

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

Vol. 33, No. 20

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 19, 2014

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Details Inside



Continuing The Battle

JOSH WINSLOW

READY TO RUMBLE – Ohio State's Ezekiel Elliott (15) and Raekwon McMillan (5) battle in a pregame circle drill before the Scarlet and Gray squads battled April 12 in the annual spring game at Ohio Stadium.

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Ohio State Concludes Third Spring Under Meyer

By **BEN AXELROD**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Urban Meyer knows how far Ohio State has come. He also knows how far the Buckeyes have to go.

Wrapping up his third spring as the Ohio State head coach with an admittedly lackluster spring game exhibition, Meyer failed to let an uneventful afternoon in Ohio Stadium tarnish his team's previous 14 practice sessions. After a 24-2 start to his Buckeye career, Meyer has seen enough to make him believe that the best is yet to come.

"We had a good spring," Meyer said following the Gray team's 17-7 win over the Scarlet on April 12. "I think we're better than we were two years ago, and I'm hoping we're a notch better than we were last year."

Meyer's stellar start as the OSU head man was at one point a 24-0 mark, but the Buckeyes fell victim to Michigan State in last season's Big Ten Championship Game before losing to Clemson in the Orange Bowl. Ohio State's issues were obvious, as the Buckeyes surrendered an average of 539.0 yards in their final three games of the season.

As a result, the OSU defense underwent an overhaul, with Meyer hiring Arkansas defensive coordinator Chris Ash to implement a new quarters coverage system. All throughout spring practice, the Buckeyes practiced press coverage with their cornerbacks, and after 15 practice sessions, Meyer has seen enough to be encouraged by the progress of his defensive unit.

"I hope the reaction was that they looked quicker, they look faster, they trigger on the ball much better than they have in the past," Meyer said of his

defense following the spring game. "If that's your perception, that's mine as well."

Along the defense, Meyer already knows who seven of his starters are going to be heading into the 2014 season. Defensive linemen Noah Spence, Joey Bosa, Michael Bennett and Adolphus Washington, linebacker Joshua Perry, cornerback Doran Grant and safety Tyvis Powell have all secured spots in the starting lineup, leaving four vacancies still up for grabs.

Those position battles will be fought between Curtis Grant and Raekwon McMillan at middle linebacker, Darron Lee and Chris Worley at strongside LB, Gareon Conley, Armani Reeves and Eli Apple at cornerback, and Vonn Bell and Cameron Burrows at safety. Of those matchups, the one between Grant and McMillan possesses the most intrigue as the senior Grant looks to stave off the highly touted freshman.

"(McMillan's) in the rotation," Meyer said. "He's going to play. Whether he's going to start depends on – you know, him and Curtis are in a battle. Curtis had his best spring. He's earned that right. He's not a freshman anymore. He's got to go play."

Merely having options at linebacker is an improvement for the Buckeyes from a year ago, and Meyer was also quick to single out the play of both red-shirt freshman strongside linebackers throughout the spring as well. The Silver Bullets may not be back just yet, but their return could be imminent.

On another positive note for the Buckeyes, Meyer witnessed the development of backup quarterback Cardale Jones, who took the majority of the offense's first-team snaps as senior star signal caller Braxton Miller sat out

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OPINION

Spring Answer Man Returns For Another Q&A

The 2014 version of Ohio State's annual spring football game ranked somewhere on the excitement meter between paying taxes and watching paint dry. When a halftime footrace between a handful of university students and a couple of OSU players serves as the highlight of the afternoon, it's not exactly a ringing endorsement for the event.

Even head coach Urban Meyer admitted it was a game "that at times I (didn't) want to be watching."

Not that a spring game is necessarily designed to enthrall onlookers. It serves as the caper on a 15-session practice schedule that allows college football teams a chance to knock off some winter rust as well as affording young players the opportunity to do what they have to do to get playing time in the fall.

The Buckeyes have won 24 of 26 games in the two years Meyer has been at the helm, but while enjoying a 92-percent success rate is enviable, the team finished last season with a decidedly ugly thud. Ohio State lost its last two games of the season for just the second time since 2000, and only Michigan's unsuccessful two-point attempt with 32 seconds remaining avoided a season-ending streak of three losses for only the seventh time in program history.

Accentuating the lingering sour taste since the losses to Michigan State and Clemson – games in which the Buckeyes could not hold fourth-quarter leads – was defensive play that could only be described as pitiful. In those last two games, the Buckeyes allowed an average of 37.0 points and 507.0 yards. Tack on the numbers against Michigan, and the defense surrendered averages of 38.3 points and 539.0 yards over the final three games of the season.

That won't get it done at any level of the game, much less the major league tackle football played in the Football Bowl Subdivision. Obviously, Meyer knows that and hired former Wisconsin and Arkansas coordinator Chris Ash as well as longtime Penn State assistant Larry Johnson Sr. to help change the mentality as well as plug the holes.

Meanwhile, the Buckeyes' record-setting offense from a year ago is in a state of flux. Braxton Miller is rehabbing from surgery on his throwing shoulder, and graduation losses include four starting linemen as well as the team's leading rusher and receiver from a year ago. As if that weren't enough, the offense will be without its ace in the hole – backup quarterback Kenny Guiton, whose cool head and Midas touch will be sorely missed.

It seems every year the number dwindles of spring practice drills open to public and media scrutiny as Meyer and his coaching staff attempt to figure out what went wrong at the end of last season and determine which players can be counted upon to assume leadership roles in 2014.

Despite the dearth of open practices and a spring game that revealed very little, the Spring Answer Man returns for his 20th annual visit to provide some insight and information about what the Buckeyes accomplished this spring.

Q. We know Miller will be the starter at quarterback, but with his history of injuries, we also know a capable backup is needed. Did the Buckeyes find a replacement for Guiton this spring?

A. Based upon what we saw in the spring game, the short answer is no. While Cardale Jones and J.T. Barrett each seemed more than capable of making short and medium-range throws, neither showed much flair for the position. Together, they combined to complete 31 of 64 passes for 277 yards, no touchdowns, no interceptions and a quarterback rating of

84.79. For comparison's sake, Guiton's efficiency number last season was 165.24, while Miller was at 158.08.

Of course, the April 12 game/scrimmage represented only one of 15 practice sessions, and reports emanating from the Woody Hayes Athletic Center seemed to indicate Jones was gaining a foothold on the backup spot. The 6-5, 250-pound sophomore had more ups than downs during the spring and exhibited a rifle-like arm, although running with the football still seems to be his strength.

Meanwhile, we have to remember that Barrett is just now getting his first meaningful reps after tearing up a knee as a high school senior and then redshirting last season. The 6-1, 225-pounder seems to have an easy throwing motion, and it will be interesting to see how much he progresses as he gets more and more comfortable with his surroundings.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Mark Rea

Q. What is the pecking order at tailback now that Carlos Hyde is gone?

A. It seems a foregone conclusion that Ezekiel Elliott will be the starter, and the 6-0, 225-pound sophomore from St. Louis had an excellent spring. Behind him will be a pair of fellow sophomores – Bri'onte Dunn, seemingly rejuvenated after taking a redshirt season last year, and Warren Ball, a kind of forgotten player who seems to be the kind of workhorse who can thrive between the tackles.

Perhaps the breakout player was true freshman Curtis Samuel, who graduated early from high school to join the Buckeyes for spring practice. The 5-11, 190-pound newcomer repeatedly showcased his speed through the spring, and he could become a factor in the fall.

The news wasn't all good at the tailback spot. Fifth-year senior Rod Smith was held out of the last few spring practice sessions, including the spring game, while he attended to his academics. To be honest, those were drills Smith could not afford to miss.

Q. How about the offensive line? Who will be the starters there?

A. Taylor Decker is the lone holdover from last year's starting five, and even he will be manning a new position, switching from right to left tackle. Meanwhile, sophomore Pat Elflein, who filled in admirably for Marcus Hall at the end of last season, is apparently penciled in at right guard.

The right tackle spot featured a battle between fifth-year senior Darryl Baldwin and redshirt freshman Evan Lisle, while junior Antonio Underwood seemed a little bit ahead of senior (and converted defensive lineman) Joel Hale at left guard.

At center, junior Jacoby Boren spent most of the spring trying to fend off redshirt freshman Billy Price, who scored some points with the coaching staff during a pregame circle drill when he got the better of starting defensive tackle Michael Bennett.

Q. Who will be Miller's go-to receiver with Philly Brown gone?

A. It's pretty obvious the Buckeyes are expecting big things – huge things, actually – from Devin Smith. Now a senior, Smith has always been able to make the acrobatic catch, and he will now be called upon to catch everything.

How many balls go in Smith's direction will be predicated on how much confidence Miller

gains in his other receivers. Evan Spencer was sidelined all spring with an injury, but that just allowed sophomore Michael Thomas and speedy freshman Johnnie Dixon to gain valuable reps. JUCO transfer Corey Smith could also be the mix.

Also, don't forget that Meyer wants to get much more from the "H" position than he did in 2014. Dontre Wilson is eager to build upon what he considered to be a disappointing freshman campaign, and the position should become even more of a weapon once redshirt freshman Jalin Marshall returns in the fall after knee surgery.

Q. Let's switch to defense. The big question is how the Buckeyes can expect to improve in the back seven, especially with their two best players – linebacker Ryan Shazier and cornerback Bradley Roby – headed to the NFL.

