

Ohio State Beat Writers Poll: Unanimous On Buckeyes Playoff Return, Champion A Toss-Up



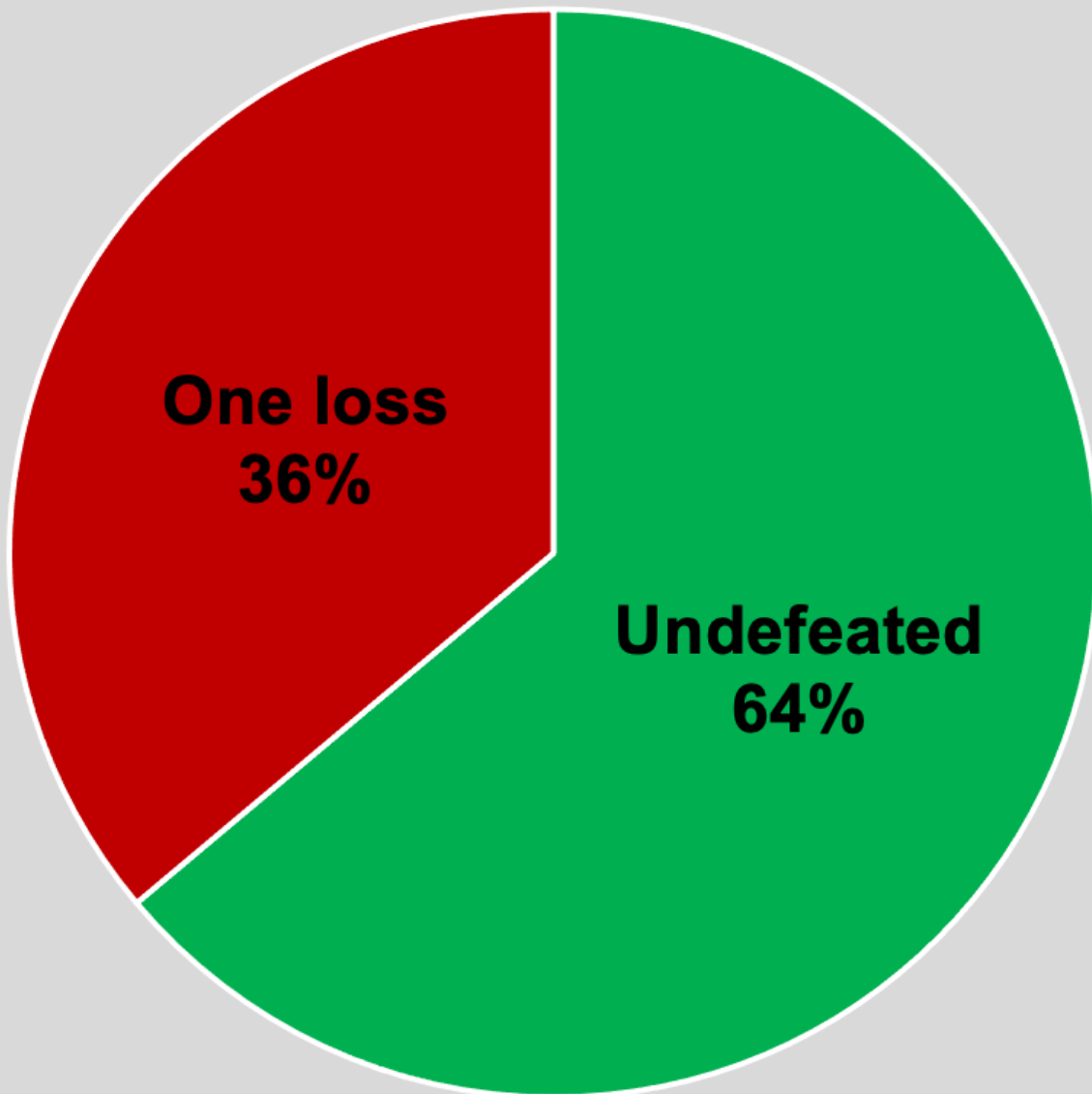
***This is a story from the Sept. 1 print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. For four free issues of the print edition, no card required, sign up at the link here:
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For the second straight year, Buckeye Sports Bulletin reached out to various members throughout the Ohio State beat to get a feel for what they are expecting heading into the season. In total, including five BSB members, 36 people's responses were counted in the poll.

This time around, while sticking to many of the same questions about Ohio State's title aspirations, who will lead the team in various categories and which freshman will break out, we added a few of the more of the big questions about the team this offseason. What that meant was a pair of questions about the quarterback battle and one about the pass defense.

