

## 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 inbound 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.

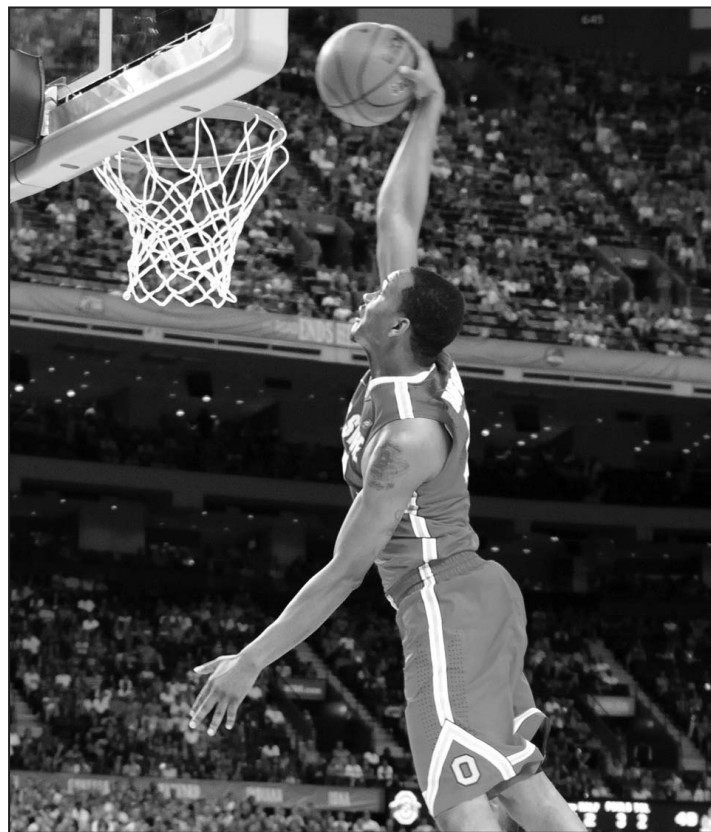
With 2.9 seconds remaining, Craft made the opening end of his one-and-one, but he was whistled for a lane violation when he crossed the foul line too early after trying to intentionally miss his second free throw. While Craft and some of his teammates attempted to plead their case with officials, the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

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 it 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 Krenzel 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 Clarett.

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.



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# Thomas To Return For Junior Season At OSU

Deshaun Thomas has had the NBA on his mind since the moment he stepped foot on Ohio State's campus. That doesn't mean he's ready to realize his lifelong dream of playing professional basketball.

Instead of becoming the second Ohio State underclassman in a three-day span to declare for the NBA draft, on April 6 Thomas announced his intention to return for his junior season.

Thomas, who was one of the essential pieces in Ohio State's Final Four run, sees the potential for the Buckeyes to make another deep run in the NCAA Tournament even with the early departure of big man Jared Sullinger.

## COURT REPORT

Ari Wasserman

"We have a great team returning next season, and I want to be a part of another championship run," Thomas said in a statement. "My family, my coaches and I looked at my future as a professional, but I love being a Buckeye and want to continue my education and development as a player and as a person at Ohio State."

In the time since the Buckeyes' season ended March 30 with a national semifinal loss to Kansas, head coach Thad Matta gathered feedback from sources in the NBA to see where Thomas stood as a draft prospect. Thomas, however, recognized he still has strides to make in college.

"Deshaun, his family and our coaching staff have spent the last week evaluating his future," Matta said. "Deshaun determined he wants to remain a Buckeye. We are looking forward to building on the success our team enjoyed in 2011-12 with Deshaun playing a significant role next year."

Thomas was Ohio State's second-leading scorer (15.9 points per game) and rebounder (5.4) behind only Sullinger. Without the big man in the Buckeyes' lineup next year, the Fort Wayne (Ind.) Bishop Luers product figures to be the team's top scoring option.

The situation in which Thomas finds himself is comparable to the decision former Buckeye All-American Evan Turner made three years ago. After Turner's sophomore season – a year during which he averaged 17.3 points and 7.1 rebounds – he was a fringe first-round selection.

