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Vol. 29, No. 20

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

February 27, 2010

Getting To That Next Level

Former Buckeyes Work To Advance Careers

By MARCUS HARTMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Eric Lichter probably summed up best what almost a dozen former Ohio State football players were going through from January through April at the Woody Hayes Athletics Center.

"I think there are two phases to this," said Lichter, currently finishing his fourth year as director of football performance on Jim Tressel's staff. "You've got the kind of grade you have as a football player. That's most important, and then they're going to give you an evaluation or a grade on what type of shorts-and-T-shirt athlete you are and how you perform under any type of stress or anxiety. That's the part that we're trying to train right now."

Lichter and his assistants are putting about a dozen former Ohio State football players through grueling workouts on a daily basis, as he did when they were active Buckeyes for the last four or in some cases five years. This winter, though, instead of working on building better football players, Lichter's intention is to cultivate faster 40-yard dashes and better bench presses – numbers that impress pro scouts and elevate players on draft boards.

Essentially, the now-former Buckeyes have completed their final college exams on the field but still face entrance exams for the next level. Instead of vying for acceptance into a professional school of law or medicine, they are hoping to catch the eye of someone representing one of 32 teams in the NFL.

In both cases, how much the tests really translate to expected production in the professional ranks is up for debate, but everyone knows there are evils that have been dubbed necessary.

"You're training to be a football player when you're at Ohio State, you're training to be a track star when you're training for the combine and that stuff, and then you go back to football," linebacker Austin Spitler said following a Feb. 16 workout. "It's kind of hard to understand sometimes because you're not really showcasing your football abilities, but it's something that's been going on for a while now, and you have to do well at it if you want to be successful."

"Some of the events are silly to me, but the NFL guys want you to do them so you go out there and just prove to them that you can do them."



JEFF SVOBODA

WORKING HARD – Director of football performance Eric Lichter (right, leaning) has been working with several former Ohio State football players, including Thaddeus Gibson (left) and Doug Worthington (right, standing), in preparation for April's NFL draft.

Lichter's subjects fall into two groups training for two different stages.

Defensive back Kurt Coleman, defensive lineman Doug Worthington, linebacker Thaddeus Gibson and kicker Aaron Pettrey have the first close-up. They are among 329 players invited to the annual NFL Scouting Combine and will head to Indianapolis between Feb. 24 and March 2 to work out for and be poked and prodded by representatives of all 32 NFL teams.

"It's a huge opportunity," Worthington said. "When I got the invite, it was a blessing."

Gibson agreed.

"Absolutely. It's truly an honor to be selected to go to the combine," he said. "You can't get there and stink it up. You've got to get there and get it done."

Then there are Spitler, tight end Jake Ballard, offensive lineman Jim Cordle, defensive lineman Todd Denlinger, safety Anderson Russell and defensive lineman Lawrence Wilson, all of whom will get their big chances to impress NFL personnel when Ohio State holds its annual Pro Day event March 12.

"You have the combine in Indy, but at Ohio State basically the combine comes here," Cordle said. "You have double-digit coaches, lots of scouts – it's going to be fun."

Ballard also chose to look on the bright side.

"I think a little pressure is actually relieved since I don't have to go to the combine," he said. "I wanted to go, but at our Pro Day there won't be as many people as there are at the combine. If you mess up at the combine, it might ruin your whole day. If you mess up here, you still have field drills, your 40 and short-shuttle and that stuff. Plus, you have more time to train."

Different Players, Common Goal

There seem to be as many different personal stories as there are players working out at the WHAC these days.

Pettrey, one of only three college placekickers invited to the combine, intends to prove to NFL teams he has completely healed from the torn knee ligament that prematurely ended his regular season. He returned to kick for the Buckeyes in the Rose Bowl and appeared in the Texas vs. the Nation all-star game held Feb. 6.

"Once I got hurt, I knew I had to go to the combine to show that I would be healthy to be drafted or signed as a free

agent," he said. "It will be a real blessing to be able to go in there and be able to compete against the best guys coming out (of college) and show what I can do."

Coleman, a three-year starting safety who served as a co-captain and was selected team most valuable player his senior season, has challenged himself to showcase a couple of facets of his game. He wants to show he is an athlete versatile enough to cover receivers better than the average run-stopping safety while playing with more physicality than those players whose coverage skills are their best feature.

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OPINION

Pondering Conference Expansion Targets

Since Wisconsin athletic director Barry Alvarez in December prematurely let the cat out of the bag that the Big Ten was going to consider expansion, speculation has run rampant on which school would become the 12th member of the conference.

Rumors were rife that Pittsburgh was not only interested in joining the Big Ten, it was prepared to do so right after National Signing Day. Last time I checked, the Panthers remained in the Big East.

When that rumor died away, conjecture switched to Texas and how the Longhorns would represent significant shots in the arm to Big Ten football, basketball and baseball. One phone call to Austin found, however, exactly zero interest there in leaving the Big 12 and getting on an airplane for every away contest in every sport big and small.

So, which schools are left?

One that has been suggested in the past is Missouri. The Big Ten has steadfastly maintained that any new conference member will have to meet stringent academic requirements as well as show overall strength in its athletic programs, and MU would seem to qualify. It is one of only six public universities in the nation that houses law, medical and veterinary medicine schools all on the same campus.

Facilities for the major sports in Columbia are excellent. Faurot Field has an official capacity of 71,004 for football, and the \$75 million Mizzou Arena – built in 2004 for men's and women's basketball – seats 15,061. Mizzou also has plenty of athletic tradition, including a 1911 event when athletic director Chester Brewer invited alumni to "come home" for a big game against rival Kansas and homecoming was born.

Another possible Big Ten addition that has been mentioned in recent years is Nebraska. Despite the fact the Cornhuskers' football team hasn't finished in the top 10 since 2001, there is still no doubt they would provide the conference with another marquee program. They are among the top five schools in winning percentage since 1950 with Ohio State, Oklahoma, Texas and Penn State being the others.

NU also has an excellent academic standing to go along with a campus that features nine colleges of study, a library system with more than 3½ million books, four museums and several performing arts centers.

The major drawbacks for both Missouri and Nebraska? Like their Big 12 brother Texas, it's simple geography. From most Big Ten schools, it's likely no more difficult to get to Columbia or Lincoln than it is to State College, Pa., but Missouri or Nebraska would expand an already expansive conference and would stretch athletic travel budgets already stretched to and sometimes beyond their limits.

It is approximately 775 miles between Iowa and Penn State, the Big Ten's westernmost and easternmost campuses. Tack on another 100 miles from Happy Valley to get to the Missouri campus, and another 200 on top of that to get to the Nebraska campus. Travel expenses for a Nebraska-Penn State matchup in football would likely pay for themselves, but it's doubtful the Cornhuskers and Nittany Lions would want too many round trips in excess of 2,000 miles for women's basketball, gymnastics or softball.

Of course, there is one school that makes perfect sense when it comes to Big Ten expansion. The welcome mat has been out for some time to Notre Dame, the pri-

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

with
Mark Rea

vate Catholic research university located in South Bend, Ind. – the heart of Big Ten country.

There is no doubt Fighting Irish football is not what it once was, but every great program experiences periodic lulls. And make no mistake, Notre Dame is a great college football program. It has put the most players into the College Football Hall of Fame, it is tied with USC and Ohio State for most Heisman Trophy winners, and the Irish boast the second-best winning percentage of all time. Any conference would gladly welcome Notre Dame as a dues-paying member.

Of course, the football program at UND already has a pretty sweet financial deal with NBC and the Bowl Championship Series, annual money it does not have to share with any other school. There have been studies, however, that indicate Notre Dame could realize an even larger monetary gain should they join a conference and remain annual contenders for a big-money BCS game berth.

So far, though, no one in South Bend has expressed any desire to join the Big Ten. When Penn State became a member of the conference back in the early 1990s, the rumor was always that Notre Dame was asked to join as well. The invitation was politely but firmly declined, and that sentiment seems to remain today under the Golden Dome.

Of course, where there is a will there is a way. If the Big Ten is truly intent on expansion, why not think big and kill the proverbial two birds with one stone? Why not give Notre Dame a little nudge by swallowing up the eight Big East teams that play football and men's basketball to make a super conference?

Perhaps you have forgotten that while Notre Dame is independent in football, it plays its other intercollegiate sports as a member of the Big East. By folding Cincinnati, Connecticut, Louisville, Rutgers, South Florida, Syracuse, Pittsburgh and West Virginia into the Big Ten and then adding Notre Dame, you get a 20-team league with instant superiority not only in football but in men's basketball as well.

Naturally, the super conference must be divided into at least two divisions but that doesn't seem too difficult. Put Connecticut, Iowa, Michigan, Michigan State, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Rutgers, Syracuse and Wisconsin in the Northern Division, and place Cincinnati, Indiana, Illinois, Louisville, Ohio State, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Purdue, South Florida and West Virginia in the South.