A. The additions of Ash and Johnson have seemed to breathe new life into a unit that was sucking air at the end of the 2013 season. While Johnson inherits a deep and talented group up front, Ash has seemingly meshed nicely with defensive coordinator Luke Fickell to simplify the defense, which in turn allows an individual player's natural instincts to take over.

Additionally, the Buckeyes expect to pressure the opposing quarterback much more this fall than they did in 2013 with the intention of using the tried-and-true philosophy that makes it difficult for any quarterback to complete a pass from the seat of his pants.

Q. Who will start at linebacker and in the secondary against Navy in the season opener?

A. Doran Grant is the only returning starter in the secondary, and his play this spring strengthened his hold on one of the cornerback spots. The other corner featured spirited competition between junior Armani Reeves and a pair of redshirt freshmen – Eli Apple and Gareon Conley. Reeves has the experience, but both Apple and Conley have tremendous upside.

Sophomore Tyvis Powell will be one of the safeties, and we don't think we're crawling too far out on a limb to say that sophomore Vonn Bell will be the other even though he missed the bulk of spring practice following knee surgery. Don't count out sophomore Cam Burrows, who got a lot of reps in Bell's place.

At linebacker, true freshman Raekwon McMillan looks to be every bit as good as advertised. He should start in the middle with junior Joshua Perry, who started 10 games last season, at one outside spot. Meanwhile, sophomore Darron Lee had a breakout spring and could be looking at starting at the other outside linebacker position.

Q. You mentioned Lee as a breakout player this spring. What other under-the-radar players got the coaching staff's attention this spring?

A. Apple seemed to be a defensive player who was constantly around the ball, something that continued with the spring game. Redshirt freshman linebacker Chris Worley was another defensive player who emerged from the shadows this spring, while redshirt freshman tight end Marcus Baugh, Underwood and Baldwin turned some heads on offense.

There was also defensive end Rashad Frazier, a fifth-year senior who has transferred in from Purdue. He might have solidified a spot in the two-deep, finishing things off in the spring game by beating offensive tackle Kyle Dodson, swatting the ball out of Barrett's grasp and then falling on it in the end zone for the Scarlet team's only touchdown.

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Charter Member

Ohio State Still Has Questions Left To Answer

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all of spring practice following postseason shoulder surgery. Jones struggled during the spring game, completing 14 of his 31 passes for 126 yards, but his head coach saw enough to name him Miller's chief understudy heading into summer conditioning.

"I'm not going to let that ruin his spring," Meyer said of Jones, a third-year sophomore. "He's had a good spring for us."

The development of the 6-5, 250-pound Jones came as a surprise to some who had previously written off the Cleveland Glenville product after two substandard seasons in Columbus. In October 2012, Meyer suspended Jones for a game after the then-freshman posted a tweet in which he suggested that going to class as a student-athlete is "pointless."

But sometime this spring, Jones managed to turn a corner. And not just on the football field, either, as his off-the-field progress has led him to become the heir apparent to former Buckeyes backup Kenny Gupton.

"He was a guy that couldn't get out of his own way," Meyer said of Jones. "You're starting to see the progress in the classroom. You remember the famous tweet? It's a different guy."

For his part, Jones was pleased with the way he took advantage of Miller's absence in the spring.

"I've been waiting for a long time," Jones said. "The better I get off the field, the more comfortable I'll be on the field."

Unlike the defense, few starters on offense outside of Miller have cemented their spots. But rather than that uncertainty being caused by a lack of options, it's been created by a bevy of skill players at Meyer's disposal.

At the end of spring practice, Meyer said that he doesn't know who any of the starting wide receivers will be in 2014, but he has a plethora of players who he believes could do just that. Dontre Wilson was a playmaker throughout the spring at the "H" spot while Devin Smith, Evan Spencer, Michael Thomas, Corey Smith, Jalin Marshall, Jeff Greene and early enrollee Johnnie Dixon



JOSH WINSLOW

BATTLE CONTINUES – Ohio State sophomore Michael Thomas (3) caught a game-high six passes for 64 yards in the spring game but will need to continue to try to nail down a starting wide receiver spot in the fall.

are all vying for playing time at wideout and incoming freshmen Terry McLaurin and Noah Brown are on their way.

"Receiver, I can't name you one that's going to start, which is concerning," Meyer said. "But it's comforting to know I can name about six that have the ability."

Also comforting for Meyer is the strength of his tight end position. Senior Jeff Heurman missed the second half of spring ball with a foot sprain but is expected to be full-go by fall camp, while Nick Vannett had what Meyer believes is one of the best springs of anyone on his

roster. Redshirt freshman Marcus Baugh is also coming on, impressing in the limited number of opportunities that the media had to watch practice.

"We always push each other to be great and challenge each other to practice," Vannett said of the Buckeyes' tight end unit. "It kind of hurts not having (Heurman) out here, but I kind of took the challenge upon myself to step up and get better."

At running back, Ohio State has plenty to make up for with the departure of Big Ten Running Back of the Year Carlos Hyde, but like at wide receiver, Meyer sees a number of weapons at its disposal.

Sophomore Ezekiel Elliott appears to have the edge in the Buckeyes' backfield, although senior Rod Smith was putting together an impressive spring before academic issues forced him away from the playing field. Ohio State found an unexpected option in early-enrolling freshman Curtis Samuel and also still possesses redshirt sophomores Bri'onte Dunn and Warren Ball.

"The guy that really, really excites me is No. 4, Curtis Samuel," Meyer said after the spring game. "We've just got to figure out if he has the size and strength to take the pounding the running backs take. We have some depth there, but right now (Elliott) and (Samuel) are the two. Rod was having a very good spring before we had to sit him down and Bri'onte Dunn, so it's still pretty much – I'm not ready to anoint a starter yet."

But while Meyer is happy with the improvement and options he has seen on both defense and with his skill players, the same can't be said about the Buckeyes' offensive line.

Replacing four senior starters from a season ago, the third-year Ohio State head coach heads into the summer knowing who just two of his starters will be. Junior Taylor Decker will play left tackle for the Buckeyes after playing on the right side of the line in 2013, while Pat Elflein will man the right guard position that he played sparingly a season ago. Outside of that, three positions in OSU's front five are up for grabs, and Meyer doesn't appear to be as excited by his options.

"The offense line, we've got a lot of work to do," he admitted.

Fifth-year senior Darryl Baldwin appears to be battling with redshirt freshman Evan Lisle for the Buckeyes' right tackle spot, while junior Jacoby Boren and redshirt freshman Billy Price are still fighting at center. Junior Antonio Underwood and converted defensive lineman Joel Hale are OSU's top two options at left guard, but Meyer said not to count out an incoming class of five freshman offensive linemen vying for playing time.

"I saw Jamarco Jones (today), Demetrius Knox is coming in, Brady Taylor," said Meyer, who already has early enrollees Marceyls Jones and Kyle Trout on campus. "Those are three bodies that are going to be coming in in June, and I looked them right in the eye and said, 'You're not red-shirting; you're playing,' and that's hard for an offensive lineman."

"That's an area that we have got to get back to where we – maybe not where we were, but close."

According to Decker – who has suddenly gone from the baby of the Buckeyes' offensive line room to the veteran – the

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COVER STORY

ability is there. It's just a matter of his teammates putting it all together by the start of the season.

"It's a talented group of guys," Decker said. "They just have to get experience. It's definitely a different feeling, but I think our focus needs to be not to worry about who we lost, but focus on who we have because we have a lot of talented guys. Our only issue is inexperience. There's talent there."

The same could be said about a large portion of the Buckeyes roster, which outside of defensive line and tight end doesn't return a complete unit from a season ago. With Meyer having brought three straight top-five recruiting classes to Columbus, Ohio State is undoubtedly a talented squad but remains a work in progress nonetheless as it enters the dog days of summer.

"We're not where we need to be," Meyer said. "We've got a ways to go."

Miller Still Monitoring

Although he didn't practice this spring, Miller wasn't uninvolved. The two-time reigning Big Ten MVP took mental reps behind the Ohio State quarterbacks, wearing a hat with a camera that monitored each play's progress. Miller would review the film with offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Tom Herman, and Meyer has been pleased by the development of his star player's preparation.

"The problem Braxton had is he never had a grinder in front of him," Meyer said. "He came in and we had the Terrelle Pryor issue, and he left and all of the sudden, Braxton is the guy. That's not the way to

do business. It's no one's fault. That set him back more than helped him because he didn't have a chance to prepare.

"The best example we had was Kenny Guiton, who would prepare the right way, but he's your backup. So it was kind of a nonfunctional situation for a while that we worked through. You're talking about the Big Ten Player of the Year two years in a row, and I believe he gets it now, and he's a wonderful kid that wants to be great."

Meyer also said he will get creative as he attempts to make up for the time Miller was not on the field this spring.

"We're doing stuff like the Jon Gruden Football Camps with him," the head coach said. "I'm going to have a former GM come in and talk to him sometime in June about what they expect a quarterback to do, so we're working our tails off to get this thing right."

After enduring an injury in the Orange Bowl on Jan. 3, Miller didn't undergo surgery until Feb. 21 after his shoulder failed to respond to treatment. He is expected to make a full recovery by the start of his senior season, which Herman believes will be a special one.

"He can still get a whole lot better," Herman said. "He can probably make that same leap this year and still have work to do. Just the constant studying of the game, studying of defenses and the studying of our plays now that we've kind of done the same thing for two years in a row. I think he's getting to that point where all that stuff is slowing down, and he needs to stay on that path."



