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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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The Urban Meyer Effect

KEVIN DYE

BUILDING MOMENTUM – New Ohio State football head coach Urban Meyer (center), seen here addressing the crowd at Value City Arena during halftime of the Jan. 15 men's basketball game against Indiana, has found plenty of recruiting success since taking the job.

Recruiting Fortunes Have Turned Under New Coach

By **ARI WASSERMAN**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Experts have a simple two-word explanation for how perhaps the most trying year in Ohio State football history is about to be capped off with what appears to be the most impressive two-month stretch run of recruiting success the program has ever seen.

Urban Meyer.

Not yet on the job long enough for the magnitude of his hire to fully sink in for even the program's closest followers, Ohio State's new head coach has already earned a string of verbal commitments for a 2012 recruiting class that has stormed back from being considered by experts as fairly average to one of the nation's best.

Recruiting experts expected an uptick in OSU's recruiting when Meyer was officially introduced as head coach Nov. 28, but they have been surprised with how quickly the Buckeyes have padded their class with seven highly sought-after verbal commitments.

"Before Meyer came, Ohio State's class was just viewed as a solid workmanlike class built on guys that didn't have a ton of hype or were in-state guys that just committed to the program for more than

just the previous staff," said Allen Trieu, Midwest recruiting analyst for Scout.com. "Then, all of a sudden, Meyer comes in and it is a star-studded top-five class.

"I don't think we were surprised that Ohio State bounced back, but what I am surprised about is how quickly he was able to seal the deal on some of the best recruits in the nation. What he is doing is fairly unprecedented from what we've seen even from some of the best recruiting coaches in college football."

During Meyer's introductory press conference in late November, he said he didn't believe the Ohio State program was broken even after transgressions from former head coach Jim Tressel and a few of the team's former players left the Buckeyes in disfavor with the NCAA.

That was quite the testament given that Ohio State was coming off a regular season plagued by six losses following the firing of Tressel and the loss of one of the most talented quarterbacks in college football in Terrelle Pryor. On top of that, Ohio State's NCAA sanctions – which have since been finalized – had yet to be handed down.

Instead, Meyer said he was energized to prove that Ohio State was still one of the top programs in the nation, mentioning his eagerness to start the

recruiting process multiple times during his first minutes in front of the media.

Not even an hour passed from the time he was at the Fawcett Center lectern before Meyer started making phone calls to all sorts of prospects, many of whom were either committed to other programs or had long ago written off Ohio State as a potential destination.

Some prospects were surprised to hear from him. Some had hoped they'd be on his call list. Others didn't even want to hear from him. But to Meyer, as he had promised only moments earlier, each of the nation's top prospects was worth at least a shot.

"When Urban Meyer calls, they're all answering," said BuckeyeSports.com recruiting analyst Bill Greene. "They're not all coming, but they are all taking his calls. They are all talking to him and they're all impressed with him. He has instant credibility and success, so even kids Ohio State didn't seem to have a chance with wanted to hear what he was going to say."

So far Meyer has proved he fully buys into his thought process that every prospect – regardless of where he stands in the recruiting process – is fair game until he signs a national letter of intent.

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Penn State's Struggles Have Aided Buckeyes

Continued From Page 1

And it has paid off in ways perhaps even Meyer didn't think were possible in such a short amount of time. The Buckeyes' class, ranked in the high teens by Scout before he took over, had jumped to No. 3 in the nation with just over a week before National Signing Day on Feb. 1 – and it could go even higher.

"Without Meyer, none of this would be happening," Greene said. "If you would have hired Mark Dantonio, Tim Beckman or Bo Pelini, this would not be happening. This is Urban Meyer. He loves it. He is rejuvenated, he's recharged and he did most of this without a staff because they were prepping the team for the Gator Bowl when the ball first started rolling."

Just two weeks after Meyer was hired, the head coach made his first bold statement when he landed verbal commitments from Canton (Ohio) McKinley defensive end Se'Von Pittman and Glen Elyn (Ill.) Glenbard West defensive tackle Tommy Schutt.

Not only were the four-star Pittman and five-star Schutt considered to be two of the best defensive linemen in the country, each abandoned verbal commitments to other Big Ten schools – Michigan State for Pittman, Penn State for Schutt – before joining Ohio State's class.

Momentum took over from there. Six days later, Meyer received a commitment from five-star defensive end Noah Spence, the nation's No. 2 player at his position out of Harrisburg (Pa.) Bishop McDevitt.

Spence, rumored to be a strong Penn State lean and perhaps even a silent commitment to the Nittany Lions, was one of the most coveted prospects in all of high school football and his pledge made arguably an even bigger statement than the commitments from Pittman and Schutt.

Meyer wasn't finished flipping prospects from his rivals, either, doing it three more times in a four-day span in mid-January.

The Buckeyes landed a commitment Jan. 15 from four-star offensive tackle Taylor Decker of Vandalia (Ohio) Butler, who was previously committed to Notre Dame, and two days later received a verbal from offensive guard Joey O'Connor of Windsor, Colo., a three-star prospect who was once committed to Penn State. That was followed Jan. 18 by a pledge from four-star linebacker David Perkins of South Bend (Ind.) Washington, a former Notre Dame commitment.

Two days later Meyer took another commitment from Penn State and added it to Ohio State's class when receiving a pledge from four-star linebacker Camren Williams out of West Roxbury (Mass.) Catholic Memorial.

Grabbing the pledge from Williams, a 6-2, 200-pound outside linebacker ranked by Scout as the No. 16 overall outside linebacker in the 2012 class, capped a six-week run unlike anything seen in recruiting in recent memory.

"Urban Meyer may be the best recruiter

in the country," said CBS College Sports recruiting analyst Tom Lemming. "The success he's already enjoyed has basically erased all the issues they were facing in recruiting the past year. It's like it didn't happen."

Finishing Strong

Following Williams' verbal, Meyer had 23 commitments in this year's class, but he could be eyeing five more pledges before National Signing Day.

Though the total number Ohio State can afford to take is somewhat subjective given the scholarship reductions imposed by the NCAA and the uncertainty of future attrition on the current roster, Meyer still has offers out to many prominent prospects. And even more could be on the way.

"There could be new names popping up yet," Greene said. "He's not done. It's not like he is limited to the talent pool out there that we're aware of. He may go after other kids."

"(When he was) at Florida, you'd see new names pop up three days before signing day. Someone would come in for a late visit and he'd sign that kid, too. There is no ceiling here yet. He's not done. I can guarantee you that."

But even if there are only five spots remaining in the 2012 class, the known prospects with Ohio State offers are enough to keep the average fan on the edge of his seat until signing day.