Scheduling will be a bit of problem in the beginning, and there is the question of what to do with the seven Big East schools that do not play Division I-A football. But if the Big Ten wants to be the biggest and the best, it needs to start thinking outside the box, and expanding to 20 schools certainly accomplishes that.

Numbers Don't Lie

There really seems to be little question that Evan Turner is the best player in col-

lege basketball this year. You really need to look no further than Ohio State's performance with Turner and without him.

With Turner in the lineup, OSU has an 18-4 record (good for an .818 winning percentage) and has averaged 76.4 points per game. With their star player on the floor, the Buckeyes are shooting 50.1 percent as a team, including 38.5 percent from three-point range, and hitting 70.0 percent of their free throws. The team is also averaging 34.0 rebounds and 15.3 assists per game.

During the six games Turner missed with two broken vertebrae in his back, the Buckeyes were 3-3 (a .500 winning percentage) and averaged 63.8 points per game. They shot 45.9 percent as a team, including 36.0 percent from three-point range, and hit 66.1 percent of their free throws. The team also averaged 29.7 rebounds and 12.3 assists per game.

Great players elevate their teams to greatness and make their teammates better by their mere presence. Turner has done that and he has the numbers to back up his performance. If he's not college basketball's player of the year, I'm not sure what it takes to win that award.

And Finally

• Ohio State isn't the only school to monkey with the early part of its 2010 football schedule. Utah has moved its opener against Pittsburgh to Sept. 2, most likely the second game of a prime-time double-header that begins with the Buckeyes hosting Marshall. Meanwhile, Toledo will host Arizona the following evening for a Friday night affair televised by ESPN, and the season-opening weekend culminates Labor Day night when Boise State and Virginia Tech square off in prime time at FedEx Field in Landover, Md.

• Here is some trivia for you: Name the first football coach ever to win 100 or more games at both the collegiate and professional levels. The answer comes later.

• Ohio State vs. defending national champion Alabama in next year's BCS National Championship Game? That's how ESPN.com writer Mark Schlabach envisions the end of the 2010 college football season. He ranks the Crimson Tide and the Buckeyes atop his preseason top 25 with Boise State, Oregon and Virginia Tech rounding out the top five. Schlabach also has three other Big Ten schools in his rankings – Wisconsin at No. 9, Iowa at No. 12 and Penn State at No. 22.

• If you like the blue turf at Boise State, you're really going to love this. Division I-AA Eastern Washington has announced plans to install a red playing surface at its Woodward Field facility in Cheney, Wash. How long before Nike suggests installation of a yellow field at Oregon's Autzen Stadium?

• The trivia answer is Don Coryell, who went 104-19-2 in 12 seasons at San Diego State from 1961-72 and then posted a 111-83-1 mark in the NFL as head coach of the St. Louis Cardinals (1973-77) and San Diego Chargers (1978-86). If you guessed former Ohio State All-America end Sid Gillman, you were close. The innovative Gillman posted a 122-99-7 record in the pro ranks with the Chargers, Rams and Oilers and was 81-19-2 in 10 college seasons at Miami (Ohio) and Cincinnati. Interestingly, Coryell has always maintained that he was heavily influenced by Gillman and routinely took his entire San Diego State team to Chargers workouts to observe how Gillman ran his practice sessions.

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Buckeyes Bounce Back With Big Victory

By ADAM JARDY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State stayed in the running for a Big Ten title with a big road win Feb. 21 against Michigan State.

The ninth-ranked Buckeyes won for the 10th time in their last 11 conference games but for only the third time in their last 10 trips to the Breslin Center in East Lansing, earning a 74-67 victory against the No. 11 Spartans.

With the win, OSU (21-7, 11-4 Big Ten) pulled even with Michigan State and back within a half-game of conference-leading Purdue in the league standings. The Buckeyes now have the tiebreaker against the Spartans (21-7, 11-4) by virtue of winning the lone contest between the two teams this season.

It did not come easily. Ohio State saw a 14-point second-half lead disappear, but with a hostile crowd of 14,759 roaring, the Buckeyes did what they have done all season when the going gets tough. They turned to star performer Evan Turner.

The junior guard struggled with his shot for most of the afternoon contest, but that did not stop him from scoring 16 of his game-high 20 points in the second half as the Buckeyes weathered the storm.

Fourteen of Turner's points came in the final 1½ minutes of the game with six of those coming inside the last three minutes.

"Evan Turner is a great basketball player," OSU head coach Thad Matta said after the game. "He is a great kid, a great competitor and an ambassador for The Ohio State University. I know that he is special. He is

a tremendous player and real important to me."

Turner's performance came after he had battled flu-like symptoms for the previous two days. According to Matta, the junior could handle only a walk-through one day before the game and slept in the stands while the team had a shootaround.

"At breakfast, he came down and loaded up a plate of food and never touched a bite of it," Matta said. "I said, 'This is not good,' but I thought he did a tremendous job battling through it and I give him a lot of credit for how he played. He was a little off at the beginning. He had some great looks but had no legs."

The Spartans scored the first four points of the game and opened a 10-4 lead at the 15:41 mark, a stretch during which Turner missed his first two attempts and the Buckeyes were 2 for 6 as a team from the floor.

Michigan State continued to hold the lead, making it 12-8 with 13:39 remaining after a basket by reserve Garrick Sherman. But that would be the last time the home team would score for nearly six minutes. Two possessions later, the Buckeyes got a dunk from junior center Dallas Lauderdale after he grabbed his own rebound to make the score 12-10, and a serious run had begun.

When junior guard Jon Diebler connected on a three-pointer for OSU at the 8:15 mark, it capped a 15-0 run for the Buckeyes that turned a four-point deficit into a 23-12 advantage. During that stretch, the Spartans missed nine straight shots from the floor and committed two turnovers.

They would finally break the streak with a pair of free throws from senior forward

Raymar Morgan at the 7:52 mark, but they had a shot blocked on their next possession before finally scoring from the field with 7:26 remaining on a layup by guard Durrell Summers.

His basket and subsequent free throw made it a six-point OSU lead at 23-17, but the Buckeyes scored the next three points to push their lead back to nine points, an advantage that would grow to as much as 12 with 3:13 remaining when sophomore guard William Buford found a loose ball near his basket and scored to make it 31-19.

Michigan State twice got the lead to nine points down the stretch, but Ohio State headed into halftime with its largest lead of the game thanks to a jumper by reserve Kyle Madsen that rolled around and fell in with four seconds remaining to set the score at 39-26.

For the half, the Spartans were 9 for 26 (34.6 percent) from the floor and had assists on only four of those baskets against what was predominantly a man-to-man defense for the Buckeyes. Meanwhile, OSU was 16 for 36 (44.4 percent) from the field with eight assists.

The Buckeyes opened their first-half lead despite a quiet half from Turner. The team's leading scorer was held to four points on 2 of 9 shooting, with most of his attempts coming on deep jumpers. Buford picked up the slack, netting 13 first-half points on 5-of-8 shooting.

While Turner was struggling, so was Michigan State point guard Kalin Lucas. The reigning Big Ten Player of the Year missed all five of his first-half attempts and went to the break with just one point.

Despite the big lead, Matta did not feel safe.

"We told our guys at halftime, 'You're playing one of the best teams in the country and they are going to make a run at you,'" the OSU coach said. "Sure enough, they did."

Junior forward David Lighty converted a three-point play with 16:02 left in the game to make it 46-32 and the Buckeyes appeared to have things well under control. Michigan State, however, began its comeback with a furious 18-7 run capped by a Lucas layup to bring the Spartans within three at 53-50 at the 9:17 mark.

The Buckeyes managed to stem the tide and got their lead back up to 59-51 on a tear-drop from Turner in the paint with 7:10 left. But MSU began another charge, this one an 11-2 run to give the home team its first lead since the early going. Summers hit a jumper to give him seven points during the run and give his team a 62-61 advantage with 4:04 remaining.

That turned out to be Michigan State's last gasp, however, as Buford hit two free throws 19 seconds later to give his team a one-point lead it would not relinquish. After the Summers jumper, the Buckeyes outscored

Ohio State 74, Michigan State 67

Feb. 21, 2010									
Breslin Center; East Lansing, Mich.									
Ohio State		Total FG FT		Rebs.					
(21-7, 11-4) Min.		M-A	M-A	Off-Def.	A	PF	Pts.		
Turner	40	6-17	8-11	0-10	6	2	20		
Lighty	40	4-9	3-3	2-7	2	3	13		
Diebler	40	4-10	0-0	0-0	2	1	12		
Buford	40	5-12	6-8	2-8	3	3	17		
Lauderdale	24	4-6	0-1	4-4	0	3	8		
Madsen	16	2-5	0-0	1-0	0	5	4		
Totals	200	25-59	17-23	9-32	13	17	74		
Percentages: FG: 42.4%, FT: 73.9%, 3-point goals: 7-17 (Lighty 2-4, Diebler 4-10, Buford 1-3).									
Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 3 (Lighty 2, Turner).									
Turnovers: 8 (Turner 4, Lighty 2, Buford, Madsen).									
Steals: 6 (Diebler 2, Turner, Lighty, Buford, Madsen).									

