

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

\$2.50
PERIODICAL NEWSPAPER
CLASSIFICATION
DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE RUSH!!



Vol. 31, No. 19

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 31, 2012



SONNY BROCKWAY

ONE GOAL DOWN – Jared Sullinger (0), Lenzelle Smith Jr. (32), William Buford (44), Evan Ravenel (30, right) and head coach Thad Matta (foreground) celebrate as they near the end of Ohio State's East Regional final win.

BAYOU BOUND

Meyer Ready To Start His First Spring

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

Time and change will be more than part of the Ohio State alma mater this spring as the Buckeyes take their first on-field steps toward becoming the 123rd football team in school history.

The majority of the starters – and members of the 2011 two-deep, for that matter – return from the disappointing 6-7 campaign of a year ago, but that might not mean much given the changes throughout the rest of the program.

2012 Spring Football Preview

Urban Meyer took over as head coach in late November and used the phrase "culture shock" when describing what the players are in for during his first spring on the job in Columbus.

For 15 work days from March 28 through the annual spring game April 21, the Buckeyes will learn Meyer's spread offense and the tempo at which he wants them to run it.

Defensively the changes might not be as stark, but players on both sides of the ball can expect to learn plenty about the expectations Meyer and his new staff have for them.

The tone was set during a grueling two months of workouts under new strength and conditioning director Mickey Marotti, a time that saw plenty of players impress their new bosses even as they told people they had never been through anything so difficult in their young lives.

The Buckeyes new and old will not have much time to waste getting acclimated, however, as Meyer expects to leave spring practice with his starting lineup set. He hopes to do as little tinkering as necessary to the lineup when the team reconvenes in August, putting a premium on picking up the nuances of the new coaches' systems as quickly as possible.

Potentially complicating matters further could be the lack of familiarity between the members of the coaching staff itself. Six of Meyer's nine assistants – defensive coordinator Luke Fickell, co-defensive coordinator Everett Withers, cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs, defensive line coach Mike Vrabel, offensive coordinator Tom Herman and offensive line coach Ed Warinner – will be

Ohio State Wins East Regional, Punches Its Ticket To Final Four

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

Ohio State was labeled a 2012 Final Four team long before even Thad Matta knew what to expect. When the head coach finally got a good enough look at his team to come to his own conclusions, he disagreed with the overwhelming sentiment from the public.

That's because the view Matta had was an intimate one. He watched the team intently in practice, a time when the Buckeyes were more than just how the public viewed them. They weren't just a team with an All-America big man, a dangerous senior scorer, and one of the best on-ball defenders in college basketball.

Matta saw them as a collective unit. The weaknesses were glaring, though he never spoke about them publicly.

"As I watched them unfold, we struggled early in terms of mental toughness in practice – finishing out a two-hour practice with the intensity it needed to be," Matta said. "That prompted me to say in

mid-December, 'This is the worst practice team I've ever coached.'

"I said, 'Fellas, right now, you're a round-of-32 team. That is what it is. We're going to be out in the round of 32 unless some things change.'

It's a wonder, then, that second-seeded Ohio State is fresh off a 77-70 win over top-seeded Syracuse, a

March 24 victory that has the 31-7 Buckeyes on their way to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans for the Final Four.

That's because things didn't change – at least not immediately.

Remember, a stretch in February during which the Buckeyes lost three of five games happened after Matta was blunt enough with his team to elaborately point out its deficiencies. If the coach was concerned about the way his team was practicing in December, the public blunders that developed into concerning losses down the stretch of the regular season had to keep him awake at night.



Continued On Page 6

Continued On Page 20

OPINION

Ohio State Is More Than Just A Football School

What do UCLA, North Carolina, Kentucky, Duke and Kansas have in common with Ohio State?

The answer is obviously not football. The Buckeyes have celebrated five consensus national championships in that sport, five more than the Bruins, Tar Heels, Wildcats, Blue Devils and Jayhawks have won combined.

When the conversation turns to basketball, however, the overriding conjecture is that the Buckeyes do not belong in that group of elite programs. And that is where the overriding conjecture is dead wrong.

I mentioned this in a previous column a couple of years ago, but in light of the Ohio State basketball team making its 11th trip to the Final Four, it bears repeating.

Back in 1989 when Gary Williams was head coach of the Buckeyes, the two of us were visiting in the coach's office at St. John Arena. At one point during the interview, Williams wheeled around in his chair, looked outside his second-story window and said something to the effect of "I'll never understand why this school doesn't support basketball the way it does football."

Without much thought about how it would sound, I immediately replied, "Well, Coach, there's a simple explanation and part of it is why your office is located on Woody Hayes Drive and not Fred Taylor Drive."

Williams didn't like it, but the implication was clear. Ohio State was then, is now and always has been a football school. That has to do with any number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that the football program generates many, many more dollars than the basketball team.

Football is also the sport where most Buckeye fans get their identity. Ask 100 fans to name their favorite Ohio State sports memory and chances are 95 of them will have to do with football.

In terms of championships, however – or at least in terms of playing for championships – the basketball Buckeyes are very much on par with their football brethren.

Ohio State celebrates those five consensus national championships in football (1942, 1954, 1957, 1968 and 2002) and several more if you count the National Championship Foundation title in 1944, the championship awarded by the Football Writers Association of America in 1961 and the trophy handed out in 1970 by the National Football Foundation.

Meanwhile, the men's basketball team has only the 1960 national title banner hanging in the rafters of the Schottenstein Center.

But with the basketball Buckeyes making their 11th trip to the Final Four, the program has cemented its claim to join elite status with the aforementioned cage powerhouses. Only UCLA (18), North Carolina (18), Kentucky (15), Duke (15) and Kansas (14) have made more trips to the Final Four than Ohio State.

The perception of Ohio State as a football school was steeped mightily by the Woody Hayes era that began in 1951, produced its first national championship in 1954 and became an all-encompassing behemoth in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

It was Taylor's unfortunate fate to serve as basketball coach of the Buckeyes during the same era as Hayes. Taylor's persona of mild-mannered tactician made far fewer headlines than his football counterpart's bombastic personality. But the truth of the matter is that Taylor's best years were more successful than any comparable stretch Hayes put together.

From 1960-63, the basketball team posted a .98-10 record (a .907 winning percentage) with four straight Big Ten titles, three trips to the Final Four and one national championship.

Hayes' best four-year span came between 1972 and '75 when the football team went 40-5-1, good for an .880 winning percentage, won the Big Ten championship each year and appeared in a record-setting four straight Rose Bowls.

Still, Ohio State football has generally always trumped Ohio State basketball in the minds of most fans. Not that it should be that way. There should be room to embrace both programs by the majority of Buckeye Nation.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
Mark Rea

And why not? Florida proved in 2007 that national championships can be won both in football and basketball (victimizing Ohio State in the process of capturing both). Now, with Urban Meyer patrolling the halls of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and Thad Matta marking his second trip to the Final Four in the past six seasons, why can't the Buckeyes be national championship contenders in both sports?

History dictates they always have been.

A Few Observations

- Did anyone notice that Syracuse began to leave William Buford alone on the offensive end during the final minutes of the regional final game? The OSU senior's late-season shooting slump became more pronounced in the NCAA Tournament. After scoring 17 points on 5-for-11 shooting in the tourney opener against Loyola, Buford went 8 for 33 (24.2 percent) in the next three games vs. Gonzaga, Cincinnati and Syracuse.

Look, the last thing I would ever want to do is dump on a kid who has played his guts out for Ohio State these past four years. Likewise, I know Matta feels he owes Buford a huge debt of gratitude for his years of service. But doesn't the coach also owe his only senior the chance to win a championship ring even if it means some Final Four bench time?

- Imagine one game with this scenario: Jared Sullinger gets his normal double-double, Aaron Craft has an overall game like he did against Gonzaga, Deshaun Thomas lights up the scoreboard as he did against Loyola, Lenzelle Smith Jr. rains in threes the way he did against Cincinnati and Syracuse and Buford shakes off his lengthy slump and finally plays the way we know he's capable of playing.

No opponent – not even heavy favorite Kentucky – could match that kind of firepower.

- How do you like this starting five for next season: Craft at the point, Smith at shooting guard, LaQuinton Ross and Sam Thompson at forward and Amir Williams at center.

Craft is already a star and Smith only needs consistency to become one. Ross has an impressive skill set, Thompson can literally jump out of any gym and Williams will become better and better the more experience he gets.

Of course, that starting five is minus Sullinger and Thomas. This year was a gift from Sullinger, who could have gone to the NBA last year and been a lottery pick. As for Thomas, continued success through the Final Four will likely mean he's gone next year as well.

Some Tournament Trivia

- Did you know the NCAA Tournament is the brainchild of a former Ohio State basketball coach? In 1938, OSU head coach Harold Olsen, also a past president of the National Association of Basketball Coaches, proposed

the concept of a national championship tournament. The first tourney was held the following season at Patten Gymnasium on the Northwestern University campus in Evanston, Ill., with Olsen's Buckeyes losing to Oregon in the title game. Olsen remained tournament chairman from its inception until 1946.

- Did you further know the term "Final Four" also has Ohio roots? It first appeared that year in an article for "The Official Collegiate Basketball Guide" and was coined by Cleveland Plain Dealer sportswriter Ed Chay. In the story, Chay simply mentioned that "outspoken coach Al McGuire's (Marquette) team was one of the final four" during the previous season's tournament. Someone at the NCAA liked the phrase and the governing body of college sports later trademarked it.

- McGuire is credited with first referring to the NCAA Tournament as "The Big Dance." During his team's run to the 1977 championship, the coach wore the same blue blazer for each regular-season game. When asked if he would continue to wear the blazer in the NCAA Tournament, McGuire replied, "Absolutely. You gotta wear the blue blazer when you go to the big dance."

Never A Better Time Than Now

According to a recent survey by the Nielsen Co., more than 80 percent of Americans have a computer in their homes, and of those, almost 92 percent have Internet access.

Personally, I would have thought those numbers to be much higher. Another number I would have thought to be much higher is the percentage of BSB subscribers who have signed up to read our online-only issues. It's a good percentage, but nowhere near the percentage of subscribers we know have computer and Internet access.

For those of you who have been procrastinating about signing up to read your BSB issues online, there really has been no better time than the present. Our next electronic issue will be dated April 3 and will contain full recaps of the Ohio State basketball team's Final Four run.

Spring football practice under first-year head coach Urban Meyer will also be getting under way, and BSB will have detailed reports of the early camp sessions in that April 3 electronic issue.

Rest assured, the Final Four and early spring drills will be covered in the next issue of BSB print, but that issue doesn't go to press until April 10 and there will be plenty of other news in the meantime. The only place to read full recaps will be the April 3 electronic issue of BSB.

Don't think we're trying to phase out BSB print and that putting off signing up to read issues electronically will prevent us from doing that. We simply want you to know that by not signing up for this service – which is absolutely free, by the way – you are missing out on more than half of what you're paying for because we produce 36 electronic issues in addition to 24 printed issues of BSB each year.

After you sign up, you will continue to receive your print copy in the mail like always, and you will also have the opportunity to read it online as soon as it is finished – on Monday during football season and Tuesday the rest of the year. And you get those 36 additional electronic issues as a bonus.

If you are a current subscriber, all you have to do is email your name, address, telephone number and preferred email address to subscriptions@BuckeyeSports.com and we will send back easy-to-follow instructions on how to read BSB and the BSB electronic issues on your computer.

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

Vol. 31, No. 19
March 31, 2012
www.BuckeyeSports.com

Buckeye Sports Bulletin (USPS 705-690, ISSN 0883-6833) is published 24 times a year (weekly September through November, biweekly mid-March through May and January through early March and monthly June through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications
1350 W. Fifth Ave., Suite 20
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$74.95/year.

PUBLISHER
Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

MANAGING EDITOR
Mark Rea

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
Becky Roberts

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
Kevin Dye Josh Winslow

CONTRIBUTORS
Bill Armstrong Bob Roehm
David Breithaupt Julie Roy
Rich Exner Mark Schmetzer
Matthew Hager Steve Siegfried
Marcus Hartman Stacey Stathulis
Rich Leonardo Jeff Svoboda
Craig Merz Mike Wasserman
Eric Loughry Ari Wasserman

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
Toni Daniels Jan Jager
Ron Friedman Jack Woodworth

2011-12 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 31)

No. 1	Sept. 10	No. 13	December
No. 2	Sept. 17	No. 14	Jan. 14
No. 3	Sept. 24	No. 15	Jan. 28
No. 4	Oct. 1	No. 16	Feb. 11
No. 5	Oct. 8	No. 17	March 3
No. 6	Oct. 15	No. 18	March 17
No. 7	Oct. 29	No. 19	March 31
No. 8	Nov. 5	No. 20	April 14
No. 9	Nov. 12	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 19	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 26	No. 23	July
No. 12	Nov. 30	No. 24	August

The next issue (April 14 cover date) will be mailed on April 10.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is a privately owned newspaper and is not affiliated directly or indirectly with The Ohio State University.

BSB email address is: bsb@buckeyesports.com

CSPA
COLLEGE
SPORTS
PUBLISHERS
ASSOCIATION

Charter Member

COVER STORY

Sullinger's National Title Dreams Remain Alive

Continued From Page 1

"Things weren't always good with this team," sophomore Deshaun Thomas told BSB. "We had our issues, we had problems, and we lost because of it. But the season wasn't over and that's what we kept telling each other."

Before the February slump happened, things looked good for the Buckeyes. Ohio State was on track to achieve the goals outsiders figured were foregone conclusions before the season started – Big Ten regular-season and tournament championships followed by a deep NCAA Tournament run.

Then the Buckeyes lost on their home floor to Michigan State on Feb. 11 – snapping a 39-game Value City Arena winning streak – and the Spartans drew even in the conference race. Afterward, star player Jared Sullinger said his team played like "spoiled brats" during the loss.

Those comments became more glaring when the Buckeyes went on to trade wins for losses the following two weeks, a time during which Sullinger publicly expressed concern about the way referees were officiating Ohio State's games.

As the team prepared for Wisconsin on Feb. 26, Matta saw the same problems in practice that he had witnessed in December. This time, though, they were magnified to the point that he couldn't stand to watch them anymore.

So he threw his team out of the gym.

The Badgers did what Matta expected as a result – they delivered what seemed to be the knockout punch when they dealt Ohio State

a home loss on Senior Day. The defeat put the Buckeyes two games behind Michigan State in the Big Ten race with two games remaining. OSU's Big Ten title dreams were all but dead.

"Everybody on the outside said we didn't have a chance," junior Evan Ravenel said. "It was hard not to believe that at times, but we somehow stayed together."

There's no telling what Matta was thinking at that point. Maybe he would have taken a deal with the devil to get the Buckeyes into the Sweet 16, the round each of his last two teams couldn't get past.

