

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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## Buckeye Sports Bulletin Wraps Up 1994 Grid Recruiting Season

# OSU Reels In One Of Nation's Best Classes

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

John Cooper is finally beginning to enjoy himself.

On the heels of his best record, first postseason victory and first top 10 finish at Ohio State, Cooper reeled in one of the nation's finest recruiting classes.

And after six long years on the job with the Buckeyes, he is finally beginning to enjoy some of the fruits of his labors. So when someone mentioned that some of the recruiting experts had his class rated as high as number two nationally, Cooper couldn't help but let a smile cross his lips.

"It's probably the best class we've had since I've been here," he said. "It's a good, solid group of players that a lot of other people wanted as well."

Exactly one year ago, Cooper was defending his recruiting class to reporters after many of the experts downgraded it. Some had the effort rated as low as seventh in the Big Ten, although eight players eventually played in at least one game for the Buckeyes in 1993.

Last year, Cooper had bristled at the criticism. He said he didn't put a lot of stock in how the recruiting experts rated the class, saying, "I think those guys are more interested in national recognition and in selling their recruiting publications than they are in anything else. Who are these guys to sit back and rate these players?"

This time around, the OSU coach didn't back off from his statements. But he did admit that when the class is rated so well, it helps the program.

"I base how we did a lot more on our judgment than I do on some so-called expert," Cooper said. "But I'm not going to lie to you. It pleases me if Tom Lemming or some of these other gurus think we had a good recruiting class. I'm not going to complain about that."

"But I think the jury is still out. We all want to wait and see how good these players are when they get in here. I hope there are some 'Big Daddys' in this group. I hope there are some Corey Stringers in this group. I hope there are some Raymont HARRISES and players like that in this group. If there are, this will be a very good group indeed."

The Buckeyes were impressive when it came to filling their needs this season. They lost six of nine starters on the offensive and defensive lines, including "Big Daddy" Dan Wilkinson and three-year starters Jason Simmons, Jason Winrow, Dave Monnot and Alan Kline. Cooper and his assistants responded by going out and signing eight linemen, including USA Today All-Americans Eric Gohlstin and Orlando Pace.



**SIZING UP THE CLASS** — Ohio State head coach John Cooper talks with reporters about the Buckeyes' recruiting efforts. The Buckeyes signed 20 players to national letters of intent and the class was rated by many national experts as one of the best in the country. OSU addressed its needs, especially at lineman and running back, signing a combined 13 players at those two spots.

"I think the fact we lost so many of offensive linemen actually helped us in recruiting this year," Cooper said. "The fact that we lost Danny helped us, too, although I'm not sure that any player came here specifically because Danny left or because Alan Kline left or because any of the other seniors left the football team."

"I think the fact that Corey Stringer played as a freshman two years ago was encouraging to some of these offensive linemen that we recruited this year. I think some of the guys think if they're good enough, they may have a chance to come in here and play next year."

"But there were absolutely no promises made. They'll have to come in here and earn the right to play, just like Corey did and just like Danny did."

Cooper may not have made any promises to either Gohlstin or Pace, but it doesn't take much of a genius to figure out that either one or both will have a legitimate shot at cracking the lineup next season.

Gohlstin, who is listed at 6-5 and 295 pounds, and Pace, listed at 6-8 and 305, are both now reportedly around the 330-pound mark. The Buckeyes will likely want to trim them down about 15 or 20 pounds, but the loss of Kline, Monnot and Winrow gives them an im-

## OSU Football Commitments

High school football players who signed national letters of intent with Ohio State:

| Player           | Pos | Hgt  | Wgt | High School                 |
|------------------|-----|------|-----|-----------------------------|
| Steve Baird      | QB  | 6-3  | 185 | Hilliard, Ohio              |
| Calvin Brown     | DL  | 6-4  | 275 | East Cleveland (Ohio) Shaw  |
| Che Bryant       | DB  | 6-3  | 180 | Canton (Ohio) McKinley      |
| Brooks Burris    | OL  | 6-8  | 280 | Logan, Ohio                 |
| Roedell Dupree   | LB  | 6-3  | 225 | Jersey City (N.J.) Ferris   |
| Winfield Garnett | OL  | 6-7  | 310 | Harvey (Ill.) Thornton Twp. |
| Dan Gibbons      | DL  | 6-4  | 288 | Birmingham (Mich.) Rice     |
| Eric Gohlstin    | OL  | 6-5  | 295 | Cleveland St. Ignatius      |
| Kevin Griffin    | RB  | 5-10 | 170 | Kirkland (Wash.) Juanita    |
| Jermon Jackson   | RB  | 5-11 | 180 | Ironton, Ohio               |
| John Lumpkin     | TE  | 6-8  | 240 | Trotwood (Ohio) Madison     |
| Dee Miller       | WR  | 6-1  | 200 | Springfield (Ohio) South    |
| Joe Montgomery   | RB  | 6-0  | 208 | Oak Lawn (Ill.) Richards    |
| Damon Moore      | DB  | 6-1  | 185 | Fostoria, Ohio              |
| Orlando Pace     | OL  | 6-8  | 305 | Sandusky, Ohio              |
| Pepe Pearson     | RB  | 5-11 | 175 | Euclid, Ohio                |
| Jerry Rudzinski  | LB  | 6-2  | 215 | Kettering (Ohio) Alter      |
| Marcus Spriggs   | DL  | 6-6  | 285 | Washington, D.C., Woodson   |
| Jamie Sumner     | OL  | 6-4  | 300 | Coffeyville (Kan.) JUCO     |
| Jeff Wilson      | DL  | 6-4  | 260 | Deerfield Beach, Fla.       |

Continued On Page 25



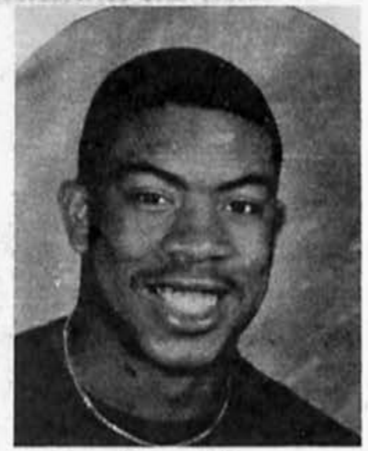
Orlando Pace



Che Bryant



Pepe Pearson



Dee Miller

### Twenty Players Sign National Letters Of Intent To Play For Buckeyes

# OSU Accomplishes Search For Big Linemen

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

After losing five offensive linemen to graduation and three more off the defensive line for a variety of reasons, Ohio State had a burning need to successfully recruit high school linemen this year who could contribute immediately.

The Buckeyes went out and accomplished their mission, signing eight top linemen in a 1994 recruiting class that numbered 20.

OSU will be without the services of offensive line starters Alan Kline, Dave Monnot, Jack Thrush and Jason Winrow next season, as well as top backup Rod Smith. Then, on defense, the Buckeyes lost "Big Daddy" Dan Wilkinson to the NFL, Jason Simmons to graduation and Jayson Gwinn to a fatal car accident.

