
- No. 6 Findlay (9-3) vs. No. 2 Springfield (10-1)
- No. 2 Pickerington Central (11-1) vs. No. 6 Pickerington North (9-3)
- No. 3 Lakota West (10-1) vs. No. 2 Cincinnati St. Xavier (10-2)
- No. 2 St. Clairsville (12-1) vs. No. 6 Byesville Meadowbrook (10-2)

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1986

One of the most talented defensive prospects in the nation was Jerrod Vance (6-3, 228) of Massillon (Ohio) Washington. Many compared him to Ohio State linebacker Chris Spielman, but his head coach was not one of them.

“It’s hard to compare anyone to Spielman,” John Moranto said. “Vance is a different kind of player because he is so much bigger than Spielman. He has 4.74 speed, and he should be able to play linebacker at 235.”

Another top prospect in the Midwest was Scott Kowalkowski of Orchard Lake (Mich.) St. Mary’s. He was the son of former Detroit Lions guard Bob Kowalkowski.

“He can play the run with the best of them and drops back into the passing lanes very well,” said one Big Ten coach who wanted to sign Kowalkowski.

30 Years Ago – 1991

Cincinnati Moeller senior offensive lineman Eric Wendt narrowed his choices to five schools, but two of them appeared to clearly be at the top.

“I’d say right now it’s really close between Notre Dame and Michigan,” Wendt said. “But I’m also looking at Ohio State, Penn State and Clemson. Anything can happen when I take my visits.”

The 6-4, 265-pounder explained that when he was growing up, he lived next door to Gerry Faust when he was coaching at Moeller. Faust then went on to Notre Dame, which led to Wendt following the Fighting Irish.

25 Years Ago – 1996

With the team in need of defensive linemen at season’s end, Ohio State may have found a potential one when Walla Walla (Wash.) Junior College product Toalei Mulitauaopele said his No. 1 choice was hesitant to take him because of his past.

Mulitauaopele served two years in prison after pleading guilty to being an accomplice to a murder charge for driving the getaway car on a drug-related hit. He was waiting in the car while his sister’s ex-boyfriend murdered two people in a Tacoma, Wash., apartment. He claimed he had no knowledge of the crime.

Because of his suspicious past, Washington wasn’t quick to offer him a scholarship, but with the Huskies stalling, that gave schools such as LSU, Ohio State, Oregon, Syracuse and Washington State an opportunity to sign him.

“(Ohio State) tells me they want me and they call me weekly,” he

said. “But I think they’re trying to get me in through the back door, to have me walk on and then give me a scholarship later.”

20 Years Ago – 2001

Westerville (Ohio) North tight end George Cooper Jr. was considering following in his father’s footsteps and playing at Ohio State. His father was a fullback for the Buckeyes from 1984-87.

The younger Cooper caught 25 passes for more than 400 yards and one touchdown as a senior for the Warriors. He also set the school’s career receiving record when he hauled in his 60th pass in his final season. Growing up, Cooper was thought to be an offensive tackle because of his size.

“He really started pretty slow,” the elder Cooper said. “He wasn’t that much of an athlete when he first started playing football. He was really big and clumsy. He has those large feet – size-18 shoes. But right now, I think he is a prototype tight end. He’s around 6-6, 230 pounds, and he has great hands.”

Cooper Jr. said he wanted to wait until he took all five of his official visits before deciding but Ohio State was a viable option.

15 Years Ago – 2006

Ohio State had landed some well-publicized players from Cleveland Glenville in its recent past, but the Buckeyes had not extended any offers to players on the 2006 edition of the Tarblooders.

But they had found some serious mutual interest in quarterback/linebacker Jermale Hines, and he said that if they offered, they would have a pretty good chance of landing him.

“I’ve been to two Ohio State games,” Hines said. “I went to the Penn State game and the Indiana game. If they would offer, they would be one of my top choices.”

Hines held offers from Iowa, Michigan and West Virginia and planned to take official visits to all three schools. Considered a four-star prospect, Hines was not lacking for talent, but Ohio State was reportedly waiting for his ACT results before moving forward with his recruitment.

10 Years Ago – 2011

Ohio State recruiting fans were hopeful for good news when Cincinnati Taft duo Dwayne Stanford and Adolphus Washington confirmed they planned to announce their college decisions Nov. 9.

But those fans would have to wait a little longer to find out the decision of two of the most coveted prospects in the state of Ohio.

“It’s all up in the air now,” Washington said. “Dwayne wanted to visit Oregon on Nov. 19, so we’ll decide after that. When it comes to

making my decision, I think a lot will come from what I saw and how I enjoyed my official visits.”

The pair was expected to pick a school together and had been looking closely at Ohio State and Cincinnati. But Stanford was also looking at Oregon, while Washington was considering Alabama and Michigan State. Washington did not plan to join Stanford on his trip to Eugene but did want to take a trip to see the hometown Bearcats.

Five Years Ago – 2016

Ohio State was still fighting hard for the pledges of Anthony Hines, a linebacker out of Plano (Texas) East, and Shaun Wade, a cornerback from Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian, who was reportedly a soft pledge to the Buckeyes.

Both players were on hand as the Buckeyes rolled to a 62-3 win against Nebraska on Nov. 5, but head coach Urban Meyer and his staff wouldn’t have many more opportunities to lock down either player as neither was likely to make a return trip to Columbus before they made their final college decisions.

Bill Greene, a recruiting analyst for Scout.com, told BSB he was somewhat surprised that Hines (6-3, 222) even made it to campus. Greene noted that although Hines had had his eyes on Ohio State for a while, but home-state Texas A&M was more likely to land his signature.

“I think the kid’s going to A&M,” Greene said. “I think they feel like they’ve got him.

“But Urban Meyer’s success rate when he gets that kid to come on an official visit is pretty high. But, hey, you fight it out, you play it out and we’ll see what happens here. Like I said, Ohio State’s closing rate if they can just get the guy on campus is really high.”

One Year Ago – 2020

Pilot Mountain (N.C.) East Surry four-star tight end Benji Gosnell committed to Ohio State on Nov. 4, choosing the Buckeyes over finalists Florida and North Carolina. The 6-4, 225-pound Gosnell was considered the 11th-best tight end and No. 265 prospect overall in the class of 2022.

Ohio State extended an offer to Gosnell in July, and though he’d never been to campus, he had been able to build a strong relationship with head coach Ryan Day and offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson through virtual visits and Zoom calls.

Gosnell trimmed his list of schools to the Buckeyes, Gators and Tar Heels on Aug. 23, with most prognosticators expecting him to follow his older brother, Stephen, a four-star wide receiver in the class of 2020, to North Carolina.

Fields Experiencing Growing Pains As Bears Starter

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Yes, Justin Fields has thrown more than twice the number of interceptions as touchdowns. And, yes, he lost five fumbles and had been sacked a whopping 26 times through his first eight NFL games, heading into a Nov. 8 encounter with Pittsburgh.

But the good news for the former Ohio State star is that the honeymoon between the often-critical Chicago Bears fans and the rookie quarterback is nowhere near being over.

In fact, it's still in its infancy, according to ChicagoBears.com senior writer Larry Mayer.

"He represents great hope for a fan base that hasn't had a lot of great quarterbacks over the years," Mayer told BSB. "So I don't think we'll even see the end of that (honeymoon) at any point. Fans are very excited about having him here."

"I think fans understand that there's going to be some growing pains with a rookie quarterback, so the bar isn't set incredibly high. But he's making progress, and that's what people want to see."

Fields, who was 20-2 as a starter for the Buckeyes in 2019 and 2020 with a 9-2 record against ranked opponents, had his best professional game Oct. 31 during a 33-22 loss to the San Francisco 49ers, a game that dropped the Bears' record to 3-5. He completed 19 of 27 pass attempts for 175 yards with a touchdown and an interception. He also ran for 103 yards on 10 carries with a highlight 22-yard TD run. The performance made him only the third rookie QB in NFL history to rush for 100 yards, run for a touchdown and throw for one in a game.

"He's showing progress, and that's the most important thing," Mayer said. "You can tell he's gaining experience, that he's understanding certain things that he didn't understand before. He's shown that he's more comfortable on the field than when he first started, which is natural and what you would expect."

Through the loss to the 49ers, Fields had a 2-4 mark as a starter. He had completed 59.5 percent of his passes for 991 yards and three TDs against seven interceptions and rushed 44 times for 243 yards (5.5 yards per carry) and two scores heading into the Bears' Monday Night Football game against the Steelers Nov. 9. The Steelers had taken particular notice of the young quarterback.

"He's growing," Pittsburgh defensive end and former Buckeye Cam Heyward said at a press conference leading up to the game. "Every week you see more and more. He's getting more comfortable. He never gives up on a play. Mobile quarterbacks stress the defense. He can beat you with his arms and legs, so we're going to have our work cut out for us."

Pittsburgh defensive coordinator Keith Butler said pressuring Fields is the key.

"We'll do our best to keep him from running the ball and then putting him in situations he's not used to," Butler said. "We're going to try to make him a little uncomfortable if we can."

That doesn't always work, though, as Butler noted that Fields' electric TD run vs. the 49ers was off a scramble.

It was quite simply a coming-of-age play.



FILE PHOTO

GETTING ACCLIMATED — Former Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields is getting acclimated to life in the NFL after being selected in the first round of this year's draft by the Chicago Bears. Through his first six games as a starter, Fields had a 2-4 record but was making progress.

"That game, he ran the ball more than he has, and pretty much all the coaches say because he was decisive in his running, that's why he was successful," Mayer said. "You can't really be decisive if you don't know what's happening. To me, that was a sign that he's really starting to learn things."

Chicago head coach Matt Nagy said his staff was still figuring the best ways to use Fields and the San Francisco game represented the opportunity to get him outside the pocket.

"When he gets around the edge, most quarterbacks are going to get tackled," Nagy said. "He had a few plays where it was him one-on-one with a D-end or an outside linebacker, and they didn't have a shot. He turned it into a 15-yard scramble."

Of course, Ohio State fans know what Fields can do. He was a two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year and the 2020 Chicago Tribune Silver Football Award winner as the conference's best player. He was also a 2019 Heisman Trophy finalist.

In two seasons with the Buckeyes, he accounted for 78 touchdowns (63 passing and 15 rushing) and had only nine interceptions. Fields threw for 5,373 yards and rushed for 867 more, and he helped the Buckeyes defeat Clemson in the 2020 College Football Playoff semifinal before losing to Alabama in the title game.

When the NFL draft rolled around, there was a lot of conjecture where Fields would land. Chicago, picking 20th, was not considered an option. The Bears had given up on Mitchell Trubisky after four seasons and had signed veteran Andy Dalton to compete with Nick Foles in the 2021 season.

Additionally, Fields was part of a deep and talented QB class that included No. 1 overall pick Trevor Lawrence as well as Zach Wilson, Trey Lance and Mac Jones.

Mayer said Chicago fans had resigned themselves to not drafting one of the elite five.

But then it happened. The Bears traded their first- and fifth-round picks in the draft as well as their first- and fourth-round picks in next year's draft to the New York Giants in order to move up to No. 11 to select Fields.

"I should say this as a fact, not an opinion, but there has not been a draft pick that I can remember — and that was the 30th draft that I've covered the Bears — that elicited this kind of excitement," Mayer said. "I've never seen the type of euphoria that surrounded that one draft pick. Part of it was the expectation that the Bears were originally drafting 20th, so they weren't going to get a top quarterback. They made the playoffs last year, so they had the 20th pick."

"The anticipation wasn't like, 'OK, we're going to get one of these guys. Which one is it going to be?' If you ask Bears fans, most would think it wasn't a possibility to get one of the top five quarterbacks. But then when it happened, people lost their minds — in a good way."

Adding to the love affair was Fields' toughness as evidenced by his quick bounce-back after being crushed by Clemson linebacker James Skalski during last season's CFP semifinal. Skalski was ejected for targeting, but Fields missed only one play before returning to throw a 9-yard touchdown pass on the next snap.

"The fans are aware of his reputation to take a hit," Mayer said. "He's gotten rocked a bunch of times since he's been here. If you've watched him in the preseason, he took a hit that was just as bad as the Clemson one. I think it was the Raiders game (Oct. 10) when he took about four or five just killer shots. He's shown nothing but toughness since he's been here."

"He was getting nailed in that Raiders game, and he just kept coming back for more. It does look he knows how to slide and avoid some hits, but there's other plays when he's going for first downs and taking some big

shots because, yeah, he played at a big-time college, but in the NFL, everybody's fast."

Fields won over his teammates as well with his work ethic and demeanor. It could have been tough for veterans Foles and Dalton to accept him knowing Fields was the future QB, but that was not the case.

"Andy Dalton and Nick Foles are great teammates and great people who really welcomed him to Chicago," Mayer said. "They didn't feel threatened by him."

"Generally speaking, rookies have to gain the respect of veteran players, but I don't think it took much. Like I said, they were very welcoming and, I mean, Justin's smart. He's not going to be the guy that comes in all crazy as a rookie and do anything outlandish."

"We had a rookie punter in the '90s who came in with license plates that said, 'Hang time.' You can imagine how well that went over."