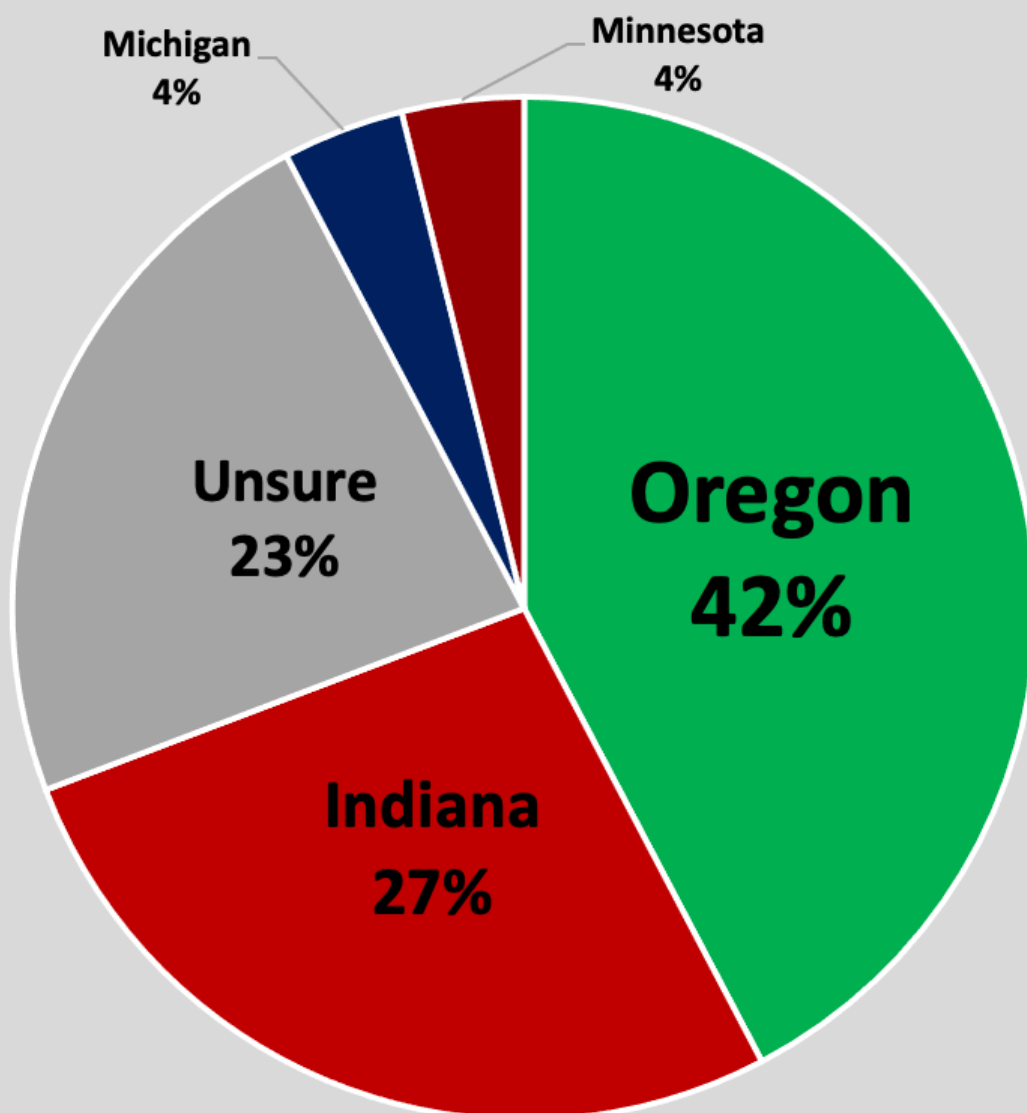
Also, it should be made clear that this is originally based on an idea from Scott Bell, who does this with the Michigan beat. Read his story about the Michigan poll from this year here.

Ohio State's Regular Season



Ohio State's Regular Season Record: While all but Buckeye Scoop's Tom Orr picked Ohio State to go undefeated in 2020, it is more split this time around. But, nearly two-thirds (23 of 36) are still expecting the Buckeyes to go 12-0 heading into the Big Ten championship.

Who Is The Loss



Who Is The Loss: Of the 13 beat writers predicting a loss, five straight up predicted it to come in Ohio State's second game of the season against Oregon. One other, Lori Schmidt of the Columbus Dispatch, predicted it be one of either Oregon or Minnesota, giving the Ducks 5.5 votes. Indiana, a team that has not beaten Ohio State since 1988, was next highest. The unsure category is for three writers who said they predict a loss, more so by odds and less so because of a specific team on the schedule.

Big Ten Champion

36

A red bar chart with a single bar. The bar is red and has the number 36 written inside it in black. The bar is centered horizontally.

Ohio State

Will Ohio State Make The Playoff?

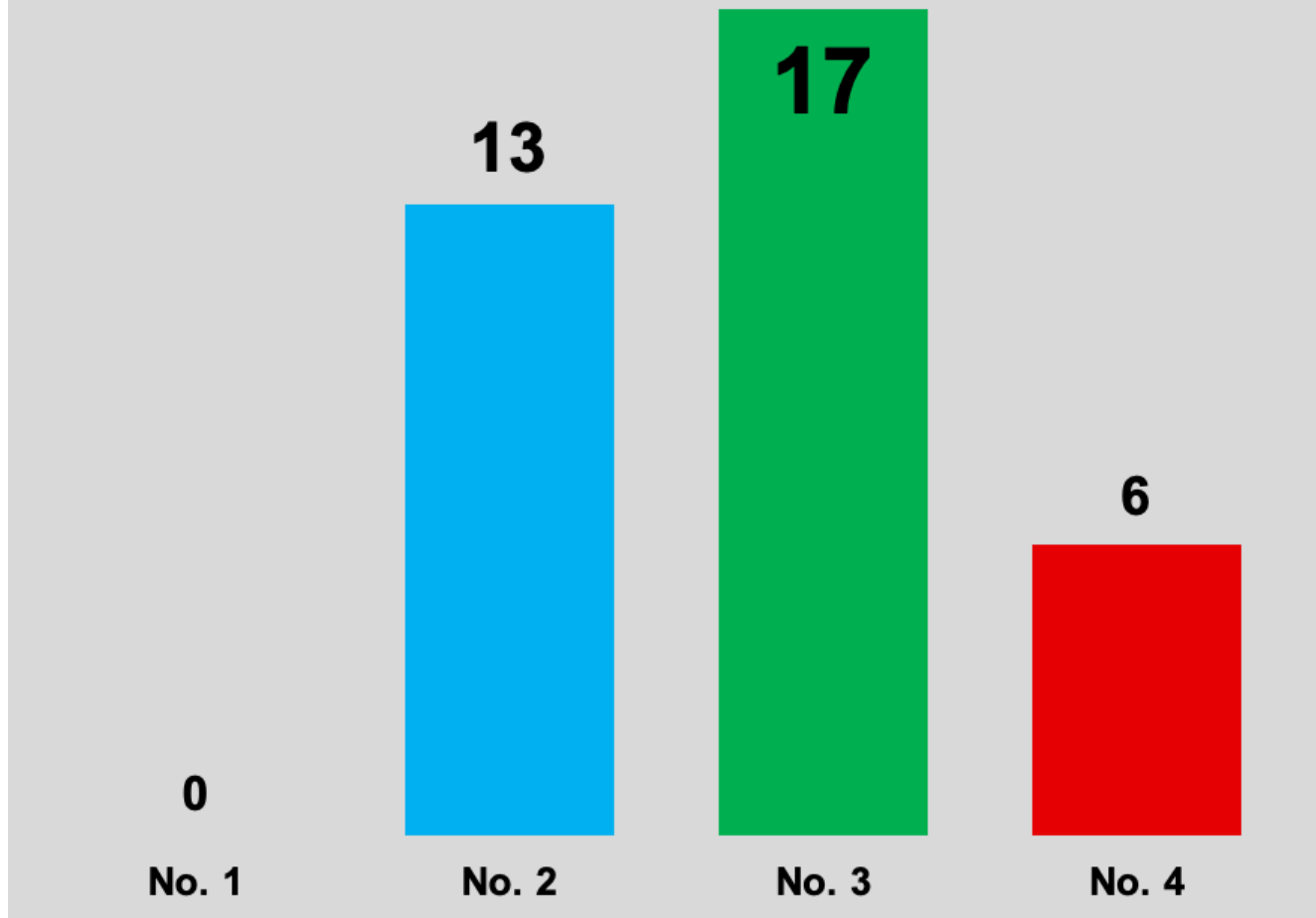
36

A green bar chart with a single bar. The number 36 is displayed inside the top portion of the bar.