Michigan State (21-7, 11-4) Min.	Total FG FT		Rebs.		A	PF	Pts.
	M-A	M-A	Off-Def.	A	PF		
Lucas	35	3-13	3-4	0-2	8	1	9
Morgan	30	3-7	3-4	5-9	1	4	9
Allen	34	4-11	0-1	1-1	2	1	11
Roe	20	2-5	0-2	1-2	1	2	4
Summers	30	6-12	3-5	1-3	0	4	16
Kebler	0+	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Green	29	5-9	1-2	0-5	3	4	11
Lucious	17	2-5	0-0	0-2	1	1	5
Sherman	3	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	2
Nix	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	26-63	10-18	10-28	16	17	67

MSU by a 13-5 margin, tallying eight of those points at the foul line.

"I think (we) showed composure, kept it together and did a good job down the stretch finding guys and making free throws," Matta said.

Turner's 20 points led four Buckeyes in double figures. Buford finished with 17, Lighty had 13 and Diebler added 12, including a crucial three-pointer at the 1:47 mark of the second half. Turner and Buford also chipped in with 10 rebounds each.

Summers led MSU with 16 points. Morgan had nine to go along with a game-high 14 rebounds, and Lucas was held to nine points on 3-for-13 shooting.

"Disappointed would be a foolish word right now," said Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo, whose team lost for the fourth time in its last six conference games. "It's more than that."

Game Notes

- Turner pushed his career scoring total to 1,314 points and passed Jamar Butler (1,313, 2005-08) for 23rd place on the school's all-time scoring list. In addition, Turner's 10 rebounds boosted him to 602 career boards and vaulted him into the No. 17 spot all-time past Michael Redd (593, 1998-2000) and Larry Huston (593, 1957-59).

- The Buckeyes improved to 19-0 this season when leading with five minutes remaining.

- Diebler is now within 15 three-pointers of the program record of 242 set by Butler.

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Purdue Puts Big Ten Title Hopes On Hold

By ADAM JARDY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

This time, Purdue made sure history did not repeat itself.

After an unranked Ohio State team earned a come-from-behind road victory Jan. 12, the No. 4 Boilermakers came to Columbus on Feb. 17 and fended off another second-half Buckeye charge before emerging with a 60-57 victory.

"As a unit, we just didn't execute the way we were supposed to," junior guard Evan Turner said. "Maybe I didn't do something getting us ready. That's pretty much it."

Relying almost solely on a starting lineup dubbed "The Iron Five" for the number of minutes they have logged this season, the No. 9 Buckeyes used their speed and athletic ability to mount a second-half comeback. But when it came to crunch time, those minutes showed and Purdue held on for the victory.

The loss snapped a nine-game conference winning streak for the Buckeyes, who entered the evening one half-game behind Big Ten leader Michigan State in the league standings and one half-game ahead of the Boilermakers.

After having trailed by as many as 15 points in the first half, OSU (20-7, 10-4 Big Ten) relied almost exclusively on Turner to get them back in the game. After pulling to within two points at 48-46 with 9:44 remaining in the second half – thanks largely to Turner's ability to drive to the basket – suddenly the home team's shots started coming from farther away from the basket.

OSU's next seven shot attempts were jumpers. Just one of them went in, and in the process Purdue (22-3, 10-3) was able to increase its lead back to eight points at 58-50 with 3:07 remaining. The Buckeyes managed to whittle away at that lead down the stretch, and junior guard Jon Diebler had a chance to tie the game at the buzzer but his three-point shot was off the mark.

After the game, the Buckeyes denied that fatigue played any factor in their shot selection down the stretch.

"They were good shots," Turner said. "A couple of them rolled around the rim and the ball just didn't go in. The ball didn't go in and that happens."

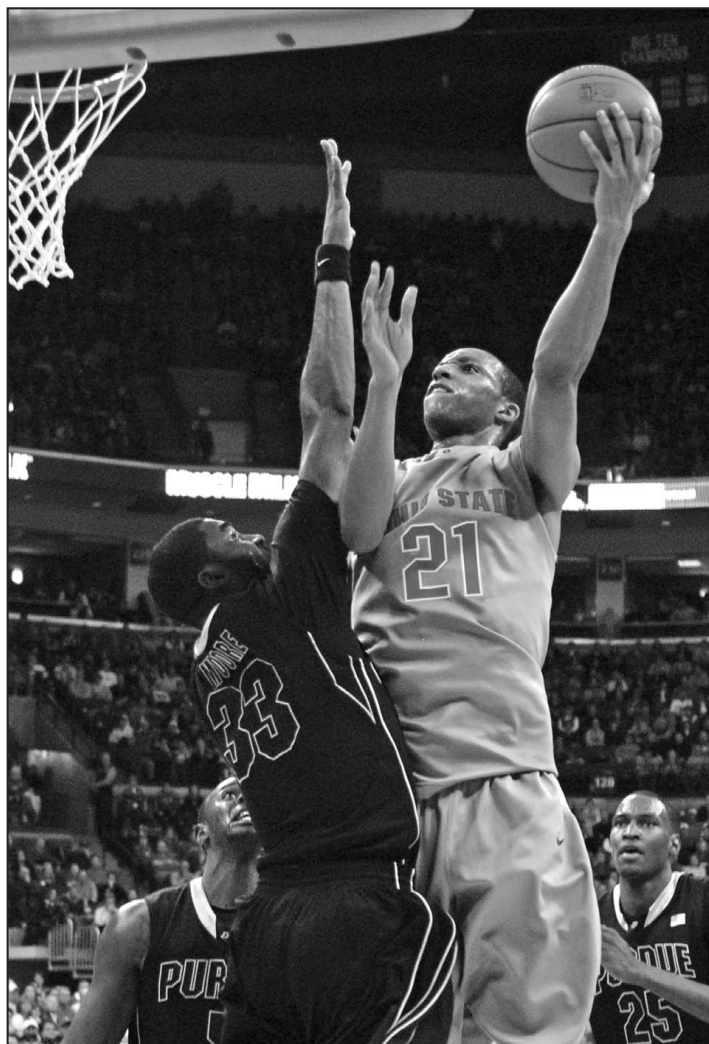
Purdue guard Chris Kramer saw it differently.

"There was definitely some aspect of (the fact that) we were more fresh in the later part of the game," said Kramer, who tallied four points and four rebounds while playing 36 minutes. "A huge key for us is having that deep bench and being able to go seven, eight, nine deep, but they kept battling."

The Boilermakers used nine players while OSU used six, and each of the five Buckeye starters played at least 31 minutes. The four wing players – junior David Lighty, sophomore William Buford, Diebler and Turner – each went the distance.

Purdue still led by seven at 60-53 with 1:11 remaining after guard E'Twaun Moore got some help from the Value City Arena rims and converted two free throws. Ohio State center Dallas Lauderdale then tipped in a Buford miss to cut it to five with 59 seconds remaining.

OSU immediately fouled Kramer, who missed the front half of a one-and-one at the 0:58 mark. Turner pushed it up the court and hit a jumper with 47.9 seconds remaining to pull his team within three, and the VCA sellout crowd of 19,049 was roaring.



KEVIN DYER

NOT QUITE ENOUGH – Junior Evan Turner scored 29 points on 11-of-21 shooting Feb. 17 at Value City Arena, but Purdue managed to hold off a late Ohio State rally and posted a crucial 60-57 Big Ten victory.

Rather than foul, the Buckeyes manned up and forced Moore to miss a jumper with eight seconds remaining. This time, a streaking Buford started to drive the lane and draw contact but had his shot rejected by Kramer. The ball landed in the hands of Diebler, who finally sprang free and found himself with a wide-open look near the top of the circle. Having already gone 2 for 5 from deep on the night, he fired.

The shot was dead on but long, and the high rebound that ensued when the ball hit the back of the iron allowed the final horn to sound before the Buckeyes could regain possession.

"I got a good look and I should have knocked it down," Diebler said. "They made shots. We didn't. There are really no excuses."

OSU head coach Thad Matta said he could not have drawn up a better play at the end had he called a timeout. Likewise, Purdue head coach Matt Painter said he thought his team was headed to overtime for the third straight season in Columbus.

After scoring a career-high 32 points in the last matchup between the two teams, Turner led all scorers with 29 points on 11-

for-21 shooting. Buford added 11 – all in the second half – and Diebler had 10 to pace the Buckeyes.