Then something crazy happened and Ohio State was given CPR. Indiana knocked off Michigan State in Bloomington and suddenly the Buckeyes were in control of their own destiny again. All they had to do was win two games – both of which were on the road – to achieve at least a share of their third consecutive Big Ten regular-season title.

"What turned the corner for me was that night when we realized we had a chance to win a share of the Big Ten championship," Matta said. "It seemed like it sort of came together there."

Given another crack at achieving something the team thought was lost, Ohio State went to Northwestern and Michigan State and earned victories to grab a piece of the Big Ten title.

Both games were won on the Buckeyes' final possession, including a buzzer-beater in East Lansing by senior William Buford to lift the team in a way that couldn't have been scripted before the season started.

For the first time all season, the Buckeyes were the team they were supposed to be.

"We went soul-searching and we found our soul," Sullinger said. "Now we're competing for a national championship."

Here the Buckeyes stand – two wins away from winning only the second national championship in program history and the first since 1960. And Ohio State looks stronger than it ever has, especially given the way it advanced past top-seed Syracuse to win the East Regional final.

The Orange followed the blueprint to beat Ohio State. Syracuse got the Buckeyes in foul trouble – both Sullinger and Ravenel picked up two whistles in the first half – and Buford didn't play particularly well.

Given Syracuse was one of the best teams in college basketball – they were 34-2 before falling to the Buckeyes in the Elite Eight – the Orange would probably have liked their chances if told before the game that Sullinger would be a nonfactor in the opening 20 minutes.

But it didn't matter. Ohio State got contributions from myriad players, whether it was sophomore shooting guard Lenzelle Smith Jr. or seldom-used freshman big man Amir Williams, who gave his team nine valuable minutes to keep it in the game with Sullinger in foul trouble.

Now when Final Four opponent Kansas turns on the film, the game plan for stopping the Buckeyes won't be quite as cut and dry. Ohio State is deeper, it is confident and it is getting contributions from players who were often afterthoughts during the regular season.

"We're a scary team right now," Thomas said. "Every single person on this team can be the best player on the team on any given night. It's hard to game-plan for us when we're feeling like this. We're playing great basketball right now, and you have to honor every single player on this team as a weapon."

Outsiders were right about the team when predicting it would be in the Final Four. Matta, however, got an inside look at what it took to get to this point.

"I think one of the biggest challenges this team had to overcome is that they were cast into a light before the season even started of

what they were going to be," the OSU coach said. "And it was unfair in my mind because you lose three starters and you had so many unknowns."

"To their credit, I think they understood the importance of all the little things, and that was always the challenge for me – to get them to understand the little things. They've done the work. They've done the job and they've put us in this position."

Sullinger Captures Dream

Satch Sullinger has taught a lot to his son Jared, whether it is about the game of basketball or how to find fulfillment in life. When the younger Sullinger was facing the hardest decision of his life last year – whether to go to the NBA or stay at Ohio State – he heard his father's voice in the back of his head.

"His goal of winning a national championship at Ohio State was within the realm of their reality," Satch told BSB. "It wasn't a goal that was unrealistic. It was a realistic goal. He's always been raised to know that if you have a dream you have to participate in your own dream."

The life the younger Sullinger turned his back on is an intriguing one. The NBA could have been his home this year, where basketball meets a glamorous lifestyle filled with endless money, unmatched fame and anything imaginable for a 20-year-old kid.

Sullinger knew what he was turning down when he opted to return to Ohio State for a second season. He thought about what he would be leaving in the balance, but it all seemed unimportant when compared to another chance at NCAA Tournament success.

It was a tough decision, needless to say. The boyhood dream for every basketball star is to reach the NBA and enjoy the privileged life that comes with it. There was one major con that couldn't be overcome by Sullinger, though – Ohio State's stinging loss to Kentucky in the Sweet 16 a year ago.

He said he hasn't thought about the NBA since returning to the Buckeyes.

"No," Sullinger responded when asked if he ever thought twice about his decision not to go to the NBA after his freshman season. "I love this school too much and I knew this basketball team had a chance to win."

Grove City Where OSU fans stay overnight!

JUST 12 MILES FROM CAMPUS

Best Western	614/875-7770
Comfort Inn	614/539-3500
Days Inn	614/871-0440
Drury Inn & Suites	614/875-7000
Hampton Inn	614/539-1177
Hilton Garden Inn	614/539-8944
Holiday Inn Express	614/801-9000
Knights Inn South	614/871-0065
LaQuinta Inn	614/539-6200
Microtel Inn	614/277-0705
Super 8	614/875-8543
Red Roof Inn	614/871-9617
Travelodge	614/991-5301

Grove City Visitors Bureau
800-539-0405
www.visitgrovecityoh.com

**HOUSE
of
CIGAR**

HouseOfCigar.net

Members get 5% off everyday

**Largest Humidor
in the Midwest!**


**Check out our
three locations:**

7099 Huntley Rd., Suite 105
Columbus, OH 43229

9697 Sawmill Rd. 1088 N. High St.
Powell, OH 43065 Columbus, OH 43201

MONTECRISTO

SMOKE ONE AND YOU'LL KNOW WHY



TIM SWANSON
Certified Personal Trainer

**Flat Stomach • Weight
Loss • Strength Training
• Cardio Kick-Boxing •
Boot Camp**

614-886-9331
foreverfitswan@yahoo.com

COVER STORY



SONNY BROCKWAY

NEW HARDWARE – Ohio State head coach Thad Matta (left) and sophomores Aaron Craft (center) and Jared Sullinger (right) celebrated with the East Regional trophy after the Buckeyes beat Syracuse on March 24.

Sullinger had a piece of the net from Ohio State's win over Syracuse tied to his Final Four hat when he answered the question. Ahead of him is a career in the NBA no doubt, but a stop in New Orleans now will come first.

"He's got that winning mentality – that refuse-to-lose mentality," OSU assistant Jeff Boals said while describing Sullinger. "His goal is to win a national championship and he's won on every level. He has an unbelievable will to win."

Even when his will to win didn't seem strong enough – think February – the two-time All-American kept at it. His mind could have been in the clouds, dreaming about the NBA and the big payday that comes with it.

He isn't ashamed to admit he was reading press clippings, especially when Ohio State wasn't playing up its expectations. Sullinger could have checked out – the June NBA draft isn't that far in the future after all.

Instead, doubt is what fueled Ohio State's NCAA Tournament run.

"I appreciated everyone that doubted this basketball team," Sullinger said. "Everyone said we were the underdogs, we weren't good enough, not mentally strong enough, not physically strong enough, mentally immature – we heard it all."

"When we were going through that slump in February, everybody was saying this team was kind of on the downhill. We heard the negative comments. I want to thank you all because through all the adversity, we constantly pushed through that."

The storylines were all over the place during the team's Big Dance run. Thomas had a stretch of games good enough to join Sullinger's NBA talk, sophomore point guard Aaron Craft continued to play top-notch defense, and Smith has come on of late as a big scoring threat.

Sullinger remained consistent through the ups and downs. Whether it was foul trouble or foot pain – he admitted to suffering through lingering issues with a painful plantar fasciitis condition down the stretch of the regular season – the Buckeyes knew they were going

to get somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 points and 10 rebounds out of their big man.

"And it's not over yet," Sullinger's father said. "This is just another step into the process of the journey. If they're satisfied getting to the Final Four, then it is over. But this is just another obstacle in the way of their goal – which is the national championship."

"Jared has been raised that there are only three things you have total control over: what you think, what you say and what you do. He has done that and that's part of the reason why he and this team are in this position."

Final Four ... Finally

It has been 20 years since Chris Jent had a chance to make a 12-foot baseline jumper to send Ohio State to the Final Four.

It was 1992 when Jent misfired on the biggest shot of his playing career, leaving the Buckeyes with a 75-71 loss to Michigan's Fab Five in the Southeast Region final in Lexington, Ky.

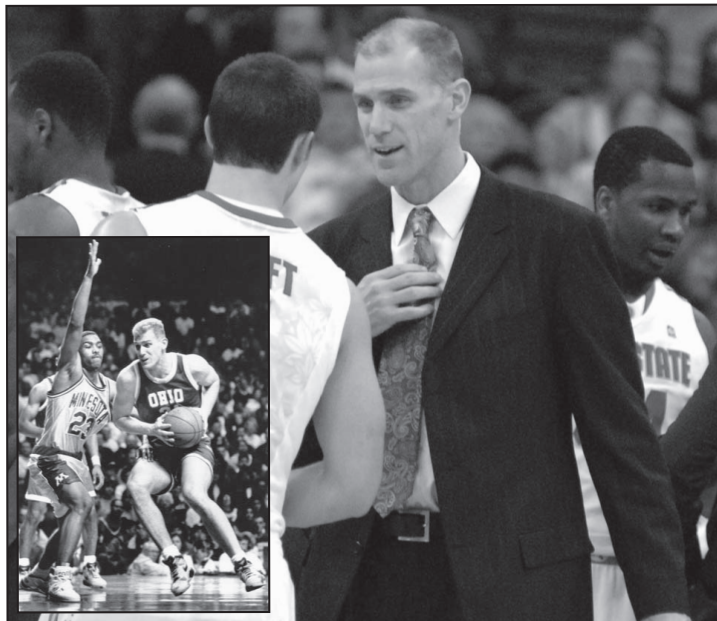
Memories of the tears Jent shed in the postgame locker room are still fresh, and the now 42-year-old remembers the moments leading up to the shot as vividly as what he just ate for breakfast.

Now a first-year Ohio State assistant coach, Jent is taking the trip to the Final Four he never got to make 20 years ago. It isn't redemption, but it is a dream come true for the lifelong Buckeye.

"I have tried to put the past aside," Jent told BSB. "I just told myself the only time I'm going back to a Final Four is if I am a part of Ohio State and a Buckeye again. Obviously, we have great love and passion for Ohio State, and that's what brought me back into the fray."

Jent left Ohio State two decades ago and became quite accomplished in the game of basketball. A former interim NBA head coach with the Orlando Magic, Jent is probably best known for his time as LeBron James' shooting coach with the Cleveland Cavaliers.

When Matta brought Jent out of the NBA to be an assistant with the Buckeyes, some viewed it as a demotion for the coach. Jent



KEVIN DYE; FILE PHOTO (INSET)

HE MADE IT – Twenty years after losing to Michigan in the Elite Eight as an Ohio State standout (inset), OSU assistant coach Chris Jent, seen here with sophomore Aaron Craft, is finally going to the Final Four.

saw it as an opportunity to be something he's always been – a Buckeye.

"I was hoping we'd get to this point and I knew we had the talent to do it, but I never dreamed this would happen, especially this quickly," Jent said. "It is really hard to explain how I feel right now because you reflect a lot on those negative emotions you had years and years and years ago."

"Like I said before – I would never go back to the Final Four unless I was with this team. Now, to be here, is phenomenal."

Rock, Chalk, Jayhawk

The Final Four teams are quite familiar with one another. In one game, there's a bitter in-state rivalry and both feature a rematch of a game that has already been played this season.

If anything, New Orleans is going to be interesting.

The games kick off March 31 in the Superdome, starting when Kentucky plays in-state rival Louisville at 6:09 p.m. Eastern. UK beat the Cardinals 69-62 in Lexington on Dec. 31.

Approximately 30 minutes following the conclusion of that game, Ohio State will get another shot at Kansas. The Jayhawks scored a 78-67 win over the Buckeyes in Lawrence on Dec. 10, but Sullinger missed the game because of back spasms.

The winners of the two games will face each other two days later with the national title at stake.

"We caught a break the first time when Jared didn't play and we were kind of finding

ourselves," Kansas head coach Bill Self said. "We knew they were a team that could make a run and win a national championship. They have so many pieces that are so good. It starts with Jared."

The Jayhawks dealt Ohio State its first loss of the season, and All-America forward Thomas Robinson led his team with 21 points. Kansas never trailed despite a second-half surge by the Buckeyes when Buford scored 17 of his 21 points after the intermission.

This time the matchup should be dramatically different. It isn't in Lawrence and the Buckeyes will have the services of Sullinger, who has played perhaps the best basketball of his career in recent weeks.

Kansas senior point guard Tyshawn Taylor, who scored 22 points in the Jayhawks' 80-67 regional final win over North Carolina to seal the rematch with the Buckeyes, understands it is a whole new test.

"I think it's going to be good game," Taylor said. "The last time we played them, they had their best player on the bench and it was a home game, so it's definitely their chance to get back at us."

"But we feel like we didn't play our best that game, either. I didn't play my best individually that game, and I'm sure Thomas is excited to play against Jared, so I think it's going to be an exciting game."

Sullinger agreed. "Hopefully it's not our last game," he said. "We're just trying to play hard and play smart, and not going down to New Orleans for a vacation. It's a business trip."

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Beasts Of The East: Ohio State Wins Regional

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The nature of coaching is that many of the men in charge have a hard time stepping back and truly enjoying a victory, as there is always another game to win.

Ohio State head coach Thad Matta didn't want to fall into that trap March 24 after his Buckeyes knocked off Syracuse by a 77-70 score to capture the East Region of the NCAA Tournament.

"I've been a head coach now for 12 years, and the one thing I've always tried to do was enjoy the special moments," Matta said. "We don't even know who we're playing yet (in the Final Four in New Orleans). I think taking the time to celebrate is something that they deserve."

That celebration began earlier on the floor of TD Garden. The Buckeyes slowly but surely closed out the Orange in front of 19,026 fans, including a small pocket of scarlet and gray that stood out like a sore thumb in a heavily orange-clad arena.

As a result, Matta made sure to credit those fans when he took to a hastily erected podium, backed by players donning new championship hats and T-shirts, for the trophy presentation.

"We will see you in New Orleans," Matta said, inciting a roar that was soon joined by the school pep band's rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In."

The party was well-deserved.

The second-seeded Buckeyes (31-7) were the tougher and better team against the Orange, absorbing the early loss of big man Jared Sullinger because of foul trouble and then utilizing the All-American's talents to their fullest upon his return while knocking off the top seed.

Sullinger finished with game-high honors of 19 points and was named the most outstanding player of the region, but his contribution was far from the only one on the night. None was bigger than the 18 points put in by blistering sophomore guard Lenzelle Smith Jr., who was joined on the all-regional team by classmate Deshaun Thomas, who finished with 14 points and nine rebounds.

Senior William Buford was the fourth Buckeye in double figures with 13 points and nine more boards, while sophomore point guard Aaron Craft had five points, four assists and one steal and played his usual excellent defense. Freshman Amir Williams played nine critical minutes and had three points, four rebounds and two blocks while junior Evan Ravenel and freshmen Shannon Scott and Sam Thompson also did their parts.