The Buckeyes are currently heavily pursuing a wide range of prospects, all of whom are at different points in their recruiting process. The top names on Meyer's current radar are three-star safety Bam Bradley of Trotwood (Ohio) Madison; four-star athlete Joel Caleb of Midlothian (Va.) Clover Hill; five-star offensive tackle Jordan Diamond of Chicago Simeon; four-star offensive tackle Kyle Dodson of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, a current Wisconsin commit; three-star defensive end Jamal Marcus of Durham (N.C.) Hillside; four-star speedster Davonte Neal of Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral; four-star linebacker Dalton Santos, a current Tennessee commit from Van, Texas; and four-star cornerback Armani Reeves, a teammate of Williams at West Roxbury (Mass.) Catholic Memorial who is still currently a Penn State commitment.

"He's got a reasonable shot at every one of the kids still on their board," Greene said. "A lot of those names are going to be a part of this class by the time it is all said and done, so in actuality all the things he's accomplished is just the beginning."

"All the kids he's still in on are highly rated kids. They're definitely going to finish this class off strong, and I predict it will be a top-five class or even higher by the time all the dust settles. It is less than two weeks before signing day, so this is when the fun begins."

Many of the aforementioned names came onto the scene late in the process for Ohio State, and Greene said that developing a close enough relationship with

top-rated prospects this late is borderline impossible.

"With 99 percent of the coaches, it is impossible, but with Urban Meyer anything is possible," Greene said. "He's that good."

On Jan. 19, Meyer secured his first commitment for 2013, landing a verbal from safety Cameron Burrows of Trotwood-Madison. That has experts predicting Ohio State's top finish in 2012 will continue into the following year without a hitch. It doesn't hurt, of course, that in-state talent in 2013 is arguably the best it has been in years.

"Next year, he'll put the fence around Ohio and get almost everybody he wants. Then he'll go into Florida and get another good number of guys," Lemming said. "As long as he has the numbers, it isn't unreasonable to expect he'll have a top-10 class on a yearly basis. He is that good."

Greene agreed, adding, "He's going to finish big this year with a top-five class, and then next year they'll probably be the top class in the country. It is pretty easy to say that even though it is over a year away. I would imagine he is going to have three or four in the bag by mid-February – all of which are going to be highly rated kids – and then he is just going to go from there."

PSU Loss, OSU Gain

Ohio State has grabbed the headlines in adding commitments to its 2012 class from players all but set to go to Penn State. Those players – Schutt, Spence, O'Connor and Williams – could wind up being only a portion of this year's OSU class who otherwise would have been locks to play for the Nittany Lions.

As previously mentioned, Meyer is still recruiting Reeves, who would be an instrumental get if the head coach can secure a commitment from him.

Off-the-field issues at Penn State with a child sexual abuse scandal involving former defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky that eventually cost longtime head coach Joe Paterno his job have gone a long way in helping Meyer take some of the most talented players in the nation out of the grasp of the Lions.

"If we're sitting here right now and that Penn State stuff never happened, Noah Spence is going to Penn State, and Camren Williams and Armani Reeves aren't even in the conversation. It's a done deal to Penn State," said Pennsylvania-based Bob Lichtenfels, national recruiting analyst for Scout. "Is (the recent success) all because of Urban Meyer? No. It was kind of a perfect storm."

"Meyer is a good recruiter and a good person, so I don't want to take it away from him, but he came in at a perfect time because of what was going on at Penn State."

Meyer, like all good recruiters, took the Nittany Lions' vulnerable position as an opportunity to introduce himself while giving the elite prospects the option of looking at Ohio State.

"They're like fish in the water when there are sharks out there," longtime SuperPrep magazine publisher Allen Wallace said. "People prey on certain



Camren Williams

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Urban Meyer

COVER STORY

programs and that's the way it is in recruiting.

"When there is a sign of weakness within a program, the vultures swoop in. It is just like the stock market or American business. When competitors perceive a weakness, they're ruthless. They go in and they rip you apart. A team like Penn State is ripe for the pickings right now."

Though Meyer seized an opportunity to land some of those prospects, he still had to outrecruit Penn State and other programs continuing to pursue the prep stars. It was there where Meyer found even more success, which allowed Ohio State's new head coach to take full advantage of the opportunity.

"It is not just that Penn State has struggled because everybody has gone after Penn State's recruits," Trieu said. "Ohio State has been competing against other schools for those commitments. They were the first to get those guys on campus and they closed the book on them. Again, it was just another example of great recruiting by the Buckeyes' staff."

Anatomy Of A Great Recruiter

Perhaps the reason there was a point in Meyer's career when he thought he couldn't physically handle coaching anymore was because of the nonstop speed at which he approaches his profession.

Meyer has never completely elaborated on the extraneous things that caused him to burn out while at Florida, but recruiting must not have been one of them if the pace at which he's attacked that portion of the job at Ohio State is taken into consideration.

"He is so good because of his overall effort," Trieu said. "You can tell he really enjoys recruiting and he puts a lot of time

into it. I think he comes in with some built-in advantages like his name recognition and the things he's accomplished, but then you put in on top of that kids feel really comfortable around him and their parents seem to be comfortable with him. It is really the perfect storm of elements that come together for a successful recruiter."

Meyer wasn't bashful about reaching out to any recruit he'd like to see in his program, which is something many other coaches may have been apprehensive to do when starting a new job so late in the recruiting year.

But his success on the field on a national level while at Florida and the tradition of Ohio State have been a deadly combination for other coaches butting heads with Meyer on the recruiting trail.

"They're scared," Lemming flatly said of other head coaches. "His reputation follows him and there has never been one word about him doing anything underhanded. The other schools have to be worried because he's not only relentless, his assistants under him have to be relentless on the recruiting trail or they won't last."

Meyer's ferocity while tackling recruiting was evident from the beginning when he called Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward offensive tackle Kyle Kalis, the high-profile prospect who changed his commitment from Ohio State to Michigan in July when the NCAA ratcheted up its investigation into the Buckeyes.

Though Kalis reaffirmed his commitment to the Wolverines, the confident manner in which Meyer carries himself was perfectly illustrated when calling a recruit widely regarded to be a lost cause for the Buckeyes.

"Ohio State wouldn't be where it is right now if it wasn't for Urban Meyer," Wallace said. "He could take any program and immediately jump-start it, but when you add the tradition of Ohio State with the prominence of Urban Meyer, the energy he brings, the know-how, the commitment, the name recognition, you're going to see the results in a big way."

All of the experts have noticed one thing when talking to the countless prospects being recruited at the national level on a weekly basis – Meyer's relentlessness shines through every time.

"If Urban goes after a kid, you'd better be ready to strap up the boots and be ready for the long haul because he will stop at nothing to get the kid," Lichtenfels said. "He is going to work his butt off until he gets the prospect or they say no."

Upgrade From Tressel?

With the success Meyer has already enjoyed in such a short time, the memory of Tressel already seems to be fading into what feels like the distant past.