Yes

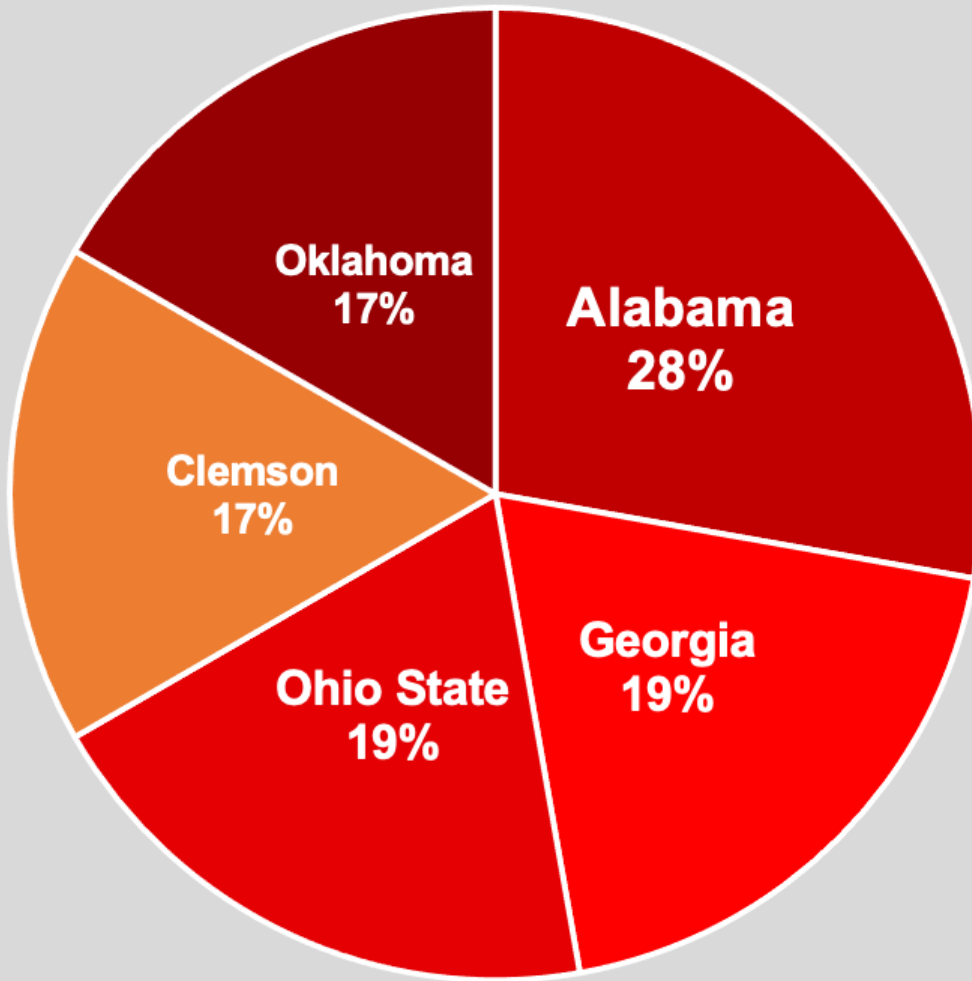
Two pretty straight forward ones. Every beat writer predicts Ohio State, loss or not, to both win the Big Ten and to make the College Football Playoff for the third straight time under Ryan Day.

Ohio State's Playoff Rank



Ohio State's Playoff Rank: One of my favorites on here, simply because I find it fascinating that not one beat writer selected Ohio State to be first overall, even if that Buckeyes team is a 13-0 Big Ten champion.

Who Is The National Champion



National Champion: One of the most divisive questions on the list, not one answer for who will be the national champion got even 30 percent of the vote. And yet, only five teams were named, showing the level of both parity and the opposite of parity existing in college football at this time. Alabama narrowly led the pack with 10 votes, while seven think that the Buckeyes can pull it off this season with a new quarterback. Speaking of quarterback...

Starting QB At End Of Season



C.J. Stroud

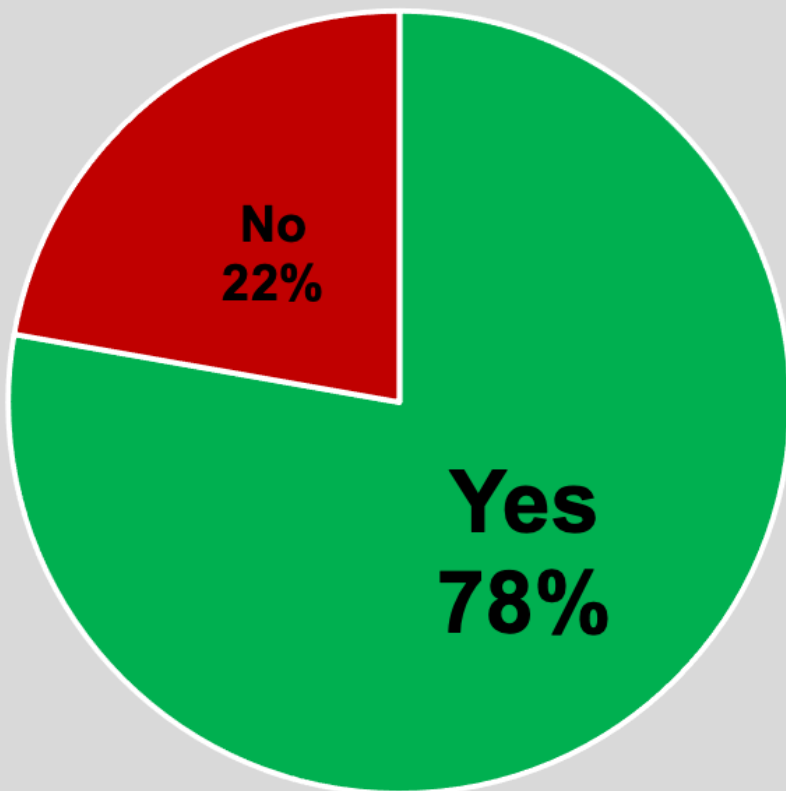
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Quinn Ewers

