

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Details Inside

Vol. 31, No. 20

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 14, 2012



SONNY BROCKWAY

PATIENCE NEEDED – Ohio State's offense under Braxton Miller (5) will have a new look under Urban Meyer (right), but the changes are taking time to implement.

Getting Up To Speed

Learning Curve Steep As Buckeyes Learn Offense

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

Frustration is often a product of expectation, as the Ohio State football team was reminded during the first third of spring football practices this year.

Urban Meyer's hiring as the 24th football coach in school history inspired elation from a fan base that had grown tired of the sometimes stale offensive attack of the previous regime despite the wins and Big Ten championships that piled up. Buckeye rooters saw not only Meyer's 104 victories in 10 years as a head coach but also the high-powered offenses he built at Bowling Green, Utah and Florida.

When Meyer and his staff were introduced during halftime of a men's basket-

ball game in January, one of the loudest cheers from the sellout crowd at Value City Arena came when the new coach mentioned what type of offense he planned to bring to Columbus.

"We're going to run the spread, open it up bit," he said casually before calling his staff to center court one by one.

Most in the stands were familiar with Meyer thanks to his ultra-successful reign in Gainesville from 2005-10, but they were seeing the majority of his new assistants for the first time. At that point, few on the staff were much more familiar with each other than those who bought a ticket to cheer on the basketball Buckeyes.

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Sullinger Leaves OSU To Begin Pro Career

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

Jared Sullinger was a projected NBA draft lottery pick before he ever stepped foot on campus at Ohio State, but he looked Thad Matta in the eye before his freshman season and told the coach he'd be a Buckeye for more than a year.

That's why it wasn't a surprise to Matta when Sullinger turned his back on the draft last year to return to Ohio State for his sophomore season.

This time, though, the OSU head coach was prepared for the alternative.

"I've known since Jared got here this was probably going to be the end of the road," said Matta, who sat proudly next to the sophomore April 4 as the big man declared for the June 28 NBA draft. "Not only did he make us a better program and a better team, the list of accomplishments over the two-year span he's been here is unlike anything I've ever seen before."

Sullinger's two-year career at Ohio State made for the latest chapter in the advancement of Matta's program. Having averaged 17.3 points and 9.7 rebounds per game during his career, Sullinger helped lead the Buckeyes to consecutive Big Ten regular-season championships and most recently to the Final Four.

As Sullinger walked off the floor at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans on March 31, his jersey No. 0 draped over his head in the moments after Ohio State's 64-62 loss to Kansas in the national semifinal of the NCAA Tournament, the general sentiment was he had played his last game as a Buckeye.

"In reality, you would love to play four years at a university that has done so much for you," said Sullinger shortly after announcing his decision. "Being a hometown kid and trying to build a legacy at The Ohio State University – one of

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PHOTO BY JIM DAVIDSON FOR THEOZONE.NET
FAREWELL – Ohio State men's basketball standout Jared Sullinger is leaving for the NBA draft.

OPINION

Bumps In Road Likely For Meyer's Buckeyes?

To say Ohio State football fans are giddy with anticipation for a glimpse at the new-look Buckeyes under Urban Meyer would be an understatement. From some of the comments I have heard these past few weeks, university officials might as well get the paperwork started on renaming Ohio Stadium in the new coach's honor.

What most fans tend to forget, of course, is that Meyer is not only overhauling a team that finished 6-7 last season, he is attempting to change an offensive philosophy that dates back several generations.

Woody Hayes was credited with the program's three-yards-and-a-cloud-of-dust mentality, but the truth is that Ohio State has been a run-oriented team for much of its 122-season history. Even during the high-octane seasons of 1998 (when Joe Germaine set the single-season passing record) and 2006 (when Troy Smith won the Heisman Trophy), the Buckeyes still ran the ball and ran it a lot – respectively 54.9 and 58.5 percent of the time to be exact.

I am guessing the 2012 edition of the team will also be run-oriented despite the fact most fans think (or hope) quarterback Braxton Miller will be chucking the football all over the lot in Meyer's attacking style of the spread offense. Unfortunately, the talented Miller is still a bit raw when it comes to the passing game, he is learning an entirely new offensive system, and there really are no bona fide go-to receivers upon whom he can rely – at least right now.

What will set this year's Ohio State team apart – and indeed set it apart from last year's squad and most of the ones in program history – is the mobility of the offensive line. Apparently gone with longtime assistant Jim Bollman to his new assignment at Boston College is the old drop-step-and-retreat mentality. Rather than letting the opponent come to them, OSU linemen are actually being tasked with initiating contact.

Additionally, some of the excess baggage those on the offensive line used to carry around their midsections also seems to have disappeared. Meyer apparently favors quality over quantity.

The Buckeyes remain paper-thin in the offensive trenches, meaning just a handful of bumps or bruises could have a devastating effect on the team's bottom line. But if its health holds up, and highly-rated players perform to anywhere near their potential, the offensive line could be one of the most pleasant surprises of the upcoming season.

I know one thing: Meyer wants to play a fast-paced, attacking style of offense, and that is precisely what he has been concentrating on this spring. I was told recently by someone who has been in and around the OSU program for several years that the offensive line hasn't been this mobile since the early 1980s when Art Schlichter was running, throwing and establishing a school record for total offense that's still on the books.

Want even more reason for optimism? Meyer not only works miracles, he works them right away.

During his first season as a head coach in 2001, Meyer piloted Bowling Green to an 8-3 record. The Falcons had been 2-9 the year before. When the coach got to Utah in 2003, he led the team to a 10-2 finish. The Utes had been 5-6 the year before. And when Meyer rolled into Gainesville, one year after Florida had finished 7-5, he produced a 9-3 record.

One year later, the Gators met top-ranked and undefeated Ohio State in Arizona for the national championship and ... well, you know the rest.

Off To The NBA

I thought there was the slightest of possibilities Jared Sullinger could return to Ohio State for a third season mostly because he enjoys the camaraderie of his college teammates. But it certainly didn't catch me off guard when he announced he would make himself eligible for this year's NBA draft.

An early-season back injury, recurring foot problems and absolutely no sympathy from Big Ten officials all conspired to make the All-America big man's decision to go just that much easier.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Is Sullinger ready for the day-in, day-out rigors of professional basketball at its highest level? Is anyone who just turned 20?

Most of the griping about Sullinger's departure came from those who know very little about how the NBA operates nowadays. It matters very little if a player is ready to play NBA basketball. Most teams in the league draft solely on potential, and if a player is ready to play from the outset of his career, that is simply an added bonus.

Of the top 14 selections in last year's draft, only two – top overall pick Kyrie Irving of Cleveland and No. 8 selection Brandon Knight of Detroit – would be considered full-time starters for their new teams, Eastern Conference clubs that are going to miss this year's playoffs by wide margins.

Still, when there really isn't much more for you to accomplish at the collegiate level, why not go ahead and get paid to play? With the exception of winning a national championship, Sullinger has done just about everything he can do for the Buckeyes.