Fields made his first start Sept. 26 in game three at Cleveland, and things didn't go well during a 26-6 loss. He was just 6 for 20 for 68 yards and was sacked nine times for 67 yards.

He's come a long way since. CBSSports.com named him a "Riser of the Week" after his game against San Francisco. "Fields has shown glimpses of his first-round talent this year, but never more clearly than in week eight against the 49ers, when he used both his arm and legs to nearly spoil San Francisco's day," wrote the website. "Ironically, the rookie's breakout came with Matt Nagy sidelined due to COVID-19, but either way, it's a big step in the right direction for a signal-caller still trying to find his footing."

Fields is the lone ex-Buckeye on this year's Bears roster.

Ohio State has had 31 players drafted all-time by Chicago, second only to Notre Dame's 42. But the last OSU player drafted by the Bears was linebacker Marcus Freeman in 2009.

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Epic 2001 Season Begins With '310 Days' Speech

Throughout the 2021 football season, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is publishing historical stories from seasons ending in the numeral "1." This week, BSB looks back at the 2001 season that began a sea change in the rivalry with Michigan and primed the Buckeyes for a national championship run in 2002.

By **MARK REA**

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

History books will always record the first day of Ohio State's 2001 football season as Sept. 8 with a game at Ohio Stadium against the University of Akron. In reality, the 2001 grid season began more than seven months before that with a mid-January basketball game at Value City Arena against the University of Michigan.

Jim Tressel had been hired Jan. 18 as the new head coach of the football Buckeyes and was introduced at halftime of the basketball game. The new coach stood at center court with a microphone in his hand, and the rest is history – glorious scarlet and gray history.

"I really didn't preplan anything to say at the basketball game," Tressel told BSB. "I figured I would go out, wave to the crowd and that would be it. But when they handed me a mic, I guess I just said what I was thinking. I just wanted everyone to know how important we felt that rivalry still was."

Wearing a dark suit, white shirt and multicolored tie, Tressel wrapped both hands around the microphone and told the crowd, "I am so proud, so excited, and so humbled to be your football coach at The Ohio State University. I can assure you that you'll be proud of our young people in the classroom, in the community, and most especially in 310 days in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on the football field."

The place exploded with thunderous applause that, more than two decades later, still reverberates through the rafters of the Schottenstein Center. It also signified the beginning of a seismic shift in the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry, a series in which the Wolverines had enjoyed almost unprecedented success during the late 1980s and most of the 1990s.

From 1988 through 2000, Michigan ruled the rivalry with a 10-2-1 record that included consecutive upsets in 1995 and 1996 that ruined potential national championship seasons for the Buckeyes. Then in 1997, the top-ranked Wolverines scored a 20-14 win against the No. 4 Buckeyes in Ann Arbor and grabbed a share of that season's national title.

Ohio State broke through with a 31-16 win against Michigan in 1998, but when the Buckeyes lost the rivalry game again in 1999 and 2000 – as well as the bowl game in each of the seasons – the university finally cut ties with head coach John Cooper after 13 seasons.

An exhaustive two-week search for Cooper's successor included speculation on such names as Mike Bellotti of Oregon, Tyrone Willingham of Washington, Glen Mason of Minnesota and even Jon Gruden of the NFL's Oakland Raiders, but OSU athletic director Andy Geiger settled on Tressel, a 48-year-old coach at Youngstown State, where he had won four Division I-AA national championships.

Tressel grew up in Berea, Ohio, and played quarterback at Baldwin-Wallace for



FILE PHOTO

HECK OF AN INTRODUCTION — Jim Tressel acknowledges a thunderous ovation from the crowd at Value City Arena on Jan. 18, 2001, after making what has become known as his "310 Days" speech the same day he was hired as head coach of the football Buckeyes.

his father, College Football Hall of Fame head coach Lee Tressel. The younger Tressel began his coaching career in 1975 as a graduate assistant on Jim Dennison's staff at Akron, and he later spent three years as an assistant on Earle Bruce's staff at Ohio State during the mid-1980s. But after 15 years in Youngstown, Tressel was a virtual unknown to Buckeye Nation when he was hired over bigger-name coaches.

"I remember there was a lot of talk around Columbus that maybe Ohio State was taking too big of a gamble," OSU football historian Jack Park told BSB. "After Coach Cooper, fans really wanted someone with Ohio ties, but I think they also wanted someone who had coached at a bigger school. I remember the question was, 'Jim who?' They knew Tressel was from Ohio and that he had won championships at Youngstown State, but many people felt it was a huge step going from Youngstown State to Ohio State."

Recruiting analysts around the country also had their reservations about Tressel making the leap from Division I-AA to the shark-invested waters of major college football.

"There's a lot of pressure on coaches that you don't really see at the lower divisions, and I remember thinking that Tressel was in for tough times," CBS Sports Network national recruiting analyst Tom Lemming told BSB. "Some coaches who do well at lower levels aren't ready for the back-stabbing and the bad-mouthing, and the days were gone when Ohio State could have its pick of the best just because they were Ohio State."

Despite the challenges Tressel faced, his speech won over at least one Ohio high school prospect who had been prepared to go elsewhere once the university made the coaching change.

Dustin Fox, a highly rated defensive back from GlenOak High School in Canton, had decommitted from Ohio State when Cooper was fired and was leaning toward a commitment to Penn State, where his older brother, Derek, had played. Fox was watching the OSU-Michigan basketball game on television when he heard Tressel's speech.

"Two minutes later, my phone rings," Fox told Stewart Mandel of The Athletic website earlier this year. "(It's Tressel) calling me from the arena, and I was like, 'Wow. This is pretty cool.' He's like, 'I need you to be my first Buckeye.' And I said, 'OK, I'm in.'"

The hiring of Tressel also reaped another recruiting benefit for the future. Junior running back Maurice Claret, who lived in Youngstown but played his high school ball 10 miles away at Warren (Ohio) Harding, had reportedly been considering Notre Dame after Cooper had been fired. But he quickly switched his allegiance to Tressel, whom he had known since he was 5.

"With Coach Cooper getting fired and Coach Tressel going down there, that changed everything," Claret told BSB at the time.

Up-And-Down Campaign

Before Claret would set foot on campus in 2002, and even before the new coach had a chance to make good on his "310 days" promise, there was a 2001 regular season to navigate with veteran players trying to acclimate themselves to a new staff and new system.

But since the Buckeyes finished No. 2 in the final poll of the 1998 season, missing a potential national championship when a Nick Saban-led Michigan State team engineered a 28-24 upset in early November, the program was floundering. The 1999 season produced only a 6-6 record, while the 2000 season fea-

tured another loss to Michigan followed by an embarrassing 24-7 defeat to a four-loss South Carolina team in the Outback Bowl.

Perhaps because of those lean years, however, most of the players on the team bought in fairly quickly to what the new coaching staff was trying to teach.

"Transition isn't easy and I thought that group was very open to what we were trying to do," Tressel said. "It was our first year and I know some of those players were unsure of the direction we wanted to take them, but they were open-minded and willing to try new things."

Balmy 77-degree temperatures greeted an Ohio Stadium crowd of 102,602 in the 2001 season opener, and they looked on as the Buckeyes scored three quick touchdowns before taking their foot off the gas on the way to a 28-14 victory against Mid-American Conference rival Akron.

The game wasn't nearly as close as the final score might have indicated. OSU piled up 525 yards of total offense to just 248 for the Zips, but the Buckeyes fumbled five times – losing two – and were intercepted once to keep the final score down.

Senior tailback Jonathan Wells had waited his turn behind the likes of Derek Combs and Michael Wiley, and he broke out in the opener with 119 yards and two touchdowns. Meanwhile, third-year starting quarterback Steve Bellisari completed 15 of 24 passes for 246 yards and a pair of scores, including a 61-yarder in the third quarter to junior split end Chris Vance.

"We came out like there was nothing that could stop us," Wells told BSB. "We made some mistakes like teams do in their first game of the season or we would have hung 50 on them at least. Run game, pass game – it was all clicking. We thought we were unbeatable."

Turnovers notwithstanding, Tressel deemed the season-opening victory "satisfactory" and quickly turned his attention to the team's next test, a first-ever meeting with Mountain West Conference member San Diego State on Sept. 15. Four days before that game was scheduled to be played, however, came the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon outside Washington, D.C., and most of the world came abruptly to a halt.

Rather than playing a football game, Ohio State held a memorial service at Ohio Stadium, a "Show Your Care" rally that helped raise more than \$650,000 for families of loved ones lost on 9/11.

"I think there were 15,000 to 20,000 people there," Park said. "It was very, very somber – just people there to remember what had happened."

Following the memorial service, university officials gathered to figure out how to move forward. Major League Baseball and the National Football League had postponed their scheduled games while the PGA Tour canceled the World Golf Championships to be played in St. Louis. Meanwhile, the 2001 Ryder Cup, scheduled to be played in England, was postponed for a year.

"No one really knew what we were supposed to be doing," Tressel said. "But we made the decision that maybe getting back to concentrating on football would be the best

thing for our young people. It was probably the best thing for all of us.”

College football games scheduled for Sept. 15 were either postponed or canceled with most universities agreeing to resume the season the following Saturday. That meant a cross-country flight for the Buckeyes to meet UCLA in the Rose Bowl.

“That was Coach Tressel’s first road game, and there were a lot of people from Columbus planning to go to that game,” Park said. “It was a big deal to go out and play UCLA in the Rose Bowl, but many of the people wound up not going because they didn’t want to fly.”

A crowd of 73,723 – only about three-quarters of Rose Bowl capacity – showed up in Pasadena on Sept. 22, but neither Ohio State nor UCLA seemed to have much focus. The Bruins scored a touchdown and two field goals while the lone OSU score came when sophomore receiver Ricky Bryant recovered a blocked punt in the end zone. Kicker Mike Nugent, then just a freshman, missed his PAT attempt after Bryant’s touchdown, and UCLA wound up with a 13-6 victory. Nugent would miss just three of 143 PAT attempts during his college career.

The Buckeyes managed only 166 total yards with Bellisari connecting on just 5 of 23 attempts for 45 yards. He was also intercepted twice and sacked twice.

It was the beginning of one of the most uneven seasons in recent memory. Ohio State rebounded with a 27-14 win at Indiana the following week and then returned home for a convincing 38-20 win against No. 14 Northwestern in early October. Wells was nearly a one-man wrecking crew against the Wildcats, rushing for 179 yards and touchdowns of 71, 1 and 6 yards.

Now with a 3-1 record, the Buckeyes made a return to the national rankings at No. 21, but as soon as they were back in the rankings, they were back out again following a 20-17 home loss to Wisconsin, a game in which OSU was leading 17-0 late in the second quarter.

The hangover from that loss lingered throughout the first half of the following game, a rescheduled contest with San Diego State during what had originally been scheduled for a week off in the 2001 schedule. The Aztecs held a 12-6 halftime lead before the Buckeyes got in gear and secured a 27-12 victory against an SDSU team on its way to a 3-8 record under head coach Ted Tollner. That was the same Tollner who had been head coach at USC when the Trojans scored a 20-17 win against the Buckeyes in the 1985 Rose Bowl.

Ohio State blew another lead the following week at Penn State, squandering an 18-point advantage early in the third quarter before losing a 29-27 decision. When junior cornerback Derek Ross returned an interception 45 yards for a touchdown, the Buckeyes enjoyed a 27-9 lead at the 12:16 mark of the third period.

But the OSU defense couldn’t contain Penn State quarterback Zack Mills during crunch time. Mills followed the pick-six he threw to Ross with a 69-yard touchdown run of his own and then directed two more touchdown drives – the last one a 10-play, 90-yard march in the fourth quarter – to pull out the victory for the Nittany Lions.

The Buckeyes had a chance in the waning minutes, but Nugent’s 34-yard field-goal attempt was blocked with 2:55 remaining and Ohio State never got the ball back.

Wells rushed for 152 yards and two TDs while Bellisari threw for 203 yards and a pair of scores as the Buckeyes rebounded the following week, scoring a come-from-behind victory of their own with a 31-28 win at Minnesota. And the duo of Wells (101 yards and a touchdown) and Bellisari (263 yards passing and three scores) was at it again during a 35-9 romp against Purdue the following week.

The Buckeyes, now with a 6-3 record, appeared to be finally hitting their stride. They had returned to the top 25 – albeit at No. 25 – but Wells had rushed for 936 yards and 11 TDs, Bellisari had racked up 1,599 yards and eight touchdowns through the air, and a young defense led by junior safety Mike Doss, junior linebacker Matt Wilhelm and sopho-

more defensive end Will Smith was among the national leaders in forcing turnovers.

But then something happened that threatened to completely derail the season.

Bellisari, the three-year starting QB and one of four team captains, was arrested on a drunken driving charge the day before the Buckeyes were set to face a one-loss Illinois team in Columbus. Tressel had no choice but to suspend Bellisari for the game and insert sophomore backup Scott McMullen in his place.

McMullen completed only 4 of 13 passes for 42 yards before Tressel pulled him in the second quarter in favor of fellow sophomore Craig Krenzel.