Greene, however, isn't so quick to call Meyer an upgrade on the recruiting trail from the previous regime, referring to Tressel as one of the best recruiters in college football in the past decade.

"Jim Tressel was a great recruiter and I wouldn't say Meyer is an upgrade yet," Greene said. "If you look at the recruiting rankings for the six years Urban Meyer was at Florida, Ohio State outrecruited them more than once. For now, I won't say he is an upgrade (from Tressel) but he is getting off to a fast start."

Though Tressel did draw some grumbles from fans at times – most notably for his perceived lack of ability to close on the

high-level prospects on National Signing Day – the former coach did put together perhaps the best class in the history of Ohio State football in 2008.

Tressel got the signatures of six five-star prospects – offensive linemen Mike Brewster, Mike Adams and J.B. Shugarts, linebacker Etienne Sabino, wide receiver DeVier Posey and Pryor. That class was ranked No. 4 in the Scout team rankings that season despite having only 20 players. Alabama led the rankings that year but had 32 commitments on signing day. Notre Dame and Miami (Fla.) finished second and third with 23 and 33 commitments, respectively.

"That class was amazing to me," Greene said. "Tressel signed so many highly-rated stars and they were spread out on position groups, too. He almost recruited a whole team. Don't mistake some of those classes Tressel had. Those were legendary."

Though Meyer is already predicted to secure the top overall class in 2013 – something Tressel accomplished in 2009 while at Ohio State – Greene said the new head coach has a lot to prove before eventually being regarded as an upgrade.

However, it can be done. "He's different," Greene said of Meyer. "He is going to do things differently than Tressel did, and in 10 years we'll look back and decide if it was an upgrade or if it was better."

"Jim Tressel just did it differently, but his way was pretty darned good. That was a 10-year run at Ohio State that you'd be hard-pressed to match in the team's history."

"I expect similar things from Meyer, but you can't tell if he is going to be better this early."

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Bright Spots There Despite Struggles

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The final Ohio State offense overseen by Jim Bollman finished in the bottom half of the country in yards per game for the eighth time in 11 years, but that's not to say there weren't some positives for the Buckeyes during the 2011 season.

The main one was probably that the young unit got better throughout the season. Three times in the final five Big Ten games, the Ohio State offense topped the 33-point barrier. In addition, after a pair of contests in the first half of the season during which the team couldn't reach double digits in points, Ohio State's lowest output of the last seven games was 14 points.

Center Mike Brewster, the main senior leader of the offense who didn't miss any time to suspension on the season, said he saw a few reasons the team was able to make more plays near the conclusion of the campaign.

"Probably confidence I think is the biggest thing – just knowing that we can put points on the board," Brewster said. "Getting DeVier (Posey) back has really opened some things up for us. They've had to call off the dogs a little bit up front and made it a little easier for us."

In addition to the return of Posey, Ohio State saw the maturation of true freshman quarterback Braxton Miller as the year went on. Miller took every snap from center in the second half of the season and saw his passing abilities grow as he got more experience in the team's offense. The one-time five-star prospect out of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne never lost his ability to use his legs to make plays as well.

"I think the big thing is Braxton kept getting better through the season, and I think he plays best when he's just out there being natural," Brewster said.

Despite those improvements, the offense still had its share of struggles, but there were some obvious reasons. The youth the team had to deal with at the start of the year never really got better, as the Buckeyes started a freshman at quarterback, a number of youngsters at wide receiver and two sophomores on the offensive line.

In addition, the team was undermanned throughout the season. Posey, running back Boom Herron and offensive lineman Mike Adams missed between five and 10 games with suspension, while wideouts Verlon Reed and Philly Brown, tight end Jake Stoneburner and offensive tackle J.B. Shugarts were sidetracked by injuries of varying significance throughout the campaign.

"It's still the same kind of situation where we all have to deal with the cards that we have," Bollman said. "I know that everybody in the staff is working hard to do the very best that we can with the guys we have. (The offense) wasn't as good as any of us would have liked. There are no excuses for anything. It just needed to be better than it was."

The end result was that the Buckeyes' final game left a sour taste in a lot of mouths. Ohio State scored 17 points, including a last-ditch touchdown against a prevent defense, in the 24-17 loss to Florida the

Gator Bowl to close the campaign and couldn't carry momentum from a 34-point showing to finish the regular season against Michigan.

"We just couldn't get a nice rhythm going today," Posey said after the Gator Bowl. "We were trying to get some momentum going (but) it was kind of rough."

The following are BSB's grades of the team's offensive position groups throughout the season.

Quarterback

All eyes were on the development of Miller once he took over as the starter four games into the regular season, and the No. 2-rated quarterback in the class of 2011 showed both development and some areas in which he will need to improve going forward.

There wasn't much question that Miller improved as a passer in his time as the No. 1 signal caller. In his first six games as the starter, Miller was trusted to throw the ball no more than 13 times in a game, and he was 28 for 58 (48.3 percent) for five touchdowns and two interceptions. He didn't top 100 yards passing in any of those games, either.

Then in the last four games, Miller's passing started to improve. With the team behind in all four contests and needing him to make plays through the air, the freshman improved his completion percentage to 56.6 percent while throwing seven touchdowns against just one interception.

He showed improvement at commanding the huddle, something that was a bit of an issue for the soft-spoken Miller at the start of the season. He also became more confident at taking the game into his own hands, such as the times in the Michigan game when he checked into quarterback draws that gained first downs.

"I think throughout the season he's gotten a lot smarter, reading coverages and stuff like that – even checks," fullback Zach Boren said. "At the beginning of the year, he was having trouble making checks and things like that, but now from the last couple of games of the season, he was really stepping up and taking everything into his own hands."

"I feel like he's been getting better every week even since the season started. You guys can see that."

Miller often used his legs to his advantage as well, topping 90 yards on the ground against Nebraska, Wisconsin, Indiana, Penn State and Michigan. He ran for a pair of scores against both the Hoosiers and Badgers.

One other attribute that impressed the Ohio State coaching staff was his ability to take things in stride and stay humble.

"What you see on Saturdays with Braxton was obviously a process, but the thing that you really saw as a coach was how he handled the week," said Luke Fickell, who served as head coach in 2011. "I think that's the biggest difference in a young guy – the ability to prepare and get that performance on Saturday."

"Sometimes when you're a young guy and you've been very successful and things have come pretty easy to you during your



SONNY BROCKWAY

HERE IT GOES – Freshman quarterback Braxton Miller (5) had some ups and downs during his first season as a Buckeye, but he showed signs of development as the season progressed.

high school career because you're better than everybody, your preparation doesn't always match your performance. When you get to college, you start to realize that everybody is better and your preparation has to be a lot greater to get the performance you want on the field."