1

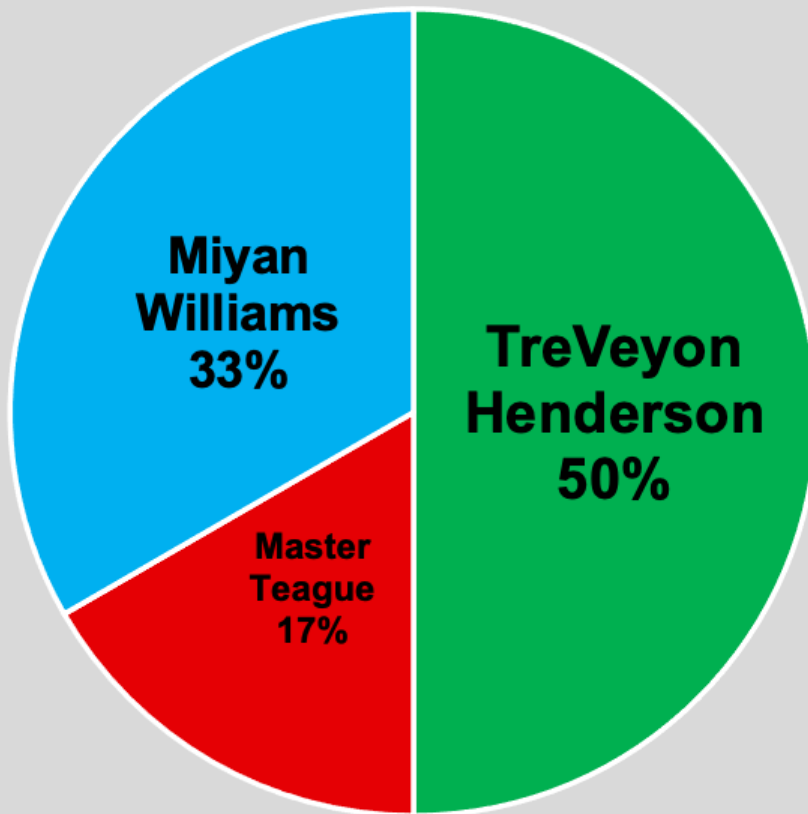
Kyle McCord

Is That The Same Starting QB In 2022?



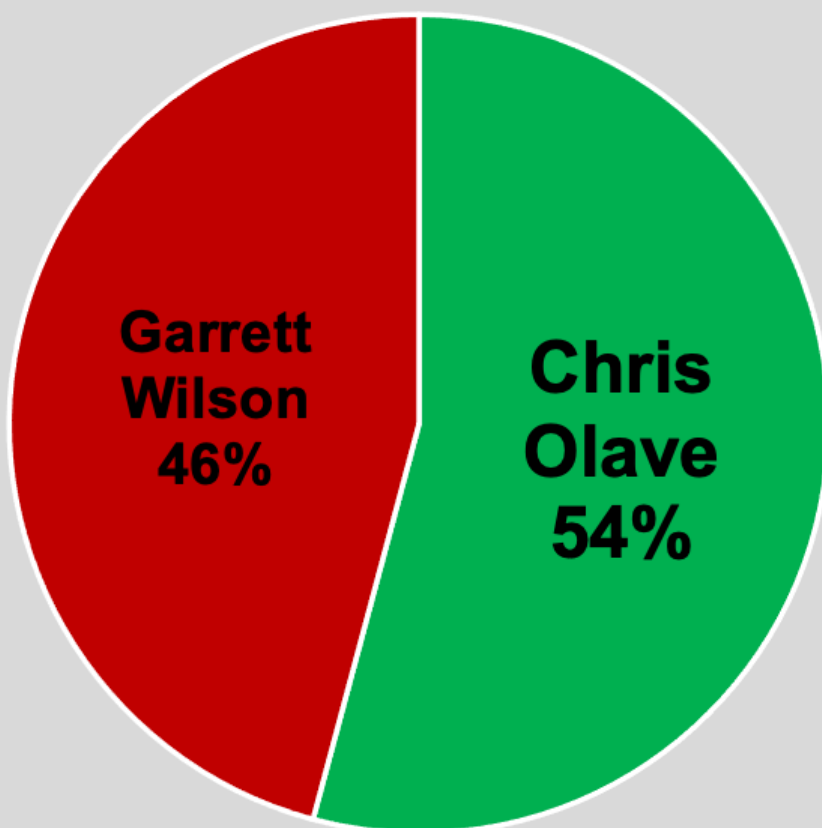
Who Is Starting At The End Of 2021 / Is He The Same Starter For 2022: The goal of these questions was to really ask one thing: What is the expectation for how firm of a grasp C.J. Stroud has on the starting job, something made extremely difficult because he's never thrown a collegiate pass. Only Cleveland.com's Doug Lesmerises and BSB's Craig Merz predicted Stroud loses the job by the end of this season, while eight pollsters think that the quarterback will change in the offseason.

