

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

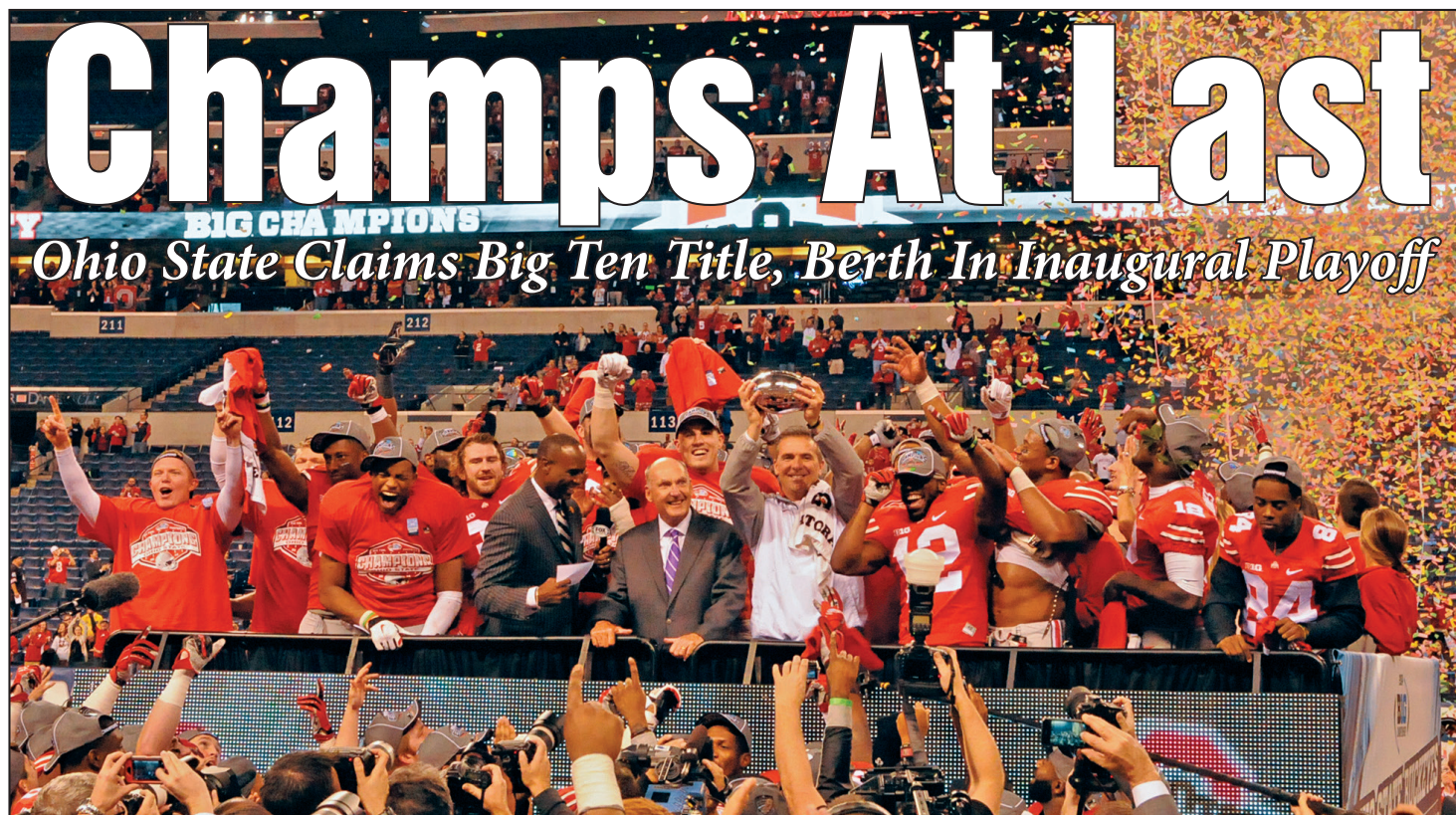
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Vol. 34, No. 13

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Dec. 20, 2014



SONNY BROCKWAY

**ANOTHER FOR THE TROPHY CASE** – Members of the Ohio State football team and head coach Urban Meyer (center) celebrate after routing Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game.