On the other hand, Miller's deficiencies were also obvious to those who watched the team throughout the season. As good as he was at some points in the last couple of games, the freshman QB could have been even more dynamic and produced even more offense had he hit Posey a handful of times for big gains when the receiver was open.

Pocket presence will also be an area of concern going forward. Though Miller was able to make plays miss once he got into the open, he was too often a sitting duck in the pocket, at times caught between taking off with the ball and also wanting to keep his eyes downfield looking for a receiver. That's one reason Ohio State gave up 46 sacks on the year, one of the worst totals in the nation.

Still, on the whole, the Buckeyes were encouraged by the progress Miller showed throughout the season.

"The Braxton that I have under center as opposed to the Braxton I had at the beginning of the season is night and day," Brewster said before the Gator Bowl. "I think that's awesome that he's grown so much and he's more confident now. He's really just a different player."

Senior Joe Bauserman, who started the first three games and played in the first six contests of the season, didn't see action in the final seven games and finished a disappointing 40 for 86 (46.5 percent) for the year.

Though he did throw five touchdowns against only one interception, Bauserman's reticence to throw into tight windows caused the offense to sputter against Miami (Fla.) and Nebraska.

BSB Midterm Grade: C-
BSB Second-Half Grade: C+
BSB Final Grade: C

Running Back

What was supposed to be a position that went five deep for Ohio State coming into the 2011 season ended up with only three players sharing most of the load with Herron stepping to the fore as he concluded his senior campaign.

The Warren, Ohio, native was the go-to guy among the running backs upon his return in the seventh game against Illinois, averaging 19.3 carries and 96.9 yards per game. Herron didn't show much rust after his six-game suspension, topping the 100-yard mark in his first three games and putting up 160 yards in the thrilling win against Wisconsin.

However, his effectiveness was dulled a bit near the end of the year – he dipped to 4.0 yards per carry in the last four games of his career. He did, however, close on a high with 82 yards on 12 carries as the offensive line often creased Florida in the Gator Bowl.

Sophomore Carlos Hyde finished as the team's second-leading rusher among tailbacks with 566 yards and six scores on 106 carries and had his moments. Beginning the year as the team's starter, Hyde topped the 100-yard mark against both Nebraska and Indiana. He showed the ability to break

big runs thanks to good speed for a 238-pound back, and his ability to pick the right hole seemed to improve during the year.

Junior Jordan Hall might have gone the other way. After missing the first two games of the year because of suspension, he came back and steadied the running game but got banged up and was just a bit player in the second half of the year. Hall finished with 99 carries for 405 yards and two touchdowns.

"All those guys have looked good all season," Boren said near the end of the year. "Obviously Boom is going to be a big loss (next year). I honestly think he's going to end up being one of the best running backs ever to come through Ohio State with his work ethic and his toughness and leadership."

Rating The Offense

Here is where the OSU offense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally for the 2011 season.

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Offense	191.15	27th	4th
Passing Offense	127.00	115th	12th
Total Offense	318.15	107th	11th
Scoring Offense	24.46	81st	8th
Turnover Margin	0.38	30th	4th
Third Down Con.	38.73	81st	9th

FINAL GRADES: OFFENSE



SONNY BROCKWAY

GIVING A BOOST – Fifth-year senior tailback Boom Herron (1) rushed for more than 100 yards in his first three games back after sitting out the first half of the regular season because of NCAA suspension.

"It's going to be hard going through next year without him, but we've got guys competing every day in bowl practices. Hopefully that will come out next year."

The Buckeyes didn't get the production out of redshirt freshman Rod Smith and sophomore Jaamal Berry as hoped. Smith had 98 yards in his first two games, but he fumbled twice in those games and got only four carries the rest of the year. He also played special teams and dabbled at linebacker. Berry dealt with off-the-field issues and had only three carries for 5 yards.

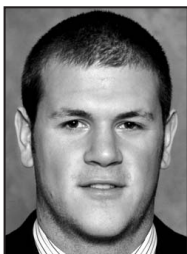
Ohio State's fullback position continued to be in good hands with Boren, who was rarely spelled by backups Adam Homan – who was banged up at times and missed four games – and David Durham. Boren was one of the most consistent players on the squad and showed his versatility, lining up in a number of different spots while still providing solid lead blocking and catching six passes for 60 yards.

**BSB Midterm Grade: B-
BSB Second-Half Grade: B-
BSB Final Grade: B-**

Receivers

There's little question the Ohio State passing game struggled throughout the year, finishing ranked 115th in the country, and the team's inexperience at wide receiver combined with Miller's youth was a major factor.

Ohio State's only upperclassman among the wideouts was Posey, and he missed all but the last three games. Injuries to Brown and Reed sapped the position of more juice.



Jake Stoneburner

In the end, the results weren't pretty. Brown, tight end Jake Stoneburner and freshman wideout Devin Smith tied for the team lead with 14 receptions, the lowest total to lead a Buckeye squad since wingback Jim Harrell had the same number in 1976.

"We knew it was going to be a matter of growing throughout the season," receivers coach Stan Drayton said. "Our deal is as an offensive unit we're going to play into our strengths. Right now, the strength of this football team offensively is to make sure that we get the proper amount of run calls in. That's where our explosive (plays) are coming right now."

"These receivers have to understand that when their opportunity comes they have to be ready for it. Most times we have been ready, but there's times where we have not."

Certainly, missing Posey was one of the key limiting elements in the offense throughout the season. He proved that upon his return, catching 12 passes for 162 yards and two touchdowns – totals that would have been higher had Miller put a few more passes on target. Posey's excellent combination of size and speed allowed him to both get open and to open things for other targets.

Brown had a solid year and finally made a big play after coming close numerous times in his career, snagging a 54-yard pass from Miller on the opening possession at Michigan. He showed speed throughout the year but still struggled at turning that into consistent big plays.

The rest of the group was a mixed bag. Reed had nine catches in the first five games and showed good hands but had troubles with getting separation from top-flight corners before tearing his ACL late in the Michigan State game. Devin Smith showed the ability to make catches down the field, averaging 21.0 yards and scoring four touchdowns on his 14 catches, but his inability to stay on the field was puzzling.

Sophomore Chris Fields contributed little, grabbing only eight passes for 114 yards and committing a number of mental errors, while freshmen T.Y. Williams and Evan Spencer saw little time as the year went on.

The season Stoneburner put up from his tight end spot included a team-high seven touchdown catches, and his blocking skills continued to mature in his junior season. Reid Fragel added five catches for 64 yards and was a very good end blocker in his final season at the position. Fragel is scheduled to move to offensive tackle in the spring.