For the shortsighted few who claim he was either too soft or didn't play his hardest at all times, the numbers don't lie. He averaged nearly a double-double for his career – 17.3 points and 9.4 rebounds – and led his team to Big Ten championships each year he was in uniform. Not bad in a conference largely acknowledged to be among the toughest in the country.

Then there was the small matter of becoming the first Ohio State player to earn back-to-back All-America honors from The Associated Press since Gary Bradds did it nearly 50 years ago in 1963 and '64.

There should be little debate that Sullinger was one of the top players ever to wear scarlet and gray. Just where he belongs in the OSU pantheon is a little less absolute.

In fact, if you want to have a more intelligent discussion, debate whether Sullinger belongs among the all-time top 10 basketball Buckeyes. Start with the likes of Jerry Lucas, John Havlicek, Jim Jackson, Clark Kellogg, Dennis Hopson, Herb Williams, Robin Freeman, Larry Siegfried, Frank Howard and Bill Hosket Jr. – not to mention such old-timers as Paul Ebert, Dick Schnitker, Jimmy Hall and Johnny Minor – and tell me where you think Sullinger fits in.

Top 25? Definitely. Top 10? Not so much.

Basketball Leftovers

• To satisfy some of his most ardent detractors, Ohio State head coach Thad Matta will have to produce nothing less than a national championship – and it had better be sooner as opposed to later.

The sound of the final buzzer in the Buckeyes' national semifinal loss to Kansas had barely died away before Matta's critics began the tired old comparisons to former OSU football coach John Cooper. The argument goes that while both coaches have few peers on the recruiting trail, neither excels at gameday X's and O's.

First of all, that analogy is a ridiculous one to make. As much affection as I have for Coop, his teams won only three Big Ten championships in 11 years and never played for the national title. Then there was that dismal record against Michigan and in bowl games.

By comparison, Matta's teams have five regular-season conference championships in eight years – including the last three in a row – and have brought home the Big Ten tournament trophy three times. Additionally, fans would do well to remember just how dire the circumstances were regarding Ohio State basketball when Matta took over.

Besides, winning a national championship isn't exactly easy. It took 27 years at Syracuse before Jim Boeheim won a national title. It took 21 years before Dean Smith hoisted his first national championship trophy at North Carolina. The legendary John Wooden took 16 years before winning the first of his 10 titles at UCLA.

Even Mike Krzyzewski was at Duke for 11 seasons – and head coach at Army for five years before that – before he got his hands on his first NCAA Tournament championship.

My advice for Ohio State fans would be to exercise a little more patience where Matta is concerned.

• Not many noticed it, but William Buford's final career two-pointer – a putback slam in the waning seconds against Kansas – allowed him to tie Lucas for third place on Ohio State's all-time scoring list.

Buford and Lucas each finished their careers with 1,990 points, scoring totals that trail only Hopson (2,096, 1984-87) and Williams (2,011, 1978-81).

During his four seasons with the Buckeyes, Buford compiled some impressive numbers. In addition to his scoring, he totaled 666 rebounds, 361 assists and 131 steals. The last four-year OSU player with those kinds of overall numbers was Kelvin Ranscy, a three-time All-Big Ten selection and consensus second-team All-American in 1980. Ranscy finished his career with 1,934 points, 417 rebounds, 516 assists and 169 steals.

• Call me crazy, but Ohio State could actually be a better overall team next season without Sullinger. Obviously a guy who nearly averages a double-double every night leaves a huge vacancy, but the Buckeyes can insert 6-11 Amir Williams into the lineup and have a more traditional back-to-the-basket post player. Some tend to forget the sophomore-to-be was a McDonald's All-American who averaged 18.0 points, 12.6 rebounds and five blocked shots as a high school senior at Detroit Country Day.

That leaves Deshaun Thomas free to roam the perimeter – concentrating on his shot without worrying about getting into foul trouble – while Lenzelle Smith Jr. continues to get better and better. With Aaron Craft back to run the point and the electrifying potential of LaQuinton Ross, those who discount the Buckeyes' chances next season in the wake of Sullinger's departure will do so at their peril.

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Charter Member

Offense Off To Slow Start In Grasping Changes

Continued From Page 1

Of Meyer's five-man offensive brain trust, only wide receivers coach Zach Smith and running backs coach Stan Drayton have worked with the head coach in the recent past. Meyer and tight ends/fullbacks coach Tim Hinton were graduate students together at Ohio State, but that was in 1986. Meyer never previously worked with offensive line coach Ed Warinner, whom he lured along with Hinton away from Notre Dame, or offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Tom Herman, who previously held the same titles for three seasons at Iowa State.

The sextet (including Meyer) had three months to decide what the Ohio State offensive attack will look like in 2012. With many having to wait for their families to make the move to join them in Columbus, there was plenty of time to tinker and trade ideas.

"Most of us are here by ourselves and all we've got is this field house and each other," Herman said. "It's 24-7 football. Do I miss my kids and my wife? Absolutely – more than anything in the world – but I think it helps when you can totally immerse yourself into your players and your scheme and your fundamentals and really fast-forward to the point we are now that we're all on the same page and speaking the same language and feel really good presenting it to the players."

They started teaching what they came up with on the field for the first time March 28, the first day of spring practice.

The results of those lessons have been mixed, an outcome that seems to have been

met with both understanding and frustration.

"We're not where we need to be," Meyer said April 4 after the defense bested the offense in a second "winner/loser" day of the spring. "I am not upset; I just wish we would grasp it a little faster."

"And it's not just one position. On offense, anytime you're installing or you're doing something new, nine guys do it right and two guys do it wrong and it looks like the most disgusting thing you've ever seen. We just have to be a little more consistent."

Crawling Before Walking

Herman called the performance of his unit disheartening after the first winner/loser day of the spring, but he acknowledged the reality of the situation.

"As we start to install it, the kids' brains get overwhelmed a little bit with new terminology and new tempos – everything from stances to starts to formations to tempos. All of that is new," Herman said March 30. "Once you get to day three, it gets to be a bit overwhelming (but) that's part of the plan. Let them get introduced to everything, and then after four or five or six days go back and reteach the finer points of it. Are we anywhere close to where we want to be? No. Is this kind of the normal progression of things? Yes."

Two days and one practice later, Hinton saw many of the same things going on. With confusion setting in, missed assignments became a problem. That was not only among the youngsters but also veterans from whom

the staff expects a lot as the transition takes place.

"We've really thrown a tremendous amount at them the first four days," the tight ends/fullbacks coach said April 2. "The complexity of what we've done is amazing. Our job is to keep pushing them through and let them know we'll get stronger from it. We'll build from it. Get in there and study video, get in there and study film, get in there and learn it and make sure we're really managing our day because we have to do a tremendous job of doing the things we have to do."

