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Vol. 31, No. 18

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

March 17, 2012

Eyes On The Prize



SONNY BROCKWAY

EASTWARD BOUND – Ohio State head coach Thad Matta (center), his men's basketball Buckeyes and other friends and family watched the Selection Show together March 11 and learned Ohio State would be the No. 2 seed in the East Region of the NCAA Tournament.

After Big Ten Tourney Run, NCAA Hopes Renewed

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

The ladders were being set up March 11 under each basket at Bankers Life Fieldhouse for the net-cutting ceremony as Michigan State's players finished the postgame handshakes, put on their Big Ten tournament champions hats and T-shirts and celebrated at midcourt.

Jared Sullinger walked past them slowly. He didn't bother to raise his head as he ferociously clenched his jaw on his way to the arena's concourse.

Frustration – a feeling that had becoming nothing but a distant memory for the rejuvenated big man – once again set in as Sullinger grasped the realization that defending champion Ohio State wouldn't be cutting down the nets for the third consecutive year in Indianapolis.

The Buckeyes had just lost a 68-64 decision to Michigan State, a game that featured the intensity of an NCAA Tournament regional final. Had Ohio State won, it would have served as the perfect ending to a rather imperfect six-week stretch.

"It was a tough-fought game and it was an NCAA-type game," Sullinger said. "It was a very tough battle, and I think we can learn from it. Hopefully

these guys understand that we can't dwell on this loss and we just have to keep moving forward."

Forward happens quite quickly for the Buckeyes, as their NCAA Tournament fate was learned not even an hour after suffering the heartbreaking loss.

Had they beaten Michigan State, they likely would have replaced the Spartans as the No. 1 seed in the West Region in Phoenix. Instead, the Buckeyes were awarded the No. 2 seed in the East Region behind top-seeded Syracuse and will open the NCAA Tournament on March 15 in Pittsburgh at Consol Energy Center against No. 15 seed Loyola (Md.).

Consol Energy Center, which opened in 2010, is home to the NHL's Pittsburgh Penguins. The arena seats 19,000 for basketball.

If the Buckeyes advance, they'll face the winner of the game between No. 7 Gonzaga and No. 10 West Virginia, a school that could have home-court advantage given its campus is roughly a 90-minute drive from Pittsburgh.

"This loss hurts and it is tough to think about," William Buford told BSB as he described coming up short against Michigan State. "But that's behind us now. This is my last go-around and we have to make it special. This is my last chance to accomplish the top goal, and I don't want to be let down."

Ohio State's 77-55 win over Michigan in the Big Ten tournament semifinals March 10 had the Buckeyes sporting confidence they haven't displayed since early in the season. It even helped Sullinger get to the point where he could look back to the month of February objectively despite it being perhaps the toughest month of his collegiate career.

With a newfound confidence, as if February were ages ago, Sullinger instead simply shoved it off into the past by referring to it as "the bad month."

Why would February be anything else but simply an unpleasant memory? Ohio State's blowout of Michigan, a regular-season conference co-champion along with the Buckeyes and Michigan State, marked a fourth consecutive win after the Buckeyes fell in three of their eight February games.

The Buckeyes, who won two road games in the final week of the regular season to clinch a share of the conference crown, were poised to close out the second phase of their season with a Big Ten tournament championship.

Then the Michigan State game happened, derailing Ohio State's plans of heading into the NCAA Tournament having captured the Big Ten regular-season and tournament titles.

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OPINION

Three-Point Ace Diebler Sorely Missed By OSU

With the sincerest of apologies to Paul Simon, this musical question begs an answer as Ohio State enters March Madness: "Where have you gone, Jonny Diebler? Buckeye Nation turns its lonely eyes to you."

I left out the "woo woo woo" part, but you get the idea.

Diebler, like Joe DiMaggio in Simon & Garfunkel's 1968 hit "Mrs. Robinson," has left and gone away, taking his talents to Greece where he is averaging 10.1 points per game and connecting on 52.8 percent of his three-point shots in his first season for the Panionios BC team.

Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, Diebler seems to have taken most of his former team's outside shooting prowess with him overseas.

For much of the season – or at least since mid-February when the Buckeyes began losing games at an alarming pace – many observers have been of the opinion that the team lacked the floor leadership provided last season by David Lightly. Me? I think leadership is overrated especially when you can't find the bottom of the basket, and that has been the Achilles' heel for Ohio State this season.