Tom Herman



JOSH WINSLOW

GRINDING – Ohio State senior quarterback Braxton Miller (right), seen here with head coach Urban Meyer (left) before the spring game, will have a busy summer leading into his final collegiate season.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Gray Earns Victory In Sluggish Spring Game

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

For much of the past few months, Urban Meyer has been the defender of spring games among college football coaches.

While some of his brethren canceled the fan-friendly exhibitions in favor of controlled scrimmages, Meyer repeatedly told the media that he would never do the same, noting he likes to see how his younger players react to playing in front of big Ohio Stadium crowds during the 15th and final spring practice of each year.

But even the third-year Ohio State coach admitted that the Buckeyes' April 12 exhibition was less than pleasing on the eyes at times even as the Gray team rebounded from an early deficit to take a 17-7 win against the Scarlet in front of 61,058 fans.

"I want to thank our student body and our fans," he said. "For 60,000-plus people on a beautiful day in Columbus to sit through a spring game, sometimes I don't want to be watching, but we appreciate everyone being here."

With many of Meyer's established players either unable to play because of injury or rested in order to allow younger players a chance to play in the Horseshoe, the game was helter-skelter from nearly the beginning. The Scarlet offense was shut out as the team managed just eight first downs and 185 yards to go with four punts in the 40-minute game, while the Gray had a better go of things but still wasn't the efficient machine Buckeye fans became used to a season ago when OSU set school records for points and yards.

But with temperatures soaring into the 70s and not a cloud in the sky, the game – which also helped showcase the program to recruits and was shown live on the Big Ten Network – was more about the experience than anything else in Meyer's eyes.

"It's a chance to see some young guys that really haven't played, and to be quite honest, I'm not sure how much they will play," Meyer said. "This is a chance for a lot of guys in our program who work very hard – we are to be able to let some guys play or catch a pass in Ohio Stadium or whatever. In the big picture it's the right thing to do and I'm glad we do that."

Among those who did not take part because of injury were starting quarterback Braxton Miller, wideouts Evan Spencer and Jalin Marshall, "H" Dontre Wilson, tight end Nick Vannett, cornerback Doran Grant and safety Vonn Bell.

Meanwhile, offensive linemen Taylor Decker and Pat Elflein as well as the entire starting defensive line – ends Joey Bosa and Noah Spence as well as tackles Michael Bennett and Adolphus Washington – were held out, having already earned their stripes, while senior running back Rod Smith and



JOSH WINSLOW PHOTOS

BIG PLAY – Ohio State defensive end Rashad Frazier (94, center) stripped quarterback J.T. Barrett (in black) and recovered the fumble for a first-quarter touchdown before celebrating with teammates (left, leaping).



junior defensive end Jamal Marcus did not play as they were tasked with focusing their energies on the classroom.

The result was that many younger players were given a chance to showcase their skills, especially on the defensive side of the ball. For Scarlet, that meant redshirt freshman linebacker Chris Worley shone, picking

up a game-high nine tackles and a tackle for loss, while classmate Eli Apple broke up two passes and Michael Hill had a sack.

On Gray, second-year defensive end Tyquan Lewis had two sacks among his five tackles, while true freshman middle linebacker Raekwon McMillan also tied for the team lead with five stops.

Walk-ons were also given a chance to shine, with wideout Kato Mitchell snagging four passes for 23 yards for Scarlet. His teammate, cornerback Nik Sarac, had five tackles and broke up a pass, while former walk-on defensive end Rashad Frazier had two sacks, including a strip sack of quarterback J.T. Barrett in the end zone that led to Scarlet's only points. On the Gray side, walk-on LB Joe Burger tied for the team lead with five stops.

"It's more individual," Meyer said of the spring game. "I'm not trying to evaluate an offense. Who cares? There are guys out there who will never play or they're not ready to play now. I was handed these stats – I'm not sure what to do with these. I don't care."

"But I do care who is physically going to make plays. It was almost like an individual game today. That's what I wanted to watch. I wanted to see who's going to compete, who's going to make plays and not who's going to fit the team concept because we all know what we saw out there. That's not a team. That's not the Ohio State Buckeyes."

Much of the focus was on the quarterback battle, where two-time defending Big Ten Silver Football winner Braxton Miller watched the game from behind the line of scrimmage along with Meyer and the head coach's son, Nate.

The pass-heavy exhibition ended with Barrett having slightly better stats than sophomore Cardale Jones, as the redshirt freshman completed 17 of 33 passes for 151 yards, no TDs and no interceptions. Jones also finished without a TD or INT, going 14 for 31 for 126 yards, most of those coming in the second half. Jones also ran for 28 yards while Barrett had 21.

"A lot of guys were out there playing with jitters," Jones said afterward. "Some of the guys had never played in front of a crowd that big. Some of the guys, especially the offense, had never even been in that stadium, in a position like myself and a couple of the linemen and some of the skill guys who played."

"The teams were divided and then we're working with a certain group as far as being with the ones for 14 straight practices, and then you got some guys who you never really threw it to, guys whose faces you're not used to seeing in the huddle. We're not going to make an excuse for it. We still have to get better."

The scrimmage stars on offense were likely Gray running backs Warren Ball and Bri'onte Dunn, with Ball rushing eight times for 55 yards and a score, while Dunn had six totes for 35 yards and a TD. For Scarlet, spring standout Curtis Samuel had six rushes for 11 yards and was stuffed on a key fourth-and-goal, while Ezekiel Elliott ran three times for 16 yards.

Barrett seemed to have chemistry with Michael Thomas, completing six passes to the 2012 spring game star for 64 yards. Tight end Nick Vannett added four grabs for 35 yards, though he couldn't hold on to a high pass from Barrett in the end zone early in the

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Spring Game Box Score

Gray 17, Scarlet 7

April 12, 2014 – Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
Gray	3	7	0	7	17
Scarlet	7	0	0	0	7

First Quarter

SCARLET – Frazier, fumble recovery in end zone (TEAM kick), 7:34.

GRAY – Nuernberger, 43 yard field goal, 3:11; 6 plays, 33 yards, 1:23 TOP.

Second Quarter

GRAY – Dunn, 2 yard run (Clinton kick), 7:36; 15 plays, 80 yards, 4:46 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

GRAY – Ball, 3 yard run (Clinton kick), 4:30; 9 plays, 80 yards, 4:54 TOP.

Att. – 61,058.

Weather – 73 degrees, sunny; wind, S 17 mph.

Team Statistics

	GRAY	SCARLET
First Downs	17	8
Rushes-Yards	20-111	18-59
Passing Yards	151	126
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	17-33-0	14-32-0
Total Net Yards	262	185
Third Down Efficiency	7-11	3-13
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2	2-5
Punts (No.-Avg.)	2-49.5	4-42.5
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	1-1
Penalties	0-0	3-22
Time of Possession	18:08	21:52

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – GRAY: Ball 8-55; Dunn 6-35; Barrett 6-21. SCARLET: C.Jones 8-28; Elliott 3-16; Samuel 6-11; C.Smith 1-4.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – GRAY: Barrett 17-33-0-151-0. SCARLET: C.Jones 14-31-0-126-0; Collier 0-1-0-0-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – GRAY: Thomas 6-64; Vannett 4-35; Greene 2-18; Dixon 2-14; Epitropoulos 1-9; Ball 1-8; Dunn 1-3. SCARLET: C.Smith 5-72; Mitchell 4-23; Samuel 3-17; Baugh 1-4.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – GRAY: Johnston 2-49.5-54. SCARLET: Johnston 4-42.5-54.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCARLET: None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCARLET: None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: TEAM 1-0. SCARLET: Frazier 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCARLET: None.

SACKS – GRAY: Lewis 2.0-7. SCARLET: Frazier 2.0-6; M.Hill 1.0-6.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: Lewis 2.0-7; Parry 1.0-5; Tanner 1.0-2. SCARLET: Frazier 2.0-6; M.Hill 1.0-6; Worley 1.0-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – GRAY: Lewis 4-1-5; Burger 2-3-5; McMillan 1-4-5; Lee 4-0-4; Tanner 2-2-4; Reeves 3-0-3; Burrows 2-1-3; Perry 2-0-2; Parry 2-0-2; C.Carter 0-1-1. SCARLET: Worley 6-3-9; Sarac 2-3-5; S.Miller 2-2-4; Johnson 1-3-4; Tanner 2-1-3; M.Hill 2-1-3; Williams 1-2-3; C.Grant 1-2-3; Thompson 1-2-3; Frazier 2-0-2; Apple 0-2-2; Cibene 1-0-1; Parry 1-0-1; Munger 0-1-1.



JOSH WINSLOW

PAY DIRT – Ohio State tailback Warren Ball (28) tallied the final touchdown of the spring game, netting six points for the Gray with his 3-yard scoring run in the fourth quarter.

game that would've been six. On the Scarlet side, Corey Smith led the way with five grabs for 72 yards, while the two offensive lines combined to give up five sacks.

"It's not fair to say I'm discouraged," Meyer said of the offense's play "Jeff Heurman, Braxton Miller, Jalin Marshall, Dontre Wilson were all standing next to me and I tell them they can't play. I tell Decker he can't play. Then I go chew out the coaches? That's probably not the best thing to do.

"They all know what it is. I just wanted to see a little cleaner (passing game). We didn't do it, but I'm fine. We had a good spring."

Defensive Affair

The game was played with 10-minute quarters, and there were no kickoffs, as teams assumed possession at the 35-yard line to begin a half or after a scoring play. In addition, periods of field-goal kicking – which allowed walk-on Kyle Clinton and true freshman Sean Nuernberger the chance to kick in front of the Ohio Stadium crowd on a windy day – were interspersed throughout the proceedings.