"What's really interesting is we had a Friday (March 30) practice, we turned around and had a Saturday practice and then we turned around and had a Monday practice – bang, bang, bang. It's really tough to turn all that around that quickly with a large install on each day of those practices."

After the defense won its second winner/loser practice of the spring, Meyer talked about slowing down the installation process. Warinner, however, said little if any of that went on the next time the Buckeyes took the practice field. It was mostly full-speed ahead.

"We've pulled back a little, but not much," Warinner said April 6. "We installed quite a bit today. We're not going to just shut that down, but we're trying to be smart about it. We want to keep moving forward, but you have to base it on your personnel and what they can handle."

There might be no overestimating what a difficult task the staff faces as it installs the new offense.

The Ohio State coaches are in the unique

position of having to teach the offense to players while still learning it themselves.

Meyer brought his blueprint for success to Ohio State, and his staff has been charged with adapting to his way of doing things.

"I think Coach Meyer came in with a time-tested, obvious system that has been proven over the years to be very dynamic and very explosive," Herman said. "Our job as assistant coaches is to learn that system and then, as he likes to put it, enhance it with some of the things we have done."

"I think the core of what we do certainly has Coach Meyer's fingerprints all over it, and that's a great thing because that system is tried and true and has produced unbelievable results over the years at many different places. As college football continues to evolve, I think the staff we have on offense is very seasoned and successful, so our job is to enhance it and then go teach it to the kids."

Warinner likened it to Meyer playing the role of planner and designer while the assistants put the ideas into action.

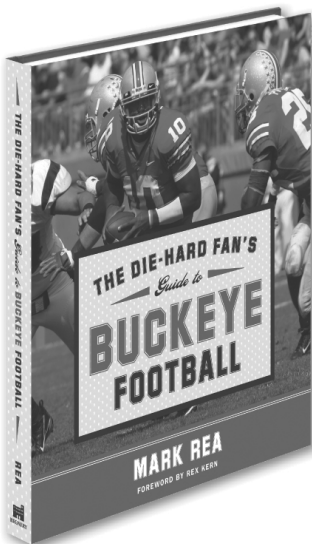
"It's our job to put it together and make it work so that it's strong and makes sense and will hold up," Warinner said. "Then we all have things we've done that can enhance Coach Meyer's philosophy and package so that when he looks to us for enhancement or some ways to do the same thing better, that's the advantage of having a lot of different minds in different systems."

While the coaches balance learning Meyer's ways and expectations with explaining it to their pupils, a similar burden falls on veteran players such as fullback Zach Boren as well.

A three-year starter, Boren is adjusting to

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SONNY BROCKWAY

ADJUSTING – Ohio State senior fullback Zach Boren (44) could be a bigger part of the offense this season and is doing his best not only to learn the new offense but to lead his teammates.

COVER STORY

lining up at places other than directly behind the quarterback this spring but still trying to provide the leadership expected of a senior.

"You want to be out there pushing the guys and being vocal, but at the same time you're trying to see the plays because you're learning them, too, so you want to know what's going on," Boren said. "It's kind of pulling you both ways, but as long as you're mentally into the practices, it's not that bad."

Every player to go on record in the spring expressed excitement about the process of picking up the new offense.

That probably comes as little surprise considering the struggles of last season under longtime offensive coordinator Jim Bollman. The Buckeyes finished 11th in the Big Ten and 107th nationally in total yards while checking in at eighth and 81st, respectively, in scoring.

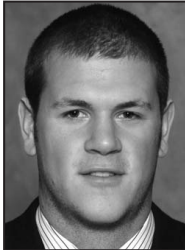
They relied heavily on the arm and especially feet of Braxton Miller, the first-year quarterback who suffered through significant growing pains but still managed to win Big Ten Freshman of the Year while leading the Buckeyes to a 4-6 record as a starter.

Miller is back and expected to be the focal point of the offense, but there is optimism the new staff will get more players involved in the weekly game plans.

That includes not only the wide receivers and running backs but also the fullbacks and tight ends. The latter two position groups now share one room and play largely interchangeable roles.

Jake Stoneburner, who tied for the team lead with 14 receptions as a tight end last season as a junior, made no attempt to conceal his excitement for the change in offensive philosophies.

"I was thrilled (when Meyer was hired) because I knew what he did with the tight ends," Stoneburner said. "I knew what he brought on and off the field with winning and excellence and being demanding. I was pretty pumped for it."



Jake Stoneburner

Boren has lined up in a multitude of spots throughout the offensive formations the Buckeyes have installed so far – even taking direct snaps in the Wildcat formation. He enters the season with 21 career college touches, a total that includes just one carry. That was a 2-yard gain against Michigan in 2010.

"It's an exciting offense," Boren said. "We're just running and going. It's all about making plays and letting people get the ball in their hands and try to do what they can. I'm excited that I'll have that opportunity. Hopefully I can make everyone happy and do the right things."

"We're getting better every day. They've been pushing the whole playbook at us. We've definitely had to deal with a lot with installs every day, but we're getting better. The first walk-through was rough, but ever since then I've seen improvement."

Turning Up Tempo

The changes going on involve not only a different batch of plays but also a totally new tempo at which to run them.

That extra wrinkle is designed to give opposing defenses more to worry about this fall, but it has made installing the offense now even more difficult.

"It's really intense, but we all know that we're here for a purpose – to work on football and get better at it," senior fullback Adam Homan said. "I don't think anyone expects it to be any other way."

Warinner is helping install a spread

offense for the fifth time as an assistant coach, experience he feels gives him an advantage because he knows what is likely to be absorbed quickly and what might need extra attention.

He also pointed to the variety of different positions he has coached as an advantage when it comes to teaching the offensive line techniques and schemes. Warinner coached running backs at Akron in 1984 and linebackers and defensive backs at Michigan State the following two years. Seven of his 13 seasons at Army from 1987-99 saw him coaching offensive linemen, but he also spent a year in 1991 working with the defensive line and two years ('98 and '99) directing the quarterbacks while also coordinating the offense.

"The reason it helps me is when I watch what goes on in terms of a play or practice, I look at the big picture – not just the right guard but understanding how what the quarterback or the tight end does affects how the line works," Warinner said.

"There are 11 pieces to the team, so just having coached a lot of different positions – I've coached offensive line the most, but I played quarterback – I always see things from that standpoint and understand," the Mount Union (Ohio) product said. "I teach my guys what the quarterback is doing so they understand the context of the play and why he's doing what he does. It's frustrating for a lineman when they don't understand that. When they understand it, they can just move on and not worry about those things."

Warinner did not downplay the sheer volume of new ideas the staff is bringing to the Buckeyes this spring compared to the past decade, but he was sure to point out there are always going to be basic similarities regardless of a coach's preferred offense.

