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In-State Feud

HUDDLE PHOTO BY KEVIN DYE; FILE PHOTOS INSET

FAMILIAR FOE – Ohio State head coach Thad Matta and his Buckeyes (center) will face Dayton in the second round of the NCAA Tournament. The Flyers are led by former OSU assistant Archie Miller (inset left) and one-time Buckeye guard Jordan Sibert (inset right).

Buckeyes Draw Dayton In NCAA Tournament

By BEN AXELROD
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

While the announcement of Ohio State's No. 6 seed in the NCAA Tournament should have been cause for momentary celebration in Columbus, Buckeyes head coach Thad Matta was instead met with somewhat of an insult from CBS analyst Seth Davis.

"You can't duck them anymore," Davis said on the official selection show, immediately after it was announced that Ohio State will face 11th-seeded Dayton in Buffalo, N.Y., as a part of the South Region's opening round on March 20.

Davis' ribbing of Matta was in reference to a perceived notion that the Buckeyes head coach is reluctant to face in-state opponents on a regular basis. Games against fellow Ohio teams have been few and far between in the Matta era, as the Buckeyes' only in-state foe this year was Ohio University, and last year the Buckeyes didn't face a single Ohio team.

While Matta has remained mum on the topic in the past, there's a multitude of reasons that the head coach of Ohio's premier basketball program would be hesitant to take on a formidable in-state foe such as the Flyers – or Xavier or Cincinnati, for that matter. There would be little incentive for the Buckeyes to give a platform to a team right down the road that they'd be expected to beat, thus giving Ohio State nothing to gain and a lot to lose in any Buckeye State battle.

But when Matta first saw that he wouldn't be able to – as Davis put it – "duck" Dayton this year, his first thought wasn't dread. Rather, Matta saw an attention-getter for his team, which he believes will ultimately benefit the Buckeyes.

"I think for this team, it's a great thing," Matta said of Ohio State being paired with the Flyers. "I like that because there won't need to be a wake-up call. There won't need to be a, 'Who is this? Who are they? What conference are they in? I haven't heard of that guy,' or anything like that."

The connection between Ohio State and Dayton extends beyond more than just I-70.

The Flyers have been led for the past three seasons by head coach Archie Miller, who served as an assistant under Matta at OSU from 2008-09. The brother of Arizona head coach – and fellow Matta disciple – Sean Miller, the younger Miller has maintained a relationship with Matta since leaving Columbus to join his brother's Wildcats staff.

"We talk all the time," Matta said of his relationship with Archie Miller. "It's sort of like playing Arizona last year. He knows a lot about my team, I know a lot about his team."

Matta's knowledge of the Flyers also extends beyond his conversations with his former pupil.

Two years after opting to transfer from the Ohio State program, junior guard Jordan Sibert has put together an impressive debut season at Dayton. The Cincinnati Princeton product leads the Flyers with a team-best 12.5 points per game while averaging an impressive 43.9-percent success rate from beyond the three-point arc.

As Matta explained, Sibert's departure following the Buckeyes' 2012 Final Four run came as the result of a wish for more playing time for the 6-4, 187-pound guard. A former four-star prospect, Sibert averaged just 11.4 minutes

Continued On Page 6

COVER STORY

Florida, Kansas Are Top Seeds In OSU's Region

Continued From Page 1

per game during his sophomore season and failed to appear in 14 of Ohio State's final 18 games – including the Buckeyes' final six contests.

With Sibert now in a starring role at Dayton, his decision to head west appears to have paid dividends for the fourth-year junior. And despite his own team's struggles from three-point range, Matta doesn't have any ill feelings toward the player who fell out of his rotation two seasons ago.

"When he left he just said, 'I want to play a lot.' He's definitely getting to do that," Matta said of Sibert. "He's having a great career there. I'm one of these guys that as long as everybody's happy in terms of where they are in what they're doing, I'm happy for them."

A member of Ohio State's third-ranked recruiting class in 2010, Sibert arrived in Columbus alongside current Buckeye seniors Aaron Craft and Lenzelle Smith Jr. Playing in 25 of Ohio State's 37 games as a freshman, Sibert was believed by many to be the heir apparent to Jon Diebler at Ohio State's shooting guard position, but when his sophomore season began, he found himself on the bench in favor of Smith.

"Just like any of these other guys sitting up here, we were brothers," Smith said. "We were teammates. We had one another in hard times. I guess things really didn't pan out for him as well as they did for me. I guess I was just the fortunate one to get that starting position and remain here on this Buckeyes team. Then again, I'm pretty sure he's happy with what he did and his decision and that he's looking forward to playing us."

