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A Year To Remember

Ohio State Boasts Plenty Of Success, Championships

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

When Gene Smith met with BSB last summer to discuss an athletics year in which Ohio State finished a program-worst 25th in the annual standings of the Directors' Cup, he said he expected a turnaround a year later.

Clearly, the Ohio State athletics director knew what he was talking about.

Highlighted by football's magical run to the first-ever College Football Playoff title behind Urban Meyer, OSU won a school-record five national championships during the 2014-15 season and finished seventh in the Directors' Cup standings, earning its fifth top-10 standing in the past seven years.

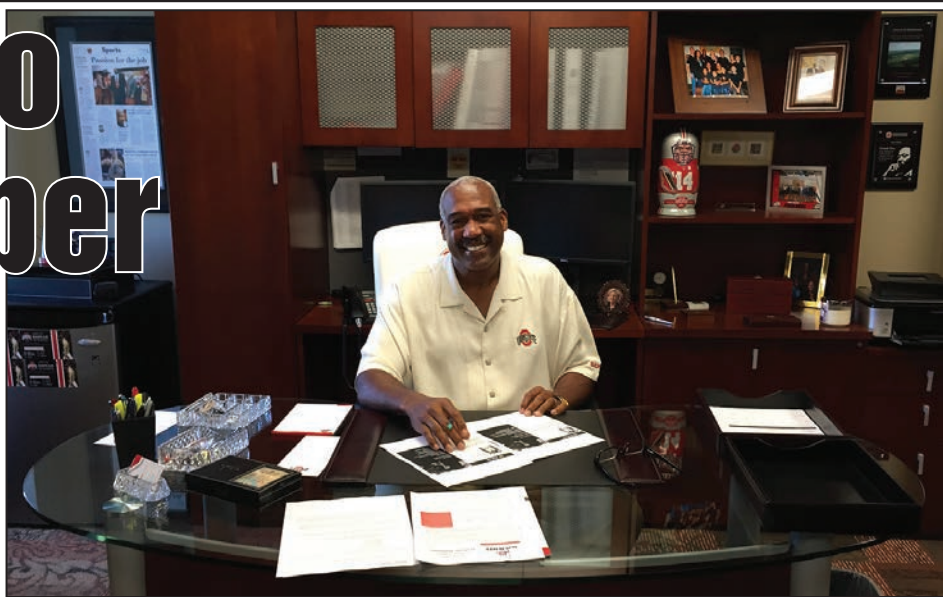
So it's no wonder Smith was all smiles as he met with BSB in his office in late June. Reflecting on a season in which the Buckeyes won titles not just in football but wrestling, pistol, synchronized swimming and rowing, Smith was more than happy to talk about what led to that all of that success as well as the major changes that are continuing in the college athletics landscape.

Smith is a major player in those discussions, and the fruits of that labor in the college athletics industry are starting to become clear. Cost of attendance stipends will be implemented this season, with more structural changes on the way, and lawsuits such as the Ed O'Bannon case continue to loom as potential major agents of change on the collegiate sports landscape.

While Smith handles those discussions, he also runs an athletics department that boasts 36 sports and is successful in many of them. Such sports as fencing, men's tennis and women's volleyball joined the championship squads in scoring big points in the Directors' Cup standings, while such sports as baseball, women's tennis, women's basketball and track and field are rising in the eyes of the AD.

The following is a partial transcript of the conversation in his office as well as one from earlier in June after the rowing team won its national championship.

BSB: What does winning five national titles say about Ohio State's athletics program?



JEFF SVOBODA

GOOD TIMES – Ohio State athletics director Gene Smith had plenty to smile about during an academic year that saw five Buckeye teams take home national championships.

Smith: "I think we have good leadership in our coaches. We have unbelievable support from the university community and Buckeye Nation, and we're really focused and make sure that all of our coaches work together and share their talents and skills to create winning programs. It's really a culture thing that all of our student-athletes and coaches have bought into competing at that championship level, and we have the support in place to help them do that."

leaders as coaches, how do they adjust to whatever that new challenge is? We have to help our leadership and our coaches have the tools to adjust so that our student-athletes have a chance.

"We have great coaches. They all work well together. I really like how our coaches are sharing ideas and different tactics that they use in recruiting and different things, so we have a pretty cohesive group of people who are very talented and skilled. Recruiting has been phenomenal for all of our sports.

"I feel good about things. We just had a great year, obviously. Academically, we're doing great. Behaviorally, our issues are down because of how well our coaches are creating the cultures on their teams, so their kids are learning respect and how to strengthen their character a lot better. We're in a good place. It's really fun."

BSB: You've put a lot of emphasis on programs for student-athletes outside of the classroom in recent years where you're trying to establish a functional education for them.

Smith: "That's right. We're creating that culture and environment where all of our student-athletes understand the importance of internships, résumé writing, interviewing skills, all those things. They all bought in. The upperclassmen are teaching the underclassmen the importance of being engaged in those programs. We have our Bucks Go Pro program – we're north of 20 interns just in the athletics department and some of the areas around us. We're sending kids to different parts of the world with our study abroad program. It's working really well, and that's the important thing is getting the buy-in within the student-athlete culture."

BSB: Many of these are fairly new programs. Would you say you're a step ahead of a lot of schools in that regard?

Smith: "Bucks Go Pro is maybe three or four years old, and it's grown. We've had mandatory résumé writing for a long time, but we never really had the structure with it, the interview teaching and the career fairs. Urban did his own career fair and invited all the other sports. We also had a cou-

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE

Gene Smith
Corey Linsley
Roy Hall
John Johnson
Brandon Fuss-Cheatham
Malcolm Jenkins
Jon Diebler

BSB: Last year, you said you expected a rebound season in the Directors' Cup, and that's what happened. How did you see that coming?

Smith: "It's what we do as sports administrators. We can look at the teams, see what is coming back, understand their schedules. ... We could look at each team and see. I'm excited for track next year. They accomplished so much this year. The women won the indoor (Big Ten title) and were close to winning the outdoor, and the men were so close to finishing right there in the outdoor. I can go through almost every team – women's basketball, holy smokes. I start to think about if they're fortunate enough to stay healthy and execute, we can see where they have a chance to have a pretty exciting year."

BSB: This is what it's supposed to be at Ohio State in your eyes, right?

Smith: "It is. Exactly right. This is the way it's supposed to be. Our challenge is to sustain it. Each year will bring something different, the challenge will be different – but our

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Time Demands Of Student-Athletes Are Next Challenge

Continued From Page 1

ple of other career fairs throughout the year. Now (assistant director of career management) Latoya Farris is taking that to another iteration, so she's going to take a look at those majoring in marketing and we'll have a mini career fair of about maybe 10 to 12 firms that are marketing firms for those marketing students. It'll be focused on what they want to do business in, so now we're operating on another level, which is really cool.

"To me, that's the stuff that we're all about. We ended up with about 220 graduates, and there were 44 that had not gotten jobs or doing postgraduate work and that was a few weeks ago. Hopefully by now our numbers have shrunk."

BSB: That's better than the average student population.

Smith: "Much better. That includes guys who are going pro and a lot are going to get their master's, which is a big part of what we do is making sure they apply for postgraduate scholarship money. It's working. It's great."

BSB: Cost of attendance stipends are now in place for scholarship athletes. How do you make the money work?

Smith: "We did an estimate a couple of years ago when we saw this thing possibly coming. We did an estimate based upon our scholarships at the time and what our normal split is out-of-state vs. in-state, and that's how we came up with the \$1.65 million that we have in place this fall. We're not as challenged as many of the other schools are nationally. I think that's going to be a challenge across the country, but it's the right thing to do."