To put it bluntly, there are nights when the Buckeyes couldn't hit a bull in the butt with a bass fiddle. They simply have no outside shooter on whom they can rely on a consistent basis. The team's best three-point marksman is none other than Jared Sullinger at 39.4 percent, but I doubt very seriously OSU can hang its NCAA hat on the long-range shooting of a player who needs to spend 90 percent of his time in the paint.

Ohio State could be one of the streakiest shooting teams I have ever witnessed over the course of an entire season. It's not just that the Buckeyes' touch comes and goes on a game-to-game basis; it ebbs and flows by the minute.

A perfect example came in the second half of the Big Ten tournament championship final against Michigan State. The Buckeyes made seven of their first nine shots after the break to turn a two-point halftime deficit into a 52-45 lead at the 14:06 mark of the second half.

Then they proceeded to miss 11 of their next 13 attempts from the floor, falling back into a 62-57 hole with 5:48 remaining. OSU followed that cold spell by making two of its next three shots to climb back within two at 64-62 at the 3:27 mark, but the Buckeyes finished the game with misfires on eight of their final nine attempts and dropped a 68-64 decision to the Spartans.

That second-half performance (12 for 34, 35.3 percent) knocked their shooting percentage down to 39.7 for the game. That from the same Ohio State team that shot 60.7 percent two days earlier on the same floor during an 88-71 victory over Purdue.

Unfortunately, you never know what you're going to get on a nightly basis from this year's Ohio State team. The Buckeyes played like world-beaters back in late November when they chewed up and spit out a Duke team that finished 27-6 this season. And OSU played inspired basketball at Michigan State on March 4, going into the Breslin Center and erasing an early 15-point deficit before securing a 72-70 victory and the piece of the Big Ten regular-season championship that went with it.

Then there were the lackluster performances that resulted in three losses – two of them at home – during a six-game span in February. There were times during that stretch when passes became lazier, help defense disappeared and the Buckeyes looked a step slow and largely uninterested.

There was also one other constant in those defeats – lousy shooting.

Ohio State finished second in the Big Ten this season in shooting percentage, its 48.3

mark just a tick below Indiana's 48.7. But in their seven losses, the Buckeyes shot barely better than 40.0 percent – 160 for 391, which equals 40.9 percent. In four of those games, the team shot less than 40 percent, and in the first loss to Michigan State on Feb. 11, the Buckeyes turned in a season-low performance of 26.4 percent during a 58-48 loss.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

The poor shooting cannot be traced to just one player. Sophomore point guard Aaron Craft, for example, missed a pair of layups in the second half of the Big Ten tournament title game against the Spartans, and he was a 50.5-percent shooter for the season.

But senior guard William Buford is a lightning rod for most of the team's critics, and the numbers don't lie. During the team's 27 victories this season, Buford shot 45.6 percent (155 for 340) from the field and 38.7 percent (48 for 124) from three-point territory. During the team's seven losses, Buford's percentages went off a cliff – 32.6 overall (31 for 95) and 17.4 from behind the arc (4 for 23).

To be sure, Buford is just one player out of five on the floor. But more often than not, the rest of the team takes its shooting cues from its only senior. During the conference tournament final loss to Michigan State, Buford made three of his first four attempts and then missed seven of his final eight, including two three-pointers in the final 33 seconds while the Buckeyes were trailing by five.

I'm not trying to suggest that Buford is the sole reason Ohio State lost seven games this season. The Buckeyes lost seven games this season – including four of their last 10 – because they do not have anyone who can be relied upon to consistently knock down an outside shot.

That is the major reason that Ohio State misses Diebler so much. It's also how the Buckeyes have gone from a lead-pipe Final Four lock to a team whose NCAA Tournament fortunes are now anyone's guess.

Utter Baloney

Certainly everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion, but some of what passes for criticism of this year's Ohio State team can only be described as somewhere between fantasy and idiocy.

Following the team's 63-60 loss Feb. 26 to Wisconsin – a home defeat on Senior Day witnessed by a nationwide television audience – one Internet message board chowderhead drew a dull-witted comparison between Thad Matta and John Cooper. Another apparently intellectually-challenged individual actually had the temerity to suggest Matta be fired.

Those sentiments were either an overindulgence of alcohol talking or a gross underutilization of brain cells (perhaps a little of both) since Matta has taken what was once a rudderless program and turned it into one of college basketball's elites.

In case you need a quick refresher course, the Buckeyes had won exactly four Big Ten championships in the previous 33 seasons before Matta's arrival. During the coach's eight seasons, the team has captured five conference titles including at least a share of the last three in a row.

