

## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

# Meeting With Meyer Has Sparked Stoneburner

By MATTHEW HAGER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The 2012 season was supposed to be Jake Stoneburner's breakout campaign. With a move from tight end to wide receiver in the new Urban Meyer-Tom Herman spread offense, many expected big things of the fifth-year senior from Dublin (Ohio) Coffman.

Since arriving on campus, Ohio State fans – as well as his teammates and coaches – have had high hopes for Stoneburner. He came to the Buckeyes after finishing his prep career in 2007 as a four-star tight end prospect as well as the No. 4-ranked prospect at his position in his recruiting class.

Stoneburner boasted a mix of size and speed that was supposed to make him a dangerous weapon in the Ohio State offense at tight end. After redshirting in 2008, Stoneburner worked behind Jake Ballard and caught two passes in his first collegiate season. He took over as the starting tight end in 2010 after Ballard's graduation and held that spot on the depth chart the following two seasons, catching a combined 35 passes for 415 yards and nine touchdowns.

Even so, Stoneburner did not emerge as a top offensive threat under Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel in 2010 or interim coach Luke Fickell in 2011.

That was supposed to change this season with Meyer's arrival. Despite an off-season incident that left in him Meyer's doghouse, Stoneburner was still looked upon to be a bigger part of the offense in his final season. He made the move to wide receiver – the position he played in high school – and molded his body to better suit his position.

Before the season, Meyer said Stoneburner would be Ohio State's "Hernandez-type guy," referring to Aaron Hernandez, the versatile All-America tight end who helped Meyer's 2008 Florida team win the BCS national championship before moving on to an NFL career with the New England Patriots.

"We would like to see Jake be a guy that we can obviously flex out in the slot and at the receiver position – do some things out there in terms of using his size and athletic ability in the slot," Herman said in August. "But at the same time, (we want him to)



SONNY BROCKWAY

**SEE YA – Ohio State fifth-year senior tight end Jake Stoneburner (11) caught two passes for 86 yards against Penn State, including a 72-yard fourth-quarter touchdown. He has four touchdowns on the season.**

come in the box and play the traditional tight end role and even the H-back where he can motion around and block people."

Things started well enough when the regular season began in September. Through the first three weeks of the season, Stoneburner caught seven passes for 92 yards. He even played a large role in Ohio State's 35-28 victory against California when he caught three passes for 44 yards and two touchdowns – giving him three through the first trio of games. His reception on a Braxton Miller jump pass remains one of the highlights of the season for the Buckeyes.

After the Cal game, however, Stoneburner disappeared. He caught no passes the following week against UAB. Then during Ohio State's Big Ten opener at Michigan State, Stoneburner was again without a reception.

Meyer, who early in his Ohio State head coaching tenure has not been shy about voicing his opinion about his players, called

out Stoneburner on his weekly radio program prior to the team's next game against Nebraska, saying the senior was guilty of running slow routes.

But it turns out Meyer was not airing those criticisms without talking to Stoneburner first.

Two weeks later, after the Buckeyes' overtime win against Purdue, Meyer confirmed he and Stoneburner had a long conversation about the wide receiver's performance.

"We had a 'come to you-know-what' meeting because he wasn't playing well," Meyer said. "He was playing OK. ... He wasn't playing very hard in East Lansing. He played OK, but OK is not good enough for a guy like that."

Stoneburner said it was more of a heart-to-heart conversation.

"I wasn't playing as well as I should have been or as well as he thought I should have been," Stoneburner said. "I agreed with him. We talked and sat and thought about why and what I needed to change and what part of the game I needed to step up."

"It was kind of an eye-opener, what he thought."

And that was?

"It was not that I wasn't playing aggressive, but I wasn't *being* aggressive," Stoneburner said. "For me being 245 pounds, sometimes I was thinking too much when I was blocking or running routes. I wasn't playing with my speed and my weight against little guys. I was being a little bit tentative, almost afraid to make a mistake."

Unfortunately for Meyer and Stoneburner, the Nebraska game was much like the previous two. While the Buckeyes steamrolled the visiting Cornhuskers under the temporary lights at Ohio Stadium, Stoneburner once again finished the game with a goose egg in receptions.

Perhaps whatever changes Stoneburner made took time to surface. In this case, it took an extra week. Stoneburner arguably had his best game as a wide receiver at Ohio State in a closer-than-expected 52-49 victory at Indiana. He caught a season-high four passes for 41 yards.

Two days after the battle in Bloomington, Stoneburner was listed as one of Ohio State's

game champions for the first time by Meyer at the head coach's weekly press conference.

"Jake Stoneburner played his best game since our staff has been here – 88-percent grade-out," Meyer said. "He's not been grading that high. Four receptions, 41 yards, very good blocking, his aggressiveness and toughness really excelled in that game."

Stoneburner didn't have as much of an impact on the stat sheet against Purdue as he did against the Hoosiers. The 6-5, 245-pound receiver caught one pass for 17 yards, but it was an important grab. His reception came on a second-and-10 at the Purdue 25 during Ohio State's overtime possession. It set up a first-and-goal at the PU 8, and three plays later the Buckeyes scored the eventual winning touchdowns on a 1-yard TD run by Carlos Hyde.

Afterward, Meyer gave Stoneburner praise.

"He played his tail off, and he has the last two weeks," the OSU head coach said.

Meyer's sit-down with Stoneburner has resonated with the fifth-year senior.

"It was all just in my head," Stoneburner said of his midseason struggles. "I was playing tentative and not as aggressive as I should have been. I probably wasn't running my routes as crisp as they needed to be."