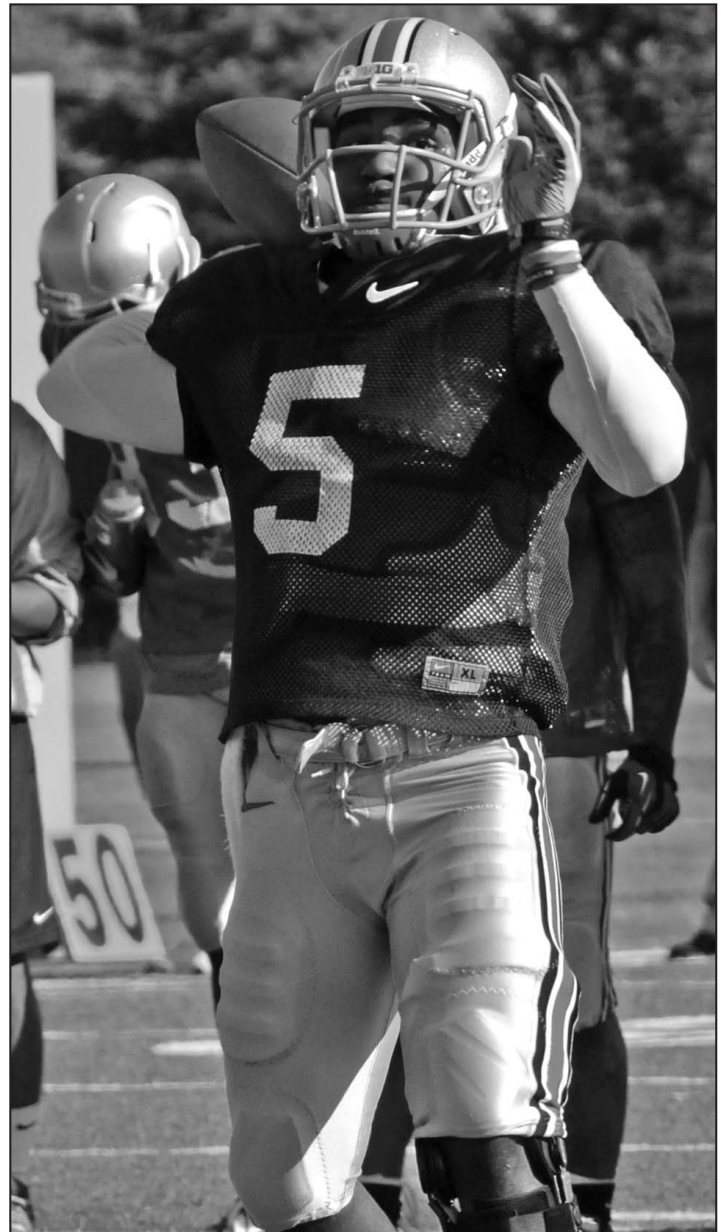
"I think what you're asking them to do – the variety of plays, the schemes and things that happen – there's a lot of difference," he said. "Football's still football. Playing with a good base, being able to strike, hit, finish, knock people off the ball – all those things haven't changed, but sometimes you forget about fundamentals when you're thinking about new concepts and plays and terms and how they all piece together."

Although much work remains to be done, Hinton expressed optimism the task will be accomplished. The offense will be game-ready before the 2012 season opener against Miami (Ohio) on Sept. 1 even though it will not be a finished product.

"It's why you have spring practice," Hinton said. "We're not ready to play a game tomorrow, but neither is anyone else in America. Our job right now is demand from them and push them and build them as the spring goes along and be a lot better in practice 14 and 15 than we are today."

"I don't know if any offense is completely functional in game one as far as everything they'll have in and everything they're doing. If you did, you'd play a one-game series and play the national championship, right? You watch teams every year regardless of the sport have to develop from game one to game 12, and if you're not getting better every game, you're getting worse. I think a guy that used to coach here used to say that all the time."

"Will we have everything in (by the opener)? Yes. Will we work to execute it as well as we can? Yes. We hope we're better in game 12 than we are game one, but we want to be very good game one."



SONNY BROCKWAY

HOPING FOR IMPROVEMENT – After Ohio State ranked 107th in the nation in total yards and 81st in scoring last year, quarterback Braxton Miller (5) and the rest of the offense are looking for better results in 2012.



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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Fast-Tempo Practices Highlight Spring Action

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

Media members were allowed to watch a pair of practices during the first week of spring football at Ohio State.

The two days – March 28 and April 4 – provided plenty of contrast. Day one represented not only the first day back on the football field as a group since losing the Gator Bowl on Jan. 2 in Jacksonville, Fla., but also the first time the Buckeyes had to endure the pace of an Urban Meyer practice in helmets, football pants and jerseys but no pads.

One week later, reporters returned to see them strap it on in full gear and go at it for nearly three hours at full speed.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin staffers were on hand both days, and their observations follow.

April 4

This day marked the second “winner/loser” practice of spring for Ohio State football and the second time media were allowed to watch the Buckeyes.

Competition was a major theme throughout, beginning with a *mano-a-mano* activity pitting one offensive player against another to start the day, continuing through position drills and into a practice-ending scrimmage.

The latter was the highlight of the day as the first- and second-team offense and defense squared off against each other for nearly 50 plays.

The unique format did not involve long drives but rather asked each side to do one thing – win on first down. In Meyer’s view, that means staying “on schedule” for the offense, so that unit has to gain at least four yards to claim a victory.

The defense dominated early, bolstered by a trio of forced fumbles and several tackles for loss.

Senior defensive end John Simon blew up the first play – an inside run attempt – with penetration and on the following snap brought down quarterback Braxton Miller on a zone-read keeper. Simon later beat senior right tackle Reid Fragel for a sack, showing the newly converted tight end has a ways to go in developing as a pass blocker.

Sophomore defensive end Steve Miller, Simon’s backup, posted a sack and forced a fumble by second-team quarterback Kenny Guiton, and junior tackle Johnathan Hankins and sophomore end Michael Bennett also posted sacks.

The offense mixed runs and passes fairly evenly, and running backs Carlos Hyde, Rod



SONNY BROCKWAY

DEFENSE DOMINATING – Thanks in part to strong play by defensive linemen John Simon (54) and Johnathan Hankins (52), Ohio State’s defense has won the first two ‘winner-loser’ practices under new head coach Urban Meyer (left).

Smith and Bri’onte Dunn had up-and-down days. Smith in particular looked good as he ripped off a handful of nice runs, but a lost fumble at the end of a gain of about 15 yards left a stain on his performance.

Hyde also lost a fumble early, and Dunn appeared to cause a turnover when he collided with QB Miller on a botched attempt at a zone-read play. Slot receiver Chris Fields also lost a fumble after a catch over the middle

that would have netted about 15 yards. Safety Corey Brown stripped the ball and fellow safety Ron Turner recovered.

There was one early bright spot for the offense when Miller rolled to his right and found wide receiver Philly Brown open behind the defense in what looked like a busted coverage. Brown hauled in the pass and raced into the end zone for a 50-yard scoring play.