Of course, in this day and age, Big Ten championships are merely window dressing

for fans. Jim Tressel won seven conference titles in 10 years and was the subject of criticism long before anyone ever heard of something called NCAA bylaw 10.1.

College football fans want nothing but BCS championships, and college basketball fans determine success only by Final Four appearances. So far, Matta has only one of those, and given the preseason hype of this year's team, anything less than a trip to New Orleans will be considered a disappointment.

But to even consider letting Matta go is ludicrous.

You can complain about the way he uses his bench (or doesn't use his bench), his weak nonconference schedule, the fact that he seems to rarely work the officials (as Tom Izzo did to his team's benefit in the Big Ten title game) or his implementation of a fairly bland offensive scheme that channels nearly everything through Sullinger and seems to have no Plan B.

But the one thing you cannot complain about is the bottom line. Matta recruits as well as nearly anyone else in his profession and he wins games – a lot of games.

Some Final Thoughts

- Here is a little trivia about Ohio State's opening-round opponent. Despite the fact the Loyola universities located in Chicago and New Orleans are more well-known, the school in Maryland is the original Loyola, established in 1852. Distinguished alumni include author Tom Clancy and legendary sportscaster Jim McKay, and the Greyhounds are making only their second-ever NCAA Tournament appearance. The first came in 1994 when the team was coached by the late Skip Prosser and resulted in an 81-55 loss to eventual Final Four participant Arizona.

- My Final Four picks for this year's tournament are Kentucky, Syracuse, Kansas and Michigan State. Many brackets have the Spartans going out early, but pick against Izzo's team at your own peril. Izzo has taken his team to the Final Four every time it has earned a No. 1 seed. The Spartans are also more battle-tested than any other team – they topped the nation this season in strength of schedule.

- One of the potential upsets getting the most pre-tournament talk was No. 14 Belmont scoring a first-round knockout of third-seeded Georgetown. Are you kidding me? The Bruins lost in mid-January at South Carolina Upstate, the same team Ohio State crushed by 24 points on Dec. 14.

- If it's a sleeper you want, how about Wichita State? The Shockers are the No. 5 seed in a loaded South Region that includes Kentucky, Duke and Baylor, but they have an inside presence with 7-footer Garrett Stutz, they can score with anyone on any night, and head coach Gregg Marshall has four senior starters. You might also want to know that Wichita State knows what it takes to win a postseason tournament. They took home the NIT trophy last year.

- You might notice the level of excitement ratcheted down just a bit in this year's tournament, but it will have nothing to do with the games themselves. CBS no longer has the services of play-by-play man Gus Johnson, who now calls games for Fox Sports, Showtime and the Big Ten Network. Every game just seems more exciting when Johnson is behind the microphone, and his call on Ron Lewis' late three-pointer to send Ohio State into overtime against Xavier in the 2007 NCAA Tournament still ranks as one of the best calls in the history of March Madness.

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Charter Member

COVER STORY

National Title Dreams Remain For Ohio State

Continued From Page 1

"(The game) felt really good," said Buford, who became the first Big Ten player to play in four straight conference championship games. "It was an NCAA experience. But that was our problem. We kept trading baskets and we can't do that. We can't trade baskets. We've got to score and stop somebody on the defensive end."

The loss was yet another reminder of how fragile seasons can be in college basketball. The Buckeyes were riding high with confidence and many of the players goofed around in the locker room as they remembered what it felt like to be untouchable.

Michigan State then gave the team a courtesy reminder of how quickly a season can end, even if the Buckeyes have the opportunity to play another game.

Ohio State won't be afforded that same luxury if it loses again this season. As quickly as the Spartans ended their Big Ten tournament hopes, the Buckeyes' shot at a national title could be ruined even quicker.

"This team showed me a lot over the last couple of weeks," OSU head coach Thad Matta said. "We didn't get the job done in terms of the plays we needed to make, but I

thought we played in stretches some really good basketball.

"It's a little bit of a mental letdown when you play the last game of the regular season, but you've got to pick yourselves back up."

Match Between Heavyweights

Those watching the game had the feeling that two of the nation's best were on the same floor. Though Ohio State couldn't beat the Spartans for the second time in seven days – the win came in East Lansing on March 4 on a buzzer-beater by Buford – the Buckeyes asserted themselves as one of the favorites to make a deep NCAA Tournament run despite being viewed as a wounded team in the recent past.