"I've been trying to work on it in practice and it's been carrying over into (games)."

It showed again during Ohio State's Oct. 27 game against Penn State. In the 35-23 victory for the Buckeyes, Stoneburner caught two passes for 82 yards – including a 72-yard touchdown in which he got a step on PSU safety Jacob Fagnano on a pass over the middle and outraced the defense en route to a fourth-quarter touchdown.

Stoneburner's boosted work ethic has begun to rub off on his teammates, too. Junior Chris Fields is listed behind Stoneburner on the team's depth chart at the H-receiver spot and said he has learned a lot from watching the tight end-turned-wideout.

"He's a terrific athlete for being his size," Fields said. "Jake is a very positive person. He comes out every practice ready to go. He critiques his routes and he's hardworking. I try to feed off that."

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

# Mewhort Prefers To Do His Talking On Field

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There are times when Jack Mewhort is surrounded by a gaggle of reporters at the weekly interview scrum that they have to strain to hear what the Ohio State junior left tackle is saying.

Mewhort's size (6-6, 312 pounds) belies his softer voice that doesn't seem befitting a player who enjoys "pancaking" an opponent by knocking him on his rear, something he did 12 times with relish against Indiana on Oct. 13.

"That was the most I've had all year so I'm pretty excited," Mewhort said in quiet tones a few days later. "I had a lot of help from the guys playing next to me – Andrew Norwell and Corey Linsley are making the right calls, putting me in the right position to block well."

Mewhort is usually more demonstrative on the field. He has to be as the most experienced of the linemen even though he is learning a new position under a new coach this season.

The Toledo St. John's product got the final eight of his 13 starts at right guard in 2011 after beginning the season at left guard. He also made brief appearances at right tackle in the past before being designated to replace left tackle Mike Adams, a second-round draft pick of the Pittsburgh Steelers in April.

"He's a very good player all around with the pass and run block," defensive lineman John Simon said of Mewhort. "He's a big force on the offensive line for us."

Mewhort was unsure how the change in coaching staffs from the man who recruited him, Jim Tressel, through interim coach Luke

Fickell to finally Urban Meyer and his spread offense would impact him.

What he soon discovered is that the ground game is still a priority at Ohio State and the big boys up front are just as valuable a commodity.

"I don't think we knew we'd be running the ball with as much power stuff as we are now, but we really enjoy it as an offensive line," Mewhort said. "We take pride in it that we can go out there and run the ball the way we do."

He said the learning curve was not as steep as he feared when it came to mastering the schemes under Meyer and offensive coordinator Tom Herman.

"There's not a huge difference on the offensive line," Mewhort said. "There's still a lot of the power running game. The coaches have done a great job helping us adjust to the new offense. Guys have really put in the work to pick it up fast."

"It's not too much different than what we're used to, but there are some tweaks. Guys come in every day and watch film and try to adapt to the new system that we're learning."

As much as Mewhort was expected to provide guidance and leadership, his image took a very public hit in early June when he, senior Jake Stoneburner and a non-football player friend were arrested for urinating in public and charged with misdemeanor counts of obstructing official business when they tried to run away.

Meyer immediately suspended the players and stripped them of their scholarships for the summer. They eventually pleaded guilty to lesser misdemeanor charges of disorderly con-

duct and earned the right to have their playing status and scholarships reinstated in time for the football season.

Just as importantly, their teammates have supported them throughout.

"He's one of the leaders on the offensive line," sophomore linebacker Ryan Shazier said. "He's an amazing leader and doing an outstanding job out there."

Being able to handle adversity – be it self-made or from the constant criticism that the O-line has received over the years from Buckeye fans – makes the good days even more rewarding, such as when quarterback Braxton Miller and running back Carlos Hyde each ran for more than 100 yards in consecutive games against Nebraska and Indiana in early October.

The 724 team rushing yards vs. the Cornhuskers and Hoosiers were the most in a two-game stretch since the 1980 team piled up 800 against Northwestern and Indiana, and the Buckeyes entered the Oct. 27 game at Penn State ranked 10th in the nation in rushing offense with an average of 247.9 yards per game.

"We're a hardworking unit. As an offensive line we're really coming together and really starting to understand this offense more and more each week," Mewhort said. "That's the biggest part of it. We don't get complacent and we come in to work every day."

"Obviously the guys we're blocking for – Carlos, Braxton and Rod (Smith) and Philly (Brown) when he rushes the ball – they have great vision. They run hard. It's a pleasure blocking for those guys. As an offense everyone is growing up and maturing. Everyone has more confidence."

That would include Mewhort, who cites former Michigan All-America tackle and current Miami Dolphins player Jake Long as an idol growing up. Mewhort considered going to U-M – he went on a recruiting visit the day Appalachian State shocked the Wolverines in 2007 – but always wanted to be a Buckeye and enrolled in January 2009.

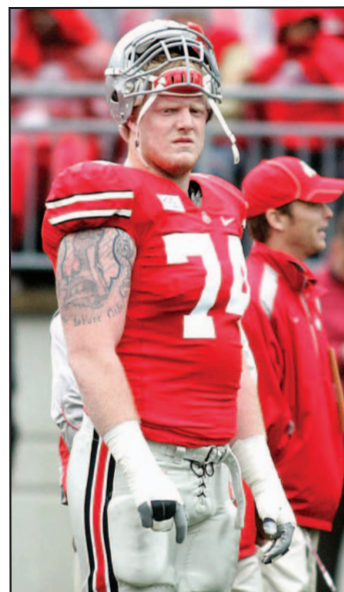
He redshirted as a true freshman before playing in 10 games in 2010. Last season, he was an honorable-mention All-Big Ten selection by the coaches and media.