"Everybody kind of pulled together, and it's something we've been preaching with this basketball team," Matta said.

Syracuse, already owner of a school-record win total, finished the season 34-3. Guard Brandon Triche had a team-high 15 points while senior point guard Scoop Jardine finished with 14 to go with six assists.

"I thought we fought as hard as we have all year," longtime Syracuse head coach Jim Boeheim said. "But I give Ohio State a ton of credit. They played really, really well. They've got a great basketball team and they deserved to win."

Ohio State's biggest minutes might have been those played without Sullinger. The big man was a beast in the early going, working well with Thomas against Syracuse's 2-3 zone and going 2 for 4 from the floor with four points and three rebounds before pick-



SONNY BROCKWAY

IMPORTANT MINUTES – Freshman Amir Williams (23) played nine important minutes for the Ohio State men's basketball team during a 77-70 win against Syracuse in the NCAA East Regional final.

ing up his second foul – a debatable one at that – on a Dion Waiters layup with just 6:18 gone.

When Waiters made the free throw to complete the three-point play, Ohio State held a 13-11 lead.

A dunk by Baye Keita with 9:31 left in the half gave Syracuse a 22-21 advantage, and with the Orange partisans roaring, it looked like the game might get away.

But Ohio State buckled down thanks to a variety of contributions to shepherd the game to halftime with the teams deadlocked at 29. Williams checked in when Ravenel got his second foul and affected several Orange shots while the rest of the Buckeye defense kept Syracuse to just 6-of-18 shooting with Sullinger on the bench.

"I just thought we could have gotten some better shots in the first half," Boeheim said. "We needed to do a better job in the first half offensively, and that's where I think we lost the game. We needed to be in a better position at the end of the half."

Ohio State's offense wasn't any better, going only 4 of 17 from the floor in Sullinger's absence, but the Buckeyes had confidence that they got into the break with so little impact from Sullinger.

"We were battling out there," said Smith, the recipient of four stitches above his right eye after an early knock of heads with Triche. "It's always great to have him out there on the floor, but at this time in the tournament you can't worry about things like that. You're not going to have guys out there. You can't let that get you down. You have to fight even harder."

When Sullinger returned to the floor in the second half, it was clear he would make a difference as he spurred the Scarlet and Gray to a 17-7 run to start the stanza that gave his team a 46-36 lead.

Ohio State went ahead for good on two free throws by Buford with 18:16 left that made the score 35-33. Smith drained a three next time down the court before Buford followed his own shot to draw a foul. The senior made 1 of 2 from the charity stripe,

Ohio State 77, Syracuse 70

		March 24, 2012						
		TD Garden, Boston						
		Total FG FT Reb.						
Ohio State (31-7)	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Sullinger	26	5-9	9-12	3-4	1	3	19	
Thomas	40-	6-14	2-2	3-6	1	3	14	
Craft	39	1-3	3-3	1-3	4	5	5	
Smith Jr.	35	4-10	7-9	1-2	1	2	18	
Buford	40	3-12	6-8	3-6	2	3	13	
Scott	0+	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	
Thompson	6	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	2	
Williams	9	1-2	1-4	1-3	1	1	3	
Ravenel	5	0-0	3-4	1-0	0	2	3	
Totals	200	21-51	31-42	14-25	10	20	77	

Percentages: FG: 41.2%, FT: 73.8%, 3-point goals: 4-13 (Thomas 0-2, Smith Jr. 3-6, Buford 1-5). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Williams 2, Sullinger). **Turnovers:** 12 (Thomas 3, Sullinger 2, Craft 2, Williams 2, Smith Jr., Buford, TEAM). **Steals:** 4 (Sullinger, Thomas, Craft, Thompson).

		Total FG FT Reb.						
Syracuse (34-3)	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.	
Fair	31	1-2	6-6	1-3	0	4	8	
Joseph	37	4-11	2-3	2-0	0	1	10	
Christmas	16	3-3	0-0	0-2	0	4	6	
Jardine	33	5-12	1-2	0-1	6	3	14	
Triche	28	4-10	5-6	0-1	1	2	15	
Waiters	20	2-8	5-6	0-1	2	5	9	
Keita	24	1-3	1-2	3-7	0	4	3	
Southerland	11	2-4	0-0	0-1	0	5	5	
Totals	200	22-53	20-25	8-18	9	29	70	

Percentages: FG: 41.5%, FT: 80.0%, 3-point goals: 6-16 (Joseph 0-2, Jardine 3-7, Triche 2-4, Waiters 0-1, Southerland 1-2). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Keita 4, Christmas 2, Joseph). **Turnovers:** 12 (Joseph 4, Jardine 2, Triche 2, Waiters 2, Fair, Keita). **Steals:** 6 (Joseph 3, Waiters 2, Jardine). **Halftime:** Tied 29-29. **Technical foul:** Syracuse head coach Jim Boeheim. **Officials:** Higgins, Nance, O'Neill. **A:** 19,026.

and Thomas netted a putback to give OSU eight straight points.

After a three by James Southerland of Syracuse made it 41-36, Sullinger went strong to the hole for a basket and then created his own shot between two Orange defenders to push the lead to nine. Lastly, Smith ended the run at 13:47 with 1 of 2 free throws just moments after Craft sent the Buckeyes into a media timeout in a frenzy by taking a charge on Waiters.

Syracuse got the lead down to one point twice with around seven minutes left, but the Buckeyes hit a string of important shots to push it back to as much as eight in the final minute. Particularly big baskets were a three-pointer by Smith that extended OSU's lead from one to four at 55-51 with 7:11 on the clock and a floater by the sophomore that made it 62-55, baskets that bookended five straight OSU points by Sullinger.

Things really looked good when Thomas hit a tough shot along the baseline with 1:47 left to make it a six-point game at 64-58. The Orange made the last few minutes harrowing, however, getting it down to a one-possession game at 70-67 with 37 seconds remaining. But Ohio State made 13 of 14 foul shots down the stretch to ice the victory.

Syracuse committed 29 fouls in the game – including a first-half technical foul on Boeheim as he argued a call – to just 20 for Ohio State.

As inconsistent as the officiating was, it didn't take away from the quality of play – and the amount of drama – in the contest.

"I thought it was a high-level college basketball game, probably the way it's supposed to be in the regional finals," Matta said. "We beat a tremendous basketball team tonight."

The reward was Matta's second Final Four in eight years and first since 2007. It was first celebrated by a trip up a ladder to cut down the nets, but the ultimate prize was a visit to the Big Easy.

"It's a great feeling," Thomas said. "I love it. This is everybody's dream. At the end of the game I wanted to cry, but I held it in. That's how emotional it is because everybody wants this."

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Buckeyes Best Bearcats For Sweeter Sweet 16 Result

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Not even head coach Thad Matta knew how good his young Ohio State team was going to be in 2011-12.

As it turns out, the Buckeyes were good enough to advance deeper into the NCAA Tournament than either of their star-studded predecessors.

Ohio State clinched that designation March 22 in front of a crowd of 18,796 at Boston's TD Garden, using its own brand of inconsistent but ultimately redeeming basketball to down sixth-seeded Cincinnati by an 81-66 final in the Sweet 16.

The win was the second-seeded Buckeyes' 30th of the season, but given the round in which it came – and Ohio State's demise in the regional semifinal each of the past two seasons – it was surely the sweetest.

"I couldn't be happier for this team," Matta said. "If you would have told me in November this team was going to win 30 games, I would have said there's no way. And to their credit, they've done a great job of putting us in the position."

The Buckeyes controlled three-quarters of the game against their in-state rivals in a heavily anticipated matchup – just the 10th in the all-time series and the second in the past 50 seasons – but that one slip-up left the Queen City challengers in position to get the win.

Despite taking a 12-point lead into half-time, Ohio State (30-7) allowed the Bearcats (26-11) to retake the lead within the first six minutes of the second stanza.

But instead of folding, OSU showed its newfound mettle, putting together a 17-1 run over six minutes and change to punch its ticket to the Elite Eight for the first time since 2007.

"We lost a lot of close games like this where some guys punched at us and we kept backing up," sophomore point guard Aaron Craft said. "But from the Big Ten tournament on, we try to stand our ground as much as possible."

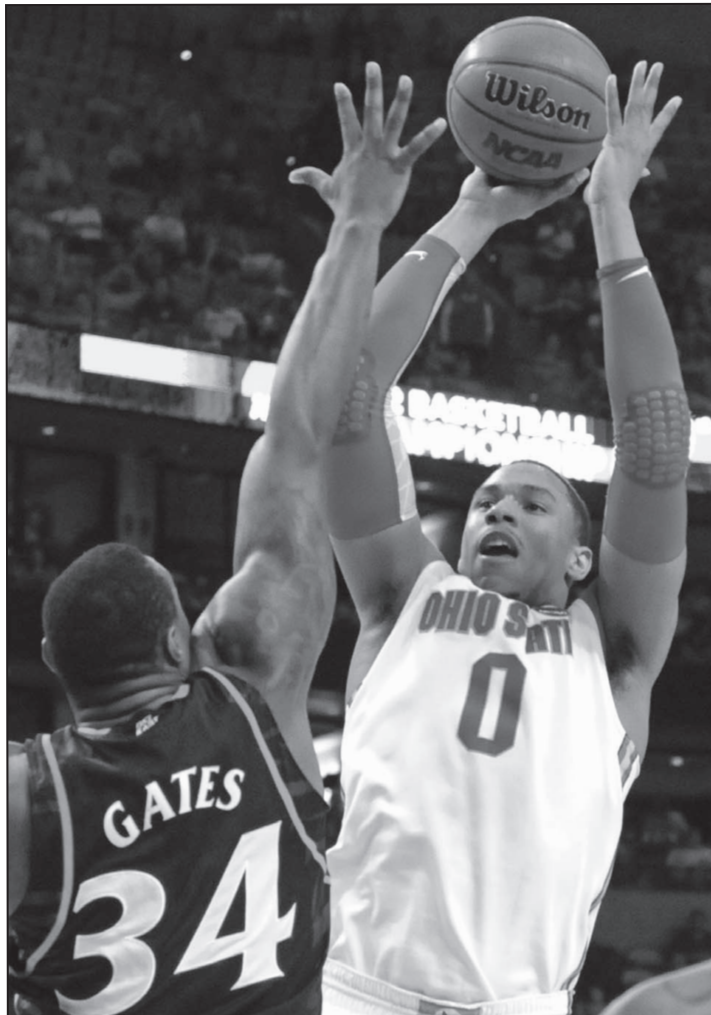
"We understand that these are great teams that are going to go on runs. It's going to happen. We just can't get too down on ourselves, try to stay as positive as possible, and it worked today."

There were a number of keys to the win, from the dominating frontcourt pairing of Jared Sullinger and Deshaun Thomas – who combined for 47 points and 17 rebounds – against Cincinnati's undersized lineup to the steady contributions of all five starters on the floor.

But the biggest difference was Ohio State's defensive intensity. In addition to its late shutting of the UC attack, Ohio State forced 18 turnovers out of a Cincinnati team that entered the game losing only 10.6 per game to place ninth in the country in that statistic.

"At the end of the day, we didn't take care of the basketball," UC head coach Mick Cronin said. "We gave ourselves no chance to win. They're hard enough to guard, but with 18 turnovers we just gave ourselves no chance."

Ohio State kept the Bearcat attack under wraps in the opening 20 minutes while taking a 37-25 lead into the break. The Buckeyes forced Cincinnati into nine turnovers in the opening period while keeping it to a 10-for-26 showing (38.5 percent) from the field. Reserve forward Justin Jackson had eight points and five rebounds, but leading scorer Sean Kilpatrick was held to only four points



SONNY BROCKWAY

STATE CHAMPS – Ohio State earned a Sweet 16 victory against Cincinnati on March 22 thanks in large part to a 23-point, 11-rebound performance by OSU sophomore Jared Sullinger.

thanks to the stiff defense of OSU senior William Buford.

On the other end, Ohio State's offense efficiently made the extra pass on most of its possessions, assisting on nine of 14 field goals. Thomas was dominating, posting 20 points by the intermission, while Sullinger added 10 points and nine rebounds as the Buckeye duo had its way with Cincinnati's zone defense.

"I was really good in that zone, flashing and kicking it down to Sully and just getting in the open area and just knocking down shots," Thomas said. "That's what got me going."

However, Cincinnati would not go quietly. The Bearcats switched to man-to-man defense to slow down the Buckeyes, but the real story was how Cincinnati finally was able to pierce the OSU defense. Kilpatrick ignited the rally with the Bearcats' first eight points of the second half, and Cashmere Wright gave the Bearcats a 44-43 lead at the 14:05 mark with a three-pointer.

When forward Yancy Gates made a free throw coming out of the under-12 media timeout, the Bearcats' lead had reached four at 52-48.

"For some reason, guys thought that they were going to stop fighting," OSU guard

Lenzelle Smith Jr. said. "We got into our relaxed mode and took a chill pill, but they came out fighting."

But just as quickly as Ohio State had lost its defensive chops, the Buckeyes found them. Cincinnati's next 10 possessions ended with five turnovers, four missed shots and a single made free throw by Dion Dixon.

On the other side of the floor, Ohio State pulled away. Sullinger hit three free throws in a row to make it a one-point game before Craft put the Buckeyes ahead for good at the 10:23 mark, making it 53-52 with a jump shot.

Ohio State 81, Cincinnati 66										
March 22, 2012 TD Garden; Boston										
Cincinnati (26-11)	Total FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.	
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D						
Gates	29	3-7	1-1	0-5	0	3	7			
Wright	34	6-12	2-2	1-3	3	5	18			
Dixon	38	3-10	1-2	1-1	1	3	8			
Kilpatrick	36	6-12	0-0	0-1	2	2	15			
Parker	32	4-10	1-3	2-4	2	2	10			
Davis III	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Jackson	20	4-5	0-0	3-3	0	5	8			
Mbodj	5	0-0	0-0	0-2	0	0	0			
Guyn	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
Sanders	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	200	26-56	5-8	8-21	8	21	66			
Percentages: FG: 46.4%. FT: 62.5%. 3-point goals: 9-23 (Wright 4-6, Dixon 1-5, Kilpatrick 3-8, Parker 1-4). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 5 (Jackson 4, Gates). Turnovers: 18 (Jackson 4, Wright 3, Kilpatrick 3, Parker 3, Dixon 2, Gates, Mbodj, Guyn). Steals: 5 (Gates 2, Dixon, Parker, Mbodj).										
Ohio State (30-7)	Total FG		FT		Reb.		A	PF	Pts.	
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D						
Sullinger	37	7-13	9-10	5-6	3	3	23			
Thomas	39	9-16	3-4	3-3	0	2	24			
Craft	39	2-7	6-10	0-4	5	1	11			
Smith Jr.	35	7-8	0-0	1-5	2	1	17			
Buford	30	1-8	1-2	2-3	1	4	4			
Scott	16	1-4	0-1	0-1	3	0	2			
Thompson	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Ravenel	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	200	27-56	19-27	12-23	14	11	81			
Percentages: FG: 48.2%. FT: 70.4%. 3-point goals: 8-17 (Sullinger 0-2, Thomas 3-5, Craft 1-4, Smith Jr. 3-4, Buford 1-2). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 1 (Thomas). Turnovers: 11 (Craft 4, Buford 4, Sullinger, Thomas, Scott). Steals: 13 (Craft 6, Buford 3, Smith Jr. 2, Sullinger, Scott). Halftime: Ohio State 37, Cincinnati 25. Officials: Luckie, Eades, Irving. A: 18,796.										