"It stinks that we didn't win the tournament, but at the end of the day this team has grown tremendously in such a short amount of time," junior Evan Ravenel said. "We lost to one of the best teams in college basketball, but that's an experience. Sometimes teams grow in losses. The way we are playing now, I am confident we're good enough to accomplish some even bigger goals – the ones that matter the most."

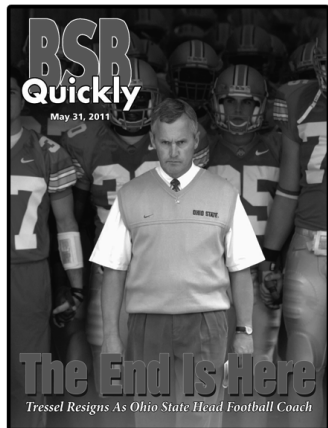
It is a wonder Ohio State is in the position it currently finds itself in after enduring a "bad month" that, after all, wasn't that long



SONNY BROCKWAY

GAINING MOMENTUM – Ohio State head coach Thad Matta said he thought his Buckeyes played well in stretches during the Big Ten tournament.

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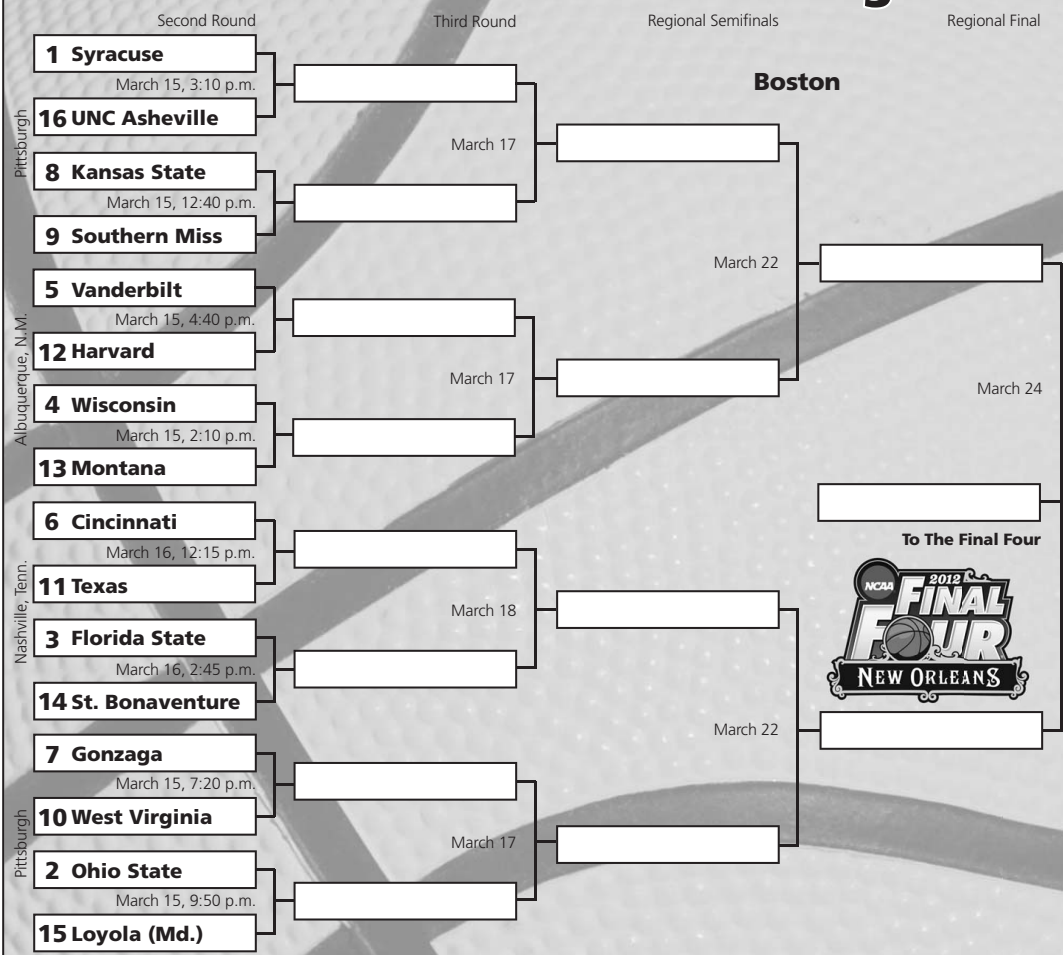
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COVER STORY

2012 NCAA Tournament East Region



ago. Lingering thoughts about the team's weaknesses turned into more pressing questions about its possible vulnerability in the NCAA Tournament.