Turner opted to return for his junior season and eventually developed into one of the most complete players in college basketball. As a junior, Turner averaged 20.4 points and 9.2 rebounds per game before being selected as the 2010 national player of the year.

He eventually was selected by the Philadelphia 76ers with the No. 2 overall pick in the 2010 NBA draft, making his decision to return for an additional season a rather lucrative one.

Thomas has the potential to follow in Turner's footsteps, specifically after the performance he put on during Ohio State's most recent NCAA Tournament run. Thomas averaged more than 22 points per game during the first four rounds of the tournament before being a nonfactor in Ohio State's 64-62 loss to Kansas while saddled with foul trouble.

He has improved each season he's been in Columbus. Coming into Ohio State as the No. 3 all-time scorer in Indiana high school basketball



SONNY BROCKWAY PHOTOS

**AS FOR NEXT YEAR ... – While Deshaun Thomas (1) has already announced his intention to return for his junior campaign at Ohio State, sophomore Jordan Sibert (2, right) is not so certain about his future as a Buckeye.**

history, Thomas averaged only 7.5 points and 3.5 rebounds per game as a freshman. But he was a bench player during his first season, playing only 14 minutes per contest.

Making similar strides next season could mean pretty impressive numbers for Thomas, especially now that he'll have more opportunity without Sullinger in the lineup to do his favorite thing – shoot the basketball.

Thomas' return should make the Buckeyes one of the preseason favorites to repeat as Big Ten champions next season. The spotlight will be on him, but it will be up to him to perform.

"If I do have an opportunity to play basketball professionally, I want to have an immediate impact," Thomas said. "Working with my teammates and coaches at Ohio State will help me achieve my future goals."

### Sibert To Explore Options

Jordan Sibert had a vision before the season. He would have an integral role coming off the bench for an Ohio State team that would make his first trip to the Final Four since 2007.

The sophomore from Cincinnati Princeton turned out to be only half right.

Though the Buckeyes' season culminated in a Final Four berth, Sibert didn't come off the bench consistently to help the team get there.

"It was a great year as far as the team and as far as everything we accomplished," Sibert told BSB. "Personally, it was rough not being out there as much as I wanted to and feeling disappointed in myself and feeling kind of bad. In the end, though, it is a team thing. It isn't individual."

During the weeks leading into the season, Sibert seemed part of the plan to help the Buckeyes overcome the loss of three-point sharpshooter Jon Diebler. Sibert said he envisioned he would be a player who could come off the bench and knock down critical shots for his team in times of need.

Sibert, however, was inconsistent with his shooting during the early portions of the season and saw his playing time dwindle. Sibert averaged 8.4 minutes a game during the Big Ten season, but he appeared in only 24 of Ohio State's 39 games over the course of the entire year.

Unhappy with his situation this past year, he said he always maintained a mind-set that concentrated solely on getting better. With his name floating around as a player who might look into a transfer, Sibert acknowledged he would explore his options.

"Everything is into consideration," he said. "You gather yourself, you weigh out all of your options, and you go from there."

With William Buford departing, there should be ample opportunity for players



such as Sibert to play into expanded roles next season.

Sibert, of course, understands that he'll have to grow in the areas of concern if he's going to earn a major role with the Buckeyes. Three-point shooting was supposed to be his niche on this year's team, but he made only 13 of his 50 attempts (26.0 percent) this season from behind the arc.

"I definitely need to focus on being more consistent shooting in games and in practices," Sibert said. "Defensively, I need to be more active on the ball. I think I am definitely making improvements. People didn't get to see it on the court, but ... my teammates and even coaches can agree that I've been making strides."

### Parker Set To Announce

Ohio State has yet to secure a commitment in its 2012 recruiting class, but the coaching staff will know soon if that's going to change. That is because five-star center prospect Tony Parker was scheduled to make his college choice public sometime in April.

Parker, a 6-8, 255-pounder from Lithonia (Ga.) Miller Grove, has narrowed his choices to five schools.