While Smith was anointed the starter, Sibert remained a part of the Buckeyes' rotation and even scored 12 points off the bench in a Dec. 28, 2011, win against Northwestern. But as Ohio State made a run to a second straight Big Ten regular-season title, the sophomore guard's minutes dwindled with then-freshman Sam Thompson earning increasing playing time for Matta's squad.

"Our practices are the toughest practices that I've ever been a part of," Thompson said. "There was competition across the board between all 12 guys or however many guys we had that year. There was definitely some competition between the two of us."

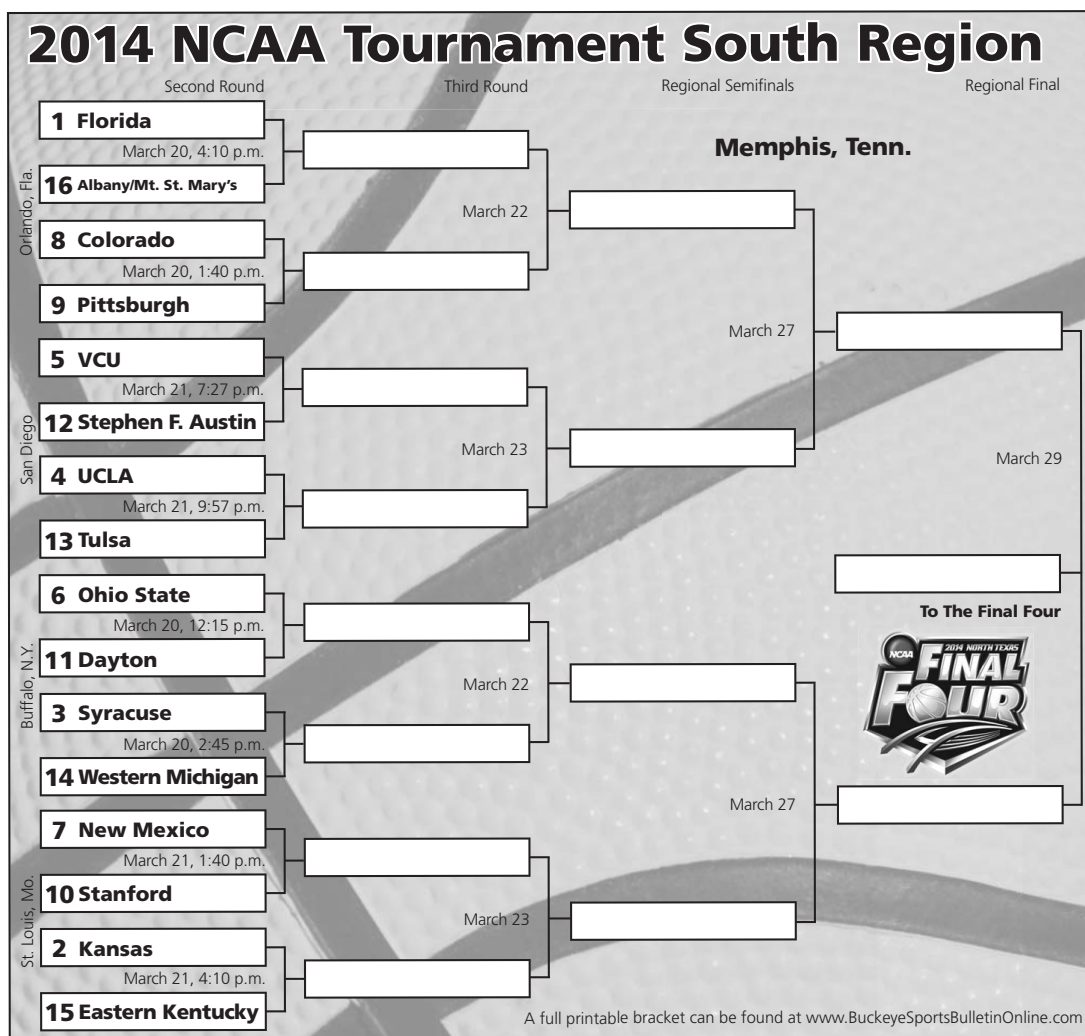
Between Matta's alleged disdain for facing in-state foes and Miller and Sibert's Ohio State connections, there won't be any shortage of storylines when the Buckeyes and Flyers square off in Buffalo. But according to Matta, they're nothing more than just that, as it's the NCAA Tournament in and of itself that is everybody's primary focus this time of year.

"The fact that we're playing a team an hour away, five hours away, that's kind of irrelevant to me," Matta said. "We're going to Buffalo. This is Ohio State's sixth straight NCAA Tournament, which I think the most they've ever done before was three years in a row. I'm excited for this team and the opportunity to play again."