That made it imperative for the Buckeyes to restock their supply of linemen. Now, with the eight linemen signed last year, Ohio State has a youthful look along both the offensive and defensive fronts.

So many linemen signed pumped up the average size of the Buckeyes' recruiting class this season. The players average nearly 6-3½ and 240 pounds, but 13 of them are 6-3 or taller while eight of them are 275 pounds or more.

For the second year in a row, 12 of

the signees are from Ohio. The Buckeyes also signed two players from Illinois and one each from New Jersey, Michigan, Washington, Florida and Washington, D.C. There was also one junior college transfer.

Here are thumbnail sketches of the 20 players signed by the Buckeyes:

- Quarterback Steve Baird (6-3, 185, 4.55) of Hilliard, Ohio. Threw for 1,162 yards and 17 TDs and rushed for 973 yards and 10 touchdowns as a senior, leading team to an 11-2 record and first-ever appearance in state playoffs. Passed for 155 yards and three TDs and rushed for 151 yards and one score in regional finals of playoffs. Earned second-team all-state honors in Division I and was *The Columbus Dispatch's* central Ohio back of the year.

- Calvin Brown (6-4, 275, 5.1) of East Cleveland (Ohio) Shaw. Registered 102 tackles and four sacks as a defensive end, helping his team to a 10-0 regular-season record and state playoff berth. Three-time Lake Erie League selection and earned honorable mention All-American berth from *USA Today*. Two-time all-scholastic team pick by *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland. Has yet to qualify academically to play as a freshman.

- Che Bryant (6-3, 180, 4.5) of Canton (Ohio) McKinley. Recorded 68 tackles, five interceptions and two fumble recoveries in 1993, earning first-

team All-Ohio honors in Division I. Also named to *Parade* magazine All-American list. A member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty." Also considered an excellent running back prospect and is mentioned by several recruiting services as a Division I basketball prospect. Has yet to qualify academically to play as a freshman.

- Brooks Burris (6-8, 280, 5.2) of Logan, Ohio. Earned second-team All-Ohio honors in Division I and was also the Ohio Southeastern District player of the year. Saw action on both offense and defense as a prepster but will concentrate on offense in college. Hails from same high school as OSU walk-on kicker Josh Jackson and OSU women's basketball All-American Katie Smith. A member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty."

- Roedell Dupree (6-3, 225, 4.7) of Jersey City (N.J.) Ferris. Had 68 solo tackles among his 105 total stops and also tallied three sacks, one interception and three fumble recoveries. A *Parade* magazine All-American and *USA Today* honorable mention pick. Also a member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty." Considered one of the top linebacker prospects in the nation. Also plays basketball and throws the shot put in track. Has yet to qualify academically to play as a freshman.

- Winfield Garnett (6-7, 310, 5.2) of Harvey (Ill.) Thornton Township. One of the top-rated linemen in the Midwest.

Was a force on both the offensive and defensive lines. Will likely be an offensive lineman in college but will try the defense first. Earned All-American honors from national recruiting expert Tom Lemming. Also a member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty." Compiled a 32-1 record as a heavyweight wrestler as a junior.

- Dan Gibbons (6-4, 288, 5.0) of Birmingham (Mich.) Brother Rice. Had 65 total tackles as a senior, including 15 for loss and four sacks. Earned all-state "Dream Team" honors from *The Detroit News* and was an all-metro selection in the Detroit area. Also played offensive line and garnered all-league honors at that position. Will become one of three Michigan natives on OSU roster. Has yet to qualify academically to play as a freshman.

- Eric Gohlstein (6-5, 295, 5.1) of Cleveland St. Ignatius. A first-team All-American selection by *USA Today* and also a first-team All-Ohio player in Division I. A member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty." Helped lead his team to a perfect 14-0 record, the Ohio Division I title and the mythical national high school championship. Started for two years while Ignatius went 28-0. Cousin of OSU offensive lineman Juan Porter. Has yet to qualify academically to play as a freshman.

- Kevin Griffin (5-10, 170, 4.4) of Kirkland (Wash.) Juanita. Played in only seven games as a senior due to



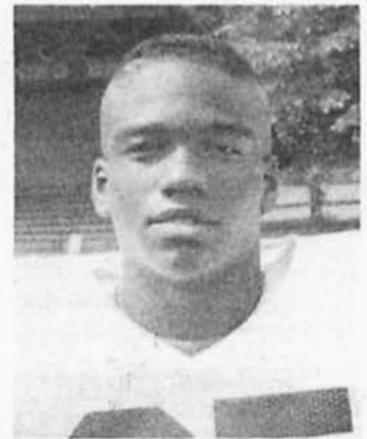
Kevin Griffin



Winfield Garnett



Damon Moore



Jermon Jackson

minor injuries but still rushed for over 500 yards and earned all-state honors. Also played defensive back and may be switched there in college. Nephew of former OSU All-Americans Archie and Ray Griffin. Native of Columbus, but moved to Seattle when he was 11.

• Jermon Jackson (5-11, 180, 4.5) of Ironton, Ohio. Received honorable mention All-American berth from *USA Today*, was a two-time first-team All-Ohioan and the state's Division III back of the year as a senior. Rushed for 1,849 yards and 29 touchdowns as a senior. Totaled 4,452 yards and scored 70 touchdowns during his prep career. Team was 26-2 his last two years and made the Division III championship game both times. A member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty."

• John Lumpkin (6-8, 240, 4.8) of Trotwood (Ohio) Madison. Two-sport standout who will get a football scholarship and then plans to go out for the OSU basketball team. Caught 22 passes for 292 yards and three touchdowns as a senior. Earned honorable mention all-district honors and was a member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty." Also averages over 15 points and 10 rebounds per game in basketball. An honor student who wants to major in electrical engineering.

• Dee Miller (6-1, 200, 4.45) of Springfield (Ohio) South. Regarded by many as the top recruit in Ohio State's class of '94. A *Parade* magazine All-American and second-team selection by *USA Today*. Also was named Ohio offensive player of the year in Division I and was a member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty." Caught 56 passes for 1,139 yards and 16 touchdowns as a senior. Also played safety and totaled 118 tackles and five interceptions. Scored rare double when he earned his league's offensive and defensive player of the year honors. Career reception totals were 126 catches for 2,756 yards and 36 TDs.

• Joe Montgomery (6-0, 208, 4.45) of Oak Lawn (Ill.) Richards. Considered one of Illinois' top prospects. Rushed for 1,676 yards and 26 touchdowns in only his third season of organized football. Scored 180 points in 1993 to set a new school record and also rushed for a state playoff-record 328 yards and six touchdowns in his team's first playoff game last season. Totaled 855 yards and nine touchdowns as a junior. Named to Lemming's All-American list.

• Damon Moore (6-1, 185, 4.5) of Fostoria, Ohio. Earned first-team All-Ohio honors as a junior and senior and added state Division II defensive player of the year plaudits in 1993. An excellent double threat. Had 72 tackles and six interceptions as a defensive back while passing and rushing for 1,800 yards as an option quarterback. Led Fostoria to a perfect 10-0 regular season and number one spot in statewide Division I poll. A member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty."