Purdue center JaJuan Johnson led his team with 24 points after being held to four the last time the two teams met. Moore added 15 and reserve Keaton Grant finished with 13 after scoring 11 in the first half.

During Ohio State's 70-66 come-from-behind victory Jan. 12 in West Lafayette, Purdue junior guard Robbie Hummel had a career-high 35 points. This time, Hummel was held to a season-low four points.

OSU went into the half trailing by 13 points at 36-23, and the fact that it was even that close was almost solely due to the play of Turner. The Buckeyes were 9 for 24 in the half (37.5 percent), but Turner was 6 for 13 (46.2 percent). Turner had nine of the team's final 12 points of the half and assisted on the other basket – a three-pointer from Diebler.

It was the only Ohio State assist in the first half compared to 10 turnovers. The Buckeyes entered the game averaging 11.3 giveaways per contest and finished with 14.

"The passes just weren't as sharp as they needed to be when we started the game,"

Purdue 60, Ohio State 57

Feb. 17, 2010 Value City Arena; Columbus, Ohio										
Purdue (22-3, 10-3)	Min.	Total FG	M-A	FT	M-A	Off-Def.	Rebs.	A	PF	Pts.
Hummel	28	1-3	2-2	1-3	0	4	4	0	4	4
Johnson	39	11-17	2-2	1-6	3	2	24	1	2	4
Kramer	36	2-4	0-1	0-4	1	1	4	1	1	4
Barlow	13	0-0	0-2	0-0	2	3	0	0	0	0
Moore	37	5-12	2-2	1-5	5	0	15	2	2	13
Grant	29	5-8	1-1	0-3	2	2	13	2	3	0
Jackson	8	0-2	0-0	0-1	2	3	0	0	1	0
Hart	9	0-2	0-0	0-0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Bade	1	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Totals 200 24-48 7-10 6-24 15 16 60

Percentages: FG: 50.0%. FT: 70.0%. **3-point goals:** 5-13 (Hummel 0-2, Kramer 0-1, Moore 3-4, Grant 2-5, Hart 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Johnson, Kramer). **Turnovers:** 17 (Kramer 4, Grant 4, Barlow 3, Moore 3, Hummel, Johnson, TEAM). **Steals:** 2 (Moore, Grant).

Ohio State (20-7, 10-4)	Min.	Total FG	M-A	FT	M-A	Off-Def.	Rebs.	A	PF	Pts.
Lauderdale	31	1-2	1-2	0-3	0	1	3	0	1	3
Turner	40	11-21	6-8	1-6	5	4	29	1	4	29
Lighty	40	1-6	2-2	1-3	1	3	4	0	2	11
Diebler	40	3-7	2-3	1-2	0	2	10	0	2	11
Buford	40	4-12	2-3	1-3	0	2	11	0	2	11
Madsen	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0	0	1	0

Totals 200 20-48 13-18 8-20 6 13 57

Percentages: FG: 41.7%. FT: 72.2%. **3-point goals:** 4-15 (Turner 1-3, Lighty 0-2, Diebler 2-6, Buford 1-4). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Lauderdale, Lighty, Buford). **Turnovers:** 14 (Turner 5, Lighty 3, Diebler 3, Lauderdale 2, Buford). **Steals:** 6 (Lighty 3, Turner 2, Buford). **Halftime:** Purdue 36, Ohio State 23. **Officials:** Valentine, Olson, Steed. **A:** 19,049.

Matta said. "We were not as in sync as we needed to be against a team like that. We didn't have an efficiency about us that we needed."

Purdue opened the game on a 7-0 run before Turner broke the ice at the 16:40 mark with a putback on a shot by Lauderdale that had been rejected by Johnson. Turner would score on OSU's next possession as well to pull the Buckeyes within three points, but they would not get that close for the rest of the half.

The Boilermakers came up with three key plays in the half that kept the momentum in their favor. After Turner converted a three-point play to make it 20-12 Purdue with 6:59 left, Grant connected on a three-pointer in front of the Ohio State bench as he was fouled by Diebler.

He converted the free throw to push his team's lead back to double digits at 24-12. Turner countered with a drive to cut the deficit to 10 points, but Purdue struck back on its next possession.

After reserve guard Lewis Jackson missed a jumper with the shot clock winding down, Hummel corralled the offensive rebound in the paint and kept the possession alive. A few seconds later, Moore buried a wide-open three-pointer to make it 29-14 and the crowd started to grow restless.

"It slipped away in the first 20 minutes," Turner said. "They made some shots, Johnson had his way and we didn't attack the way we were supposed to. We were digging our way out of a hole the whole game."

Game Notes

- The win was Purdue's first ever at Value City Arena, snapping a nine-game losing streak in the building. It also marked the Boilermakers' fourth victory in as many tries this season against a team ranked in the Associated Press top 10.

- OSU suffered its first loss at home this season after 15 straight wins.

- The Buckeyes are 2-4 when trailing at the half this season.

- Turner moved into 24th place on OSU's all-time scoring list with 1,294 points, passing Clark Kellogg (1,285, 1980-82) in the process.

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Taking Five Not An Option For Starting Five

While discussing Ohio State's 2009-10 men's basketball team, ESPN college basketball analyst Jay Bilas described the Buckeyes as having the best starting five in the Big Ten. That sentiment was echoed by Illinois guard Demetri McCamey following OSU's win Feb. 14 at Illinois.

But having the best starting five is not necessarily the same as having the best team.

By this point of the season, the numbers have become common knowledge to Buckeye fans. Head coach Thad Matta generally goes no deeper than a six-player rotation in any given game.

As for the team's starting five, however, Matta said he likes the chemistry that is developing.

"I like our guys," he said. "Hopefully (the compliments from Bilas and McCamey) mean we play well together and they're good basketball players."

After the Buckeyes used only center Kyle Madsen off the bench against Purdue and Michigan State, one reporter asked Matta during a Feb. 22 teleconference whether or not his entire lineup was available to play. The coach responded in the affirmative, saying each player on the roster was physically capable of shedding his shooting shirt and seeing game action.

Internet statistician Ken Pomeroy quantified just how much the OSU starters have carried the load this season. Out of 347 Division I basketball teams, the Buckeyes ranked 339th in minutes played by reserves through Feb. 21.

Are such bench players as senior guards P.J. Hill and Jeremie Simmons not playing because they are not capable of holding the fort or is it because the players in front of them are just so much better? Matta has indicated the latter at a number of different times this season.

The coach said getting the best out of juniors Evan Turner, Jon Diebler, David Lighty and Dallas Lauderdale and sophomore William Buford has been a process that extends back to the start of last season.

"Obviously, I think that coaching a basketball team is like recruiting – you're piecing together a jigsaw puzzle and trying to get each piece to mesh together. Hopefully in the end you've got a beautiful picture," Matta said. "That's the big thing of having guys who have been in the program at least two years. ... That's what we're striving for – to have five guys connected and playing well together, especially on the defensive end."

Although this year's team returns all but center B.J. Mullens from last year's roster, Matta said there was still a case of having to learn the team's identity based upon how it reacts to game situations.

Through Feb. 21, Diebler led the way with an average of 36.2 minutes per game. Lighty checked in next at 35.8, while Turner and Buford were averaging 33.9 and 32.6 minutes, respectively. Each ranked among the top 15 in the Big Ten in average minutes played.

As the season has gone on, Lauderdale said the bond shared among the starters has intensified.

"Teams have put runs on us and I think we responded well," he said. "We came in and did what we needed to do. We countered their runs with runs of our own. We're maturing and getting better."

Asked if he felt OSU's starters were more important than on other teams, Lauderdale



KEVIN DYE

COURT REPORT with Adam Jardy

WORKHORSE – Junior Jon Diebler leads the Ohio State men's basketball team with an average of 36.2 minutes played per game. Ohio State's five starters have been heavily relied upon during Big Ten play.

replied, "Well, yeah, since we don't sub. We've got people playing 40 (minutes every game) and I'm playing the most minutes of my life. The starting five are important because they're basically the people playing the whole game."

In other words, if you have the best five players in the conference, you may as well stick with them as long as possible.

"Turner is a great player and he's got the perfect combination with the shooters on the wings and a guy like Lauderdale who can bang inside," Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo said. "The only thing they don't have is great depth, but with everything else they've done a marvelous job."

Keeping Focused

After Ohio State dropped a three-point decision Feb. 17 to Purdue, the team's chances of bringing home a Big Ten title grew a little tougher.

Until that point, the Buckeyes controlled their own destiny. Win out and the outright championship would be theirs. The loss to the Boilermakers, however, makes OSU reliant on other teams in its attempt to win the conference title for a third time in five seasons.

With another tough task on the way in the form of a road game Feb. 21 against Michigan State, Matta gave Turner an analogy to help keep him focused.