"No matter whom you're going to play in the NCAA Tournament, it's going to be a really, really good basketball team."

New Seed, Same Attitude

Should the Buckeyes' fight past the Flyers, they'll be faced with a potential nightmare matchup with No. 3 seed Syracuse in the tournament's round of 32. The Orange's stout 2-3 zone defense would certainly not



be ideal for an Ohio State squad that has struggled with its shooting throughout the 2013-14 season.

"I just hope we get to see it," Matta joked of Syracuse's zone.

The Buckeyes' road to the Final Four from the South Region doesn't include only the Orange, but the tournament's top overall seed in Florida, as well as arguably the country's most talented team in second-seeded Kansas. Ohio State's unfavorable draw is the result of a 25-9 overall record, which coincided with a fifth-place finish in Big Ten play.

Matta said that he was under the impression that the Buckeyes would be receiving a No. 5 seed, but with six Big Ten teams receiving NCAA Tournament bids, he believes that his team was bumped down a slot.

Either way, Ohio State is entering the NCAA Tournament lower than a two-seed for the first time since 2009, but the 10th-year Buckeyes head coach is hopeful that his team will maintain the same attitude that it has in each of the past four seasons.

"I'd like to have the same mind-set," Matta said. "Because I've liked how far our past couple of teams have made it."

Ohio State's past four NCAA Tournament runs include four trips to the Sweet 16, two to the Elite Eight and one to the Final Four. Despite the team being an underdog of sorts this season, Thompson remains confident

that the Buckeyes will be advancing to the second weekend of the tournament for the fifth consecutive season.

"Seeds don't matter," he said. "Wichita State beat us last year as a 9-seed. The seed doesn't matter. What matters is the team that shows up to play when the tournament comes. The Ohio State Buckeyes will show up to play, no matter what seed we are."

If the Big Ten tournament is any indication, Ohio State remains a flawed squad but one that can never be counted out. The Buckeyes erased an 18-point deficit to defeat Nebraska in the tournament's quarterfinals and overcame a 16-point Michigan lead before ultimately falling to the Wolverines in the semifinals.

With an impressive press defense that has been spearheaded by one of the best perimeter defenses in the country, the Buckeyes are well aware of what their calling card is. Whether OSU will have the offense to match remains to be seen, but Thompson insists that the pieces are all there for the Buckeyes to again make an impact in the Big Dance.

"We always have something to prove," the junior forward said. "We're a confident bunch right now. We feel that we can beat anybody in the country when we come out and play the type of basketball we're capable of playing. All that matters right now is that we have a good few days of practice, we get our bodies right and we get ready to go."

About Dayton

Located: Dayton, Ohio

Enrollment: 7,700

Nickname: Flyers

Colors: Red and Blue

Conference: Atlantic 10

Record: 23-10 (10-6)

Head Coach: Archie Miller
(60-37, Third Year, all at UD)

Home Arena: UD Arena

How'd They Get Here:

At-Large Bid

Top Players:

Jordan Sibert, Jr. Guard
12.5 PPG, 43.9-percent three-point shooter

Devin Oliver, Sr. Forward
12.1 PPG, 7.5 RPG

Dyshawn Pierre, So. Forward
11.1 PPG, 5.6 RPG

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

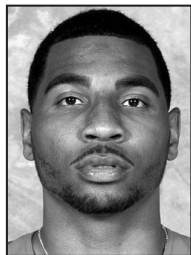
Spring Practice Kicks Off At Ohio State

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

As Ohio State's 2014 spring practice sessions got under way March 4, Braxton Miller donned two interesting accoutrements in addition to his black No. 5 practice jersey.

The first was a sling that held his right shoulder, which underwent surgery in late February that will likely keep him out of all 15 practices including the April 12 spring game.

The other was a camera and microphone setup that clipped onto a red Ohio State baseball cap, which the Buckeye staff will use to make sure Miller's spring will still be a fruitful one even though he won't be taking live reps.



Braxton Miller

"We have a contraption set up where he actually calls the play and he also tells us what he sees in the secondary," head coach Urban Meyer said. "Every play, we're having him say what he sees in the secondary. It'll be a productive spring."

The film taped each day is then broken down by the staff, including offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Tom Herman.

"The video itself is just OK," Herman said after practice No. 2 of the spring. "The audio is what I was the most interested in, and it was really good. To be able to stand there and have a conversation and verbalize every single play ... 'OK, here's what I'm looking at. There's the Sam. OK, it looks like quarters, but the Sam's outside leverage so it might be this and it might be that. I'm going to go here and go there,' and just have him talk and talk and talk and talk."