• Orlando Pace (6-8, 305, 5.0) of Sandusky, Ohio. Regarded by many as the top offensive line prospect in the country. Earned first-team All-American honors from *Parade* magazine and *USA Today*, as well as Lemming, *Blue Chip Illustrated* and *SuperPrep* magazine. A dominant force on both the offensive and defensive lines. Totaled 80 tackles, six sacks and two fumble recoveries on defense as a senior. A member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty." Also plays on high school basketball team.

• Pepe Pearson (5-11, 175, 4.4) of Euclid, Ohio. A first-team All-Ohio player in Division I and also an honorable mention All-American by



Eric Gohlstin



Joe Montgomery



Dan Gibbons



Jerry Rudzinski



Jeff Wilson



Marcus Spriggs

*USA Today*. Rushed for over 4,300 yards in his career, including more than 1,500 as a senior. A member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty." Perhaps the fastest of the class of '94. Competed in the National AAU Junior Olympics last summer and has a personal best of 10.5 in the 100 meters. From the same high school that produced former OSU star Robert Smith.

• Jerry Rudzinski (6-2, 215, 4.75) of Kettering (Ohio) Alter. A two-time All-Ohio selection and the state's defensive player of the year in Division III in 1993. Also an honorable mention All-American by *USA Today*. Recorded 142 tackles with 14 for loss and six sacks as a senior. Also played quarterback and passed for 1,200 yards and ran for 500 more. Career numbers: 302 tackles, passed for 2,592 yards and 29 touchdowns, rushed for 1,112 yards and 13 TDs. A member of *BSB's* "Hot Twenty."

• Marcus Spriggs (6-6, 285, 5.0) of Washington, D.C., Woodson. Named *USA Today's* player of the year in Washington, D.C., area. Recorded 53 tackles and nine quarterback sacks as a senior. Earned All-American honors from Lemming and was named *The Washington Post's* high school defensive player of the year. Also handled his team's punting duties, averaging better than 35 yards per kick. Has yet to qualify academically to play as a freshman.

• Jamie Sumner (6-4, 300, 5.0) of Coffeyville (Kan.) Junior College. A two-year starter for Coffeyville, one of the nation's top JUCO programs. Earned second-team JUCO All-American honors as well as being named Jayhawk Conference lineman of the year. Helped

team to a 9-2 record in 1993 and ranking of sixth in national JUCO poll. Prepped at Wichita (Kan.) North, the same high school that produced Heisman Trophy winner and Detroit Lions All-Pro running back Barry Sanders. Only second JUCO transfer signed by OSU in head coach John Cooper's seven recruiting seasons. Already enrolled and will join Buckeyes for spring prac-

tice. • Jeff Wilson (6-4, 260, 5.0) of Deerfield Beach, Fla. Considered one of the top defensive end prospects in Florida. Totaled 80 tackles as a senior, including four quarterback sacks. Also recovered three fumbles. Earned all-area honors for the second straight season. Played on both sides of the ball in high school. Also a heavyweight wrestler.

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# Potential Impact Players Plentiful In Class

On the facing page, you can read where all of the recruiting experts rank Ohio State's 1994 class of high school prospects.

On this page, though, I get to play recruiting expert. The Buckeyes have obviously had an excellent season in luring some of the top prep players to Columbus. But most fans don't care about the overall team — they want to know who the individual impact players will be.

Last season was a rare one for John Cooper because he put eight rookies into battle. His track record always was to sign blue chip players and then let them acclimate themselves to the program for a year through redshirting.

The way things are going nowadays, though, Cooper has been forced to rethink that strategy. If a player is even remotely ready to go, he's going to get a shot to play as a true freshman. That is because you are seldom going to get a full four years of football from a top-notch player.

In the past three years, the Buckeyes have lost four players to the NFL — Alonzo Spellman, Robert Smith, Roger Harper and Dan Wilkinson — before their college eligibilities were used up. Smith and Wilkinson both left with two years remaining on their NCAA calendars.

So, for that reason, you could make a case for as many as 13 players in this class to play for the Buckeyes as early

## Recruiting Outlook with Mark Rea

as this fall. However, we look for only about seven of them to get playing time.

Five of those players are linemen. It has been well chronicled that Ohio State has holes to fill on both the offensive and defensive lines.

Korey Stringer has the right tackle spot to himself on offense and will probably be joined by Juan Porter and Brian Smith at right guard and center, respectively. But the other two spots are up for grabs, giving Jamie Sumner, Eric Gohlstein and Orlando Pace an immediate shot to follow in Stringer's footsteps and start as first-year players.

Sumner gets a jump on Gohlstein and Pace since he will join the Buckeyes for spring ball. If he can clearly win the left guard spot, that would leave a massive fight for the tackle spot between veteran Mike Dully and the two newcomers when fall camp opens in August.

On defense, Wilkinson and Jason Simmons are gone from the starting lineup. Mike Vrabel is the likely successor to Simmons, while Matt Finkes, Pete Beckman and Matt Bonhaus (if he

returns) will probably fight it out for Wilkinson's spot.

But they will likely have a fight in the fall, when Marcus Spriggs arrives on campus. Spriggs was rated just slightly below Floyd Wedderburn by most recruiting services and OSU is anxious to see what he can do. And don't count out Dan Gibbons, an underrated defensive line prospect.

The other two impact players are obvious choices.

Even though the Buckeyes would appear top-heavy with receivers, they will likely find room for Dee Miller. In past years, OSU would probably redshirt him while he learned in back of Joey Galloway. But if he is as good as most people say he is, Miller is just passing through Ohio State on his way to the NFL, so the Buckeyes will try to get as much production as possible from him.

The other cinch for playing time should be Pepe Pearson. In all the media crush for information about Pace, Miller and Gohlstein, Pearson got a little lost. But he is a bona fide speed merchant who broke Robert Smith's track records at Euclid High School.

With the losses of Raymont Harris, Butler By'not'e and Travis McGuire, coupled with the uncertainty of which backfield position Eddie George will play, it is not a stretch to think Pearson could be in the Buckeyes' starting lineup for the 1994 season opener.

Those seven players have as much chance as any to play in their rookie OSU seasons. Defensive backs Che Bryant and Damon Moore will also likely get long, hard looks in the fall. And with depth a problem in the offensive backfield, Jermon Jackson and Joe Montgomery shouldn't be counted out of the mix. In addition, Roedell Dupree has a chance to make an immediate impact at linebacker, as does John Lumpkin at tight end.

Winfield Garnett is a wild card. He wants to play defense, although most people figure he'll wind up on offense. If he insists on playing defense, he'll likely be redshirted. If not, he could be in the fight with the others for playing time on the offensive line.

Such a wealth of incoming talent should make for a very interesting fall camp for the Buckeyes.

IF YOU are looking over the thumbnail sketches of Ohio State's recruits on pages 12 and 13, you might be wondering what happened to linebacker Andy McCullough of Dayton (Ohio) Meadowdale and tight end Lele Sualua of Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei.