Simon said Mewhort has since taken his game to another level.

"He's a tremendous player," the OSU defensive star said. "That's what makes the D-line better every day – guys like him on the offensive line with his leadership and skills and his mentality and toughness. For him to go against us makes us better and makes him better."

Shazier couldn't help but notice the same thing.

"Jack has gotten a whole lot better since last year and even in the spring," the sophomore linebacker said. "Every time I'm looking at game film, if I see a big play happen, Jack's



JOSH WINSLOW

**FARING WELL** – Ohio State junior Jack Mewhort (74) and the rest of the offensive line are making plenty of holes for Buckeye rushers this season.

one of the guys right there making it happen. Nobody's getting past him."

Along with Mewhort's improved play has come an appreciation, maybe a little swagger, for Meyer's up-tempo offense.

"At first back in the spring, it was kind of a shock to us," Mewhort said. "Now that we're in shape, sometimes we'll have to go to the coaches and say, 'We need to move the ball faster,' because we took so much pride in the offseason getting in good shape and running."

"Now we want to take advantage of it and try to wear guys out. That's a big point of pride for us."


If you've got a new svelte line, relatively speaking, why not flaunt it?

"The offensive line is in a whole lot better shape than last year because sometimes they used to walk to the line of scrimmage from the huddle," Shazier said. "Now you see them hurry up, sprint to the huddle and sometimes they sprint to the next play."

Speaking of speed, Mewhort is rapidly gaining a following on Twitter (@jackmewhort) for his wit that is apparent when seeing that he describes himself as "I am fungi."


The more than 3,100 followers have seen recent tweets that include, "Whenever somebody calls me 'sir' I secretly laugh in my head because of how far away from a 'sir' I really am."

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## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL PREVIEW

# Matta's Men Looking For Identity, Results

By ARI WASSERMAN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It probably wouldn't be fair to hold this year's Ohio State basketball team to the standards of last year's Buckeyes, who won a third consecutive regular-season Big Ten championship before embarking upon a deep NCAA Tournament run that eventually culminated in a Final Four berth.

After all, the 2012-13 version of Ohio State won't have two-time All-America big man Jared Sullinger manning the paint, nor will it be able to lean on outside scoring from William Buford, one of the all-time winningest players in program history.

What's left over for this year is a talented team with some star power, but one that still has an identity to find before it is clear whether expecting another trip to college basketball's biggest stage is even a reasonable thought.

"A normal team may not think it is fair to have to be accountable for previous year's standards and have to use them again after losing their best player, but this isn't a normal team," Evan Ravenel, the team's lone senior, told BSB. "That's the standard of Ohio State and that's what we have no choice but to live up to."

When looking at OSU's roster, head coach Thad Matta sees a bunch of highly athletic puzzle pieces, but he's still trying to identify what the big picture may look like.

Matta knows his team will play at a higher tempo this season, but he is still wary about jumping to conclusions about what his rotation might look like or how deep he'll reach to the bench he's seldom used in the past.

"What I want to see this team do, first and foremost, is to be a great practice team," Matta said. "If they're a great practice team, things can fall into place for them. This is not a group that can afford to have a bad day or consecutive bad days, and I think they know that."

Perhaps that's the reason the range of expectations for this year's team from a national perspective has been so vastly different depending on the source. One preseason publication had the Buckeyes ranked as high as No. 4 in the country; another had them as low as No. 17.

During the conference's annual Media Day on Oct. 25, Ohio State was picked to finish third

in the Big Ten. That poll is voted on by conference media members, and OSU is tabbed to finish behind Indiana and Michigan.

Rankings mean very little at this time of year, though.

"There are no great teams in October," junior point guard Aaron Craft said. "Everybody has to start off at square one, and that's what we're going to do. We're ready to get back into the flow of practice and start realizing and understanding what our identity is as a team."

Craft and junior Deshaun Thomas – both named to the preseason All-Big Ten team – will go a long way in helping determine Ohio State's personality as a team, but the uncertainty of what the end product will look like is reason for the divergent preseason outlooks.

Both juniors have cemented their spots in Ohio State's starting lineup – along with junior shooting guard Lenzelle Smith Jr. – but the remainder of the lineup is still in flux. Matta hopes having spots up for grabs will help raise the competitive nature of his team in practice.

"That's what is exciting about putting a team together," he said. "There is potential for a lot of guys to make an impact, but figuring out how and when is what we're still driving to find. I look forward to seeing it."

Matta couldn't isolate names when asked who he thinks will be the biggest breakout player for the team this year, instead citing multiple players in a position to go from afterthought to main contributor.

That could be a big plus for the Buckeyes, particularly if Matta finds a way to get an array of his athletic players involved. The coach has been criticized in the past for not utilizing his bench, but this year things could be different.

"I think we have more depth to do that this year," Matta said.

Time will tell whether that's a real possibility for the Buckeyes or if Matta will shrink his rotation down to six or seven players as March approaches. That's all part of figuring out how to build his team, but the players on the roster believe the Buckeyes will be ready for another deep run when tournament time approaches.

"I don't know how this team will look in

a few months, but I do know that if guys are going to come out and play 100 percent, I see us right back where we were last year if not better," Smith said. "This program builds winners and everyone in this program wants to and expects to win games. I think we're going to come together and figure out whatever it takes to get wins."



Thad Matta

"I know some people have us ranked kind of low, but those are going to be the same people that when we're at the top or we do end up winning the conference again, they're going to say, 'We knew it,' or, 'We told you so.' It is one of those up-and-down things, but I do feel like it will be a good season for us."