By RYAN GINN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Standing in the home locker room of Lucas Oil Stadium, covered in streamers, Ohio State safety Tyvis Powell let out a howl of protest.

It had been suggested to him that, following a 59-0 dismantling of Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game, Ohio State had finally won something other than the Illibuck trophy under third-year head coach Urban Meyer.

"We got those gold pants!" Powell said. "You can't forget about those."

Up until that Dec. 6 night in Indianapolis, Ohio State's three wins against Michigan ranked among the program's most significant accomplishments over the last four seasons.

The 2011 team, playing under interim head coach Luke Fickell, finished 6-6 in the regular season before losing to Florida in the Gator Bowl. The 2012 group ran the table but was banned from the postseason. The unbeaten streak eventually morphed into a 24-game run, but Ohio State lost both postseason games in 2013 to Michigan State in the Big Ten title game and to Clemson in the Orange Bowl.

Other than fifth-year senior right tackle Darryl Baldwin, who didn't play during the 2010 season that ended with a league title and Sugar Bowl win, nobody on the team had won a conference crown or a bowl game.

When the clock ticked down to zero in the fourth quarter, members of the 2014 Ohio State Buckeyes could no longer say they were a group without a ring. Sure, there were division titles in three consecutive years, but the Buckeyes hadn't been able to capitalize on that for reasons on the field (2013) and off (2012).

The last five minutes on the sideline felt like a party. Players crept over to the Gatorade jugs and attacked their coaches from behind, while others exchanged hugs or danced on benches.

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## BSB's Annual Bowl Preview

Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 64-page bowl preview issue is overflowing with information about Ohio State's College Football Playoff bid as well as features, news and updates on all of OSU athletics, including:

- A preview of the Sugar Bowl against Alabama, including our staff prediction, season stats, bowl notes, a feature about the hyped coaching matchup between Urban Meyer and Nick Saban, and more
- A recap and stats from the Buckeyes' satisfying Big Ten Championship Game blowout of Wisconsin
- A rundown of the top moments from the 2014 season and an update on injured quarterback J.T. Barrett
- For those of you traveling to the game, a rundown of attractions in the New Orleans area from Louisiana native and BSB staffer Ryan Ginn
- A feature on Ohio's new Mr. Football, OSU commit Joey Burrow, as part of nine pages of recruiting and high school football coverage
- Reports on the men's and women's basketball, men's hockey and wrestling programs
- Plus all of BSB's regular briefs, columns and features





## COVER STORY

# Seniors Get First Taste Of Championship Glory

Continued From Page 1

"We've been waiting for this for four years," senior defensive tackle Michael Bennett said. "It means so much to me to be able to do this with these senior guys. And all these young guys that have contributed and take it seriously, you don't see that in every program where the young guys look up to the seniors and respect them the way our young guys do. That just means a lot to me because it shows how close this team is and how much we care about each other."

"We've been hyped up before a lot of games, but this game was different – the way guys looked at each other, the way guys cared about each other. Just so much intensity, and people have taken ownership in what they do. It was incredible. I'm blessed to be a part of it."

Ohio State celebrated though it did not know its playoff fate, an answer that became clear about 12 hours later when the Buckeyes were picked as one of the four teams that will compete for the inaugural College Football Playoff.

But for one night in Indianapolis, the potential of what was to come didn't matter. Ohio State had won the championship it so deeply coveted, and done so at a place that held harsh memories.

In 2013, the Buckeyes trudged off the field as Michigan State players pranced around with roses in their teeth after an unexpected 34-24 victory over Ohio State. The loss hurt, and some players stuck around on the field afterward to soak in the disappointment.

After the Wisconsin game, the Buckeyes

stayed on the field for a different reason. Celebratory hats and shirts were passed around and donned, and players clambered up to the dais for the trophy presentation. There, the silver football that adorns the conference championship trophy was passed around, kissed one at a time as it made its way through the masses. Meyer held it up as confetti and streamers shot upward in the background.

"It's truly special," senior tight end Jeff Heurman said. "Your senior year, being a captain, this is what you set out to do at the beginning of the year and we accomplished it and that's truly special. I can't thank these guys enough on this team and this coaching staff for putting in so much work and getting us to here. It truly paid off tonight as you can see. We played nine units strong, and you can see what happens when we do that."