Both players recanted their verbal commitments to Ohio State on national signing day. McCullough wound up with Tennessee, while Sualua decided to stay closer to home and signed with Oregon.

McCullough was rumored to have committed to Tennessee several weeks before even visiting Ohio State on the last weekend of recruiting season. But he told *BSB* on two separate occasions that he had not committed to the Volunteers.

However, after mulling over his decision to become a Buckeye, he decided that he would rather give Tennessee a try since it was recruiting him as a wide receiver.

"I want to play offense," McCullough told *BSB*. "Ohio State was recruiting me as a linebacker and I thought that would be all right. But the more I

thought about it, the more I knew I wanted to play offense. That's why I'm going to Tennessee."

McCullough had originally told *BSB* he wanted to play whichever position got him into the lineup sooner. He may have gotten jumbled up a bit. Ohio State has recruited only three linebackers in the past two years, but Tennessee signed three receivers this year, all of whom were ranked well ahead of McCullough by most recruiting services.

Meanwhile, Sualua evidently had a lot of trouble making his final decision. He favored Ohio State, where his older brother Nicky redshirted this past season, while his mother liked Arizona State and his father wanted him to attend Oregon.

"In the end, it was left up to me," Sualua told *BSB*. "It was a hard decision, but I think Oregon is going to be the right place for me. If I had gone to Ohio State, people might have said I was just following in my brother's footsteps. This way I can go off on my own and make a name for myself."

Neither recruiting loss seemed to have any kind of impact on Ohio State's recruiting class. Cooper mentioned that he signed every player the Buckeyes had a "firm" commitment from, while national recruiting expert Tom Lemming agreed that OSU would miss neither McCullough nor Sualua.

"Both of them are pretty good players, but certainly not the stature of some of the others in the class," said Lemming.

OHIO STATE signed only one quarterback in Steve Baird of Hilliard, Ohio, just one year after signing three. But when the first-year players meet in the fall, Baird will be joined by at least one other signal caller.

Gary Jones, a 6-3, 170-pound quarterback from Cincinnati Woodward is planning to walk on with the Buckeyes in the fall. Jones has earned an academic scholarship from OSU and plans to join the team this coming season.

He is the career passing leader at Woodward with 2,630 yards and 23 touchdowns. Jones threw for 1,450 of those yards as a senior.

THE FINAL tally is six for those players in Ohio State's recruiting class who have yet to qualify academically.

Those players are Bryant, Dupree, Gibbons, Gohlstein, Spriggs and defensive lineman Calvin Brown. All six have core grades in excess of the minimum NCAA requirements but have yet to achieve passing scores on either the ACT or SAT.

The time to panic as far as Proposition 48 is concerned has not yet arrived, though. The players are awaiting scores from tests they took in December and, in fact, some may have already received those scores.

If they still haven't passed, each has three more times to take either test before Prop 48 becomes an issue.

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## Buckeyes' Recruiting Class Ranks Anywhere From Second To Ninth

## Experts Say OSU Effort Deserving Of Top 10

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Tom Lemming said it was a photo finish. Rick Kimbrel had a tough time separating the teams. Bill Kurelic couldn't separate them.

It was a wild ending to the 1994 college football recruiting season, one in which Ohio State landed solidly in everyone's national top 10.

Lemming, a national recruiting expert who has been publishing *Tom Lemming's Prep Football Report* for 15 years, placed the Buckeyes as the number two class in the nation, just behind Tennessee and just ahead of archrival Michigan.

"Tennessee had the overall superior class, but it was very close among the first four or five schools," Lemming told *BSB*. "You could really make a case for any of them."

"Tennessee had such a great lead on everyone going into the final few days, but they lost four guys on signing day, so they came back to the pack a little bit."

"As far as Ohio State and Michigan are concerned, it was extremely close. I thought both of them had great classes and I rated them three or four different ways. I just thought Ohio State's was a little bit better."

After his top three, Lemming rated Florida State fourth while Southern Cal rounded out his top five. Number six was Alabama followed by Penn State, Texas A&M, Notre Dame and North Carolina.

Meanwhile, Kimbrel, editor of *BlueChip Illustrated*, said he couldn't remember another season when the top 10 classes came out so close to one another. *BlueChip* uses a rating system with its players so that if a team signs a particular prospect, that school gets that player's rating points.

Although he planned to go back and check the tally again, Kimbrel reported less than a point and a half separating the number one school from two that were tied for 10th.

"It's really quite unbelievable," he told *BSB*. "Never have we seen the quality classes from top to bottom in the top 10. I have never seen it this tight. You can't fit one more sardine into this can."

*BlueChip* tentatively placed the Buckeyes in a tie at number seven in the nation, but only one point in back of number one Tennessee. Florida State followed in second place, while Miami (Fla.) and Southern Cal tied for third.

Florida and Penn State tied for fifth, followed by Ohio State and Georgia in a seventh-place tie. Notre Dame was ninth and there was another tie for 10th between Michigan and UCLA.

Kurelic, who edits and publishes *Ohio Football Recruiting News*, also couldn't break a tie. He had Ohio State and Penn State tied for the second best classes in the nation behind Tennessee.

"Tennessee was the best even with the guys they lost at the last minute," Kurelic told *BSB*. "But you could certainly make a case for either Ohio State or Penn State to be number one, too. They both had great recruiting seasons."

Other recruiting experts had the Buckeyes in their national top 10s. Bill

Buchalter of Orlando, Fla., rated them second behind Tennessee. Florida, Michigan and USC rounded out his top five. And Allen Wallace of *SuperPrep* magazine had the Buckeyes ninth. He, too, ranked Tennessee first with Southern Cal second, Florida State third, Michigan fourth and Miami fifth. The second five were Alabama, Notre Dame, Georgia, Ohio State and Boston College.

Most of the experts agreed that the Buckeyes signed the most number of blue chip athletes in recent memory.

"Look over their list and just about every name jumps out at you," Wallace said. "It's quite possible that Ohio State has the finest crop of linemen in the country this year."

"Then you also have some marquee names in there such as Dee Miller, Pepe Pearson, Roedell Dupree, Marcus Spriggs, John Lumpkin. The list goes on and on."

Lemming said that he couldn't remember an OSU class that was so highly rated.

"I know I have never rated them number one," he said. "They may have been number two several years ago, but I know they've never been number one. This one, though, if it hadn't been for Tennessee, would certainly have merited them a shot at the top spot."

"Just about every player they signed was an excellent prospect. Dee Miller, Orlando Pace, Eric Gohlstein, Joe Montgomery, Roedell Dupree, Winfield Garnett, John Lumpkin. These are guys that just about everybody in the country wanted."

He added that Ohio State got so many potential stars that some players go unmentioned.

"Dan Gibbons, for example. Here's a guy that was one of the two best linemen in Michigan this year," Lemming said. "People aren't talking much about Pepe Pearson, but he's a burner who could go right in there next year and start."