The following is a position-by-position look at the Ohio State roster for the 2012-13 season with listed first in the breakdown.

## Guard

**Aaron Craft, 6-2, 195, Jr. (8.8 points per game, 4.6 assists per game, 2.5 steals per game, 50.0 field-goal percentage)** – After arriving at Ohio State two years ago as an unknown, Craft quickly asserted himself as one of the premier point guards in the country through his first two seasons with the Buckeyes.

Known for his intense defense and an unrelenting will to pressure opposing teams, Craft enters his junior season as one of the leaders of a squad still searching to find its identity.

Assuming Craft plays a considerable role in helping the Buckeyes find that identity, expect this year's team to be a fast-paced squad that hangs its hat on tough defense, moving quickly in transition and playing smart offensive basketball.

"Defensively we're going to be the same, but offensively we're probably going to be different," Craft said. "Without Jared and Will, we have to find ways to score. We are just going to try and take what opposing defenses give us."

Expecting Craft to do anything other than play top-notch defense would be a mistake, especially because Matta has cited only improvement from the reigning Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year.

Despite having offseason ankle surgery to repair bone spurs – a procedure Craft was initially reluctant to undergo because he wasn't comfortable missing time in the gym during the summer – the junior said he has now his full range of motion back.

That's a big step for the defender, who fought through noticeable pain during big moments in the NCAA Tournament a year ago. Fully healthy for the first time since high school, Craft feels primed for another productive defensive season.

"I'm ready for that next step in my career," he said. "Leadership-wise, being a junior now, I feel a little old being an upperclassman. I am just trying to come into that role. We have a great group of followers on this team, and you can't be a good leader without great followers."

The Buckeyes will lean on Craft's defensive prowess, but with the major loss of scoring production from a year ago, the team will rely on the point guard to be more assertive on the offensive end.

Craft won't have to dramatically increase his ability to score, but he is expected to raise his production by four or five points per contest.

The junior is capable, as he showed prolific scoring ability in certain instances last year. Craft was most lethal with his jump shot when he achieved open looks, but Matta imagines the junior's entire offensive repertoire to be greatly expanded this season.

"He is a completely different player than he was last year," the OSU coach said. "His offense has really taken form. He has shot the ball well, he's driving, he's finishing and he has just scored well. We're going to need him."

A player who scored 25 points per game for his AAU team in high school, Craft's role was different through the first two years of his collegiate career. Not always leaned on as a scorer – particularly with the presence of such players as Sullinger and Buford in the lineup – Craft was instead the team's offensive facilitator.

Though he'll continue to try to find open scorers this season, Craft has a better awareness now that Matta wants him to shoot when he has open looks, especially after making 50.0 percent of his 230 field-goal attempts a year ago.

"We have a lot of guys that have worked really hard and can knock down a lot of shots, so I'm just trying to be unselfish and make a play for someone else and see where we can go," Craft said. "At the same time I understand that if I have the chance to score for us, I am confident in my ability to do that, too."

**Lenzelle Smith Jr., 6-4, 210, Jr. (6.8 ppg, 4.6 rebounds per game, 2.0 apg, 1.1 spg, 47.3 fg pct.)** – Heading into last season, Matta faced similar questions to the ones he's currently dealing with having endured the losses of seniors David Lighty, Jon Diebler and Dallas Lauderdale.

The head coach found answers quickly in Smith, who went from being a freshman reserve to a player who started all of OSU's 39 games as a sophomore.

"Lenzelle Smith didn't play as a freshman, but he was part of the reason we went to the Final Four last year," Matta said. "He couldn't do those things at the beginning of the year, but he saw the big picture and he saw what it is and kept working."

"Last year, we had a question of who is going to replace Jon or Dave, and to his credit, Lenzelle came in on day one and said, 'You aren't getting this spot. This is mine, and I am going to take it from you.' That's what he did."

For the second consecutive year, Smith will have to change his role and become a more integral part of Ohio State's offensive plans. Though he was a constant member of Ohio State's starting lineup with hefty minute totals, Smith eased into the team's attack as a secondary option while other proven players stole the show.

This year will be different. Returning as one of the most experienced players on the team, Smith has immediately gone from an offensive afterthought to one of the team's biggest threats to rack up points.

"It was a humbling experience and I took a backseat to guys like Jared and William," Smith said. "But you have to be willing to do whatever it takes to be out there on the court and be out there to win the games. I recognize that and I realize that, but I feel like now it is my turn to come out and show what I am capable of."

Smith averaged only 6.8 points per game in his sophomore season, but there were instances when he took over games. That was specifically the case in OSU's 80-63 win over Indiana in Value City Arena on Jan. 15 when he scored a game-high 28 points and knocked down 4 of 5 attempts from behind the arc.