"I'm talking a lot with my parents and trying to see what I want to do," said Parker, who is considering Georgia, Kansas, Ohio

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State, UCLA and Duke. "I think I'm going to make a great decision and whatever school I'm going to is going to be a great atmosphere, a great school and a great place to grow and become a man."

One of five uncommitted players to play in the annual McDonald's All-American Game this year, Parker scored 10 points and grabbed seven rebounds for the East during a 106-102 loss to the West. The game was played March 28 at the United Center in Chicago, home of the NBA's Chicago Bulls.

"It's been one of the best experiences of my life," Parker said. "To come out here with these great basketball players in such a prestigious event and having fun and playing with the guys that I've been playing with all summer on the same team and against them is great."

Sources close to the situation have indicated to BSB that Parker would love to be a Buckeye, but there could be some disagreements within his family regarding what college presents the best situation for him.

Parker was scheduled to announce his college decision April 11, but that date seems to be in flux.

"I'll probably make my decision in the month of April," he said. "I don't think I'll take any more visits or anything else."

As Parker continued to mull over his decision, the Buckeyes have been eliminated from the competition for Wynnewood (Pa.) Friends Central power forward Amile Jefferson.

The five-star prospect, who also played in the McDonald's All-American game, has narrowed his choices to Duke, Kentucky, North Carolina State and Villanova. Scout.com rates Jefferson the nation's No. 3 power forward in the 2012 class.

#### OSU On Guard's Radar

Even as the Ohio State staff hopes to land a commitment in the 2012 class, the recruiting game never stops. The Buckeyes have surfaced as one of the schools of interest in the recruitment of Tyus Jones, the nation's top-ranked point guard in the 2014 class.

Jones, a native of Apple Valley, Minn., just completed his sophomore season but has become one of the most coveted players in high school basketball. The 6-0, 175-pound prospect has already picked up seven scholarship offers from some of the top college programs in the country.

Ohio State is one of those schools that has tried to get in early on the electrifying guard, who also has scholarship offers from Arizona, Baylor, Duke, Iowa, Michigan State and Minnesota.

"I think I had a good high school year," Jones told Scout national recruiting analyst Brian Snow. "I was focused on becoming more of a leader. I wanted to be more vocal because I know a point guard has to be a leader. It just means being more vocal and also focusing on defense. The little things like boxing out were a focus for me."

Though Jones has heard extensively from the programs that have issued him a scholarship offer, the No. 5 overall player in the 2014 class said the Buckeyes are starting to stand out.

"Ohio State, I like them quite a bit," Jones said. "Coach Matta is a real good coach and I have a good relationship with him. They let their point guards be leaders on the floor. It looks like their point guard has freedom to make calls and play their game. I think that is good for me and good for any point guard."

Battling with Duke has become a common occurrence for Ohio State in the recent years – see the Parker situation – and if the

