

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 33, No. 21

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

May 2014

# Building Leadership

## Meyer Working To Form Culture He Wants At OSU

By JEFF SVOBODA  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

This time of year, it's not hard to find stories penned by beat writers from across college football about how a team had to identify or develop leaders or instill a tough, hard-working culture during spring football.

The construct usually goes as such – after a veteran or starter graduates, that means a younger player, usually one inheriting a starting role, must step up and become a leader, the kind of guy who is dependable on the field yet vocal off it. That usually plays into how a team, often coming off a disappointing end to the season, must improve off the field in order to reach that elusive success on it.

One year ago, I authored one of those stories.

In the May 2013 issue of BSB, I wrote more than 2,500 words on how the Buckeyes were trying to develop leaders for the upcoming season. And as far as that style of story goes, it was pretty detailed, addressing how Braxton Miller was becoming a more vocal member of the Ohio State football team, how players at other position groups such as Ryan Shazier and Jack Mewhort were progressing and how head coach Urban Meyer had a systematic approach to building leaders.

But what does it really mean to build leadership and a winning culture in a football program?

Such stories are often light on details, and as it turns out, so are many coaches.

"You can't just declare a culture," Columbus-area consultant Brian Kight said. "Every coach declares a culture. Every coach ever says, 'We're going to be the toughest team.' So why isn't every team tough? That's what every coach talks about. Because you don't get the culture you declare, you get the culture you lead."

In the football world, players are asked to become better leaders, to become the ones who mentor and bring along the fellow



FILE PHOTO; INSET PHOTO BY MATTHEW HAGER

**PUTTING IN WORK** – Head football coach Urban Meyer (inset) said he 'never worked on anything as hard in my life ... to make sure that we have the exact culture I want' at Ohio State.

members of their position groups, without being given the guidance or tools to succeed. Coaches often create buzzwords around a program or bring in speakers to discuss what leadership and culture mean to them with the hope that their players will pick up those skills essentially by osmosis.

Meyer now believes he was in the same boat.

"He didn't have a systematic approach to teaching it before this," Brian's father, Tim, said. "He believed in it, he always emphasized it, he always asked for it. He had speakers, quotes, posters, (strength and conditioning coach Mickey) Marotti did really cool stuff, but they've never had a genuine, systematic journey of teaching the fundamentals of leadership and then tying it to culture and mental toughness."

Meyer has realized this and turned much of his program this spring over to the Kights, who operate Focus<sup>3</sup>, a Dublin-based company that helps companies improve organizational cultures. The Kights first started working with the football program a year ago with an emphasis on helping the Buckeyes build up what Meyer believed to be substandard leadership among the returning veterans on the team.

What the Buckeyes are doing now is allowing the Kights to install a full philosophy – or a "belief system," as Tim Kight calls it – that establishes the culture of the program. Coming off two straight losses to end the season a year ago, Meyer believes there were cracks in the Ohio State system that if not addressed would have continued to eat away at the team's ability to compete at the highest level.

This story isn't the end-all, be-all piece on the subject. Many things that the Kights teach to not just Ohio State players and coaches but to their varied clients simply didn't fit, and the work they'll be doing with the Buckeyes will surely develop as time goes on.

But hopefully it provides more of an in-depth look at what is happening as the Buckeyes try to cement what Meyer first started implementing the day he officially took over at Ohio State in January 2012.

In the words of the head coach, there's nothing more important – not finding four new offensive linemen, not identifying a backup quarterback or fixing the pass defense – as he goes into campaign No. 3 at OSU.

"I can honestly say I've never worked on anything as hard in my life since that day we walked off the field in south Florida to make sure that we have the exact culture that I want, that we all want at Ohio State," Meyer said at this year's Coach Meyer Spring Kick-Off Luncheon.

### Identifying A Blueprint

Also at that luncheon, Meyer gave a hint at how he's getting the results he wants.

"We took the approach, we don't blame, complain or defend," Meyer said. "If there's something great about our program, you're going to hear the term enhance it and make it stronger. That's what we're trying to do. When there is something not exactly right, we don't blame players, we don't blame coaches."

Those words – blame, complain and defend



Tim Kight



Brian Kight

## Ranking Ohio State's Greatest Football Seasons

Not long ago, I got into a discussion with a few friends about ranking the five greatest teams in Ohio State football history.

The debate wasn't a particularly long one, especially considering the Buckeyes have enjoyed only seven national championship seasons in their long and storied history, and two of those versions – 1961 as voted by the Football Writers Association of America and 1970 as awarded by the National Football Foundation – are recognized by only the most ardent of fans.

Depending upon your generational perspective, the 1968 and 2002 teams are interchangeable at the top of the list because those are the only two seasons in which Ohio State produced a consensus national championship. Third on my list would be 1954, a team that went undefeated and altered the course of program history since it most likely saved Woody Hayes' job.

I would place the 1942 team in fourth position solely on the merit of winning the first national title in program history, and I would put the 1957 national championship squad in fifth place.

After completing the relatively easy task of ranking the top five teams in OSU football history, we decided to take on something a little more difficult – such as ranking the top five seasons from the perspective of individual statistical performances.

Think that's easy? Think again. First of all, there are seven Heisman Trophy seasons to be considered along with 10 other years during which the Buckeyes had at least one player finish among the top five vote-getters in the Heisman race. And even that number of superlative individual performances doesn't begin to scratch the surface, much less leave any kind of wiggle room for debate.

For example, how can you compare Archie Griffin's back-to-back Heisman seasons, and does either match up to the record-setting performance of Eddie George in 1995 or the electrifying 1984 campaign of Keith Byars? Troy Smith won the 2006 Heisman Trophy, but was that season dramatically better than the one turned in by Joe Germaine in 1998, a season after which Germaine finished a ridiculously low ninth in the Heisman voting?

Where would you rank David Boston with his school-record 85 receptions for 1,435 yards and 13 TDs in 1998? Ahead of the 1995 season turned in by Terry Glenn when he caught 64 passes for 1,411 yards and a school-record 17 touchdowns? What about 1986 when Cris Carter shattered every receiving record then on the OSU books with 69 catches for 1,127 yards and 11 scores?

Defensively, you have Tom Cousineau and his 244 tackles in 1978, a single-season record no one has since come close to matching; the 1986 effort turned in by Chris Spielman, who totaled 205 stops, 29 of them during a 26-24 loss to Michigan; and Mike Vrabel, who had 26 tackles for loss, including 13 sacks, on his way to a second consecutive Big Ten Defensive Lineman of the Year award in 1996.

More recently, fans tend to forget what Ted Ginn Jr. accomplished during the 2006 season – 781 yards and nine touchdowns receiving, two returns for touchdowns (one punt and one kickoff) and a touchdown pass.

Another outstanding individual performance that conveniently slips the minds of OSU fans is Maurice Claret in 2002 – a freshman-record 1,237 yards and 16 TDs despite playing in only 11 games, another 102 yards and two TDs receiving, and a

game-changing forced fumble and recovery against Miami (Fla.) All-American Sean Taylor in the Fiesta Bowl.

Dusting off the history books, it is nearly impossible to fathom the kind of multifaceted season Vic Janowicz had during his 1950 Heisman run when he starred on offense and defense, returned kicks, punted, and kicked field goals and extra points for the Buckeyes.

And, of course, Ohio State football wouldn't be Ohio State football as we know it today without the exploits of Chic Harley, whose 1919 season served as a valedictory to the outstanding career that launched the construction of Ohio Stadium.

So, how would I rank the top five individual seasons in Ohio State football history?

### EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

It's tough, but I'd start with George and his 1995 Heisman season because it was so thoroughly dominating. He set school single-game and single-season rushing records that still stand, and he averaged nearly 150 yards per game.

Byars would be a close second because he supplemented his 1,764 rushing yards by catching 42 passes for 479 yards. Plus, his performance against Illinois that year is the stuff of which legends are made – 274 yards and five touchdowns, including one on which he lost a shoe but kept right on motorizing to the end zone. It is a highlight moment fans still talk about 30 years later.