After Thomas hit a tip-in on a missed Buford dunk, Dixon scored from the charity stripe to make it 55-53, but the Buckeyes responded with the next 10 points. Smith started the run with a trey from the right wing, and then Craft coolly nailed another three – one of eight makes in 17 tries for OSU – before Smith hit a layup after a great entry pass from Sullinger, who finished the run with a jumper to make it 65-53 with 5:55 to go.

Two games after a career-high 31 points to begin the NCAA Tournament against Loyola (Md.), Thomas finished with 24 points to lead the attack. Sullinger had his 16th double-double of the year with 23 points and 11 rebounds. Smith had 17 points on 7-of-8 shooting – including 3 of 4 on threes – and Craft had 11 points and five assists.

Buford struggled, going 1 of 8 from the floor and finishing with four points in an offensive performance much like his 2-for-16 showing against Kentucky last season that helped contribute to OSU's upset loss to the Wildcats.

Unlike that game, however, the Buckeyes lived up to the old survive-and-advance mantra this time around.

"We made it farther than we made it my last three years here," Buford said. "That's all that matters to me."

Wright led the Bearcats – who fell to 4-6 all-time vs. OSU – with 18 points before fouling out late while Kilpatrick added 15.

KING AVENUE 5

SPORTS LOUNGE & RESTAURANT

Join us for Brunch on Saturdays!

945 King Ave. Columbus, OH

www.kingavenuefive.com

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Second-Seeded OSU Races Past Greyhounds, Zags

By MARCUS HARTMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Had the Ohio State basketball team been victorious in the Big Ten tournament's championship game March 11, the Buckeyes likely would have been rewarded with a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

Despite falling by a 68-64 final score to Michigan State in a hard-fought game reminiscent of a contest you'd see deep in the NCAA Tournament, the Buckeyes entered the Big Dance feeling like they were playing their best basketball of the season.

Being assigned to the No. 2 seed in the East Regional, the Buckeyes hoped the experience gained in their third battle of the year against the Spartans - a No. 1 seed in the tournament - would pay dividends.

In the first weekend of the NCAA Tournament it did as the Buckeyes advanced to their third Sweet 16 in as many years with wins over No. 15 Loyola (Md.) and No. 7 Gonzaga in Pittsburgh.

What follows are capsules from the games against the Greyhounds and Bulldogs. Complete recaps were published in the March 20 electronic issue of BSB available to all paid subscribers. If you have not already signed up for this free service, see the instructions on page 5 of this issue.

Gonzaga, March 17

Fighting through physical play in the paint that stopped him from dominating inside for most of the game, sophomore

All-American Jared Sullinger scored six crucial points during the final 3:36 to boost the Buckeyes to a 73-66 win over seven seed Gonzaga in front of 18,588 fans at the Consol Energy Center.

Sullinger, who made a basket off the glass over 7-foot Robert Sacre to extend the Buckeyes' lead to five at 66-61 with 1:03 remaining, helped Ohio State close out a pesky Bulldogs squad to advance to the tournament's Sweet 16.

While Sullinger was either out of the game with early foul trouble - he logged only nine minutes in the first half - or being contained in the paint by Gonzaga's athletic big men, it was a balanced offensive attack that kept Ohio State in the game.

Sullinger and sophomore guard Deshaun Thomas led the Buckeyes with 18 points apiece, but perhaps the best offensive game of Aaron Craft's career kept the Buckeyes constantly afloat. The sophomore point guard had season highs with 17 points and 10 assists, accounting for his first career double-double.

Freshman guard Gary Bell Jr. led the Bulldogs (26-7) with 18 points while junior forward Elias Harris added 16. Freshman point guard Kevin Pangos totaled 10 points, but he was blanketed by Craft throughout the game and made only 3 of 13 shots from the field. Pangos also had only one assist against two turnovers

Sacre finished with eight points and six rebounds in 24 minutes on the floor.

Ohio State led 52-42 with 14:22 remaining in the game, but Gonzaga switched to a zone defense and tied the game at 61 with 4:03 to go.

Ohio State 73, Gonzaga 66

Table with columns: Gonzaga (26-7), Min, M-A, M-A, O-D, A, PF, Pts. Rows: Edji, Harris, Sacre, Pangos, Bell Jr., Carter, Stockton, Spangler, Moeninghoff, Hart, Dower. Totals: 200 22-56 14-19 13-21 14 19 66

Percentages: FG: 39.3%. FT: 73.7%. 3-point goals: 8-23 (Edji 0-1, Harris 2-6, Pangos 2-8, Bell Jr. 3-5, Stockton 0-1, Moeninghoff 0-1, Dower 1-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 1 (Sacre). Turnovers: 9 (Dower 3, Sacre 2, Pangos 2, Harris, Bell Jr.). Steals: 3 (Pangos 2, Hart).

Table with columns: Ohio State (28-7), Min, M-A, M-A, O-D, A, PF, Pts. Rows: Sullinger, Thomas, Craft, Smith Jr., Buford, Scott, Thompson, Williams, Ravenel. Totals: 200 25-53 14-18 9-22 13 17 73

Percentages: FG: 47.2%. FT: 77.8%. 3-point goals: 9-24 (Sullinger 2-2, Thomas 3-7, Craft 1-3, Smith Jr. 1-4, Buford 2-7, Scott 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 4 (Thomas 2, Smith Jr., Williams). Turnovers: 11 (Thomas 2, Craft 2, Smith Jr. 2, Ravenel 2, Sullinger, Buford, Scott). Steals: 6 (Craft 3, Sullinger, Buford, Scott). Halftime: Ohio State 39, Gonzaga 37. Officials: Corbett, McCall, Breeding. A: 18,588.

Ohio State 78, Loyola (Md.) 59

Table with columns: Loyola (Md.) (24-9), Min, M-A, M-A, O-D, A, PF, Pts. Rows: Walker, Etherly, Cormier, R.J. Williams, Olson, Winbush, Drummond, Latham, PWilliams, Brooks, Wandrusch. Totals: 200 19-54 17-22 5-19 9 24 59

Percentages: FG: 35.2%. FT: 77.3%. 3-point goals: 4-14 (Walker 1-3, Cormier 2-4, Olson 1-6, Drummond 0-1). Team rebounds: 1. Blocked shots: 8 (Etherly 4, Walker 2, Latham, Brooks). Turnovers: 12 (Walker 3, Cormier 3, Drummond 3, Etherly, Olson, Brooks). Steals: 6 (Walker 3, Olson, Drummond, Latham).

Table with columns: Ohio State (28-7), Min, M-A, M-A, O-D, A, PF, Pts. Rows: Sullinger, Thomas, Craft, Smith Jr., Buford, Scott, Thompson, Weatherspoon, Ravenel. Totals: 200 26-58 21-26 16-33 11 19 78

Percentages: FG: 44.8%. FT: 80.8%. 3-point goals: 5-14 (Sullinger 1-1, Thomas 1-3, Craft 0-1, Smith Jr. 0-1, Buford 3-7, Scott 0-1). Team rebounds: 3. Blocked shots: 8 (Sullinger 5, Thomas 2, Ravenel). Turnovers: 18 (Craft 5, Smith Jr. 3, Buford 3, Thomas 2, Ravenel 2, Sullinger, Scott, Thompson). Steals: 6 (Craft 3, Sullinger, Buford, Scott). Halftime: Ohio State 42, Loyola (Md.) 31. Officials: Breeding, Eppley, Porter. A: 19,413.

Sullinger answered with a baseline bucket to give the Buckeyes a two-point lead at 63-61 with 3:36 remaining in the game, and then Thomas made 1 of 2 free throws to extend his team's lead to 64-61 at the 2:41 mark.

Pangos had a chance to tie the game with a wide-open look from the corner, but he misfired, one of six misses the Gonzaga freshman had in eight long-range attempts for the game. OSU senior William Buford came down with the rebound and Sullinger made the shot over Sacre at the other end that helped put the game out of the Bulldogs' reach.

In addition to his double-double, Craft had three steals in the game, pushing his season total to 88 and breaking Mike Conley Jr.'s single-season record of 87, set during the 2007 run to the NCAA Tournament title game.

Loyola (Md.), March 15

Thomas set a new career scoring high with 31 points and tallied his third career double-double, pacing the Buckeyes to a 78-59 victory against 15th-seeded Loyola (Md.) in the NCAA Tournament's second round.

The OSU sophomore's 31 points topped by one his previous best - set Dec. 17 against South Carolina - and he added 12 rebounds to fall one shy of a career high.

"I was just trying to get in the right spots at the right time, run a play, run with pace like Coach always tells us," Thomas said. "Then I was just knocking them down. I was just feeling it a bit."

Thomas was an equal opportunity scorer, leading Ohio State with 14 points in the first half and at one point in the second half posting 13 of the team's points in a row. He finished 13 of 22 from the field, falling just one shy of OSU's NCAA Tournament record for field goals in a game set by Jerry Lucas in 1960 and equaled a year later by the Buckeye legend.

The Greyhounds (24-9) actually jumped

out to a 5-1 lead in the early going behind a big dunk by junior forward Erik Etherly and a three by sophomore guard Dylan Cormier before Ohio State's athleticism allowed the Buckeyes to slowly pull away.

Sullinger was hard to handle early as he scored the Buckeyes' first six points - including a trey from the left wing - before an old-fashioned three-point play by sophomore Lenelle Smith Jr. stretched OSU's advantage to 13-7 with 13:20 remaining in the opening half.

Ohio State's lead fluctuated between four and nine until the 7:49 mark of the half when Sullinger drove the lane and laid it in to make it 31-20.

The lead got as high as 15 two different times before the Buckeyes finished the first half up 42-31. In addition to Thomas' 14 first-half points, Ohio State got 12 from Sullinger. Each had six rebounds as well. Smith added seven rebounds.

The second half was in many ways a replication of the first. The Ohio State lead swung between 12 and 19 for the first 14 minutes and change until Thomas' bucket with 5:35 left gave him his career-high point total and made the score 70-50.

Ohio State (28-7) was finally able to pull away behind a shooting percentage of 60.9 in the second half, but the Greyhounds did cut the OSU lead to 11 at 70-59 with 2:18 left, prompting head coach Thad Matta to insert his starters back into the game for a final 8-0 run.

Buford hit two three-pointers in the closing moments to finish with 17 points, while Sullinger had his 15th double-double of the year with 12 points - none in the second half - and 11 rebounds. The Buckeyes also held a 49-24 advantage on the glass.

Loyola - a team whose home gym holds 2,100 but who was playing in front of a facility-record 19,413 fans - was led by Etherly, who had 19 points and seven rebounds while Cormier added 14 points.

BSB staff writer Jeff Svoboda contributed to this report.

Advertisement for the Buckeye Club. Text: JOIN THE BUCKEYE CLUB FUEL THE TRADITION. MEMBERS RECEIVE ACCESS TO 2012 SEASON TICKETS. Schedule: SEPT. 1 MIAMI (OH), SEPT. 8 UCF, SEPT. 15 CALIFORNIA, SEPT. 22 UAB, OCT. 6 NEBRASKA, OCT. 20 PURDUE, NOV. 3 ILLINOIS, NOV. 24 MICHIGAN. OhioStateBuckeyes.com/BuckeyeClub | 614.292.9908 | email: buckeyeclub@osu.edu

Ohio State Is No Stranger To Final Four Trips

By MARK REA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Ohio State has a rich NCAA Tournament tradition through the years including appearing in four of the first eight Final Fours. The Buckeyes return this season to college basketball's version of the Promised Land, taking on Kansas on March 31 in the national semifinals at the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans.

It will mark the program's 11th trip to the Final Four, the sixth most in tournament history.

North Carolina and UCLA are tied for the most Final Four appearances with 18 each. Next is Kentucky, which this season makes a 15th trip to the Final Four to tie Duke for third most, while Kansas will be making trip No. 14 this year.

Ohio State began making Final Four treks in 1939 – the NCAA Tournament's inaugural year – and has appeared in three consecutive Final Fours on two occasions. The Buckeyes were among the tournament's final four teams from 1944 through 1946 and made three straight trips again in 1960-62.

The 1960 appearance resulted in the program's only national title, including a 75-55 blowout of defending champion California in the championship game.

Here are brief recaps of Ohio State's previous 10 trips to the NCAA Tournament's Final Four.

• **1939** – The first-ever NCAA Tournament featured an eight-team field consisting of seven conference champions and one independent. East region teams were Brown, Ohio State, Villanova and Wake Forest, while Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas and Utah State represented the West.

Quarterfinal matches weren't close with each advancing team winning by double digits. The same held true in the semifinals as OSU rolled to a 53-36 victory over Villanova while Oregon easily dispatched Oklahoma by a 55-37 final.

In the title game, held in Patten Gymnasium on the Northwestern campus in Evanston, Ill., the Howard Hobson-coached Ducks scored a 46-33 win over the Buckeyes to capture the title. Ohio State took a measure of solace when All-America forward Jimmy Hull was named the tournament's most valuable player.

• **1944** – Ohio State made a return trip to the tournament as part of an eight-team field that also featured Catholic, Temple and Dartmouth in the East region as well as Iowa State, Missouri, Pepperdine and Utah from the West.

The Buckeyes drew Temple in the quarterfinal round and dealt the Owls a 57-47 loss at New York City's Madison Square Garden. Back at the Garden for the semifinals, OSU wasn't quite as fortunate, falling to Dartmouth by a 60-53 final.

The Big Green went on to lose a 42-40 decision to Utah in the championship game. The Utes were led by freshman Arnie Ferrin, who was named the tournament MVP. Ferrin went on to become the only four-time All-American in Utah history and led the team to the 1947 NIT title as a senior.

• **1945** – The 1945 tournament was filled with legendary coaches including Adolph Rupp of Kentucky, Henry Iba of Oklahoma A&M, Howard Cann of NYU and Harold Olsen of Ohio State. Each would later

be inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

The Buckeyes were joined in the East region by Kentucky, NYU and upstart Tufts University while the West was represented by Arkansas, Oklahoma A&M, Oregon and Utah.