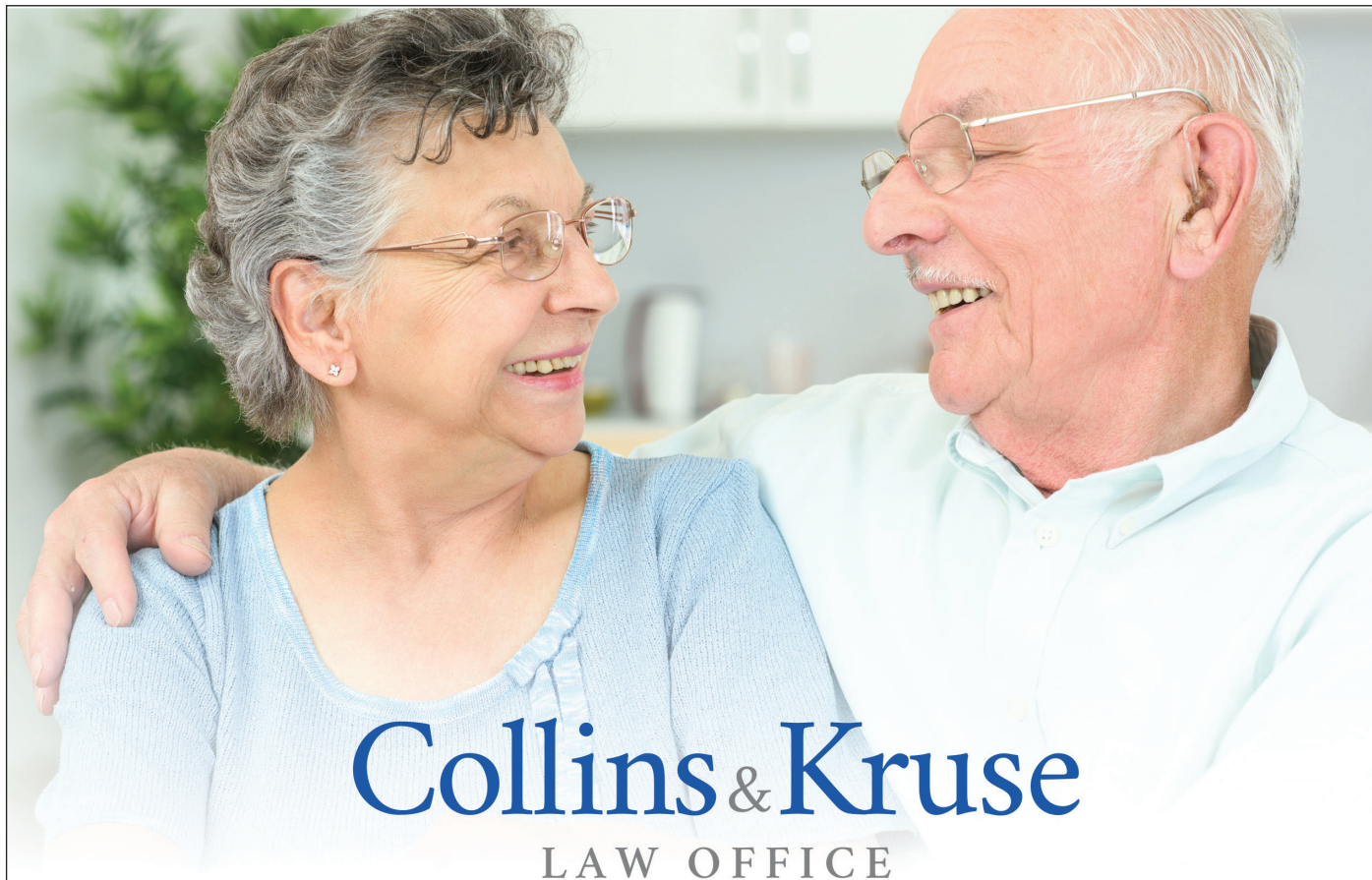
The team seemed to rally behind Krenzel,

who directed a pair of third-quarter touchdown drives that gave Ohio State a 22-21 lead at the end of three quarters. The Fighting Illini came back to take the lead early in the fourth quarter, and then Krenzel threw a pick-six deep in his own territory late in the game to seal OSU’s fate in a 34-22 loss.

That left OSU with a 6-4 record and a quarterback conundrum heading into the traditional regular-season finale against Michigan – the game Tressel had insisted 10 months earlier that would make Buckeye Nation proud.

“We gathered the seniors in the team meeting room (the day after the loss to Illinois) to seek their advice on how to handle the

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quarterback situation,” the coach said. “They said they thought Steve should be allowed to travel with the team and be on the sideline, but they didn’t think he should have the privilege to play.

“They had ownership in that decision. They knew the consequences – that we’d be playing with a less experienced quarterback – but it was their decision.”

Turning Around A Rivalry

Before being pressed into service against Illinois, Krenzel had thrown exactly nine career passes, completing five of them for 57 yards, no touchdowns and one interception. Nearly every pundit across the nation focused on the “third-string” quarterback from Michigan who’d be making his first career start in the Big House, and called it an almost guaranteed victory for the Wolverines.

“Looking back, I guess I should have been nervous but I wasn’t,” Krenzel told BSB in 2014. “I had prepared all week to be the starter, and we had what we thought was a pretty good game plan.”

Tressel said it wasn’t much of a plan – a steady dose of Wells, limit the number of times Krenzel would have to throw the ball, and keep things as simple as possible on defense.

The plan might have been simplistic, but it worked to perfection.

Doss set the tone on defense on Michigan’s first possession when he intercepted a deflected third-down pass from QB John Navarre and returned it 35 yards to the Wolverines’ 4-yard line. Three plays later, Wells scored from the 1 to give the Buckeyes a 7-0 lead.

The OSU defense continued to have its way when a third-and-5 sack by Smith ended Michigan’s next series. Then, on a third-and-10 from the Ohio State 49 later in the opening period, Wilhelm delivered a crushing third-down hit on Wolverines receiver Marquise Walker that elicited a collective groan from the 111,571 on hand at Michigan Stadium. Walker needed 10 yards for the first down, and Wilhelm made sure he gained only six.

“Between my four years at Ohio State and

my eight years in the NFL, there are only about five or 10 times where exactly what you see on film actually happens in the game,” Wilhelm told Mandel earlier this year. “I had an opportunity as a linebacker to blast the receiver and really send a message that we’re here, that we’re prepared and we’re not going to get walked over.”

After Wilhelm’s stop, Michigan punter Hayden Epstein pinned Ohio State at its own 15. Wells broke a 20-yard run on the first play, and as the second quarter began, the Buckeyes kept driving all the way to the Michigan 46, where they faced the fourth-and-1. Wells had already converted a third-and-5 on the possession, and the offense was playing with confidence.

“Normally, I would have probably punted in that situation,” Tressel said. “But sometimes you have to go with what you feel in the moment. I just had a good feeling right there.”

The call was “46 Power,” an old-fashioned run straight from the Woody Hayes playbook starting with Wells aligned up behind fullback Jamar Martin in a classic I-formation. Michigan brought nine defenders into the box, expecting an inside run between the tackles. Instead what it got was left guard Alex Stepanovich pulling out to the right while Martin took out Wolverines inside linebacker Larry Foote.

Two years earlier against Michigan, Wells had broken off a 76-yard run in the third quarter but was chased down at the 6-yard line. The OSU drive stalled and ended in a missed field goal, a series of events that eventually led to a 24-17 victory by the Wolverines.

This time, Wells would not be denied. He took the handoff from Krenzel, exploded past Michigan strong safety Cato June and raced 46 yards untouched into the end zone.

“That thing parted like the Red Sea, and once I saw that crease it was over,” Wells said. “I had waited for that opportunity for two years. This time, I wasn’t getting caught.”

Rather than try to protect their 14-0 lead, the Buckeyes continued to press the issue. Krenzel converted a pair of third-and-long situations on his team’s next possession, connecting for 14 yards to Michael Jenkins and 17 yards to tight end Darnell Sanders. But the

drive stalled, and Nugent missed a field-goal attempt from 39 yards.

Still, the OSU defense continued to smother Michigan. Defensive end Darrien Scott tipped a Navarre pass at the line of scrimmage, and defensive tackle Tim Anderson made the interception to give the Buckeyes possession at the U-M 28. Krenzel converted another third down with a 10-yard pass to Martin, and that was followed by an 11-yard touchdown run from Wells to give Ohio State a 21-0 advantage.

Two series later for the Wolverines, defensive end Kenny Peterson stripped Navarre from behind, causing a fumble that was recovered by Smith at the Michigan 21 with 1:21 left.

A Krenzel interception in the end zone gave the Wolverines a temporary reprieve. But at that point, Michigan head coach Lloyd Carr opted to pull Navarre, who had led his team to just 72 yards of offense with three turnovers. In his place, Carr inserted redshirt freshman Jermaine Gonzales, who immediately presided over a delay-of-game penalty. Two plays later, a shotgun snap sailed past Gonzales’ head into his own end zone where he fell on it for a safety.

The Buckeyes, who had entered the game as eight-point underdogs, found themselves owning a 23-0 lead with just 35 seconds remaining in the first half.

At the break, Wells had rushed for 122 yards and three touchdowns while Krenzel was an efficient-if-unspectacular 5 for 9 passing for 59 yards. Three of his completions were good for third-down conversions.

Tressel said the halftime locker room was euphoric as the coaching staff struggled to make sure everyone knew there were still 30 minutes of football to be played. Still, the coach said he figured there was no reason the game plan that had worked to near-perfection in the first half wouldn’t be just as effective in the second half.

That was not to be.

Hanging On For Victory

Early in the third quarter, Wells began to experience cramping throughout his entire body. He was carried off the field after just his second carry of the half and did not return.

“They had no one who could tackle me that day,” he said. “I have always felt that if I’d stayed in that game, we’d have blown them out of the water.”

With Wells unavailable and offensive right tackle Shane Olivea out after suffering a broken ankle in the second quarter, Michigan began chipping away at the Buckeyes’ lead. Navarre returned to start the second half and led the Wolverines on a 65-yard touchdown drive, sparked by a 30-yard Chris Perry run and capped with a 21-yard touchdown pass to Walker, who would finish the game with a school-record 15 catches for 160 yards.

But it was a rare drop by Walker late in the third quarter that Carr would later call the “major turning point” of the game. On third-and-7 at the Ohio State 10, Walker blew past Ross on a quick slant to the end zone. Navarre put the ball on the money, but it fell through Walker’s hands. All-Big Ten kicker Epstein followed by hooking his 27-yard field goal wide to the left.

Meanwhile, without Wells to carry the load, Tressel went even more conservative than usual. As a result, the Buckeyes managed only 74 yards and just one first down after halftime. But future All-America punter

Andy Groom, who punted a career-high 10 times, kept flipping the field, most notably with a 66-yard punt from his own 15 in the third quarter.

“You guys used to tease me about (saying) the punt is the most important play in football, but it is,” Tressel said. “It can devastate all the good work you’ve done or it can devastate your opponent if you return a punt or block a punt.”

For all of his good work against the Wolverines, Groom still had one of those moments of devastation to which Tressel referred. Just inside the 11-minute mark of the fourth quarter, Michigan’s Anthony Gordon blocked a Groom punt that teammate Roy Manning recovered at the Ohio State 9, setting up a quick touchdown that cut the Wolverines’ deficit to 23-13 with 10:02 remaining. (Michigan’s attempt at a two-point conversion failed.)

But Navarre continued to have problems. The QB sailed one over Walker’s head near the sideline, and Doss returned his second interception of the day 36 yards to the Michigan 9. The Buckeyes committed a pair of 15-yard penalties that pushed them back, and they had to settle for a 33-yard field goal from Nugent to make it 26-13 with 5:58 left.

Back came the Wolverines when Navarre connected with Walker for an 11-yard touchdown to get within one score at 26-20 with 2:26 showing on the fourth-quarter clock.

Ohio State recovered Michigan’s subsequent onside kick, and when it couldn’t quite kill all of the remaining time, Groom came through with one more clutch punt to pin the Wolverines at their own 20 with just nine seconds left.

Navarre heaved a desperation pass that traveled some 60 yards in the air before Fox came down with his first career interception to seal the victory.

The 26-20 win was the Buckeyes’ first in Ann Arbor since Bruce was carried off the field following his final game as Ohio State head coach in 1987. But it signified much more than that. After losing 10 of their previous 13 games (with one tie in 1992) against the Wolverines, the Buckeyes have now won 17 of the last 19 meetings between the archrivals, an unprecedented streak of dominance not seen since the early stages of the series when Michigan went 13-0-2 from 1897 through 1918.

“That 2001 team,” Wells said, “we’re the team that got up there (to Ann Arbor) and got it done, and we’ve never looked back since.”

The fact that the Buckeyes went on to a second consecutive loss to South Carolina in the Outback Bowl at the end of the 2001 season is almost irrelevant. The victory at Michigan, not only a catalyst for reversing Ohio State’s fortunes in the series, was also a springboard to the 2002 national championship season for the Buckeyes.

Perhaps that is the reason Tressel keeps a special place in his heart for the 2001 squad.

“Every season and every team is appreciated in its own way,” the former coach said. “We’ve certainly had more success in some years than we have in others, but that really doesn’t have an impact on the appreciation you have for that particular group of individuals.