In third place, I'm going with Germaine. What he accomplished in 1998 by throwing for 3,330 yards and 25 TDs – at a school known for its running attack, no less – was nothing short of remarkable. Fourth place goes to Griffin in 1974, his first Heisman season during which he rushed for 1,695 yards and 12 touchdowns, while Claret nudges Smith for my fifth-place vote.

Without Claret, Ohio State simply does not win the 2002 national championship. Meanwhile, Smith and his 2006 teammates missed out on their chance for immortality by taking late-night runs to In-N-Out Burger more seriously than an upstart Florida team.

#### The End Or A New Beginning?

It has always been a personal source of amusement and amazement at the way some Ohio State fans continue to have a vitriolic reaction to Terrelle Pryor.

Was Pryor a coddled prima donna whose sense of entitlement cost him, his head coach and his program dearly? There seems to be little question of that. But was what Pryor did really any worse than incidents involving Cam Newton at Auburn or Jameis Winston at Florida State? How about Michigan kicker Brendan Gibbons, who was allowed to continue to play football after being accused of raping another student at a fraternity party four years ago?

Yet when Pryor was traded recently from Oakland to Seattle for a seventh-round draft pick, a chunk of Buckeye Nation took to social media to voice its ongoing scorn of Pryor and gleefully announce that his pro career was over.

To be honest, I have never understood the contempt for Pryor, which began long before anyone ever coined the word

"Tattoogate." He was quite simply one of the best pure athletes ever to play quarterback for the Buckeyes, a fact his career numbers prove. He is the only Ohio State quarterback in history to throw for more than 6,000 yards and rush for more than 2,000, and he is tied with Bobby Hoying for the most touchdown passes in program history with 57.

Pryor has spent his brief NFL career with Oakland, a team that has been in disarray for a number of years. The Raiders didn't really know how they wanted to use Pryor, but he still managed to throw and run for a combined 2,374 yards and nine touchdowns last season in 11 games.

But because he was just 3-6 as a starter last season, and because the Raiders picked up Matt Schaub, who had worn out his welcome in Houston, and because Oakland is now on its seventh head coach in the past nine years, Pryor was shuffled off to Seattle where he would seem to be a better fit in Pete Carroll's up-tempo offense.

Still, Pryor is going to have to battle eight-year veteran Tarvaris Jackson during the preseason just for the right to back up Seahawks starter Russell Wilson. And even if he beats out Jackson, Pryor will likely be relegated to holding the clipboard for Wilson as long as he stays in Seattle.

That just seems like a waste of talent, especially in a quarterback-hungry league.

#### Tressel For President

A lot of the same folks who don't like Pryor harbor the same kind of ill will toward former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, who was forced out during the same memorabilia-for-tattoos scandal that ended Pryor's college career.

Tressel is currently one of three finalists for the presidency at the University of Akron and is also in the running for the same job at Youngstown State, and his detractors are scratching their heads as to why. Tressel has never before run a university of any size, doesn't have a Ph.D. and remains under an NCAA show-cause penalty until the end of 2016, a penalty that practically prohibits him from pursuing a coaching job on the college level.

Yet Tressel is a leading candidate to get the Akron job because what he would bring to the position cannot be quantified on a *curriculum vitae*.

According to published reports, enrollment at Akron is down 5 percent from last spring. The university is looking at a \$15 million deficit next year and is sitting on more than \$400 million in debt. It doesn't need an academician as its next president; it needs someone who will generate national media attention, someone who can create a culture of success, someone who is equally at ease attracting elite high school seniors as he is pressing the flesh of well-heeled donors.

Those are the kinds of skills Tressel showed for decades, first as head coach and athletics director at Youngstown State and then as a wildly successful head coach at Ohio State.

There are always going to be the naysayers, those who brand the former coach as a lying cheater who circumvented the rules whenever it struck his fancy. There is no doubt Tressel committed NCAA violations – serious ones – and he has paid dearly for those transgressions.

But are we not a forgiving society willing to offer second chances?

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Charter Member

COVER STORY

# OSU Lacked 'Clarity Of Purpose' Last Season

Continued From Page 1

– would sound familiar to anyone who has worked with Focus?

"We invented that," the elder Kight said. "It's our description based on our observations of leaders around the world, and we observed this: Leaders, when they're not getting what they want, which demonstrates they're not very effective leaders, they blame, complain and defend. That's what lesser leaders do, which only makes the problem worse.

"I think there's a BCD epidemic around the world and so does Brian. So when I introduced that, it sure motivated (Meyer) and he picked up the language."

To be fair, the chance for blame to spread was there. After 24 straight victories to open his tenure, a school record for consecutive wins, Meyer hit the first speed bumps – to use his word – of his OSU career with a Big Ten championship game loss to Michigan State that ended the team's national title hopes followed by an Orange Bowl loss vs. Clemson.

There were plenty in the fan base and even the media clamoring for sweeping changes. Many were ready to point to a pass defense that gave out at the end of last season, while others pointed to a missed block against the Spartans or a fumbled punt against Clemson as where to place blame for the end-of-season collapse.

Meyer was quick to realize that would be counterproductive.

"Instead of just blaming players, blaming coaches like most people do, I evaluated it and we have good people," Meyer said. "We have good coaches. So what happened? What I found out is I don't think there was a clarity of purpose, and that's on me.

"I've had people ask me that question,

say, 'You're changing the culture? You just won 24 straight.' No, we're not changing our culture, we're making it better. There's a couple of meeting rooms and unit groups that have to be changed, and that's what we're doing."

Meyer first let the Kights into the program a season ago after meeting Tim at a social event in 2013. A former track standout – he excelled at the 330-yard high hurdles in high school growing up in Worthington, just outside of Columbus – Tim Kight ran track at OSU and UCLA, where his team had a locker room in the same building as the basketball program run by legendary coach John Wooden.

Upon graduation, Kight quickly became a high school coach while working on his graduate degree, which turned out to be a master's in divinity. After about four years as a pastor, Kight turned his attention to his current work.

After ending up on Meyer's radar a year ago, the Kights had an impact on the 2013 Buckeyes, working with the team's 12-member leadership council of players picked by Meyer during the offseason after the head coach became concerned with what he saw in offseason workouts as the Buckeyes tried to replace inspiring figures such as John Simon and Zach Boren.

The team also started to embrace one of the leading axioms of Focus<sup>3</sup>, that how a person or team responds to an event results in the eventual outcome – or, as they call it, "Event+Response=Outcome." Black wristbands with the phrase "E+R=O" became omnipresent around the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

"I think last year, we got it to where we could get it and they got to where they could get it within the time frame that we had," Tim Kight said. "I don't think it could have

been done any differently or better than it was last year. It was just the natural flow of where it was at. This is all progressive. This is all cumulative because it's skill building. How long does it take to build a skill in anything? It takes time."

Many would be quick to label the Kights as leadership consultants or motivational speakers, but putting exactly what they do into words is difficult. Tim Kight describes the two as coaches who have figured out the characteristics of successful organizations – and any successful organization must have excellent leadership.

There are some bedrock principles of their teachings. In addition to the E+R=O philosophy, there's the "Performance Pathway" that leaders build culture, culture drives behavior and behavior produces results, which Kight calls the physics by which any successful organization operates.

From there, the program has been tailored to Ohio State and its specific message. If you've been reading BSB throughout the spring, or even heard Meyer or his players talk at any point, you're probably come across some of the core beliefs of the program. Terms such as "competitive excellence," "the power of the unit" and getting from point A to point B and playing each play with four to six seconds of relentless effort have been identified.

Those bullet points have often been stressed in Meyer's program, but now they are the front-and-center mandate after the Kights had Meyer put together a cultural blueprint that encapsulates what the Buckeyes want and expect out of their players, with the goal in mind for the team to prepare to win every day in everything they do.

"The three core beliefs that I've heard you articulate are relentless effort, No. 1," Tim Kight recalled telling Meyer. "Competitive excellence is No. 2. The power of the unit is No. 3. Correct me if I'm wrong, but that's the Urban Meyer culture. That's what you believe in the bottom of your heart.

"So then the behavior of relentless effort is go as hard as you can for four to six seconds, A to B, that's the behavior you want. Then there's an outcome you get from that, and you can recover from any situation you can possible face.