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## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL PREVIEW

## 2012-13 Projected Starting Lineup

4 • Aaron Craft • G		32 • Lenzelle Smith Jr. • G		12 • Sam Thompson • G/F		1 • Deshaun Thomas • F		23 • Amir Williams • C	
Hgt.: 6-2 • Wgt.: 195 • Class: Junior		Hgt.: 6-4 • Wgt.: 210 • Class: Junior		Hgt.: 6-7 • Wgt.: 200 • Class: Sophomore		Hgt.: 6-7 • Wgt.: 215 • Class: Junior		Hgt.: 6-11 • Wgt.: 250 • Class: Sophomore	
Yr. GP/GS Min./G PPG RPG A TO Bk. Stl.		Yr. GP/GS Min./G PPG RPG A TO Bk. Stl.		Yr. GP/GS Min./G PPG RPG A TO Bk. Stl.		Yr. GP/GS Min./G PPG RPG A TO Bk. Stl.		Yr. GP/GS Min./G PPG RPG A TO Bk. Stl.	
10-11 37-1 29.6 6.9 2.9 177 79 4 73		10-11 20-0 4.6 1.2 0.8 9 8 0 5		11-12 39-0 10.6 2.1 1.1 28 19 17 7		10-11 37-0 14.0 7.5 3.5 17 30 6 14		11-12 29-0 6.6 1.7 2.1 2 9 23 5	
11-12 39-39 32.2 8.8 3.2 181 84 7 98		11-12 39-39 25.4 6.8 4.6 78 48 5 35				11-12 39-39 31.4 15.9 5.4 35 47 9 15			
	Craft earned several honors last season, including Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year, in serving as OSU's top point guard.		Smith was named to the NCAA All-East Region Team last season for his performances against Cincinnati and Syracuse.		Thompson provided OSU with one of its best weapons off the bench last season and averaged 6.8 minutes during OSU's five NCAA games.		Thomas, a pre-season All-American, averaged 19.2 points and 7.6 rebounds during the 2012 NCAA Tournament.		Williams' 23 blocks during the 2011-12 season ranked second-best on Ohio State's roster, trailing only Jared Sullinger's 39.

## 2012-13 Ohio State Men's Basketball Roster/Schedule

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht./Wt.	Yr.	Hometown/Previous School
1	Deshaun Thomas	F	6-7/215	Jr.	Fort Wayne, Ind./Bishop Luers
2	Andrew Goldstein	G	6-3/200	Jr.	Marlboro, N.J./Marlboro
3	Shannon Scott	G	6-1/185	So.	Alpharetta, Ga./Milton
4	Aaron Craft	G	6-2/195	Jr.	Findlay, Ohio/Liberty-Benton
10	LaQuinton Ross	F	6-8/220	So.	Jackson, Miss./Burlington Township (N.J.) Life Center Acad.
12	Sam Thompson	F	6-7/200	So.	Chicago, Ill./Whitney Young
14	Alex Rogers	G	6-2/200	Jr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Christian Bros. Univ.
23	Amir Williams	C	6-11/250	So.	Birmingham, Mich./Detroit Country Day
30	Evan Ravenel	F	6-8/250	Jr.	Tampa, Fla./Boston College
32	Lenzelle Smith Jr.	G	6-4/210	Jr.	Zion, Ill./Zion-Benton
33	Amedeo Della Valle	G	6-5/190	Fr.	Alba, Italy/Henderson (Nev.) Findlay Prep
34	Jake Lorbach	F	6-7/210	So.	Elyria, Ohio/Lakewood St. Edward
55	Trey McDonald	C	6-8/240	So.	Battle Creek, Mich./Central

Head Coach – Thad Matta (Butler, 1990).

Associate Head Coach – Dave Dickerson (Maryland, 1990). Assistant Coaches – Jeff Boals (Ohio, 1995); Chris Kent (Ohio State, 2006). Director of Basketball Operations – David Egelhoff (Ohio State, 2001). Video Coordinator – Greg Paulus (Duke, 2009). Athletic Trainer – Vince O'Brien (Ohio State, 1991). Associate Strength & Conditioning Coach – Dave Richardson (Louisiana-Monroe, 1989).

## Regular Season Schedule:

Oct. 30 WALSH (Exhibition), 7 p.m.

Nov. 9 Carrier Classic at Charleston, S.C., vs. Marquette, 7 p.m.; 11 ALBANY, 2 p.m.; 17 vs. at Uncasville, Conn., vs. Rhode Island, 5 p.m.; 18 at Uncasville, Conn., vs. Washington or Seton Hall, 4:30 p.m.; 23 MISSOURI-KANSAS CITY, 6 p.m.; 28 at Duke, 9:30 p.m.

Dec. 1 NORTHERN KENTUCKY, 4:30 p.m.; 8 LONG BEACH STATE, Noon; 12 SAVANNAH STATE, 7 p.m.; 15 UNC ASHEVILLE, Noon; 18 WINTHROP, 7 p.m.; 22 KANSAS, 4 p.m.; 29 CHICAGO STATE, 4:30 p.m.

Jan. 2 NEBRASKA, 6:30 p.m.; 5 at Illinois, 2:15 p.m.; 8 at Purdue, 9 p.m.; 13 MICHIGAN, 1:30 or 4:30 p.m.; 19 at Michigan State, 6 p.m.; 22 IOWA, 6:30 p.m.; 26 at Penn State, Noon; 29 WISCONSIN, 7 p.m.

Feb. 2 at Nebraska, 7 p.m.; 5 at Michigan, 9 p.m.; 10 INDIANA, 1 p.m.; 14 NORTHWESTERN, 7 p.m.; 17 at Wisconsin, 1 p.m.; 20 MINNESOTA, 7 p.m.; 24 MICHIGAN STATE, 1, 4 or 6 p.m.; 28 at Northwestern, 7 p.m.

March 5 at Indiana, 9 p.m.; 10 ILLINOIS, 1, 4 or 6 p.m.; 14-17 Big Ten Tournament at Chicago.

Given that the Hoosiers' primary defensive focus was to key on other players on the team, Smith found open looks easier and consistently made Indiana pay. This season, he knows he won't be the beneficiary of not being in opposing teams' game plans.

"This is my time to be a focal point for this team, and I know that means doing it consistently," Smith said. "I know other teams aren't going to leave me open like they did some times last year, but I still have to find a way to get to the basket and score. I have waited a long time for this chance, and I am not going to miss it."