Sophomore linebacker Curtis Grant stood out for the first-team defense as he came from behind to strip Hyde early in the scrimmage and notched several big hits before the day was over.

Late in the afternoon with the sun having nearly completed its descent in the west, both offenses began to find some rhythm in the run game and through the air. Miller and Guiton each began finding receivers open underneath the pass coverage, and the offensive lines opened a few seams in the running game. But it proved to be too little, too late.

Practice concluded with the offensive players and coaching staff running width-of-the-field sprints as punishment for losing.

Other notes and observations from the April 4 practice:

- The depth chart was similar to the first day of practice with the notable exception of Bennett replacing junior Adam Bellamy among the No. 1 defensive line unit. Simon remained the No. 1 Leo defensive end while

Goebel played nose tackle and Hankins was the three-technique tackle alongside Garrett Goebel. Bellamy dropped to the defensive end on the second team with Miller, nose tackle Joel Hale and three-technique tackle Chase Farris.

- The No. 1 offensive line remained junior Jack Mewhort and senior Fragel at left and right tackles, respectively, with sophomore Andrew Norwell and junior Marcus Hall at left and right guards. Junior Corey Linsley played center. The second-unit offensive line saw sophomore Antonio Underwood at right guard with redshirt freshman Chris Carter playing left guard. Sophomore Darryl Baldwin, redshirt freshman Tommy Brown and true freshman Taylor Decker alternated at the tackles while Brian Bobek and true freshman Jacoby Boren took turns at center.

- Senior tailback Jordan Hall took part in individual drills but not the scrimmage. There was no explanation after practice.

- Hankins was dinged up at the end of practice but seemed to be OK. He walked off under his own power.

- Hale had an interesting day. He subbed with the first team for a few plays in a seven-on-seven when Goebel got hurt. He nearly got into a fight with Linsley at one point, and he was doing up-downs (a.k.a. grass drills) by himself after practice. No one was quite sure what Hale had done to earn those.



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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL



SONNY BROCKWAY

HERE'S HOW IT'S DONE – New quarterbacks coach Tom Herman (left) demonstrated some footwork to quarterbacks Cardale Jones (12), Kenny Guiton (13) and returning starter Braxton Miller (right) on March 28 during Ohio State's first spring practice.

- Senior cornerback Travis Howard missed the last third of practice after what seemed to be a knock to the head. He was replaced on the No. 1 unit opposite sophomore Bradley Roby by sophomore Doran Grant. That left the second-team cornerbacks as sophomore Adam Griffin and true freshman Tyvis Powell.

- Philly Brown had Powell beaten on a fly route, but Guiton missed him with a deep pass. Afterward, cornerbacks coach Kerry Combs pointedly told Powell he intends to break the DB of his habit of turning to look for the ball at the wrong time.

- During individual group work, offensive line coach Ed Warinner talked to Baldwin about getting lower. The former defensive lineman is lean and possesses a large frame, but he seems to have a hard time dropping his hips and sitting down.

- True freshman defensive end Se'Von Pittman (undisclosed), sophomore safety Jamie Wood (shoulder) and redshirt freshman walk-on offensive lineman Ivon Blackman (undisclosed) did not practice while sophomore defensive end J.T. Moore (undisclosed) and sophomore wide receiver Verlon Reed (knee) were limited. Senior defensive end Nathan Williams (knee) and senior safety Zach Domicone (knee) did not practice after previously being declared out for spring.

- Afterward, Meyer confirmed the offense had again come up short in its battle against the defense. He said he had hoped to be farther along in installation of the new system but had seen similar growing pains in previous stops at Bowling Green, Utah and Florida.

- The head coach called sophomore Evan Spencer the team's most consistent wide receiver so far and praised the early performances of tight end Jake Stoneburner.

- Meyer expressed concern about finding players to rush the passer aside from Simon, but he identified Steve Miller as a player showing improvement in that area.

March 28

With temperatures in the 70s and precipitation limited to the morning, the Buckeyes hoped to practice outside. Strong winds forced them indoors, however, so Meyer and his staff got their first look at their new

players on the turf field at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

- The injury report was the same as day two with the exception of senior linebacker Storm Klein, who was limited as he recovered from a knee injury suffered during winter drills.

- The first unit on offense had Braxton Miller at quarterback, Hyde at running back, Devin Smith and Spencer at the outside receiver spots with Fields in the slot, and Stoneburner at tight end. The offensive line featured Mewhort (left tackle), Norwell (left guard), Linsley (center), Marcus Hall (right guard) and Fragel (right tackle).

- Guiton was the No. 2 quarterback with Rod Smith at running back and sophomore Jeff Heuerman or redshirt freshman Nick Vannett at tight end. The receivers were Philly Brown, T.Y. Williams and redshirt freshman walk-on Ryan Ross (slot). The second-team offensive line was (left to right) Baldwin, Carter, Bobek, Underwood and Tommy Brown. Decker also saw a few snaps at right tackle and performed well enough to earn praise from Meyer after practice.

- The defense took the field in a 4-3 alignment with the same starting defensive line that finished last season. Simon played the Leo end while Goebel was at nose tackle with Hankins playing the other tackle spot and Bellamy the strongside end. Senior Etienne Sabino played strongside linebacker while sophomore Ryan Shazier played on the weak side. Klein began the day in the middle but was soon replaced by Curtis Grant. Howard and Roby played cornerback with juniors C.J. Barnett and Christian Bryant at safety.

- The second-team defense had Steve Miller at Leo with a rotation at the other spots that included Bennett and Hale along with redshirt freshmen Kenny Hayes and Farris.

- The backup linebackers were true freshman Josh Perry at Sam, redshirt freshman Conner Crowell at Mike and true freshman Luke Roberts at Will with walk-on Stewart Smith also seeing some time on the strong side.

- The No. 2 cornerbacks were Doran Grant and a rotation of Powell and Griffin. Senior Orhian Johnson and Corey Brown joined them in the backfield as safeties.

- Those who tried their hand at returning punts included Devin Smith, Rod Smith, Jordan Hall, Roby and Hyde.

- Meyer was noticeably hands-on with the quarterbacks, even acting as the crashing defensive end on one option drill. He spent some time coaching the QBs on mesh points on the zone-read play, and the head coach joined offensive coordinator Tom Herman in working with them on mechanics. Meyer was happy with the quarterbacks' ability to throw.

- All of the quarterbacks wore braces on their left legs as a precaution. Meyer said that is a regular practice for his teams because they are at risk of serious injury when they plant the leg to throw.

- Hankins was among those who looked noticeably thinner after taking part in strength and conditioning director Mickey Marotti's winter workouts. Hankins is listed at 317 pounds – 18 fewer than last season – but Meyer said he would not mind seeing him drop a few more.

- Meyer was happy with the performance of the running backs, who he said collectively had developed positive momentum as the winter conditioning program came to a close.