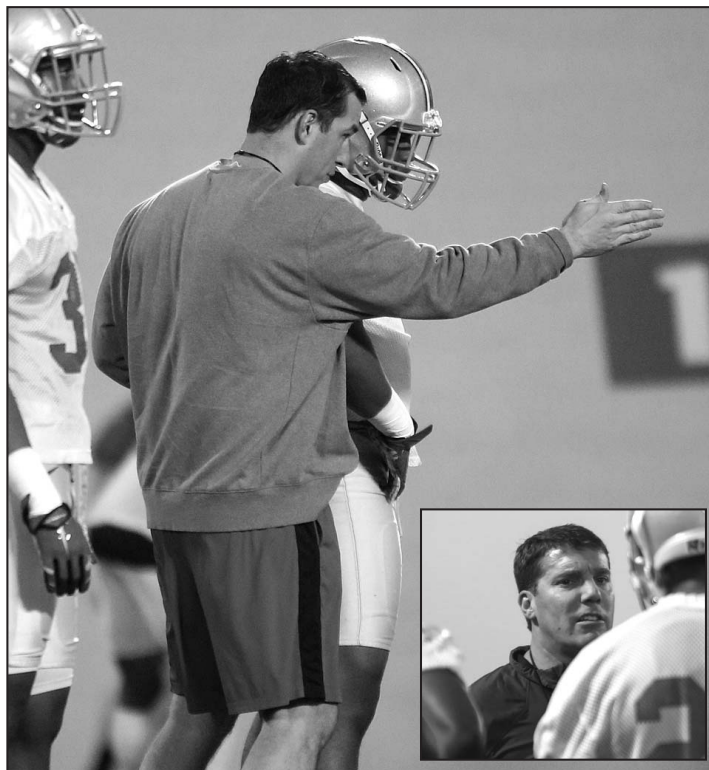
"One of the things we want to do is, he knows football. He's actually really football smart. It's the speaking the language thing that we're working on with him so when a GM or a scout or an offensive coordinator comes in this time next year and puts him on the board, all that football knowledge can come out. So the more he can talk and articulate that, the better."

In fact, the Buckeye coaching staff appears to be focusing on getting Miller to improve by pointing to his pride and his pocketbook after Miller came back to school in part because NFL draft returns were mixed.

Meyer recently called Miller "the most improved quarterback in America," and the numbers bear that out. During his up-and-down freshman season, Miller took far too many sacks and completed just 54.1 percent of his passes, while during his junior season he captured his second Big Ten Silver Football while completing 63.5 percent of his passes for 24 touchdowns and seven interceptions.

Yet he also struggled at times down the stretch, going 30 for 60 with five TDs and three picks in the last three games of the season vs. Michigan, Michigan State and Clemson.

That those performances came in the three most important games of the season left many draft experts saying that Miller was best served by returning to Columbus for another season to work on his game, and Meyer seems to know that for Miller to be a first-round choice next spring, he needs



JOSH WINSLOW PHOTOS

'GREAT TRANSITION' – Ohio State coach Luke Fickell (center) discussed the changes on the defensive coaching staff, including the addition of co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash (inset).

to keep making strides during his senior season.

"If he doesn't have a good summer it will cost him a lot," Meyer said. "He'll be a very average player. I think he understands his weaknesses – his verbal skills and keeping his eyes on the secondary. The good thing is you can do that without having him throw. It's obviously better if you throw, but you saw him use every snap, watch things – he was engaged."

"He has a lot riding on this now. If he doesn't fix this, it's a different spot than he wants to be in."

The way Meyer sees it, Miller has progressed from needing to work on fundamentals such as footwork and balance to skills like verbal communication and keeping his eyes downfield so he's properly able to diagnose where – and when – to throw the ball.

Those are the skills NFL scouts will be looking for when Miller does leave Ohio State, and Meyer wants to help the Huber Heights, Ohio, native be ready for that next step by focusing on key aspects of his game.

"There's a lot of average quarterbacks out there," Meyer said. "You've got to be tough to stand back there with a pass rush coming and still keep your eyes downfield. I'd say that's probably typical of every quarterback I've been around (to make that rise). You have to fight through that."

And of course, any improvement Miller makes during his final season in Columbus will not only help his draft stock but also make an already record-setting Ohio State offense even more lethal during the 2014 season.

Getting to the top of the mountain as a team is also on the quarterback's list of

goals, yet another reason this spring won't be a waste even if Miller won't be facing any live bullets.