Though the Buckeyes didn't knock off Michigan State to achieve an ending that might have been unimaginable just three weeks ago, Ohio State's positioning in this year's NCAA Tournament could be conducive to a long postseason run.

Compare Ohio State's path to the Final Four to the one it had just last season as the No. 1 overall seed in the tournament, and this year's team looks to have an easier route. Perhaps the Buckeyes' positioning in this year's tournament was a reward for the run they put together in the final weeks of the season.

A year ago, the Buckeyes were placed in the same region with No. 2 seed North Carolina, No. 3 Syracuse and No. 4 Kentucky. The Tar Heels and Wildcats went to the regional finals, and UK advanced to the Final Four.

A quick look at this year's bracket shows UNC, Syracuse and Kentucky owning three of the four No. 1 seeds.

"That is an incredible thing when you stop and think about it," Matta said in Ohio State's locker room shortly after the latest bracket was revealed.

Despite losing only two regular-season games a year ago, Matta's team fell to Kentucky in the Sweet 16. The Buckeyes, however, hope to advance deeper than that in this year's tournament, seeking their first Final Four appearance since 2007.

But leaving the Big Ten tournament in the past is crucial. Ohio State returned to Columbus shortly after losing to Michigan State, and the players took final exams as early as 7:30 a.m. the following morning. Matta said he hoped his team would have all of its academic obligations behind it when the Buckeyes travel to Pittsburgh two days before their game against Loyola.

Then March Madness begins. "There's no tomorrow," Sullinger said. "(The Michigan State game) was the last game of this season where if we lose, we can have practice the next day. This team understands that as long as we have two feet in and we're ready to play, I think we're one of the best teams in the country."

In Pittsburgh, the East Region gets under way March 15 with a 12:40 p.m. tipoff between No. 8 Kansas State and No. 9 Southern Mississippi. That will be followed by top seed Syracuse vs. No. 16 UNC Asheville, seventh-seeded Gonzaga against No. 10 West Virginia and then the OSU-Loyola matchup, scheduled to begin around 9:50 p.m.

Also on March 15, No. 4 Wisconsin plays No. 13 Montana to kick off games in Albuquerque, N.M. Five seed Vanderbilt will also take on No. 12 Harvard in Albuquerque.

Two other East regional matchups are set for March 16 in Nashville - No. 3 Florida State against No. 14 St. Bonaventure and No. 6 Cincinnati vs. No. 11 Texas, a team that was reportedly on the tournament bubble.

Sizing Up The Bracket

Ohio State's first taste of the NCAA

Tournament comes against Loyola (Md.) of the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference. The Greyhounds are a 24-8 team that punched its ticket to the Big Dance for the first time since 1994 after winning the MAAC tournament.

Loyola hired head coach Jimmy Patsos eight years ago after enduring a 1-27 record. Patsos, a former Maryland assistant of 13 years under Gary Williams, has led the program to a 122-122 record since being hired.

During his time with the Terrapins, Patsos coached with current Ohio State assistant Dave Dickerson. Matta, who admittedly didn't know much about Loyola when first learning of the matchup shortly after the bracket was released, hopes that will give the Buckeyes some insight into the Greyhounds' style of play.

During his tenure at Maryland, Patsos became very familiar with winning basketball. He was there for the span when the Terrapins made the NCAA Tournament 11 consecutive times, reaching the Final Four in 2001 and winning the national championship the following year.

"I assume they run some of the same stuff (Patsos learned while he was at Maryland)," Matta said. "I know Dave did at Tulane, so hopefully we have some familiarity with it."

Coming off Big Ten tournament titles in 2010 and 2011, Ohio State fell in the Sweet 16. Matta, however, was quick to remember that the last time his team lost in the conference tournament title game in 2009, the team lost in the first round to Siena.

Ohio State played in the Friday-Sunday

sessions in the last three NCAA Tournaments, so Matta has one less day to prepare than he has become accustomed to with this year's Thursday opener.

"Coming off (the Michigan State loss), it's probably a little bit easier to play the Friday-Sunday setup," the coach admitted. "But we'll try something different this time."

Ohio State will see a lot of familiar faces if it advances to deep into the tournament, and it could start as quickly as the second game. The Buckeyes could move on to face West Virginia, a team coached by former Ohio State assistant Bob Huggins.