**BSB Midterm Grade: D+
BSB Second-Half Grade: C-
BSB Final Grade: D+**

Offensive Line

Ohio State's line had to go through a few iterations because of suspensions to Adams, Marcus Hall and Corey Linsley, but by the end of the year, the Buckeyes had settled on a starting five that was pretty good at opening holes in the run game but struggled in pass protection.

Adams anchored the left side as a dominating run blocker and proficient pass protector while sophomore Andrew Norwell slid inside upon Adams' return and provided another big body who helped the Buckeyes in the run game.

Brewster struggled with bigger foes at center and had his fair share of issues delivering accurate snaps, but he was still one of the better players at the position in the country and often used his excellent athleticism to his advantage.

Sophomore Jack Mewhort had an admirable first season as a starter, beginning the year at left guard before moving to the right side. At right tackle, senior J.B. Shugarts gutted through injury but continued to be plagued by false starts and was an occasional liability in pass protection. True freshman backup Antonio Underwood was no better, however, in a spot start against Purdue.

On the whole, though, Mewhort was impressed by the way the senior trio of Adams, Brewster and Shugarts – all part of the famed Block "O" recruiting class – performed.

"In my eyes, they played well every game," Mewhort said. "They're just consistent. I think one big emotional boost for us was when we got (Adams) back at Nebraska. He came out killing guys and that was good to see. I like to watch him play, his intensity. Same with J.B. and same with Michael Brewster."

"That's why those guys have been so good over the last four years. It's because they give it their all. They work hard. They hone their technique. I've learned a lot from them."

Linsley and Hall began the year splitting time at right guard with Adams out, and the former looked good in his first major action as a sophomore and seemed ready for increased playing time going forward. Hall had his moments as well but struggled when asked to pull in some of the team's run-blocking schemes.

**BSB Midterm Grade: B
BSB Second-Half Grade: C
BSB Final Grade: C+**

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Defense Dipped During Disappointing Season

By **MARCUS HARTMAN**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

By just about any measure, the 2011 Ohio State defense did not match up to the high standard set in the previous six years of Jim Heacock's tenure as coordinator.

After finishing first or second in the Big Ten in scoring defense every season from 2005-2010, the most recent version checked in at sixth. The 21.0 points per game were the most since 1999, when the Buckeyes gave up an average of 23.9 while posting a 6-6 campaign. That year they finished 48th in the nation in points allowed, the last time Ohio State failed to finish in the top 20 in that category until this season, when they checked in at No. 27.

The final numbers across the board were pedestrian at best, and several marked significant decreases from the middle of the season.

The rushing defense allowed 141.5 yards per game for the season, representing a jump of nearly 25 yards from the numbers at the middle of the year (116.7). While the passing defense improved in terms of yards (from 191.5 to 182.0 yards per game), it was likely as a result of the run-stopping deficiency.

Overall, Ohio State allowed 323.5 yards per contest, the worst since giving up 332.0 in 2004. That was the last time a Buckeye defense allowed more than 300 yards per game, and it represented a regression of about 15 yards per game from the middle of the season.

The defense also gave up a preponderance of big plays – 13 runs and 24 passes of 20 yards or more – often as a result of someone being out of position or taking a poor angle to the ball.

"Pursuit angles are so critical," Heacock said. "That's the name of the game. What the pursuit angles do are prevent the long runs. That's where we've had a little bit too much of this year, and I think that's the one area where we've probably given up too many big plays. In the past we've been ... at the end of the season you look at the big plays and they've been minimal."

The biggest change in the second half of



JOSH WINSLOW

NOT GETTING AWAY – Ohio State defensive lineman John Simon (54) recorded 53 tackles en route to earning first-team All-Big Ten and third-team All-America honors in 2011.

the season, however, came on third down as the Buckeyes went from one of the best in the nation in getting off the field to one of the worst.

They checked in at midseason with a 31.4 percent opponents' success rate on third down, a figure good for No. 2 in the Big Ten and 13th nationally. But they found themselves allowing a 40.2-percent success rate by the time the season was over. That was good only for seventh in the Big Ten and 65th nationally.

Opponents were an even 50.0 percent (27 for 54) during the season-ending four-game losing streak to Purdue (9 for 18), Penn State (7 for 13), Michigan (5 for 11) and Florida (6 for 12).

The Buckeyes finished seventh in the Big Ten with 20 takeaways and sixth in the conference in sacks (1.8 per game).

In part because of youth and injuries, the defense lacked play-makers and suffered too many fundamental breakdowns. That was a bad combination.

"The word confidence is the word we keep coming back to," Heacock said late in the season. "We just don't have a real confident group. You're probably not going to when you have four or five freshmen out there and some young guys. When something goes wrong or it doesn't look real good at a particular time, they kind of panic a little bit. I think that's where if you had some of those guys we had last year, they would take care of it and be fine and everything would be all right."

"That's confidence and swagger or whatever you want to call it. The question is what

comes first – the confidence or playing well? I think we need to find ways to play better and when you do that you get a little more confidence."

Teams were often able to move the ball consistently, and Ohio State did not come up with enough game-changing moments to offset its own breakdowns.

"One thing we talk about with the defense is consistency," senior defensive back Tyler Moeller said. "If you look at, for example, the Nebraska game. We were one of the best defenses in the first half in college football in my opinion, and we were one of the worst defenses in the second half. We haven't been very consistent. We were a great defense at times and at other times we haven't been so good at it."

Heacock admitted his final group of Silver Bullets had a tough year, but he expressed optimism that the growing pains will have been worth it someday.

"We were young at the beginning of the year and I think we had some busted coverages and we had an issue with some fundamental things – pursuit angles and tackling," he said.

"I think we understand the importance of the little things and the importance of doing fundamentals – not getting too caught up in the scheme as much as we are execution. Eleven guys doing their job. That's what we've always been based on. I'm not sure we did a great job this year. We've been a little bit inconsistent in that category, but I think we'll be better."

The following features BSB's evalua-

tion of the defensive by position group, including our midterm, second-half and final grades.

Defensive Line

Despite the presence of two standouts, this group never had the overall impact expected or needed of it.

Heacock prefers to rely on a strong pass rush from his front four to allow the rest of the defense to be sound and make plays, but that never materialized due at least in part to the loss of senior Nathan Williams to a week one knee injury.

Williams' exit caused a ripple effect through the defense as it forced John Simon to play out of position. A natural strongside defensive end, Simon took over Williams' weakside position, also known as the Leo. He found some success, leading the team with seven sacks, but Simon was the only consistent threat for teams when they dropped back to pass. That let opposing coaches scheme to slow down the high-motored junior without fear of an attack from the opposing side. He finished the season with 53 tackles, including a team-high 16 for loss, and earned first-team All-Big Ten and third-team All-America honors for his efforts.