"Coach Matta asked me why the windshield is way bigger than the rearview mirror," Turner said two days before his team traveled to East Lansing. "I said I didn't know, and he said that it was because what's behind you doesn't really matter. It's what's in front that counts."

The Buckeyes had an NCAA-mandated day of rest following the Purdue loss, but Matta said he kept in touch with his players via phone calls and text messages. The next day, the feeling he got from them on the off day was reaffirmed during practice – that the Buckeyes were willing to buy into the sentiment he had shared with Turner.

What the coach would not discuss was where his program sat in the conference standings with four games to go.

"The only thing I've addressed is how we play better," Matta said. "We know this: With the games we have remaining on our schedule, if we don't play well we're going to be in for long nights. I'd rather keep it at that from my perspective."

The Buckeyes apparently got the message.

"We can't control what happened in the past," Lighty said. "We let one go (against Purdue), but we're still in the race so we have to worry about the future. Take it one game at a time. There are still a lot of games to be played."

During the interview session, Lighty spoke of trying to win the conference while Turner referenced improving the team's résumé for postseason play. Asked about the difference in goals, Turner said the primary focus remained on capturing a league crown.

"That would mean everything," he said. "If you don't win, you're not anything. That would mean a lot."

Looking back on the week, Matta said he was proud of the focus his team showed in facing the Boilermakers and Spartans.

"I hope that we're playing a little bit better each time," he said. "When you've got experienced guys who have been through a

BIG TEN Men's Basketball

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Purdue	11	3	.786	23	3	.885
Ohio State	11	4	.733	21	7	.750
Michigan State	11	4	.733	21	7	.750
Wisconsin	10	5	.667	20	7	.741
Illinois	9	5	.643	17	10	.630
Minnesota	7	7	.500	16	10	.615
Michigan	6	8	.429	13	13	.500
Northwestern	6	9	.400	17	10	.630
Iowa	3	11	.214	9	18	.333
Indiana	3	11	.214	9	17	.346
Penn State	2	12	.143	10	16	.385

Feb. 16 Games

Michigan State 72, Indiana 58
Michigan 80, Iowa 78 (OT)

Feb. 17 Games

Purdue 60, **Ohio State** 57
Penn State 81, Northwestern 70

Feb. 18 Game

Minnesota 68, Wisconsin 52

Feb. 20 Games

Purdue 75, Illinois 65
Penn State 55, Michigan 51
Minnesota 81, Indiana 58

Feb. 21 Games

Ohio State 74, Michigan State 67
Wisconsin 70, Northwestern 63

Feb. 23 Game

Illinois at Michigan, 7 p.m.

Feb. 24 Games

Ohio State at Penn State, 6:30 p.m.
Purdue at Minnesota, 8:30 p.m.

Feb. 25 Games

Iowa at Northwestern, 7 p.m.
Wisconsin at Indiana, 9 p.m.

Feb. 27 Games

Michigan at **Ohio State**, Noon
Minnesota at Illinois, 4 p.m.

Feb. 28 Games

Northwestern at Penn State, Noon
Michigan State at Purdue, 4 p.m.
Indiana at Iowa, 6:05 p.m.

Big Ten season before, they've got a real good understanding of what it takes to win."

The Buckeyes will not have a day off during the week of Feb. 22 owing to their game schedule. With the MSU game in the past and contests against Penn State and Michigan scheduled for Feb. 24 and 27, respectively, OSU is allowed to move its day of rest to the following week.

As a result, the Buckeyes will have two days off during the first week of March with the final regular-season game coming at home March 2 against Illinois. They will also have their lone open week of the season heading into the Big Ten tournament, which begins March 11 in Indianapolis.

Turner Wins Award – Again

For the sixth time this season and ninth time in his career, Turner has brought home the Big Ten's player of the week honor.

In doing so, the Ohio State star broke the record for five awards in a single season he shared with Purdue's Glenn Robinson and OSU's Jim Jackson. Turner already held the career conference record.

This season, he has been in action and eligible for the award in 11 of 15 weeks and won it six times.

Playing against No. 4 Purdue and No. 11 Michigan State, the junior from Chicago averaged 24.5 points, 8.5 rebounds and 5.5 assists while going the distance in both games.

"I think that he brings an attitude, a mindset to our basketball team," Matta said. "I think that's the No. 1 thing. He's a ter-

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

2009-10 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

21-7 Overall (11-4 Big Ten)
Statistics through games of Feb. 21

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Rebounds				PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
								Pct.	Off.	Def.	Total-Avg.						
Evan Turner	22-22	746-33.9	166-307	.541	8-31	.258	89-124	.718	45-159	204-9.3	58-2	127	84	17	41	429-19.5	
William Buford	28-28	912-32.6	144-337	.427	35-99	.354	66-84	.786	36-113	149-5.3	56-0	86	47	7	28	389-13.9	
Jon Diebler	28-28	1018-36.4	106-240	.442	83-191	.435	56-66	.848	8-73	81-2.9	48-0	47	31	3	31	351-12.5	
David Lighty	28-28	1001-35.8	120-249	.482	34-90	.378	71-110	.645	40-90	130-4.6	67-1	75	71	15	47	345-12.3	
Dallas Lauderdale	27-25	680-25.2	81-106	.764	0-0	.000	35-75	.467	44-94	138-5.1	59-0	7	25	63	18	197-7.3	
Walter Offutt	2-0	22-11.0	4-9	.444	2-5	.400	4-6	.667	1-2	3-1.5	3-0	2	0	1	1	14-7.0	
Jeremie Simmons	25-0	360-14.4	47-104	.452	26-67	.388	23-32	.719	3-20	23-0.9	29-0	24	11	1	15	143-5.7	
P.J. Hill	22-6	321-14.6	24-55	.436	13-34	.382	20-24	.833	5-26	31-1.4	33-1	33	16	0	10	81-3.7	
Kyle Madsen	28-3	351-12.5	33-56	.589	0-0	.000	7-10	.700	21-26	47-1.7	47-1	5	16	5	7	73-2.6	
Nikola Kecman	13-0	68-5.2	11-24	.458	2-13	.154	3-5	.600	3-12	15-1.2	13-1	2	2	2	1	27-2.1	
Zisis Sarikopoulos	12-0	82-6.8	6-11	.545	0-0	.000	1-5	.200	9-11	20-1.7	14-0	2	5	6	2	13-1.1	
Mark Titus	7-0	17-2.4	0-3	.000	0-3	.000	1-2	.500	0-1	1-0.1	1-0	1	0	0	0	1-0.1	
Eddie Days	4-0	7-1.8	0-2	.000	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0-1	1-0.3	0-0	0	0	0	1	0-0.0	
Danny Peters	9-0	16-1.8	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-1	1-0.1	2-0	0	2	0	1	0-0.0	
TEAM									36-47	83-3.1				6			
Ohio State	28	5600	742-1505	.493	203-535	.379	376-543	.692	251-676	927-33.1	430-6	411	316	120	203	2063-73.7	
Opponents	28	5600	611-1493	.409	189-549	.344	281-406	.692	278-609	887-31.7	507-9	341	415	53	138	1692-60.4	

rific young man and a terrific kid. You take the rebounding, the scoring, the passing, the defense and all that, but I think it's more (about) who he is."

Speculation has increased that Turner will not only bring home the Big Ten's player of the year award but the national version as well. Following Turner's performance of 20 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists while battling the flu against the Spartans, ESPN college basketball analyst Dick Vitale wrote on his Twitter page that Turner is making a strong case for national player of the year honors.

Matta said the growing talk about Turner's stardom has not affected his preparation or play on the court.

"I haven't noticed one change in his demeanor or his behavior," the OSU coach said. "His work ethic gets stronger every day. It's amazing to watch him in that regard because a lot of young kids start to believe everything that they're hearing and let up, but he hasn't done that. It's a true testament to who he is and what he wants to be."

In eight games against ranked opponents this season, Turner has averaged 23.5 points and 9.5 rebounds, shot 51.1 percent from the field (69 for 135) and recorded 36 assists and 11 steals.

Lauderdale was asked about Turner's qualifications for the national player of the year honor.

"I'm voting for him all the way," he said. "If there was a way you could call in and vote or text for player of the year, I would call or text a thousand times for him. He deserves it and I hope he gets it."

Latest Bracket Projections

After splitting games against two of the top teams in the league, Ohio State remained No. 9 in the Associated Press poll released Feb. 22, but the team's postseason destination remained up for debate.

In his latest round of bracket projections released Feb. 22, ESPN's Joe Lunardi still had the Buckeyes as a No. 3 seed in the NCAA Tournament but moved them from the East bracket to the South. In his projection, OSU would face No. 14 seed Oakland in Providence for the right to face the winner of No. 6 Tennessee vs. No. 11 Marquette.