The Buckeyes could also face a Florida State team it played - and beat - in each of the past two seasons, while Wisconsin is a team the Buckeyes lost to on their home floor Feb. 26 - Buford's Senior Day.

Matta, however, doesn't like to think too far in advance in terms of the teams he could meet later in the tournament. Advancing is the only thing he's concerned about, though he did admit that he's happy with his team's draw.

"I like our positioning," the coach said. "We were a No. 1 seed last year and now we're a 2. I just hope it speaks volumes about where our program is and the job our players are doing."

Remembering To Smile

There was a time in February where Matta felt the need to have a one-on-one meeting with Sullinger to reaffirm to him how important his progress on the court was to the Ohio State basketball program.

It was a tough month - for Sullinger, who admitted multiple times to focusing too much on referees and outside influences instead of concentrating on his game.

Sullinger had a heart-to-heart conversation with those closest to him - his brothers, father and girlfriend - and they reminded him of something he might have forgotten when Ohio State wasn't playing as well as he hoped.

"My support system told me I don't smile enough," Sullinger said. "They said when I'm smiling and having fun, my game comes out."

During the Big Ten tournament, Sullinger was noticeably looser. Before games, he was flashing that forgotten smile, and after them he was horsing around with his teammates in the locker room.

Though Sullinger did become frustrated at times during the loss to Michigan State, it was only natural for the sophomore who has yet to adjust to losing. His performances in the conference tournament speak for themselves.

In Ohio State's opening-round win over Purdue, Sullinger scored a season-high 30 points. The following day in the blowout against Michigan, the big man tallied 24 points after hitting his first four shots from the field.

Against the Spartans, Sullinger managed 18 points despite playing only 29 minutes after being forced to sit a good chunk of the first half on the bench with foul trouble.

If the Buckeyes had trouble running their offense through the big man in February, Sullinger's new attitude has certainly helped the Buckeyes find him inside.

"We've been working on offense execution, spacing, every little thing we always talked about in practice," Sullinger said. "Coming into this tournament, I thought that was the biggest key for this basketball team. And, I mean, this basketball team found me when I was open and I was blessed enough to make the shots."

Buckeyes Hold Big Dance Destiny In Their Hands

I could say March Madness bothers me because it is a drain on the nation's productivity, but I don't want to bore you with something I've said so many times before. A bigger issue I have with the NCAA men's basketball tournament is that the country has become so obsessed with it that the regular season has become almost meaningless – an exercise simply to help in the seeding for the Big Dance.

Take the 2010-11 Ohio State team, for instance. Never mind that the Buckeyes won a second straight regular-season title and a second consecutive conference tournament last season. All you heard fans talking about from last season was how William Buford missed his last-second shot against Kentucky and that the Buckeyes were bounced in the Sweet 16. It's like the regular season never existed – mentally vacated, if you will.

This season, the Buckeyes won a share of a third straight regular-season crown and took Michigan State the distance before falling in their quest for another tournament title. Yet despite that consistent success, some fans are grumbling about head coach Thad Matta because his team has not been to the Final Four since 2007.

So what are the Buckeyes' chances of advancing past the Sweet 16 this year?

I guess it depends on which squad shows up – the one that struggled late in the regular season or the one that beat No. 1 tournament seed Michigan State in East Lansing on March 4 and then cruised to the conference tournament finals with impressive wins over Big Dance-bound Purdue and Michigan before falling to the same Spartans in a battle of conference heavyweights.

It was the Spartans who lowered the Buckeyes into their mini-funk with a physical 58-48 win Feb. 11 in Columbus. Tom Izzo's Green and White showed that a good way to slow down OSU was to manhandle Buckeye big man Jared Sullinger underneath, a tactic that future opponents used to frustrate the All-America sophomore.

Once Sullinger learned to stop worrying about the contact and just play, he went on a run and so did the Buckeyes. Since scoring eight points and pulling down six rebounds during a Senior Day loss to Wisconsin on Feb. 26, Sullinger has averaged 21.6 points and 10.4 rebounds in five games. The Buckeyes are tough to beat if their big man puts up those kinds of numbers, and he should be aided by the fact that the officiating in the NCAA Tournament will probably allow less constant contact against him.

If Sullinger was able to play with a smile through the abuse of the Big Ten down the stretch and still retained his productivity, think what he could do if he were allowed some room to operate. However, if the officials are going to be calling fouls inside, the sophomore needs to watch himself on defense. He is of no use to the Buckeyes on the bench in foul trouble.