"There's some nuance in management of that based on whether the athlete is getting a Pell Grant, whether they're getting some academic money. There are a whole lot of things you have to manage around that with the financial aid office, but it's a good thing. Kids are getting more money in their pocket. Freshmen won't know a difference, but the returning athletes will know the difference. I think it's going to work fine."

BSB: According to federally published figures, Ohio State is middle of the pack in the Big Ten as far as the actual value of that cost of attendance stipend. There have been stories where some schools have a higher number and that could be a recruiting advantage. Is that something you're aware of?

Smith: "I think we're going to have to watch that down the road. I just read something about the SEC and Auburn is at like \$5,600 and Alabama is like us at \$2,000-something. So I think you are going to see that down the road. I don't know if it's going to have the impact right away. I think people are still trying to figure that out. You can't go out and say, 'Hey, kids, you're going to get this amount of money,' because it really depends on some things about them. I think eventually coaches will learn that and it could become a recruiting advantage, but for us you have other assets. You look at Columbus and the Fortune 500 companies that we have, and we work with student-athletes to ultimately help them get jobs and things of that nature. A lot of schools don't do what we do."

"Well make sure our coaches have their recruiting toolbox to combat that when they're in that situation, allow them to show somebody that, 'OK, right, you may get another \$450 at that school, but look at what we have here in Columbus, Ohio, and what

we do for you.' Kids are impressionable, but you have to figure out how to use those assets and sell the parents. Eventually maybe a couple of years from now once people really understand it, the money might become a factor. I don't think it's going to become a factor initially because people don't really understand it yet."

BSB: What is the next frontier when it comes to initiatives to promote student-athlete welfare at the NCAA level?

Smith: "I think the biggest decision is going to be around time demands and looking at the hours student-athletes put into their sports. I think the academic piece is going to be an issue because at a lot of schools, the gap (between student-athletes and the general population) is getting bigger, and how do we handle the student-athletes who are getting admitted who are underprepared? I think that's going to be a top issue."

"The O'Bannon case, we're in appeal right now. Technically, if it's not overturned, it gets implemented Aug. 1 of this year. Even if the appeal is lost, which I'd be surprised, we're going to need direction because the judge's ruling wasn't really clear. There are a lot of things that have to be clarified for us on how to implement things. Hopefully it's overturned. If it's not, then that's going to be a huge issue."

BSB: Do you think about that specific case much?

Smith: "No, I don't worry about the O'Bannon one. We know that the appeal has a good chance, but if it doesn't get overturned, we have a long time before they can actually be implemented because there are so many uncertainties in the judge's ruling. The biggest one is Title IX, so there are a lot of things that we would have to get direction from our conference, the NCAA, the Department of Education for us to even begin to implement something. So I don't worry about that one much. I'm really more focused on making sure that the new structure engages our coaches and our practitioners in talking about time demands, talking about the academic issues, and I think those are the two this year and we'll go from there."

BSB: Can the toothpaste be put back in the tube as far as time demands?

Smith: "It's going to be hard because I think it has to be done in a federated way by each sport. Every sport doesn't have that problem. Urban and I talked about football, and he and I agree that for football the first thing that comes to our mind is that January/early February time frame, it almost seems there ought to be a shutdown period. You go through your season, and we have a large number of teams going to bowls because there's so many bowls, so if you just say, 'Jan. X to Feb. X, it's shut down.' Then what you do to start back up and get ready for spring ball is defined within the calendar."

"I don't worry as much about the summer time. There are probably some different thoughts from people about football, but we have athletes doing internships, taking six credit hours and working out. That's what you did back in the day. It was just the working out was on your own back in the day, but you still worked (a job), you took six to eight credit hours and you worked out. It really is the same model, so I worry more about that January/early February time frame. We came back from the national championship game, and two weeks later we were working out."

"But for tennis, I have to rely on the tennis industry to tell me what that means because

if you're a tennis athlete, you want to play every day. It's a different deal. Each sport is going to be different. In the new structure, we're doing that. There is a committee on student-athlete welfare that will be discussing that in their meetings and coming up with strategy to get feedback and deal with that."

BSB: Another thing that was part of that discussion was freshman ineligibility. Was that just a trial balloon by the Big Ten?

Smith: "Right. We wanted to throw it out there. There are people that believe in it, but it was more to get the discussion going on around the academic piece and on the time demand issue to get people talking. I like that we got it out there. I like that Jim Delany sent it to a lot of different deep thinkers and influencers – the Knight Commission, the Drake Commission – to get feedback during the summer. Some people believe in it. I don't, but I like the fact that we're talking about it."

BSB: You've implemented a lot of things at Ohio State the last couple of years. What's the next thing on your docket?

Smith: "The biggest things now are facility oriented. One is the (new court sports) arena, so our goal is to finish fund-raising for that year and get started on construction next year. Then there is the student-athlete development center, which is a weight room, training room, locker rooms and offices for our Olympic coaches. We'd like to finish fund-raising on that this year and get started next year. And then the wrestling practice facility. Those three are probably my biggest drivers right now, working with our development team and our fund-raising and getting those things done."

"The other thing is I want to keep our team – our administrators and our support staff and everyone – continuing to grow. Using Urban as an example, he's making sure that our (football) team doesn't get complacent. I do the same thing every year. We can't get complacent. We need to constantly grow and learn and get better. Like the social media world, we need to make sure we stay on top of that and be a leader in that industry, which we are in the collegiate market, so we're constantly on that. But our biggest priority is those facilities. We have to get those done."

BSB: It seems like there haven't been as many major facilities projects the past few years.

Smith: "We've had a lot of those projects that people would define as smaller, but we've added the lights in the stadium, we have the new seats in there. We got the three new fields – the indoor field, the outdoor field and the stadium field. We have a lot of projects upcoming. We have to replace the roof on the Woody Hayes Athletic Center in 2017. We're going to replace that entire thing. We have the new scoreboards in some of our facilities and the video infrastructure. We have some things done, but the big deals like I was just talking about, we have to get those done. That's what our team is really focused on. We're going to do a renovation for the Schott – concourse improvements, concession stand improvements, things of that nature. It's not sexy, so to speak, but will provide better service for our fans. We'll do that hopefully next year, too. That will be a longer term project because you have to work around all the events."

BSB: What has been the feedback for the new plan in 2016 as far as seating for football season tickets? We've heard

from some fans who have been upset with the point system and potentially losing the seats they've had for a long time.

Smith: "The reality is we've had a points system in place for years, so technically your seating is based upon your points, and we have been doing that in the ticket office working with the development office. With your points, this is where you should be seated. But over the years, I can't remember when that was implemented, but we have some improprieties in the system."

"One of our challenges is bringing the integrity back to it, making sure that if that's what we're going to do, it's going to be based upon your points. We've met with I don't know how many people that we're seating inappropriately, and we're allowing them to understand what they need to do to get their points up. And then the other thing is taking advantage of the technology and allowing you to do what you want to do. You'll be able to go to the website and pick your seats."

"The thing that people are probably most upset with is that, 'Wait a minute, I've had these seats for years.' You're right, but the reality is you should be seated based upon the points system. We did it for faculty and staff last year, and it worked perfectly. We had one glitch with a gentleman in Europe because his computer couldn't make it work. But there will be trepidation and some people will be upset because they have been inappropriately seated based upon their points."

BSB: We've also heard some fans are not happy with the new prices for parking near the stadium established by CampusParc. Some people are feeling the big-business crunch.

Smith: "It's true. We went to CampusParc three years ago and you have that funding the overall university received from CampusParc in order to run that, which went to scholarships and research and things of that nature, which was huge for the institution. That changed the model. It really did. So there's no question when that happened, we received a few complaints. But it's a business change, and that's the hard part."