"You want to accomplish things that you didn't accomplish in your first three years," Miller said. "I feel like I left little things out on the field, and I can achieve all my goals. It's some things I think about, and that's why I wanted to come back."

Fickell Defends Record

Of all the numbers that stuck out for the Ohio State football team in 2013 – 24 straight wins, a school-record 45.5 points per game, Carlos Hyde topping the 1,000-yard barrier to become the first Meyer back to do so – the one that brings perhaps the most negative connotation is 110.

That is where Ohio State finished in the Football Bowl Subdivision when it came to passing yards allowed per game, and the defense was shredded through the air during the second half of the season, particularly in the losses to the Spartans and Tigers that ended the campaign.

That led to some massive restructuring on the coaching staff, with new co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash being brought in from Arkansas with the directive to fix the pass defense.

So when defensive coordinator Luke Fickell faced the media after the March 6 practice, it wasn't going to be a strictly riled conversation. One question in particular riled Fickell up, as a media member asked if he ever worried that his job at Ohio State was in jeopardy during the early throes of the offseason.

The former OSU nose guard responded with a 352-word answer in which he expressed frustration with the struggles

– and the criticism that has come with them – but also said his love of his alma mater and desire to fix what went wrong a season ago has him excited to face the challenge.

"The reality is as you go on battling, if (being let go) happens, it happens," he said. "If it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen. But what are you going to do, live your life worried about everything? How would that be? What would that do for you? You know what, you're confident in what you do and you believe in what you do. If that's what the plan is, that's what the plan is."

"I want what's best for this place. Coach Meyer knows that and we talked about that from day one. If something is better for this place, then so be it because I want what is best for my alma mater, my university."

Of course, Fickell remains at Ohio State, and through two practices he said his relationship with Ash – not to mention new line coach Larry Johnson, who replaced Fickell's longtime friend and former teammate Mike Vrabel – has worked well thus far.

"It's been a great transition, to be honest with you," Fickell said. "I know that we haven't had the real stresses and the reality of a season, but we battled through a lot of things in about the last month or so and it's been a great growing experience for me. I've always had a bit of a comfort level since I've been here with the people that I've known. Even having Coach Vrabel here, not that he's been here for a long time, but a guy that's had a comfort level in there that you always knew."

"That's one of the things that Coach Meyer likes to challenge you to do is to get you out of your comfort zone. Having some new guys has made me do that and broaden things that we do. It's been a great growing experience I think for all of us, and I think it's going to show."

That meshes with what Ash said about his hiring when asked in February.

"If I didn't think that Luke and I could have a good working relationship and have chemistry in the room, I would not have done it," he said of taking the job. "The players are going to feed off the coaches, and we talk a lot about successful teams have one thing in common – they have great chemistry."

"A lot of that comes from the staff. You don't have to be best friends or anything, but you have to be on the same page, you have to have a great working relationship, you've got to share the same beliefs and philosophies and direction for the defense or offense, whatever it may be."

And so far, it appears some of the fundamentals of Ohio State's previous regimes are meshing with the ideas of the new members of the staff. Fickell continued to talk about the defense doing its "one-11th," a hallmark of the defensive staff's directions for years, while with Ash on board the team will work on simplifying the defense and allowing what will be a young back seven to fly to the football.

It's too early to tell how some of the adjustments – which will include more aggressive, press coverage on receivers – will pan out on the field come August. One thing is for sure, though – the plan to win at Ohio State still begins with defense.

"He wants to be great," Fickell said of Meyer. "It's pretty self-explanatory. We have to understand that we're going to challenge things. If a guy catches one, he catches one, but the idea of sometimes bending but don't break is not exactly the mentality that obviously Coach Meyer likes, and those are

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

some of the things that as you get into the third year of it, you figure out each other. And hopefully we'll do a better job of it."

O-Line Looks For New Blood

One of the most intriguing things about the entire spring will be how a new-look offensive line comes together under position coach Ed Warinner, who must replace four seniors in left tackle Jack Mewhort, left guard Andrew Norwell, center Corey Linsley and right guard Marcus Hall.

Even the one returning player, Taylor Decker, is undergoing a transition, moving from right tackle to left, so nothing will be the same along the line when the Buckeyes meet Navy on Aug. 30 in Baltimore.

Warinner doesn't seem to be worried, though, as he puts his young charges through their paces in the early days of spring ball.

"I'm pretty confident," he said. "Everything that you want to see at this point, we're seeing."

To start the spring, the Buckeyes sent out Antonio Underwood at left guard, Jacoby Boren at center, Pat Elflein at right guard and Darryl Baldwin at right tackle to join Decker with the first unit, while the second team included Kyle Dodson, Joel Hale, Billy Price, Tommy Brown and Evan Lisle from left to right.