Whether Sullinger is on the bench or not, Ohio State will not advance deep into the tournament if he is the only one providing offense. Someone else is going to have to get hot.

Wouldn't it be nice if it's Buford? The team's lone senior has had several signature moments this season, including the game-winning basket in East Lansing to cap the regular season. But the reality is that his final season has not been what was expected from a player who scored 14.4 points per game on a veteran-laden team last year. Some players are better as complementary pieces than stepping up and being "the man."

Buford struggled again in the tournament championship loss to Michigan State, hitting

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

just 4 of 12 shots, including none of his four attempts from long range, while scoring 11 points.

If basketball fans remember only March Madness, wouldn't it be great if Buford planted an even more indelible memory than his miss against Kentucky last season?

By the way, speaking of players stepping up, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the play of junior Evan Ravenel in the win over Michigan State in East Lansing.

With Sullinger on the bench with four fouls, the 6-8 junior transfer came in with 8:31 to go in the game and the Buckeyes trailing by a 57-52 deficit. When Sullinger came back in at 3:16 following an energetic effort by Ravenel, the score was tied at 64.

Ravenel finished the game with seven points, two rebounds and two assists and had as much to do with the victory as Buford did with his winning shot.

On The Same Page

Ohio State football coach Urban Meyer has said that one of the keys to running a successful football program is having all the coaches on exactly the same page. He also indicated that one of the reasons for his success at Florida, which included two national championships, was that he had such a staff when he arrived in Gainesville.

This led me to wonder who was on the staff that helped return the Gators to the glory they had achieved under Steve Spurrier but had lost under former Buckeye assistant Ron Zook, whose Gators dropped five games in each of his three seasons at the helm.

Meyer's first staff at Florida featured Steve Addazio, tight ends; Stan Drayton, running backs; Billy Gonzales, wide receivers; Chuck Heater, recruiting coordinator/cornerbacks; John Hevesy, offensive line; John "Doc" Holliday, safeties; Greg Mattison, co-defensive coordinator/defensive line; Dan Mullen, offensive coordinator/quarterbacks; and Charlie Strong, assistant head coach/co-defensive coordinator/linebackers.

Just as a great staff like the one Ohio State's Woody Hayes had in 1968 that featured such noted coaches as Earle Bruce, Bill Mallory and Lou Holtz can be evaluated by the success of those coaches after they left Hayes' employ, it is interesting to look at where Meyer's aides have gone.

Addazio is now the head coach at Temple. Drayton, of course, is the running backs coach at Ohio State after serving as wide receivers coach under Luke Fickell last season. Gonzales is the new offensive coordinator at Illinois under freshly hired head coach and former Buckeye assistant Tim Beckman. Beckman and Gonzales had worked together at Bowling Green under Meyer.

Heater, who coached defensive backs under Bruce at Ohio State from 1985-87, is defensive coordinator under Addazio at Temple. Hevesy is offensive line coach and running game coordinator at Mississippi State, where he serves under Mullen, who is now head coach of the Bulldogs. Holliday is head coach at Marshall.

Mattison is an interesting case since he is now the defensive coordinator for archrival Michigan and will have the task of stopping Meyer's spread offense. Mattison also served as defensive coordinator of the NFL's Baltimore Ravens after leaving Florida.

Strong, who was the only coach Meyer retained from Zook's staff, is now the head coach at Louisville.

So of the nine coaches on Meyer's first staff at Florida, four are now head coaches and three others are coordinators. That would seem to indicate Meyer is a pretty good judge of coaching talent.

One of the keys for Meyer in Florida was that he kept that staff intact for three seasons, which included a national championship in 2006. That continuity made it easier to help build the foundation that led to a second national championship in 2008 and a 13-1 season and No. 3 ranking in 2009.

Of course success breeds interest from other programs, and after the 2007 season Drayton left for Tennessee and then coached a year at Syracuse before returning to Florida and Meyer in 2010 as running backs coach and recruiting coordinator.

Also leaving after that '07 season was Holliday, who became associate head coach at West Virginia before taking over the Thundering Herd in 2010, and Mattison, who left to join the Ravens staff before being hired by Brady Hoke in Ann Arbor for the 2011 season.

It will be interesting to see how long Meyer can keep his first Ohio State staff together.