“I will say that one of the seasons I enjoyed most was 2001. We may not have had the success that season in terms of wins and losses that we had in other years, but looking back, that season was very special. I enjoyed that 2001 team very much.”



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Buckeyes Have Chip On Shoulders Entering 2021

If there's nothing to play for at the end of the season, what is left to motivate players on the court?

That question was at the root of Ohio State's women's basketball team last season, recipients of a self-imposed postseason ban from the 2021 Big Ten and NCAA tournaments following the results of the Patrick Klein investigation.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

Coupled with the NCAA tournament being canceled entirely in 2020, the Buckeyes have not participated in the Big Dance since the 2017-18 season despite being in a position to likely qualify in each of the past two seasons.

With a chance at postseason play back on the menu for Ohio State this season, head coach Kevin McGuff views the opportunity as a motivator for his team in his ninth year leading the Buckeyes.

"With COVID the year before, we didn't have an NCAA tournament, and we weren't eligible for it last year, so while it's not something we talk about every day, it's certainly in the backdrop and something that we hope to attain," McGuff said during a preseason media day. "We're more focused on the process of what we do on a daily basis to put us in position to do that, but certainly we're hopeful we can put ourselves in a great spot to do that."

Perhaps even more frustrating for Ohio State is the lack of postseason opportunities coinciding with successful regular seasons.

In 2019-20, the Buckeyes finished the season with a 21-12 record, their season ending prematurely with an 82-65 loss to Maryland in the Big Ten tournament finals. Just five days after that loss, it was announced that both the men's and women's tournaments were canceled.

Last season, Ohio State got off to a 7-0 start through Jan. 13, but it was a stretch during which the postseason ban was announced. From that point on, the Buckeyes were just 6-7, including losses in their last four games with then-sophomore guard Madison Greene out of the lineup due to an injury.

So with the frustrating way the last two seasons have ended, do the Buckeyes have a chip on their collective shoulder heading into this season?

"I think so," McGuff said. "This team, they really like each other. They've done a great job developing chemistry that I think can really be an important part of the fabric of this group this year. They're motivated. They know we didn't get a chance to be in the tournament for the last couple of years, and that's something they want to do."

"We have a long way to go between now and then, so we won't really talk much about that. It will be more like the process of how we're going to get better and be the team that we're capable of being."

Sixth-year senior Tanaya Beacham echoed her coach's sentiment, saying she feels Ohio State is an underdog headed into the season.

"I feel like we have a lot to prove and we do have a chip on our shoulder," she said. "We're going hard every day and it can tell."

The junior guard duo of Greene and Jacy Sheldon, as well as fifth-year senior guard Braxtin Miller, are going into their third year together with the Buckeyes, and all are looking for their first berth in the NCAA tournament.

"We're beyond excited," Sheldon said. "I think, especially last year, not being able to play in the postseason kind of took a toll on us. But that even adds to our excitement for this coming year. We have a good group, so we're definitely excited."

That path to the postseason won't be easy, however, with a daunting Big Ten schedule in place this year, including road matchups at Maryland, Indiana, Michigan, Northwestern and Iowa, each of which finished in the top half of the conference last season.

That puts a larger emphasis on the early part of the schedule, including non-conference contests against Bucknell, Norfolk State, Bowling Green, Bellarmine, Cincinnati and Syracuse to begin the season before Big Ten play begins Dec. 5 at Purdue.

"It's super-important," Miller said of getting off to a good start. "I think that we have some games in order to get that started. It's going to be tough toward the beginning. It always is. But I think that we have such a good foundation right now as it is. I think we're a super close-knit team."

Preseason Rankings Have Buckeyes at No. 17

After finishing last season ranked No. 22 in the nation, Ohio State will begin the season tied for the No. 17 team in the country after receiving a boost in the preseason top-25 rankings from The Associated Press. The Buckeyes are tied at No. 17 with Georgia Tech.

This marks the 18th consecutive week that the Buckeyes have been ranked, dating back to last year's preseason poll.

The Buckeye are joined in the poll by four fellow Big Ten teams – No. 4 Maryland, No. 8 Indiana, No. 9 Iowa and No. 11 Michigan.

Ohio State has seven games against ranked opponents on its schedule, including Indiana at home, Iowa on the road, home and away contests with Michigan and Maryland, and a road matchup with No. 20 UCLA.

The top of the poll features South Carolina at No. 1 followed by Connecticut, Stanford, Maryland and North Carolina State.

In addition to being ranked in the AP poll, Ohio State was ranked fifth in the Big Ten in both the coaches' and media polls.

Both polls had Maryland at No. 1 followed by Indiana, Iowa and Michigan.

The coaches chose Iowa sophomore guard Caitlin Clark as Big Ten preseason player of the year, while the media selected Michigan senior forward Naz Hillmon. Despite being ranked fifth, Ohio State had no players selected to either preseason All-Big Ten team.

Six Hit Double Figures Against Slippery Rock

The Ohio State women's basketball kicked team off its 2021-22 campaign with a 96-48 doubling up of Slippery Rock during a Nov. 3 exhibition game.

The Buckeyes had six players finish with double-digit scoring, including four starters – Sheldon, junior forward Rebeka Mikulasikova, freshman guard/forward Taylor Thierry and junior guard Hevynne Bristow – in addition to redshirt sophomore guard Rikki Harris and sophomore forward Gabby Hutcherson off the bench. Bristow led the bunch with 18 points on 6-of-11 shooting, including 3 of 6 from beyond the arc.

Ohio State raced out to a 34-12 lead after the first quarter, scoring 19 of those points off 13 turnovers. In total, the Buckeyes scored 42 points off 33 Slippery Rock turnovers, accounting for nearly half of their scoring.

"Offensively, we wanted to execute, run our stuff and get used to being out there," Sheldon said. "For some of us, it was our first time so that was awesome – being able to play together. Defensively, being disciplined – we really worked on rebounding. That's been our main focus this year."

In the second quarter, Ohio State went on a 20-10 run through the first five minutes, boosted by Hutcherson's three baskets during the stretch. After a two-minute scoring drought for both teams following the

run, the Buckeyes finished the first half with a 59-28 lead.

Though Ohio State's offense stalled in the third quarter, the Buckeyes held Slippery Rock to just five points in the period, eventually holding a 75-33 lead going into the fourth quarter.

Thierry led the Buckeyes in the final frame, scoring six points on two baskets and a trip to the free-throw line. Harris, Mikulasikova and sophomore guard Anyssa Jones each added five points in the period for the 96-48 final.

In addition to turnovers, Ohio State made its money in transition, scoring 31 fastbreak points.

"With (us) being so athletic, our main focus throughout the year is running up and down the court," Hutcherson said. "We're one of the fastest teams in the Big Ten, so that's what we're going to do."

The Buckeyes finished 34 of 74 from the field, good for 45.9 percent, but were just 10 of 38 (26.3 percent) from three-point range. Ohio State also finished 18 of 23 (78.3 percent) from the line.

On the other end of the court, Slippery Rock was held to just 35.8 percent from the field on 19-of-53 shooting.

Ohio State will have two home games during the first week of the regular season, beginning with Bucknell on Nov. 10 at 7 p.m. and following with Norfolk State on Nov. 14 at 2 p.m.

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Young Buckeyes Impress In Indianapolis Exhibition

Ohio State opened its 2021-22 men's basketball season with an 82-46 exhibition win against Indianapolis on Nov. 1, welcoming in a new season of play in front of a sparse crowd, which shouldn't be the case come Nov. 9 against Akron or in general this season. There's excitement around the team in Columbus. Plus, the Buckeye Nuthouse student section sold out its allotment of tickets within an hour of their sale and was packed even for the exhibition game.

COURT REPORT Patrick Mayhorn

As the season began with a game meant more as a teaching tool for Ohio State – as well as one that will not count on the final record – it feels more appropriate to take things away from this exhibition vs. the Greyhounds rather than to purely recap it.

Youngsters Flash Brilliance, Inexperience

Sophomore forward Zed Key said during the offseason that he wanted to improve physically after a year of exposure to Big Ten play. He was already a big kid a season ago, but he looked like a legitimate 6-8, 245 pounds on the floor. He flashed his strength early, too, finishing at the hoop through a hard foul and converting on the free throw to cap three points the old-fashioned way.

Key was strong at the hoop again later in the first half, breaking through contact and slamming home an emphatic dunk despite another foul. It was a good day offensively overall for the New York native, as he generated 12 points on 5-of-9 shooting and added nine rebounds and four blocks. If Kyle Young is going to be out to start the season – as it seems he will be – Key's offensive ability when

paired with E.J. Liddell could be really hard to handle for opposing defenses.

"I think that's how he has to play," OSU head coach Chris Holtmann said of Key. "He has to play as physical as he can. That's who he is. The biggest challenge for him is that he has to see the game a little bit easier. He doesn't always make the right reads. He can be super-aggressive and super-physical, which I love, but he has to play with his mind a little more at times. But I thought he had some great finishes. He set the tone for us really in those first 10 minutes."

It's hard to gauge much from his defense against Indianapolis, though, because the Greyhounds were without anyone who could comfortably bang with him in the interior.

Alongside Key in a number of the line-ups was sophomore winger Eugene Brown, who certainly looked the part of a lockdown defender and had one of his best games as a Buckeye. He was comfortable within Ohio State's matchup 2-3 zone (which just means that the Buckeyes took a 2-3 shape but would sometimes pick up the ball-handler off the dribble) as either a guard or a wing on switches – of which there were plenty – and made nice plays on back-to-back possessions just before the eight-minute break.

On the first, Brown switched with ease and defended the perimeter comfortably, tracking an Indianapolis guard to the hoop as the shot clock ticked down. His man was able to get off a pass, but Brown stuck with the ball and knocked it loose in the post as the clock expired.

A series later, he jumped a pass between the guards and split them, darting down the court for an easy dunk.

Brown led the team in scoring, hitting on 6 of 7 shots and 3 of 4 from deep for 15 points.

Ohio State would really love to be able to rely on Brown as a rotational piece and the de facto replacement for Musa Jallow, especially if he can match Jallow's defensive ability and exceed his offense. Holtmann seemed pleased with the aggressiveness he saw out

OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2022 who have issued verbal commitments 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

of the sophomore after he struggled in Ohio State's not-so-secret scrimmage against Ole Miss in October.

"(The young guys) had some really good moments," the OSU head coach said after the game. "Zed had a really good scrimmage (against Ole Miss) while Gene really struggled in the first scrimmage. I didn't feel like he played as aggressively as he needed to play. I thought tonight he had a much better energy and aggressiveness. Granted, the competition was different, but I thought he did some good things."

Second-year guard Meechie Johnson picked up where he left off last season, looking at times like the best player on the floor and at other times a little overwhelmed. He had a couple of decisions that he would have really liked to have back and seemed to be pressing in his passing, especially early on. In fact, at one point, Holtmann had to pull him off the court and chat with him after he was sloppy with some footwork off a ball screen but still managed to score on a midrange bucket.

"He had the one play that he got rewarded for in the second half – I took him out right afterward because he jumped really far out. He had made a great reject of the ball screen but jumped almost inside the foul line," Holtmann said. "He's not going to be able to get that shot off against Akron. It's going to be blocked or it's going to be a turnover. I think there's an adjustment level for him."

When Johnson is good, though, he's really good. He sliced like a pro through the Indianapolis defense on an isolation possession with a few minutes to play in the first half and finished at the hoop despite some stiff defense. He would have liked a foul call as well and probably had a case for it.

Johnson's play was an example of one that no one else on this year's team can consistently make. His combination of athleticism and creativity with the ball is extremely valuable when it isn't being paired with youthful mistakes, but separating the two isn't as easily done as it is said. That's likely to be a battle for the Buckeyes with all of its youngsters this season.

"I love his aggressiveness, especially in attacking the paint," Holtmann said. "I thought he did some really good things in the open floor, which I love because he gives us a burst there. I like how he's attacking right now. We're going to have to play through some of his mistakes, for sure."

"Meechie's had, like you saw tonight, some flashes of really good play. He's also had some moments where he just has to continue reading the game or he gets playing a little too fast, which is normal. He's a freshman. This is his first full year. We're going to have to play through that with him and Malaki (Branham) as well as through some of the growing pains

with Zed and Gene and some of those younger guys. They're going to be critical for what we can eventually be as a team right now. We're not there yet with those guys, but they're going to be really critical for us."

During his postgame press conference, Holtmann was asked specifically about Johnson's flare for the dramatic, which was described as "Duane-ish" in reference to former OSU guard Duane Washington, who became well-known for his own antics – both positive and negative – with the basketball. The head coach shuddered at the thought.

"Oh, man, you're throwing 'Duane-ish' out there right now," Holtmann said with a laugh. "Golly. I love (Duane), but he did give me some gray hairs. I think (Meechie) is just young. He's still figuring out what he can and can't do, and that's going to be very much a work in progress."

Branham isn't expected to contribute significantly this season, but he is not lacking for confidence in any way. The freshman from Akron was touted as a scorer coming to Columbus and was not hesitant in putting shots on the hoop for the Buckeyes in his debut. He was 3 of 9 with 10 points for the evening, showing off a strong feel for attacking the basket while also making some mistakes on both sides of the ball that Ohio State just can't afford – including being blocked twice at the hoop.