Lunardi foresees five Big Ten teams making the tourney with Purdue climbing to a No. 1 seed. He has Michigan State as a No. 4, Wisconsin as a No. 5 and Illinois as a No. 10.

Andy Glockner of SI.com also posted a bracket projection Feb. 22 that had OSU as a No. 3 seed in the Midwest playing No. 14 seed Weber State. The winner of that game would take on the winner of Texas A&M and Charlotte in New Orleans.

Glockner predicts a No. 1 seed for Purdue,

a No. 4 seed for Wisconsin, a No. 5 seed for MSU and a No. 9 seed for Illinois.

CBSports.com analyst Jerry Palm sees the Buckeyes landing a No. 3 seed in the East, drawing a first-round contest with Wofford while playing in Jacksonville, Fla. The winner of that game would face either Texas A&M or Old Dominion, according to Palm who also has Purdue as a No. 1 seed, MSU and Wisconsin as No. 5 seeds and Illinois as a No. 12 seed.

Battling Through Injuries

As Ohio State prepared to host Purdue on Feb. 17, the health of two key players was in doubt. Both Diebler and Buford had suffered injuries during the team's lopsided road win Feb. 14 against Illinois, casting doubt on their ability to play against the Boilermakers.

Diebler injured his right (shooting) wrist while taking a charge against the Fighting Illini while Buford knocked hips with an opponent and was unable to play during the majority of the second half.

Both were good to go against Purdue, however, and played all 40 minutes of the loss.

Diebler has since played with a heavy tape job on what has been diagnosed as a sprained wrist but said the injury has not affected his ability to shoot the basketball.

Likewise, Buford was not slowed by his injury. The sophomore struggled from the

field against the Boilermakers, going 4 for 12 and finishing with 11 points. Afterward, Matta praised his defense and said he was not physically limited.

"I thought William played some of the best defense I've ever seen him play tonight, especially in the second half," the coach said. "I think he did a remarkable job. I think he was good to go."

The two are not the only Buckeyes to have suffered recent injuries. During practice Feb. 16, reserve sophomore center Zisis Sarikopoulos had to receive stitches in his head after a collision with Lighty during a defensive drill.

"I'm a defensive guy and he's a big man, so I tried to front him as hard as possible," Lighty said. "I was on help side and they skipped (the ball) and I had to come back around and front him. When he turned, I was coming full force at him and my head hit him and my tooth hit first."

Lighty said he initially thought he had lost his tooth in the collision.

"I turned around and he had blood all over his face," the junior said.

It was not the first time Sarikopoulos has been involved in a tooth-to-head situation this season. While suffering a chipped tooth of his own this season, Sarikopoulos left the broken piece in Lauderdale's head.

"I was dribbling with my right hand and I

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made a spin move to go over my right shoulder and his head was right there," Lauderdale said. "I was lower than he was and I turned and he got me. It chipped. His tooth was ingrown in my head."

This most recent incident, however, apparently takes the cake as the most gruesome incident of the season.

"It might have been the most blood because there was a lot squirting off the side of his head," Lighty said.

Asked if Sarikopoulos seems to be on the unfortunate end of a number of injuries, Lauderdale said, "He plays hard. He gives up his body. He's a great teammate, a great finisher. He's a great player and he's a great person. He's just playing hard. That happens."

Lauderdale suffered a broken bone in his hand as the Buckeyes were preparing to start fall camp. He missed the first game of the season and was limited to a reserve role during the next two games after Hill fouled him during a shot attempt in practice.

The junior said he has not exacted revenge on Hill but said he enjoys harassing him a little bit before practice.

"I haven't gotten P.J. back but I rough him up every day," Lauderdale said. "In the locker room, I'll grab him by his collar and be like, 'Are you ready to practice?'"



KEVIN DYE

SOLDIERING ON – While junior Evan Turner (21) battled flu-like symptoms Feb. 21 at Michigan State, there had been some concern about the availability of sophomore William Buford in the days before the team's Feb. 17 game with Purdue. Buford missed most of the second half Feb. 14 at Illinois after knocking hips with an opponent.

BIG TEN NOTES

Conference Expansion Rumors Abound

Get used to talk regarding possible Big Ten expansion for the foreseeable future. Since the conference announced in December that its presidents and chancellors would entertain the notion of adding schools, rumors have spread like wildfire.

Immediately, some wondered whether Notre Dame would finally join the league, a fate discussed by college football enthusiasts throughout the past few decades. Others speculated the Big Ten would dip into the Big East to poach a team such as Pittsburgh or Rutgers or look to the Big 12 at Missouri or Nebraska, both of whom have expressed interest.

One January rumor said that Pittsburgh soon would be announced as a Big Ten member and that student-athletes in the Panthers' athletic program had already been told of the move. That report went as quickly as it came.

The biggest story involving Big Ten expansion came Feb. 11 when the Lawrence (Kan.) Journal-World reported that the conference had preliminary conversations with Texas about joining forces. The Chicago Tribune later quoted an anonymous Big Ten source that corroborated the report, noting the conference had explored partnering with several institutions including Texas.

The Journal-World's source said that the report would be denied, which proved to be true when Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany went on Chicago radio station WSCR on Feb. 12 to debunk the claims.

"There were reports a few weeks ago about one institution," Delany said in reference to Pitt. "This week, there were reports about another institution (in Texas). I can report to you guys we haven't had any informal or formal interface with any institutions. We're in the process of an internal study, and we'll take those studies and those options and talk to our athletic directors, who then will pass on their thoughts to our presidents."

"I hope by the spring or the summer we'll have an idea of what it is we'd like to try to do, if anything."

The Big Ten's initial press release on the subject Dec. 15 noted that Delany had 12 to 18 months to report back to the Council of Presidents/Chancellors on the league's findings in regard to expansion.

More light was shed on the subject Feb. 19 when Wisconsin athletic director Barry Alvarez told his school's athletic board the league had hired a firm to research potential candidates.

"They basically broke down what they would bring to the table," Alvarez was quoted by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel as telling the board. "They talked about academics. They talked about size. They talked about size of their arenas. They talked about attendance. They talked about the populace in that specific area."

Alvarez added that 15 schools were on the initial report, but Texas was not one of them. He also added that he didn't expect Notre Dame to be interested in joining the league, the school's long-held position.

Since the Big Ten announced its plans, the Pac-10 has made a similar declaration, leading many to wonder if a full-scale realignment would be in the cards.

"You saw what happened a handful of years ago with the ACC and the Big East,"

Alvarez said. "I think there may be realignment and I think people are out there trying to position themselves, saying, 'When the music stops, we better have a chair.'"

"I think people are looking right now and trying to decide what's best for them. I think our league is doing the same thing."

The Council of Presidents/Chancellors previously asked the Big Ten to look at possible expansion in 1993, 1998 and 2003. Penn State was voted into the conference as its 11th member in June 1990.

Penn State Gets Wins

Tom Izzo seemingly delivered a crash course in damning with faint praise when he called Penn State the "best 0-12 team I've seen in a long, long time in the league," but the Michigan State men's basketball coach may have been proven right when the Nittany Lions won their next two games.

Never a basketball power since joining the Big Ten, Penn State got off to its worst conference start in history by dropping those dozen games before finally winning a pair of road contests. First, the Nittany Lions downed Northwestern, 81-70, on Feb. 17 before a 55-51 triumph at Michigan three days later.

"It's just a testament to us not giving up," said PSU leading scorer Talor Battle. "With the season we've had and the record we have, we could have easily given up. But we've continued to work hard and it's paid off the last couple of games."

Battle has been one of the few bright spots for the Nittany Lions. He went into the week of games as the only player in the six BCS conferences to lead his team in points (19.5), rebounds (5.3), assists (3.8) and steals (1.2) per game. After the two wins, his scoring average of 19.0 placed second in the league behind Ohio State guard Evan Turner.

The lack of help for Battle has resulted in a tough year for head coach Ed DeChellis, who led his team to the NIT championship

a season ago. Penn State has eight Big Ten losses by 10 points or less, including one in overtime at Wisconsin and one by a single point at Illinois.

"I never thought we were horrible," DeChellis said. "I know our record was horrible but our kids came to practice every day with good spirit and pretty good energy. We were in every

game and something bad would happen and we couldn't recover."

"I'm proud of these kids. It hasn't been easy. We expected to do a lot better. It didn't happen and now we're playing a little bit better and playing with a little more confidence."

U-M Sued Over Meeting

A closed-door meeting during which Michigan's Board of Regents reportedly discussed possible NCAA violations committed by Rich Rodriguez's football program has resulted in a lawsuit against the school.

Alumnus Robert Davis filed the suit in Washtenaw County (Mich.) Circuit Court, saying that the university violated the state's Open Meetings Act by staging the meeting. Davis wants the minutes of the meeting to be released publicly.