"I don't disagree with those feelings. We see it in life in everything we deal with. Change is hard, so that's why for the seat selection process I said, 'Hey, it's a two-year window.' We're not going to announce it and implement it the next year. So all of last year, it's education, education, education."

"There are a lot of people who knew their points. I went into it thinking nobody knew their points. A lot of people knew their points, so our whole deal was education, education, education and allowing people to have time to make the decision of what they wanted to do or not do. We go into it and you're going to have some people upset, but the system is clean. It's not, 'You have those seats because the athletics director said you could have those seats.' That's what we have. We have deals in there from years ago. I can't have you sitting in the club section or whatever because somebody did a deal for you 13 years ago and I'm over here and I'm abiding by the points system that is in place. We're sitting here talking and I'm like, 'How did you get these seats?' That's what we had."

"We said, 'Look, we have to clean this up,' but to clean it up we had to take our time and then we needed to take advantage of the technology that a lot of schools were using. We are totally behind in what we're getting ready to implement. We're ahead in a lot of things, but this one, we are behind."

Linsley Finding Success Early In NFL Career

By RYAN GINN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In the two years during which Ohio State ran up 24 consecutive victories to begin the tenure of head coach Urban Meyer, there was no shortage of contributors to an offense that routinely lit up the scoreboard.

Quarterback Braxton Miller provided the flash and running back Carlos Hyde brought the power, but it was the cohesion of a veteran offensive line that helped the Buckeyes reach their highest heights. The quintet of Jack Mewhort, Andrew Norwell, Corey Linsley, Marcus Hall and Taylor Decker – Ohio State's self-styled "slobs" – meant so much to the program that they got a special shout-out from Meyer before the final game of the 2013 season.

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE Corey Linsley

"I love this group," Meyer said. "I have great admiration for these players, and they've earned that right. I think the Buckeye Nation knows exactly the way the staff feels about this group of players, especially the ones walking out the door."

"I love who they are. I love who they've become. If I was a college kid, that's who I would hang out with. They're sincere, great people that work their tails off. They love Ohio State and they love football."

Mewhort ended his Ohio State career with a tree in the Buckeye Grove and was the highest NFL draft pick of the four departing seniors, but it was the Youngstown, Ohio, native Linsley who helped anchor the line and earned the nickname "The Apex."

A team captain in 2013, Linsley was a first-team All-Big Ten selection by both the coaches and media during his final season in Columbus before being selected in the fifth round (No. 161 overall) of the NFL draft by the Green Bay Packers.

Linsley was expected to compete for the

starting center job as a rookie, but his role became much clearer when projected starter JC Tretter went down with a leg injury during the preseason. Thrust into the spotlight, Linsley performed admirably during a campaign in which Green Bay went 12-4 in the regular season and advanced to the NFC Championship Game. He started every game, beginning with the opening contest of the 2014 season during which Green Bay faced reigning Super Bowl champion Seattle on the road in prime time.

By the end of the season, Linsley's contributions were so significant that he graded out third among NFL centers over the 2014 season according to ProFootballFocus.com, a website that grades every player on every play of the season. He trailed only fellow Buckeye Nick Mangold of the New York Jets and Max Unger of the Seattle Seahawks.

With his rookie season behind him, the newly engaged Linsley is now back in Columbus until the Packers begin training camp in late July.

After finishing Green Bay's three-day mandatory summer minicamp in June, Linsley spoke one-on-one with BSB about his first year of professional football and the adjustments that it entailed.

BSB: You grew up a fan of Green Bay, right?

Linsley: "I grew up a Brett Favre Green Bay fan. I liked watching him play and thought I was going to be a quarterback like every other football player does when they're young. That's why I liked Green Bay."

BSB: What went through your mind when you got the call that the Packers were drafting you?

Linsley: "It was crazy. It was an amazing feeling. To look back on it now, it turned out to be a great moment in my life. I'm very fortunate to say that."

BSB: Did you have a "Welcome to the NFL" moment?

Linsley: "The first game at Seattle was my moment where I was like, 'Man, this is kind of crazy.' But seeing everybody day in and day out, we have some of the best players in the National Football League on our team."



PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM LINSLEY

SPECIAL START – Former Ohio State offensive lineman Corey Linsley (right), seen here with his dad, Jim (left), called it an honor to protect Green Bay quarterback and teammate Aaron Rodgers in his first professional season.

To see them work day in and day out is pretty special."

BSB: In what ways is the NFL different from playing in college?

Linsley: "Obviously there's no class, so there's a lot more free time and time to work on recovery and other stuff you need to work on. There's a lot of time you don't know what to do with. One of the big differences in terms of day-to-day life would be the amount of film watching. We did a lot in college but there's even more in the NFL and more breakdowns. There's a bigger emphasis on that than even practice."

BSB: Did you enjoy the Green Bay tradition of riding local kids' bikes from Lambeau Field to training camp?

Linsley: "It's really cool because that's a tradition that's been around since Vince Lombardi (who coached Green Bay from 1959-67), so that's pretty cool. The tradition has been around for a long time, and not everyone gets to be a part of something like that. Most NFL teams don't have a tradition like that, so I'm very fortunate to take part in that."

BSB: When did you find out you'd be starting the season opener on the road against the defending champions?

Linsley: "I found out around the week of the game. I didn't think anything was going to change, and then obviously we found out the severity of the injury. It was basically the week of the Seattle game because that was a Thursday night game."

BSB: What did you think when you heard Seattle linebacker Bruce Irvin said he was going to pray for you because it was going to be a long night for you?

Linsley: "It was definitely nerve-racking, and it added a little more anxiety to the

game. I have no idea what I'm walking into, and I've never been a part of something like this. This wasn't even part of the plan, initially. It was crazy, but it kind of got me fired up for the game. It was a bunch of emotions, but looking back on it now, it's a funny story that you can tell for years to come and everybody will get a good laugh out of it. But that's only because it went well. If it hadn't gone well for me, if I had just been tossed around all night, I wouldn't be telling anyone that story."

BSB: Did you have to work to develop chemistry with quarterback Aaron Rodgers?

Linsley: "It's really an honor to play with him – as it is with most people on our team. More so than the chemistry between center and quarterback, it was really the chemistry with the offensive line that helped. I was fortunate enough to have probably the best guard tandem in the NFL – Josh Sitton and T.J. Lang – and they helped me out a lot. I was very fortunate to be a part of that. They definitely facilitated the relationship between all of us and helped me out a lot. Whatever level of success you want to say I had last year, I wouldn't have had it without those guys."

BSB: Did that chemistry remind you of the 2013 offensive line at Ohio State?

Linsley: "Every offensive line has to have good chemistry to operate well, so I think that's a characteristic shared by every great offensive line. That's something we had last year (at Green Bay), and it's something I hope we continue into this year."

BSB: What did you think about being one of three rookie offensive linemen (along with Norwell at Carolina and Mewhort with Indianapolis) from Ohio State to start in the NFL last season?

Linsley: "It was really fun to watch them

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THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: COREY LINSLEY

succeed because those are guys you spent four years at Ohio State with – and Jack and I spent five together. It was really fun to watch them succeed, as well. I'm still trying to get everyone back together in Columbus to work out. I think Jack's falling in love with Indianapolis, but we should get everybody back and working out together. We did for a while in the winter. It's awesome to sit there and share stories and reminisce about the past and joke about coaches, so it was fun."

BSB: Does Ohio State encourage former players to come back?

Linsley: "They definitely want to see us. They treat us well when we come back. My fiancée has a job in Columbus so I'd be coming back to Columbus regardless, but it's nice to come back to Ohio State and know that you're welcome."

BSB: What are your thoughts on Mewhort posing nude in ESPN the Magazine's upcoming body issue?