OSU got past Kentucky in the quarterfinals by a 45-37 score, but the Buckeyes dropped a 70-65 overtime thriller to NYU in the semifinals. The Violets advanced to the championship final, where they lost a 49-45 final to Oklahoma A&M. The Cowboys' 7-foot center Bob Kurland, who won Olympic gold medals with the U.S. basketball team in 1948 and 1952, was the tournament MVP.

• **1946** – The Cowboys and Kurland were back to defend their title in '46 and were joined in the West region by Baylor, California and Colorado. Meanwhile, Ohio State was making its third straight tournament appearance and was part of an East region that included NYU, North Carolina and Harvard.

The Buckeyes rolled to a 46-38 win in their quarterfinal match with Harvard but came up short again in overtime in the semis, losing a hard-fought 60-57 decision to North Carolina. Meanwhile, A&M (now known as Oklahoma State), sailed through Baylor and Cal before notching a 43-40 win over the Tar Heels in the championship final.

Kurland repeated as tournament MVP and Iba claimed his second straight national championship. That was a first-ever feat in the NCAA Tournament and would not be repeated until a Bill Russell-led San Francisco won back-to-back titles in 1955 and '56.

The 1946 tournament marked the first time that losers of the national semifinal games played one another for a third-place trophy. Ohio State captured that honor with a 63-45 victory over Cal, thanks in part to 19 points from junior center Jack Underman. The third-place game would continue through the 1981 tournament.

• **1960** – Thanks to a strong class of high school stars signed in 1958, Ohio State made the first of three consecutive trips to the NCAA Tournament championship game.

By 1960, the tournament had expanded to include 25 teams playing in four regions. The Buckeyes were included in the six-team Midwest region along with Georgia Tech, Miami (Fla.), Notre Dame, Ohio University and Western Kentucky.

Tournament teams were not seeded in those days, but OSU received an opening-round bye before facing high-scoring Western Kentucky, which was coming off a 107-84 pasting of Miami in the regional quarterfinals. But the Hilltoppers had no answer for Ohio State sophomore center Jerry Lucas, who totaled 36 points and 25 rebounds during a 98-79 victory. Lucas' point total remains an OSU record for an NCAA Tournament game.

The Buckeyes went on to coast to an 86-69 victory over Georgia Tech in the regional finals, giving the team its first trip to the Final Four in 14 years. OSU then proceeded to run roughshod over its opponents, first taking a 76-54 decision over NYU before blowing away defending national champion California by the 75-55 score in the title game.

Lucas was named tournament MVP after

averaging 24.0 points and 16.0 rebounds in four games.

• **1961** – With Lucas returning along with junior classmate John Havlicek and senior captain Larry Siegfried, Ohio State was a heavy favorite to repeat as the national champion. The Buckeyes, who entered the tournament with a perfect 24-0 record, were placed in a Midwest region that included such perennial heavyweights as Kentucky and Louisville as well as such underdogs as Morehead State, Ohio University and Xavier.

Following a first-round bye, OSU had some difficulty with Louisville before scoring a 56-55 squeaker over the Cardinals. The regional final was a much more comfortable affair as the Buckeyes got 33 points and 30 rebounds from Lucas during an 87-74 win over Kentucky. The rebound mark established another OSU record in an NCAA Tournament game for Lucas.

In the national semifinal game against St. Joseph's, coached by the famed Dr. Jack Ramsay, the Buckeyes ran away with a 95-69 victory. But two days later, they were denied a second straight title when Cincinnati landed four players in double figures and scored a 70-65 upset win.

Lucas was again named the tournament's most valuable player after averaging 24.5 points and 18.3 rebounds during his four games.

St. Joseph's won the third-place game with a 127-120 win in four overtimes over Utah. No NCAA Tournament game has since gone to four overtimes. The victory was later vacated when St. Joseph's was rocked by a gambling scandal.

• **1962** – The Buckeyes were determined to avenge their only loss from the year before and sailed into the 1962 tournament fresh off a third straight Big Ten title and a 23-1 regular-season record.

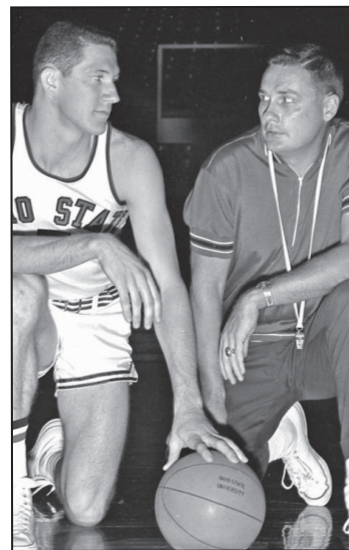
OSU found some familiar faces in the Midwest region as Western Kentucky and Kentucky again qualified for tournament play. But neither team from the Bluegrass State could get past the Buckeyes as the Hilltoppers dropped a 93-73 decision in the semifinals before the Wildcats were victimized in the regional finals by a 74-64 decision.

Those victories sent Ohio State back to the Final Four, and the team sailed through Wake Forest, 84-68, in the semifinals. But Lucas sustained an injury in that contest and wasn't his normal self for the championship game rematch with Cincinnati. The OSU star still accounted for 11 points and 16 rebounds, but the Bearcats got 22 points and 19 boards from center Paul Hogue to win a surprisingly easy 71-59 decision.

Despite the fact he averaged 18.0 points and 15.0 rebounds during the tournament, Lucas was denied a third straight MVP trophy as the award went to Hogue, who had averaged 29.0 points and 19.0 rebounds in the Final Four.

• **1968** – Legendary head coach Fred Taylor appeared in his fourth and final Final Four, guiding an overachieving team to a tie for the Big Ten championship.

The Buckeyes were back in the Midwest region, joined by the likes of Bowling Green, East Tennessee State, Kentucky, Marquette and Florida State. OSU received a first-round bye despite going only 18-7 during the regular season. Its first tournament action came in the regional semifinals and resulted in a 79-72 win over East Tennessee State.



FILE PHOTO

CHAMPS – John Havlicek (left) and head coach Fred Taylor (right) led Ohio State to its only men's basketball national championship in 1960.

That set up a regional final vs. Kentucky, and the Buckeyes squeezed out an 82-81 victory thanks to a combined 45 points and 19 rebounds from senior forward Bill Hosket and sophomore center Dave Sorenson.

Unfortunately for Ohio State, it ran into a North Carolina buzz saw in the national semifinals and bowed with an 80-66 loss. The Tar Heels went on to lose a 78-55 decision to UCLA in the title game, giving the Bruins their fourth national championship in five years. Lew Alcindor (who later became Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) was named tournament MVP.

The Buckeyes took home the third-place trophy following an 89-85 win over an Elvin Hayes-led Houston team. Junior forward John Howell scored 26 points and pulled down 13 rebounds in that game for OSU while Hosket added 19 points and 17 boards. Hayes had game-high totals of 34 points and 16 rebounds for the Cougars.

• **1999** – Ohio State ended a 31-year Final Four drought with an improbable postseason run by a team that had finished with an 8-22 record the year before.

The NCAA Tournament had undergone lots of changes since the Buckeyes had been away, including an expansion to include 64 teams. OSU entered the tournament as the No. 4 seed in the South region and opened with double-digit victories over Murray State (72-58) and Detroit (75-44) before bouncing No. 1 seed Auburn by a 72-63 final.

That set up a regional final vs. third-seeded St. John's, and the Buckeyes scored a 77-74 victory over the Red Storm to earn a trip to the Final Four in St. Petersburg, Fla.

The magical postseason run ended there, however, with a 64-58 loss to eventual champion Connecticut. The Buckeyes were victimized by a cold second half from the floor as they made only 8 of 33 attempts (24.2 percent). Ohio State guards Michael Redd and Scoonie Penn totaled 15 and 11 points, respectively, in the title game but shot a collective 10 for 31 (32.2 percent) for the contest.

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Buckeyes In The Final Four

Year	Record	Finish	Champion
1939	16-7	Runner-Up	Oregon
1944	15-6	Fourth	Utah
1945	15-5	Fourth	Oklahoma State
1946	16-5	Third	Oklahoma State
1960	25-3	Champion	Ohio State
1961	27-1	Runner-Up	Cincinnati
1962	26-2	Runner-Up	Cincinnati
1968	21-8	Third	UCLA
1999	27-9	Vacated	Duke
2007	35-4	Runner-Up	Florida



FILE PHOTO

CLOSE TO A TITLE – Former Ohio State standout Greg Oden (20) led the Buckeyes to the Final Four in 2007, but OSU fell to Florida and Joakim Noah (right) in the national championship game.

Five years later, Ohio State's feel-good march to the Final Four as well as most of the team's victories from 1999 through 2002 were vacated due to NCAA violations committed during head coach Jim O'Brien's tenure.

- **2007** – Third-year head coach Thad Matta put together a team that featured several veterans and a mix of talented freshmen, and that formula propelled the Buckeyes all the way to the national championship game.

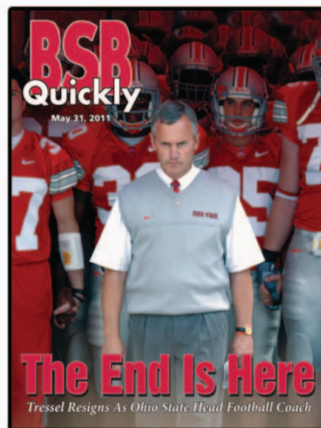
Ohio State carried a 30-3 record into the tournament, earning a No. 1 seed in the South region. An opening-round 78-57 rout of Central Connecticut preceded a pair of heart-pounding victories – a 78-71 overtime win over Xavier followed by an 85-84 victory over Tennessee to get to the regional finals.

There, the battle-tested Buckeyes took out second-seeded Memphis, getting 22 points from senior guard Ron Lewis during a 92-76 decision to advance to the Final Four at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

During the national semifinals, Ohio State scored a 67-60 win over Georgetown before the postseason ride ended with an 84-75 loss to defending national champion Florida in the title game. Freshman center Greg Oden totaled 25 points and 12 rebounds for the Buckeyes while freshman point guard Mike Conley Jr. added 20 points, six assists and four steals.

The loss was especially bitter because the Gators had defeated the OSU football team three months earlier to capture the national title in that sport.

**SEE WHAT YOU'VE BEEN MISSING
BSB'S ELECTRONIC ISSUES
Free To Print Subscribers**



Buckeye Sports Bulletin has expanded its publishing schedule to include 60 annual issues, including 36 electronic issues available only online to print subscribers.

Here's what you've missed if you're not taking advantage of reading BSB online:

2012 BSB Quickly Schedule

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| Jan. 6 | June 19 |
| Jan. 13 | July 17 |
| Jan. 17 | July 31 |
| Jan. 20 | Aug. 7 |
| Jan. 27 | Aug. 14 |
| Jan. 31 | Aug. 31 |
| Feb. 3 | Sept. 7 |
| Feb. 14 | Sept. 14 |
| Feb. 21 | Sept. 21 |
| March 6 | Sept. 28 |
| March 20 | Oct. 5 |
| April 3 | Oct. 12 |
| April 17 | Oct. 19 |
| April 20 | Oct. 26 |
| May 1 | Nov. 2 |
| May 8 | Nov. 16 |
| May 15 | Nov. 23 |
| May 22 | Dec. 4 |

**To sign up for this free service
send an email to
subscriptions@buckeyesports.com
and we will send you easy-to-follow
instructions on how to enjoy reading
your Buckeye Sports Bulletin online**

Offense Looking For New Faces To Emerge This Spring

Continued From Page 1

coaching with him for the first time. Running backs coach Stan Drayton and wide receiver coach Zach Smith worked with Meyer during his stint as head coach at Florida from 2005-10, but he last shared a staff with running backs and tight ends coach Tim Hinton when the two were graduate assistants at Ohio State in 1986.

Prior to the start of spring practice, Meyer said he liked the direction the acclimation process had taken so far.

"It's great," he said before describing regular early-morning meetings in which members of the coaching staff taught each other what they would be doing with their position groups.

"The most underutilized resource on a staff is each other, and I'm not going to let that happen," Meyer added. "I'm going to use everybody. There are a lot of good coaches on this staff. They've been a lot of good places with a lot of great ideas. Let's use them. By noontime I'm ready to go jump out a window. I'm tired of sitting in meetings with coaches, but it's been very good."

Needless to say, the spring of 2012 figures to be a busy one for the Ohio State football program.

Offensive Holes To Fill

The heavier graduation losses hit the Buckeyes on the offensive side of the ball, but Meyer can look forward to a returning starter at the most important spot in his innovative offense.

Quarterback Braxton Miller is back after taking over as the starter in the fourth game of last season. The freshman endured some growing pains but still completed 85 of 157 passes for 1,159 yards and 13 touchdowns with only four interceptions. Opponents had more reason to worry when he pulled the ball down to run, however, as Miller left countless defenders in his wake en route to running for 715 yards on 159 carries. He also scored seven touchdowns on the ground and was named Big Ten Freshman of the Year at the conclusion of the season.

Junior Kenny Guiton returns as the likely backup with true freshman Cardale Jones and walk-ons Justin Siems and Ross Oltorik also looking for reps. Oltorik is in his second tour of duty with Ohio State. The Cincinnati Moeller product, who began his college career as a Buckeye, transferred to Arizona before returning to Columbus for his senior season.

Though Miller's 2011 numbers were impressive, they would have looked better if not for taking 39 sacks that cost him 207 yards. Some were the fault of blocking breakdowns, and others came when he held the ball too long.

How much help he gets from the big guys up front remains to be seen as the offensive line was the spot on the team hit heaviest by graduation. Three multiyear starters – center Mike Brewster and tackles Mike Adams and J.B. Shugarts – exhausted their eligibility, and Meyer has expressed some displeasure with what he found left in the cupboard upon his arrival.

The line could be configured any number of ways by the time spring practice is over, but Andrew Norwell and Jack Mewhort give Warinner two solid blocks to build around. Both started every game last season as sophomores and have the ability to play guard or tackle, though Mewhort seems better suited inside.

Norwell is expected to slide back outside to left tackle, where he started the first five games last season before moving to left guard to make way for the return of Adams from a season-opening suspension, while Mewhort could end up at right tackle.

Mewhort started every game at guard but also saw some time at tackle when Shugarts missed a November game with a knee injury and backup Antonio Underwood struggled in his place as a true freshman.

Mewhort looks like a lock to be one of the top five when all is said and done, but where he ends up likely will be more determined by the performance of the rest of the line. He could play guard if one of two newcomers to the offensive line room, senior Reid Fragel and true freshman Taylor Decker, can prove

to be quick learners at tackle, but that is a lot to ask either of them.