According to The Associated Press, a source familiar with the situation reported that the discussion was football-related.

The university said it acted appropriately in keeping the subject secret, per a clause in the Open Meetings Act that allows public agencies to hold closed meetings under certain circumstances.

Rodriguez is alleged to have forced players to spend more than the allowable time per NCAA rules on football-related activities both in-season and offseason during his first year at Michigan.

Purdue Pete Purge Pending

Earlier this year, Michigan State was on the receiving end of a heavy backlash

when it tried to update its classic Spartan logo. Whether the same fate will hit Purdue remains to be seen, but the school plans to redo its Purdue Pete logo in 2010.

"Purdue Pete has undergone numerous changes in his history, and it's been at least 25 years since Pete has been updated, so we are exploring how we can improve the mascot's look," athletic director Morgan Burke said. "We are studying the matter, and a new design has not been selected yet."

The makeover would be the sledgehammer-wielding Pete's sixth over the years, and Burke said the school plans to undertake the project with student input before unveiling the result later this year.

Purdue Pete first was created in 1940 as the logo of the school's university bookstore.

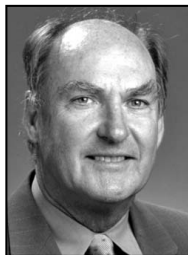
Conference Football Notes

• Iowa defensive end Adrian Clayborn, the 2010 Orange Bowl MVP and a first-team All-Big Ten choice, will plead guilty in March to charges of misdemeanor assault stemming from a January 2009 altercation with an Iowa City taxi driver. The charge carries a maximum of one year in prison and a fine.

• Purdue linebacker Jason Werner has been given a sixth year of eligibility by the NCAA for the 2010 season. Werner, who had 77 tackles last year including 14½ for loss, missed the 2006 and '08 seasons because of a back injury.

• Wisconsin has suspended backup receiver Kraig Appleton, defensive end Shelby Harris and linebacker Nick Hill indefinitely for a team rules violation. Appleton, who was a four-star recruit in the class of 2009, made three receptions for 26 yards last year in his first season at UW.

• Former Minnesota wide-out Eric Decker, a first-team All-Big Ten honoree last year, will take part in upper-body strength tests and interviews with teams at the NFL Scouting Combine from Feb. 27-March 2. Decker continues to rehab a foot injury suffered Oct. 24 against Ohio State.



Jim Delany



Jason Werner

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COVER STORY: GETTING TO THAT NEXT LEVEL

Former Buckeyes Hope For NFL Careers

Continued From Page 1

"I hope I've proved that (I can cover), and going out to the NFL combine and just showing them my true speed in the 40, I think that will really signify that I can play corner and safety," Coleman said.

He hopes he was able to begin to make an impression on pro scouts while practicing for and playing in the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Ala., in January, but he knows he has more work to do.

"I feel like it's just going to help me further my career and put me in a better spotlight hopefully to get drafted higher," he said. "The Senior Bowl, which is only the top 100 seniors, helped me out tremendously. This is just the top of the top now, so it's time for you to really just step out and do your best."

"I don't think a lot of safeties out there are able to cover coming down on the slot or fill in run responsibilities, and I feel like I'm a combination of both. That's what teams like to see – that versatility. I think I just need to shore up my man skills. I was playing a little bit of corner out there (at the Senior Bowl), one-on-one, and it was a little new for me. It's been three years since I've been out on the outside, so I've just got to continue to work on that here and I should be ready by the time workouts come."

Meanwhile, Worthington wants to show NFL teams he can play just as many roles for them as he did while moving all along the defensive line at Ohio State.

"I played almost every position but outside linebacker," he said with a smile.

In truth, the Athol Springs, N.Y., native came to the Buckeyes as a five-star defensive end prospect before being moved inside. As a regular contributor for defensive coordinator and line coach Jim Heacock's 4-3 base defense for three years, Worthington mostly alternated between one of the two tackle positions, but he also saw some time at end this past season.

"I'm very excited Coach Heacock let me (play a variety of positions)," the 6-8, 292-pounder said. "He let me play nose guard, let me play three-technique (tackle) and let me play end. I give him a lot of credit because he had to teach me different things for every position I had to play. He helped me become more versatile."

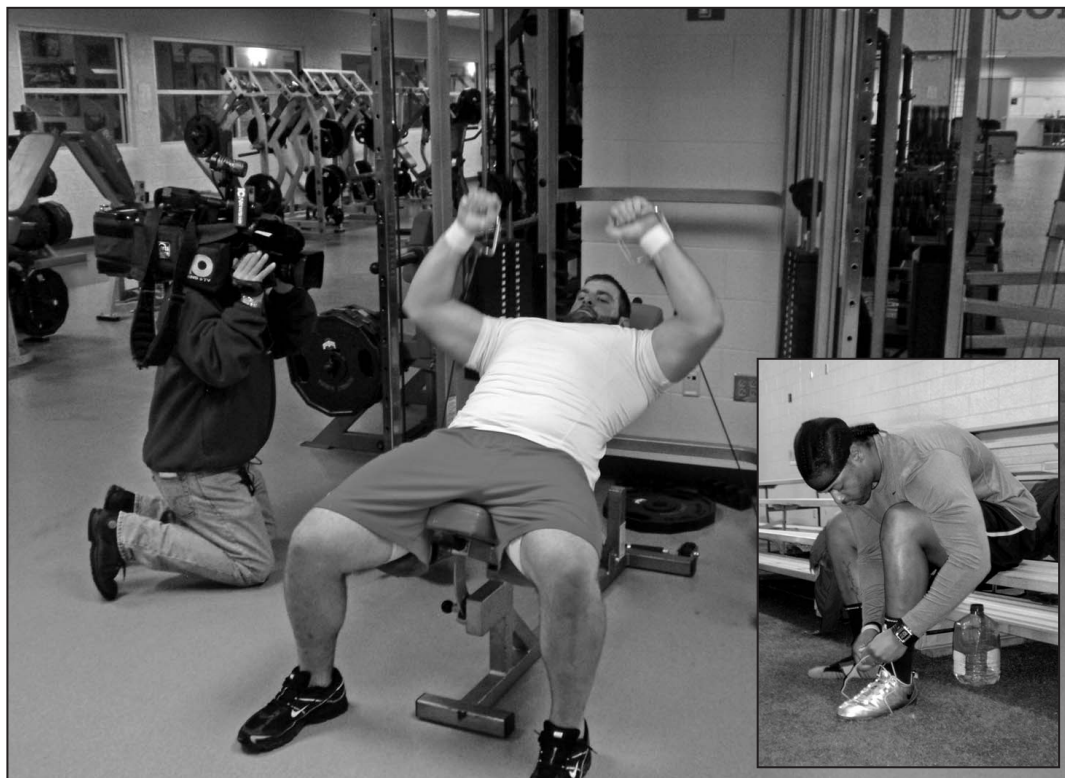
That versatility figures to be an asset when Worthington auditions for the NFL, where he envisions himself fitting into yet another role in a different type of defense.

"I would love to play anything really," he said, "but a 3-4 end would be tremendous for me – just going out there and stopping the run and letting (other) guys come off the edge in pass blocking and using my long limbs to get into those passing lanes for the quarterbacks. That's something that I think I can excel at at the next level."

While Worthington anticipates trying his hand at a new spot if a 3-4 team calls his name on draft day, Cordle wants to go back to what he knows best.

The past two seasons, he made most of his starts at guard or tackle, but he was the team's starting center for all of 2007. That came after two years of grooming to fill that role in the middle. Cordle was allowed to play center for the East team in the annual East-West Shrine Game in January and enjoyed the flashback.

"It was nice to get all those reps at center," he said. "That's what I was exclusively down there, and it just felt right in there."



ADAM JARDY PHOTOS

SHOWTIME – Former Ohio State players Todd Denlinger (center) and Thaddeus Gibson (inset) hope to improve their NFL draft chances with intensive workouts prior to OSU's Pro Day event March 12.

Snap were good and (I was) feeling comfortable inside with the nose guard."

He started the game and felt good about his performance despite having to overcome an ankle sprain suffered early in the week of practice.

Cordle also heard from NFL scouts who told him his experience at all three line positions would make him more attractive to a squad because most teams in the league prefer to use only seven or eight active linemen on game days.

Ohio State's recent track record with centers – all four starters of the Tressel era prior to Cordle were drafted – probably won't hurt, either.

While such players as Coleman, Worthington and Cordle can each fall back on three seasons in the starting lineup, Gibson figures to be more of an unknown to pro scouts.

Though the coaches raved about his ability to rush the passer even early in his career when he was buried on the depth chart at linebacker, Gibson was not afforded a chance to show the public what he could do until his third year in Columbus.