Heurman was just one of the seniors who helped the Buckeyes navigate an unlikely road that now could lead all the way to the top and for whom the championship ring holds such great meaning.

## Recovery Mode

The fact that Ohio State even put itself in a position to win a conference championship and compete for a national title is a minor miracle on its own.

When the dust settled after the second week of the season, the Buckeyes were in as about as bad a position as they could have been up to that point. They'd just lost 35-21 to Virginia Tech at home, plummeting to a No. 22 ranking in the Associated Press writers' poll.

The hill to climb became even greater because Michigan State lost at Oregon that same day, lessening the impact of a potential win against the Spartans and leaving the Big Ten the butt of jokes across the country. To top it off, the Buckeyes were forced to navigate these obstacles without their starting quarterback, who happened to be the two-time reigning conference MVP.

Meyer said Dec. 7 that college football programs are the most complex organizations in the world, more so than major corporations or any other complicated entity. As such, direction has to be set at the top.

"When you talk about 18- to 22-year-olds, what made that (success) happen? You see a lot of times where that doesn't happen and everyone's intention is for it to happen," Meyer said. "I think it's a combination of things. We spent an inordinate amount of time on leadership training for our coaches in the offseason. We've never done that before. I'm glad we don't have selfish coaches or people that are above and beyond it. They went to class. Our coaches went to workshops on leadership training, on how to develop the room – we call it power of the unit, and I saw improvement."

"The linebackers were a very poor unit a year ago. They're one of our strongest now. It's the same coach, coaching better. It's phenomenal the way they've improved. I think that's one reason – our unit leaders have done a phenomenal job developing our units. We also, for two years now, put our players through leadership training as well, and I think it's paying off."

Ohio State began reeling off victories one after the next, but the end of the season presented a myriad of challenges. Luckily for the Buckeyes, the senior captains helped guide the underclassman-heavy team to safe harbors week after week. Against Minnesota, Bennett gave an impassioned speech at half-time of what became a 31-24 win against the Golden Gophers.

Two weeks later, he was back at it in the third quarter of the Michigan game as Ohio State went back-and-forth with the toothless Wolverines. The Buckeyes corrected course and finished with a 42-28 triumph.

In addition to those wins, victories on the



SONNY BROCKWAY

**TITLE TIME** – Ohio State senior defensive lineman Michael Bennett, wearing the No. 53 of late teammate Kosta Karageorge, helped lead the Buckeyes to a 59-0 win in the Big Ten Championship Game vs. Wisconsin.

road against Michigan State and Penn State put the Buckeyes in position to erase the bad memories from one year ago and to show the country just how much they'd grown since the loss to Virginia Tech.

"This doesn't happen without the leadership demonstrated by the guys who usually sit in the front row who are called seniors," Meyer said after the win over the Badgers. "Mike Bennett, he just finished his best three weeks as a Buckeye. I don't know how he played – I think he played pretty good, but I'm not talking about that."

"I'm talking about his development as a leader, a guy that I can count on, a guy that doesn't whine and moan and complain about stuff. That's kind of how he got through it in the old days, and that's not the case now."

The seniors had some help from some of the younger players, too. Meyer said in the Dec. 7 press conference that he didn't



## COVER STORY

## College Football Playoff

**No. 2 Oregon vs. No. 3 Florida State**  
Rose Bowl • Pasadena, Calif. • Jan. 1, 2015 • 5 p.m.

**No. 1 Alabama vs. No. 4 Ohio State**  
Sugar Bowl • New Orleans • Jan. 1, 2015 • 8:30 p.m.

**CFP National Championship Game**  
Arlington, Texas • Jan. 12, 2015 • 8:30 p.m.

anticipate the success of redshirt freshmen such as linebacker Darron Lee, quarterback J.T. Barrett and cornerback Eli Apple, all of whom were chosen as Freshman All-Americans.

"I didn't think Darron Lee would perform like an All-Big Ten outside linebacker," Meyer said. "He's not quite there but darn close. To see the development of Eli Apple, I thought he was a very average player. He's not an average player anymore, he's a pretty good player. We had two sophomore safeties that never started before. J.T. Barrett, I thought he'd be OK."