Perhaps the biggest moment of Smith's career came in Ohio State's 77-70 win over Syracuse in the Elite Eight at Boston's TD Garden. He scored 18 points and made 3 of 6 shots from long range, all while overcoming an injury sustained early in the game that caused him to get stitches over his eye.

Helping lift his team to the Final Four makes for quite a bullet point on his résumé, but Smith knows the biggest difference from last year is that he's expected to perform that well each night.

That could be cause for pressure for a player who isn't accustomed to the spotlight, but Smith said he's ready. And with no proven threat to knock down threes, Ohio State will turn to the junior to be its best sharpshooter.

"Lenzelle has shown the ability to make

the three for us, and we're definitely going to need him to do that," OSU assistant coach Jeff Boals said. "Like all players, Lenzelle's role has changed from year to year, and this year that's no different. We're really going to be relying on him this year."

**Shannon Scott, 6-1, 185, Soph. (1.2 ppg, 1.1 rpg, 1.5 apg, 28.2 fg pct., 10.6 minutes per game)** – When Matta looks back at Scott's freshman season, he sees an immensely talented guard who took a little longer than expected to adapt to the change of culture in the college game.

What the head coach has seen since is the crucial link that will help the Buckeyes overcome the loss of Sullinger and become one of the fastest-paced teams in the Big Ten.

"From what I have seen out of Shannon, I am not sure if there is a guard better pushing the ball in transition," Matta said. "He is as fast and quick with the ball as I have seen in that regard."

A four-star prospect whom Scout.com ranked the No. 6 point guard in his recruiting class, Scott has never lacked the talent necessary to be a game-changing entity at the college level. However, the quiet sophomore has had to grow tremendously with his communication skills, particularly because Matta said the point guard on his teams must be a vocal leader.

"He appears to have a better understanding

and I think he has more confidence in what he's doing," the coach said. "I told him, 'You can't be a point guard and not speak. You have to say something sometime.' Now he has a different way about him. I have been extremely pleased with how he's played consistently over the time we've been together."

Also hindering Scott from more playing time in his freshman year was his tendency to sometimes become trigger-shy with his shot despite having open looks. That happens quite often with youthful players in adjusting to Matta's program, but experience is often the needed solution.

"I see a change in him," Thomas said. "Last year he was scared to take shots, but now he's taking them and he's hitting them. It is all that confidence and believing and trusting in Coach in knowing that he wants you to shoot the ball."

"I am pretty sure in his freshman year he didn't want to be taken out when he got in, which is why he didn't shoot. Now he knows that Coach Matta trusts him to take a shot when he has it. He's been taking it way more often now and he is knocking it down."

With Sullinger no longer in the mix, Matta is more prone to going with a smaller lineup, which frequently could include a two-point-guard look with both Craft and Scott on the floor at the same time.

The hope is that having two quick and talented ball handlers on the floor together will quickly push the tempo, thus helping the Buckeyes get easy buckets in transition. In order for that to happen, however, OSU must be stingy defensively.

Matta thinks Craft and Scott can create defensive havoc on the floor together, citing a recent 40-minute workout during which Scott had eight steals.

"Coach wants me to come in and do what I did last year at the end of the year – just come into games and control the tempo by pushing the ball up the floor," Scott said. "I just need to put a lot of pressure on the defense and up the tempo. I am quick and I think that plays into my strengths."

As far as Scott's improved confidence, he doesn't believe that's going to be a problem heading into his second season with the program.

"I took a lot of shots in the summer, and I feel really good about my shot right now," he said. "I feel like if teams are going to continue to leave me open, I would just sit there and knock them down. Coach Matta has talked to me about it and he told me he wants me to shoot the ball, so I know what he wants and I will do it."

**Amedeo Della Valle, 6-5, 190, Fr.** – OSU is still in the process of trying to identify this year's go-to threat from beyond the arc, so there's the potential that Della Valle could find a playing role – even if limited – in his freshman season.

A three-star shooting guard from Henderson, Nev., Della Valle is the team's lone freshman, but his most developed skill set is his ability to knock down shots from long range with relative ease.

Della Valle was the recipient of perhaps the biggest possible compliment when Matta said at the team's Oct. 11 Media Day that he

wouldn't hesitate to throw the freshman into the game if the Buckeyes needed a big shot.

"I've been very, very pleased," Matta said of the freshman. "I have almost been shocked at how he has adjusted and what he's done to his body. He has put pounds on, he has gotten a lot stronger and he knows how to play. He can really make shots."

The fight for playing time won't be easy, and freshmen guards have typically had a hard time earning a spot in the rotation under Matta as they struggle to play defense of the caliber the head coach expects.

Add that to the numerous other players – all with more experience – trying to earn valuable minutes, and Della Valle likely has an uphill battle toward earning minutes.

But if Matta's comments are any indication, Della Valle is way ahead of schedule. The native of Alba, Italy, has the track record of a deadly shooter, breaking the record for three-pointers made in a single season at Findlay Prep (66) during his senior year in 2011.

**Alex Rogers, 6-2, 200, Jr.** – After sitting out the 2011-12 season to satisfy NCAA transfer rules, Rogers will be eligible to play for the Buckeyes this season as a junior.

A former walk-on who transferred from Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tenn., Rogers did enough during practice sessions last season to become a scholarship player for the Buckeyes this year.

After attending high school at Cincinnati Oak Hills, Rogers started 34 of the last 55 games for Christian Brothers two years ago before completing the transfer. He averaged 5.1 points per game during his single season with the Buccaneers.