"For competitive excellence, the behavior you want and you've communicated is that you're constantly taking mental reps or game reps – you're always preparing either mentally or physically. The outcome you get from that is a la Kenny Guiton, when your number is called, you perform.

"The power of the unit, the behavior is an uncommon commitment to each other and the work ethic necessary to achieve our purpose. The outcome we get from that is a brotherhood of trust and the willingness to do what needs to be done.

"Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but that's the Urban Meyer culture. And he's like, 'I've never seen my beliefs spelled out that clearly and that concisely.' I said, 'That's it. That's your culture.'"

Any question of whether that culture is starting to take hold was likely answered by the way players and coaches talked to the media this spring. And in turn, that culture has an application when it comes to the way the team will play on the field.

"Here's what I think, and I think this is at the core of everything we've talked about all spring," cornerback coach Kerry 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 last – then it's really, really important, and our guys are playing like that."

Meyer has always spent a fair bit of time on leadership and culture in his career and especially since arriving at Ohio State. The message of four to six seconds of relentless effort has been a maxim since arriving, and he has broken down the players' off-field characteristics into levels designed to help motivate players as well. When he sensed a lack of leadership last year, he put together a plan to address the situation.

But this is the first time a comprehensive plan with the tools to improve leadership and culture has been implemented.

"He has the dedication," Tim Kight said. "He has always had that. He does not need us for that, but they sought a systematic approach. That's exactly what we've brought. Here's what's interesting, and Meyer and I have talked about this – I don't think there's hardly anything that we've ever said that he didn't already believe. But we are very effective in the mechanics of how to teach it and install it."

And in the view of the Kights, it's an essential task. A year ago, the Buckeyes had talent and great coaching and finished just short of their goal. The difference between 12-2 and holding hardware at the end of the



Urban Meyer

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COVER STORY

# Potential 2014 Ohio State Football Captains



**Braxton Miller**

People have been wondering each of the past two seasons if the quarterback would become a captain, and his fourth year as the team's starter could be the charm. After working on being more vocal on the field during the spring, Miller – who is popular among his teammates – could win a captain's vote.

**Jeff Heuerman**

This one seems like a lock, so much so that Meyer essentially named him a captain while speaking publicly during the spring. Not only is he an excellent all-around player and a third-year starter, Heuerman is confident and has a strong work ethic.

**Taylor Decker**

Maybe a bit of a dark horse considering he's a junior, Decker will be a second-year starter and will be counted on to be a key piece of a rebuilt unit. Decker said he spent much of the spring attempting to build his leadership skills and might become a captain based on his importance to the team.

**Michael Bennett**

This one also seems like something close to a lock. After an excellent bounce-back season in 2013, one in which he became the dean of the defensive line, Bennett will return as a starter and has the respect of everyone in the program for his demeanor and approach.

**Curtis Grant**

It might be hard to be a leader if Grant ends up losing his starting job, but he's the only senior among the linebackers and has been praised for acting like a veteran by the coaching staff.

**Doran Grant**

The elder statesman in the back seven, this Grant looks well on his way to becoming the kind of confident, backs-up-his-words-with-his-play cornerback that most thought he could be when he arrived at Ohio State.

season could just be what happens off the field.

"There's no technique or in business there's no strategy that is going to overcome an absence of those things," Brian Kight said. "You can't pass block well enough to overcome an absence of leadership in your unit, competitive fire or not going hard. You can't do it."

**Staff Improvement**

When it comes to getting better performance from each of the team's nine position groups, Kight told Meyer that he needed to look at his assistant coaches – or as they have now become known, unit leaders.

In Tim Kight's world, the message must be communicated clearly by each leader on the team, especially in a sport like football where players spend much more time with their position coaches than they do the head coach on a daily basis.

"It has to be communicated by a unit leader," Kight said. "It can't just be a speech from Urban Meyer. If they hear four to six, A to B, and they just hear it from you as a pregame speech and they don't hear it in their rooms, it's not going to happen."

The result has been classes – held a few times each week, generally about 90 minutes, even during spring practice – that taught methods for the coaches to better relate to their players and continue establishing the culture that is desired.

Asking a coach who has done his job – and generally done it well – for decades to change could have been received in many ways, not all of them good. That's not what has happened at Ohio State, though.

"I would say enthusiastic wouldn't adequately describe their mind-set," Kight said. "I would say totally committed, extremely impressive group of young men in terms of their willingness to grow and get better. There was no sense of compliance; there was every sense they were compelled to get better. They didn't participate in this because Urban Meyer asked them to do it, they participated in it because they wanted to."

"Hungry would be a great word for these guys – humble in that willingness to identify strengths and use them and identify gaps and get better. Humble, all of them, to a man."

When Ohio State's assistants were asked about the training sessions, a theme emerged – that their desire to improve as people drove their thinking.

"We're all lifelong learners," Coombs said. "I'm 52 and there's a whole lot of things I still need to learn in this world. I think the only things in this world that educate you in life are the books you learn and the people you meet. Coach Meyer is providing us with both people and things to read that are impactful."

"We're still a learning vessel," tight ends coach Tim Hinton added. "Think about every year with X's and O's, what do coaches do? They go out and they learn. They go out and see other coaches, and other coaches seek them. It's a constant conversation, 'OK, how can I improve?' You're constantly challenging each other in a staff room, 'Is there a better way to do this?' That vessel, it won't fill up."

Hearing those words would likely be

music to Tim Kight's ears. Coaches spend much of their time asking players to trust their methods and devote themselves to getting better, so to see them live up to that message in their own lives has been fulfilling.

To hear Coombs tell it, the feeling is mutual.

"The experience here is unique in many, many ways, but what Coach is doing with us

as staff and as men this offseason is remarkable," he said. "I don't know that I can limit what I'm getting out of it to any singular thing, but it is a passion for being a man, leading, doing things right, communicating."

"Relentless effort, four to six, is all football stuff, but it goes so far beyond that. Being able to have that conversation with my kids every day has been a remarkable experience."

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# BSB Staffers Talk Ohio State Spring Football

Ohio State's spring practice is in the books and the start of fall camp is still three months away, but football talk in Columbus has no offseason.

From the ever-popular discussion about the men who line up under center to talk about how Ohio State can fix a defense that wilted near the end of last season, there are plenty of hot topics to debate when it comes to the Buckeyes. And with Urban Meyer riding a 24-2 record in two seasons at the helm and the new College Football Playoff set to debut, there's no shortage of excitement about the upcoming season as well.

With that in mind, we assembled our team of BSB editor Jeff Svoboda and staff writers Ben Axelrod, Ryan Ginn and Marcus Hartman for a roundtable discussion to sort through the ins and outs of Ohio State football now that spring football is over and we head into the summer months.

What follows is our free flowing conversation, touching on topics ranging from spring practice takeaways to the Buckeyes' 2014 playoff chances.

## Offensive Debate

**Marcus Hartman:** Starting with the offense, looking back at my notes, I was kind of surprised about how negative I felt overall (in spring practice). Urban was pretty down on the offensive line at the end of the spring. I thought it was pretty easy to look at everything else though and say, 'Eh,' other than the running backs, because they have about five running backs who can play. But the receivers didn't exactly blow me away and I didn't think either of the backup quar-



JOSH WINSLOW

**BIG PIECE** – Ohio State's Dontre Wilson (left) could be a bigger part of the Ohio State offensive attack during his sophomore season.

terbacks could play a large role in winning a Big Ten game right now.

**Jeff Svoboda:** There are definitely significant question marks at each position, which is weird because they're coming off a season where they set almost every school record and they bring back the two-time Big Ten MVP. There's talent there, but I just don't know how this is going to come together necessarily.

**Ben Axelrod:** I just don't know what this offense's bread and butter is going to be. Last year, we knew they could just give it to Carlos Hyde and pick up 8 yards. Yeah, now they have five running backs and they're all nice names, but we haven't seen any of them really do anything against anyone. With the wide receivers, I still don't see the game breaker outside of maybe Dontre Wilson. I think that's the kind of the X-factor in the offense – what's Dontre Wilson going to do? Because I think he is the player who could become your bread and butter and give this offense a different look.