Scarlet grabbed the upper hand in the game just 2:26 into action. The Gray defense stopped Scarlet on the first drive of the game, but Bryce Haynes downed Cameron Johnston's punt at the 2 – a nice callback to

the 2013 season for both – and on the very first play from scrimmage for Gray, Frazier came off the edge and hit Barrett, forcing the ball loose. Frazier also fell on the ball in the end zone to give Scarlet the lead, though no extra point was attempted and Scarlet was credited with a made team kick to make the score 7-0.

Gray bounced back, though, with its defense leading the way. Scarlet was held to punts on the next three drives, allowing the Gray team to battle back and take the lead by halftime.

On its third drive, Gray took over at its own 48 and moved 33 yards, 30 of it coming on consecutive passes from Barrett to Thomas for 20 yards and to true freshman Johnnie Dixon for 10 to start the drive. Eventually, the drive stalled and Clinton missed a 36-yard field goal on fourth down, but Nuernberger came on to make his try and three points were awarded to Gray with 3:11 left on the first-quarter clock.

That opened the first period of field-goal kicking on the day, with Clinton also missing from 42 yards before Nuernberger made from that distance.

Gray's next drive also ended in points, this one a 15-play, 80-yard jaunt. Barrett ripped off a 21-yard run to get things going, and Dunn had rushes of 7, 6 and 13 yards

before going over the goal line from 2 yards out with 7:36 to play to make it a 10-7 game.

Both kickers were given a chance to make the extra point – they did each convert – before another field-goal period. Clinton made from 37 and 47 but left a pair of 52-yarders short, while Nuernberger made from 37, made and missed from 42 and drilled a 52-yard try to move to 5 of 6 on the day.

Gray attempted to add to the lead later in the half with a 17-play, 90-yard drive. Thomas caught passes worth 13, 11 and 11 yards on the possession and Ball had a 20-yard run to the Scarlet 22 to set the table, but Barrett overshot Vannett on third-and-goal from the 4 and then threw a fade pass to Thomas out of bounds to end the drive with no points.

At the end of the first half, Gray had outgained Scarlet by a 189-44 margin, with Barrett going 15 of 27 for 112 yards and also rushing for 13 yards, while Ball led the way with 34 yards rushing on four tries. Jones was 6 of 15 for 7 yards.

Jones made strides on the stat sheet early in the second half when he threw a perfect rainbow that hit Mitchell in stride along the left sideline for 27 yards to the opposing 16, but Scarlet stalled and was unable to erase its three-point deficit. After facing second-and-goal from the 1, Scarlet chose to give the ball to the diminutive Samuel three straight

times, and on the final try from the 2, he ran into the teeth of the defense and was stopped by Lewis and McMillan.

Gray had to punt on its ensuing drive, but another chance for Scarlet to take the lead went by the wayside when a run by Corey Smith ended in a turnover. On the first play of the fourth quarter, Smith raced for the front corner of the end zone but fumbled the ball as he attempted to stretch it across the goal line, leaving the ball to bounce out of bounds for a touchback.

From there, Gray went down the field and pushed the ball in with 4:30 to play to take a 17-7 lead. The nine-play, 80-yard drive included a 24-yard completion from Barrett to Vannett, and Ball capped off the possession by going through the line unimpeded for a 3-yard TD, which was followed by matching PATs by Clinton and Nuernberger. Clinton then made a 47-yard field goal that was followed by a conversion of the same distance by Nuernberger.

Scarlet attempted to rally, using both Jones and Stephen Collier on the next drive, but the team could not get points. Consecutive fourth downs for Scarlet went unconverted, though the team kept possession both times, and Jones ended the game by failing to hook up with Corey Smith on a deep pass.

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Student Appreciation Day Is Another Success

By BEN AXELROD
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Urban Meyer doesn't often mince words when it comes to publicly evaluating his team. The third-year Ohio State coach isn't shy about sharing the value of each player on his roster.

The same rings true when Meyer talks about the Ohio State student body.

"Take away the students and I don't have a job," Meyer said bluntly in a recent interview with student media outlets The Lantern and Buckeye TV.

It's that sort of sentiment that has led to Meyer looking for ways to thank Buckeye students in efforts that extend beyond post-game remarks. It's why in each of his three springs as the OSU head man, Meyer has invited students to attend an open practice with their classmates, in what has become known as Student Appreciation Day at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

The 2014 installment of the annual event occurred April 5, with an estimated crowd of more than 2,500 fans watching the Buckeyes' 11th spring practice of the year. Meyer's efforts were evidently well received by the Ohio State students – particularly those with an affinity for the football program.

"What brought me out here today is I really, really love this team and I love showing my appreciation in any way I can," Will Brokaw, a junior mechanical engineering major at Ohio State, told BSB. "It's really nice that they want to give back to me. I think Urban Meyer's done some magical things. I think he really, really respects this campus and the students that come out, and he realizes that the people up in the stands make a really big difference in the game, more than what people realize."

Frank Myers, a senior strategic communication major from Cincinnati, agreed.

"Without us, without all the students packing the stadium every Saturday, it doesn't matter what the team's doing," Myers told BSB. "For him to acknowledge that and reach out and allow us to come in here and see what he's doing and gets paid six or seven million dollars a year for is pretty cool. We haven't had that here in the past."

With the sizable crowd on hand, Student Appreciation Day was far from a standard Ohio State practice. Concessions were sold, races were run, tours were given and a meet and greet with the players and coaches – which included the chance for the students to take pictures and get autographs – was held.

But despite the distractions surrounding them, the Buckeyes were all business when they were on the field. Meyer and his staff conducted an otherwise typical session on the indoor field of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, complete with a situation-filled scrimmage.

From a football standpoint, redshirt freshman Eli Apple stole the show, recording two interceptions, delivering a massive hit, breaking up a pass in the end zone and stuffing Dontre Wilson on a reverse at the goal line. That performance not only earned Apple reps with Ohio State's first team, but the Voorhees, N.J., native also had his black stripe removed at practice's end – a moment made all the more special by the presence of the Buckeyes' student body.

"I loved it," Apple said. "A lot of students came out, and it was a great atmosphere and a great energy. We just vibed off of it and had a great time."

Moments such as Apple's black stripe removal – symbolizing his "arrival" as an Ohio State football player – came as a welcome surprise to Myers.

"It's really exciting, and then you realize that they're even having a legit practice," Myers said. "There's actually teaching and coaching going on. I was expecting it to be a little more fan-centric, but this is better."

Following Ohio State's two-hour practice session, the intramural program held its flag football championship with Delta Sigma Pi squaring off with C'Mon Man! That was followed by the semifinals of Ohio State's fastest student competition, which saw four winners advance to race Buckeyes Dontre Wilson and Devin Smith at the spring game the following week.

Various OSU players and coaches were sprinkled into the races, including Johnnie Dixon, Doran Grant, Raekwon McMillan, Marcus Baugh, Gareon Conley and cor-



MATTHEW HAGER PHOTOS

SPECIAL DAY – Ohio State students surround the Buckeyes on April 5 during Student Appreciation Day at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, which gave classmates a chance to interact with players such as Braxton Miller (inset).

nerbacks coach Kerry Coombs. Like the players, the participants were wowed by the atmosphere inside the WHAC, which included players and students lining the center of the field for the races.

"It was awesome to get in front of the students and the fans," said Malcolm Branson, a senior criminology major from Massillon, Ohio, who wowed those in attendance as he won his semifinal race with ease. "To show off my speed, it felt pretty good."

Whether the student races become an annual tradition at Ohio State – Meyer staged the contest just once at Florida – remains to be seen, but it's becoming clear that Student Appreciation Day is here to stay. Among the enduring images from the latest installment was the annual circling of students around the Buckeye field-goal kickers – which included a guest appearance from Meyer's daughter Nicki, who got her attempt over the line of scrimmage and past the diving block attempt of mascot Brutus Buckeye.

With some students bringing along their parents and others inviting younger siblings,

there was something to be had for every Buckeye fan in attendance.

For Marissa Sieman, a senior strategic communication major from Fresno, Calif., the best part was the post-practice meet and greet with the team, while Brokaw was more eager to get an advanced look at the 2014 Buckeyes.

"I'm just excited to see how everyone's doing and see where everyone's at," Brokaw said. "I mean, football season's almost back."

Looking at the crowd at Student Appreciation Day, one must have wondered if it ever truly went away.

"Awesome, awesome day," Meyer said afterward. "I love our students. I think we've got as good a student body as there is in America. They had a ball. I don't know how many programs in America can really do that. I loved it. I could have stayed out there all day with them, so it was a great day."

A more in-depth breakdown of the action on the field and the day's standouts can be found in the April 8 edition of BSB Quickly.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Maturing Jones Hopes To Continue Progress

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Urban Meyer is not one to mince words, so when he found the Ohio State offense's performance in the team's April 1 practice hard to stomach, he didn't treat sophomore quarterback Cardale Jones with kid gloves.

When talking to the media after that very practice, Meyer said, "Cardale was bad today. When I say bad – real bad." A day later, speaking to fans, boosters and media at his annual Spring Kick-Off luncheon, Meyer termed the performance of his fill-in No. 1 quarterback "awful."

Jones didn't take the criticism lying down.

"I grabbed our offense together earlier today in the team room and just talked to them," he said after Ohio State's student appreciation practice April 5. "I said, 'We can't be tight, playing tight,' because Tuesday we played real tight. We had a terrible day overall, and we just got back to the basics with the guys."