- The practice was not at the tempo the new head coach wanted, but he said it was what he expected on the first day.

- Four players joined the roster March 26 with the start of spring quarter – true freshmen Decker, Roberts and Pittman as well as freshman walk-on punter Kevin Niehoff from Mason, Ohio. That pushed the roster to 95 players.

- A more complete rundown of the March 28 practice session appeared in BSB's April 3 electronic issue, available online free of charge to all paid subscribers. Sign-up information appears on page 5 of this issue.

BSB staffers Matthew Hager, Jeff Svoboda and Ari Wasserman contributed to this report.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Position Change Has Suited Fragel Quite Well

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The first few months of 2012 have been all about transformation for Reid Fragel.

He's changed positions from tight end to offensive tackle for the Ohio State football team, and in an effort to make his body more ready for the demands of his new spot, Fragel has added 20 pounds. He's even changed numbers, dropping from No. 88 to 77 with the position switch.

Then there's been the transformation of Fragel in the classroom. When Urban Meyer got to town, it's fair to say the new head man wasn't impressed with the effort the communication major was putting in when it came to hitting the books.

"He was very lazy in the classroom," Meyer said in mid-March. "Lazy in the classroom a lot of times correlates to lazy on the football field. We had a little conversation. He was challenged very directly."

It's fair to say that conversation hit the mark.

"He's had his best semester academically," Meyer said of Fragel at the start of OSU spring practice. "He did a nice job. He's much more serious. He's done everything we've asked since the day we had our little meeting together with him, his family, his strength coach and his position coach. He's done everything we've asked off the field."

The hope is that Fragel undergoes a similarly positive change on the field. After serving for three years as a part-time starter at tight end who excelled more at blocking than pass-catching, Fragel made the choice – with Meyer's blessing – to move to the offensive line for his senior season.

"I wanted to make the change," he said after playing his last game at tight end in January's Gator Bowl loss to Florida. "I just feel like our team needs some help at tackle. We don't have that much depth. Looking at our tight ends, we have Jeff (Heurman) and Nick (Vannett) and (Jake Stoneburner) coming back. I think we'll be strong at tight end, and I feel like my blocking will help us at tackle."

Now that he's actually started making the change, Fragel feels that things are going well so far. He even debuted this spring as the No. 1 right tackle on the Ohio State depth chart.

"Obviously it's a transition that is going to take some time," he said. "Every day I'm getting more and more comfortable out there. I'm a guy that really doesn't learn it on paper. I'm a guy who likes to get out there and actually get reps at it in order to learn. These practices are crucial, obviously, and every day I feel like I'm getting better."

He's already passing the look test. Checking in at 6-8 and 298 pounds, Fragel boasts a body that looks great getting off the bus.

"He's gained 20-some pounds and his body fat has actually gone down," Meyer said. "He's one of the leanest offensive linemen I've seen. He's a 300-pound guy with below 10 percent body fat, which is borderline incredible."

Jack Mewhort, Ohio State's other new starter at tackle on the left side, described Fragel as a freak, while new offensive line coach Ed Warinner can't help but be impressed by the physical attributes the Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South product brings to the table.

"He's the body type you want for tackle," Warinner said. "He's made a great transition. He's gained weight. He's just learning



FILE PHOTO (LEFT), SONNY BROCKWAY (RIGHT)

NEW LOOK FOR FRAGEL – Former tight end Reid Fragel (left) has become offensive tackle Reid Fragel (right) this spring.

how to play the position (but) he's coming along well."

Fragel agreed with that assessment.

"I feel like I still have a lot to improve on," he said, "but as far as the whole transition thing goes, I feel like I'm coming along at the pace that I want to."

Fragel mentioned pass protection as something he'd like to continue to see improvement on, which makes sense because he spent his first three years going out for passes rather than blocking the edge most of the time.

Though Stoneburner was Ohio State's preferred target when it came to stretching the field and running pass routes out of the tight end spot, Fragel showed he was certainly competent when the ball was thrown his way.

After working mainly on special teams his freshman season of 2009 after arriving at OSU a four-star prospect, Fragel stepped into a part-time starting role a season later as Stoneburner fought injury. That season, Fragel finished with nine catches for 121 yards and a touchdown. The score came during Ohio State's huge late-season victory against Iowa, and he added a 42-yard catch-and-run in the Sugar Bowl win against Arkansas.

In 2011, Fragel caught five more passes for 64 yards, but he knew in his heart it was time to make the position change at the end of the campaign.

"I never really had a doubt about switching," he said. "I was more comfortable blocking at tight end than I was running corner routes and stuff. In the back of my mind, I felt like I was going to be fine."

Fragel does have some experience playing tackle as well. In addition to his work matching up against opposing linemen at Ohio State, he broke his thumb during his senior year of high school, an injury that necessitated a move to tackle. Later that year, analysts at the Offense-Defense Bowl, a national prep all-star game, noted he had the edge blocking abilities to handle a move to the position.

Such a change isn't exactly unprecedented in the sport. Nate Solder, an NFL rookie a season ago with the New England Patriots, arrived at Colorado as a tight end but switched to tackle during his career. By the time he left Boulder, Solder was a finalist for the Outland Trophy and a first-round draft pick of the Pats.

Fragel's teammates think he can follow a similar path.

"My advice to all the other guys was to become friends with him because he's going to be a big-time draft pick," Heurman said. "He looks like an NFL tackle out there right now – less than 10 percent body fat at 300 pounds and he can move. He's going to be a big-time player for us this year, and I'm excited to watch him do that."

Warinner isn't ready to anoint Fragel with such high praise yet, but the former Notre Dame assistant is pleased with the progress his new tackle has made.

"I like where he is," Warinner said. "He's still a work in progress, but all the physical attributes you're looking for in a guy you'd go recruit, he has them. He's 6-8, 300 pounds, fast, athletic, can bend. The more comfortable he gets with technique, the better he's going to be. It's just learning to play that position (and) in six practices he's doing OK."

Mewhort also sees his teammate as up to the challenge.

"I'm very impressed," Mewhort said. "One thing about Reid is he never gets negative. He's getting coached very, very hard right now and a lot of guys would look at that negatively, but he's getting better every day."

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Buckeyes Looking For Linebackers To Improve

By **MATTHEW HAGER**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It is starting to look like the light is coming on for Curtis Grant, which couldn't make new Ohio State head football coach Urban Meyer happier.

Grant, a sophomore linebacker, saw limited playing time last season. He was primarily used as a special-teamer, notching two tackles in 10 games. The former five-star prospect from Richmond (Va.) Hermitage overanalyzed everything last season, according to Meyer, and was not enjoying football.

Then came his first collegiate offseason, one during which Grant took advantage of a fresh start and earned the right to start the spring as the Buckeyes' No. 1 middle linebacker.

"He had an excellent offseason," Meyer said March 28 following OSU's first spring practice. "He's a guy that has to develop. Obviously it was his first day. He did fine. In a week - we have no choice - he has to be a player for us. If not, we've got problems."