Linsley: "It's pretty funny, isn't it? It seems like something Jack would be up for doing. He's not shy or timid by any means. It'll be fun to see him in it. That's a big deal, right? It's something you can put up and frame in your living room for 20 years down the road (laughs). Nah, I'm just kidding."

BSB: What was it like to watch Ohio State win the national championship?

Linsley: "It was amazing, obviously, because of the storyline with Cardale (Jones) and also Braxton (Miller) getting hurt before the season and just the whole deal. It honestly didn't surprise me. Everyone in the NFL talks trash about their college teams, and we went into this game and everyone was asking me,

'Who is this kid?' I knew he'd be fine and the whole team would be fine. I felt like that was going to happen. I knew as soon as we beat Alabama there was no doubt we were going to win the national championship. I was so happy for all those guys. You can't take that away from those guys – winning the first College Football Playoff, that was awesome."

BSB: What did you think about the development of the offensive line in 2014 after losing four starters?

Linsley: "That was the thing Coach Meyer even said last year, that the emphasis was on bringing up these four new starters. It's not that he was nervous about it, but that's where the focus was last season. In my head, I was thinking all these guys are talented as all get-out, they just needed the reps. They obviously got them, and it's a testament to

how good of a job Coach Meyer and (offensive line coordinator Ed) Warinner do."

BSB: What are your thoughts going into your second season?

Linsley: "I'm more comfortable, but you have to continually raise the bar. Green Bay is such a great place because they're always trying to look for ways to make you better from a physical and mental standpoint. It's amazing how much little stuff we do just to fine-tune the process. It's got to be tough to find these finite details that we can improve on, but it always gives you something to chase and to work on. That's motivation in and of itself."

"We have a lot of people back on offense, and we have a hell of a defense as well. It has all the makings of an amazing season that's getting ready to happen. I'm excited to play my part in that, whatever it may be."

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Hall Pays It Forward Through Driven Foundation

By **BLAKE WILLIAMS**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Roy Hall hasn't played a down of competitive football since 2011, but if you see him around Columbus the former Ohio State wideout still looks ready to step on the field and contribute.

Hall, who was on the scout team for the 2002 national title team and graduated from Ohio State following the 2006 season, was drafted in the fifth round by the Indianapolis Colts in 2007. He recorded his lone NFL catch for Indianapolis in 2008 and spent time on the practice squads of the New Orleans Saints and the Detroit Lions.

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE Roy Hall

Though he harbors no aspirations of returning to the NFL, Hall has stayed in immaculate shape since he left the football field, a product of the disciplined and detailed way he approaches life. That dedication has manifested itself in the Driven Foundation, a Columbus-based nonprofit that Hall cofounded with fellow Buckeye football alum Antonio Smith in 2008.

Driven is "committed to providing a continuum of support services along with educational and fitness programming to families and youths throughout Central Ohio and surrounding cities," according to the organization's website. The foundation has programs focused on everything from providing underprivileged or critically ill children with birthday parties to handing out school supplies to football camps and a food outreach program that has distributed 450,000 pounds of food since 2008.

With Smith working full time as a mechanical engineer, Hall has taken the reins of the foundation and serves as president of the nonprofit.

Taking time off from planning his upcoming Champions Training Camp, a five-day experience beginning July 13 that will give high school kids a crash course of experience in five area businesses, Hall sat down with Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Wearing a Driven Foundation shirt, Hall spoke about everything from the origins of his foundation to his time as a Buckeye and his current relationship with Ohio State, using plenty of football-centric analogies along the way.

BSB: You started the foundation shortly after leaving Ohio State. Was it on your mind while you were still a Buckeye?

Roy Hall: "A lot of community outreach was developed at Ohio State with Jim Tressel. He was huge on giving back, huge on serving and leveraging your platform for service and helping other people in the community. It really allowed me to see the impact that you could have beyond football. At the end of the day football is entertainment. As many passionate fans as we have, that's great. We invest so much in Ohio State and ticket sales and seeking out autographs and things, but when it is all said and done it's just football.

"When you go through different challenges in life, you don't look to an Ohio State game to get you through. You may win temporarily or the Buckeyes may win and you may feel good for an hour afterwards,



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROY HALL

GIVING BACK – Former Ohio State football receiver Roy Hall (standing) co-founded the Driven Foundation, a Columbus-based nonprofit, in 2008 with fellow OSU football alum Antonio Smith.

but you still have to come back to reality. So what happens to those kids in children's hospitals or families going through financial crisis and the Buckeyes show up and you can see everything about them changes and you're like, 'OK, this is what life is about,' taking what you have – whatever it may be – and using it to help people.

"Getting that foundation at Ohio State prompted me getting to the NFL as far as thinking about what I wanted to do after football and how I could use football to help other people."

BSB: So how did things finally start for Driven?

Hall: "In 2008 we did what most football players do and that is have a football camp. That's how we started. We were very intentional as far as getting other former players in there to speak on different things on building character, honesty, loyalty, trustworthiness, and we had different Buckeyes speak on those issues and obviously the parents really liked that. I think it resonated with the kids as well outside of teaching them how to run a 40-yard dash or how to catch a football.

"A parent came up to me and said, 'Well, what else do you guys do?' and at the time it was nothing. So it really convinced me from the standpoint of we have to do more than just teach kids how to play football, so we've expanded every year to a different program. We are just trying to help families and kids identify with being a champion, identify with being a winner, try to instill a never-give-up mentality.

"Once you help people figure out what's really keeping them driven – usually if it's something outside of yourself you won't quit, but if you are only driven by yourself you will give up on yourself. That's what the Driven Foundation is all about. It's been a lot of fun developing what we have now."

BSB: How did you build from the football camp into what you have now?

Hall: "I think like many things, if you want to do something and have the passion and desire to do it, you'll get it done. At the end of the day you have to eliminate the

excuses. What is it you want to accomplish? If you want to help people there is always something to do.

"So Antonio and I, we eliminated all the excuses on why we can't help whoever we want to. Sometimes when you are dealing with other organizations they only cater to a certain group and sometimes they raise millions of dollars for that specific group and it's awesome. We like to think of ourselves as a versatile, one-stop shop – a special teams, Evan Spencer of nonprofit organizations that can do a lot of different things. We identify a need and try to fill that need."

BSB: You founded this while still playing for the Colts. How much more involved can you be now that you aren't playing? What has changed?

Hall: "A lot of it is the day-to-day operations. When you are in the NFL you have a lot more freedom with your money. If you want to do a fundraiser it is easy to get players there. But when I got done playing I really felt that this is how I wanted to build a business, this is what I wanted to do. I really just wanted to serve and give. I really believe that if I am giving, someone is going to give to us. To get you've got to give. I'm more involved now because I am the president. The day-to-day operations, the strategy, the marketing, it can be challenging, but that's what it's about.

"The birthday bashes, the basketball camps, the school supplies for inner-city kids, the food we donate, all those things go into the brand of staying driven. If you think about Evan Spencer, he did everything. He'll do whatever it takes to be successful. So Driven, we just like to think of ourselves as doing the dirty work, we'll get into the trenches with you. A lot of that goes into how Antonio and I were raised (in) fatherless homes. My father was a heroin addict. Growing up without certain finances and without being afforded certain opportunities, I didn't even start playing organized football until I was in eighth grade because we couldn't afford it. When you get older and in a position to use what you have to help some-

body else, you can identify with the things that people are going through.

"This is what Ohio State really stands for. That Block 'O' is about family, it's about others and helping other people up the ladder. Everybody in the world knows that if you rose to the top multiple people helped you get there. We always try to remember we are driven by other people."

BSB: In addition to you and Antonio, how involved are other former Buckeyes?