After breaking into the starting lineup as a defensive end in 2008, he frequently displayed the speed, quickness and strength that his teammates and team insiders had described from their dealings with him in practice, but his skills never translated into eye-popping statistics. In 26 games (23 starts) during his sophomore and junior seasons, Gibson totaled 71 total tackles, including 13 tackles for loss and nine sacks. He also knocked down three passes and had an interception.

That all means Gibson's football grade may not be written in ink as permanent as some others, but he has a chance to

greatly enhance his résumé with a series of impressive workouts in Indianapolis and Columbus.

"It's crunch time now, so I'm critiquing all the things I need to work on and after that I'll be ready to go," he said. "I've heard good feedback, but it all boils down to what I do at the combine, at Pro Day and at team workouts – just staying active and pushing it."

Working in Gibson's favor figures to be the recent trend toward the use of the 3-4 defense in the NFL. At 6-2 and 245 pounds, he seems destined to be an outside linebacker in such a scheme, and he was even afforded some experience in a form of it last season as Ohio State used its own variation of a 3-4 at times that called for Gibson to play from a standup position instead of in a three- or four-point stance like a normal 4-3 defensive end.

More Valuable As Pros?

Ballard and Spitzer each represent unique cases because they could find their skills more valuable to a professional team than they were for Ohio State.

Not highly coveted by a who's-who of colleges, Spitzer graduated from a solid Ohio high school program and was considered a three-star linebacker prospect as a senior at Bellbrook. He picked an Ohio State scholarship over an offer from Wisconsin among others and then spent four years as a special-teamer and a backup linebacker in Columbus.

Even when his time to step into the starting lineup on the defense finally came, he was not exactly a full-time player. His role as the strongside linebacker in Ohio State's base defense was one of the most important in that scheme, but coaches usually chose to replace him with a defensive back in their

nickel package when facing three- and four-receiver sets.

With the proliferation of spread offenses in college football, those were common sights – more common than they are in the NFL, which could mean Spitzer's skills are in higher demand in the pros.

"That's what everybody has always said and that's my mind-set," said the 6-3, 234-pounder. "Football is changing these days in college. It's more a seven-on-seven look instead of what the Big Ten used to be and what the SEC used to be – a two-back, pound-the-football (attack) and throw some deep passes. (Now it's) scrambling quarterbacks with more five-wide sets. It's a different game and you've got to adapt to it, but I would say I'm definitely more suited to (face) the pro-style offense."

As for Ballard, he was a bigger star and a higher-profile recruit as a schoolboy at Springboro, Ohio.

Scout rated the 6-6, 257-pounder a four-star prospect and the No. 6 tight end in the nation, but he possessed the athletic ability to be honored as the Division II Defensive Player of the Year as a senior. His quickness and jumping ability also made him a basketball standout for the Panthers, but because of strategy and circumstance only rarely did Ballard get to showcase all of his skills in college.

Rarely has the tight end been a pass-catching threat in the Ohio State offense during Tressel's nine seasons as head coach. Most often, that position is relied upon for blocking since the tight end is rarely the primary target. That leaves his chances to catch passes reliant upon the quarterback's ability to move through his progressions to find the tight end when his receivers are covered. Through no fault of Ballard's, the latter part

COVER STORY: GETTING TO THAT NEXT LEVEL

of his career coincided with a time when such reading of defenses was not necessarily the strength of either quarterback Todd Boeckman or Terrelle Pryor.

Additionally, Ballard was often asked to stay in to help with the pass-blocking effort because of periodic struggles by the offensive line in that area.

Given those realities, it was hardly a surprise to hear Ballard talk as if he is ready to prove there is more to his game than has recently met the eye.

"I think I'm a good receiving tight end," he said. "Obviously I think I'm a pretty good blocking tight end, but I just need to show the world that I can be that two-threat guy."

Though he caught only 34 passes for 377 yards and three touchdowns in 51 games at Ohio State, Ballard developed as a blocker to the point that he was named the co-winner (along with Cordle) of the Jim Parker Award as the Ohio State offensive lineman of the year in 2009.

"All I'm hearing is based on what they know right now," Ballard said when asked about feedback from people in and around the NFL. "They don't know how fast I can run, so they're saying sixth, seventh round, free agent ... but who knows? If I have a good (performance at Pro Day), I could get bumped up a couple of rounds or more than that. It all depends what the scouts think and what kind of player they think I am because I know what I can do."

'Preparing For A Track Meet'

Ballard's last sentence could apply to him as easily as it does every one of his former teammates and current workout partners.

Although all the players are using significantly different résumés in their attempts to get to the same level, each has to go through the same process, and that is not the process they are used to.

"We spend maybe four weeks out of a year prepping our underclassmen for this type of stuff," Lichter said. "These are performance-indicating tests, but you can be unbelievable at these tests and you might not be an unbelievable football player and vice versa."

"The training for the most part is very different. We wouldn't necessarily use the weight room programming that we have and complement that with the speed programming when we're getting ready to play football. Basically, we're preparing these guys for a track meet. It's a straight-ahead race that is a little bit different than all the multidirectional stuff you get into as a football player."

No matter what type of football grade each player is trying to build upon, there is no getting around the necessity of perfecting some of the tests.

"It's kind of a sad situation that they base it all on the track," Spitzer said. "A lot of guys can run track, but they can't play football and vice versa, but we're trying to play football here. But it matters, so we're going to have to go out there and run fast."

That is where Lichter comes into the picture.

He oversees all aspects of Ohio State's training for football, but before joining the Buckeye family in June 2006, his business was preparing athletes for the pro ranks.

"I think this is his favorite thing," Spitzer said. "He's really passionate about it (and) he's really good at it. Most of the time we're working with the coaches. We've always had somebody there to help us and guide us, and we're very fortunate with that."

Worthington agreed, adding, "He goes out there and he's hollering, he's smiling, he's jumping, he's doing the drills himself. You can see this is something that's huge for him because he's competing with trainers throughout the country. He takes it very, very proudly, just like he does with the football program. He doesn't slack off."

Lichter was accepting of the praise but took exception with the idea he might prefer training players for workouts more than for football.

"I love my entire job to be honest, and I just love those guys and what they've meant here for four years," he said. "Maybe it's just a sense of a little bit more of an emotional arousal or excitement for me when I see these guys starting to get it."

What they're getting is a sense of how perfect they need to be in order to improve and be at their best when the stop-watches come out in Indianapolis and at their other workouts.

The urgency to adopt better techniques in what can be unnatural activities varies from athlete to athlete, but most of the players said they were willing to go along because they understood what was at stake.

"One of the things guys will always hear me say is, 'Here's where you are right now and here's where your best-case

scenario is going to be. If you're happy with that, then don't change that start technique or don't get your back flat because your leg burns,'" Lichter said. "But if you want to go (higher), you'll buy in and you'll fix it."

"You have to stand your ground. You knock heads with a few guys but later on down the line they realize you knew what you were talking about and they appreciate it."

Coleman, who had to endure a painful abdominal injury that hindered him until recently, said the challenge is as much mental as it is physical.

"It's hard waking up every morning and trying to tell yourself, 'I have to get better. I have to perform,'" he said. "That's what I tell myself every day when I'm tired and I don't want to get out of bed. I don't have time to be tired. I've got to come out here and work my butt off."



Eric Lichter



ADAM JARDY

HOPING FOR THE CALL – Former Ohio State kicker Aaron Pettrey is rated the No. 5 kicker in the draft by Scout.com.

Much Work To Do?

Like it or not, most of the Buckeyes preparing for the April NFL draft seem to have a lot of work to do to impress talent evaluators.

At least one Ohio State player has been picked in the first round in four consecutive drafts, but that streak looks to be in major jeopardy. With two months to go before the April 22-24 draft, no OSU players are considered likely first-rounders by various Internet sites that rate prospects.

Only Gibson (No. 140) and Coleman (No. 205) appear in the top 256 players in Scout.com's NFL draft ratings.

Another site, NFLDraftScout.com, has better news for some Buckeyes, but the outlook for many is bleak. The site pegs Coleman as the sixth-best strong safety prospect and No. 161 overall while Gibson checks in as the No. 7 outside linebacker and 189th overall. Pettrey is rated No. 242.

The site foresees Gibson as a potential third-round pick and tickets Coleman for the fifth round. Pettrey and Worthington could be seventh-rounders. Scout ranks Pettrey the No. 5 kicker in the draft, but NFL Draft Scout has him second and ESPN draft analyst Mel Kiper Jr. sees him as the best.

Those sites and analysts, however, should never be confused with actual NFL personnel whose opinions truly count. Those types have given some of the Buckeyes better reviews.

Worthington said he has gotten feedback that projects him as high as a mid-third-round pick, and Spitzer said his agent has been told he could sneak into the draft late if he can impress the right people.

"If I can have a great Pro Day and just kill it and impress the coaches and the scouts, ask anybody – you can move up a draft board just like that," he said.

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