Fragel was a regular contributor at tight end for the past three seasons but chose to move to tackle with an eye on playing there in the NFL. Decker was a late recruiting steal by Meyer, who sees in the four-star prospect a lot of things to like, starting with his 6-8, 315-pound frame. Fragel also goes 6-8 with a listed weight of 298 that is 18 pounds heavier than last season.

There is no shortage of candidates to play guard. Aside from Mewhort, juniors Marcus Hall and Corey Linsley bring game experience to the table and figure to be ready to play expanded roles. Also in the mix will be Underwood as well as redshirt freshmen Tommy Brown and Chris Carter.

Also joining the mix is Darryl Baldwin, a 6-6, 292-pounder who played seven games on the defensive line last season as a redshirt freshman.

Center is also a question mark heading into spring practice after Brewster started the past 49 games there. Sophomore Brian Bobek is considered by many to be Brewster's heir apparent, but he has limited experience after only one year in the program. If Bobek falters, Linsley or Mewhort could be next in line. Both have repped at center in the past, though Linsley often struggled snapping the ball during practices open to the media last year.

Competition at running back and wide receiver figures to be fierce after the head coach put himself on record as being concerned about what types of assets he has on hand at the skill positions.

"I don't know who is going to catch a pass," Meyer said to reporters. "I'm sure you guys don't either. There's no track record. You go back and watch the film and go, 'I don't know.' I don't know who is going to carry the ball."

Two-year starting tailback Boom Herron is gone to graduation as is wide receiver DeVier Posey.

Senior Jordan Hall could find himself helping to cover for the loss of both in Meyer's offense after rushing for 408 yards

on 100 carries and picking up another 114 yards on 10 catches last season. The 5-9, 198-pound Hall is built like a slot receiver and able to make tacklers miss in space, perhaps making him a better fit in the new Ohio State offense than the old one.

"Jordan Hall has had a decent career," Meyer said. "I would not say good. I would say decent. I watched him compete and he should do better. He's a competitor. I like Jordan. He had a very good offseason – not good, I mean borderline great."

The other three candidates to replace Herron in the backfield are all bigger backs. The 6-0, 235-pound Carlos Hyde ran for 566 yards and six touchdowns on 106 carries last season as a sophomore while Rod Smith (6-3, 230) ran for 116 yards and a touchdown on 29 totes as a redshirt freshman. Both could find themselves in a heated battle with touted incoming freshman Bri'onte Dunn. The 6-1, 214-pound Dunn enrolled in January and impressed his new head coach enough to be included among the top performers on the team when winter workouts concluded.

As for wide receiver, junior Corey "Philly" Brown leads a group that learned mostly on the fly last season while Posey sat out 10 games because of twin suspensions.

"He's a competitor, showed up every day with high energy," Meyer said of Brown, who caught 14 passes for 205 yards and a touchdown last season as he battled an ankle injury off and on. ("He is) a sponge who is always in here trying to get extra work. He shows a lot of ability on the field. I haven't seen him catch, but running the routes and doing things."

Devin Smith led the team in receiving yards (294) last season as a freshman and was listed as the No. 2 wide receiver in Meyer's eyes coming out of winter. He was followed by classmate Evan Spencer, junior-to-be Chris Fields and sophomore T.Y. Williams.

Verlon Reed, a starter for the first five games of last season as a redshirt freshman before tearing a knee ligament late in a 10-7 loss to Michigan State on Oct. 1, is expected to be able to take part in some spring drills but will be limited.

"They're all showing up," Meyer said. "I'm anxious to see what they can do."

Last and certainly not least are the fullbacks and tight ends. In fact, Meyer described the group consisting of seniors Zach Boren, Adam Homan and Jake Stoneburner as well as sophomores Jeff Heurman and Nick Vannatt as the best on the team during winter workouts.

"We're not known as a fullback/tight end offense, but you're going to see some formations of that," Meyer said. "We have to get our best 11 on the field. If they're our best 11, there are creative ways we can get those guys involved."

Meyer and Herman will work together to combine their versions of spread offense and hope to find some basics on which to rely early on.

"I think all of us have gone through these transition periods as coaches, and I think you have a good idea of, 'Here's who we are, here's our base philosophy,'" Herman said. "Now, what can we be successful doing? How do the pieces of the puzzle fit and jell with each other? Maybe then you adapt and say you have to slow down or keep moving forward. It's a fluid deal as you go through spring practice, but you start with the nuts and bolts and then start to broaden."

Players On The Spot

• **Braxton Miller, quarterback** – With a new coaching staff comes a new offense with new responsibilities. How will Miller adapt from last year's conservative attack to one that has been described as a power spread? It will be an interesting spring on many levels, but Miller's development in Urban Meyer's system will definitely be in the spotlight.

• **Bri'onte Dunn, tailback** – If pre-spring talk is worth anything, Dunn could be the next big thing at running back for Ohio State. The 6-1, 214-pound freshman is joining the Buckeyes for spring drills and could very well emerge as the No. 1 tailback from a talented group of holdovers. Of course, Carlos Hyde, Jordan Hall and Rod Smith might have something to say about that.

• **Wide receivers** – It wouldn't be overly critical to characterize as mediocre the production from last year's receiving corps. Devin Smith, Corey Brown, Chris Fields, Verlon Reed, T.Y. Williams and Evan Spencer combined for 53 receptions last year. In 2010, Dane Sanzenbacher caught 55 by himself. The time to step up is now – right now – for those young WRs.

• **Brian Bobek, center** – Ohio State has been spoiled at the center position for most of the last decade with the likes of LeCharles Bentley, Nick Mangold and Mike Brewster manning the position. The 6-2, 275-pound Bobek would seem to be next in line, and gets a chance this spring to show he deserves the starting nod over such possible challengers as Jack Mewhort and Corey Linsley.

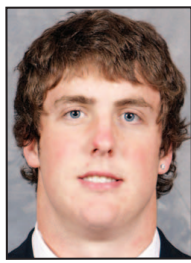
• **Reid Fragel, offensive tackle** – Fragel making the switch to tackle has generated some buzz, most notably from Meyer. Just since the Gator Bowl, the former tight end has added 18 pounds to his 6-8, 280-pound frame and seems intent on making a serious run at the vacant right tackle position.

• **John Simon, defensive line** – While some players such as Fragel have picked up weight, Simon has gone in the opposite direction. Perhaps because he seemed to wear down a bit at the end of last season, the senior-to-be has dropped about 10 pounds and is now listed at 6-2, 260. That would seem to be the ideal size for the defensive end spot opposite the Leo.

• **Curtis Grant, linebacker** – We kept waiting for Grant to make an impact last season and it never happened as the former prep standout never quite got the hang of the OSU defensive scheme. Now, with an entire season of experience, we're looking for the 6-3, 235-pound wrecking ball to have a spring coming-out party.

• **Christian Bryant, safety** – There is no doubting that Bryant maximizes his athleticism in a 5-10, 190-pound package. He finished third on the team last season in tackles, led the Buckeyes in breaking up passes and tied for second in passes defended. But we're looking for more consistency this spring – a lot more consistency – and we're fairly sure the new coaching staff will be as well.

– Mark Rea



Reid Fragel

COVER STORY



MATTHEW HAGER

LOOKING FOR BETTER RESULTS – Co-defensive coordinator Everett Withers will work with defensive coordinator Luke Fickell on improving the Ohio State defense in 2012.

Focused On Improvement

What's in store for the defense is a bit more of a mystery heading into spring practice, but the personnel are more familiar on that side of the ball.

Eighteen of the 22 players listed on the last depth chart of the 2011 season are back, as are Fickell and Vrabel from the coaching staff.

The only regulars to graduate were linebacker Andrew Sweat and nickel back Tyler Moeller, but the returnees are not likely to look much to last season for inspiration as youth, injuries, blown assign-

ments and poor tackling marred a disappointing season.

Fickell was tight-lipped when asked about potential changes in the defense, but Withers indicated a major shake-up is not in the cards.

"We have a lot of similar ideas," said Withers, the defensive coordinator at North Carolina from 2008-10 before serving as interim head coach there last season. "As we met a while back when I had a chance to sit down with him, there are a lot of similar philosophies. I don't think it is going to be hard at all. We will be up and running really fast."

He said to expect the Buckeyes to continue to have a base defense with four down linemen with an emphasis on stopping the run first.

"I have a lot of respect for what Coach Fickell has done here at Ohio State with the defense and how hard and passionate they played," Withers said. "I think it is always good when you get a chance to be around somebody else that has done it – is doing it – and you can put ideas together. I always thought two heads are better than one, so I am looking forward to it. It is going to be a great opportunity and a great journey."

John Simon and Johnathan Hankins headline a defensive line that returns six of eight members of the depth chart.

Simon, a 260-pound end, had a team-high seven sacks and 16 tackles for loss last season and earned first-team All-Big Ten honors as a junior while Hankins (three sacks among 11 tackles for loss) enjoyed a breakout sophomore campaign playing mostly tackle. Joining them as returning starters are senior nose guard Garrett Goebel and junior end Adam Bellamy.

They will be pushed by Michael Bennett, who impressed in a part-time role as a freshman last season, and Joel Hale, a rising

sophomore who has dropped 15 pounds from his 6-4 frame to check in at 295 for spring practice.

Also back are sophomores Steve Miller and J.T. Moore while Kenny Hayes and Chase Farris hope to impress as redshirt freshmen.

All indications are that the defense will continue to include a pass-rushing end known as the Leo, but who might fill that role is unclear as senior Nathan Williams will not be available for the spring following knee surgery that kept him out of every game but the opener last season.

Simon filled the role admirably, but he is expected to go back to his more natural spot on the other side.

Miller and Moore tried their hands at Leo last season but proved unready. They could get another shot, but the answer in the short term might turn out to be Se'Von Pittman, a four-star prospect from Canton (Ohio) McKinley who enrolled shortly before the start of spring quarter.

At linebacker, Etienne Sabino and Storm Klein are back after sharing the middle linebacker role to mixed reviews last year as juniors, but sophomore Ryan Shazier could steal the show. He came on late in 2011 after head and elbow injuries knocked Sweat out of the lineup and impressed with his athleticism and natural play-making ability. Shazier had 34 tackles in the last three games despite playing at only around 210 pounds. The 6-1 native of Plantation, Fla., is up to 226 heading into spring ball and has fans excited about his potential.

Spring practice also figures to be a crucial developmental time for Curtis Grant, a five-star recruit from Richmond, Va., who failed to have much impact as a freshman last season after struggling to pick up the

defense in preseason camp. Fickell praised his development in midseason after moving from middle linebacker to the strong side, but his progress never manifested itself in significant playing time.

Also joining the mix for spring ball are early-enrolling freshmen Joshua Perry and Luke Roberts.

All four starters are back in the secondary, but they will be under new guidance.

Coombs inherited a thin but talented bunch at cornerback, where there are only three scholarship players. Travis Howard was expected to have a breakout campaign last season as a junior, but instead it was then-redshirt freshman Bradley Roby who turned heads. Both are back for their second seasons as starters with Doran Grant hoping to build on a freshman campaign that was spent mostly on special teams.

Depth is not a problem at safety, but Withers will look for more consistent play out of returning starters C.J. Barnett and Christian Bryant, both juniors who have flashed big-play ability but inconsistent tackling so far in their careers.

Senior Orhian Johnson, a former starter, provides another veteran option, and juniors Corey "Pittsburgh" Brown and Jamie Wood are waiting in the wings. Wood will be limited by a lingering shoulder problem, and senior Zach Domicone will not take part in spring drills as he continues to rehab a knee injury.

Also looking to earn a spot on the safety depth chart for the first time will be redshirt freshman Ron Tanner and true freshman Tyvis Powell, who enrolled in January.

Where Meyer should have no problem with attrition is in the kicking game as both senior punter Ben Buchanan and junior kicker Drew Basil return.

CONVENIENT AIR TRAVEL TO...

CHICAGO



\$495

NEW YORK



\$695

DETROIT



\$495

ULTIMATE AIR SHUTTLE SM

ultimateairshuttle.com

Public Charters operated by Ultimate Jet Charters Inc. dba Ultimate Air Shuttle

Much Has Happened During OSU Basketball Season

Back when the Ohio State basketball season started in November, many fans thought this year's team had what it took to make it to the Final Four. By the time February rolled around, however, many of those same fans wondered if those same Buckeyes could even make it as far as the Sweet 16, the level the team had reached the previous two seasons.

Even head coach Thad Matta seemed to have his doubts.

But here we are at season's end and the Buckeyes are headed to the Final Four for the first time since 2007, just as so many had predicted what seems like so long ago.

What happened between the February doldrums and NCAA Tournament victories over Loyola (Md.), Gonzaga, Cincinnati and Syracuse?

For one thing, I think Jared Sullinger re-established himself as one of the best players in the nation. As the sophomore big man struggled through the physical battles of the Big Ten, I think many fans either forgot or questioned how good he really is.

Once Sullinger stopped worrying about all the foul calls and non-calls – or as one observer put it to me, once he stopped making faces after every call or non-call – and went back to playing his game, he was outstanding down the stretch and in the tournament. Sullinger is a load on both ends of the floor for any team to handle.

The other change I think occurred is that Deshaun Thomas became the Buckeyes' second option after Sullinger, taking that distinction away from struggling senior William Buford.

Following Ohio State's 58-48 loss to Michigan State on Feb. 11, arguably the low point of the season, Buford was averaging 15.0 points and 4.7 rebounds a game and shooting 42.4 percent from the field. Meanwhile, Thomas was averaging 14.3 points and 4.4 rebounds and was shooting 52.2 percent from the floor.

In the 13 games since then, Thomas has averaged 19.4 points and 7.4 rebounds while shooting 54.1 percent, while Buford has averaged 13.2 points, 5.4 rebounds and 39.7 percent from the field.

Thomas has been all but demanding the ball – and rightfully so – while Buford seems content to pass the ball right now. The emergence of the 6-7, 225-pound Thomas has eased some of the blanket coverage that hounded Sullinger.

The other factor I believe has lifted the Buckeyes to Final Four caliber play is the way sophomore guard Aaron Craft has stepped it up a notch – if that is possible over the way he has always played. His teammates were clamoring for him to become more involved in the offense earlier in the season, and he seems more willing to do so now, a fact proven by his 17-point, 10-assist performance in the tourney win over Gonzaga.

Craft has also been even more suffocating on defense during the tournament than he was in the regular season when he was named the Big Ten's defensive player of the year.

With Lenzelle Smith Jr. showing that he can produce at crunch time in big games, such as he did in the regional final against Syracuse when he scored 16 points in the second half to help the Buckeyes advance to New Orleans, if Buford does what he has proved so many times he is capable of doing, the Buckeyes may really have what it takes to win it all.