Hall: "We have at least 30 guys that throughout the year help us out. You've got Craig Krenzel showing up to some events, Dustin Fox, Branden Joe, Stanley Jackson. We have tons of guys. Guys come back and when they are here, they're a part of it. We have guys who want to serve and come out without hesitation."

BSB: You didn't play under Urban Meyer. How close are you to the program with this staff?

Hall: "I'm very tight with the entire staff, tight with Coach Meyer. I served as one of the team chaplains during the season. Every Friday night and on Sundays I spent at least 15, 20 minutes basically with the entire team. I get a chance to speak on life outside of football with those guys. I'm very much tied in from that standpoint.

"In the offseason I'll step in and lift weights every now and then and see how I can compare with those guys, but I love being able to talk away from football with a lot of those players. A lot of times the graduated players will call me or text me, 'Hey, Roy, what do you think about this?' How can I get plugged in here? I'm thinking about starting my own foundation, what are some of the steps you would take?' I just like being there for guys outside of football."

BSB: Do you have a favorite memory at Ohio State?

Hall: "It's a tossup between the 2002 national title – being a freshman that year and coming in and learning how to win a national title and the sacrifices that it takes. The year started with Mike Doss coming back for his senior season – that was a big deal, him coming back and saying he wanted to win a national title. So we had a selfless mentality that entire season.

"So it's a tossup between 2002 and beating That Team Up North in 2006. That No. 1 vs. No. 2 game was unbelievable. You are talking 42-39. I don't know how many draft picks were on the field that year. To win on my Senior Day, we executed that entire game. It was a slugfest. We really had people on the edge of their seats. Winning that game was crazy. The preparation that week with Senior Tackle and just everything that goes into your last game at the 'Shoe. It was awesome. Those two are the most memorable moments."

BSB: So where do you keep the national title ring and your gold pants?

Hall: "I've got four pairs of gold pants. None of them are on eBay. They are all in a safe place, whether I gave them to a relative or someone close to me. All of my rings are in a safe place. If they end up on the Internet I'll have to figure out who took it and how it got there. They are in a safe place and I cherish those things.

"If you have an event you'll throw a ring on here and there. I usually wear the 2006 Big Ten title ring. I don't wear the national title ring that much. The Big Ten title ring was the biggest of them all. That national title ring is solid gold. That thing is heavy so I'll wear my Big Ten title ring occasionally."

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: JOHN JOHNSON

Hayes Disciple Has Seen It All Through Years

By RYAN GINN
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At a boxing gym in northeast Columbus, posters of championship boxing fights divide two waves of framed memories. Photos of such boxing champions as Muhammad Ali and James "Buster" Douglas dot the left and pictures of legendary Ohio State head coach Woody Hayes and two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin sit to the right.

"None of this," John Johnson said, pointing to the boxing pictures, "would be possible without this," as his gaze moved to the Ohio State section.

Johnson grew up the son of a coal miner in Red Jacket, W.Va., and his rise to fame began when he spent a few years as a graduate assistant at Ohio State in the 1970s after improbably talking his way into a spot on Hayes' staff.



RYAN GINN

GIVING CREDIT – A trainer of former world heavyweight champion James "Buster" Douglas, John Johnson served as a staff member under Woody Hayes at Ohio State.

which was like a steel plant. I was in there one time and there were like fires burning and it wasn't a real pleasant place to be. Archie's dad was a great guy, and we've talked about the fact that there's no way he and I could measure up to our dads and who they were and so on and so forth."

BSB: How did you end up coaching at Ohio State?

Johnson: "I went to high school in the northern part of Ohio and ended up coming to Columbus actually going to work in the finance business and was pretty successful. I got married and had kids and was successful. I eventually met Dick Walker and Ed Ferkany, two coaches at Ohio State. At that time there were no NCAA regulations about who could recruit, and I started helping them recruit. Through that I got to know Coach Hayes.

"I was doing really well in the finance business, but I decided I wanted to coach football. So I went to Coach Hayes, who I had met from doing the recruiting stuff, and I told him I wasn't happy with what I was doing and told him I wanted to be a football coach. He put his arm around me and said, 'Come help me coach.' So I started school.

"I'm 28 years old and married with two kids. I sell my home, move into an apartment and the next five years I got my bachelor's and my master's because I wanted it so bad. It was almost 24 hours a day between coaching and going to school. Three summers I worked at Anheuser-Busch for 70 straight nights, but that's how I made money to go to school."

BSB: What do you remember most about Woody Hayes?

Johnson: "He was there for me. I had a really controversial career at Ohio State. I've been a very controversial, crazy person. I always say I'll stand up for what I believe in even if I have to stand alone. Sometimes that's not the easy way. Someone said Coach Hayes had five people you could put on one hand that he trusted and I was lucky enough to be one of them, and that's amazing. Here I was, this graduate assistant coach. And he was there for me and trusted me."

BSB: What was Woody like during Michigan week?

Johnson: "He was uptight. He was very uptight. Everybody was watching out. Everybody loved it when he threw one of his tantrums and got all crazy. Nobody laughed while he was doing it, but inside we were laughing. Not on the outside. He did some crazy stuff.

"With him, the Michigan game was every-

thing. Temperament-wise, I'm more related to Urban and Woody, but I give Jim Tressell credit too because he knew the importance of the Michigan game. I've made the statement before that I'd rather lose every game on the schedule and beat Michigan than win every other game and lose to them. Coach Hayes instilled that in me. Our Monday practices were always the Michigan practice. All season. We'd spend one day every week getting ready for a game that was months away. But that was Woody."

BSB: Do you have any particularly memorable stories involving Woody?

Johnson: "Martha Mitchell was (United States Attorney General) John Mitchell's wife. She had said that Richard Nixon should resign. Coach Hayes said, 'You don't think he'll do that, do you?' Our meeting room had a phone jack, but it didn't have a phone. You had to go get a phone if you wanted to use it. So he said, 'Go get me a phone.' I bring the phone in and he calls the White House. At the time, I had called it a couple of times before for him. What they did since there was no caller ID was ask what number you were calling from. They must have somehow had a way of knowing who you were.

"So he calls the White House and they answer. He said, 'This is Coach Woody Hayes, let me talk to the president.' Two minutes later, 'Mr. President, one of my coaches came in and said Martha Mitchell said you should resign. Well you're not going to resign, Mr. President. You hear me? You listen to me.'

"One thing I found out from being around him talking to Gerald Ford and Bob Hope and others: Coach Hayes would say something and the other person would say, 'Yep, you're right, Woody.' He just totally dominated conversations. He was a very dominating and strong person. But that was crazy. I mean, he just called the president – and did all the talking, too."

BSB: Why do you think Woody trusted you so much?

Johnson: "What happened was Pete Johnson's freshman year, he wasn't getting to play, not even making the traveling team. He was thinking about leaving and I went to Coach Hayes and told him, and then Coach Hayes watched him at practice and Pete went from fifth team to third team. Of course he went on to play great against The Team Up North and scored three touchdowns in the Rose Bowl.

"He didn't do well academically because he was so down about his playing time. He's a very, very smart guy but just didn't care about going to school at the time. I'm living on the

north side of Columbus, and I get a call from Coach Hayes. He said, 'John, get down here right now. I don't care what you're doing. This is Coach Hayes. Get your ass down here right now.'

"I'm shaking because I don't know what I did. When I went in, I saw the secretary and she said he was over in (OSU director of athletics Ed) Weaver's office. This was in St. John Arena. I walked over there and he was walking back. He was left-handed and put his left arm around me and pulled me in close and said, 'John, I know you can do it. I know you can do it. I know damn well you can and I know you're going to do it.' I said, 'Do what, Coach?' And he said, 'Get Pete through school.'