**Andrew Goldstein, 6-3, 200, Jr.** – Ohio State officially added Goldstein as a walk-on Oct. 22. A native of Marlboro, N.J., Goldstein averaged 18 points, five rebounds and three assists during his prep career while tallying 1,069 career points to become the Mustangs' second-leading career scorer.

As a senior, Goldstein was responsible for helping lead Marlboro to the New Jersey state semifinals in 2010, the high school's deepest playoff run in program history. He played last year at Brookdale Community College in New Jersey, where he was a team captain in his only season before transferring to Ohio State.

## Forward

**Deshaun Thomas, 6-7, 225, Jr. (15.9 ppg, 5.4 rpg, 52.0 fg pct.)** – The Buckeyes are lucky Thomas didn't leave for the NBA after his sophomore year as Sullinger did. There was a time when Thomas thought that was going to be a reality, especially after his 19.2 points per game during the NCAA Tournament was one of the main reasons Ohio State advanced to the Final Four.

"After having that great run in the NCAA Tournament, I really thought it was going to be my time to make the jump," Thomas said. "When it came to making a decision, though, I think coming back for another year was just the right decision."

Though Thomas said his lifelong goal of playing in the NBA is still in the back of his mind, he understands that developing his all-

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## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL PREVIEW

# Ross Could Find Larger Role In First Full Season

Continued From Page 35

around game will likely set him up for a more prosperous professional career.

Known solely as a scorer during his first two seasons with the Buckeyes, Thomas hopes to take the next step as a ball handler, passer and defensive player. His ability to score has never been in doubt – or his willingness to shoot the ball – but Thomas is out to prove that he's gaining a better grasp of the entire game of basketball.

If he is successful in doing that, it will likely go a long way in helping Ohio State accomplish its lofty goals. The NBA will be impressed, too, but Thomas promises that he has put thoughts about his professional career on the back burner.

"I put it outside of me," he said. "I was trying to go to the next level, but I made the decision not to go. When I put that in my past, I decided that it is time to get better and focus on school, get closer to my degree and also help this team be successful."

"When I got back to Ohio State after I made the decision not to go, it was simple. I came back to get better at what I do because the sky is the limit. I brushed thoughts of the NBA off and told myself that my time will come, and hopefully it will."

Thomas finds himself in the position he's wanted to be in since his collegiate career began – the star of his team and the go-to scorer. He's gaining national attention, too, earning preseason all-conference and All-America honors.

But it's the little things that Thomas hopes to improve on, and Matta has drilled home the importance of believing that's what is important.

"Sometimes Coach will stop the drill if I make a good pass," Thomas said. "I get hyped passing the rock."

In the offseason, the OSU junior added a lot to his offensive capabilities. Last season he showed he was able to score in a variety of different ways – both inside and out – but he hopes he'll have more flexibility now that he's an improved ball handler and can pull up off the dribble to knock down a shot.

Thomas likely will have more opportunity to shoot this season. Returning as the team's lone proven scorer, he might be counted on to add five or more points per game to last season's average.

"When we recruited Deshaun, we knew what we were getting," Matta said, commenting on his propensity to shoot. "The biggest thing I am proud of with him is just what he's done in terms of expanding his vision for the game of basketball and having a better understanding of all the little things he can do to affect the game. I have been very pleased with that."

**Evan Ravenel, 6-8, 250, Sr. (3.4 ppg, 2.2 rpg, 10.2 mpg, 54.1 fg pct.)** – Though

listed as a forward, Ravenel returns as the most experienced big man on Ohio State's roster. The team's only senior will be turned to as one of the players to pick up the slack in the paint with the departure of Sullinger.

Last season, Ravenel was used more as a stopgap, a player who was pressed into service when Sullinger came out of the game because of foul trouble or if he needed a break. The Buckeyes counted on Ravenel to play productively in his short time on the floor, which was something that he did fairly well.

But given that he averaged only around 10 minutes per game and is the team's most experienced big man, Ravenel must prepare for more extensive action in his final season of college basketball.

"I am ready for that," he said. "I think it was a great experience playing with one of the best big men in the country with Jared, but I am confident in my abilities and I am excited for the challenges that are ahead."

Ravenel isn't much of an offensive threat, but he does have a knack for grabbing tough rebounds and could be well suited for Ohio State's new up-tempo style. Though he's in a battle with sophomore center Amir Williams for playing time, Ravenel's versatility and experience should have him right in the thick of the Buckeyes' plans.

"I actually like the up-tempo way we play and I think that's something that suits my game pretty well," Ravenel said. "Sometimes when the game is slower, it is easier to get complacent, so I like that we'll be running around and playing with a lot of intensity."

**LaQuinton Ross, 6-8, 220, Soph. (2.0 ppg, 0.4 rpg, 3.9 mpg, 33.3 fg pct.)** – For someone who had a relatively insignificant playing role on last year's team, Ross has emerged as one of the players fans expect a lot from heading into the season.

Known as a pure scorer after averaging 25 points per game in high school, Ross was instantly a fan favorite long before he ever got into a game. But his ability to earn a role on last year's team was all but lost when he was unable to join the squad in a full capacity until December while he worked to become academically eligible.

As the season progressed, the legend of Ross became more popular among the team's onlookers, many of whom were perplexed by Matta's reluctance to put him into the game.

"It was cool hearing people call my name and always wondering why I wasn't in the game," Ross said. "That made it hard at times because I am a competitor and I wanted to play, but I just took things as a learning experience."