Simon's move to Leo might have been temporary, but neither redshirt freshman J.T. Moore nor true freshman Steve Miller had much impact in limited action at that position early in the season. They played primarily in nickel and dime situations but saw their playing time essentially eliminated after the 34-27 loss at Nebraska on Oct. 8. Moore logged nine tackles for the season, including one for loss, while Miller had one stop.

Senior Solomon Thomas also took a turn at Leo but was ineffective. He had four tackles – all assists – after returning from suspension and recovering from a broken leg.

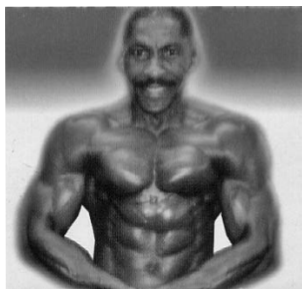
"Nate threw a wrench into things basically because of what his position was and what we were going to ask him to do and what we thought we had," Heacock said. "All during the offseason, we're thinking we have Nate on one side and he can be that drop guy. Then you put Johnny on the other side and we're going to get pressure."

The other bright spot on the defensive line was Johnathan Hankins, a sophomore who logged 67 tackles while playing inside and out. Showing surprising quickness and agility for a player listed at 335 pounds, he was both a big body at the point of attack and effective at running down plays from the back side.

A late-season knee injury slowed him somewhat, but he still appears to have a bright future as he continues to refine his technique and work on his body. Hankins finished second on the team with 11 tackles for loss.

Nose guard Garrett Goebel turned in a solid junior season with 33 tackles, including four for loss, and tackle Adam Bellamy took advantage of the minutes opened by Williams' injury by logging 25 tackles. Bellamy spent a lot of time at the strong-side end spot Simon vacated to fill in for Williams.

Freshman tackle Michael Bennett also saw his role expand as the season went on and left the impression he could be a star of the future after notching 17 tackles. He had three sacks among his five tackles for loss



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Rating The Defense

Here is where the OSU defense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally for the 2011 season.

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Defense	141.54	50th	5th
Passing Defense	182.00	14th	4th
Total Defense	323.54	19th	5th
Scoring Defense	21.00	27th	6th
Sacks	23.00	T72nd	6th
Third-Down Def.	40.22	65th	7th

FINAL GRADES: DEFENSE

and looked adept at stopping the run and rushing the passer.

BSB Midterm Grade: B+
BSB Second-Half Grade: B-
BSB Final Grade: B

Linebackers

This was by most accounts the most disappointing group on the team.

After years of excellence, Ohio State struggled all season to find adequate linebacker play, something that was the result of multiple factors.

Andrew Sweat became an every-down player for the first time in his college career and was one of the team's best defensive players – when healthy. He started the season slowed by nagging injuries and then missed half of the Purdue game and all of the Penn State game because of a concussion. He also sat out the regular-season finale at Michigan after suffering a dislocated elbow in practice the week before, but the senior still wound up the leader of the linebackers with 72 tackles. He made five stops for loss, intercepted one pass and forced a fumble.

Juniors Etienne Sabino and Storm Klein shared the middle linebacker spot most of the season, but neither performed on a consistent basis. Klein had 45 tackles, a sack and an interception, but he struggled to close ground in space against teams that like to spread the field. Sabino had 6½ tackles for loss among his 62 stops, but he fought bouts of poor tackling and did more reacting than attacking. Sabino also saw some time at the Sam outside linebacker position when the team played its base defense.

Freshman Ryan Shazier piqued the interest of fans from the beginning of the season with his speed and athleticism, but the slender (6-2, 210) Florida native played only sparingly until the last quarter of the season when Sweat went down.

Once afforded full-time action, Shazier showed both his youth and his potential. He logged 40 tackles in the last four games, including 15 against Penn State in his first career start. He made big plays (three sacks, two fumbles forced) but found himself out of position at times as well. He also battled a knee injury that limited his mobility for much of the last two games.

Sweat, Klein and Sabino all played well in the upset of Wisconsin, but that was the high-water mark for Klein and Sabino. Meanwhile, Shazier's athleticism did not offset the leadership of Sweat when the senior went down, and the linebackers had a lot to do with the team's collapse in November.

The group's play fell off down the stretch as missed tackles and missed assignments led to far too many big plays. Those went a long way toward the Nittany Lions rushing for 239 yards and Michigan piling up 277 on the ground.

BSB Midterm Grade: C-
BSB Second-Half Grade: D
BSB Final Grade: D+

Secondary

To no one's surprise given the loss of three starters from 2010, this group suffered some ups and downs throughout the season.

The top performer was unquestionably

Bradley Roby, a redshirt freshman cornerback who was named the team's outstanding first-year defensive player after logging 47 tackles. He had three interceptions to go with 3½ tackles for loss, and he showed no timidity in attacking the ball in the air or a ball carrier on the perimeter.

Roby was a sticky man-to-man defender and flashed good reaction times when playing zone. He also brought some swagger to the position, and more good things can be expected from him in the future.

Roby had the type of season many expected from veteran Travis Howard, a junior who looked during spring and preseason practices to be ready for a breakout campaign. That never materialized, however, as he was frequently targeted by opposing quarterbacks and gave up numerous important catches, particularly on third down. He broke up five passes and intercepted two more, but he was inconsistent as a tackler even as he racked up 41 stops.

Safety was a source of frustration for much of the season as a pair of talented sophomores endured numerous growing pains.

C.J. Barnett had a strong start to the season but struggled with pursuit angles and tackling later in the year. He finished with a team-high 75 tackles and picked off two passes. He also broke up six other throws.

Classmate Christian Bryant led the team with eight pass breakups and logged 68 tackles, but a penchant to go for kill shots led to several big plays being made at his expense.

Most notably, Bryant missed an open-field tackle on Nebraska running back Rex Burkhead that turned into a game-tying touchdown reception. He was also caught out of position on a deep touchdown pass that started the Cornhuskers' rally from a 27-6 deficit. Three weeks later, he did not see Wisconsin receiver Jared Abbrederis running a vertical route and could not recover in time to keep him from hauling in a fourth-quarter touchdown that put the Badgers ahead late in the game.

Bryant replaced Orhian Johnson as the starter early in the season, but Johnson continued to play a regular role in the team's dime package. Johnson was another Buckeye who had a problem with pursuit angles and tackling at the outset of the season, but he showed some improvement late in the year before suffering a knee injury at Michigan. He had 32 tackles and three interceptions.

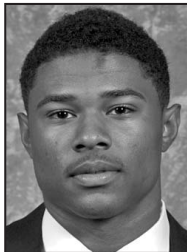
Finally, there was Moeller, who played the Star position in the nickel defense, a look the coaching staff opted to use almost exclusively in the last 10 games. In his return from a pectoral injury that ended his 2010 season prematurely, Moeller never quite regained the playmaking skills he once displayed. He finished the season with 44 tackles, including two for loss. His lack of production was at least in part a result of a shift in strategy as well. Moeller frequently blitzed during his high-impact junior year but usually was asked to stay home and defend the perimeter as a senior.