"I want him to stay aggressive and attacking," Holtmann said. "I want him to compete on defense and to play really hard. The first thing is aggressiveness on both ends, and I think we saw that. He's a young kid, youngest on our team. He has a bright future, but he's just a young guy right now. You see some glimpses of really good things."

Mixed Bag Of A Night For Team Captains

Ohio State was without a pair of its veteran leaders against the Greyhounds. Young continues to deal with vestibular dysfunction, and Justice Sueing is working through what Holtmann described in the postgame as a lower leg injury that has apparently nagged him going back to the end of last season.

"He's had some really good practices and some good moments," Holtmann said of Sueing, "but it's bothered him a little bit. It's lingered here. Tonight, we asked him how he felt, and he just did not feel like he could go at this point. For us, it made sense to sit him and to try and get him rehabbed."

"I hope it's not a situation where we have to deal with this as the year goes on. You always have to deal with injuries. But last year, toward the end of the year – and some of it was the wear and tear – everybody knows about Kyle being out. What they don't know is that Justice was struggling with this in the NCAA Tournament. As much as possible, we need to get




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Indianapolis (0-0, 0-0)		25		2		F				
Ohio State (0-0, 0-0)		41		41		82				
Indianapolis		Total FG		FT		Reb.				
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Tchoua	15	2-8	2-3	1-1	1	3	6			
Bingham	19	1-4	2-2	0-4	0	1	4			
Robinson	22	1-7	0-0	1-3	2	4	3			
Montgomery	18	1-8	0-1	0-1	0	2	3			
Miller Jr.	21	5-7	1-3	0-2	1	1	11			
Tynes	15	0-4	0-0-2	0-3	1	1	0			
Steinfeld	14	0-2	0-0	2-4	0	2	0			
Nicoson	17	1-1	0-0	1-1	1	0	2			
Etherington	13	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	3			
Becher	13	2-3	0-0	2-0	0	1	4			
Peeters	13	1-4	0-1	0-0	0	1	3			
Ambrose	11	2-4	0-0	0-0	0	0	4			
Hines	6	1-2	0-0	0-2	0	0	3			
Bomba	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	1	0			
Totals	200	18-56	5-12	10-24	6	18	46			
Percentages: FG: 32.1%. FT: 41.7%. Three-point field goals: 5-12 (Peeters 1-1, Etherington 1-2, Hines 1-2, Robinson 1-6, Montgomery 1-7, Ambrose 0-1, Bingham 0-1, Tynes 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 4 (Bingham 2, Steinfeld 2). Turnovers: 19 (Tynes (4), TEAM (3), Etherington (2), Nicoson (2), Peeters (2), Becher, Bingham, Montgomery, Robinson, Steinfeld, Tchoua). Steals: 3 (Etherington, Miller Jr., Tchoua).										
Ohio State		Total FG		FT		Reb.				
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Ahrens	24	2-8	0-0	0-1	2	1	6			
Key	21	5-9	2-2	3-6	2	2	12			
Liddell	25	5-8	1-1	2-7	3	2	12			
Johnson Jr.	18	3-9	5-6	1-4	2	2	12			
Wheeler	15	2-3	0-0	0-3	2	2	5			
Brunk	9	0-0	0-0	2-0	0	5	0			
Branham	20	3-9	2-2	0-1	2	1	10			
Brown III	21	6-7	0-3	3-4	0	0	15			
Sotos	16	0-2	0-0	0-2	3	2	0			
Russell	18	1-7	0-0	0-2	0	0	3			
Etzler	8	1-3	0-0	1-2	2	1	2			
Hookfin	6	2-2	1-2	0-1	0	0	5			
Totals	200	30-67	11-17	17-33	18	18	82			
Percentages: FG: 44.8%. FT: 68.8%. Three-point field goals: 11-34 (Brown III 3-4, Branham 2-5, Ahrens 2-7, Wheeler 1-2, Johnson Jr. 1-3, Liddell 1-4, Russell 1-5, Etzler 0-1, Key 0-1, Sotos 0-2). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 7 (Key 4, Ahrens, Brunk, Liddell). Turnovers: 13 (Brunk 3, Sotos 3, Key 2, Liddell 2, Ahrens, Branham, Johnson Jr.). Steals: 5 (Ahrens 2, Brown III, Sotos, Wheeler).										

healthy. That's going to be critical for us. I'm hoping it's not going to be one of those things where it's touch-and-go throughout the year."

The Buckeyes did have senior wing Justin Ahrens and Liddell in the lineup, though, and got to see plenty of play from both.

Ahrens still looked a bit troubled at times on defense. He had some good possessions, but he was also beaten off the ball on several occasions. If that's happening against Indianapolis more than a few times, it seems likely that it will repeat itself against Duke, Kentucky and the standard Big Ten fare as well. Ohio State needs to be able to trust Ahrens defensively for it to feel good about using him as much as it would like to.

Looking for why the Buckeyes want so badly for him to click defensively? The first bucket of the second half was a good example. Off a missed three-pointer on the other side of the court, point guard Jamari Wheeler took the ball up for the Buckeyes and dished to Ahrens on the wing. Without a dribble needed, he pulled and fired before the defense could catch up and cashed in for three extremely easy points.

As most teams, Ohio State likes easy points, and at his best, Ahrens can provide them better than anyone else on the roster with his stroke from deep.

In the case of Liddell, he's a known commodity at this point, but it really does bear mentioning that he is really good. He had only 12 points on 5-of-8 shooting and nine boards, but it's obvious that when the Buckeyes actually need him, he's going to be a critical piece of the offense.

Look no further than the stretch of play from the 15:29 mark to 13:50 remaining in the second half. He opened off a Cedric Russell pass with a pretty midrange fadeaway, scored again on the next trip down the floor with an even prettier face-up, dribble, shoot

sequence for two more points and then corralled an offensive rebound and drew a foul on the next possession before he capped it with a three-pointer.

In about a minute and a half of game time, that was 3-of-3 shooting, one offensive rebound, one foul drawn and seven points.

Ohio State's ceiling is going to be as high as its All-America candidate sets it this season, and even though Liddell played only 25 minutes against the Greyhounds, he looked every bit the part of the most important member of the team.

Transfers Still Adjusting To OSU

Wheeler, the Penn State guard transfer with a pair of All-Big Ten defensive team nods to his name, certainly played to character. Out of the first break of the game, with just less than 15 minutes to play, he nabbed an Indianapolis pass from the post to the wing with one hand, pushed the ball up the court and finished at the hoop on the other end through contact for two of his five points on the night.

He was around the ball all game, and good things seemed to happen for the Buckeyes whenever he was involved defensively.

Wheeler played a crucial role in a 30-second violation about four minutes later, first when he deflected another pass and then when he teamed up with Key in the corner to defend a last-gasp, three-point try that missed the hoop by a mile.

Even when he isn't recording a stat, Wheeler's effort on the defensive end of the court is obvious. He's such a pest on the ball, picking up ball-handlers well before half-court and causing them the kind of trouble that Ohio State guards have struggled to deal with for years against Big Ten defenses.

When Wheeler wasn't on the floor, though, the defense seemed to stagnate a bit. There was a lot of 2-3 zone, and though there were some phenomenal possessions, there were some others that saw Ohio State lose concentration and surrender an easy bucket for it. Wheeler has a knack for keeping the team locked in that just wasn't there when he left the game.

"I thought our effort waned at times," Holtmann said. "We need to be better with that. I didn't think our effort at times was what it needed to be. Our concentration lapsed at times as well, to be honest with you. We have a tremendous opening opponent in Akron, and we need to get better in the next few days in preparing for them."

That could be something of an issue. Wheeler had two fouls at the four-minute mark of the first half and probably could have had another one. Ohio State doesn't have the kind of guard depth for him to be consistently out of games with foul trouble.

BSB kept an eye on Russell from when he first entered the game at just after the 17-minute mark in the second half. The Louisiana transfer is an interesting piece, especially offensively, because he was such a spark plug for Louisiana. The Buckeyes could really use him being that same player in Columbus, but it's a little unclear how he'll fit into the offense. He doesn't serve as an obvious fit with the non-Wheeler guards on the outside because he's something of a liability on defense.

Russell's first offensive possession was spent primarily on the wing, but he did get the chance to touch the ball twice, both rolling from the wing to the corner. On his first touch, he took one dribble and handed the ball back off. After working his way back into a similar spot, he dribbled a few more times and fired from midrange. His shot didn't fall, but it wasn't a bad look, and the play seemed to call for him to shoot it.

He showed up again a few possessions later offensively, taking the ball up the court off a Branham steal and distributing the ball to Liddell on the wing. It wasn't an assist, but Liddell did score off the pass.

Russell finished the day with three points on 1-of-7 shooting. Not exactly his stat sheet-stuffing showings in the Sun Belt, but he moved well within the offense and Holtmann complimented him while noting that he still has a lot of work to do.

The final member of the transfer trio, former Indiana center Joey Brunk, wasn't in the game enough to make any serious impact. He played nine minutes, snatched two

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

rebounds and blocked a shot before fouling out.

"I think Jamari was really good," Holtmann said. "He's been that way. Joey looks like a guy who has been off an entire year. He has to get more physical and shake some of the rust off. Cedric has to continue to get used to the length and everything at this level. He's a work in progress."

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Wrestling Team Looking To Rebound After Down Year

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State wrestling team is a perennial championship contender, but that wasn't the case last season. After finishing as national runner-up in three of the previous four years, the Buckeyes finished ninth at the Big Ten championships in 2021 – the program's lowest ranking at the conference tournament in a decade – and claimed ninth place at the NCAA championships the following week.

Tom Ryan enters his 16th year at Ohio State with high expectations for his team. He will rely on eight returning starters to return to form, allowing them to set the program's trajectory this season.

"All of them had a great offseason," Ryan said. "This is a team that can vie for a championship, one that can hoist a trophy if they do the right things and compete. We are glad to have had a full summer of training, and I think that will help us prepare for what's next."

The Buckeyes open their season as the No. 10 team in the first National Wrestling Coaches Association poll of the season. Eleven Big Ten teams are ranked among the top 25, and five are in the top 10, including Iowa, Penn State, Michigan and Nebraska.

Under Ryan, Ohio State has finished in the top 10 at the NCAA championships in all but one season. The Buckeyes won the team championship in 2015 and have earned a runner-up title five times during his 15-year tenure.

Ohio State opened its season against North Carolina on Nov. 7, and results of the dual will be featured in the next issue of BSB.

After facing the Tar Heels, the Buckeyes will wrestle against Virginia Tech, Notre Dame College, Pittsburgh and American University in nonconference action. The team will also compete in the Intercollegiate Open and the Cliff Keen Invitational.

This season, Ohio State gets a loaded Big Ten slate with matches against Michigan State, Michigan, Iowa, Maryland, Penn State,

Rutgers, Minnesota and Indiana. The Buckeyes' duals with the Wolverines, Hawkeyes, Nittany Lions and Golden Gophers will all be nationally televised on the Big Ten Network.

As previously mentioned, eight starters return this season. The following is a run-down of each weight class for the Buckeyes.

125 pounds – Malik Heinselman returns this season after becoming the most improved wrestler on the Ohio State roster in 2021. He is one of the Buckeyes five "black shirts" – awarded to the program's leaders on and off the mat, and is the undisputed starter at 125 pounds.

The Castle Rock, Colo., native, peeled his redshirt midway through his freshman year before claiming ninth at the Big Ten championships and the No. 25 seed in the NCAA championships.

Heinselman struggled to build consistency in the 125-pound weight class in his sophomore season, finishing with a 5-7 dual record (2-5 Big Ten) and an 18-5 mark overall. He came along at the end of the year, creating optimism for the Ohio State coaching staff and reminding them of his capabilities.

That momentum continued to build early last year as Heinselman won his first five matches before finishing the year with an 11-5 record, including a 7-1 mark in duals, and his plus-22 point differential was third on the team behind Sammy Sasso and Ethan Smith, respectively.

"I thought I wrestled hard in the regular season," Heinselman said. "I worked hard in the offseason to keep improving, and I think that showed each time I took the mat against my competition."

Heinselman lost an 8-2 decision to Michigan State's Rayvon Foley – an opponent he had defeated 5-4 earlier in the regular season – to take fourth place in the Big Ten tournament.

He dropped an opening-round match to Penn State's Robert Howard in the NCAA championships then bounced back with a 10-3 win over Stanford's Jackson DiSario

before eventually losing to Foley in a rubber match, 6-3.

During the offseason, Heinselman worked to get his body right. He spent countless hours in the wrestling room developing techniques that would expend less energy throughout a match.

"I feel really good," he said. "I feel like my conditioning is really good right now. And over the summer, I've gotten a lot stronger, so I think I've had strength-stamina and conditioning-stamina right now, so we'll see how it is. But as of right now, I'm great."

Behind Heinselman sits sophomore Ajabu Crews. Heinselman defeated Crews by technical fall in Ohio State's annual wrestle-offs. Crews will likely see time in exhibition matches for the Buckeyes and will serve as Heinselman's primary backup for the 2021-22 season.