"Even the two guys that most people rate at the bottom of Ohio State's class — Steve Baird and Kevin Griffin — are good players. Baird is very athletic, and Griffin has all kinds of speed. From top to bottom, this is a great, great class for Ohio State."

Kurelic has been saying for much of the recruiting season that the Buckeyes' effort was so outstanding because they addressed their biggest needs. He did not back off that statement after signing day.

"They lost a total of eight linemen from last year's roster and they signed eight more," he said. "They lost a bunch of running backs and signed four more. They not only filled their needs, they filled them with outstanding players."

The highly rated finish for the Buckeyes was one of the best in John Cooper's tenure. Always regarded as an excellent recruiter, Cooper's classes in the past have usually been ranked in the top 10 by one service or another but have been hard-pressed to break into the consensus top 10.

The experts agreed that there were several factors for the outstanding class this year.

"I don't think you can sneeze at the fact they were .10-1-1 and won their bowl game for the first time under

Cooper," Kimbrel said. "They faltered a bit at the end of the season, but these kids look at the fact they only lost one game and contended for the national championship. That means a lot."

Kurelic said that the sometimes-tenuous nature of Cooper's status was never in question this year and that helped the cause.

"He still has two years left on his contract and everyone at the university seems to be very happy," he said. "There was no way that any other school could use anything like that against Ohio State this year."

"And it was a coaching staff that was largely intact for the second year in a row. It really helps that the assistants get a feel for the area and the players they are recruiting. Everything goes hand in hand when you're trying to get the best players possible."

And Lemming gave credit to first-year recruiting coordinator Larry Petroff.

"He is an extremely engaging person and I think a lot of the kids responded to him," Lemming said. "He has been at several other schools and he really knows what he's doing. That helped, especially since he was their third or fourth guy in that position in the last three or four years."

Most of the experts agreed that Ohio State, Michigan and Penn State led the

Big Ten recruiting parade since all three made most of the top 10 lists around the country.

After those three, however, the conference was segmented into two other groups. Kurelic said that OSU, Michigan and PSU represented the elite and that they were followed by another group of three — Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin. The other five schools brought up the recruiting rear.

"Illinois did a pretty good job, although Ohio State beat them for Garnett and Montgomery, two in-state players they really wanted," Kurelic said. "Then, Iowa had a really fast finish. They got a couple of junior college players and then linebacker Vernon Rollins, a guy Michigan thought they had, and defensive back Eric Thigpen, a guy Wisconsin thought they had."

"Speaking of Wisconsin, they had kind of a disappointing class considering they were Big Ten co-champions and won the Rose Bowl. They really only signed one or two real blue chip players. Of course, they're kind of young, so maybe it won't hurt them."

The rest of Kurelic's Big Ten ratings had Michigan State in seventh place followed by Indiana, Northwestern and Minnesota. Purdue finished 11th for the second year in a row, not a good omen for a team that posted a school-record 10 losses in 1993.

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# With Depth A Problem In Backfield, Pearson Eager To Join OSU This Fall

By MIKE WACHSMAN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If Pepe Pearson's Ohio State career begins anything like his formal gridiron debut, then Buckeye fans are in for an absolute treat.

Pearson, one of four running backs in OSU's highly acclaimed recruiting class, didn't really get into football until the age of 10. He was asked by a few people if he wanted to participate in the Northeast League, a junior division, and he answered in the affirmative. After his mother gave him her blessing, Pearson was off and running — literally.

"The first time I ever carried the ball, I ran for a 65-yard touchdown," he said. "Before that I didn't really know if I could be a good football player. That kind of let me know I could do it. I liked it from that point on."

And why not?

After all, Pearson, who made all-state honors after leading Euclid to an 11-1 campaign, was one of the most

sought-after runners in the entire country. The speedy back rambled for more than 1,500 yards, averaging 7.6 yards per pop. He ran for 1,527 yards and scored 18 times as a junior on the way to second-team all-state accolades.

With his prep grid career behind him, he's looking ahead to becoming a Buckeye and maybe even making an impact commensurate with another recent Euclid High graduate.

"I'd like to have the chance to play and do what Rob (Smith) did," Pearson said. "I feel if I work hard, I'll be able to accomplish some things. All I want is an opportunity, and they said they'd give me that."

They'll probably give him the ball a lot, too, something he was adamant about during the recruiting process.

Most schools projected Pearson as a runner, but one — Penn State — liked him better as a receiver. That didn't sit too well with the soft-spoken young man.

"When they told me that, I kind of crossed them off my list," Pearson said. "I didn't even visit. I want to be a running back, and Ohio State, Michigan and Michigan State (his three visits) were all going to give me a shot."

The Wolverines took an early lead and looked hard to beat for Pearson's services, but when he toured Columbus and saw what the Buckeyes had to offer, he was sold.

"Michigan was nice and for a while I thought I might go there," he admitted. "But I was really impressed by Ohio State. It was a lot nicer than I thought it would be. I didn't know anything about any of the schools, so I just wanted to see what was there."

And what was there was a friendly, no-nonsense attitude, another big selling point for Ohio State. Kids can tell when a production number is being put on, and Pearson sensed none of the phyness sometimes associated with recruiting visits.

"Everyone was really nice," he said. "Randy (Brown) was my host and he was easy to get along with. The team seemed a lot like me, laid-back. They didn't put any pressure on me at all. They let me take it all in myself and get the feel for things. I liked that a lot."

Euclid head coach Tom Banc liked Pearson a lot, holding him in high esteem for the season just passed.

"He's a great kid and a great competitor," Banc said. "He's a lot like Robert. He's got his speed but isn't quite as big. And his character is impeccable."

Pearson, who also dabbled in basketball as a freshman and junior, is currently involved in track, where he's putting his 4.4 speed to good use in the sprints. Having been timed recently as fast as 4.3, he would have to be considered one of the favorites for the 100-meter state title later this year.

Many OSU football players run track, and Pearson will dip his feet into those waters after his second year. He wants to get his football legs on solid ground before tackling any other chore.

"I want to go in and play," Pearson said. "I have to get my mind on football once track season is over, and I plan to do that. Football is what I really think I'm best at, so I'm going to work as hard as I can to get in there this season."

The fact that the Buckeyes lost talents such as Raymont Harris, Butler By'no'te, Jeff Cothran and William Houston to graduation, as well as Travis McGuire to defection, certainly



Pepe Pearson

wasn't lost on Pearson. If anything, that dearth of running backs could give him a better chance to see some early action.

Whether he plays early or late, odds are good that he will be a vital cog in any Big Ten championship dreams the Buckeyes may entertain in the years to come.

But he doesn't want all that pressure thrown on his shoulders. He'll let his newest teammates take their share of the burden.

"If everyone stays healthy and can play, this recruiting class can do some great things," Pearson said, obviously not heeding the adage that kids don't read about themselves. "We have some good people coming in, and that should only make the team stronger."

Pearson may be a stronger person for being able to weather the recruiting crunch.

It was the same old story, where the kid enjoys the initial trip to the spotlight. But before long, recruiting becomes as enjoyable as an all-day root canal.