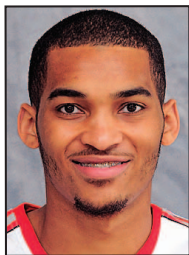
With Buford no longer in the mix, Ross hopes his days as a bench player are behind

him. But as Matta has proved each season, a player must earn the coach's trust on the defensive end to get into the game.

Ross said he feels as if he's come a long way defensively, and he expects a considerable role in this year's lineup because of it. The sophomore, however, remains most confident in his ability to score with ease.

"I think I am going to play a bigger role on this team, and I am excited to know that I will have a bigger hand in helping us on the floor this year," he said. "I think I have gotten better on defense, but I can score with the basketball. I have proven that."

Whether Ross can earn a major role in the rotation this year remains to be seen, but his coach said he has noticed the strides the sophomore has made during the offseason.



LaQuinton Ross

"I think he knows that he has to be able to defend, and at times he's going to be thrown into guarding some smaller guys that can go off the bounce and that sort of thing," Matta said. "But to his credit, what he's done with (strength coach Dave Richardson) with his lateral quickness and those types of things, it has been very, very effective for him."

**Sam Thompson, 6-7, 200, Soph. (2.1 ppg, 1.1 rpg, 10.6 mpg, 49.3 fg pct.)** – Matta has never been shy about his admiration for Thompson's natural ability, saying on multiple occasions last year that Thompson might be one of the most athletic players he's ever coached.

Thompson gave glimpses of what Matta was talking about with some acrobatic dunks and highlight reel-worthy blocks, but it was clear during his freshman season that he still had to develop his game.

That natural athleticism, however, helped Thompson make an appearance in all of Ohio State's games, even if a few were short stints.

"I want to show that I am more than just a dunker," he said. "I bring more to the table than just my athletic ability. I am pretty excited to show what I can do more than that in whatever role I have this season."

Thompson remains one of the leading candidates to take over a starting spot, but he will have to get over some shooting struggles that cropped up last season – a problem that reportedly all but disappeared during the summer months.

Thompson's quickness and length make him an ideal fit for Ohio State's regular rotation, but consistency as an offensive threat would likely put him over the top in the fight to earn a starting spot this year.

"I feel like I have gotten stronger in all areas of my game," he said. "Last year, playing, you learn a lot playing against all the guys. I feel like I have a better defensive IQ and I am just more experienced."

**Jake Lorbach, 6-7, 210, Soph.** – Along with Goldstein, Lorbach was added to Ohio State's roster as a walk-on Oct. 22. A native of Elyria, Ohio, he earned four varsity letters at Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward.

Lorbach was part of two Ohio High School Athletic Association Sweet 16 teams, one of which advanced to the Elite Eight, and he averaged 6.0 points, 8.0 rebounds and 3.0 assists as a senior.

He also earned two varsity letters for the

St. Ed volleyball team and led it to a Division I state championship in 2011.

## Center

**Amir Williams, 6-11, 250, Soph. (1.7 ppg, 2.1 rpg, 0.8 blocks per game, 6.6 mpg, 52.8 fg pct.)** – With Sullinger and Ravenel on the roster last season, Williams had more of a reserve role. Though he played in 29 of Ohio State's 39 contests, Williams was mostly reserved for when both Sullinger and Ravenel got into early foul trouble.

Despite not being a major contributor as a freshman, Williams saw big moments when he was thrust into game action early in the regular season during road games at Kansas and South Carolina while Sullinger missed time with a foot injury.

The biggest moment of Williams' freshman season came when it mattered most. During a 77-70 win over Syracuse in an Elite Eight game of the NCAA Tournament, Williams maximized nine minutes against the Orange with three points, four rebounds and two blocked shots.

"I always had a great deal of confidence within myself, but just playing in that game and being in that environment, that was definitely a boost of confidence for myself," Williams said. "I was happy to go out there and contribute to the team. With Coach having the trust in me to put me out there and throw me into the fire, I feel like I gained so much trust."

Williams acknowledges that gaining strength is a must before he can compete in the Big Ten at the highest level, but he said he's grown tremendously in that regard. Now vying for a starting spot, the sophomore's shot-blocking ability could serve as the difference-maker the Buckeyes have lacked since the departure of Lauderdale two seasons ago.

"I have grown more confident over the year," Williams said. "After sitting down and talking to Coach Matta, I realized I had to step up my game offensively and defensively to be a presence down there in the post after losing our best player last year."

"I just stayed confident and tried to work hard this summer so that I am more prepared for the year. I think I'm ready."

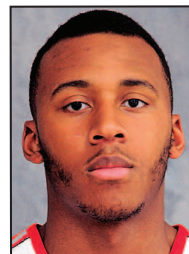
**Trey McDonald, 6-8, 240, Soph. (0.2 ppg, 0.5 rpg, 2.9 mpg, 16.7 fg pct.)** – McDonald was the only freshman last season who was considered for a potential redshirt year, but he eventually opted against it. Even so, McDonald played very little in his first season with the Buckeyes.

After a year in the program, however, the sophomore hopes he'll have a more extended role because he's worked diligently to become a more versatile player. A track athlete in high school – he participated in the high jump and ran the 400 meters – McDonald thinks he can provide ample athleticism from the center position in an offense that wants to run.

"It has helped with my conditioning a little bit and helped me be able to play fast and at a quick pace," he said of his track days. "Every day is a new challenge, but I feel myself getting better."

McDonald has played power forward and center all summer, and he's made it a point to cover Thomas in the hopes that he'll grow defensively from covering one of college basketball's most elite players.

"I hope I can be a contributor this year," McDonald said. "I have grown a lot and I feel like a new player. I hope my versatility will give the coaches more options on how to use me."



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