133 pounds – The 133-pound weight class had its fair share of inconsistencies last season. Then-sophomore Jordan Decatur, who wrestled at a heavier weight in high school, cut weight and stepped into the vacant role formerly owned by Quinn Kinner.

Decatur gained eight pounds of muscle in the offseason to contend for a starting spot at 141 pounds, leaving the door open for a new wrestler at 133.

Three Buckeyes will compete for starts at the weight, including redshirt senior Dylan Koontz, redshirt sophomore Phillip Kue and redshirt freshman Alex Flerlage, with Koontz leading the way.

Last season, Koontz wrestled in two matches for Ohio State, collecting a 1-1 record and minus-five point differential. His loss came against then-No. 4 Austin DeSanto of Iowa, who placed third at the NCAA championships.

The battles at 133 won't be easy for Koontz, and the coaching staff doesn't expect them to be. Ryan understands the weight class is full of talent at the national level and is at its best in the Big Ten.

"Everybody in the weight class is top 15

in the country, so there is no easy weekend," Ryan said. "I'm looking forward to seeing Dylan compete at a high level with some competitions under his belt and a desire to get better."

141 pounds – With the addition of Decatur, the 141-pound weight class quickly became crowded with talented wrestlers. Returning are redshirt sophomore Dylan D'Emilio and sophomore Anthony Echemendia, a pair that split time at the weight last season.

D'Emilio wrestled in 18 matches for the Buckeyes last season, amassing a 10-8 record with wins over a pair of ranked opponents. The Curtice, Ohio, native, finished ninth at the Big Ten championship and qualified for the national tournament. D'Emilio lost to Sebastian Rivera of Rutgers at the NCAA championships before ripping off three consecutive wins to reach the third consolation round. He dropped a 14-8 decision to Oklahoma's Dom Demas.

Echemendia competed in five bouts for the Buckeyes in 2021, winning four with a 3-1 dual record. He showed Ohio State and the rest of the Big Ten what talent he possesses.

However, his early-season success was cut short due to an undisclosed injury, and he missed significant time following a dual with Iowa's Jayden Eierman.

"I feel great going into practice," Decatur said. "My weight is not much of a concern because now it's just my concern is wrestling. I get to focus more on that and positioning and not so much on my nutrition and hydration. Overall, I just feel a lot better. The coach has been working with me more with wrestling than sucking down every week."

Decatur defeated Echemendia, 7-3, in the preliminary rounds of the wrestle-offs, looking strong and using an excellent combination of moves to earn easy takedown points. In the finals, Decatur faced D'Emilio, dethroning the former starter with an 8-6 overtime win.

"It wasn't a shocking result," assistant coach J Jagers said. "I thought he would be right in there. I don't think Dylan wrestled a poor match, either. They're competitors, and they've wrestled their whole lives. All three of them are good, tough guys."

149 pounds – After a monster redshirt sophomore season, Sasso will anchor the Buckeyes from the 149-pound weight class again this year. The Nazareth, Pa., native, is one of the best wrestlers in the country and claimed a 16-1 record in 2021.

Even more impressive, Sasso's 16 victories included five pins, a technical fall and a major decision. His 9-1 mark against top-25 opponents ranked among the best in the country – a testament to his dedication and skill – and helped him claim his first Big Ten title last season.

"It was a fun season," Sasso said, "but I am just looking to get better and go out and compete every day. The great ones, they don't care who they wrestle. The great ones don't care. You've got to be ready to fight, and you've got to bring the heat. If someone is worried that they shoot on me, they're going to get cradled."

Ryan said Sasso spent his summer training in Pennsylvania, working with and coach-



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WRESTLING PREVIEW

ing the state's Fargo team – a group of high school wrestlers who compete in a national tournament that takes place in Fargo, N.D. He even traveled with the squad to its competition to encourage and instruct them during their matches.

Sasso's work with the Fargo squad and his consistency in the wrestling room served as a therapeutic activity for him after he lost a highly-contested 3-2 decision to North Carolina's Austin O'Conner in the NCAA championship final last year.

After last season's conclusion, O'Conner moved up to the 157-pound weight class, making room for All-American Zach Sherman to compete. Sasso won't get his revenge, but that doesn't mean he didn't consider gaining weight to try to meet O'Conner one more time.

"If it were up to him, he would probably bump up and go to 157 because he's a competitor who wants the toughest guy in the arena," Jagers said.

157 pounds – Elijah Cleary graduated, leaving the door open for a new contender at 157 pounds this season. Redshirt junior Jashon Hubbard will fill that role for the Buckeyes after taking a back seat to Cleary in the last two years.

Hubbard started his collegiate career at Notre Dame College in South Euclid, Ohio, and wrestled unattached from the team as a redshirt. Following his first season with the Falcons, Hubbard enrolled at Ohio State in the spring of 2019. In his first year with the Buckeyes, he wrestled in three matches, winning each bout and collecting two pins.

The Steubenville, Ohio, native looked like a solid contender to take the 157-pound weight class heading into his redshirt sophomore season. Still, Cleary beat him in the wrestle-offs and never relinquished his spot.

"My first year here, I was in the stands watching the guys run out on the red carpet, and it was just exciting," Hubbard said. "It was like the first time I was in an atmosphere like that for everyone in the wrestling world to see you guys wrestle, but it was also frustrating the last few years not being able to wrestle as much as I wanted. Coming out of high school wrestling matches and then sitting in the stands for two years gets in your head a little bit."

Hubbard used wrestling to take out his frustration and spent countless hours working on his craft this summer. He devoted time to his strength and conditioning while studying his previous film to improve his technique and form.

"After getting past this last season, getting healthy and working out and everything, it gave me the drive again to where I was going to do whatever it took to make sure I was prepared for the season no matter what happened," Hubbard said. "I'm thankful for the opportunity to show what I can do for this team."

165 pounds – Smith dominated the 165-pound weight class last season for the Buckeyes, compiling a 15-4 record with five major decisions, one technical fall and a pin. His plus-29 point differential trailed only Sasso for best on the team, as did his eight wins over top-25 opponents.

However, like Decatur's increase in weight, Smith packed on nine pounds of muscle to jump from 165 to 174, allowing redshirt sophomore Carson Kharchla to step in for his long-awaited debut.

Kharchla came to Ohio State in 2019 as

one of the nation's best wrestling recruits. He was a back-to-back state champion at Olen-tangy Liberty High School in Powell, Ohio, an Intermat National Wrestler of the Year, an Ironman champion and a Fargo title winner.

He wrestled unattached from the team in his first season as a redshirt, collecting a 16-0 record with four tournament titles at the Michigan State Open, Ohio Intercollegiate Open, Storm Open and the Purple Raider Open. His wins included three major decisions, three technical falls and three pins.

In December 2020, Kharchla suffered a torn ACL in preseason training, causing him to miss all of last year's competitions. He spent the previous 10 months rehabbing his knee and conditioning his body to return to matches this season for the Buckeyes.

"It's hard to control some emotions – the excitement and the nerves, some of the fear of having the same thing happen again," he said. "I'd be lying to you if I said it wasn't a constant fear that I'm going to tear my ACL again. But I think the biggest thing is going out and knowing this is what I've done my whole life. I shouldn't be afraid of anything, and I have nothing to worry about. Not only that, I get an opportunity to do this, so why waste that opportunity? It's time to grab the bull by the horns and throw it around a little bit."

There are big shoes to fill in Smith's absence at 165 pounds, but Kharchla is ready for the task. As the leadoff for the heavyweights, he will need to energize the second-half starters with wins, specifically extra-point victories.

174 pounds – Kaleb Romero continues the trend of wrestlers to bump up their weight class after last season. He leaves the 174-pound weight class to wrestle at 184 pounds this year, giving Smith his chance against heavier opponents.

Smith, a Big Ten runner-up and fifth-place finisher at the NCAA championships last season, hopes to keep winning despite wrestling at a weight class that requires more strength and endurance than he saw at 165. He understands he will see tougher competition but thinks Ohio State prepares him well for whatever might come his way.

"There are a lot of tough guys in my class," Smith said. "We have a few tough guys here. It always stinks not to have everyone compete, but it's a good problem to have in the program with great training partners. That will make us all the better in the long run. It's a double-edged sword, having some of the best training partners in the country run around your weight. It's great all season. It's great all offseason."

184 pounds – Ohio State selected Rocky Jordan to compete at 184 pounds in 2021. He gained 13 pounds in the offseason to wrestle at 197 for the Buckeyes, letting Romero slide into the open spot at the third-heaviest weight.

Jordan struggled to build consistency as a redshirt sophomore, riding a roller coaster of wins and losses. He finished with a disappointing 8-10 record, with a 4-9 mark against top-25 opponents. Jordan came along late in the season, reaching the fourth round of wrestle-backs at the NCAA championships.

Meanwhile, Romero's redshirt junior season ended with an 11-6 record, including a fifth-place finish at the Big Ten championships and a trip to the quarterfinals in the national tournament. While he could have stayed at 174 pounds this season, Romero

said it was probably for the best that he move up a weight class.

"I contemplated it last year because I'm known to get pretty big in the offseason," he said. "Getting closer to the season, I weighed around 205 pounds, but I was probably the leanest and strongest I've ever been, so that initial cut (in weight) before the year would have been pretty rough. I felt like making the move this year would be good for myself and the team. I am excited to see what happens."

Romero had double-digit wins in each of his first four seasons at Ohio State. In 2019-20, he set a career-high with 19 victories, amassing 10 wins against top-25 opponents.

197 pounds – The Buckeyes failed to find a consistent contender at 197 pounds last season as Gavin Hoffman, Chase Singletary and Nick Boykin all wrestled in the weight class during the short regular season.

Singletary is no longer on the Ohio State roster, and Boykin moved up to compete with the heavyweights, leaving behind Hoffman as the only returning starter at the weight. However, Ohio State will turn to Jordan as the wrestler who will lead the team at 197 this year.

"I thought Rocky looked great in the offseason," Ryan said. "He came to a lot of optional workouts over the summer. Rocky trained hard, and he's beyond where he was last year. There were a lot of positives that I could see."

Jordan will hope to return to the form he found in 2019-20 when he won 29 matches for the Buckeyes, including five major decisions and seven technical falls. That year,

Jordan placed fifth in the Big Ten championships.

Last season, Jordan rebounded from a rough performance at the conference tournament with three solid wins at the NCAA championships and a trip to the fourth round of wrestle-backs.

Heavyweight – Tate Orndorff transferred to Ohio State in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and hoped to continue his decorated career with the Buckeyes. His decision to come to Columbus paid off as the former Utah Valley wrestler won his second All-American award in his four-year career.

In his fifth collegiate season, Orndorff will look to improve on his 11-11 record from last year. He hopes to move further than his fifth-place finish at the Big Ten championships and a seventh-place finish at the NCAA championships.

"I'm excited to see what I can do after a normal offseason," Orndorff said. "Last season, I came in during the shutdown. The facilities weren't available to us, but I was able to lean out muscle mass, and that was my goal."

"I knew that if I were leaner with more muscle, I'd be more explosive. I've been able to get some rest, and I feel a lot quicker and more explosive. I'm in the best shape I've ever been."

Orndorff will anchor the Ohio State wrestling team and will be the final wrestler you see before the final buzzer sounds.

Redshirt sophomore Nick Boykin will make his debut in the weight class, but that won't be until he finishes competing at the U23 World Championships.

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Wise Choice Helps Himself As Well As Icers

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Having played three seasons for Boston University in the Big East, forward Jake Wise was looking for a different experience for his senior season.

"I knew when I transferred I wanted to play in the Big Ten," he said. "There's so much history with all the teams in this league, so playing in the Big Ten is a blast."

Wise chose Ohio State, and so far the decision has benefited him and the surprising Buckeyes. He has posted six points (two goals, four assists) in eight games following his career at BU where he had 17 points (three goals, 14 assists) in 50 games.

The Buckeyes, after sweeping a home series vs. Penn State on Nov. 5 and 6, are 6-2-0 overall and 3-1-0 in the Big Ten.

They are one win away from matching their victory total in 27 games last season when they went 7-19-1 and already halfway to their conference wins (6-16-0).

"What drew me here? I think just Ohio State in general," Wise said. "When you look at it from the outside, you always wonder what it's like at this massive school. You hear about the football, basketball, hockey. I mean, there's so many sports here that are so good."

"So when I got the chance to come here and visit and talk with the coaches, it was really a no-brainer. I loved it. The facilities are unbelievable. The team had a down year here last year, but years prior they were winning, so having a chance of getting back to that Big Ten championship, that's really cool and it was an

easy decision for me."

Wise is the third former Boston University player to transfer into the OSU program. Junior defenseman Dominic Vidoli and junior forward Mark Cheremeta joined last season. The three were teammates at BU during the 2018-19 season.

Ohio State head coach Steve Rohlik said there isn't a magic formula that attracted the trio.

"If I knew," he said with a smile, "I would have gotten them here in the first place."

In fact, Cheremeta and Vidoli paved the way for Wise.