Those actions show the maturation process of the Cleveland Glenville and Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy product. Less than two years after his famous tweet disparaging academics earned him a one-game suspension, Jones is working to show the Buckeye coaching staff that he's someone who can be trusted on and off the field.

It's an ever-continuing process, but Jones got high marks in all realms for the way he handled himself during the spring.

"He's a completely different player than he was, still not ready to take it, but he's completely different," Meyer said. "I don't know if you guys got to witness it, but he's a



JOSH WINSLOW

BECOMING A LEADER – Ohio State quarterback Cardale Jones (12) earned the top backup job behind Braxton Miller this spring, taking the first-team reps while Miller was held out because of an injury.

completely different player. He's a very functional guy that cares, tries to lead. It's hard to believe he's like 21, 22 years old. He's 14 going on 22, but I'm really pleased by where he's at right now."

If it sounds as though Meyer is guarded about the progress of Jones, the quarterback still feels the same way. Even after serving as the No. 1 quarterback for much of the spring – and likely cementing his spot as starter Braxton Miller's top backup come the fall – Jones admitted he still had work to do.

"I've been waiting for a long time, and I still have work to do to enhance my abilities," he said. "I've still got quite a way to go."

He's already come a long way, though. The tweet was his most famous transgression, but it's clear from his words that mistake wasn't the only adversity he's had to overcome since his arrival from Fork Union in 2012 after nearly leading the Tarbloaders to their first state championship in school history.

"I'm not going to lie, I had a lot of reality checks from my coaches," he said.

The tweet, of course, stands out because it was so public. Days before the huge prime-time game against Nebraska in 2012 with the Buckeyes at 5-0 under Meyer and coming off a unifying win at Michigan State, Jones posted on his personal Twitter account, "Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL, we ain't come to play SCHOOL, classes are POINTLESS."

Then the third-string QB, Jones – a true freshman at the time – did not suit up against the Huskers, and he didn't see game action at any point that season. Looking back, he sees the error he made but also how he grew from the mistake.

"It bothers me a lot that I did it because at that point, I was still 10 times better than what I was as a person off the field," he said. "It never should have been tweeted, but how I reacted to it was just having my teammates and my coaches around me comfort me about the whole thing. They got on me about it, but we moved past that."

In fact, Jones admits he was very close to being done at Ohio State – Meyer and the coaching staff even had a sit-down with the quarterback and his family to discuss his

future – but the confidence and support of the coaching staff kept him going.

"It's been more hard on the coaches than for me because they stuck with me and they believed in me and they kept pushing me," Jones said. "They've basically stuck with me, and they kept riding me every day."

Despite being only a three-star prospect coming out of high school and the No. 24 signal caller in the nation in Scout.com's rankings, Jones' strengths are obvious on the field, including a rocket arm, an excellent deep ball, tremendous size at 6-5, 250 pounds and good speed provided by a long stride.

He can make something out of nothing and continues to develop both his understanding of the offense and his accuracy, though some passes still end up off the mark and turnovers happen more than the coaches would like.

Harnessing those abilities into more of a finished product is the task now for both Jones and quarterbacks coach Tom Herman.

"Cardale is 6-5 and 250 pounds and can throw it through that wall," Herman said this spring. "We tell him, 'Use some of that. Use the talents that you have while we develop the portions of your game that need to be developed.' Cardale has done a great job. He has done nothing to deserve less reps with the ones right now. He's playing like a quarterback at Ohio State should."

Meyer has also been impressed with Jones, echoing Herman's words about the fact that the Cleveland native has proved this spring that he can be a quarterback at Ohio State. In addition, the head coach assessed Jones' performance this spring by saying that "he was one of the most improved players on the team."

He'll have to be if he is to be the No. 1 backup behind Miller, who has been plagued with injuries during his Ohio State career. Backup Kenny Gupton threw a combined 132 passes the past two campaigns and finished a number of games thanks to injuries to Miller.

Jones, meanwhile, was tasked with passing only twice as the third-stringer last year, completing just one of those tosses for 3 yards. He was more of a factor in the run game, rushing 17 times for 128 yards and a touchdown.

In the spring game, he was just 14 of 31 for 126 yards and ran eight times for 28 yards, but Jones said he spent more time focusing on acting like the starting quarterback than anything else during the game.

"It's hard to say how I did because my main thing going into today was making sure my guys had energy, making sure I could lead them the right way," he said. "I really wasn't worried too much about field play. That will come over time. I'm trying to be a better leader overall."

Jones knows he's not where he needs to be, but when he hears from the coaching staff that he belongs at Ohio State, Jones knows that he's on the right track after a rough beginning.

"It is good to hear from our coaches because that ensures that they have complete confidence in me and trust me," Jones said. "Our coaches are pretty straightforward. When we have bad days and we're not looking too good, they'll let you guys know. (Meyer) letting me know I've come a long way and things like that, it's just fuel to the fire."

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Tight End Makes Most Of Run With Ones

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

The Ohio State football team dealt with several players being sidelined during some or all of spring practice.

The absences of players such as Braxton Miller and Jeff Heurman – among others – allowed others to take first-team reps. Though that did not result in a dynamic spring game April 12 at Ohio Stadium, the spring as a whole allowed several Buckeyes to gain some positive momentum heading into the summer.

One of those players was Nick Vannett. The tight end from Westerville (Ohio) Central moved up to the first-team offense during much of the spring when Heurman

suffered a pair of injuries, including a foot injury that required surgery and ended his spring. Vannett made the most of the opportunity to step up, catching the eye of and earning praise from head coach Urban Meyer in the process.

"I will take our two tight ends over anybody in America," Meyer said at his annual Spring Kick-Off luncheon April 2.

Vannett did not come out of nowhere, of course. He caught eight passes for 80 yards and a touchdown last season. Even so, Meyer said Vannett is the most improved player on the team.

Naturally, Vannett appreciated the compliment and said maturity is a big reason for his strong spring.

"It's my junior year, so I figured I have

to step up," Vannett said. "I've got two more years. I've been taking the game of football real seriously, just studying the game and trying to improve in all aspects of it.

"I took a challenge this winter to get stronger and get bigger. On the field, I wanted to be dominant. I've got a lot of pride in my game, and I just try to win the battle on every play."

Vannett added that he feels more comfortable in the offense designed by Meyer and third-year offensive coordinator Tom Herman. The maturity and knowledge have led to better on-field play according to tight ends coach Tim Hinton.

"He's having a great spring," Hinton said. "Each of those reps is an opportunity to get better and improve. As you go through it, you gain confidence and you believe in yourself. Coach Meyer is teasing him all the time that he has veins in his arms now. He's starting to feel good about himself. He's just going out and executing.

"The game is fast and no one is perfect, but he's had a great spring and has improved his skill level."

Whether all of that means fans will see more of Vannett on the field this fall remains to be seen. Meyer has said on multiple occasions this spring that the Buckeyes will put their best offensive talents on the field.

That could mean three- or four-wide receiver sets, or it could mean fewer wide-outs and two tight ends. Vannett is a fan of the latter, of course.

"I think Jeff and I are trying to become as good as we can," Vannett said. "Every time we have a chance to do that on the practice

field we're going to do that, just try to prove to the coaching staff that they're making a mistake if they don't put us on the field together."

Vannett said after the spring game that putting the duo together on the field could make the Buckeyes more of an offensive threat because of the different strengths of the tight ends. Thought to be a dynamic pass-catching option coming out of high school, Vannett has started to show those skills at the college level, making him a complement to Heurman, a third-year starter.

"We do a lot of things well. Just being honest, he's better at attacking in run blocking," Vannett said of Heurman. "I think I am a little better in the passing game with route running. I think with our combo, we create huge mismatches for defenses.

"I'm curious to see if we're going to use that this season."

Vannett concluded what Meyer called a good spring for the junior with a four-catch effort for 35 yards for the victorious Gray squad in the spring game. He wanted more, however, and dropped what would have been a tough catch in the end zone on a high throw from quarterback J.T. Barrett.

"I had a couple of balls that I dropped that nine times out of 10 I usually catch. I wasn't happy about that, but blocking-wise I think I did really well," Vannett said. "All in all, it was just one of those deals where you come out and have fun with the guys. I think it was a great day."

Now it is a question of whether a great day and a good spring will result in additional playing time for Vannett this fall.

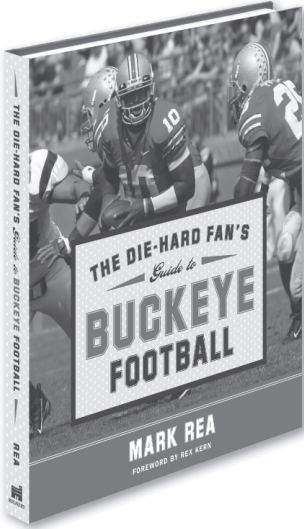


JOSH WINSLOW

HE'S GOT IT – Ohio State junior tight end Nick Vannett (81) caught four passes for 35 yards to conclude a spring during which he was called the Buckeyes' most improved player by Urban Meyer.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

OSU Defense Wants To Turn Back Clock

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

Spring football stories often boil down to a few things: buzzwords, history and the future.

Many of the first often have to do with what happened in the second, of course, and in that way Ohio State was no different in 2014, but they hope the work they put in leads to looking more like something out of the program's past.

"When you come to Ohio State, we want to be considered the best," sophomore safety Tyvis Powell said. "As far as last year, we were not the best defense. Everybody knows that our offense bailed us out of a couple of games, and people come to the games now, and what do they talk about? Ohio State's offense. Back in the day, it was about the defense.