**Ryan Ginn:** That's my biggest thing is last year you had two people through the air and on the ground that you knew you could go to. Philly Brown was not the best receiver in the conference overall, but he gave you a dependable presence. Carlos Hyde was the player they often said, 'Hey, go win us the game.'

**BA:** He was their MVP last year.

**RG:** Yeah, and like you said, they have five running backs, but are any of them *that* good? They just have a lot of players who are similar and the same is pretty much true at wide receiver. It's just going to be a matter of them either pushing each other to get better or someone emerging.

**MH:** One of the main thoughts that I did have is that one of the big positives they could have is if Dontre is Philly-plus – like if he gives them what Philly gave them, plus he can make big plays. That's the No. 1 thing that I would be looking for this year to fill in the gaps. With Dontre, for all the hype that he came in with and that we gave him, he

didn't have a lot of game-breaking plays last year, either. He's obviously still a question mark, but if you're looking for one absolutely huge positive, I think that's an interesting place to start.

**JS:** I talked to Dontre after the Orange Bowl and he basically said that he didn't play the way that he wanted to play at all last year. He said he didn't play as fast as he wanted to play. He came in as 'Dontre Wilson, speedster' and all the talk was about his track times, but you're right, he didn't have a lot of those plays where he went the distance. But Urban has said this spring that he's the guy who's their biggest game breaker. He has to be that.

**BA:** To his credit, I think he does look like that Dontre – at least he has in the spring. It looks like he's being used the way that he wanted to be used and the way that they sold him on being used. I thought he was the focal point of the offense in the spring and obviously Braxton Miller was out, but even when he comes back, I don't know if that's going to change.

**MH:** I think they really want to try to not build the offense literally around Braxton. I think that's probably smart because you always know that you can call the QB power play and he can always scramble. I don't think that's lip service. I think they're really going to make an effort. It wouldn't surprise me if when he was wavering on coming back, they said that they were going to make an effort to not get him hit 30 times a game, too.

**BA:** But I think that if they get into a close game, that promise is going to go out the window.

**MH:** Oh, for sure. And I think he'd be fine with that. He wants to win the game, too. But like I said, I don't think it's total lip service when they talk about wanting to find other ways to win. And it makes sense, too, because you know what Braxton can do with his legs. You don't even have to scheme for that. There's two designed plays that they run for that.

**BA:** Two years ago, Braxton Miller was the offense. And then last year, it was really Carlos Hyde's offense. Kind of bringing this full circle, I think that's the biggest question – now that you don't have Carlos Hyde, what are you going to do?

**JS:** It's legitimately going to be interesting to see what this offense is or what they want to be. Because they've got the potential to do everything but not be as good at it as they were – they could be a jack of all trades and a master of none. Last year, they obviously mastered, 'Give it to Carlos Hyde and let him run behind Jack Mewhort and get 8 yards a pop.' Now this year, what's it going to be? I think they legitimately don't know what they're going to have on the offensive line at this point.

**MH:** I was surprised it sounded like they weren't sold on a center at all considering how much Urban has said that he loves Jacoby Boren. You wonder about his size and maybe you wonder about the raw ability of Billy Price being a four-star defensive line recruit who has a fair amount of athleticism. The offensive line is not necessarily all doom and gloom. It only has to be average – I think – for them to have a pretty good offense. They can't be bad. But they don't have to have it be that steamroller that it was before.

**BA:** You look at the offensive line and right now the guys fighting for spots from the second team are Billy Price, Evan Lisle

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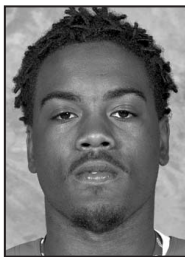
## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

## Offensive Players On The Spot

Before spring ball started, BSB highlighted five offensive players who needed to take big steps during the 15 practice sessions. We revisit those five now that spring is done.

• **Darryl Baldwin and Kyle Dodson, offensive tackle:** Baldwin spent spring serving as the right tackle with the No. 1 unit and is expected to begin the fall there. A fifth-year senior, he isn't a perfect physical specimen for the spot but was the team's third tackle a season ago and appears to be a serviceable player. It was a victory for Dodson, meanwhile, just to be on the field after injuries dogged his first two seasons on campus. His play was uneven at times – especially in the spring game when he struggled early with Rashad Frazier – but he had his good moments as well. He doesn't appear to be a serious contender to start in 2014, though.

• **Rod Smith, running back:** The only upperclassman in the running backs room, Smith was one of the confounding figures of camp. He spoke to reporters about wanting to



Corey Smith

cement himself as a team leader, and running backs coach Stan Drayton spoke well of his work in that realm. Drayton and Urban Meyer also said that he appeared to be playing his best football – Drayton said that he'd finally figured out how to run behind his gangly frame – but his spring was short-circuited when he was taken off the practice field while tending to academic issues midway through the spring.

• **Corey Smith and Michael Thomas, wide receivers:** These two were the big winners at the wideout spot, appearing to cement themselves as potential starters along with senior Devin Smith and converted running back Dontre Wilson. Thomas was yet again a spring star, as he showed he can make the tough – and sometimes spectacular – catches. He also adds size OSU hasn't had in a while. Corey Smith, meanwhile, had people raving about his ability, though consistency appears to be the next mountain to climb for the Akron native.

– Jeff Svoboda

and Joel Hale. And you could make compelling cases for all of them being starters. So I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing for this offensive line, really.

**RG:** I thought it was pretty telling that Urban namedropped the three incoming freshman offensive linemen after the spring game.

**JS:** Literally, namedropped.

**RG:** You don't often hear that. He said, 'I told them all they're going to have to be ready.' Whether that was lip service or not. I think Jamarco Jones and Demetrius Knox could easily wind up on the two-deep.

**BA:** I think they will, day one.

**MH:** At least one of them will.

**RG:** It just depends on out of the guards and tackles, who has the worst fall camp, but I think they're both capable.

**JS:** The entire offensive line other than Pat Elflin and Taylor Decker are all 'yes, but' guys. Like yes, Antonio Underwood has impressed this spring and come back from a lot, but he's never done it before. For a lot of them, the 'but' is that they've never done it before. That's the thing – there's just not anybody who has that pedigree that was a five-star offensive line recruit that was highly rated and ready to just step in like Taylor Decker was as a sophomore.

**RG:** I guess the good news is that Ed Warinner is a good mix between defensive and confident about his ability to shape them. People were asking about Joel Hale converting to the offensive line and he basically said, 'I've done it before with Reid Fragel.' Urban mentioned that (Warinner) turned one of the biggest weaknesses on the team into a positive. He said that these guys are basically on the same level that the Jack Mewhorts of the world were two years ago.

**BA:** Honestly, they're probably further than those guys were just because they've had Ed Warinner coaching them for however many years that they've been here.

**MH:** I always thought that was interesting. Those seniors who wound up being so good were still four and five-star recruits. Now you're looking at the older guys who are left, not many of them were highly recruited, but some of the younger guys were. Lisle was a guy that a lot of people wanted and the guys coming in are all big-time pedigree guys. It's a little bit of an interesting mix.

**BA:** On a positive note, I'm really impressed with Taylor Decker. I think he's going to be an anchor for this offensive line. If this was his last year here, it wouldn't surprise me. I think he's that good.

**MH:** Last year's guys – and I think it

came from Warinner – played with an attitude. That can go way toward getting things done. It's not like any of these guys are just being pulled off the street. You've got a certain amount of ability and sometimes you can get a little more done with that.

**JS:** This is a very Ohio State conversation. We started with the offense and wound up with the offensive line. I think they're certainly going to try to mitigate the fact that they're going to have a young offensive line. Now how it's going to work remains to be seen. You don't necessarily have to be great at the dropback passing game anymore to have an effective offense.

**MH:** They are built to not have to rely on the offensive line. It's just what we've seen so far in the Urban Meyer era is that they did rely on the offensive line.

**RG:** Tom Herman talked incessantly this spring, albeit about his quarterbacks, but about accenting what you're good at and hiding what you're bad at. And if the offensive line is bad, they're going to have to get to the outside, and he's a guy who seems to know that. As long as he can find out what their strengths are and what their weaknesses are by August, they'll basically do whatever they can. How it ends up will depend on what he views as their strengths and weaknesses at the start of the season.