Leading Rusher



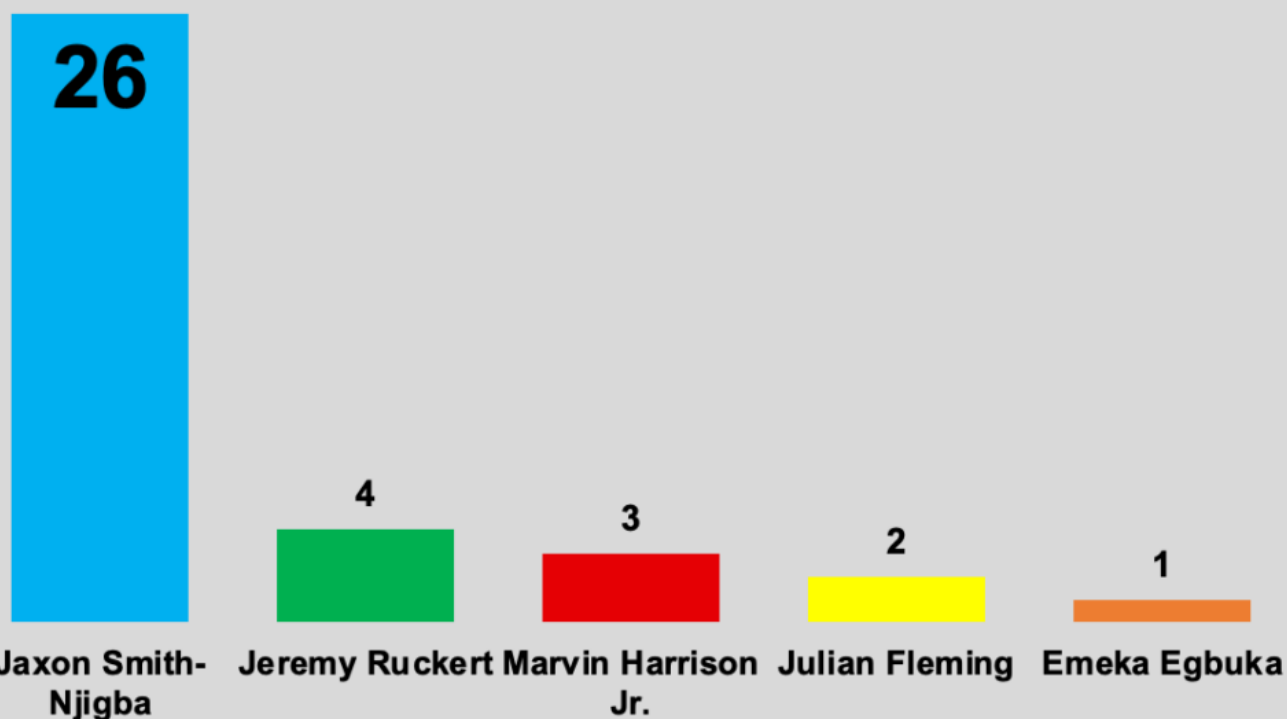
Leading Rusher: A pretty split vote here, and still half of those polled believe that true freshman TreVeyon Henderson will lead Ohio State's rushing categories in 2021. The other half of the vote primarily went to Miyan Williams, who flashed in spurts last season and has been getting reps with the first team in fall camp. The main incumbent, Master Teague, earned just six votes.

Leading Receiver

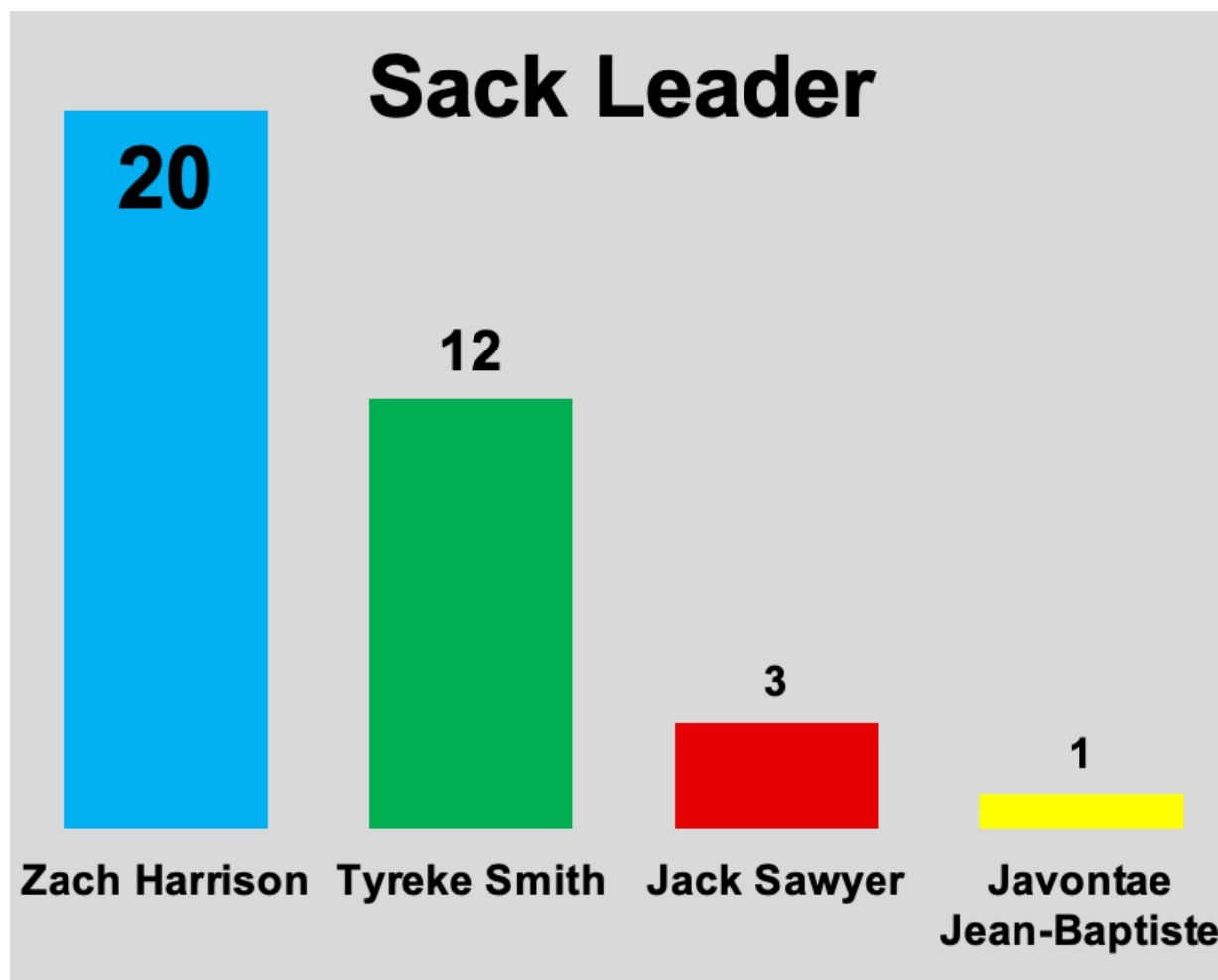


Leading Receiver: I guess when you have two of the top wide receivers in the country, this can become a difficult question. Chris Olave just narrowly edged out Garrett Wilson in the vote 19.5 to 16.5. The half points came from Buckeye Scoop's Tony Gerdeman, who has Wilson leading in catches and Olave leading in yards.