"So that's what we're trying to go back to – everybody going to the game to see the defense, not the offense."

Head coach Urban Meyer's idea for fixing a defensive unit that faltered down the stretch last season: Play hard and let consequences be damned. To implement that philosophy, he brought in Chris Ash as safeties coach and co-defensive coordinator to join longtime Buckeye assistant Luke Fickell, who retained his titles as linebackers coach and defensive coordinator.

The result?

Six straight weeks of players hearing about the importance of worrying only about getting from point A to point B and playing hard for four-to-six seconds (the length of the average play).

Not surprisingly, these were common phrases that popped up throughout interviews all spring, but while reporters might have gotten tired of hearing about the "power of the unit" and the importance of relentless effort every play, there was also a message that players no longer want to hear: That the defense was the weak link of the team last season.

The Buckeyes were more interested in bringing back the great units of the past known as the Silver Bullets than dwelling on what went wrong last season.

Strong Finish

The Buckeyes finished up April 12 hoping to turn some of their newest buzzwords into a defense that resembles the legacy built from 1996-2010.

The prevailing phrases this year were all about effort and thinking. More specifically, Meyer, Ash, Fickell, cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs and defensive line coach Larry Johnson all want to see more of the former and less of the latter.

Johnson, a newcomer like Ash, was happy to heap responsibility on his group to stop the run and disrupt the passing game. If the line is successful at that, he reasons,



JOSH WINSLOW

STEPPING UP – Ohio State linebacker Darron Lee (43) was one of the standouts of the spring and a player the Buckeyes might rely on this fall to help bring their defense back to its former glory.

the back seven should find playing fast and free all that much easier.

He spoke at the annual Ohio State coaches' clinic about doing that by teaching his charges through hundreds of different drills designed to develop different aspects of a player's game from getting off the line of scrimmage to causing fumbles to breaking up passes, but it all came back to one thing he had mentioned earlier in April during interviews with reporters.

"It's a trust factor," he said. "I've got to get them to trust me. I tell them all the time once they drink the Kool-Aid, we're ready to go. Understanding four-to-six seconds from A-to-B is how we're going to play here and they understand my passion for that, then winning them over in that sense, I told them as soon as I got here I was going to reach as far as I can to reach them and develop trust. I have, and once they start reaching back, we're on the same page. Right now they're reaching back, and that's really great to see."

Evidence of the effectiveness of his lessons was visible early in the spring game as Rashad Frazier burst by the left tackle and knocked the ball out of quarterback J.T. Barrett's hand for a sack-fumble that he recovered in the end zone for a touchdown.

It is probably no coincidence that Johnson's stated goal for this season is to lead the nation in strip sacks, and that Frazier made the play seemed appropriate as well.

That's because while he is not likely to crack the starting lineup at end with starter Joey Bosa returning after a freshman All-America season, Frazier can look forward to extensive playing time this fall if he earns it.

Johnson, unlike 2012-13 defensive line coach Mike Vrabel, believes in substituting heavily to keep his men fresh, and he is hoping to find a role for as many of them as he can this fall.

To that end, the standout play of rush end Tyquan Lewis and interior linemen Tommy Schutt and Michael Hill was also notable during the spring game.

Then there is linebacker, a position that

has been one of the best in the nation for most of Fickell's time as its coach (from 2004-10 and 2012-present) but not the past couple of years.

Ash's arrival has meant some different ways of doing things for this group as well. It means more man-to-man pass coverage for the linebackers while the "Sam" linebacker will have a different look.

Instead of being a big, physical player such as 246-pound Joshua Perry last season, the new Sam this spring was 225-pound Darron Lee with 218-pound redshirt freshman Chris Worley backing him up. The hope is a more athletic player at the position will make the Buckeyes less susceptible to being hurt by bubble screens and other quick-hitting plays without giving up too much in coverage down the field or against the running game.

As far as Meyer is concerned, what Lee and Worley bring to the table is less about strategy than it is about effort, though, and they both acquitted themselves well in the spring game.

"Darron Lee and Chris Worley are two examples of guys that have developed," Meyer said after Lee posted four tackles and broke up a pass for the Gray while Worley led all players with nine tackles for the Scarlet. "I was ready to send Darron Lee back to New Albany (his Ohio hometown) on a one-way bus ticket (last year). He just didn't show up with the right demeanor. He was a quarterback (in high school). All of the sudden about midway through (last) season you saw this natural athlete and great kid start to develop, and here he is. He'll most likely start for Ohio State (this fall)."

Other than the increased pass coverage responsibilities, life in the middle might not be much different this fall, but there is a general consensus the Buckeyes will need to get better play than they did last season.

Having Curtis Grant, a rising senior who was in danger of being considered a five-star bust early in his career before starting well last year only to have injuries mar his second half, healthy all year could be a start, but true freshman Raekwon McMillan also did enough this spring to cause some excitement for the future.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

After McMillan notched five tackles in the spring game, Meyer was asked if he finished the spring on a high note.

"He certainly did, and he's in the rotation," Meyer said. "He's going to play. I would put him in the same category although a year younger than Worley and Darron Lee. Those guys, they've earned it. They're playing."

He stopped short of declaring McMillan a starter thanks to the continued presence of Grant, but his excitement for the youngster was impossible to miss.

And then there is the secondary, where the most scrutiny was applied this spring and some of the best work occurred in the spring game.

Quarterbacks Cardale Jones and Barrett combined to complete only 31 of 64 passes, and when they did connect, little damage was done. OSU receivers averaged only 8.9 yards per catch, a far cry from the 11.4 Ohio State yielded last season, and rarely did they gain separation on deep routes.

"The corners were pressing, not allowing any of that stuff in the flats," Powell said. "And the safeties can be aggressive on routes because we know the D-line is going to pressure the quarterback."

He confirmed the cornerbacks and safeties went into the spring knowing they had a lot of work to do, and he pinpointed the problem as a fear of making mistakes.

"I knew we had to make a drastic improvement in the pass defense because we really did give up a lot of things," he said. "The problem was last year I think a lot of people had this fear that we didn't want to get beat deep, and it didn't allow them to be aggressive on the short stuff, which was killing us."

"So this year we said we're just going to be aggressive and let our effort make up for it. Like if we get double-moved, as long as you read your keys and try to collision a guy, you're going to make up for that loss on that double move. It just allows us to be more confident and aggressive on those little short passes."

Secondary Effort

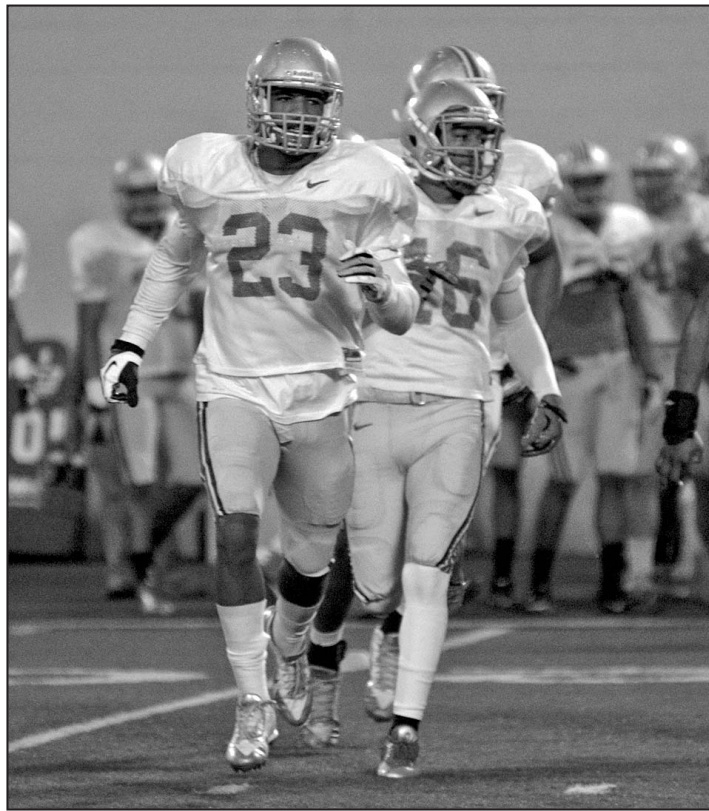
Powell and senior cornerback Doran Grant, two Ohio natives steeped in the traditions of the Buckeyes before they ever donned the scarlet and gray, both reported positive feelings when spring ball was all wrapped up.

"As a unit I mean everybody just bought into the coaches' message of four-to-six, A-to-B, just going hard," Grant said. "Everybody did that, especially on the back end. We're going to take that into the summer."

They were happy the 61,058 fans in attendance got to see the new pressure defense on display, but they knew that nothing they could do in a scrimmage would change the results of the past few fall seasons. There is more to playing winning defense than just attacking the line of scrimmage and getting in the faces of receivers.

It was something Coombs referred to earlier in the spring, a camaraderie necessary to form a cohesive unit full of players confident in their own abilities and those of the men to either side of them.

"I think this is at the core of everything we've talked about all spring," Coombs said. "I know you guys are getting tired of hearing 'power of the unit' and 'four-to-six seconds,' but here's the reality: If that is what is truly important and it becomes important to our players that 11 guys show up to the ball and it doesn't really matter which number gets there first – and in fact, maybe it matters which number gets there



KEVIN DYE

BOUNCING BACK – Ohio State safety Tyvis Powell (23) will likely be a starter this fall for the Buckeyes and said the defense played with a chip on its shoulder during the spring.

last – then it's really, really important, and our guys are playing like that.