Heck, with the solid performance turned in by seldom-used center Amir Williams in relief of the foul-strapped Sullinger against the Orange, Matta might even be more willing to try some of his options off the bench in New

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Orleans, although I guess I wouldn't count on that.

"We're a scary team right now," Thomas said after the team punched its ticket to the Big Easy. "Every single person on this team can be the best player on the team on any given night. It's hard to game-plan for us when we're feeling like this. We're playing great basketball right now and you have to honor every single player on this team as a weapon."

Bring on Kansas and let March Madness continue.

Interesting Grid Grads

Because of all the news that has emanated from the OSU athletic department in recent months, I haven't had a chance to look at the various graduating classes in this space as I have traditionally done through the years.

There were a couple of notable names on the list of graduates following the recent winter quarter, which can be found on page 35 of this issue, so I wanted to get back in the practice of noting graduates.

First of all, I always like to mention football players who come back and earn their diplomas while taking advantage of Ohio State's Degree Completion Program. I know how difficult it is to go back to school and earn that degree.

So, kudos to Jason Winrow, who played football for the Buckeyes from 1990-93, for graduating.

But I also wanted to note that DeVier Posey and Solomon Thomas graduated. The two were in the news frequently in recent months, both participants in the tattoo and memorabilia scandal that ultimately led to the demise of Jim Tressel as head coach and NCAA sanctions placed on the football program.

By graduating, the two have cast themselves and the program in a much better light than they had in the past year, and they should be commended for that.

Now That Was A Class

I tend to not put a lot of stock in the rankings of various recruiting classes at the time they are signed. You just never know how players are going to turn out once they make the jump from the prep level to the college game, and you never know who is going to get injured, get homesick or not make grades.

I must say, however, that Ohio State's No. 2-ranked recruiting class of 2002, recalled by managing editor Mark Rea in this issue of BSB, lived up to its ranking.

What can you say about a class that contained future Heisman Trophy winner Troy Smith as a late throw-in, a player who it was thought might even be switched from the quarterback position? It also had linebacker A.J. Hawk, who would go on to win the Lombardi Award, as one of the more lightly regarded members of the group.

Offensive tackle Derek Morris, one of the most highly rated recruits that year, never played a down for the Buckeyes. Yet ample firepower remained.

Among the big names in that recruiting class of 2002 in addition to Smith and Hawk were Bobby Carpenter, Maurice Claret, Santonio Holmes and Nick Mangold. But there were plenty of other major contributors on the list.

Tressel was able to corral the top five prep players from the state of Ohio that year and

eight of the top 10 from the Buckeye State. But the thing that struck me as I reviewed the class was how deep the Florida high school talent must have been that recruiting season.

Holmes, who starred with the Buckeyes and would go on to win a Super Bowl MVP award with the Pittsburgh Steelers, was ranked just No. 31 in the Sunshine State in 2002. The Buckeyes' other recruit from Florida, safety Nate Salley, was ranked 83rd in the state. Yet Salley was good enough to start three years for the Buckeyes and was a fourth-round pick by the NFL's Carolina Panthers after his collegiate career was over.

There were 14 players from Florida in the 2002 national top 100, including four of the top 10. Not that Ohio wasn't represented on the national list. Six players from the Buckeye State were listed and five of those – linebacker Mike D'Andrea (29th), Claret (37th), quarterback Justin Zwick (40th), offensive lineman Doug Datish (68th) and defensive tackle Quinn Pitcock (72nd) – chose Ohio State. Only Cincinnati Reading running back DeShawn Wynn (48th) chose to go elsewhere, oddly enough picking Florida.

Interestingly, despite all that talent available, Florida did not make the top 10 in BSB's consensus recruiting poll that year. The Gators had to overcome the departure of the highly successful Steve Spurrier on Jan. 2, 2002, to the NFL's Washington Redskins, leaving newly hired Ron Zook to try to pick up the recruiting pieces. Miami (Fla.) was fourth and Florida State finished sixth in the poll of recruiting experts.

A Solid Throw-In

In another historic recruiting note in this issue, "A Look Back at Recruiting From the Pages of BSB" on page 24 notes that defensive back Vinnie Clark was considered by many to be a throw-in as part of a package deal with highly rated running back Carlos Snow in 1987.

You have to remember that this was back in the days before the proliferation of recruiting services and not much was known about players beyond the obvious superstars such as Snow. While Cincinnati Academy of Physical Education head coach Steve Sheehan might have tried to downplay the notion of Clark being a throw-in with Snow, I remember quite clearly that was the perception. It certainly was my perception at the time.

By the time their playing days were over, it was quite easy to make the case that Clark had the better overall career. He was a three-year starter for the Buckeyes and wound up good enough to become a first-round draft choice of the Green Bay Packers. Clark later enjoyed a six-year NFL career with four different teams.

Not that Snow, who had a star-crossed career with the Buckeyes, was shabby as a collegian. When he was not battling knee injuries or a benign hip tumor, Snow racked up 2,974 yards rushing, still good for seventh on Ohio State's all-time list.

He also turned in one of the most exciting plays in one of the most storied games in the OSU-Michigan rivalry. As a freshman in 1987, Snow took a short pass and turned it into a 70-yard touchdown, capping the play with a dazzling move on Wolverine safety Doug Mallory

during the Buckeyes' 23-20 win in Earle Bruce's final game as head coach.

About the only other time I remember an Ohio State player being considered part of a package deal and having a career to match that of the targeted recruit was when little-known Ron Stokes was considered a throw-in out of Canton (Ohio) McKinley along with more-heralded teammate Troy Taylor when the two arrived in Columbus for the 1981-82 basketball season.

Taylor had a fine career as a Buckeye, but Stokes, who is now a popular color analyst for Ohio State basketball radio broadcasts, had a career nearly as good as his high school teammate.

Taylor is currently 18th on OSU's all-time scoring list with 1,497 points and fifth with 421 assists, while Stokes is 30th in scoring with 1,240 points and sixth with 419 assists.

Mr. Travel Passes

I lost a dear friend March 18 with the passing of Richard Lewis, affectionately known as "Mr. Travel." He was 86.

Many of you probably knew Richard since he literally sent thousands of Buckeye fans on Rose Bowl trips back in that bowl game's heyday through his Richard Lewis Travel in the old Lazarus department store in downtown Columbus.

I guess that was one of the things that he and I shared – our longing for those pre-BCS days when the Rose Bowl really meant something to Buckeye fans and our sadness over the fact that younger fans would never truly understand why that game was "The Granddaddy of Them All."

We also shared the fact that we were both in industries – travel and newspapers – that have been radically changed by the Internet in recent years.

Richard, who loved to travel himself, hated the fact that many now consider a trip to an all-inclusive resort the ultimate vacation, eschewing the more time-honored trips to Europe and beyond.

In addition to travel, Richard enjoyed playing golf. He recorded nine holes in one, including one as recently as last summer. He and his lovely wife, Elaine, also enjoyed entertaining and were extremely gracious hosts.

He was a decorated war hero who served in both World War II and the Korean War and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. At the height of his travel career, he had offices in Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati, Louisville, Houston, San Francisco and London, England.

I will miss bumping into Richard walking briskly up nearby Grandview Avenue between the post office and The Quickprint Centre, chance encounters where we would stop and chat for a minute or two – or usually longer.

Mostly, I'll just miss Richard Lewis, Mr. Travel.

Final Four, Spring Coverage

The next print issue of BSB is scheduled to be mailed April 10, eight days after the national championship basketball game and 13 days after the start of spring football practice.

There is no reason to wait that long to read about the basketball or football teams or any of the other Ohio State sports action, as we will have a complete electronic issue posted April 3. Other electronic issues will be posted April 17 and 20 as well as May 1, 8, 15 and 22. The last spring print issue is scheduled to be mailed April 24.

If you haven't already signed up to enjoy our additional electronic issues, free to all BSB print subscribers, see the instructions on page 5.

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

End Of The Line: Ohio State Falls In Semis

By MARK REA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

In the land of voodoo and black magic, 13 proved to be a most unlucky number for the Ohio State basketball team.

The Buckeyes squandered several first-half leads of 13 points and then allowed Kansas to put together a pair of 13-4 runs in the second half, all of which resulted in a 64-62 loss to the Jayhawks on March 31 and a bow from the NCAA Tournament before a crowd of 73,361 at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans.

Ohio State initially took a 13-point lead after sophomore forward Deshaun Thomas scored off an offensive rebound to make it 26-13 at the 6:11 mark of the opening half. It was the first of five separate times that the Buckeyes held a lead of 13 points, including a 34-21 cushion following a pair of free throws from sophomore guard Lenzelle Smith Jr. with only 42 seconds left in the first half.

But some sloppy play in the final seconds of the first half allowed Kansas to cut its deficit to nine points at the break, and then the Jayhawks used their pair of 13-4 runs in the second half to gain the advantage.

The first of those critical spurts came during the initial six minutes that wiped out OSU's 34-25 halftime lead and made it a 38-38 contest at the 14:06 mark. And the second came down the stretch during a four-plus-minute run as Kansas overcame a 55-49 deficit with 5:22 to go and went on top by a 62-59 margin with 1:12 remaining.

Ohio State still had a chance to grab victory in the waning seconds. Senior guard William Buford slammed home an offensive rebound to make it 62-61 with 9.6 seconds left, and the Buckeyes had one final possession after Kansas senior point guard Tyshawn Taylor bagged a pair of free throws to put his team ahead by three again at 64-61 with 8.3 seconds showing on the clock.

Taylor intercepted OSU's inbounds pass but promptly threw the ball away. Still, it cut the Buckeyes' margin for error down to a precious 3.8 seconds, and Kansas head coach Bill Self instructed his players to foul sophomore point guard Aaron Craft to prevent a last-second three-point shot.

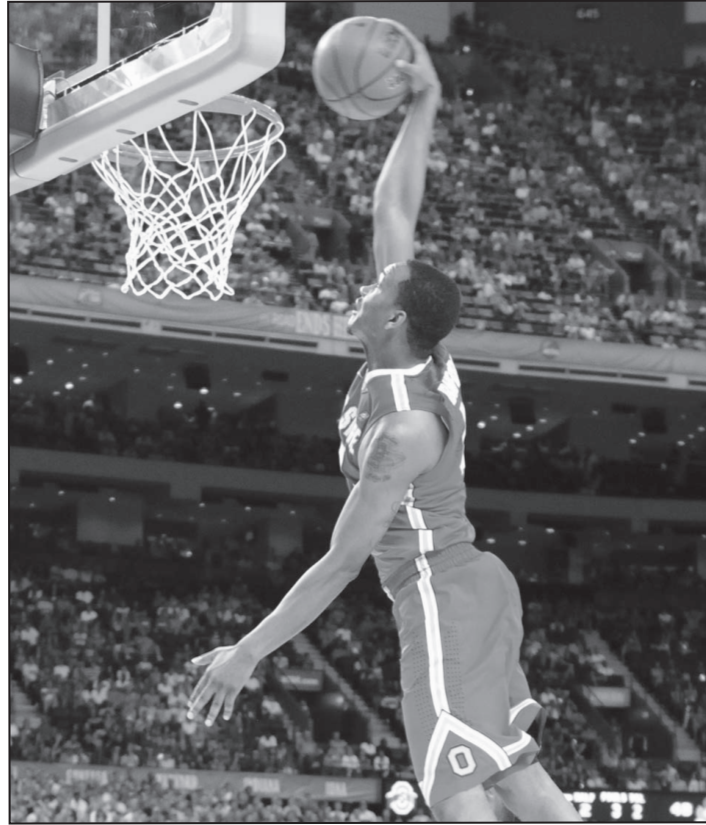
With 2.9 seconds remaining, Craft made the opening end of his one-and-one, but he was whistled for a lane violation when he crossed the foul line too early after trying to intentionally miss his second free throw. While Craft and some of his teammates attempted to plead their case with officials, the Jayhawks inbounded the ball and the final seconds ticked away.

Ohio State head coach Thad Matta acknowledged after the game that it was a contest featuring two distinct halves.

"I thought we played the first half very effectively," Matta said. "In the second half, obviously we didn't shoot the ball to the level we needed to. I thought Kansas was much more active defensively – using their athleticism – and our execution wasn't as good. We didn't get as clean of looks as we needed."

"Down the stretch as this tournament goes, it comes down to making some plays. Give them credit. They did a great job of finishing whereas when we had the ball and had some great shots, it wasn't able to go in for us."

Buford finished his college career by leading four Buckeyes in double figures with a game high-tying 19 points on 6-of-10 shooting from the floor. Sophomore All-



SONNY BROCKWAY

ONE LAST TIME – Senior William Buford ended his Ohio State career by leading the Buckeyes with 19 points March 31 in a 64-62 loss to Kansas in a national semifinal.

American Jared Sullinger added 13 points to go along with a game-high 11 rebounds, but he seemed to struggle with the Jayhawks' length and made only five of his 19 shots from the field. Craft tallied 11 points, three assists and three steals, and Smith chipped in with 10 points.

Thomas was limited to just nine points on 3-of-14 shooting and played only 23 minutes because of foul problems. He sat for nearly five minutes after picking up his third foul at the 17:36 mark of the second half and then rode the pine nearly 7½ more minutes after being whistled for his fourth personal with 11:30 remaining in the game.

"Deshaun only playing 23 minutes tonight hurt us because they were able to sit (7-foot center Jeff) Withey down there and allowed him to double-team Jared," Matta said. "The game plan going in was we were going to have to spread Jared out and give him time to work, but also Deshaun (gave us) the opportunity to stretch the defense. That was probably the biggest advantage I think that they had on us."

In addition to foul problems, the Buckeyes were bedeviled by their own poor shooting. After making 12 of their first 25 shots in the game, they went ice cold thereafter, finishing 20 for 59 (33.9 percent) for the game. That included an 0-for-10 streak to start the second half that allowed Kansas to get back in it.

The Jayhawks were led by All-America junior forward Thomas Robinson, who had 19 points and eight rebounds. Junior guards Travis Releford and Elijah Johnson added 15 and 13 points, respectively, combining

to make 11 of 16 shots from the floor. Kansas shot 25 for 56 (44.6 percent) for the game. That included a 14-for-26 performance (53.8 percent) in the second half while the Buckeyes were shooting 8 for 33 (24.2 percent).

"They dominated us the first half," Self told reporters after the game. "We were playing in quicksand it looked like. But then the light came on and we were much more aggressive the second half. They missed some shots, we controlled the glass, were able to play through our bigs, and get out and run. The biggest thing is we got stops and rebounded."

The Jayhawks dominated the Buckeyes on the glass by a 42-30 margin. That allowed Kansas to hold a lopsided 32-16 scoring advantage in the paint.