It Was The Cover Story

It is often said that young people don't read newspapers anymore. Many of us in central Ohio who still enjoy the printed word had an ironic chuckle when word came out that former Ohio State wide receiver Ray Small had been arrested Feb. 26 by Ohio Highway Patrol troopers for suspected drug possession on U.S. 33 in southeastern Ohio.

That very day, The Columbus Dispatch's lead cover story told of how the OHP had dubbed the stretch of Route 33 between southeastern Ohio and Columbus the "Heroin Highway," and how troopers had ramped up drug enforcement on that stretch and elsewhere around the state. The patrol's seizures of cocaine were up 663 percent in 2011 over 2010, according to figures in the Dispatch. Ecstasy seizures were up 586 percent and heroin seizures were up 68 percent.

Perhaps if Small or one of his cohorts had read the Dispatch, he would have taken another route to Columbus rather than being pulled over near Pomeroy in Meigs County.

Small is one of those guys who just can't seem to stay out of trouble. While his father took to the media to claim that his son was unfairly picked on by Jim Tressel and his staff, Small repeatedly found himself in Tressel's doghouse.

The speedy Cleveland Glenville product seemed to have straightened his life out as a senior in 2009, though. Small had a huge day in a 24-7 victory at Penn State that season, setting up two touchdowns with punt returns of 41 and 45 yards, and he added a reception and a 13-yard run for good measure. He was also named a captain for the Michigan game, another OSU victory.

But when the Buckeyes headed to Pasadena for their first Rose Bowl trip since the 1996 season, Small was left behind for disciplinary reasons. It was an unfortunate end to a star-crossed career at Ohio State.

Evaluating Numbers

I have always felt NFL scouts put too much stock in such measurables as height, weight, 40 times and bench presses, sometimes at the expense of a player's football savvy and heart – things that can't be measured with a tape measure or stopwatch. Why else would Buckeye legend Chris Spielman have fallen to the second round in the 1988 NFL draft behind such players as teammate Eric Kumerow, who went in the first round to Miami?

Spielman, who was listed at 6-2 and 236 pounds as a senior at OSU but 6-0 and 247 as a pro, was deemed too small and too slow, yet he was named to four Pro Bowls before a neck injury ended his career prior to the 1999 regular season.

Despite my problem with overvaluing the numbers, I was greatly concerned about former Ohio State offensive tackle Mike Adams' 19 reps on the bench press at the recent NFL combine, a mark not only bettered by teammates Mike Brewster (29) and Boom Herron (22) but by five wide receivers attending the combine. It was among the lowest of any lineman in attendance.

I saw the difference Adams made on the playing field for the Buckeyes once he returned from his five-game suspension to start the season. He also was impressive with his work at the Senior Bowl.

But scouts may take his performance with the bench press as an indication that he is not dedicated in the weight room. Couple that with the fact that some scouts may be leery of his participation in the Buckeyes' NCAA scandal and you have a player who may not be drafted as high as he might merit because of perceived issues of effort and character.

By the way, Kumerow, who was listed at 6-7 and 264 pounds in the NFL, played four seasons for the Dolphins and Chicago Bears and appeared in 42 games, but he never started a single one.

Recruiting In 2002

In the last print issue of BSB, we ran our annual consensus poll of recruiting experts with Ohio State finishing a solid fourth among the national experts. Alabama was the easy leader in the poll, listed first in five of the six rankings.

In our last electronic issue, as part of our celebration of the 10th anniversary of Ohio State's 2002 national football championship, we ran the consensus poll from 10 years ago. The Buckeyes, in Tressel's first full recruiting year, finished second nationally and no lower than fourth in any of the experts' rankings. Michigan was the next highest team from the Big Ten, finishing 12th.

Texas was the runaway winner in '02, inking 10 of the nation's top 100 players and five of the top 35 to finish with all six first-place votes. The Longhorns reeled in the nation's top-ranked prep star, a player very familiar to Buckeye fans – quarterback Vince Young from Madison High School in Houston.

In looking back, it's interesting to note how little recruiting has changed in 10 years. Six of 2002's top 10 recruiting teams – OSU, Texas, Florida State, Miami (Fla.), Oklahoma and Georgia – were in this year's top 10 and three others – USC, UCLA and Tennessee – were in the top 20. Of the 2002 top 10, only Virginia failed to crack this year's top 25.

For a complete recap of the 2002 consensus recruiting poll, go to our March 6 electronic issue, available for free to all paid print subscribers. For instructions on how to access the issue, see page 5 of this BSB.