"We're not doing everything right and we're not making every play you can possibly imagine, but I know this: When we put the film on, we're celebrating those four defensive linemen running around, and they're celebrating us getting an intercept-

tion. It just feels good and it feels more like a family and more like a unit, and that is what is really, really exciting about our defense right now. I don't know how many first-round draft picks we'll have this year – we'll have them down the road – but we're going to have 11 hats at the ball throwing a party when they get there, and that's what's really exciting."

Coombs, who entered the college coaching ranks after a long, successful stint coaching southwestern Ohio high school teams, was not around Columbus for the glory days of the Silver Bullets, but he knows about having teams that play a nasty, hard-nosed brand of defensive football. That was what he built successful programs at Loveland and Colerain around in the Cincinnati area, and he hopes to see more of it from the Buckeyes this fall.

"We're all Silver Bullets," Coombs said. "We walk in a meeting room and it feels like that. We're out there practicing and it feels like that."

"Urban has set the tone very clearly. Nothing else matters. Four-to-six seconds from point A to point B, always doing the same thing, going hard as we can, and the kids have bought into that. And they're not allowed to not buy into that, to be perfectly honest with you. It's not an option. It is the way it's going to be, and that's pretty exciting."

Powell confirmed the secondary spent the spring playing with a chip on its shoulder as a result of all the criticism lobbed at a unit that helped allow 268.0 yards per game, the second most in school history.

After taking one more look back, he sounded ready to move on to see what is next.

"After going through spring practice I'm confident we can go out and compete at the highest level with any team," Powell said. "We've got to get better and all, but right now I feel like we're on our way back to being the Silver Bullets that everybody remembers."

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Spring Game Has Become Meaningful

I used to be of the mind-set that spring football wasn't all that meaningful and that folks who attended the spring game and made a big deal about it had a screw or two loose.

I mean, it's simply the last of many practices, and nothing about the upcoming season can be gleaned from watching it. Tailgating and getting excited about a practice seemed foreign to me, and I could never figure out why people got into it.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Well, I've come around a little bit. While I still wouldn't go to a spring game unless I really had to, I can see a little bit of reasoning as to why people would attend.

For one thing, the way Ohio State has been operating lately, the spring game is the

only chance many fans have of seeing football in person at Ohio Stadium. Regular-season ticket prices are ridiculous, especially given the schedules in recent seasons, and even this event seemed destined to face-plant after the school announced a \$12 advance ticket price and \$20 day-of-game prices before wiser heads prevailed and tickets were cut to \$5.

Another reason this year's contest was meaningful is that it provided a glimpse at players fans might not see a lot of this season. The most important spot was figuring out who would take over for all-time backup Kenny Guiton, and though Cardale Jones seemed to exit the contest with the No. 2 position in his grasp, he certainly didn't eliminate redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett from the competition. Truth be told, Barrett looked more impressive to these eyes, though it was hard to really get a true read on things given how poorly the offensive lines played.

You'll have that, though, when your best offensive linemen (Taylor Decker and Pat Elflein) don't play and you're scrambling to see

which of the unproven faces will step up. The defensive line, which appears to be bursting at the seams with talent, dictated most of the action, and that's with the four projected starters in shorts and sneakers for this game.

The spring game is more about moments than about figuring things out – anyone who thinks they can make assumptions about how good the Buckeyes will be this fall based on how they looked April 12 is foolish at best.

Guys such as Purdue transfer Rashad Frazier and redshirt freshman Tyquan Lewis made plays that they normally wouldn't because the starters were idle. Doesn't matter – they had a chance to play in Ohio Stadium, in front of fans, and made things happen.

That the results weren't real was secondary. They have memories that can carry them through the summer and into fall camp, and they showed enough that when the Buckeyes are blowing out a team in October, the coach might just remember their efforts and reward them with mop-up duty.

Also impressive was much better coverage from the secondary, the unit that was largely responsible for the Buckeyes being one of the worst pass defenses in America last season.

Ezekiel Elliott may indeed be the starting running back when the season dawns Aug. 30, but Bri'onte Dunn made sure that people don't forget about him. Dunn showed shiftness at the line, an elusiveness that seemed new, and a nose for the end zone as he bulled in for a Gray touchdown.

Curtis Samuel flashed some speed, and the Buckeyes used a lot more east-west passing to utilize their athletes in space. You can bet that will carry over into the season, especially when the explosive Dontre Wilson is healthy.

Touted linebacker Raekwon McMillan had limited chances to show himself as he was out in coverage for much of the afternoon, but when the Buckeyes did run it up the gut the Georgia native asserted himself, showing why he was such a big get. McMillan stuffed Samuel on fourth-and-goal from the 2-yard line and also forced receiver Corey Smith to fumble out of the end zone for a touchback to open the fourth quarter.

"He's not a freshman anymore," OSU boss Urban Meyer said. "He's got to go play."

Kickers are usually afterthoughts, but early enrollee Sean Nuernberger seemed to catch the eye of many, going 6 of 7 and looking pretty effortless in putting the ball through the uprights. He certainly looked to have the upper hand – or foot – for the kicking chores, but that's the call of the coaches, not yours truly.

The fact that the score was only 17-7 and that the offensive fireworks were nonexistent shouldn't be an indictment on the Buckeyes' talent or fortunes for the upcoming season.

"It's more individual," Meyer said. "I'm not trying to evaluate an offense. Who cares? There are guys out there who will never play or they're not ready to play now. I was handed these stats – I'm not sure what to do with these. I don't care.

"But I do care who is physically going to make plays. It was almost like an individual game today. That's what I wanted to watch. I wanted to see who's going to compete, who's going to make plays and who's going to fit the team concept because we all know what we saw out there. That's not a team. That's not the Ohio State Buckeyes."

Big Changes Ahead?

It's odd to think that a team with 24 wins in its last 26 games needs a radical overhaul, but that's what Meyer started this spring.

From bringing on new coaches Larry

Johnson and Chris Ash to fix the defense to changing the way the players approach and think about things, Meyer is being proactive. He knows the Buckeyes are good, but good isn't good enough in Columbus. They need to be great.

To that end, Meyer has brought in some outside help, in the form of leadership guru Tim Kight. Meyer believed that behaviors had to change, when it was really the overall culture of the program that needed work.

Those changes are seen in three simple but powerful ideas.

- Four-to-six, A-to-B, which is basically Meyer's belief that effort is given for four-to-six seconds on every play, and that A to B is the path you take to get there. Kight has a formula, E+R=O, the E meaning event, the R standing for response, and the O being the outcome. "You don't control the events of life," Kight told Sports Illustrated. "You always control how you respond."

- Competitive excellence, where Meyer and his coaches don't want players, even established starters, to become complacent. Every rep should and will matter, and players will be held accountable for their effort. A heightened sense of competition should keep the players engaged.

- The last, and maybe most important, is the power of the unit. Meyer is so into this one that he no longer calls his assistants position coaches but rather "unit leaders," per SI. Kight used the military blueprint to get through on this one, noting that a soldier's top motivation is to fight for the men next to him. If the group is too big, the bond isn't strong enough and motivation goes down.

That's why you build around the excellence of the position groups. This means that receivers compete against defensive backs, running backs compete against linebackers, and so on. Everyone is invested and has a stake in the outcome, within the parameters of their group. The goal is to get all nine "units" to play up to potential – "If you have six of nine you have a good season," Meyer said. "If you have nine of nine, well, Florida State had nine of nine."

One change that may take some getting used to by fans is the new defensive philosophy of "back-end forward." For years the Buckeyes have hung their hat on playing tenacious run defense, which sometimes led to leaky pass coverage. Last year the spigot broke, with teams throwing at will against the Buckeyes.

Meyer recalled a conversation he had with New England coach Bill Belichick, who said he was willing to give up a little in the run game if it meant being more sound against the pass. Think about that for a second, because it makes perfect sense. A mistake on a running play might lead to a 10-yard gain, while a mistake on a passing play might lead to an 80-yard gain. It's a risk vs. reward gamble, one that Meyer and the defensive staff seem willing to take.

That might mean actually double-covering someone like a Sammy Watkins, who amassed 227 yards and two scores in OSU's bowl game loss to Clemson, knowing that the defensive line can put the requisite pressure on quarterbacks to disrupt things.

How quickly the players understand and buy into these new concepts will determine whether the Buckeyes are once again merely the best of a mediocre Big Ten, or whether they have the stuff to make it to the four-team championship playoff.

"It's everything," Kight said. "We believe culture eats strategy for lunch. Strategy says 'This is the behavior I want.' Culture determines whether or not you get it."

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Hard To Draw Conclusions From This Spring Game

For years, it seemed like each spring I missed the Ohio State spring football game because I was attending the College Sports Publishers Association convention. With Ohio State on quarters and most of the other member schools on semesters, the conclave was generally held on a weekend that was convenient for the other publishers, whose schools were done with spring practice, but inconvenient for the representative of *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* – me.

If ever there was a year to miss the spring game, this could have been the one. You tend to forget, from April to April, how boring a spring football game can be or how useless it can be in terms of trying to evaluate a team with regard to an upcoming season. When it comes to those characteristics, this 2014 edition had to be right up there among the dozens that have been played in my time at BSB.

I'll give OSU football coach Urban Meyer credit for creating a spring event, with all his extras, including this year's fastest man on campus competition. And with most Ohioans still trying to overcome the effects of a winter that would not end, it was great for the crowd of 61,058 Buckeye fans to enjoy some time in the sun watching their favorite team.