"Coach Hayes said, 'Man, he could be the best fullback ever' – which he turned out to be. I went to get his schedule and I don't want to attack this person, but the statement was made to me that Pete wouldn't make it. So I was like, 'Screw you guys.' I went to Pete's classes and I had my classes scheduled so I could make sure he was going to class. Pete's a very, very smart guy. We kind of stuck it to them because Pete Johnson is the first – the first – African-American to make Academic All-American at The Ohio State University. So we kind of proved everyone wrong. It gave Coach Hayes tremendous faith in me. Nobody thought he was going to make it."

BSB: How did you meet Buster Douglas?

Johnson: "We hooked up in 1984. He called me because he knew about Stevie and that I'd taken him to the world championships. He went to his uncle J.D. and they came to my house. We were talking for a while, and for whatever reason I went into the kitchen and got a paper plate and brought it in. I laid it on the table and then on the floor, and I said, 'That's what we've got. There's nothing on that plate. If you listen and pay the price, someday you'll be a heavyweight champion and there will be millions on the plate.'

"Six years later, I get a phone call offering a fight with Mike Tyson. During those six years we had some great victories and devastating losses, the worst being his mom dying 23 days before the fight. He came to my house that morning, and after a while I asked him if he wanted me to postpone the fight. He said, 'No, my mom wants me to fight and my mom wants me to win.'

"A week later we went to Tokyo, and the reason the fight was in Tokyo is that nobody here would pay a cent to see Buster Douglas fight Mike Tyson. Ed Schuyler, who was a boxing writer for The Associated Press, went to Tokyo to cover the fight. He was going through customs and they asked him what he was here for and he said to work. They asked how long he'd be working and he said, 'About a minute and a half.' That's what most people thought, but we knew we were going to win.

"Coach Hayes said the height of human desire is what wins, be it on the Normandy beaches or Ohio Stadium. We had that great height of desire to win and to prepare to win. Ring Magazine calls it the Upset of the Century."

BSB: How long were you in Tokyo before the fight?

Johnson: "I've always been a believer that for every hour you travel with a time change, you always give yourself an extra day for your body to adjust. Like if we go west four hours, I go four days in advance. It was 13 hours time difference, and we went 16 days in advance. I went straight from the hotel to

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE John Johnson

Such was his devotion to Hayes that a 1990 Sports Illustrated story by Richard Hoffer noted that Johnson's "heroes are Jesus Christ and Woody Hayes, not necessarily in that order."

That SI story was written because of Johnson's second act. He eventually worked his way into boxing, soaking up a wealth of information from former Ali trainer Angelo Dundee. He first made a name for himself as the trainer for Steve Gregory, a then-little known Columbus boxer who ultimately fought for the WBA world super welterweight title in Denmark in 1979.

Gregory lost that bout to Ayub Kalule in a unanimous decision, but Johnson's work with the boxer caught the eye of J.D. McCauley, Douglas' uncle. Johnson began working with Douglas in 1984, and in 1990 Douglas knocked out heavyweight champion Mike Tyson in Tokyo with Johnson at his side to claim The Ring, WBC, WBA and IBF world heavyweight titles. The victory by the Columbus native Douglas is still considered one of the greatest upsets in not just boxing but sports history.

Johnson has met several United States presidents and to this day maintains friendships with several Ohio State stars from the 1970s, including Griffin and Pete Johnson, in addition to dozens of boxing luminaries.

Johnson recently sat down with BSB at his gym to discuss his memories of Hayes and Ohio State's powerhouse 1970s teams as well as his time as Douglas' trainer.

BSB: What was your life like when you were growing up?

Johnson: "My dad worked in the coal mines for 40 years. Same mine, same shift. Archie's family is from the next county over in southwest West Virginia. I'm from Mingo County – they call it Bloody Mingo County, where the Hatfield-McCoy feud took place and the Matewan Massacre took place. Archie's dad worked the coal mines. My dad came to Ohio and became a janitor. Forty years, same mine, same shift and they laid him off. 'We don't need you anymore. That's it – see ya.'

"Archie's dad came up here (to Columbus) and worked at a place called Ohio Malleable,

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: JOHN JOHNSON

the gym and back to the hotel. (Columbus Dispatch writer) Tim May was there I think the last week, and our families came over the last week, too."

BSB: What was the mood leading up to the fight?

Johnson: "We were just totally focused on the fight. The fight took place at noon on Sunday in Tokyo, so it was 11 p.m. on Saturday night back home. About 10 o'clock that morning I was standing outside our dressing room and this guy came up to me and we started talking, and probably after about 10 minutes or so, he said, 'You know, I can't believe your demeanor. I can't believe you're so confident Buster Douglas is going to beat Mike Tyson.' I looked at him and I said, 'Joe' - it was Joe Theismann - 'Mike Tyson is going to come out of that dressing room, and when he gets into the ring Buster Douglas is not only going to beat him, he's going to knock him out.'"

"Sometimes you have fear and anxiety, but I was totally confident we were going to win. I thought we had the right strategy, and we had everything. If Buster Douglas was in great shape throughout his career, he could beat anybody."

BSB: So you were pretty confident he'd knock Tyson out?

Johnson: "Coach (Urban) Meyer, the first time we talked down in his office, he sat down where he's got those four couches and he said, 'Buster, what were you thinking when you went to the ring?' and James said he was confident he was going to win. He asked me, and I said honestly I thought we were going to make him quit. I thought we'd beat the (stuffing) out of him for six or seven rounds and he'd say, 'I'm done.' I thought the bully in him would quit."

"But man, I told him to his face - and hugged him when I told him - that he fought his heart out. He took a beating and he was hurt bad and he still tried to get up and fight. That's when I really gained respect for Mike Tyson."

BSB: Since you mentioned Meyer, what do you think about the job he's done?

Johnson: "During the season I sent Urban an email and I said, 'I love you just because you're like Coach Hayes and you're a disciple of Coach Hayes.' I see it in his mannerisms and everything about him - it's like Coach Hayes, and he's proud of that."

BSB: What was your reaction when Tyson was knocked out?

Johnson: "When it was over, we were all jumping around. Me and his uncle kind of hit together and knocked his uncle's glasses off. I ended up hugging Buster's neck and saying over and over again, 'You were great! You were great! You were great!' When we kind of broke up, Don King was standing with his back against the ropes. He looked mad as hell, boy. They already had the deal. (Boxing commentator) Larry Merchant tells the story that they went to dinner with him the night before and Buster Douglas' name was never mentioned. The whole dinner, all they were talking about was having Tyson fight Evander Holyfield next. I pointed to him and said, 'I told you we were going to kick his ass.' He was mad as hell."

BSB: Tyson went down in your corner, right?

Johnson: "He fell in our corner. The referee, the count felt like it was taking forever. But when he hit seven and Mike rolled over to get his mouthpiece, I knew he wasn't going to get his mouthpiece and get up in time, and I started up the steps. I said, 'Coach, we did it,' and looked up in the air because I know Coach Hayes was like, 'Yes!' I knew his attitude would be, 'Go kick his ass,' because that's the attitude he had under all circumstances."

BSB: What happened after the fight?

Johnson: "We beat him from start to finish, just punished him. After we came back and negotiated the contract with (hotel and casino mogul) Steve Wynn, I continued to be my Coach Hayes, very demanding, crazy self. Buster had almost everyone praising him and almost godlike treatment. A couple of months after the Tyson fight he called and said, 'I appreciate everything you've done, and you've done great, but I'm going to make my own decisions.' Going into the Holyfield fight was one of the most depressing times of my life. I was depressed. Steve Wynn, who I dearly love, he was a great, great friend to me then."