**JS:** Speaking of quarterbacks, I want to make sure we address that. I think it was kind of an interesting phenomenon that everybody just accepted that Braxton Miller's hurt and that it's OK and great for the young guys to get some reps. But Braxton Miller's not a finished product as a quarterback by any stretch of the imagination. I think there's a legitimate question that Braxton Miller could have really used those 15 practices.

**BA:** He did need them and he's going to be behind the eight-ball and you're basically taking away the apex of your offense for the entire spring session. Truthfully, I wasn't very impressed with Cardale Jones or J.T. Barrett this spring. You could make a compelling argument that Kenny Guiton is the player that they're going to miss most this year because that security blanket is gone. If Braxton goes down, I am not confident in this team's ability to win a Big Ten game at this point.

**JS:** I'm grading both Cardale and J.T. on a curve, just because Cardale had so far to go. He came in with tools, but he was just tools, and Barrett's a guy who literally didn't take any reps last year because he was coming off a knee injury. Those guys are kind of starting from scratch and I think they made

progress. Whether either of them can come in and win three games like Kenny did last year remains to be seen, but grading them on the curve of where they were, I think they had good springs.

**BA:** But the Big Ten doesn't grade on a curve. For as much as Urban Meyer talked positively about Cardale Jones, he was starting as a negative and now I view him as a neutral. I don't view him as a positive asset on this team yet. For all the praise that he heaped on him, we never saw it. He didn't perform well in the spring game, he didn't perform very well in the open practices we got to see.

**RG:** The thing that softened the blow with Braxton was that Urban always talked positively about what Braxton was doing. However, what Braxton was doing was basically preparing for the NFL draft. They spent the whole spring making sure he wouldn't embarrass the school on Jon Gruden's QB camp, but that literally has no impact on the fall. Now, obviously he's going through his reps, but he's still not throwing and he's not commanding the offense or building a rapport with any of the new receivers. He was just learning how to talk about football.

**JS:** It's legitimately interesting to me that they decided to attack improving Braxton through the pocketbook. I mean, Urban came out at the start of the spring and said we have to get Braxton better because if not, he's not going to be a draftable quarterback. It's clear that the way they're motivating him is by saying, 'If you want to be ready for the league, you've got to do these things.' Now obviously, getting ready for the league gets him better as a quarterback and is better for Ohio State, but they've specifically said that the NFL is what they're getting him better for and you don't really see a lot of coaching staffs say that. Maybe that's just calling a spade a spade. It's reality. These guys want to make money at the end of the day.

**MH:** I do buy that he was able to learn a lot from standing there behind and watching the plays develop. I'm sure there were some things he wasn't able to pick up about reading defenses. People talk about his ability to read defenses and they have no idea what they're talking about. They don't know what the reads are. Let's say he did make the progress he needed to make in those areas – I still think the No. 1 thing he needs is just throwing reps.

I don't think finding the receiver is as much of an issue as actually executing the throw consistently for Braxton. I think that's

the larger issue for Braxton. Sometimes, guys are going to be covered and you're going to need to throw them open. I think he can see where it is, but can't always get the ball where and when he wants it. I think that's the main thing that he lost. LeBron James couldn't shoot until he was 25 because he didn't have to shoot until he was 25. Braxton is kind of the same way and a lot of people wind up being good at that thing. It's just a matter of them learning to do it. I'm sure Drew Brees was a more accurate passer than Braxton Miller because when Drew Brees was 14 he realized he wasn't going to be able to run away from anybody, so he had to be an accurate passer.

**BA:** Going back to his reads, I can't remember a handful of times where I've seen a wide open receiver out there and Braxton not see him. I can think of a handful of times where I've seen him miss the wide open receiver on the throw. He needs those throwing reps. Everything we've heard these past two years is that he's very good in the summer and he brings the wide receivers out and works out with them. He's going to have to do that even more this summer.

**JS:** Braxton Miller does have a proven track record of getting better each offseason, there's no doubt about that. Maybe it's much ado about nothing, but I think those 15 practices are pretty big. And they talk about how Kenny Guiton was the master of the mental rep where he could watch it, process it in his mind and go out and do it, but I think that's more weird than it is normal that a person can do that, quite honestly. I just don't know how that's going to play with Braxton, but I guess we'll find out.

## Feeling Better About Defense

**JS:** Offensively, I think we've pretty much touched on everything. Switching to the defense, the big questions are 'Can they stop the pass?' and 'What will the new schemes look like?' Now we know what the new schemes look like, but can they stop the pass? I certainly think they looked better. They're not a well-oiled machine yet, but I think there was definite progress there.

**MH:** I think in the past, we would have seen quarterbacks like Cardale Jones and J.T. Barrett complete more passes than they

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

# Revamped Defense Will Be Focal Point In Fall

Continued From Page 9

did in the spring game. I'm bullish on the defense coming out of the spring. They were aggressive from day one. They were not selling us a line when they were saying, 'This is our new mind-set, this is what we're going to do.' They were very consistent in that from day one to day 15.

We saw some mistakes and busts early on, but we didn't see as many at the end when we got to see them. There were a couple of big pass plays in the spring game, but none of them looked like somebody just turned loose a receiver there. It'd be a pocket here or there and it's not the same coverage every play. I think that while those guys aren't going to be a shutdown unit, I think that they made a lot of progress. That unit is going to be definitely better.

**JS:** There are a lot of guys who can play in that group. There are a lot of young guys who can play. They're athletic, they've got good personalities in that they seem like they want to learn and they've got a good bit of confidence about them. I think they've got guys who can play, but I think it's going to be one of those things where they're better in game 12 than they are in game one probably. But that's what impressed me – I didn't look at any guys back there and say, 'Well, I don't think this is going to work.' There's a fair number of guys back there who can make plays, which is just something they didn't have last year.

**BA:** Just wait until they get Vonn Bell back. He's arguably their most talented player in the secondary, and they went the whole spring practice without him. I agree, I thought the defense was a big plus coming out of the spring, and in the spring game we didn't see a wide receiver sneak behind the secondary like we saw pretty much every game last season. For the most part, all of the cornerbacks seem better suited to play this kind of defense. It almost makes you wonder what took so long or why this wasn't brought up earlier in the Urban Meyer era here in Columbus.

**RG:** The good news for the pass defense is game one is against Navy. The thing that struck me is that when you bring in a new coach, no matter how talented they are, you just never know how they'll fit in, what they'll



JOSH WINSLOW

**INCREASED ROLE** – Ohio State sophomore Vonn Bell (11) could start at safety despite missing the spring because of an injury.

bring and how they'll work with the other people. By all accounts, Chris Ash seems to be the perfect fit for resurrecting the Ohio State pass defense. If Kerry Coombs is to be believed, they've completely changed the way they do things with the defensive backs. The communication is much better. The players seem to get along better and they've totally embraced the new scheme. Nobody is taking the changes personally – it's just something that had to be done. They even said that Urban Meyer sits in on their meetings now and it's something that they don't care about because they know they have to get better. They just do. It pretty much shows they're willing to do whatever it takes to get better.

**JS:** Well when you can point to being 110th in pass defense, it's hard to get much worse than that. It's a lot easier to be open to change when you've really hit rock bottom. I think those last three games were rock bottom, there's no doubt about that. If you sift through what they've said, it's pretty interesting just how dysfunctional they were last season. They were a defensive train wreck last year as far as the strategies and

schemes and communication. At this point, the writing's on the wall that Everett Withers was kind of the scapegoat. It just seemed like something didn't work there. Now they're saying everything is rosy, which happens in spring, but it seems as though there's a totally different way to how they're approaching everything.

**BA:** It's interesting that they've basically eliminated the "Star" position and have switched to a true nickel back. I always loved the Star position and how they used it, but if you don't have a player who really fits it like they didn't last year, it can put you in some sticky situations. Now with guys like Darron Lee and Chris Worley, who they view more as linebackers than nickel backs, it's going to allow them to play their base defense more and I think that's ultimately going to be a good thing for them.