Adding in a five-member true freshman class – two of whom are already on campus in Marcelys Jones and Kyle Trout – will give Warinner plenty of options come the fall. The offensive line coach also knows he doesn't have to have his mind made up until then, either.

"It's a fluid deal, and we'll let everybody have their shot and kind of let it sort itself out," Warinner said. "We don't have to know who the starting O-line is going to be until



GOOD START – Ohio State freshman linebacker Raekwon McMillan (5) impressed head coach Urban Meyer during his first collegiate practice.

JOSH WINSLOW

– you guys are going to want to know by the end of spring, but I don't need to know until about 10 days before the first game."

The players, meanwhile, seem to have embraced the race for the four positions that need filled, even if the daily motto of getting better every day hasn't changed for the men in the trenches.

"Coach Meyer said it before," Decker said "I became a good player because of the culture that was created inside that offensive line room. I believe 100 percent in that. We have a culture in our room that I either had to become better or I wasn't going to play. And that's the culture – you've got to improve, you've got to be a tough guy and do

it every play. I would just say that the culture made it that way."

McMillan Impresses

Another unit that needs rebuilding is at linebacker, where All-American and Big Ten leading tackler Ryan Shazier left with a year of eligibility remaining to chase his professional dream.

There are two returning starters at the position in middle man Curtis Grant and strongside linebacker Joshua Perry, but no spots are safe after injuries and inconsistent play – especially when it came to defending the pass – at the position fed into the overall defensive struggles.

Perry and Grant – who is splitting time in the middle with junior Camren Williams – were joined by redshirt freshman Darron Lee at the first-team weakside linebacker spot to start the spring, but the player who might have turned the most heads in the first two days of practice was true freshman middle linebacker Raekwon McMillan.

A top-50 player in the nation coming out of high school, McMillan – who made 159 tackles, 35½ tackles for loss and 8½ sacks last year for Hinesville (Ga.) Liberty County – even caught the eye of the head honcho early on.

"I was very impressed with Raekwon today," Meyer said March 4. "He moved around, very mature."

Meyer didn't just comment on McMillan's skills to the media, either, going to his position coach to find out more.

"Coach comes over to me (to ask about him)," Fickell said. "I say I'm going to hold my tongue until we put on some shoulder pads and get out of the underwear stuff, but you know what, you're seeing what you saw from film, you're seeing what you saw in high school when I went to watch him play."

As Fickell mentioned, the Buckeyes didn't even put full pads on during the early days of spring, so there's a long way to go before McMillan can be penciled in as an impact player for 2014.

The recruit is still doing everything he can, though, to stand out from the rest, thanks in part to some advice from the head coach.

"Coach Meyer always tells us he wants the incoming freshmen to play early," McMillan said. "He wants us not to sit back and relax and just wait for the next guy to leave, but to practice every day like you're competing for a job. Attack every drill like it's your last drill."

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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2, 2014
The Woody Hayes Athletic Center | 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Buckeyes Hope Pro Day Helped Draft Status

By RYAN GINN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If anyone questioned the talent on display at Ohio State's Pro Day, held March 7 at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, they need only look at the sign-in sheet that sat in the lobby of the football facility.

All 32 NFL teams were present, and approximately 80 scouts in total were on hand to check out the 17 former Ohio State football players who participated in workouts or drills. A handful of big names showed up, including Minnesota Vikings head coach Mike Zimmer and general manager Rick Spielman, Philadelphia Eagles coach Chip Kelly and Pittsburgh Steelers defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau, who won a national championship at Ohio State in 1957 playing under Woody Hayes.

Six of the players had the luxury of picking and choosing which events they performed, having already competed at the NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis from Feb. 22-25.

Cornerback Bradley Roby, for example, competed only in position drills at Pro Day after wowing scouts by running a 4.39-second 40-yard dash at the combine. Although he struggled a bit when working with the punt returners, he absolutely dominated the battery of defensive back drills put on by scouts.

The cornerback might have struggled at times during the 2013 season, but a strong showing in front of scouts seems to have put those concerns in the rearview mirror. NFL Network draft analyst Mike Mayock, who was in Columbus for OSU's Pro Day, said in a post-event telecast that Roby's stock is possibly the highest of any Buckeye at the moment.

"What he wanted to do was be fluid, athletic and show a great change of direction, and I thought he did that," Mayock said. "There were several defensive coordinators, a bunch of defensive backs coaches, and he put on a show."

"Athletically, I think he and Justin Gilbert of Oklahoma State are the two most athletic corners. I didn't say they're the best corners, but they're the most athletic. I thought Roby put on a show, and I don't think he can get out of the first round."