"(Buster and I) didn't talk for about 20 years. We got back together about 5½ years ago and in ways we're closer now than we've ever been. A lot of times when you're on the bottom you realize who your friends really are, and a lot of times it's the person that disagrees with you is the one who really cares about you."

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THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: BRANDON FUSS-CHEATHAM

Fuss-Cheatham Riding Columbus T-Shirt Boom

By JEFF SVOBODA
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ten years ago, if fans wanted unique apparel to celebrate their passion for their favorite teams, well, they were largely out of luck.

If you lived in the city where the team was located, you could check out the local shops, but they were filled mostly with team-licensed gear with little variety. If you lived far away, the pickings were even slimmer, as team websites sold limited quantities of that same gear.

But the past decade has seen the birth of a shirt revolution. In Columbus, that has largely been represented by the rise of Homage, the retro-inspired T-shirt company formed in central Ohio that rose to prominence thanks in part to its selection of Ohio State gear.

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE

Brandon Fuss-Cheatham

A once relatively small operation, Homage has become a commerce giant, with two stores in Columbus, another one in Cincinnati and marketing deals with the likes of ESPN. Many such shops have since followed in Homage's footsteps, including Lamp Apparel, whose flagship store is located in the Short North neighborhood in Columbus.

The brainchild of former Ohio State basketball player Brandon Fuss-Cheatham, Lamp Apparel has carved out a niche despite not having a license with OSU to produce team-sponsored gear.

Nonetheless, Fuss-Cheatham's work has found its way into the mainstream culture a few times. Lamp Apparel's "Ohio State of Mind" shirt – with the "H" a stylized version of Marcus Hall's famous double-middle finger salute at Michigan in 2013 – has become a popular shirt among Ohio State fans and, unfortunately, happened to be what Greg Oden was wearing in his mug shot after

being arrested for domestic violence last August.

But the real frenzy for Lamp Apparel kicked off in January when Cardale Jones stepped to the microphone at the press conference in Cleveland to tell the world he would return to Ohio State. The Buckeyes quarterback did so in a gray T-shirt emblazoned with the message "12 Gauge Buckshot," a reference to his nickname that Lamp Apparel produced after he burst onto the scene during college football's postseason.

Those moments have helped Lamp Apparel grow, and the company has a variety of shirts celebrating Ohio State, Columbus and the state of Ohio that can often be seen around Columbus. Most come from the creative mind of Fuss-Cheatham, a Buckeye guard who lettered from 2002-05 and worked a variety of jobs before business partner Scott Kaiser gave him the ability to take the full-time plunge into the apparel business.

Fuss-Cheatham met with BSB on a June morning at the flagship store on High Street in Columbus with customers going in and out, most of them looking to acquire gear in which to cheer on the Cavs during the team's run to the NBA Finals.

BSB: What's it like seeing your designs being worn around Columbus?

Fuss-Cheatham: "I see it almost daily now because I'm down in the Short North. I always see shirts anywhere I go really, and then I have a lot of friends who could be in airports, they could be somewhere in the country and say, 'Hey, man, I just took a picture with a guy with your shirt on.' To me, that's the most fulfilling part."

BSB: I would guess it helps that you have a pretty strong network of friends who are former athletes who travel a lot and wear your gear.

Fuss-Cheatham: "My network just from playing at Ohio State – the NBA guys, NFL guys, they were the first guys that I tried to get my stuff to just because if they wear it, people see them and then they wonder where they got it. Just being part of the Buckeye family has been the biggest thing for us, and that word spreads fast. People are loyal. I think Ohio shows the most pride for



JEFF SVOBODA

SHIRT MAN – Former Ohio State basketball player Brandon Fuss-Cheatham runs Lamp Apparel, which has been thrust into the mainstream thanks to multiple T-shirt designs in recent years.

its state – Texas and Ohio, that's what people say. People in Ohio have really taken to our creativity, so it's been cool."

BSB: You're also at a moment where independent T-shirt companies have taken the world by storm.

Fuss-Cheatham: "I think in the last five or six years, since Homage started, they laid the groundwork for it, and everyone has been taking to it. We have such good sports here in Ohio. We have a loyal fan base. We've had some hard times in sports, we've had the best times. Here in Ohio, you get a mix of everything, but the fan base is ridiculous about the state and their teams. It's really helped with getting us out there."

BSB: Plus in Ohio people often seem to feel a bit overlooked.

Fuss-Cheatham: "You're in the middle of the country. You're not Chicago, you're not Los Angeles, you're not New York, you're not Miami. I think people really stick together and create that feeling that this is the best state just from showing their pride and showing up to games and being loud and being obnoxious sometimes when it comes to their sports. I think that helps with our company because people like to wear their pride. That's what we provide."

"I think people want a different shirt. They don't want the shirt that everyone can have. We have shirts that a lot of people will

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THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: BRANDON FUSS-CHEATHAM

Bow Tie Business Still Good For Jenkins

buy – you see a lot of the same shirt – but to them, it's not the issued team shirt. And it's the feel of the shirt. It's a shirt you can wear out all the time in jeans, you can lay around the house in it. It's a shirt that washes well and dries well, so it always looks good. People wear it out more than just to games. They wear it to bars and having fun."

BSB: People want a message that speaks to them, too.

Fuss-Cheatham: "Exactly. And that's kind of what the basis for the company was, just expressing my creativity. I wouldn't say I'm into fashion. I'm not a fashion guy. I don't know fashion. I'm not in New York. What I do know is what's cool, and I know what I like. I think what I like, a lot of people like. I think this was my outlet to express myself other than just writing something or drawing pictures – I'm not an artist. I'm not into that. I'm more of into trends. I know what's happening. I can capture a moment. I know what can hit and I know what people want to wear. I think that's kind of what this company started with. (Kaiser) and I, we wanted to express ourselves and the passion that we have for sports and just cool sayings and stuff, and this was it and it took off."

BSB: So what is the story of how this company came to be, as far as it getting started?

Fuss-Cheatham: "When I graduated from Ohio State, I was a volunteer coach for the team for two years, then I moved to California. Out there, the T-shirt is what you wear – T-shirt, jeans and flip flops – and I got inspired out there and was messing around with some designs in my own head. When I moved back to Ohio, Scott asked me how those ideas I had were coming along, and I said, 'They're coming along, but I don't really have the backing for it. It's hard for me to get moving on it.' He was like, 'You know what? Let's do it together and I'll let you do you.'"

"Obviously it was a risk, but he really believed in me. When we first started, we were up until 2 or 3 in the morning trying to figure out what our name was going to be and what direction we were going to go – hours after hours, and weeks of thinking. We came up with Lamp Apparel, and lamp-in' is a word I've used since I was 15 years old. It means just relaxing, hanging out. I'd say, 'I'm lampin' with my friends right now.' That's where it started from, and then I think that's what our gear is. We want people to be lampin' in our gear. It was the perfect word, and it's crazy no one owned it."

"It just started from an idea of two friends who wanted to be creative and have fun with it and see what it turned into, and now it's a business where this is my job. This is what I do full-time every day. It turned into more than what I thought it was going to be."

BSB: How do the designs get created and made?

Fuss-Cheatham: "Most of them come from my brain and then I pass them along to our designers. Andrew Matre, he's our lead designer and vice president of operations, so I push most of it to him, but then I have some other guys that do some designing. If I'm looking for a certain vibe or a certain feel, I know my guys. I push my designs to the right people. And then we do it daily – we have 1,000 designs that aren't even printed or anything yet. We just continuously make stuff in our mind and put it down, and then when it's the right time, we push it. Obviously we're really big into the moment. With the Cavs thing and the Ohio State stuff, we really capture moments."