**MH:** The last few years, they were moving away from each other with the nickel defense and the base defense, and it didn't work when they tried to cross them back over. The best nickels have either been guys who would blitz a lot or were guys who knew how to play the position, and they haven't

done either of those things for like three years. Tyler Moeller – that was his thing – and they kind of neutered him the way they had the position and never figured out how to go back to it. They had this spot out there and they were getting no production from it at all. At the same time, they were doing two different things, which hurt the cohesiveness of the attack. I think it makes perfect sense to do what they've done. Now the base defense is more like the nickel, but they've got a physical guy there at that linebacker spot that is going to be able to make more plays on his own. Then when they really need to go with a pass look, then they've got this nickel look.

**JS:** Lee and Worley are a lot closer to what it was originally supposed to be, which was a guy who's an athlete who's basically more of a safety, a guy who is more athletic than your typical 250-pound Curtis Grant-like linebacker but is also able to shed blocks and make tackles. Chris Worley made a number of tackles in the spring game where it was like, 'Boy, they sure could have used that last year.' You need somebody both physical and athletic and they really didn't have that these last couple of years. Now they have those guys and they're going to simplify that to get the best use out of them. It's interesting that we're talking about a new scheme and saying that redshirt freshmen and sophomores are such an improvement over what they had a year ago. It was just so bad by the end of last year.

**BA:** You look at Darron Lee, Chris Worley, Gareon Conley and Eli Apple. Just off the top of my head, that's four guys who redshirted last year and in retrospect, they probably shouldn't have. But in the long run, it could be a good thing that they did redshirt.

**MH:** And Vonn Bell practically redshirted. He had almost no contributions on defense. Him and Cam Burrows were guys that you'd see first down on the kickoff all the time, but you can get a walk-on to do that. That's not really the point – the point is I agree that you shouldn't redshirt people if they prove they can play. I thought they just didn't pull the trigger on using some of these guys more. I thought it was very bizarre. I don't know if (Jim) Tressel ever redshirted 15 guys or whatever it was that they did last year.

**JS:** I doubt it.

**MH:** They were redshirting and they were leaving holes on the roster. That's what didn't make sense either.

**BA:** Once they got past the fourth game, they decided that if you haven't played yet, you're not playing.

**RG:** I think you'll see something different this year. Not only because Urban Meyer has made it clear that people are going to play, but Kerry Coombs said they're going to rotate their cornerbacks more, even if it takes guys like Damon Webb and Marshon Latimore playing right away. If they can play, they're going to be on the field.

**BA:** But we've heard that in the past. We've heard we're rotating the corners. We've heard we're not redshirting these guys and then they come back and at least in these last two years they've redshirted a ton of guys and they've usually only played two corners. That makes to me, Raekwon McMillan the most interesting player on this defense. By all accounts he's a guy who can win that starting middle linebacker job as a true freshman. It's just a matter of if they have the guts to do it.

**MH:** I think you're right. I think McMillan

## Defensive Players On The Spot

Before spring ball started, BSB highlighted five defensive players who needed to take big steps during the 15 practice sessions. We revisit those five now that spring is done.

• **Curtis Grant, linebacker:** Grant had his best spring at Ohio State, per Urban Meyer, but whether that will be enough to hold off a charge from impressive freshman Raekwon McMillan remains to be seen. Still, it was a good sign that Grant, a leader on a squad lacking seniors, performed so well. He showed he can be an excellent downhill middle linebacker when healthy a season ago and just needs to improve in the passing game to make it tougher for the staff to find a spot for McMillan.

• **Gareon Conley, cornerback:** A redshirt freshman, Conley was one of the big winners of the spring. Noted as an excellent athlete who ran track and could have played both ways coming out of football-mad Massillon, Ohio, Conley firmly inserted himself into the battle to replace Bradley Roby in the starting lineup. He seems to thrive on the aggressive style of coverage OSU installed in the spring.

• **Armani Reeves, cornerback:** Reeves was victimized at times during the 2013 campaign but turned in a respectable



Armani Reeves

performance for a sophomore who was still truly getting his feet wet at the college level. Reeves also appears to play his best in OSU's new coverage setup and will almost certainly see plenty of time on the field in 2014, whether it be starting opposite Doran Grant or as the team's nickel back. He could have a breakout campaign.

• **Trey Johnson, linebacker:** A highly rated prospect coming out of Georgia in the class of 2013, Johnson didn't elbow himself into the discussion for a starting spot at linebacker this spring, working primarily with the No. 2 unit. Joshua Perry seemed to cement himself as the top weakside LB this spring while Johnson still needs to work on freeing himself from blocks.

• **Ron Tanner, safety:** Tanner seems to be in a tough spot. A fourth-year junior, he appears to be one of the leaders of the safety spot and earned praise for his work ethic from Meyer during the spring. Unfortunately, in the next breath, Meyer lamented that Tanner just didn't have the talent to compete with position mates Vonn Bell, Tyvis Powell and Cam Burrows for a starting job. He'll be a veteran presence, though, and continues to be a sure tackler when called upon.

– Jeff Svoboda

**OHIO STATE FOOTBALL**

looked good in space when we saw him in the spring game. Now, I think that Curtis Grant is at least a solid guy on early downs against a running team, but with what they're doing with the scheme, I think McMillan may be a better fit in terms of what his skill level is and what he does well. Let's say they are able to get their base concepts down, another thing that the assistants talked about was having some guys who specialize in stuff. It would be interesting to see how they do adjust to teams like Michigan State. I think Rutgers and Maryland are both power-ish type of teams.

**Playoff Time**

**JS:** So we can wrap it up now by saying that there's a playoff now. It used to be, 'Is this a Big Ten championship team? Is this a national championship team?' Now the question is, 'Is this team good enough to be in the top four and make it into the playoff?' I legitimately don't know the answer to that. It's hard to figure out just how good this team is because we just watched a whole spring practice without the starting quarterback. He's maybe that X-factor that comes back. We talked about some of the flaws that they may have, but can he be good enough to take them beyond those flaws and get them to where they want to go?

**BA:** Well they have to get past Michigan State. The Big Ten right now runs through East Lansing. They're going to have to win that game on Nov. 8. They're going to have to win in Indianapolis if they get there and you're going to have to do those things to get to the playoff. Do they have the potential to do that? Yes. But I wouldn't bet on it right now.

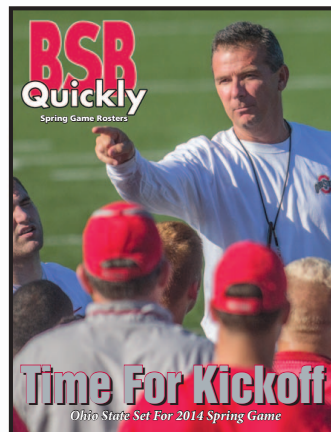
**RG:** If there is a one-loss Big Ten team, I'm on the record of saying that they will get

in to the playoff. I don't think it will be Ohio State this year. I've hedged over this forever and I don't know what game – if any – that they'll lose. You have to figure whoever they lose to, if it's a division team, will probably be the team that goes to the Big Ten title game. When you look at the fact that they play Michigan State and Penn State on the road, both of which will be coming off of open weeks, you have to think maybe it's one of those. Overall, I think they're close, but I don't think they're quite playoff-caliber.

**MH:** They don't quite pass the "it" test for me right now just looking overall. There are just too many questions. It is hard to pinpoint where they would lose. Michigan State is definitely legitimate. It's going to be interesting to see what happens there because they've had some losses but they've got a system now in place. They know what they're doing in replacing guys. That might be the question for as how far Ohio State can go – how good is Michigan State? If Michigan State is a legitimate top-10 team at the end of the year, and there's a good chance that could be true, then it's very hard to see Ohio State beating them. Right now, I don't think Ohio State is a top-10 team. They certainly have the potential to be. There are just an awful lot of question marks.

**JS:** You just never know how things are going to come together. I mean, 2002 certainly wasn't expected to be a national title team, but sometimes things just fit and sometimes things just work out for you. You get on a roll, win some games and starting feeling confident. You just never know. It's such an emotional game. If you can win all your out-of-conference games and then go play teams like Maryland and Rutgers and keep the momentum going, who knows what could happen?