Fortunately for a Meyer, Grant was still running with the starters on defense seven days later. While a left knee sprain limited senior Storm Klein at the beginning of the spring and helped allow Grant to move up to the ones, Grant had apparently impressed enough to stay in the top MLB spot. Klein was full-go during an April 4 practice open to the media, but he worked as the No. 2 middle linebacker.

Grant's rapid improvement has caught not only Meyer's eye, but those of his teammates.

"He's getting a lot better," senior linebacker Etienne Sabino said. "It's crazy how good he gets day by day. He keeps improving. I'm excited to see what he can do."

Sabino knows that having the 6-3, 235-pound Grant in the middle could help the Ohio State defense reclaim the Silver Bullets moniker after a difficult 6-7 campaign in 2011.

"He's a big physical kid," Sabino said. "He can run pretty well for his size. When you have that combination, it's going to be tough for offenses to scheme him up and block him."

Ryan Shazier had an especially close perspective of Grant's freshman struggles. The classmates are good friends, and while Shazier quickly picked up the playbook and earned playing time, Grant did not.

"At first it was tough for him, but then he handled it a lot better," Shazier said. "We talked a lot. We've worked the whole offseason and he'll do what he can. The thing was he just didn't get the playbook. The more you know the playbook, the slower the game gets."

The game getting slower may be helping Grant. What isn't in question, though, is that his physical changes stemming from Ohio State's difficult winter conditioning program have helped. Defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Luke Fickell said Grant weighed about 245 pounds during last season and is now listed at 235.

"If he had gotten to 250 (pounds), he

might have put his hand on the ground (and move to the defensive line)," Fickell said. "He went the other direction, so he can stand up (and play linebacker)."

Another player in better shape this spring is Sabino. The fifth-year senior strongside linebacker hopes to build on the end of his 2011 campaign. Sabino ended the season on a good note by recording four tackles, including two for loss, during Ohio State's 24-17 loss to Florida in the Gator Bowl.



Curtis Grant

The OSU senior said he wants to carry that momentum into the spring and fall.

"I want to keep playing aggressive and keep having an impact on this defense," said Sabino, who recorded 62 tackles last season and made five starts.

Another starter returning this season is Shazier. The sophomore had an impressive freshman year, notching 57 tackles, including a team- and season-high 15 in his first start against Penn State.

"I wasn't really surprised because I planned on doing that," he said. "That's why I came in early (as an early enrollee in January 2011). I wanted to do whatever I can to help the team. I came in early, tried to gain weight and do whatever possible to help us win."

Shazier also underwent a physical change this winter, adding 15 pounds to his frame. The weakside linebacker is listed at 6-2 and 226 pounds but said he does not feel like he has lost any mobility.

"He knows more, he understands more," Fickell said of Shazier. "He's a guy that by nature is a very confident guy. So he can make a lot of calls and do a lot of things that maybe we didn't have last year. Having another year under his belt, he has the ability to maybe take charge of that huddle a little bit more."

Battling Grant for the middle linebacker spot is Klein, who like Sabino and Shazier saw significant playing time last season. Klein made 10 starts during the 2011 season, most among the returning linebackers, and made 62 tackles.

"He did a good job for some of the things we asked him to do," Fickell said. "From edge to edge of the defense, I think Storm's very good at what we need him to do. (But) when he gets outside the edge, outside the box, he's got to do a better job."

Klein is listed at 242 pounds after playing at around 250 last season, according to Fickell.

"He's really trying to take it seriously and understands that this is one of his last shots," Fickell said.

After Grant, Klein, Sabino and Shazier, Ohio State's linebacker room is razor-thin. The second-team linebackers at the start of spring were redshirt freshmen Conner Crowell and newcomers Joshua Perry and Luke Roberts. When Klein returned to the rotation, Crowell dropped out. Walk-on fifth-year senior Stewart Smith also saw some scrimmage action at the position.

"They're working hard," Fickell said of his group. "We don't have a ton of guys, so guys are getting a lot of reps. But that's good. That's what they need."





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Sullinger Is Latest Buckeye To Leave Early For NBA

Continued From Page 1

the greatest universities in the world – you would want to play four years.

“I just want to do what’s best for my situation, and the best for my situation was going to the next level.”

The decision to leave Ohio State was a tough one, Sullinger admitted, especially because he walks away having come only two victories short of accomplishing his ultimate goal of winning a national championship.

But the decision is an understandable one, especially given what’s ahead for Sullinger. The choice to turn his back on the advancement of his

SONNY BROCKWAY
PLENTY TO SMILE ABOUT
 – Sophomore Jared Sullinger gave Buckeye fans plenty of moments worth smiling about during his time at Ohio State.

basketball career – and the vast riches that come with the NBA lifestyle – after his freshman season was hard enough. It is almost unthinkable to do it twice.

“I think for him the timing is right,” Matta said. “There’s no doubt in my mind he’s ready. He’s got a skill-set and a great understanding of the game, but the biggest thing about Jared Sullinger is he’s a winner.”

Sullinger, who turned 20 on March 4, became the seventh Buckeye in the last six years under Matta to leave Ohio State for the NBA with college eligibility remaining. Five of those players were freshmen – Greg Oden, Mike Conley Jr., Daequan Cook, Kosta Koufos and B.J. Mullens – while the other was junior Evan Turner, college basketball’s national player of the year in 2010.

Each of the six aforementioned players

was a first-round selection, and three were lottery picks – the first 14 picks of the draft. Oden was the overall No. 1 pick in the 2007 draft while Conley was selected fourth that year. Turner went No. 2 overall in 2010.

Cook was the No. 21 pick in 2007, Koufos was the 23rd selection in 2008, and Mullens went No. 24 in 2009.

Making the Final Four this season helped Sullinger come to the decision to pursue his professional career, especially given the way the Buckeyes made it. Ohio State overcame a ragged month of February during which it lost three of eight games to make what turned out to be an improbable run to college basketball’s biggest stage.

“Going to the Final Four with a team that many people said we weren’t good enough, weren’t strong enough, weren’t mentally tough enough, and still being able to get to the Final Four with all the ups and downs we had, I think that was tremendous for this basketball team,” Sullinger said.

“Once we got to the Final Four, we were trying to win it. But unfortunately, we fell short. I feel at peace with the decision I’m making.”

Factor in some of the personal adversity Sullinger had to overcome – injuries to his back and foot early in the season and frustration with the way he was being officiated down the stretch were major discussion points – it was clear that he had little more to prove at the collegiate level.

That wasn’t the case after his freshman season, a year Sullinger now looks back on as much easier than the one he just completed. In his first season with the Buckeyes, he had such outside weapons as Jon Diebler and David Lighty taking the pressure off him in the post. This year, Sullinger was more susceptible to double-teams and the relentless contact that came with being defended that way.