"It is what it is," Sullinger said when asked about the rebounding margin, which included a 23-15 edge for the Jayhawks in the second half. "We had a chance to control the game, but we didn't. But you also have to give all the credit to Kansas. They came out and played hard in the second half. They just wanted it more, it seemed like."

The Buckeyes spotted Kansas the game's first two points but were clearly the first-half aggressors from that point on. Smith bagged a three-pointer at the 18:00 mark to give OSU its first lead at 3-2, and it was an advantage the Buckeyes kept throughout the opening 20 minutes.

Ohio State used a 10-2 run midway through the half to take that first 13-point lead at 26-13 at the 6:11 mark, and it managed to preserve that cushion almost until

Kansas 64, Ohio State 62

		March 31, 2012		Mercedes-Benz Superdome: New Orleans	
Ohio State (31-8)	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A PF Pts.
Sullinger	39	5-19	3-4	6-5	2 3 13
Thomas	23	3-14	2-2	2-2	1 4 9
Craft	40	4-11	1-1	0-0	3 2 11
Smith Jr.	34	2-5	4-4	0-4	2 1 10
Buford	35	6-10	4-4	2-5	1 3 19
Thompson	12	0-0	0-0	0-2	1 1 0
Williams	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0 0 0
Ravenel	14	0-0	0-0	0-2	1 3 0
Totals	200	20-59	14-15	10-20	11 17 62

Percentages: FG: 33.9%, FT: 93.3%, **3-point goals:** 8-22 (Sullinger 0-2, Thomas 1-7, Craft 2-3, Smith Jr. 2-5, Buford 3-5). **Team rebounds:** None. **Blocked shots:** 7 (Sullinger 3, Thompson 3, Ravenel). **Turnovers:** 12 (Buford 3, Sullinger 2, Craft 2, Smith Jr. 2, Thomas, Williams, Ravenel). **Steals:** 7 (Craft 3, Sullinger, Smith Jr., Buford, Williams).

		Total FG FT		Reb.	
Kansas (32-6)	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A PF Pts.
Robinson	35	8-18	3-6	3-5	0 1 19
Releford	38	5-7	4-4	2-4	1 1 15
Withey	34	2-4	0-0	1-7	0 2 4
Taylor	37	3-11	4-4	0-3	9 1 10
Johnson	28	6-9	0-0	1-9	1 4 13
Teahan	17	1-5	0-0	1-0	2 2 3
Young	11	0-2	0-0	4-1	1 4 0
Totals	200	25-56	11-14	12-30	14 15 64

Percentages: FG: 44.6%, FT: 78.6%, **3-point goals:** 3-11 (Releford 1-1, Taylor 0-3, Johnson 1-3, Teahan 1-4). **Team rebounds:** 1. **Blocked shots:** 8 (Withey 7, Young). **Turnovers:** 17 (Taylor 5, Withey 4, Johnson 4, Robinson 2, Young 2). **Steals:** 5 (Releford 2, Robinson, Withey, Taylor). **Halftime:** Ohio State 34, Kansas 25. **Officials:** Luckie, Eades, Adams. **A:** 73,361.

the break. But after Smith hit his pair of free throws to make it 34-21 with 42 seconds left, some uncharacteristic mental errors cost the Buckeyes their double-digit lead.

Craft was whistled for a foul on a Taylor drive, and the Kansas senior point guard converted both ends of a one-and-one to make it 34-23 with 23.6 seconds on the clock. Then after OSU called a timeout to set up a final play, Craft's drive to the basket was swatted away by Withey – one of seven blocks in the game for the Kansas center – and the Jayhawks had just enough time to get a layup the other way from Releford.

Those two points, which came just a whisker before the buzzer, allowed Kansas to pull within nine at 34-25 at halftime and seemed to rejuvenate the Jayhawks.

Johnson and Robinson led the way for their team as the second half began, accounting for 11 of their team's points during the initial 13-4 run that tied the game at 38.

The Buckeyes seemed to weather that storm, however, and moved back up by six at 55-49 when Sullinger hit a pair of free throws at the 5:22 mark. OSU made 14 of 15 attempts (93.3 percent) at the foul line in the contest; Kansas was 11 for 14 (78.6 percent).

But after Sullinger's foul shots, the Jayhawks went on their second 13-4 run, this one capped by a hard-running layup from Johnson that made it 62-59 with 1:12 remaining and set up the frenetic last few seconds.

Ohio State finished the 2011-12 season with a 31-8 record and fell in the national semifinals for the sixth time in 11 trips to the Final Four. The 1959-60 team remains the only team in program history to win the NCAA Tournament championship.

Kansas (32-6) advanced to play tournament overall No. 1 seed Kentucky (37-2) in the championship game played April 2. The Wildcats had taken a 69-61 victory over Louisville in the other national semifinal game played March 31.

Full coverage of Ohio State's Final Four appearance was published in BSB's April 3 electronic issue. To sign up to read the electronic issues online, see the instructions on page 5.

Still Work To Do If Matta's Men Want To Be Elite

I've given a lot of thought to the Ohio State basketball team and basketball program in the days since the Buckeyes' loss to Kansas at the Final Four in New Orleans. I have come to the conclusion that Ohio State is just a notch below the traditional basketball powers such as Kentucky, Duke, North Carolina and Kansas.

That's not a bad thing. You have to have decades of consistent success to get to the level of some of those powers – just as Ohio State has done in football. The basketball Buckeyes have had plenty of ups and downs in the time since Fred Taylor led them to their only national championship in 1960, keeping them out of the current power elite.

Since Thad Matta took over in 2004, it has been pretty much all ups, however, including five Big Ten championships, three conference tournament titles and two trips to the Final Four. Matta has also upgraded recruiting substantially.

Despite all that success, though, the program has a way to go before it is mentioned in the same breath as the aforementioned schools. Those programs are tossing a nationwide net around prep talent year after year and are almost always in the discussion when it comes to the best teams in the country.

But the Buckeyes are certainly headed in the right direction, and I was a little surprised at the disappointment from some fans with the 2011-12 season, especially given where the team was in mid-February and how much lower the expectations were from those same fans during that stretch of Ohio State struggles.

No one is happy with the loss to Kansas in the national semifinals, but I figured that if Ohio State was to win that game, the team would have to be firing on all cylinders. Instead, Deshaun Thomas – who I noted in this space in our last issue had become the team's second offensive option after Jared Sullinger in lieu of the struggling William Buford – had problems from the field and with fouls and was limited to only nine points on 3-of-14 shooting, including just 1-of-7 from beyond the arc in only 23 minutes of action.

Despite Thomas' limited output, after an impressive clutch offensive rebound and dunk by Buford, the Buckeyes trailed Kansas by just one point at 62-61 with nine seconds remaining. It was ironic that Buford, the target of much fan criticism throughout the season, turned in the type of performance that could have helped Ohio State to the championship game. His last-second slam gave him 19 points on the night and seven rebounds. An extra bucket or two by Thomas, who had been one of the stars of the entire tournament up to that point, and the Buckeyes would have advanced to face powerful Kentucky.

I also found it ironic that Aaron Craft, known for his relentless hustle, was just a little too quick leaving the foul line in an attempt to corral his own intentional miss of a free throw in an effort to tie the game in the waning seconds. I saw irony again when the sophomore guard, who is like another coach on the court, had his back to the action, questioning the lane violation, as the Jayhawks played out the final seconds of the game.

Craft's questioning of the call was a somewhat ironic ending to the season, given that much of the team's problems during its February meltdown could be attributed to Sullinger being bothered by officiating calls and/or noncalls.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Had the Buckeyes advanced past Kansas, many figured they would be simply sacrificial lambs for the eventual champion Wildcats, acknowledged by virtually everyone as the best team in college basketball this season. But if you can make it to that final game, you never know. You never know who might go cold or get into foul trouble as Thomas did. You get to that final game and you always have a shot, which can really be said for virtually any round of March Madness.

To make it all the way through the bracket is really tough. Once you get past the bottom-feeders in the opening round, virtually any team can win any game if it gets hot or its more highly-rated opponent gets cold. I suspect that such teams as Duke, North Carolina, Syracuse, Missouri or even archrival Michigan State would gladly swap positions with the Buckeyes and taken that trip to New Orleans.

There is no question Ohio State needs to take that last step and bring home the big prize for the first time in more than 50 years. But there is no reason to minimize what the team achieved this season and has achieved in the past eight seasons.

The Buckeyes got a big boost toward reaching that ultimate goal when Thomas announced he would return for his junior season. I was concerned that seeing how Buford's fortunes changed over the course of his senior year might have given Thomas cause for concern about coming back for another go-round. But he still needs work on aspects of his game, especially defense – though he has improved mightily there – and the sky is the limit for him offensively next season with Sullinger and Buford gone. It's probably a good move for him to come back.

As for Sullinger, he has proved what he can do on the college level. OSU fans should be happy they got a second year from him and a trip to the Final Four. Let the man earn his living.

And for those who question whether Matta is the coach to take the Buckeyes to the top, let's be appreciative of where he has taken the program so far and we will see what the future will bring.

As stated previously, it takes years of continued success to get to the level of the likes of Kentucky, Duke, North Carolina and Kansas. Ohio State may be at just the beginning of the journey.

Spring Event Returns

It was great to see the return of what is now known as Coach Meyer's Spring Kickoff after a brief hiatus.

The event, started by former Ohio State head coach John Cooper and carried on by his successor Jim Tressel, has benefitted the fight against Alzheimer's disease in one way or another and brought Buckeye fans together during the spring since the early 1990s.

This year's event was special not only because it marked the return of the gathering, but it was one of the first opportunities for many fans to see new head coach Urban Meyer, who has obviously created quite a buzz around the football program.

Interestingly, to hear Meyer tell it at the event, he might have never started on the path that led him to Columbus if not for the prodding of former coach Earle Bruce and former OSU assistant and Notre Dame head coach Lou Holtz.

Meyer was an assistant for the Fighting Irish at the time the head coaching job at Bowling Green came open, and while Bruce pushed Meyer to take the job, Meyer expressed his reluctance to take it. Holtz, who was head man over Meyer for one season in South Bend, also encouraged Meyer to pursue the job with the Falcons, who were coming off a 2-9 season in 2000 and six straight losing campaigns.

Meyer complained to Holtz that the Bowling Green coaching position wasn't a very good job.

"Of course it's not a good job," Holtz told Meyer. "If it was a good job, do you think they would be interested in hiring you?"

Meyer eventually took the job and posted a 17-6 record in two seasons at BG before going on to even greater success at Utah and two national championships at Florida before he was hired by Ohio State last November.

One thing I appreciated at the Spring Kickoff was the fact Meyer and the event organizers paid a certain amount of respect to Tressel, who was deposed last spring for major NCAA violations.

Tressel's transgressions were obviously serious enough to merit his ouster. However, there are times when I feel like he was thrown under the bus, and in an effort – somewhat unsuccessfully, I might add – to limit NCAA sanctions, the university completely divorced itself from a coach who had brought the school much success and acclaim before his ultimate downfall. I also believe that many Buckeye fans, in their excitement over the hiring of Meyer, have also forgotten Tressel's accomplishments.

That does not seem to be the case with Meyer, who went out of his way at the luncheon to note that Tressel's tenure "may have been the best 10 years in our history" and assured the crowd that Tressel "left things in fine shape."

Tressel was included in a pair of special photos with Cooper, Bruce and Meyer that raised thousands of dollars in live auctions at the Spring Kickoff.

Speaking of the auction, I wanted to commend longtime WBNS-TV sports anchor Dom Tiberi for the terrific job he did as auctioneer. Having been to this event many times, as well as other such events that included a live auction – I was once even called on to be the auctioneer myself and failed miserably – I have seen many a media type get put in the position of auctioneer and struggle with the task, raising far less money than might have been expected. Tiberi kept the bids moving and helped raise thousands of additional dollars for a worthy cause.

With roughly 1,000 people attending the event on the practice field inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, I suspect that Coach Meyer's Spring Kickoff is back to stay, and I know many Buckeye fans are pleased it is back and already looking forward to next spring's gathering.

Watch Buckeye Sports Bulletin for news of the 2013 event.

Those Were The (Special) Days

Former ESPN and current Golf Channel personality Erik Kuselias made an interesting analogy during a recent appearance on Columbus radio station 97.1 The Fan.

Kuselias and host Adam Neft were talking about how Major League Baseball had Opening Day in Japan with Oakland and Seattle on March 28 before those two teams returned to the U.S. and their regular exhibition schedules. Then the St. Louis Cardinals traveled to Miami and its new ballpark for another opening day April 4 before the Marlins traveled the next day to Cincinnati for the more traditional Opening Day on April 5, a day which featured openers for many of the other major league teams.

Kuselias noted, "Opening Day has gone the way of New Year's Day in college football."

New Year's Day used to be the most special day of the year in college football, with multiple major bowl games running from morning to night. Now it is just another day in a drawn-out, watered-down bowl season. Similarly, Opening Day in baseball used to be a special rite of spring. Now it's hard to figure out when Opening Day even is.

How 'Bout Those Bobcats

Congratulations to Ohio University for their fine performance in the NCAA Tournament. Buckeye Sports Bulletin has always been somewhat of a Bobcat office with such staffers as Darrell Dawson and Ron Friedman having attended OU.

I know that most of you enjoyed Ohio's victory over Michigan, not only because it was a win by a school from the Buckeye State over Ohio State's rival, but because of this ridiculous thing with U-M football coach Brady Hoke and others in Ann Arbor referring to OSU as "Ohio." Now the Wolverines have been beaten by the real Ohio.

I know the legendary Woody Hayes referred to Michigan as "That School Up North," but that's different than calling a rival by a name that isn't. I find calling Ohio State simply "Ohio" kind of childish.

I will continue to repeat that I can live with Ohio State not being able to go to a bowl game following this season. I just want the Buckeyes to beat Michigan. That will be bowl game enough for me this year. You've got to nip the Wolverines' arrogance in the bud.

We'll see if Hoke still practices the Ohio nonsense if the Buckeyes administer a whipping in Ohio Stadium on Nov. 24.

2002 Offensive Preview

This issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin features a spring preview of the 2002 Ohio State defense, reprinted from our March 30, 2002, issue as part of our 10th anniversary celebration of Buckeyes' 2002 national championship.

A spring preview of the 2002 offense ran in our April 3 electronic issue, and that featured some interesting position battles. Craig Krenzler and Scott McMullen were vying for the starting quarterback spot, and the running back race was spiced up by the presence of an early arriving freshman named Maurice Claret.

The 2002 spring offensive preview is archived online if you missed it. If you haven't already signed up to enjoy BSB's electronic offerings, see the instructions and schedule on page 5.