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

# Several Buckeyes Make Mark During Spring

By BEN AXELROD  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Another spring has come and gone in Columbus, and like every other football team in the country, Ohio State is hopeful that it is a better team than it was 15 practices ago. With star quarterback Braxton Miller sidelined with an injury, the Buckeyes' spring session was certainly a unique one but telling nonetheless.

With fall camp still more than three months away, here's a look at what we learned and what we still need to learn before the start of the 2014 season. Consider these Ohio State's spring superlatives and top storylines of the past two months as we enter the college football purgatory that is the summer months.

## Offensive Player Of The Spring: Dontre Wilson

The self-proclaimed "decoy of the year" a season ago, Wilson was far from that throughout the Buckeyes' spring session. And for both player and program, that is ultimately a good thing.

A four-star running back by way of DeSoto, Texas, Wilson made the move to wide receiver this offseason after spending his freshman campaign serving spot duty in the Buckeyes' backfield. The emphasis that Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer and his coaching staff placed on getting the ball into Wilson's hands was apparent, with Wilson receiving passes, carrying sweeps and making big plays in every which way.

"We're learning a lot of next-level stuff," Wilson said of his second season in Meyer's spread offense. "Just becoming an all-out receiver is helping me with the position change. I consider myself a slot receiver, but once I get the ball, I consider myself a running back."

At 5-10 and 185 pounds, Wilson has added approximately 15 pounds of muscle from his freshman season, which saw him

convert 55 touches from the line of scrimmage into 460 yards and three touchdowns. Those numbers weren't bad but were admittedly disappointing for Wilson, who shone throughout fall camp upon arriving on Ohio State's campus.

"I pretty much thought I was going to come in and be the Percy Harvin role that Coach Meyer wanted me to be," Wilson said. "I wasn't as comfortable as I was. But now I feel more comfortable and I feel like me again with the number switch (from No. 1 to 2) and all that. I'm getting a lot more opportunities."

As Buckeye offensive coordinator Tom Herman explained, Wilson playing the Harvin role wouldn't have been possible in 2013, given the then-freshman's size and inexperience.

"He couldn't play receiver," Herman said of Wilson. "He didn't know what the hell he was doing. He didn't know how to do it. He was 175 pounds or whatever the heck he was. So him and his ability limited us, and the ability doesn't just include running fast and making guys miss. There's a lot that goes into ability and usability in the offense."

That no longer appears to be an issue for Wilson, who is hopeful that switching his jersey number back to his high school digit will coincide with him finding the same success that he did when he was named the Dallas-area offensive player of the year in 2012. And if he can do that, then the Harvin role might find itself renamed in 2014.

"I just have to perform," Wilson said. "I have to stand up to the hype and live up to the hype. As long as I perform, that will pretty much be dead and everyone will say it's my role."

## Defensive Player Of The Spring: Doran Grant

With three new starters in the secondary and a new coverage scheme engineered by co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash, the



JOSH WINSLOW

**SPEEDSTER** – Ohio State cornerback Doran Grant (12) not only beat Malcolm Branson (left) in OSU's fastest student race but was also BSB's Defensive Player of the Spring.

need for leadership in the back end of the Buckeyes' defense cannot be overstated.

Enter Doran Grant.

A starter at cornerback opposite two-time All-Big Ten selection Bradley Roby a season ago, Grant has made the switch from OSU's field corner to Roby's former boundary corner spot. And from what Buckeye cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs has seen thus far from the Akron native, there shouldn't be a noticeable drop-off.

"His improvement this year has been dramatic," Coombs said. "I'm excited to see him play. He is a young man with incredible athletic ability. His combine-type numbers are going to match those of many of the

great corners in the country today and those that have played here."

In his first season as a starter, Grant recorded 58 tackles, snagged three interceptions and broke up 10 passes. The 5-11, 193-pounder from St. Vincent-St. Mary High School, however, believes that the best is yet to come in his college career.

"During the start of the season, I was a little shaky, and I started to pick it up toward the end," Grant said. "I just felt like I was average. I know what I've got to do this offseason to become an All-Big Ten player, and that's what I'm going to do."

Continued On Page 14

## Spring Scholarship Roster – Offense

### QUARTERBACK

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
5	Braxton Miller	6-2	215	Sr./Sr.
12	Cardale Jones	6-5	250	Jr./So.

**Other scholarship players:** J.T. Barrett (R-Fr.), Stephen Collier (Fr.)

**Comments:** Miller didn't play in spring but the two-time reigning Big Ten MVP will be assured of a starting role when he returns. Jones beat out Barrett for the backup role vacated by Kenny Gupton, who played key roles in four OSU wins the past two seasons.

### RUNNING BACK

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
15	Ezekiel Elliott	6-0	225	So./So.
7	Rod Smith	6-3	231	5th/Sr.

**Other scholarship players:** Warren Ball (So.), Bri'onte Dunn (So.), Curtis Samuel (Fr.)

**Comments:** Urban Meyer pointed to Elliott and Smith – along with Samuel – as potentially pulling away, but nothing is guaranteed here. Dunn and Ball can also play, while Elliott (practice inconsistency), Smith (academics) and Samuel (inexperience) all have issues to address.

### WIDE RECEIVER

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
2	Dontre Wilson	5-10	185	So./So.
3	Michael Thomas	6-3	203	Jr./Sr.
9	Devin Smith	6-1	197	Sr./Sr.

### WIDE RECEIVER

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
84	Corey Smith	6-0	190	Sr./Jr.
1	Johnnie Dixon	5-11	198	Fr./Fr.
6	Evan Spencer	6-2	208	Sr./Sr.

**Other scholarship players:** Frank Epitropoulos (So.), James Clark (R-Fr.)

**Comments:** This will continue to be a battle as no one is assured a spot, though it would be hard to imagine seniors Devin Smith and Spencer not playing key roles. Wilson will line up in the slot while Thomas and Corey Smith appear to have earned plenty of chances as well.

### TIGHT END

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
86	Jeff Heuerman	6-5	255	Sr./Sr.
81	Nick Vannett	6-6	260	Sr./Jr.

**Other scholarship players:** J.T. Moore (5th Sr.), Marcus Baugh (R-Fr.)

**Comments:** Heuerman can both catch passes and block, making him one of the most useful players OSU has had at the position in a while. Vannett is quickly becoming a well-rounded player at the position and should only see time increase. Each scholarship player at this spot returns in 2014.

### LEFT TACKLE

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
68	Taylor Decker	6-7	315	Jr./Jr.
66	Kyle Dodson	6-6	310	Jr./So.

### LEFT GUARD

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
73	Antonio Underwood	6-2	303	Sr./Jr.
51	Joel Hale	6-4	310	Sr./Sr.

### CENTER

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
50	Jacoby Boren	6-1	285	Jr./Jr.
54	Billy Price	6-4	305	So./Fr.

### RIGHT GUARD

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
65	Pat Elflein	6-3	300	Jr./So.
55	Tommy Brown	6-4	310	Sr./Jr.

### RIGHT TACKLE

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
76	Darryl Baldwin	6-6	307	5th/Sr.
75	Evan Lisle	6-6	300	So./Fr.

**Other scholarship players:** Chase Farris (Jr.) Marcelys Jones (Fr.), Kyle Trout (Fr.)

**Comments:** This depth chart mimics only what was observed and doesn't include transfer center Chad Lindsay and injured guard/tackle Farris, both of whom will have their chance to earn spots in camp. Underwood, Boren and Baldwin should face stiff competition in fall, while Jones also showed well at times at guard.

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

# Grant, McMillan To Battle For Starting LB Spot

Continued From Page 12

Sitting out of the Buckeyes' spring game with little left to prove to the OSU coaching staff, Grant still managed to wow fans in attendance by winning the Buckeyes' fastest student competition. He topped that with a celebratory back tuck flip, showcasing in a matter of seconds the type of athleticism that has so many expecting big things from Grant in his senior season.

But Grant's importance to the Ohio State secondary extends beyond his physical abilities. With three new faces flanking him in the secondary, he took it upon himself to be more of a leader this spring – a trend he doesn't see stopping anytime soon.