"I didn't know they were coming to Ohio State until I saw their commitment posts after they had left and I was still at BU," Wise said. "I wasn't really thinking about transferring at the time and I hadn't talked to them."

"When it came for me to have a chance to come here, I saw Mark having a lot of success, so I was obviously thinking a path like that works. It's funny how it worked out that way, for sure."

Wise (5-10, 185) is from Reading, Mass., and coming out of the U.S. National Team Development Program, he only considered Boston University and Boston College. He was recruited by BU head coach David Quinn, but Quinn was named coach of the New York Rangers before Wise's freshman season.

Wise played 12 games for the Terriers as a freshman before an injury cut his season short. He had 13 points, including 11 assists, in 33 games as a sophomore, and last season he scored once and had an assist in five games.

"I love the school," Wise said. "It was awe-

some. A lot of my best friends were there. It was nice being from home, but hockey-wise, it just wasn't the best fit."

The new NCAA rule that allows a one-time transfer with immediate eligibility sparked Wise's desire leave Boston.

"If didn't have to sit out a year, I think I probably would have transferred a little bit earlier," he said. "Now that you're allowed to transfer once, I think that made it much easier for me once I knew that it was time for me to move on from BU."

Wise scored his first OSU goal during his fourth game, a contest vs. Michigan State on Oct. 29. He added another tally against Penn State on Nov. 5 and had two assists the following game vs. the Nittany Lions.

"He's getting better and better," Rohlik said. "He loves being on the ice, and that's why he started to get more and more confidence."

"He's at a new place. He's like a freshman. You've got to take it all in. You can't conquer the world in one day, and his work ethic, detail and want-to-compete has shown in his game."

Wise, drafted in the third round (69th overall) of the 2018 NHL draft by the Chicago Blackhawks, has no regrets about his decision to come to Columbus and constantly tells his mother that.

"I brag about it every day like, not so much anymore because she knows I love it, but at the beginning of every day she's like, 'Do you still like it?' Yeah, I love it. It's beyond hockey. It's so cool to be on a campus like this. I don't know if you've ever been to BU, but it's completely different. It's like you're in the city."

"So, getting a real college experience, like football games, is so different. I think if I could go back, I would have picked a place like this to begin with and really get the full college experience."

Nit-Picking Lions

The Buckeyes rallied in back-to-back games to defeat No. 16 Penn State, 5-2 in the series opener and 4-1 in the rematch at Value City Arena.

In the first game, OSU trailed 1-0 late in

the second period, but Kamil Sadlocha scored twice in the final 3:44 for a 2-1 lead. Wise, Jaedon Leslie and Gustaf Westlund netted goals in the first 5:49 of the third period for a 5-1 lead, and OSU freshman goalie Jakub Dobeš finished with 33 saves.

It was more of the same the next night against the Nittany Lions (6-3-0, 0-2-0), who carried a 1-0 lead into the third period before freshman defenseman Mason Lohrei made it 1-1 at 4:30 and Vidoli put the Buckeyes ahead 41 seconds later.

Joe Dunlap and Cheremeta scored late, and Dobeš made 29 saves.

"Anytime you can sweep a team in this league, you've done something pretty good, especially against a really good hockey team," Rohlik said. "My guys have worked awfully hard. We're nowhere near a finished product. We have to keep working to get there."

Easy Choice

There rarely has been an easier choice for Varsity Club Icer of the Month than Dobeš. He's not only BSB's choice, but the Hockey Commissioners Association named him its Men's Rookie of the Month.

The native of Ostrava, Czech Republic, and a Montreal Canadiens draft pick, was 4-1-0 with a 0.86 goals-against average and .964 save percentage for October.

Dobeš made 32 saves against Connecticut on Oct. 16 for his first shutout, and he stopped all 55 shots in the series after entering for Ryan Snowden in the series opener.

After the Penn State series, he was 6-1-0 with a 1.06 GAA and .960 save percentage.

Looking Ahead

The Buckeyes go on the road in the Big Ten for the first time at Minnesota on Nov. 12 and 13. Then following an open weekend, OSU hosts Mercyhurst in a nonconference series Nov. 26 and 27.

For a full recap of the Penn State series go to the BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Jakub Dobeš
Freshman Goaltender
Ostrava, Czech Republic

BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2021 FOOTBALL (8-1)

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, W 33-24.

Nov. 6 at Nebraska, W 26-17; **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., Men: 10/12; Women: 8/14.

Nov. 12 NCAA Regional Championships at Evansville, Ind.; **20** NCAA Championships at Tallahassee, Fla.

FIELD HOCKEY (7-11, 1-7)

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 3-1; **29** at Maryland, L 6-0.; **31** at St. Joseph's, L, 4-3.

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 (6-2)

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, L 2-1, W 5-1.

Nov. 5-6 PENN STATE, W 5-2, W 4-1; **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 (10-2)

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, W 5-2; **30** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 10-1.

Nov. 5-6 at St. Thomas, W 8-1, W 6-2; **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 (6-9-1, 2-6)

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, W 2-1; **31** at Rutgers, L, 4-0.

WOMEN'S SOCCER (9-8-2; 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; **31** at Purdue at Big Ten Tournament, L 1-0.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL (19-5, 9-5)

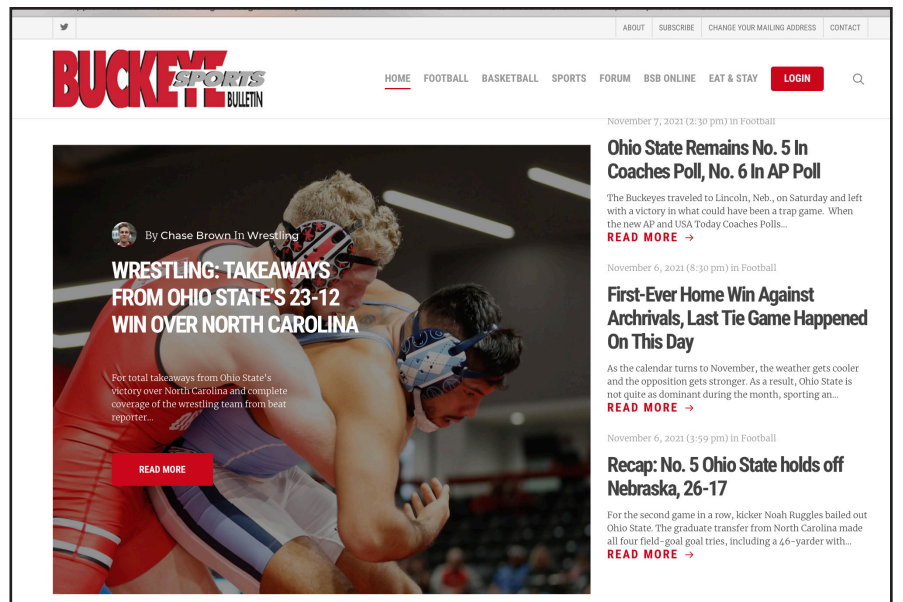
Aug. 27 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 3-0; **28** WASHINGTON, W 3-1.

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, W 3-0; **31** MICHIGAN STATE, W, 3-1.

Nov. 4 MINNESOTA, L 3-1; **6** NEBRASKA, W 3-0; **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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Lack Of Balance Nearly Costs OSU In Lincoln

Great coaches don't become great without having a stubborn streak in them.

There are many characteristics that most of the all-time great coaches have – single-mindedness, focus, discipline and a belief that their way works better than anyone else's.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

While he may not yet quite be in the category of great coaches, Ryan Day is regarded as one of the elite in his profession in college football as well as a masterful play-caller.

So it's odd to say that his performance against Nebraska was a big reason the Buckeyes barely escaped Lincoln with their Big Ten championship dreams – and peripheral ones about the College Football Playoff – intact.

The offense, which has been so good for the bulk of the season, has hit a couple of pitfalls the last couple of games against Penn State and Nebraska. Sure, the competition has gotten better, but in recent seasons, that didn't matter all that much. Good opponent or bad, the OSU offense hummed.

Now it's sputtering, and Day bears some of the blame.

There is the old "a win is a win is a win" mentality, and there is something to that. As long as it keeps chalking up victories, Ohio State can win the Big Ten title. And Big Ten titles generally lead to inclusion in the CFP. But cracks are ever so slightly beginning to show, and it's because of Day's stubbornness.

He has an NFL background, so it's understandable that he favors the pass over the run. Almost no teams in the NFL run more than they pass, in hopes of exploiting matchups and rules that cater to the offense. That mentality is seen in Day's

play-calling.

Despite his best weapon being freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson, Day had C.J. Stroud throw the ball 54 times against Nebraska. Stroud has been very good this season but was only OK against the Cornhuskers, who were able to disrupt his timing and rhythm and make him look more human than he has in weeks.

Lack of commitment to the ground game turned what could have been a comfortable victory into one that needed a late field goal to allow Buckeye Nation to exhale.

Henderson had just seven carries after halftime despite his team leading by 10 or more points for most of the third quarter. It would have been a perfect time to lean on your hoss, but instead Day felt the passing game – which has been among the most effective in the nation – needed more work. He also talked about how Nebraska was loading up the box with extra defenders, though a cursory viewing of the game replay shows that almost certainly wasn't the case.

"I will have to go back and look at it and see exactly what it was," Day said. "I think we can do a better job with the runs. Right now, we are not getting as much as we would like on it. We will go back and figure that out. When they blitz a lot, there is going to be an extra guy in the box and that opens up opportunities for the pass game. We just got ourselves out of whack with a couple of penalties. We had the sack. Just a few things in there that were big plays that got us off-schedule, which happened a little bit last week, too – things we just need to make sure we are on top of."

Also concerning is the complete lack of desire for Stroud to run the ball. No one is asking him to be Justin Fields, but the fact that there is no specter of the quarterback run makes Ohio State easier to defend. You can bet a few of those runs would pop if Stroud kept the ball a few times – by design, not by scrambling.

For his part, Stroud doesn't seem to

want any part of that.

"If my job is to run the ball, I'd be a running back or something," he said. "I throw the ball for a living."

His job is actually to win football games, and if running the ball for 5 yards instead of forcing a tough throw is the best method, that's what should be done.

OSU was way out of balance offensively in the second half, calling 27 pass plays to just nine running plays. It's one thing if you're trailing or locked in a battle and trying to come up with a big play, but when you're up by 10 (or even more), the best approach is to salt away the game.

That's one problem of today's football. Coaches want to score on every possession and put the pedal all the way down to the floor whenever possible. That can certainly demoralize an opponent when it works, but when it doesn't, it allows an inferior foe to hang around and put a real scare into you.

Sometimes, you as a coach have to realize that your preferred method isn't working, so you go to a counterattack. And that counterattack is taking a page from the Urban Meyer playbook and leaning on the ground game.

And that includes Stroud.

"If there are times for him to run the ball, we are going to have to look at that on film and go from there," Day said. "I thought he competed. He is out there as a young quarterback. I guess this is his eighth start. It's not easy; it's just not. When you play in November on the road against good teams like this, it's going to be a grind. It's going to be hard. It's all part of the process."

With the meat of the schedule still ahead, Ohio State knows that it needs to play smoother, cut out the silly things that are keeping it from reaching its peak. Some of that would be inspiration, as the Buckeyes looked very uninterested in the second half against Nebraska.

"We have a young team, and we have to learn that every single week you have to show up," Day said. "The defense did that today. They played really well."

"Coming off of an emotional game, a late game two weeks in a row coming in here, 11 a.m. kick. It was going to be a challenge. We knew it. Too many penalties on offense. Just shooting ourselves in the foot across the board. I thought the drive at the end was huge to go for the field goal and make it a two-score game."

He isn't wrong about that.

But he and his team also might not have been in position to need that field goal had it taken the best path to victory.

Stubborn is sometimes good. But it can also be one's undoing.

We'll see which it is for the Buckeyes going forward.

Getting A Star

I had an occasion to see future Ohio State linebacker Gabe Powers in action in an Ohio state high school playoff game and came away quite impressed. The senior from Marysville is tabbed as the nation's sixth-best linebacker prospect and 49th overall player in America.

It's pretty easy to see why.

He's very fluid in his movements, and there isn't a lot of wasted energy. Powers calls signals for the Monarchs' stout defense, a unit which has held 10 of 12 foes to seven or fewer points following its 42-7 throttling of Perrysburg on Nov. 5. He has excellent instincts and anticipation, is always around the football and really delivers a wallop.

But maybe the most impressive part of Powers' game is his quickness and running ability. He carries the ball quite a bit for Marysville and shows a good set of wheels. He's elusive in space and quick to get upfield, which means he could be a real problem after interceptions.

He's also close to a finished product at 6-4, 230 pounds. A lot of freshmen need to come in and work in the weight room and throw on some pounds. Powers will not need to do that, which means the road to early playing time could be there.

That shouldn't be surprising given his lineage. His grandfather was a star at Marysville and later had a tryout with Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers, while his dad was a two-time All-American at Findlay and was invited to try out with the Dallas Cowboys.

Given the problems Ohio State has had at linebacker the past few seasons, it wouldn't be any kind of shock to see Powers on the field quite a bit in 2022.