The secondary improved statistically in the second half of the season, but that might have been in part because of the decreased effectiveness of the run defense.

BSB Midterm Grade: C
BSB Second-Half Grade: C
BSB Final Grade: C



Andrew Sweat



Christian Bryant

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FINAL GRADES: SPECIAL TEAMS

Uneven Specialists Mirrored Rest Of Buckeyes

By ARI WASSERMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If Ohio State played on special teams during the regular season like it did in its loss to Florida in the Gator Bowl on Jan. 2, the team likely wouldn't have been playing in the postseason.

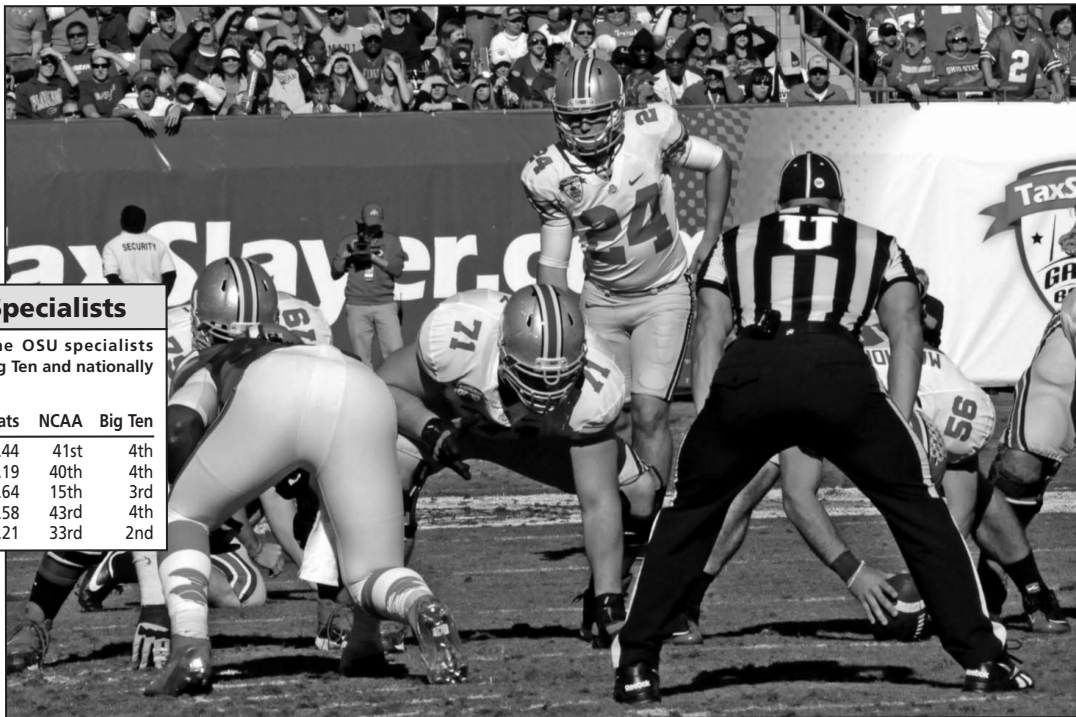
After all, the Buckeyes weren't just plagued by an inability to find an offensive rhythm in their 24-17 loss to Florida. The Gators, of course, took command of the game with two touchdowns on special teams plays.

Florida took a crucial 14-7 lead when Andre Debose returned a kickoff 99 yards for a touchdown, going all the way to pay dirt untouched, a score that answered a 5-yard touchdown strike from Braxton Miller to DeVier Posey to tie the game.

Though Ohio State went to the locker room down only four – Drew Basil knocked through a 37-yard field goal right before halftime – Florida delivered what was likely the knockout blow with another big play on special teams.

The Gators blocked a Ben Buchanan punt attempt early in the second half and Graham Stewart returned the loose ball 14 yards for another touchdown, giving Florida a 21-10 advantage. It was a lead the Buckeyes wouldn't be able to overcome.

"When two good teams play each other, special teams is usually the difference," said OSU defensive back Tyler Moeller. "As you saw (in the bowl game), that was the difference. They had a good



SONNY BROCKWAY

Rating The Specialists

Here is where the OSU specialists ranked among the Big Ten and nationally for the 2011 season.

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Net Punting	37.44	41st	4th
Punt Return Avg.	10.19	40th	4th
KO Return Avg.	24.64	15th	3rd
Punt Return Def.	6.58	43rd	4th
KO Return Def.	20.21	33rd	2nd

BETTER RESULTS – Sophomore kicker Drew Basil (24) made 16 of 19 field-goal attempts in 2011, a year after missing both of his attempts in long-range situations.

kickoff return and a blocked punt for a touchdown. That was the difference in the game. We didn't get it done on special teams."

Though Ohio State's special teams were typically reliable after a 2010 season in which a kickoff coverage miscue set the stage for a loss at Wisconsin that cost the Buckeyes a chance at playing for the national title, players admitted they didn't perform up to par on special teams in this year's final contest.

Newly hired head coach Urban Meyer

has indicated he will likely oversee the special teams next year, something he's prided himself on doing in his previous jobs. Before looking forward to what Meyer may change, what follows are BSB's final grades for the Ohio State special teams for the past season.

Kicking

Basil's opportunity to be Ohio State's kicker was a source of apprehension at the beginning of the year, especially after his stint as the team's field-goal kicker on lon-

ger attempts in his freshman year was brief and unsuccessful.

Still unsure if the sophomore would be able to take on the role with consistency – especially with a youthful offense in no position to miss out on points when they were attainable – Basil went from being a kickoff specialist to a reliable scoring option in his second season with the Buckeyes.

Basil, who had both of his attempts blocked during his freshman season, didn't get off to the smooth start he would have hoped for in the Buckeyes' season opener against Akron. The sophomore kicker missed both of his attempts, although only one counted. Basil missed his first attempt of the year from 45 yards out, but an offside penalty on the Zips gave the OSU kicker another shot. But he also missed his do-over from 40 yards, hooking the attempt to the right.

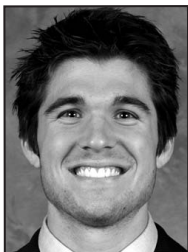
The second game, a 27-22 win over Toledo, came and went with Basil failing to get a single three-point attempt, and the sophomore entered the third game of his second season – a road contest at Miami (Fla.) – having never made a collegiate field goal.

That's when Basil turned things around for good. Though the Buckeyes lost a 24-6 decision to the Hurricanes, he knocked through both of his field-goal attempts, including one that was true from 47 yards out.