It was hard for Sullinger, but that was the final steppingstone the big man had to withstand before his father, Satch, was comfortable watching him pursue the NBA.

“The skill-set has always been there,” the elder Sullinger said. “But last year at this time, I wasn’t comfortable as a parent with the option of him possibly going to the NBA. Jared’s had it pretty easy in basketball. He’s been relatively injury-free. This year, I watched the peaks and valleys and I watched him mature.”

“There’s only one way to get experience, and that’s by being inexperienced in a situation. I watched him be immature in certain things and work his way out of it. I saw that consistency start to come back during the end of the season run all the way through the Final Four.”

Most importantly for the younger Sullinger, the taste of losing isn’t quite as strong.

The team from his freshman year had three senior starters and lost only two games before the NCAA Tournament. Regarded as the best team in college basketball – and rewarded with the No. 1 overall seed – that Ohio State squad fell to Kentucky in the Sweet 16. Quickly thereafter, a somber Sullinger told reporters he would be back with the Buckeyes for his sophomore season.

This time it was different, however.

The final game of Sullinger’s career at Ohio State will be a loss, but there were no guarantees made about his future in the locker room. Instead, the All-America big man was rather reflective on the season and his career.

Perhaps he takes solace in knowing the mark he left on the program will culminate in the raising of a Final Four banner in Value City Arena sometime in the next year.

The only thing left to do now is progress.

“I think it was a difficult decision,” his mother, Barbara, said. “In the best of all worlds, he would have been here for four years then gone off, but this is what he needs to do right now. This is the best thing for him.”

Leaves Winning Legacy

Sullinger’s April 4 press conference lasted roughly 30 minutes, but there was only one question he preferred not to answer – the one regarding what legacy he thought he’d leave behind at Ohio State.

“That’s something that you guys have to determine as media,” Sullinger said. “Whatever you all say, I go by.”

Matta had already said Sullinger’s individual accomplishments during a two-year span were unlike anything he had ever seen before, and when they’re broken down it is quite astonishing.

Only Jerry Lucas and Michael Redd scored more points in their first two seasons with the Buckeyes than Sullinger, who leaves Ohio State 29th on the all-time scoring list (1,281 points) and 11th in rebounding (717 career boards).

After his freshman season, Sullinger was named Big Ten Freshman of the Year and he was a first-team all-conference selection in both of his seasons. At the end of his sophomore season, Sullinger became the first player to earn back-to-back first-team All-America honors from The Associated Press since North Carolina center Tyler Hansbrough did it in 2008 and ’09.

“He spent two years here, but with (older brother J.J. Sullinger) here and the time he’s been around this program, it literally feels like I’ve coached him more than two years,” Matta said. “The hardest part is you develop a friendship with the guy. I’m going to miss Jared the player, but I’m going to miss him more as a person on a daily basis.”

Sullinger’s legacy expands further than what he was able to accomplish as an individual player.

Instead of turning his back on the program after suffering a tough loss in the Sweet 16 as a freshman, Sullinger postponed the life he had dreamed of enjoying since his childhood to return to Ohio State for another shot at NCAA Tournament glory.

The Buckeyes didn’t win the national championship in his sophomore season, but Sullinger led the team to its first Final Four appearance since 2007. And Ohio State was two points away from playing in its second championship game under Matta.

“The biggest attribute that Jared Sullinger has is he’s a winner,” Matta said again. “That’s something that I’ve learned throughout the process. I don’t care if it’s high school, college, the NBA. When you get a guy who cares about winning, you’re going to be successful.”



COVER STORY



SONNY BROCKWAY PHOTOS



HIGHLIGHTS – Jared Sullinger helped Ohio State win two Big Ten regular-season titles, a conference tournament title in 2011 (above) and a win against Syracuse in March that sent the Buckeyes to the Final Four (right).

Ready For NBA?

It's been a lifelong dream for Sullinger to play in the NBA, and now he is just a few months away from living that dream.

"That's everybody's dream when you're watching Michael Jordan hit that shot against the Utah Jazz ... " Sullinger said. "You're thinking, 'I want to be in a game like that.'"

Sullinger would have likely been a top-five pick had he decided to enter last year's draft. Looking at the overall sentiments of current draft projections, his stock took a hit in the last year.

At 6-9 and 269 pounds, Sullinger slid down draft boards between five and 10 spots, depending on where you look. ESPN analyst Chad Ford has Sullinger ranked the No. 11 overall draft prospect – still technically a lottery pick but certainly not as prestigious as a top-five or even top-10 selection.

"Stock doesn't really mean too much to me at this point," Sullinger said. "I just want to do what's best for my situation, and I thought what's best for my situation was going to the next level."

He is projected as a power forward despite playing center for the Buckeyes the past two seasons, and some draft experts question Sullinger's size and whether that will lead to difficulties being a force in the paint in the NBA.

But Matta isn't concerned about those opinions, especially because he said there is an extensive list of skills Sullinger has but wasn't asked to put on display during his time with the Buckeyes because it wasn't what the team needed.

"You saw signs through his career here of 'I didn't know he could that,'" Matta said. "He goes to the next level with a lot of different things he can bring to the table."

Sullinger lost roughly 25 pounds last summer and returned to the team as a smaller, leaner version of his freshman presence. He admitted that the weight loss made it hard for him to gain leverage in the post as easy as he had done in the past, and it led him to regain five pounds during the season.

Though Sullinger isn't sure what NBA teams will want him to do to his body before the draft, he said he was open to working toward shaping his frame in any way teams feel is best for his game.

Additionally, his ability to shoot from the outside – he was OSU's top three-point percentage shooter this past season – could be one of the biggest assets for his projected position, but his father said he's worked on helping his son become a better ball-handler since he was a child.

"I taught him his footwork with the rest of the boys at 2 or 3 (years old) at the foot of the bed," said the elder Sullinger, who became Jared's high school coach at Columbus Northland. "I watched him play outside and he learned footwork before he developed any bad habits. I watched him handle the ball and I knew (the NBA) was a possibility."

For Matta, the younger Sullinger's basketball IQ will serve him well in any situation.

"I've always said he's one of the most intellectual players I've ever coached," the

OSU coach said. "He came in that way as a freshman. The thing is that people don't know he studies the game – not only the college game, but the NBA game. He can tell you a lot about a lot of NBA issues. For him, the timing is definitely right."

Sullinger is scheduled to participate in workouts before the draft and will begin interviewing agents in the coming weeks. He's withdrawn from school, sparing the Buckeyes a scholarship penalty that could have ensued had he decided to prolong his decision.

"He's going to be a great pro," OSU junior Evan Ravenel told BSB. "He worked hard for this, and I'm happy he's on the verge of accomplishing it. He deserves everything he's about to get."

For now, Ohio State is rapidly disappearing in the rearview mirror for Sullinger. But he promised he will return one day.

"My mom made me look her in the eye and promise her I'd get a degree," Sullinger said. "So, I will be in classes soon."



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