Dawgs Barking Loud

It's become pretty apparent there is but one elite team in college football this season, and it's Georgia. The defense is otherworldly, one of the best in recent history, and the offense does enough to win games. It isn't spectacular, though it has had its share of explosive plays. It would be a shock if the Bulldogs are even challenged before the SEC Championship Game.

No other team has really earned its way into the College Football Playoff, which shows why expansion is a bad idea. There are a lot of folks who believe that "more opportunities" would be better for the game. But the CFP isn't, never has been and never will be about opportunities. It's about rewarding excellence. Losing three games or not even winning your conference isn't excellence and shouldn't be rewarded with a berth in the playoff.

If it is, then let's just stop keeping score.

Dandy Dozen

1. Georgia (9-0)
2. Alabama (8-1)
3. Ohio State (8-1)
4. Cincinnati (9-0)
5. Oregon (8-1)
6. Michigan (8-1)
7. Oklahoma (9-0)
8. Texas A&M (7-2)
9. Notre Dame (8-1)
10. Oklahoma State (8-1)
11. Pittsburgh (7-2)
12. Michigan State (8-1)

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After Win, Buckeyes Still Where They Want To Be

To borrow a phrase from Urban Meyer, “The best thing about being 8-1 is it gives you a chance to be 9-1.”

So true, as the Ohio State football team, warts and all, still finds itself in the running for the Big Ten championship and a spot in the College Football Playoff after a less-than-stellar 26-17 victory at Nebraska.

Let me quote another former Ohio State head coach, John Cooper: “Guys, sometimes we don’t give enough credit to the other team. Their players are on scholarship, too.” (Aren’t Coop’s quotes more colorful than Urban’s?)

The fact that the Cornhuskers put up a fight shouldn’t have come as a complete surprise. They proved to be exactly as advertised – a good team that is unable to find a way to win when the game is on the line. It’s the little things. Like special teams. Nebraska helped set up Ohio State’s first of only two touchdowns with a 13-yard punt, and the Huskers missed two makeable field goals. Connecting on even one of those three-pointers would have made a difference as Noah Ruggles’ final field goal would not have made it a virtually insurmountable two-score lead.

There were other little things working against the Huskers, such as quarterback Adrian Martinez clearly limping and the NU brain trust calling a quarterback run.

I don’t see any way Scott Frost survives as Nebraska’s head coach, but that’s Husker Nation’s problem, not ours.

Buckeye Nation is suddenly concerned about its beloved team that was rolling over opponents only a few short weeks ago. It’s funny because Buckeye fans have been saying all season that the tougher games were coming up after the off-week, so I am a little bemused by their surprise that the games have gotten tougher.

So many people that I spoke to or saw posting on our BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum were concerned or disappointed with the Buckeyes’ 33-24 win against Penn State. I thought it was a solid win over a tough division foe and traditional rival.

Those same fans must be really concerned after the game with Nebraska, where the Buckeyes hardly seemed championship caliber. The running game was stagnant, the passing game, while prolific, was inconsistent and the defense gave up two troubling big plays to Nebraska receiver Samori Toure. Add to that some interesting play-calling by Ryan Day and Co., especially at the end of the game, and I understand why some might be alarmed.

But the Buckeyes won!

At this time of year, every team is banged up and opponents also have ample game tape to evaluate and come up with ways to try to beat you. I don’t feel Day is making excuses when he says that come November, it is a battle for survival, a “one-game season” as he calls it.

“It’s like March Madness,” Day said. “You win, you survive and you move on. That’s where we are right now. We have to bring it every week because a lot of these teams are dangerous and capable of beating us.”

It’s funny. Against Penn State, Buckeye fans complained that Day stuck with the running game too long. That stubbornness paid off when TreVeyon Henderson finally broke one for 68 yards to help give the Buckeyes a 27-17 lead late in the third quarter. This time around, it seemed that Day abandoned the running game too quickly.

I thought Henderson was successfully nickel-and-dime the Huskers in the early going. He carried the ball 14 times in the first half for 52 yards and a 3.7-yard average. While 3.7 is not a Henderson-esque number, three of those runs would make a first down and everyone knows

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

that if you give the freshman sensation the ball enough, eventually he is going to break one as he did against the Nittany Lions. He only got the ball three times in the third quarter (sadly, for minus-2 yards), yet in the fourth quarter with the game on the line, he carried four times for 42 yards, including runs of 22 and 11 yards on the game-icing drive.

However, with the clock running under two minutes on that same drive and Nebraska in a position where they had to use their timeouts, there was C.J. Stroud dropping back to pass, having the ball knocked away from him and center Luke Wypler – in my mind making the play of the game (sorry, Jaxon Smith-Njigba) – falling on it to deny the Cornhuskers a genuine shot at winning the ballgame.

Stroud’s numbers were much more prolific against Nebraska than they were against Penn State, with 36 completions and 405 yards. But in a couple of key numbers, Stroud had no interceptions or sacks against the Lions, while against the Huskers, he pitched two interceptions and was sacked twice, including the near-disastrous strip sack in the fourth quarter.

Bottom line? If Ohio State is passing the ball 54 times, it is generally not a good thing. The Buckeyes need to recapture the balance that made them so prolific for much of the season.

As for the defense, if you take away Toure’s 72 yard-TD and 53-yard catch that set up another touchdown, the unit was fairly effective. The defensive line continues to come on strong, registering four of Ohio State’s five sacks and helping hold the Cornhuskers to just 113 yards rushing, 51 from quarterback Adrian Martinez, who barely completed 50 percent of his passes at 16 of 31.

While Martinez aided the Nebraska cause with his feet, Stroud continued to be the subject of criticism among fans because of *his* reluctance to run with the football. But the quarterback pushed back.

“If my job is to run the ball, I’d be a running back or something,” he said after the game with Nebraska. “I throw the ball for a living. It might look obvious when you throw the ball and everybody runs to the ball and people say, ‘Oh, he should have run it.’ But I feel like I do my job when my number is called.”

Day and his Buckeyes have moved beyond the days under Meyer when the quarterback was asked to carry a large portion of the rushing load. But it does seem there are times when Stroud rolls out of the pocket and there is ample green space in front of him. Rather than take the easy yards and slide, he sometimes forces a pass. I say take the easy yards.

In fairness to Stroud, he did awkwardly run what appeared to be some sort of option early in the game for a gain of just 1 yard. Later in the half, he converted a third-and-4 with a 6-yard run to the Nebraska 12 to help set up Ruggles’ first field goal.

In closing, let me say that I have been telling people that while I think Ohio State is the favorite to win the Big Ten championship, I was not sure the Buckeyes were a playoff-caliber team. But as I have watched things play out over the last several weeks of this wild and crazy college football season, who is out there – except perhaps Georgia – that Ohio State can’t beat?

Michigan or Michigan State? The Buckeyes will have their chance with those clubs in the regular season. Oregon? I’d love to see the Buckeyes get another shot at the Ducks. I bet that scoring

play the Ducks ran over and over again would be better defended. Oklahoma? The Sooners have given up 30 or more points in four of their nine games, including 48 to Texas, and they struggled to beat both Nebraska (23-16) and West Virginia (16-13). Cincinnati? The Bearcats have had their hands full with AAC competition the last three games. I think they would also have their hands full with the Buckeyes.

There’s always Alabama, but the Crimson Tide have their own tough road to make the playoffs.

Ohio State just needs to keep winning. Do that and the rest will take care of itself.

To Kick Or Not To Kick

On the “Official Game Thread” at BuckeyeSports.com, staffer Joe Dempsey lamented that Ruggles’ success with his field goals this season might lead to the Buckeyes settling for three points more often. An interesting thought.

I always remember the 1996 Michigan game, when the Buckeyes lost a 13-9 decision after settling for three field goals in the first half. And the game with Nebraska marked the second game in a row that Ohio State found itself in a dogfight because it failed to score touchdowns and settled for field goals.

On the other hand, Ohio State was 1 of 2 on fourth downs against Penn State, turning the ball over on downs at the PSU 13, and 0 for 1 against the Huskers, turning the ball over on the Nebraska 43 on the very first drive of the game. Going for it on fourth down is no sure thing. But you have to ask if a coach has a high level of confidence in his field-goal kicker, does it make said coach more conservative in his play-calling?

“When you kick four field goals and you win by nine, it’s obviously huge,” Day said after the Nebraska game. “(Ruggles) has become a weapon for us, and when your defense is playing well, you can play a little bit to that (strength). It’s a good feeling when you have a guy like that, who you feel strongly about, and he’s come through for us in the last couple of games.”

Ruggles is now 15 of 15 on his field-goal attempts this season. Going back to 2012, when Meyer brought his pedal-to-the metal, go-for-it-on-fourth-down offense to Columbus, Ohio State has had 15 or more field goals in a season only twice – 17 in both 2016 and 2017. In fact, the Buckeyes have attempted more than 15 field goals only three times during that span – 20 in 2014, 22 in 2016, and 21 in 2017.

As a point of reference, Mike Nugent was 25 of 28 during the national championship season of 2002. And an interesting side note, Sean Nuernberger was just 13 of 20 on field goals during the 2014 national championship run. During that span starting in 2012, the Buckeyes only had a lower success rate on three-pointers in last year’s COVID-ravaged season, when Jake Seibert’s and Dominic DiMaccio’s combined 2 for 4 dragged down Blake Haubeil’s 5-of-7 success rate.

Flag Frenzy

While we are looking at numbers, did you notice that Ohio State was flagged for six penalties for 50 yards *in the third quarter alone* against Nebraska, finishing with eight penalties for 65 yards for the game. I found a closer look at Ohio State penalties even more troubling.

The sloppy performance against the Huskers left Ohio State 101st among least penalized teams with 64.3 yards per game. But it gets

worse because this is a trend.

Ohio State was 73rd last season with 54.4 yards per game, 73rd in 2019 with 55.0 yards penalized per game, 126th of 129 teams in 2018 with 75.4 yards, and 113th in 2017 with 67.4 yards per game of yellow laundry. In fact, you have to go all the way back to the championship season of 2014 to find a Buckeye team that finished higher than 50th among least penalized teams with the champions finishing 43rd at 47.4 penalty yards on average.

This seems almost institutionalized in the program, and I would think it is not the mark of a championship program. Maybe one of those numerous “quality control” people on staff should take a look at that.

Ex-Buckeye, Colt Matte Passes

Buckeye Nation lost a legend and Buckeye Sports Bulletin lost a friend when Tom Matte passed away Nov. 2. Matte was a three-year letterman for the Buckeyes (1958-60) and had a colorful 12-year career with the Baltimore Colts.

Matte came to Ohio State as a running back, but injuries at the quarterback position caused him to become the Buckeyes’ signal-caller. He was drafted in the first round by the Colts and moved back to running back. However, Matte is arguably best remembered for again being pressed into emergency service at quarterback when Johnny Unitas and Gary Cuozzo were both injured during the 1965 season. It is a common practice now, but Matte is famously remembered for wearing the plays taped to his wrist.

While that is what he is most remembered for, the man dubbed “Garbage Can” by none other than Alex Karras had a solid career at both Ohio State and in the pros.

He was team MVP and All-Big Ten for the Buckeyes in 1960, when he passed for 737 yards and ran for 682.

He played on many great teams with the Colts, who were frequently overshadowed by Vince Lombardi’s Green Bay Packers. He did a little bit of everything while with the club, racking up 4,646 yards and 45 touchdowns rushing and 2,869 yards and 12 TDs receiving. The two-time Pro-Bowler’s best season was probably 1969, when he rushed for a career high 909 yards on 235 carries with a league-high 11 touchdowns while adding 43 catches for 513 yards for two touchdowns. His total touches, yards from scrimmage (1,422) and touchdowns were all league highs, helping him win first-team All-Pro honors.

That came a year after he played in the Colts’ famous Super Bowl III loss to Joe Namath and the New York Jets. Matte carried the ball 11 times for 116 yards, setting a Super Bowl yards per carry record (10.5), and he also caught two passes for 30 yards in the losing effort.

But I will remember Matte most for all the times he was helpful with BSB stories and how much fun it was just to chat football with him. In honor of his life and friendship, we reprinted his wide-ranging interview from the 2020 BSB Interview Issue at BuckeyeSports.com on Nov. 4. It is archived for your information and enjoyment. Mark Rea also sums up Matte’s life and career on page 19 of this issue.

Don’t Forget Tight Ends

Jeremy Ruckert had a game he’d probably just as soon forget against Nebraska. He caught three passes, but they went for just 13 yards. On Ohio State’s first possession of the game, he could not corral a Stroud pass on fourth down, helping turn the ball over to the Huskers. Then, at the start of the fourth quarter he was flagged for a personal foul after Stroud threw an interception.

HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

FOR ATHLETES

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that causes your brain to rapidly move inside your skull.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

- Headache, nausea, vomiting,
- balance problems, dizziness,
- double or blurred vision,
- sensitivity to light or noise, feeling
- sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy,
- just not "feeling right" or
- "feeling down," memory
- problems, confusion, and
- trouble sleeping.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?



REPORT IT. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

GET CHECKED OUT. If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL. A concussion can make it harder to do everyday activities, such as concentrating at school. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH AND PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain and can even be fatal.

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>

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Ohio Department of Health