Linebacker Ryan Shazier turned some heads by running a 40-yard dash clocked between 4.36 and 4.38 seconds by those present. Perhaps the most amazing aspect of his feat was not that he didn't lose his speed despite bulking up to 237 pounds, but

that he clocked that time despite injuring his left hamstring in the process.

The ailment isn't serious, but it ended his Pro Day after Shazier decided he wasn't able to re-run the 40 or participate in the position drills.

"I feel like it opened some eyes," Shazier said. "I think some guys knew how fast I was, but I feel like it also opened some eyes for some people. A lot of guys don't run 4.3s, especially at 237, so I feel like it helped out a lot."

It certainly appears to have done so. Shazier is currently projected to be taken 26th overall by Cleveland in Scout.com analyst Jamie Newburg's mock draft, and Mayock was impressed by the combination of his speed and size.

"There were a lot of scouts who wanted to watch him, and he pulled his hamstring in the 40, but not before he ran a 4.38," Mayock said. "Now that's crazy, for a 237-pound outside linebacker to have those kinds of movement skills and explosion. A lot of teams think he's a first-round pick."

Carlos Hyde, who in 2013 became the first running back coached by Urban Meyer to rush for 1,000 yards in one season, decided not to risk the 40-yard dash because of a hamstring injury sustained at the combine. Although he was hoping to run in the 4.4-second range in Indianapolis, the injury slowed him down to 4.66.

Back in Columbus, Hyde was content to settle for position drills, but his work there impressed. Known for his bruising size and downhill running ability, Hyde impressed Mayock with his versatility by flashing his ability to catch balls out of the backfield.

"What's really important for a high-level tailback, if you want to be a three-down back in the NFL, you've got to catch the football," Mayock said. "What he showed today is he's a natural catcher, another box checked off. He looks like a late-first- to mid-second-round pick."

Having completed the full arsenal of events at the combine, offensive lineman Jack Mewhort also eschewed the measurable events in favor of position drills back in Columbus.

Mewhort, who started at left tackle for the Buckeyes in 2012 and 2013, worked out at guard in Senior Bowl practices and played guard during the game. He also played guard for the Buckeyes as an underclassman.

At Pro Day, however, Mewhort got in some reps at center during the position drills. The move was a bit of a surprise given that he hadn't played center since



JOSH WINSLOW

STOCK RISING – Former Ohio State running back Carlos Hyde (34) impressed NFL Network draft analyst Mike Mayock during OSU's annual Pro Day event March 7.

high school, but he left scouts raving about his ability to fill a spot anywhere on the offensive line.

"Nobody had seen him snap before, and it created a little buzz," Mayock said. "I could see a lot of the offensive line coaches and scouts going, 'Hey, if this kid could play center, literally he could play all five positions on an NFL offensive line.' When you only dress seven offensive linemen on Sunday, his versatility is going to help him. I think he'll ultimately go in the second round."

Wide receiver Corey "Philly" Brown stated before the combine that his goal was to run the 40-yard dash just once, and he did that after clocking a time of 4.51 seconds. However, it wasn't the last time he performed the event in front of scouts, after all. At Pro Day, Brown clocked a 4.40, shaving valuable time off his previous mark.

When asked if he entered the day with any nerves given that Pro Day is a de facto job interview, Brown answered quickly and definitively with his trademark confidence.

"I've been waiting for this forever," he said. "This is something everybody's been waiting for since we were 7, 8, 9, whenever people start football. Just being able to come out here and try to make an NFL team and be able to support your family and do what you love and make it your job, it's a dream come true."

Center Corey Linsley, projected as a late-round draft pick, joined fellow offensive lineman Mewhort in focusing on the position drills. Two weeks earlier, Linsley flexed

his strength in Indianapolis by cranking out 36 reps on the 225-pound bench press, good enough for a tie for second place among all combine participants.

One Chance To Impress

For the many players who weren't invited to the combine, Pro Day offered an opportunity at a job interview that they otherwise would not have received. Many were starters at OSU hoping to make someone take enough notice to consider using a late-round draft pick or free-agent spot on them.

Safety C.J. Barnett tried to put all those factors out of his mind, but he couldn't shake the importance of the upcoming events and ended up with a rough night beforehand.

"I couldn't really sleep," he said. "Kurt (Coleman) advised me to get about 10 hours of sleep, but I woke up around 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock – I kept waking up just thinking and dreaming about it. It was very important to me, so it was in my mind."