"It got to the point where I was glad it was over," Pearson said. "At first I was worried about passing my tests, and when I did that after the first try, I knew there was nothing to worry about. But after a while, it started getting a little hectic, so I'm glad I made my decision."

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## THE PEARSON FILE

NAME — Pepe Pearson  
HIGH SCHOOL — Euclid, Ohio  
POSITION — Running back  
HEIGHT, WEIGHT — 5-11, 175 pounds  
BENCH PRESS — 280 pounds  
40-YARD DASH TIME — 4.40 seconds  
GRADE-POINT AVERAGE — 2.35  
COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS — Scored 800 on the SAT, 17 on the ACT

VITAL STATISTICS — One of the most sought-after prep runners in the nation following a senior season that saw him gain more than 1,500 yards. Has fine speed, being timed as low as 4.3 in the 40-yard dash recently, and is one of the top competitors in the state in sprints. Rushed for over 4,300 yards in his prep career. Named to Tom Lemming's All-American squad and was a first-team All-Ohio selection as a senior.

COACH'S COMMENT — "He can contribute in a big way at Ohio State. He's fast, but he's not one of those track guys who's just going out for football. Pepe is a football player who also runs track. He understands his role and what he's supposed to do. He already has good hands, which will help him a great deal. That's the reason a few schools wanted him at receiver. But I really feel he's better suited to be a running back." — Euclid High School head coach Tom Banc.

HOBBIES — Watching sports on television, basketball, staying home  
SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN — Signed with Ohio State, choosing the Buckeyes over Michigan and Michigan State

## Baird Not Backing Off Prediction That He Will Start As Sophomore

## Lone QB Recruit Refuses To Be Overlooked

By JOHN REDD

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In a stellar recruiting class filled with top-rated linemen, defensive backs and running backs, it would be easy to overlook the lone quarterback signed by Ohio State this year.

It might have been easier to overlook the quarterback if it weren't Steve Baird.

At 6-3 and 185 pounds, Baird simply refused to be overlooked. He had an excellent season in leading Hilliard (Ohio) High School into its first Division I state playoff semifinal and an 11-2 record.

Over the course of his senior season, Baird passed for 1,162 yards and 17 touchdowns while rushing for 973 yards and 10 more scores. Those are the kinds of statistics that usually make college scouts take notice, but most people figure Baird will never play the position at Ohio State.

He would like nothing better than to prove them wrong. In fact, when he committed to Ohio State in January, he promptly predicted he would redshirt in 1994, learn as the backup in '95 and then be the Buckeye starter at QB by his sophomore season.

Baird knows he put added pressure on himself when he made the prediction, but he hasn't backed down from it.

"I think it does put pressure on me," Baird said. "It may have come out wrong, but I'm not going to back out. If you're not confident in yourself, you won't be a winner.

"I think the first order of business is to have confidence in yourself. If you don't, how can you have confidence in your teammates?"

Wildcat head coach John Sines said Baird has always come through for him and he has no doubt Baird will come through at the next level.

"It's not bragging if you can back it up," Sines said. "If he wanted to shy away from pressure, he wouldn't be trying to play quarterback at Ohio

State. He usually backs up what he says."

Baird chose Ohio State after visiting West Virginia and Kansas.

"I basically went with my gut feeling," he said. "I've always been a Buckeye and I wanted to be a Buckeye. There's competition everywhere, so I went with my gut feeling about Ohio State."

Some have suggested that his future teammates may be a little wary of a guy who makes such bold statements, but it was actually the Buckeyes themselves that had the strongest impact on his decision.

"At some schools, the players are cocky and kind of ignore you. But at Ohio State, I felt really comfortable," Baird said. "The Buckeye players really helped me make my decision."

He also mentioned that Ohio State defensive ends coach Bill Conley has been a longtime family friend and was pivotal in recruiting him.

"Coach Conley has always been a friend of the family," Baird said. "He always told the truth and I believed him. It weighed into my decision and was another thing that led me to choosing Ohio State."

Sines said the Buckeyes have landed a great player and a great leader in Baird.

"He had the ability to rise to the occasion and also encourage and inspire the players around him to step it up," the Hilliard coach said. "He has the intangibles that can't be measured. In the coaching profession, we call those kids 'winners.'

"As far as being a quarterback, Steve is a double threat. He runs and throws very well. We had some specific plays for him. Most of his rushing yardage came from designed plays rather than the option. He could run the option, but I didn't want the opponent to dictate who had the ball."

While he is solid in both running and passing, strengthening his passing game will be important to Baird's suc-

cess at Ohio State.

"I need to improve my passing and I know that," he said. "I've passed the ball well in the past, but not as good as I need to at the college level. My speed comes naturally, so that will be OK. I just have to work on throwing the ball."

Since Hilliard is in suburban Columbus, Baird can familiarize himself with the Buckeye system this spring and summer and catch on to the offensive scheme earlier than most of the other recruits.

"I'll be able to go to spring practice and learn the drills and the offense," he said. "I think that's a big advantage for

me. But more than anything, I want to be ready. I think Ohio State is right there on the brink of another national championship.

"When you walk through the field house and you see the sign that says 'Beat Michigan,' it's a tradition to touch that before every practice. I want to be part of that. But I also want to win. I don't want to lose to anybody and I'm not going to settle for losing.

"I definitely feel we can win every game. To be a part of a program like Ohio State, you have to be the best, and I think we have the best here."

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## THE BAIRD FILE

**NAME** — Steve Baird  
**HIGH SCHOOL** — Hilliard, Ohio  
**POSITION** — Quarterback  
**HEIGHT, WEIGHT** — 6-3, 185 pounds  
**BENCH PRESS** — 275 pounds  
**40-YARD DASH TIME** — 4.55 seconds  
**GRADE-POINT AVERAGE** — 3.00  
**COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS** — Scored 17 on the ACT  
**VITAL STATISTICS** — Led his team to an 11-2 record and first-ever appearance in state Division I semifinals. Had best game in regional finals when he passed for 155 yards and three touchdowns and ran for 151 yards and one score. Passed and ran for a combined 2,135 yards and 27 touchdowns as a senior. Earned second-team All-Ohio honors as well as being named *The Columbus Dispatch*/Agonis Club back of the year in central Ohio. Only quarterback signed in Ohio State's 1994 recruiting class.  
**COACH'S COMMENT** — "There are probably a lot of people who question Steve's ability, but those are people who don't know him or haven't been around him. This kid has got what it takes to back up everything he says. He said he was going to get us to the playoffs, something this school had never experienced, and he backed it up. I have no doubt he will continue to excel, both in football and whatever other challenges he chooses to tackle." — Hilliard High School head coach John Sines.  
**HOBBIES** — Playing basketball, being with friends  
**SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN** — Signed with Ohio State, choosing the Buckeyes over West Virginia and Kansas

# Coordinator Happy, But Says Bucks Could Have Done Even Better In Spots

By JEFF RAPP  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If you listen to the extolling recruiting experts and ecstatic Ohio State football fans, the Buckeyes hit the jackpot this recruiting season.