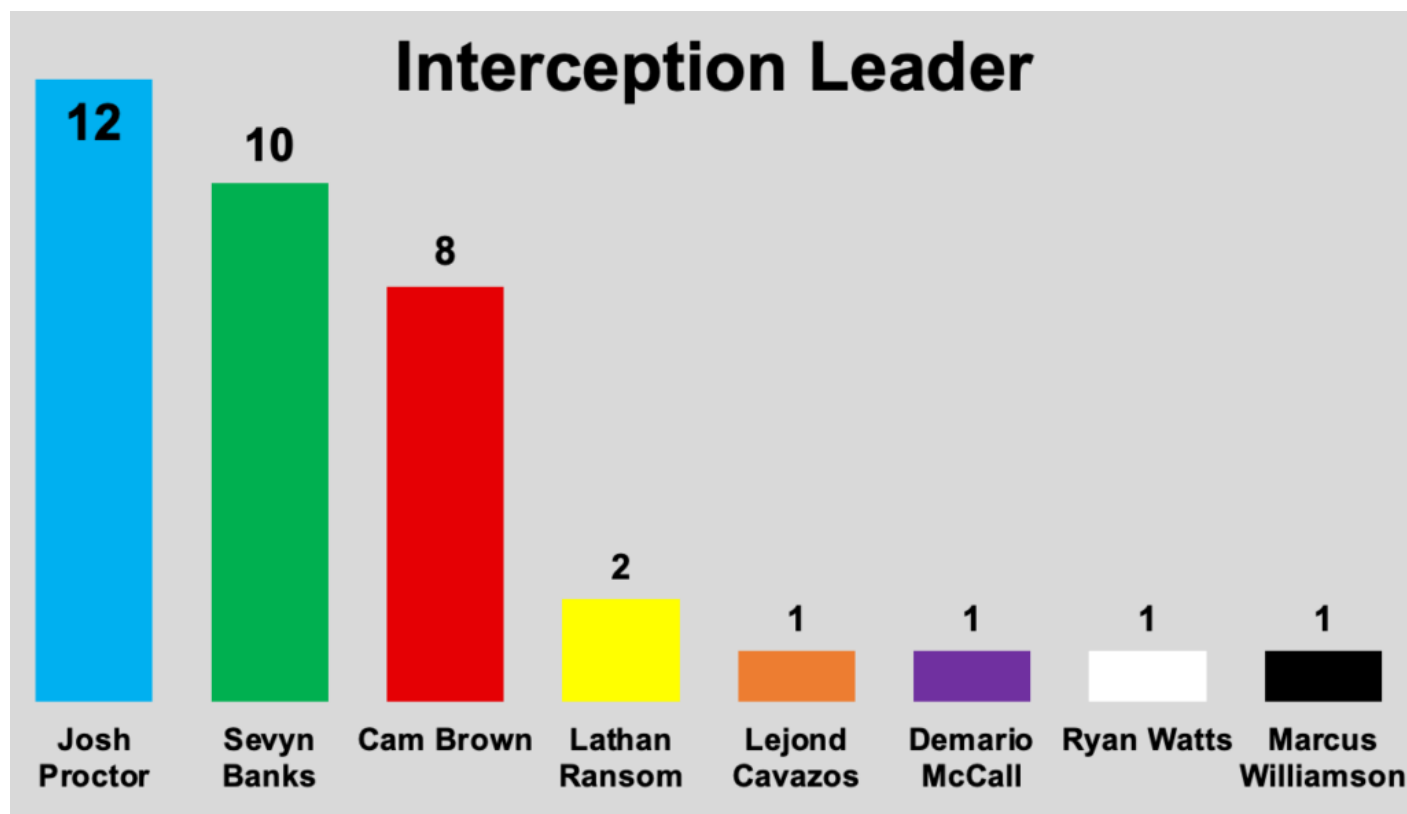
No. 3 Receiver In Production



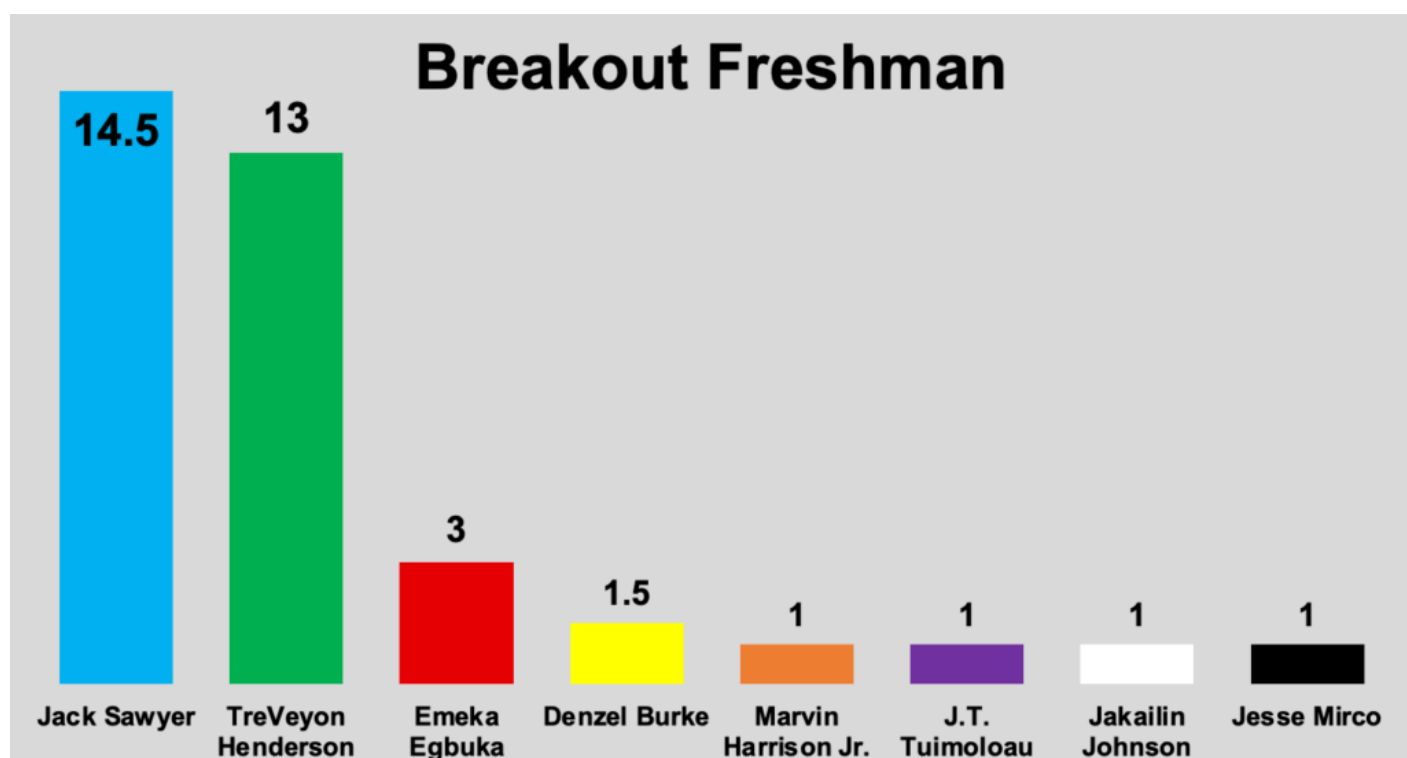
No. 3 Receiver: After Olave and Wilson it gets more interesting, but only slightly. Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who is expected to replace Wilson in the slot as he moves outside, is the runaway favorite, but there are a handful of options after him as upset picks. A pair of freshmen wide outs, a former five-star receiver and a veteran tight end make for a pretty start-studded group to challenge Smith-Njigba this season.



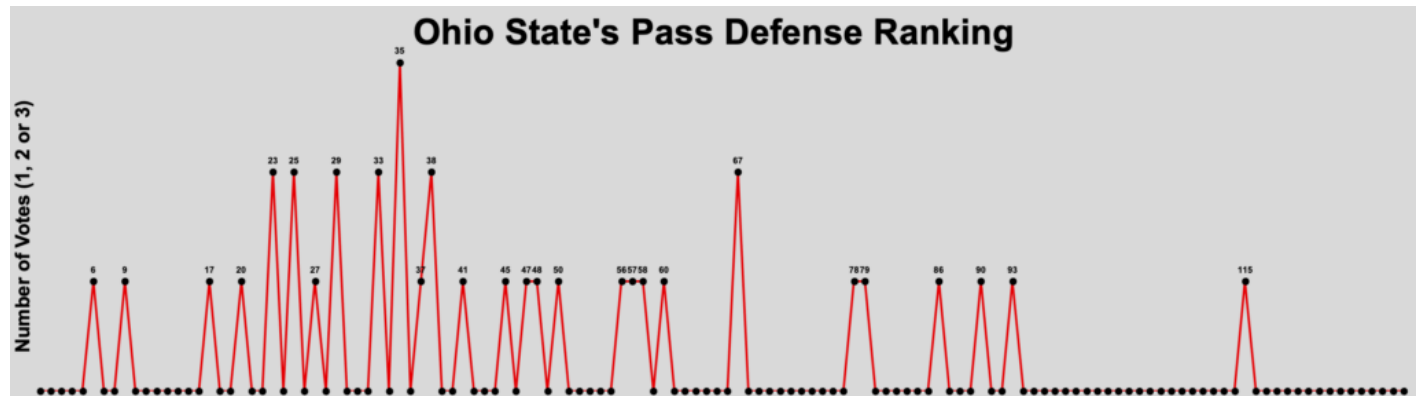
Sack Leader: A decently close battle here, with Zach Harrison leading the bunch with more than half of the vote. Harrison is a former five-star heading into his junior year, and the last Ohio State defensive end to do that had a pretty good year and went No. 2 overall in the draft, so the expectations may be high. Senior Tyreke Smith is not too far behind with a third of the vote, while true freshman Jack Sawyer picked up three votes. Lettermen Row's Austin Ward gave one to the dark horse of the group: Javontae Jean-Baptiste.



Interception Leader: If any question was truly anyone's guess, it is this one. Eight different defensive backs were named, though three of the more veteran members rose to the top. Josh Proctor, Sevn Banks and Cam Brown are expected to be the key cogs in the defensive backfield and earned 30 of the 36 votes, with Proctor holding a slight advantage. Of the ones toward the back end, BSB's own Patrick Mayhorn gave his vote to Demario McCall, a former running back/wide receiver turned corner this offseason.



Breakout Freshman: Once again, eight names were listed, but this time the two favorites were clear. Both Sawyer and Henderson come in as five-stars, both were early enrollees and both could battle for some major reps in their first season with the team. There are names all over the field past them, including at punter with Jesse Mirco, as selected by the Toledo Blade's Kyle Rowland.



Pass Defense Ranking: Finally, Ohio State's much talked about pass defense. After finishing rank No. 122 in 2020 in pass yards allowed, defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs is expected to make big improvements this year, according to the beat. The average ranking from the writers was 45.9, and the No. 46 pass defense last year, Fresno State, allowed 217.7 yards per game. That would be 86.3 yards per game less than in 2020. Two writers, Lettermen Row's Ward and Spencer Holbrook, both had the Buckeyes making a complete turnaround with a top 10 pass defense. On the other end, Mayhorn is not sold, ranking the projected pass defense the lowest at No. 115.