## 2011-12 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

### 31-8 Overall (13-5 Big Ten) End Of Season Statistics

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Rebounds			PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
								Pct.	Off.-Def.	Total-Avg.						
Jared Sullinger	37-36	1123-30.4	228-439	.519	16-40	.400	175-228	.768	116-224	340-9.2	109-1	46	71	39	43	647-17.5
Deshawn Thomas	39-39	1224-31.4	243-467	.520	50-145	.345	83-111	.748	100-109	209-5.4	65-0	35	47	9	15	619-15.9
William Buford	39-39	1320-33.8	205-489	.419	62-173	.358	94-113	.832	35-159	194-5.0	71-0	104	84	9	33	566-14.5
Aaron Craft	39-39	1255-32.2	115-230	.500	23-64	.359	92-129	.713	22-104	126-3.2	96-2	181	84	7	98	345-8.8
Lenzelle Smith Jr.	39-39	992-25.4	88-186	.473	31-82	.378	57-91	.626	51-129	180-4.6	75-0	78	48	5	35	264-6.8
Evan Ravenel	39-3	397-10.2	46-85	.541	0-0	.000	41-59	.695	31-53	84-2.2	72-1	10	29	9	10	133-3.4
J.D. Weatherspoon	25-0	157-6.3	29-47	.617	0-2	.000	18-31	.581	16-11	27-1.1	8-0	4	8	4	6	76-3.0
Jordan Sibert	24-0	273-11.4	24-79	.304	13-50	.260	10-18	.556	5-28	33-1.4	21-0	18	14	1	11	71-3.0
Sam Thompson	39-0	413-10.6	34-69	.493	1-14	.071	12-22	.545	10-32	42-1.1	35-0	28	19	17	7	81-2.1
LaQuinton Ross	9-0	35-3.9	5-15	.333	2-8	.250	6-7	.857	0-4	4-0.4	5-0	1	3	0	0	18-2.0
Amir Williams	29-0	191-6.6	19-36	.528	0-0	.000	10-28	.357	27-35	62-2.1	23-0	2	9	23	5	48-1.7
Shannon Scott	36-0	382-10.6	20-71	.282	1-18	.056	2-9	.222	4-34	38-1.1	47-0	60	36	2	18	43-1.2
Trey McDonald	13-0	38-2.9	1-6	.167	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	3-3	6-0.5	3-0	1	4	0	0	2-0.2
TEAM									45-50	95-2.4			3			
Ohio State	39	7800	1057-2219	.476	199-596	.334	600-846	.709	465-975	1440-36.9	630-4	568	459	125	281	2913-74.7
Opponents	39	7800	840-2062	.407	234-721	.325	419-599	.700	327-832	1159-29.7	732-16	397	579	117	192	2333-59.8

Buckeyes want to land Jones, they're most certainly going to have to beat out the Blue Devils.

"To be recruited by Duke is a great feeling, a humbling feeling," Jones said. "Coach (Mike Krzyzewski) is one of the best coaches of all time. I like Duke a lot. They always have great guards, and Coach K really does a great job of with them. Coach K is a great guy and a great coach, and I really like talking to him."

Another intriguing program for Jones is Arizona as the Wildcats attempt to return to the prominence they enjoyed for many years under former head coach Lute Olson. Now Sean Miller is in charge of that task, and landing Jones could be a huge step in accomplishing that goal.

"Coach Miller is a younger coach, and he is looking to get guys in there who want to compete," Jones said. "Arizona has been known for their point guards, and they like to get out and run. I think their style fits me very well."

One of Ohio State's chief Big Ten rivals is also in the mix.

"Michigan State is a winning program," Jones said. "Coach Tom Izzo is a phenomenal coach who always has his team ready and they compete. They go to the Final Four like one out of every four years, and I like their style of play a lot."

As one of the best players in the country, regardless of age, Jones just hopes to continue to improve.

"It is very humbling," Jones said. "It is always good to know that people have good things to say about you. It makes me want to work that much harder to make sure I am the best that I can be. You always want to play at a level that is up to the best of your ability."

#### Oden Not Retiring

After suffering repeated knee injuries since leaving Ohio State, Greg Oden's time with the Portland Trail Blazers has come to an end. However, his agent, Mike Conley Sr., is quick to make sure people know Oden is far from giving up on basketball.

"Everyone is quick to talk bust, but put themselves in his shoes," Conley told Comcast SportsNet Northwest. "He has gone through a lot as a young man and he is continuing to work to get back. For him to come back is going to be a remarkable perseverance on his behalf."

Oden has gone through five major knee surgeries since the Blazers drafted him with the No. 1 overall pick in the 2007 NBA draft, but the big man is still working hard to rehab his knees and get back on the floor.

"He's not retiring. The only way that would happen is if he was forced to, and I

don't see that happening," Conley said. "He's dedicated to making sure he's back on the court as soon as possible."

In four seasons in Portland, Oden played in only 82 games and averaged 9.4 points and 7.4 rebounds. He is currently back in

his hometown of Indianapolis as he tries to recuperate from his latest setback, a third microfracture surgery on his left knee performed in February.

Whether Oden will be ready to play next season is undetermined.

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