"As a unit, everybody just bought into the coaches' message of going hard," Grant said. "We have a lot of momentum heading into the summer and training camp. It feels good, but we've got to finish it in the fall and take care of it. We were 24-0, then we lost two games, and I feel like we have something to prove. That's what we did this spring, and that's what we're going to do this fall."

### Most Improved Player Of The Spring: Darron Lee

When looking at a list of potential successors to Ryan Shazier in the Buckeyes' linebacking corps, very few considered second-year player Darron Lee. And while the New Albany, Ohio, native isn't exactly playing the same position as the departed All-American, his spring has provided plenty of promise for Ohio State's stable of linebackers.

Lee won't be replacing Shazier – that task will fall upon Joshua Perry, who's moving from strongside linebacker to Shazier's spot on the weak side. But Lee will be taking Perry's place on the other side of the Buckeyes' defense, where he did enough in the spring at a position that has been tweaked to make more plays in space to catch the attention of his head coach.

"The guy that has stepped up, the guy that is playing (with four-to-six) seconds (of effort), is a kid named Darron Lee," Meyer said. "I have no idea what he's doing and he probably has no idea what he's doing, but I don't care. I want to make sure that culture is out there

"He's 225 I want to say, he's a legitimate 4.5, 4.4 guy. He's got all the skills. His nega-



JOSH WINSLOW

**GETTING MOMENTUM FOR FALL – Linebacker Darron Lee (43, left) and running back Curtis Samuel (4) had two of the most impressive springs for the Ohio State football team.**

tive is he used to play quarterback (instead of defense) at New Albany, so we've just got to get him ready to go play."

Lee looked plenty ready to play in the spring game, where he recorded four tackles and broke up one pass in a winning effort on the Gray team. And while the transition from quarterback to linebacker isn't always a natural one, it's a process that he certainly sees some benefits in.

"What I've enjoyed most about this experience is being able to hit people as opposed to getting hit all the time," Lee said at the Buckeyes' annual spring kickoff luncheon. "It's been a really great experience. I've got my brothers with me to make it a smoother transition. As Coach Meyer says, I don't know what I don't know yet, but we'll get there and be able to make plays."

If Lee can do that this fall, it would certainly go a long way toward helping replace the 143 tackles that Shazier is taking with him to the NFL. Currently in the process of applying for a medical redshirt after playing special teams in four games before suffering a leg injury, Lee hopes to be making plays in his hometown for the next four years, and if this spring has been any indication, he's well on his way to doing just that.

### Early Enrollee Of The Spring: Curtis Samuel

Like Shazier and the linebackers, the

Buckeyes have plenty of production to make up for in their backfield, where Carlos Hyde proved to be the focal point of the Ohio State offense. And while sophomore Ezekiel Elliott is the odds-on favorite to be the Buckeyes' starting running back in 2014, he's found some competition from an unexpected true freshman.

"The guy that's in the rotation already is Curtis Samuel," Meyer said. "I want to say that's shocking, especially at tailback, because I thought he'd be more of a wide receiver-slash guy. Eventually he might, but he's legitimate running the ball."

That's what Samuel did in the spring game, carrying the ball six times for a total of 11 yards. Those numbers are a bit skewed, however, as he suffered a 7-yard loss, which he made up for with an 8-yard gain.

Nevertheless, one glorified spring scrimmage wasn't enough to shake Meyer's confidence in Samuel, a 5-11, 190-pound four-star prospect from Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall. Following the spring game, Meyer raved of the Empire State product's impressive spring, which took place while he could have just as easily been preparing to go to his senior prom.

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

Whether Samuel can do that or if he'll venture back out to wide receiver remains to be seen. But regardless of exactly where he winds up, we know at the very least that it will be on the field and not the sideline.

"Unless there's something up, he'll play," Meyer insisted.

### Position Battle Of The Summer: Middle Linebacker

On one side you have a former big-time recruit looking at a last chance to salvage his college career. On the other you have an early enrollee looking to make a big first impression.

And neither has managed to edge the other one out just yet.

Curtis Grant came to Ohio State as a five-star prospect in 2011 but saw little playing time until a junior season in 2013 when he recorded 52 tackles and two sacks. That wasn't enough for the 6-2, 240-pounder to grab a firm grasp on the Buckeyes' middle linebacker spot, where he now finds himself fighting off four-star freshman Raekwon McMillan.

The fifth-ranked middle linebacker in the 2014 class and the No. 50 player overall, the 6-2, 240-pound McMillan hardly carries himself as a kid who's been on campus for only a couple of months. In Ohio State's spring game, he played alongside Perry and Lee in the Buckeyes' linebacking corps, indicating that Meyer has no problem playing him with OSU's first team.

"He's in the rotation," Meyer said of McMillan after the spring game. "He's going to play. Whether he's going to start depends on – you know, him and Curtis are in a battle."

But while many signs point to McMillan upending Grant, Meyer also explained that the senior was impressive this spring in his own right.

"Curtis had his best spring," Meyer said. "He's earned that right. He's not a freshman anymore. He's got to go play."

It also remains possible that both players could see significant playing time, although it will be telling whom the starter winds up being. This summer and fall camp will go a long way toward determining that, and the run-heavy attack of Navy in the season opener will put that player's ability to the test early on.

## Spring Scholarship Roster – Defense

DEFENSIVE END				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
8	Noah Spence	6-3	252	Jr./Jr.
97	Joey Bosa	6-5	285	So./So.
88	Steve Miller	6-3	255	Sr./Sr.
94	Rashad Frazier	6-4	272	5th/Sr.
or 59	Tyquan Lewis	6-3	260	So./Fr.

DEFENSIVE TACKLE				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
63	Michael Bennett	6-2	288	Sr./Sr.
92	Adolphus Washington	6-4	288	Jr./Jr.
90	Tommy Schutt	6-2	300	Jr./Jr.
77	Michael Hill	6-2	315	So./So.
or 52	Donovan Munger	6-4	306	So./Fr.

**Other scholarship players:** Jamal Marcus (Jr.), Chris Carter (Jr.), Tracy Sprinkle (R-Fr.)

**Comments:** All four starters return from a season ago, though the Buckeyes will need to find a replacement at the start of the season for Spence, who faces a two-game suspension. Miller, Lewis and Marcus all bring something different there. This might be the deepest position on the team.

WEAKSIDE LINEBACKER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
37	Joshua Perry	6-4	250	Jr./Jr.
36	Trey Johnson	6-1	225	So./So.

MIDDLE LINEBACKER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
14	Curtis Grant	6-3	240	Sr./Sr.
5	Raekwon McMillan	6-2	240	Fr./Fr.
or 55	Camren Williams	6-1	228	Jr./Jr.

STRONGSIDE LINEBACKER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
43	Darron Lee	6-2	225	So./So.
35	Chris Worley	6-2	218	So./Fr.

**Other scholarship players:** Devan Bogard (Jr.)

**Comments:** Perry seems set at Will and Lee turned enough heads in spring that he should also start at the reconfigured "walkout" LB spot, though Worley is physical enough to play there. The middle linebacker battle will be fun to watch. The Buckeyes will be looking for more playmaking ability out of this group in camp, especially with a rabid group of youngsters entering in June.

CORNERBACK				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
12	Doran Grant	5-11	193	Sr./Sr.
26	Armani Reeves	5-10	198	Jr./Jr.
19	Gareon Conley	6-0	190	So./Fr.
13	Eli Apple	6-1	195	So./Fr.

**Comments:** Grant is assured of a starting spot but it wouldn't be a huge surprise to see all four of these players – and perhaps freshmen Damon Webb and Marshon Lattimore – play this fall.

SAFETY				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
23	Tyvis Powell	6-3	205	Jr./So.
11	Vonn Bell	5-11	200	So./So.
16	Cam Burrows	6-0	208	So./So.
20	Ron Tanner	6-0	205	Sr./Jr.

**Comments:** Bell, Powell and Burrows are all big, talented athletes who will bring something new to the position after the departures of Christian Bryant, C.J. Barnett and Corey Brown. Powell should start while Bell vs. Burrows could be a long battle in the fall.