However, OSU recruiting coordinator Larry Petroff is not quite as dizzy with excitement.

"I'm pleased with what we did with regards to the offensive side of the ball and in-state recruiting. I'm disappointed with the numbers we got defensively and how we did out-of-state," Petroff said of the 20-person class, which signed letters of intent Feb. 2. "If you have high expectations you're always going to strive to get better, and that's how we feel."

"Maybe I'm greedy, but I want the best ones from out-of-state. I was hoping we could get eight or 10 of those, too."

The numbers show the Buckeyes did land eight players from outside the state and all of them come with good resumes. Running back Joe Montgomery and lineman Winfield Garnett were considered two of the best recruits from Illinois. Linemen Dan Gibbons (Michigan), Jeff Wilson (Florida) and Marcus Spriggs (Washington, D.C.) all have been labeled as promising players who will likely end up on the defensive side of the ball.

OSU also ushered in linebacker Roedell Dupree, a *Parade* All-American

from Jersey City, N.J., Washington product Kevin Griffin, who was an outstanding runner in high school, and Kansas native Jamie Sumner, a rare find from the junior college ranks.

What would have helped Petroff's outlook would have been the landing of mammoth defensive tackle Floyd Wedderburn of Upper Darby, Pa., who opted for Penn State instead of the Buckeyes. Wedderburn may be just about the only blue-chipper Ohio State was involved with until the final days and did not sign.

But even if OSU would have brought in Wedderburn, Petroff probably still would have remained tame in his response. That's because he does not view this as a once-in-a-while class. Instead, the first-year Buckeye staff member feels Ohio State should mop up every year.

"We feel good, but we're not satisfied," he said. "We're going to get a little better because the bottom line is we're going to win a national championship here."

Most coaches claim any quest for such a title begins up front and Ohio State may have taken huge strides in that direction with the signing of highly touted Ohio players Eric Gohlstein and Orlando Pace, who are expected to fit quickly into the plans at offensive tackle.

"There's no question the biggest thing we were looking for was offensive linemen and we got the two high school

All-Americans in Orlando Pace and Eric Gohlstein," Petroff said. "We think Jamie Sumner is going to be a good one and he's already here (in school), and Brooks Burris (of Logan, Ohio) is a huge kid who has potential as well."

"But I don't want to say so-and-so will start for us or anything like that. The hardest thing is to speculate on who is going to make an impact how soon and things of that nature. We feel good about all the linemen and all the recruits we got, but we can't sit here and say this guy is going to play right away or this guy has the most potential. We've got to view them as college players, not high school players."

However, most people in the Buckeye camp think Pace and Gohlstein could be ready. Pace, from Sandusky, has good agility and is 6-8 and 305 pounds. Gohlstein, out of Cleveland St. Ignatius, stands 6-5 and increased his weight during his senior season from 295 to 336.

The early microscope also will likely be on OSU's newly signed foursome at running back: Griffin, Montgomery and Ohio stars Pepe Pearson and Jermon Jackson. Petroff said he has seen an encouraging amount of diverse talent from the group on film.

"Pepe Pearson has got excellent speed," he said. "He's broken all of Robert Smith's track records up there, so he's a guy who can be a speed runner in the Butler By'not'e mold. Joe Montgomery is bigger and may be more of a grind-it-out type runner. He set a state playoff record of 326 yards in the semifinals, so that's some pretty good running."

"Jermon and Kevin have good speed and good vision and run hard. We're pleased with all four of them and they're all good athletes."

Despite the haul, Petroff was unhappy that the Buckeyes didn't get a bona fide successor to fullback Jeff Cothran.

"We're disappointed we didn't get a fullback," he noted, "but we weren't going to take someone just to say we took someone."

The coaching staff actually had a few more scholarships to dole out, but as Petroff pointed out, the recent reduction of scholarships from 95 to 85 has forced programs to be more cautious.

"You're not going to bring in 25 every year," Petroff said. "A year ago, Texas A&M gave out eight scholarships and the Florida schools were down in their numbers this year, so you've got to be careful you don't give out 25 one year and 12 the next."

"Our target number was 20 all along and we met that. There are always



Larry Petroff

going to be good players in the state and certainly we want to get those players every year. But I think the most important thing is getting the right players. We hope we've done that."

Some recruiting coordinators like to map out a strategy to help get the ball rolling, but Petroff said no gimmicks or good luck charms were needed this year.

"I don't think any one thing did it," he said. "I think it's a credit to the hard work by the coaches. I think our players did an excellent job. When a young man comes in here, he feels comfortable and senses a family atmosphere, which is very, very important."

"The success of the team certainly helped — the 10-1-1 record and the rankings we had. And we had a lot of positive publicity. Negatives were not brought up."

Because of the national regard for the aforementioned players and quarterback Steve Baird, lineman Calvin Brown, defensive backs Che Bryant and Damon Moore, tight end John Lumpkin, wide receiver Dee Miller and linebacker Jerry Rudzinski, recruiting experts agreed that Ohio State's incoming group easily ranks among the top five in the country.

"That's good, positive publicity and it's nice to get," Petroff said. "The proof in the pudding is how these young men perform on the field and in the classroom once they get here."

Petroff is eagerly beginning work on the evaluation of next year's recruits — Ohio is expected to field an even better senior class this fall — but he will have to step down from his current position in August because of the NCAA's elimination of the recruiting coordinator position. Petroff is not sure what his future holds.

"I can't speculate," he said. "That's up to John Cooper, (OSU athletic director) Jim Jones and (university president) Dr. (Gordon) Gee."

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# Bucks Have Excellent Season In Home State

Continued From Page 1

mediate shot at playing time.

They were joined in the class by several other linemen including JUCO transfer Jamie Sumner, another player who figures to get an immediate look, and Winfield Garnett, another 300-pounder.

Still, there are some veteran offensive linemen on the Buckeyes' roster and Cooper cautions against believing the newcomers will come in and get the red carpet treatment.

"You know how I feel," he said. "I'm glad they're on our football team, but we don't make any promises. We tell them all they can come in here and have a chance to play. The best guy plays. We don't say, 'You come in here and you can be first team or second team' or 'You're going to make the traveling squad and get so much playing time.' We never do that in recruiting."

"We tell them all that they can play where they want to play. Some of them will come in here and try to play defense and they may end up on the offensive side of the ball. Some of them may think they're offensive linemen when they come in and they'll wind up on the defensive side of the ball. It's the same way with the backs. Some of them may stay at running back or they may switch to defensive back or wideouts or something else."

Addressing a need for running backs was also a major thrust of the recruiting season for the Buckeyes. With graduation losses wiping out the two-deep chart at both running back positions and the transfer of Travis McGuire to Rhode Island, OSU signed four backs — Pepe Pearson, Jermon Jackson, Kevin Griffin and Joe Montgomery — all with 4.5 speed or better.