In the past Buckeye coaches attempted to at least make some sort of competitive game out of the exhibition. With Meyer sitting out many of his top players, this really wasn't even as good as an open practice might have been for the fans. In fact, with the top dogs taking it easy, it was almost like giving up one of your NCAA-allowed spring practices.

But who am I to question Urban Meyer. His two national championship rings are two more than I have.

Still, the scrimmage did very little for me in evaluating the team. So I'll turn to the man with the jewelry on his fingers to try to explain what might have come out of the game and this spring's practice.

Certainly, the biggest question for Buckeye fans is how the defense, which failed the team badly last season, is doing, especially under new co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash.

Of what the fans and other observers might have seen out of the Buckeye defenders during the scrimmage, Meyer said, "I hope the reaction was that they looked quicker, they look faster, they trigger on the ball much better than they have in the past. If that's your perception, that's mine as well."

While the secondary was certainly an area of concern for Buckeye fans, I think people realized there were a lot of young, talented players at the back end playing under a coach – Ash – who had been brought in specifically to aid in their growth. The secondary didn't disappoint in the spring game, holding Cardale Jones and J.T. Barrett to less than 50 percent combined in completion percentage.

But another area of concern on defense was at linebacker, where the Buckeyes have been lacking in depth for Meyer's first two seasons. The coach seemed pleased with the spring game play from that position group.

"Darron Lee and Chris Worley are two examples of guys that have developed," Meyer said of two of his young linebackers. Worley led all players with nine tackles for the Scarlet team, and Lee was credited with four stops and also broke up a pass.

But many of the eyes in Ohio Stadium were focused on the highly touted and early-enrolling Raekwon McMillan. The 6-2, 240-pounder out of Hinesville, Ga., had five tackles in the game, and Meyer indicated

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

that McMillan had earned his reps this spring.

"He certainly did, and he's in the rotation," Meyer said. "He's going to play. I would put him in the same category although a year younger than Worley and Darron Lee. Those guys, they've earned it. They're playing."

He stopped short of declaring McMillan a starter as the freshman is locked in a battle with senior Curtis Grant, who is looking to cap his OSU career with a bang after failing, so far, to live up to expectations.

Despite the fact that it has been the team's strength for the past two seasons, Meyer seemed far less enthusiastic about the Buckeye offense than the defense after the spring game. Certainly, the biggest area of concern would seem to be the offensive line, where Ohio State must replace four of five starters from a unit that has been rock solid since the arrival of Meyer and assistant coach Ed Warinner.

"The offensive line, we've got a lot of work to do," Meyer said after the patchwork group yielded a combined five sacks and paved the way for 170 total rushing yards on 38 carries. At one point the Scarlet got a first-and-goal at the Gray 3 and couldn't punch it in.

Only two spots appear set on the line, with Taylor Decker and Pat Elflein, both of whom sat out the game, set at left tackle and right guard, respectively. The battle for the other starting positions should continue into the fall, with Meyer looking toward some arriving freshmen to spice up the competition.

"I saw Jamarco Jones (today), Demetrius Knox is coming in, Brady Taylor," said Meyer of three freshmen on the way. "Those are three bodies that are going to be coming in in June, and I looked them right in the eye and said, 'You're not redshirting, you're playing,' and that's hard for an offensive lineman."

"That's an area that we have got to get back to where we – maybe not where we were, but close."

While the offensive linemen must open the holes for the rushing game, it takes running backs to get through them, and Meyer has plenty of players to choose from as he tries to replace the departed Carlos Hyde, one of the best in a long line of great Buckeye running backs.

None of the running backs had a breakout spring game, with Warren Ball leading all rushers with 55 yards on eight carries and a long of 20 yards.

"The guy that really, really excites me is No. 4, Curtis Samuel," Meyer said after the spring game. "We've just got to figure out if he has the size and strength to take the pounding the running backs take."

Samuel is a 5-11, 190-pounder out of Brooklyn, N.Y., who had six carries for just 11 yards in the spring game. But he also grabbed three passes for 17 yards, so he may be the type of dual threat Meyer has been looking for in his backfield. Samuel failed to score on three straight tries on the previously mentioned goal-line failure by the Scarlet.

"We have some depth there, but right now Ezekiel Elliott and Samuel are the two," the coach said of his backs. "Rod (Smith) was having a very good spring before we had to sit him down and Bri'onte Dunn, so it's still pretty much – I'm not ready to anoint a starter yet."

Elliott had three carries for 16 yards, and Dunn turned six carries into 35 yards. Interestingly, I think that Smith, a 6-3, 231-pound senior-to-be out of Fort Wayne, Ind., is one of the players those in attendance wanted to see as many Buckeye fans are still hopeful Smith will reach the potential he showed while in high school.

One position that Buckeye fans didn't seem to be fretting over was wide receiver. But Meyer seemed a bit apprehensive after watching his pass catchers finish the spring.

"Receiver, I can't name you one that's going to start, which is concerning," Meyer said. "But it's comforting to know I can name about six that have the ability."

Michael Thomas led the Gray and all receivers with six catches for 64 yards, while Corey Smith led the Scarlet with five catches for 72 yards.

Thomas has established himself as a great spring game performer. He burst on to the scene with 12 catches for 131 yards in the 2012 spring game. Last April he caught another seven passes for 79 yards and a score. He now needs to convert that spring play into fall production.

As I said, it was hard for me to get much of a feel for the team from the spring game. Again, I defer to Meyer.

"We're not where we need to be," Meyer said. "We've got a ways to go."

Deciphering The Intelligence

I had a political science professor in college – Mitchell P. Strohl, I believe his name was – whose background was in military intelligence. My college days were in the midst of the James Bond heyday, and Professor Strohl claimed that little useful information came from the cloak-and-dagger stuff. Rather, he maintained, most intelligence came from trained people reading and deciphering foreign newspapers, magazines, books and the like that are far from classified.

I bring this up because sometimes, media members and fans are left to try to decipher things on their own when it comes to sensitive issues involving the Ohio State football team. Little word leaked out of what I dubbed Fort Tressel during the previous coaching administration, a name that is still valid for the Woody Hayes Athletic Center under Tressel's successor, Meyer.

When it comes to who was responsible for last year's debacle on the Buckeye defense, we are left to try to interpret what little information is available.

Most of the finger-pointing among fans was directed at defensive coordinator Luke Fickell. However, as our editor Jeff Svoboda pointed out to me, Meyer is a two-time national champion who is regarded as one of the top coaches in the college game. If he wanted Fickell gone, he would probably be gone. The payoff for being a loyal Buckeye during the Tattoogate scandal, if that was what was intended in retaining the longtime coach, has been met.

Similarly, I found it odd that co-defensive coordinator Everett Withers took what I truly believe to be a lesser job as head man at James Madison at a big pay cut. While it is usually a coach's dream to be a head coach, the former interim head coach at North

Carolina would probably be on a faster track if he were a co-coordinator at a school such as Ohio State. Did he see the writing on the wall after last season or was he, perhaps, told to look for something else?

Then, in a wide-ranging interview with *The Columbus Dispatch*, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith lauded Meyer for landing former Penn State assistant Larry Johnson Sr. after the "unexpected" departure of defensive line coach Mike Vrabel. Does that mean that Withers' departure was expected?

Finally, we come to the comments from OSU cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs in the April 8 issue of *Buckeye Sports Bulletin's* electronic BSB Quickly while talking about working with Ash and the new style of play for his charges.

"When Coach Withers left, one of the things I talked to Coach Meyer about right away was we need to start meeting together," Coombs said. "We need to spend more time together as a cohesive unit. Chris and I have been able to do that and spend time together, so that has worked out really well."

"He's got good energy. He's got good passion. Everett was a good coach. But with Chris, we're playing a style of defense that is very appealing as a corners coach and a lot of stuff I believe in, so I'm very excited about that."

As the Buckeye pass defense struggled last season, many observers called for the corners to play more press coverage, something Coombs says the Buckeyes were not set up to do.

"It takes practice to play that way, and football is made up of a myriad of different schemes," Coombs said. "There's lots of different things, and it's not like you can just say, 'Hey, go put those guys up on the line of scrimmage and go play.' It's the scheme. It's how everything fits together."

"I'm not blaming anybody, but that was not what we were doing. We did it at times. It wasn't our base concept. It was an adjustment. Now, it is our base alignment and we will adjust off of that. So, in order to do that, you've got to do it. Every single snap of spring football we have lined up in press coverage, and that's the way we're going to learn it."

I wonder what Professor Strohl, if he were an Ohio State fan, would have made of all that intelligence.

Celebrating The Final Four

Speaking of the April 8 issue of BSB Quickly, we reprinted several articles from the April 10, 1999, issue of *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* recapping Ohio State's surprising run to the Final Four on the 15th anniversary of that trip to St. Petersburg, Fla.

The Buckeyes would lose their semifinal game, 64-48, to eventual national champion Connecticut.

Interestingly, it was the first trip to the Final Four for the Huskies, who recently wrapped up the 2014 national championship, their fourth with the others coming in '99, 2004 and 2011. They also appeared in the Final Four in 2009.

An interesting story that we reprinted tells of how star guards Michael Redd, who averaged 19.5 points on the season, and Scoonie Penn, who tallied 16.0, were able to play so well together.

"Each guy could be the go-to guy and when we go to the other and they accept it, it makes it nice as a coach," Ohio State coach Jim O'Brien said.