"It is a long journey. When did it start? I started seeing it, but I didn't believe it completely until the experience that we had against Wisconsin."

The seniors helped bring out that play in the underclassmen, though. Speaking after the Big Ten Championship Game, Apple said that the redshirt freshmen made it their mission to live up to the example set by the leaders on the team.

"I love the seniors," Apple said. "I love all those guys. They're maybe the best group of seniors in Ohio State history right now. We just made it a mission as underclassmen, because we're a young team, to play hard for them. It's a great feeling."

## Playoff Payoff

After 11 wins in a row, Meyer and his players still had to sweat out a playoff announcement.

With one spot left, the floodgates of relief opened when ESPN announced that the Buckeyes had received the fourth and final spot and would be taking on No. 1 Alabama in the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans. It capped a torturous morning for Meyer, who watched the announcement at his house alongside Ohio State director of athletics Gene Smith.

Meyer pressured Smith for information, figuring his boss would be plugged in. At that point, Smith had the unhappy task of telling Meyer that not even Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany knew whether the Buckeyes would be in or out.

"Gene came over to my house and I said, 'What do you got?' He said the commissioner doesn't even know," Meyer said. "I thought, 'Come on.' I thought he was going to wink or give me the thumbs up like he's done in the past. It wasn't that way at all."

While players confessed to nerves about the announcement, senior linebacker Curtis Grant played it cool hours after the pairings were made public.

"I just didn't know if we would be three or four," he said. "It didn't really matter to me as long as we were in there. If you look, we had a championship game and the other two (Big 12 teams), they're sharing a championship. Which team would you go with? The team that actually fought the last game or two teams that are sharing a championship?"

Bennett expressed a similar belief beforehand, saying in the Indianapolis Colts' locker room after the win against Wisconsin that he

didn't think it was possible that the playoff selection committee could leave out the Buckeyes.

"Watch the film. Watch the film of what we just did," Bennett said. "We functioned on all cylinders tonight, and when you see something like that happen you have to take a step back and wonder, 'Who can't they beat

## 2014-15 OSU Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Opp. Record	Bowl Game, Date
Aug. 30	vs. Navy (at Baltimore)	W, 34-17	7-5	Poinsettia vs. San Diego State, Dec. 23
Sept. 6	VIRGINIA TECH	L, 35-21	6-6	Military vs. Cincinnati, Dec. 27
Sept. 13	KENT STATE	W, 66-0	2-9	None
Sept. 27	CINCINNATI	W, 50-28	9-3	Military vs. Virginia Tech, Dec. 27
Oct. 4	at Maryland	W, 52-24	7-5	Foster Farms vs. Stanford, Dec. 30
Oct. 18	RUTGERS	W, 56-17	7-5	Quick Lane vs. North Carolina, Dec. 26
Oct. 25	at Penn State	W, 31-24 (2OT)	6-6	Pinstripe vs. Boston College, Dec. 27
Nov. 1	ILLINOIS	W, 55-14	6-6	Heart of Dallas vs. La. Tech, Dec. 26
Nov. 8	at Michigan State	W, 49-37	10-2	Cotton vs. Baylor, Jan. 1
Nov. 15	at Minnesota	W, 31-24	8-4	Citrus vs. Missouri, Jan. 1
Nov. 22	INDIANA	W, 42-27	4-8	None
Nov. 29	MICHIGAN	W, 42-28	5-7	None
Dec. 6	vs. Wisconsin*	W, 59-0	10-3	Outback vs. Auburn, Jan. 1
Jan. 1	vs. Alabama**	8:30 p.m.	12-1	Sugar vs. Ohio State, Jan. 1

\* - Big Ten Championship Game (at Indianapolis) \*\* - Sugar Bowl (at New Orleans)

when they are functioning on all cylinders? I personally think we can beat anybody."

Thanks in part to his leadership and the guidance of the other three team captains as well, the group that lost by two touchdowns

at home to an eventual 6-6 team will get up to two more games to prove themselves against the best teams in the country.

If the Buckeyes find themselves down at any point, they'll know whom to turn to.

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