Those two field goals turned into a streak to remember for Basil, who finished the first half of the season having made seven consecutive field goals. Moving forward into the second half, he eventually knocked through five more, increasing his streak to 12 in a row.

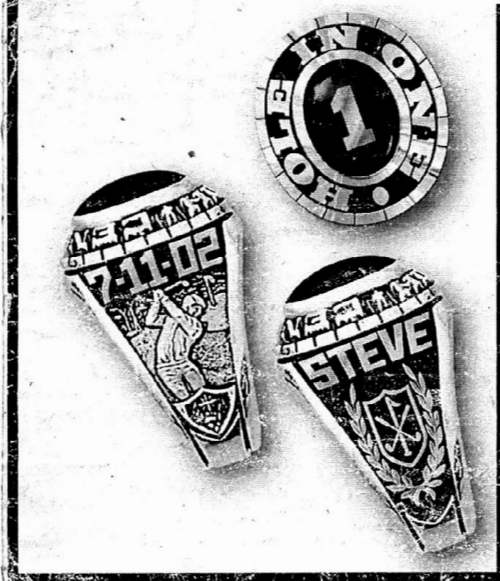
Then there was the game he'd like to forget.

During Ohio State's 26-23 overtime loss



Ben Buchanan

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FINAL GRADES: SPECIAL TEAMS

at Purdue, Basil missed his first attempt against the Boilermakers – ending his streak – and had an extra-point attempt blocked in the final seconds of the game. Had Basil made either the field goal or the extra point, the Buckeyes would likely have won the game in regulation.

Basil made his field-goal attempt in overtime to cap Ohio State's first possession, but the Boilermakers scored a touchdown in their rebuttal possession to win the game.

Basil didn't miss on his final three attempts of the season, finishing the season having made 16 of 19 attempts (84.2 percent), which tied him with UAB kicker Ty Long for the 12th-best percentage in college football this season.

In his second full season handling the kickoff duties for the Buckeyes, Basil averaged 63.5 yards per attempt and had 14 touchbacks. Though the distance was only good enough for No. 61 nationally, for reference the best kicker in terms of length in the nation – Cody Parkey of Auburn – averaged 5 five yards more per attempt.

Basil did have five more touchbacks than he posted in 2010 despite kicking off 14 more times during his freshman season.

BSB Midterm Grade: B
BSB Second-Half Grade: B
Final Grade: B

Punting

It was a rather unfortunate ending to what was otherwise a very successful junior season for Buchanan. The block he suffered against Florida – a definite breakdown on the part of his protection – served as the exclamation point for what was the most trying season at Ohio State in recent memory.

The goal for Buchanan was to build off a sophomore season he described as marginal. He wanted not only to become a more consistent performer, but he viewed himself as a weapon that could consistently punish the opposing team by burying them deep in their own territory whenever the offense stalled.

Through the team's first six games Buchanan averaged 41.6 yards per attempt, which was only sixth best in the Big Ten. But distance, the OSU junior often explained, isn't always the best way to tell the efficiency of the punter.



JOSH WINSLOW

BECOMING A WEAPON – Junior Ben Buchanan (17) helped the Ohio State defense by forcing an opponent to start inside its own 20-yard line on 27 of his 70 punts during the 2011 season.



JOSH WINSLOW

RUNNING FOR PAYDIRT – Junior Jordan Hall (7) averaged 26.3 yards per kickoff return. His best was a 90-yard return against Colorado.

"Punting is pretty misunderstood by a lot of people," Buchanan told BSB. "It's not hard to be impressed by a punter who has a booming leg and can boot it clear across the field. Even though I'd like to think I am capable of getting big distance, I like to think I am about as reliable as they come when pinning opponents deep."

Buchanan's average stayed roughly the same through the end of the season at 41.3 yards per attempt, which landed him fifth in the Big Ten and No. 46 in the nation. Of his 70 punts this season – which included eight of at least 50 yards and a season-long 60-yarder – he pinned opponents inside their 20-yard line on 27 occasions, and in all of those attempts he had only three touchbacks.

However, Buchanan did have two punts blocked, including the glaring play against Florida in the Gator Bowl. While the punter gets the blame, however, he is rarely the one at fault.

"We just had to block our guys," Moeller said. "We had to do a better job of holding them up. Florida did a great job of squeezing in, using their speed to get in there and they got one on us."

The other block was accomplished by Toledo and it set up the Rockets for an early touchdown that eventually kept the Mid-American Conference squad in the game until the final moments of the contest.

But Buchanan's mission was accomplished in becoming a weapon. When looking at how all 13 opponents punted against Ohio State, they managed to land only 16 of 69 attempts inside the Buckeyes' 20-yard line.

"I think they've seen what that can do when you don't have a super-powerful offense," Buchanan said of his punting. "It is those things that are understood by our team (and) the guys have taken to that."

BSB Midterm Grade: B+
BSB Second-Half Grade: C
Final Grade: B-

Return Game

Though Jordan Hall likely didn't have the kind of impact on Ohio State's offense that

he had hoped before the season, there's no question he helped the Buckeyes' return game.

Ohio State has always emphasized big plays in the return game since every extra yard on kickoff and punt returns can help give the offense better field position. Though the plays that stand out most are ones returned a long way, a return man who can consistently squeeze out an extra few yards is an instrumental weapon.

For Hall specifically, he was able to do that on kickoff returns. His average of 26.3 yards per return was good enough for fifth in the Big Ten and No. 17 in the nation. The best return man in the conference was also tops in the nation. Purdue freshman Raheem Mostert averaged 33.5 yards per return on kickoffs.

Though Hall missed the first two games of the season while serving a suspension, the junior immediately made plays upon his return. Perhaps his biggest play of the season came against Colorado, when he took one back 90 yards before being tackled inside the Buffaloes' 10-yard line.

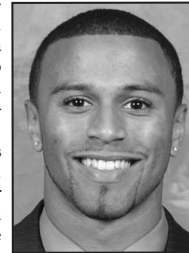
On punt returns, Hall wasn't nearly as dynamic, averaging only 5.8 yards per attempt. That was sixth in the Big Ten but only No. 46 on the national charts. The country's best performer was Texas A&M junior Dustin Harris, who averaged 18.6 yards per return.

Perhaps the best play on the punt return unit in 2011 belonged to sophomore Chris Fields, who helped the Buckeyes in the win against Toledo.

Down 15-14 with less than a minute remaining in the first half, Fields returned a punt 69 yards for a touchdown to give the Buckeyes a 21-15 advantage at the half. The play took away any momentum the underdog Rockets had going into the break.

Had the Buckeyes not been able to get that score before halftime, the Rockets – who wound up scoring on their first possession of the second half even after the deflating return – likely could have engineered the upset in Ohio Stadium.

BSB Midterm Grade: B+
BSB Second-Half Grade: C
BSB Final Grade: B-



Chris Fields



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