Here is the full list of responses from the beat:

Reporter	Employer	12-Game Record	Loss	Big Ten Champion	Playoff Rank?	National Champion	Starting QB At End Same QB For 2022?	Leading Rusher	Leading Receiver	No. 3 Receiver	Sack Leader	Interception Leader	Breakout Freshman	Pass Defense Rank	
Nathan Baird	Cleveland.com	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 3	Clemson	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Josh Proctor	TreVeyon Henderson	41
Jacob Berge	The Lantern	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 3	Oklahoma	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Myan Williams	Chris Olave	Marvin Harrison Jr.	Zach Harrison	Ryan Watts	Denzel Burke	33
Dave Biddle	Bucknute	11 1	Unsure	Ohio State	Yes 3	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Myan Williams	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	Seyvyn Banks	Henderson / Sawyer	48
Jeremy Birmingham	Lettermen Row	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Clemson	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Myan Williams	Chris Olave	Jeremy Ruckert	Tyreek Smith	TreVeyon Henderson	35	
Chase Brown	B5B	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 4	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	No	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Cam Brown	Harrison / Henderson	93
Zack Carpenter	Lettermen Row	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Cam Brown	Emeka Egbuka	20
Wyatt Crosher	B5B	11 1	Oregon	Ohio State	Yes 3	Clemson	C.J. Stroud	No	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Marvin Harrison Jr.	Jack Sawyer	Josh Proctor	TreVeyon Henderson	67
Joe Dempsey	B5B	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 3	Ohio State	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Josh Proctor	Jack Sawyer	79
Jack Emerson	The Lantern	11 1	Indiana	Ohio State	Yes 4	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Master Teague	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Seyvyn Banks	Jack Sawyer	60
Tony Gerdeman	Buckeye Scoop	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Ohio State	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Myan Williams	Olave / Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Josh Proctor	TreVeyon Henderson	29
Mark Gruber	Buckeye Scoop	11 1	Oregon	Ohio State	Yes 3	Oklahoma	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	Josh Proctor	Jack Sawyer	27
Marcus Hartman	Dayton Daily News	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Myan Williams	Garrett Wilson	Jeremy Ruckert	Jack Sawyer	Josh Proctor	Henderson / Burke	38
Colin Hess-Hill	(Formerly) 11W	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Ohio State	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Myan Williams	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Jack Sawyer	Seyvyn Banks	Jack Sawyer	78
Joseph Hastings	Buckeye Grove	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	No	Master Teague	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Seyvyn Banks	Jack Sawyer	57
Steve Helweggen	Bucknute	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Master Teague	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Seyvyn Banks	Jack Sawyer	35
Justin Holbrook	NBC4	11 1	Indiana	Ohio State	Yes 4	Clemson	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Master Teague	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	TreVeyon Henderson	90	
Spencer Holbrook	Lettermen Row	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Ohio State	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Myan Williams	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	Josh Proctor	Jakalin Johnson	9
Dave Holmes	10TV	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Ohio State	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	Seyvyn Banks	TreVeyon Henderson	45
Dan Hope	Eleven Warriors	11 1	Indiana	Ohio State	Yes 3	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Myan Williams	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Lathan Ransom	Jack Sawyer	58
Joey Kaufman	Columbus Dispatch	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Clemson	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Seyvyn Banks	Jack Sawyer	56
Bill Landis	The Athletic	11 1	Oregon	Ohio State	Yes 3	Georgia	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	Lathan Ransom	TreVeyon Henderson	33
Doug Lesmerises	Cleveland.com	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 3	Georgia	Quinn Ewers	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Cam Brown	TreVeyon Henderson	17
Tim May	Lettermen Row	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Ohio State	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Garrett Wilson	Marvin Harrison Jr.	Jack Sawyer	Josh Proctor	Henderson / Sawyer	29
Patrick Mayhorn	B5B	11 1	Oregon	Ohio State	Yes 3	Oklahoma	C.J. Stroud	No	Myan Williams	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Demario McCall	Jack Sawyer	115
Stephen Means	Cleveland.com	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 3	Georgia	C.J. Stroud	No	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jeremy Ruckert	Zach Harrison	Josh Proctor	Jack Sawyer	29
Craig Merz	B5B	11 1	Oregon	Ohio State	Yes 4	Georgia	Kyle McCord	No	TreVeyon Henderson	Garrett Wilson	Julian Fleming	Zach Harrison	Seyvyn Banks	J.T. Tuimolotau	23
Patrick Murphy	Bucknute	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 3	Georgia	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	Lejond Cavazos	TreVeyon Henderson	35
Kevin Noon	Buckeye Grove	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Clemson	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	Cam Brown	Jack Sawyer	38
Rik Oler	Columbus Dispatch	11 1	Indiana / Michigan	Ohio State	Yes 4	Oklahoma	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Master Teague	Garrett Wilson	Jeremy Ruckert	Zach Harrison	Marcus Williamson	Emeka Egbuka	37
Tom Orr	Buckeye Scoop	11 1	Unsure	Ohio State	Yes 3	Georgia	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Josh Proctor	TreVeyon Henderson	25
Bill Rabinowitz	Columbus Dispatch	11 1	Unsure	Ohio State	Yes 3	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	Josh Proctor	TreVeyon Henderson	50
Kyle Rowland	Toledo Blade	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 3	Georgia	C.J. Stroud	No	Myan Williams	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Tyreek Smith	Seyvyn Banks	Jesse Mirco	67
Lori Schmidt	Columbus Dispatch	11 1	Minnesota / Oregon	Ohio State	Yes 4	Oklahoma	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Myan Williams	Chris Olave	Emeka Egbuka	Zach Harrison	Cam Brown	Jack Sawyer	47
Jerod Smalley	NBC4	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 3	Oklahoma	C.J. Stroud	Yes	Master Teague	Garrett Wilson	Julian Fleming	Tyreek Smith	Cam Brown	Harrison / Sawyer	25
Griffin Strom	Eleven Warriors	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 3	Alabama	C.J. Stroud	No	Myan Williams	Garrett Wilson	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Zach Harrison	Cam Brown	Emeka Egbuka	86
Austin Ward	Lettermen Row	12 0	None	Ohio State	Yes 2	Ohio State	C.J. Stroud	Yes	TreVeyon Henderson	Chris Olave	Jaxon Smith-Ngiba	Javontae Jean-Baptiste	Cam Brown	Jack Sawyer	6