Cooper augmented his class this season with eight players from outside of Ohio. In addition to Sumner, Garnett, Griffin and Montgomery, the Buckeyes also landed linebacker Roedell Dupree and defensive lineman Marcus Spriggs, two of the top-rated players in the nation. The other two were defensive linemen Dan Gibbons and Jeff Wilson, two of the top performers in their respective states of Michigan and Florida.

But it was the traditional push for players in Ohio that allowed the Buckeyes to have the kind of overall success that they enjoyed.

OSU signed the state's top two defensive backs in Che Bryant and Damon Moore, the best tight end in John Lumpkin, two of the top three running backs in Pearson and Jackson, the top linemen in Pace and Gohlstin and the finest wide receiver in Dee Miller.

In all, the Buckeyes signed a dozen players from Ohio and shut the door almost completely on recruiting rivals Notre Dame and Michigan. Penn State signed two Ohioans — running back Curtis Enis and defensive lineman Mike Buzin — but OSU got just about every other top-notch player from the state.

"And that's the way it should be," Cooper said. "As far as I'm concerned, that's the most encouraging thing about this class. With very, very few exceptions, the players in-state that we recruited and offered scholarships to, we were able to sign up. That's very,

very encouraging indeed.

"Of course, one of the reasons I came here in the first place was because of the outstanding high school football played in this state and the outstanding coaching. Let me say this: The high school coaches in this state this year really helped us. I think our coaches did a good job working with the high school coaches and, almost to the man, the high school coaches helped us with our recruiting effort this year and I certainly want to thank them for that."

Help from the prep coaches in Ohio has not always been a given for Cooper. In prior years, when his status at Ohio State was not so stable, he had trouble enticing a lot of in-state players to become Buckeyes. But, of course, that was before a Big Ten co-championship.

"I think the fact that we had a good season certainly played a part in this recruiting season," he said. "But there were other factors as well. I think the fact that we got on these players early and recruited them hard helped. We got them in here to see us play and I think that the fact we had a good football team last year and a good season played a part."

"Also, we didn't have a lot of controversy last year and, as far as I know, we had very little negative press or negative things that happened around here. There wasn't any of that 'Is Cooper here or is he leaving?' type stuff. We didn't hear any of that 'Are they going to renew his contract?' stuff, or at least I didn't hear any of it. That wasn't an issue with many of the recruits this year."

Cooper also praised the efforts of first-year recruiting coordinator Larry Petroff, his assistant coaching staff, university president Dr. Gordon Gee and the current Buckeye players.

"Larry did an outstanding job coordinating the recruiting efforts and every coach on the staff worked extremely hard," the OSU coach said. "Dr. Gee did a great job helping us recruit, as he always does. He came over here every recruiting weekend, made numerous phone calls on our behalf."

"You all know how I feel. We have a great product to sell and our players did a fantastic job showing these players around when they came in here to visit on the weekends. I think that probably had as much to do with the success we had as anything else. We feel like we have a real close family — the Buckeye football family — and I just can't say enough about the effort everybody put forth this year to bring in this fine class."

Although Cooper seemed to be relaxed during much of the recruiting season, Petroff was another story. And he admitted he did not take a deep breath until all 20 letters of intent had been signed Feb. 2.

"This hasn't changed much," said Petroff, who has also been recruiting coordinator at three other Big Ten schools. "The stories are a little different and the names are different, but it really hasn't changed. We started this morning at 7 a.m. and got the last two signed at 4:15. Until they're all signed, you're still a little anxious all day."

With the heightened awareness of the media and fans on recruiting season, high school players are put under tremendous scrutiny for a couple of months. In fact, Pace was thought to be leaning toward a commitment to Ohio State for several weeks but waited until signing day to make that commitment public.

While many players switched their commitments on signing day, Cooper

swore he was never worried about Pace changing his mind.

"I never was worried about him," the OSU coach said. "He committed to me a month ago and every time we talked to him, he was firm in his commitment. He never wavered, so I was never worried."

However, Petroff worries that the intensity of recruiting season lures youngsters into making commitments they later regret.

"That's why you have to give credit to these young men," he said. "The fan interest, which has created greater media interest, is making the whole thing much larger each year. It makes it more difficult on the kids."

"You're 17 years old and you have reporters from all over the country calling you. It's hard enough being 17 years old and having a bunch of college coaches calling you. Now you're a media star, too. I think that makes it hard on the kids."

But that doesn't stop the speculation. And the speculation doesn't stop on signing day — it just switches from where will a certain player go to how will he fit in with his new team.

When reporters asked Cooper about the kind of impact a player such as Miller would have on the Buckeyes, he waved off the question.

"I hate to single one player out over the others," he said. "Certainly, you can say a lot about Dee Miller because his athletic ability just jumps out at you. But you can say that about some of the other players we signed also."

"We think that Eric Gohlstin, for example, is about as good an offensive lineman as we've seen on film coming out of high school. He came out of a great program and he has all the tools we're looking for."

## Falks Accepts Job With NFL's Chargers; Will Spencer Be Named His Successor?

By MARK REA  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State head coach John Cooper is looking for another assistant coach, but he may not have to look too far.

Running backs coach Frank Falks, who resisted an offer from his old boss, Ted Tollner, to join him at San Diego State, accepted a second offer to head for San Diego.

This one came from the NFL, however, as San Diego Chargers head coach Bobby Ross hired Falks for a similar position.

However, while Cooper is fond of saying he always carries a list of potential coaching candidates in his back pocket, he might have to only look around the room for Falks' replacement.

Former OSU All-American running back Tim Spencer spent the last season as a volunteer assistant to strength and conditioning coach Dave Kennedy. Also a former NFL running back — coincidentally with the Chargers — Spencer has had a strong rapport with the running backs at Ohio State since returning to the campus last fall.

Cooper has indicated that Spencer will get a shot at landing the job but stopped short of saying he would be Falks' successor.



Frank Falks

"I want to sit back a few days and see what happens," the OSU coach said. "There is no rush right now. We have some time to see who is available and who fits in with our staff. We want to get the best coach possible to replace Frank."

Although Spencer is close to the program, Cooper has a track record of hiring new assistants who have been

with him before. Falks had been with him at Arizona State along with defensive coordinator Bill Young. In fact, Young goes back with Cooper all the way to their days in Tulsa. Other members of those Golden Hurricane staffs were offensive coordinator Joe Hollis and defensive backs coach Larry Coker.

Incidentally, Coker was the running backs coach for a time under Cooper in Tulsa and was also the offensive coordinator at Oklahoma from 1990-92, making him a possible candidate to replace Falks.

Falks was the Buckeyes' running backs coach for two seasons and makes the fifth OSU assistant under Cooper to now have an NFL coaching job.

Former receivers coach Jerry Sullivan is now with San Diego and recommended Falks to Ross, while ex-running backs coach Gene Huey is with Indianapolis and former defensive backs coach Bobby April is now with Pittsburgh. Another former defensive backs coach, Larry Coyer, recently left his defensive coordinator position at East Carolina to take a defensive line post with the New York Jets.

Falks gets a reported raise of \$20,000 from his Ohio State yearly salary of \$60,000.