That didn't stop him from cobbling together a solid performance, though. Barnett ran a 4.46-second 40, measured a vertical leap of 37½ inches and cranked out 22 reps on the 225-pound bench press.

He was pleased with his performance, which exceeded the goals that he had set for himself.

"All the numbers I was shooting for, I surpassed them," he said. "I've been training for the past two months. Ever since the Orange Bowl, I've been training for this. It feels good that it paid off. Some teams had some GMs here, so that was good that they noticed me and that they liked me. But I did what I had to do, and hopefully they like it."

Mewhort and Linsley also had company from their fellow departing offensive linemen Marcus Hall and Andrew Norwell.

For Hall, the combine was all about showing just how much he'd improved over the last two seasons at Ohio State, both in his technique and body makeup. He noted that his weight was 313 and body fat was 21 percent. Those were stark improvements over the 330-pound frame with 25-percent body fat that he once carried, describing that as the worst shape he's ever been in.

"I feel like I'm in a lot better shape," he said. "A lot of people tell me that I improved from 2012 to 2013 with the new coaches. I feel like if I can make that much of an improvement with great coaches, there's no telling what will happen on the offensive line."

He noted that scouts told him that they'd like to see him pack on some more mass, albeit in a healthy way, in order to reach an NFL-caliber body.

"They were talking about me maybe gaining a little weight," he said. "You know



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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL



JOSH WINSLOW

SITTING IT OUT – Safety Christian Bryant was unable to participate during Pro Day as he continues his rehab of a broken fibula suffered during his senior season.

how this system is, that doesn't really mix. They said they feel like I can carry a lot more weight with my frame in the pros."

A three-year starter, Norwell measured in at 6-5 and 315 pounds. He finished with 22 reps on the bench press and joked that he was disappointed in that number because long snapper George Makridis was able to match it.

He's still in school and on pace to graduate in May, but Norwell hasn't shied away from the draft preparation process, either. He noted that he had hoped to be invited to the NFL Combine but said that he was comfortable working out in Columbus and feels he has a lot to offer an NFL team.

"I play tough," he said. "I like to finish. Playing at Ohio State and being a starter for three years, that definitely helps. I have a lot of game film. They can judge me off that and my work ethic."

Kicker Drew Basil went through a somewhat unique Pro Day experience compared to his peers, given that his sole reason for being there was lining up a few kicks inside OSU's indoor practice facility.

While most players got to cite their game film as proof of their NFL readiness,

Basil is somewhat of an outlier at his position. Despite being a three-year starter, he was often limited by Urban Meyer's high-powered offense, taking just 10 attempts in 2013 and converting nine of them.

Working in front of scouts, Basil drove 85 percent (17 of 20) of his attempts through the uprights. It was a solid performance, but he displayed the marked perfectionism of a kicker in assessing his day.

"Not awful but not great," he said when asked to describe his outing. "When do you not want to be perfect? I just went out there and I wanted to have fun. Every since I've been little, it's always been you perform better whenever you're having fun."

Bryant Forced To Watch

As his teammates put on a show in front of NFL scouts, safety Christian Bryant was forced into the familiar position of watching from the sideline. After missing the final nine games of the 2013 season with a broken fibula, Bryant still isn't 100 percent and won't work out in front of scouts until he is.

He plans to work out in front of scouts in April or May when he feels he can fully showcase his recovery. The knowledge that he'll likely get a chance to make his case before the draft eased the pain of not being able to compete at the combine or Pro Day.

"It wasn't really that tough because I know where I'm at in this process," Bryant said. "I wanted to of course be here for the scouts and just be here for my teammates, cheer them on a little bit."

He hasn't sulked after the injury that ended his Ohio State career or the ruling by the Big Ten that denied him a medical redshirt and the chance to compete as a Buckeye in 2014.

"That's behind me now, to be honest with you," he said. "Like I said before, everything happens for a reason. I'm not quite sure why it happened just yet, but I mean, I'm pretty sure I'll figure it out some time here soon."

Bryant believes that he'll be drafted. In fact, when he does finally get a chance to showcase his abilities, he thinks he'll be at the highest level of his career.

"I just want to show that I'm back at 100 percent – can cut, can break, didn't lose a step," he said. "Maybe I gained a step or two with this comeback."

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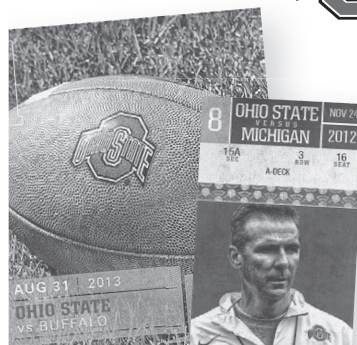
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