BSB: Is it a challenge not having a license from Ohio State or the Cavs to make apparel that specifically mentions the teams?

Brandon Fuss-Cheatham is far from the only former Buckeye athlete to dabble in the fashion or apparel industry over the past few years.

After graduation, 2007 football captain Dionte Johnson purchased Sole Classics footwear and apparel in Columbus and later created the lifestyle apparel brand Kingsrowe, eventually opening Kingsrowe Gallery in the city's Short North to showcase the line.

And then there's Malcolm Jenkins. The New Jersey native starred at Ohio State from 2005-08, winning the Thorpe Award as the nation's best defensive back his senior season, and has become an NFL mainstay first with the New Orleans Saints and now with the Philadelphia Eagles.

Shortly after making the NFL, Jenkins made the bow tie a staple of his ensemble, but he had trouble finding ties or patterns he liked. So in 2013, Jenkins founded Rock Avenue Bow Ties, and the company has been met with rave reviews for its fashionable, unique products.

Jenkins talked via phone with BSB recently to discuss his burgeoning business venture.

BSB: How is the business going at this point now that it's had some time to grow?

Jenkins: "It's going really well. We're starting to expand here now that the season is over and I have a little bit more time, so we'll have some new offerings. We've created some neckties, and we'll start venturing



Malcolm Jenkins

Fuss-Cheatham: "I like it that way. I like providing something that is a twist and a turn to a certain degree on a certain moment. I don't want it to say 'Ohio State Buckeyes' – you can get that anywhere. You can go down to Kohl's or go to all the local or campus stores or get it at Kroger. I think that's already out there, so with us not being licensed, we have to be very creative, and that's our niche, too. That's what people are looking for. They know now when it comes to Lamp Apparel, they know they can come here and get that shirt with a twist on it."

BSB: Did you think you'd be doing something like this when you graduated?

Fuss-Cheatham: "Not at all. I'm a basketball guy. I thought I'd be in sports. Before I went full-time here, I worked at a sports technology company in Dublin, InfoMotion Sports Technologies. We invented basketballs with sensors in them. I thought I was going to be in sports my whole life, but with this, I started 2½ years ago. I didn't know it was going to be full-time. I thought it was going to be a hobby. It's been a roller-coaster ride – for the best. It's so exciting that this is my job. I sit around and think of stuff. I get to hang out with the community, I get to go to the games – it's my job to be in tune with stuff. I'm constantly involved with things in the area. I'm watching TV nonstop to find ideas, and I get to hang out with my friends and just talk nonsense."

"I can't complain. I work for myself. I get to do what I want. I provide a service that's fun. You see the smile on peoples' faces when they get compliments on their shirts. Daily, I have people come in and say, 'I wore this shirt last night and I got 10 compliments, it was awesome!' and that's what I

into more offerings so it's not just bow ties anymore. It's going well. We've got great feedback from the people who follow us. We're just trying to build brand awareness and keep going."

BSB: For something that started off as a fun side project, are you surprised by how people have taken to it?

Jenkins: "It started off as a hobby of mine and really worked its way into a full-time thing, and I think a lot of people can relate to the brand whether it's the Ohio State ties or the patterns that we're doing. People have gotten behind me. I'm trying to include some more people with the neckties and bring more to the brand."

BSB: Have you found it as enjoyable as you thought you would now that it's gone from a hobby to a business?

Jenkins: "I'm still having fun, but it's a bigger burden than it was before. I'm trying to balance it all. It's a little tough, but I still enjoy it. It's a great experience, something that I'm glad I'm learning now, and then once I'm done playing ball and I actually have the time to go after some other endeavors full time, I have a little experience. It's good."

BSB: You've done some Ohio State patterns, which seems like a natural outgrowth, but was it good to get the alma mater involved?

Jenkins: "Oh yeah. That's one thing I definitely wanted to do. We haven't been able to do any other schools, but as long as we had the Buckeyes it was going to be fun. Those have been in the works for about

a year so to have them, especially with the kind of year the team had last year, it was perfect timing."

BSB: Did you have to go through OSU trademarks and licensing to do that?

Jenkins: "Basically you have to get approval from trademarks and licensing, and after we got that, which is pretty hard to do, we were excited about that. We'll probably have another one before the season starts. Even after the season, we were still getting orders for them. Obviously most of the people are from Ohio, but we've gotten orders from Buckeyes all over the country – Vegas, California, Florida. We're everywhere. It's fun to see the Buckeye support."

BSB: There are a number of former players who have gotten into fashion and apparel. Is it neat to see the passion and creativity a lot of former Buckeye stars have?

Jenkins: "Yeah. Dionte and I actually still talk. I remember when he first took over Sole Classics and how he's grown that. Now he has his own brand with Kingsrowe. We often talk about different ideas and different things we want to do moving forward beyond my bow ties and his shoe stores and stuff because I think we both have other passions and ideas. We just both fell into what we're doing now."

"It's going to be fun moving forward, and he's doing some great things. I think there is more to come. I think we have ideas we bounce off each other. I feel like we can have an impact on some culture and bring some new things to the table. Only time will tell, I guess."

– Jeff Svoboda

love. That's my drive – those conversations where people get excitement out of things that they're wearing, and it's us."

BSB: So how is the business doing?

Fuss-Cheatham: "It's definitely exceeded our expectations. We have three or four people that are working for us, and this is my life. For me to provide a living for other people that are close to me and provide a living for myself, it's ridiculous. And we're young. The growth potential in our business is huge. We're seeing that, and it's moving fast. Obviously our goals are a lot higher, but we've definitely exceeded our expectations when we first started."

BSB: When Cardale wore one of your shirts at his draft announcement, that brought a lot of attention to the business. What was that like?

Fuss-Cheatham: "There were a lot of good and bad conversations about it. People thought we had made it just for him (to wear), and we didn't. We made that shirt months before. He came onto the scene – played three games and took the nation by storm – so anything he did or wore was a conversation piece. It just so happened the biggest interview of his life was to return or go pro, and he happened to be wearing our shirt."

"We got a lot of reaction, good and bad. People definitely gravitated to it. We only sold it for a few days, just because we got so much heat for it. People thought we had manipulated it. No, he just wore the shirt."

BSB: Did that help you guys from a name recognition aspect?

Fuss-Cheatham: "It definitely brought attention to us. It definitely did. But we only sold it for a couple of days because of all the flak we were getting. People were thinking

that we set it up. Believe me, you would be surprised how much controversy a T-shirt can cause, especially with Ohio State where people are so quick to jump on any type of controversy or compliance issues. They think just everything is handed to these athletes, and that's not really the case. He had just come in and bought it."

BSB: Was there a similar reaction with the situation with Oden?

Fuss-Cheatham: "It was sad to see Greg in that situation. He had chosen to wear the shirt that day. It had nothing to do with us, but again, it turned into a conversation about what happened but also the T-shirt. It was a weird situation for us. Greg is my friend. I know him well and I was sad to see that happened, but the conversation did turn into that shirt. That just happens. We're in that business of, the shirt is on you. The things that happen aren't really in your control. I just make shirts and people wear them and that's it."

BSB: What have been your top sellers or top buzzworthy shirts?

Fuss-Cheatham: "As of right now, the Dunk King shirt with (a silhouette of LeBron James) dunking the state of Ohio, that's been huge. That's been monstrous. We've had a lot of viral moments. The whole Ohio State of Mind shirt is huge still. Obviously our Buckshot shirt was huge. Our Duck Season one when the Buckeyes were playing Oregon was ridiculous. That was probably our biggest moment. For a span of a week, we were selling thousands of them. That was pretty cool. Our C-Bus shirt is a classic. We have some good shirts. People are really enjoying them. It's good when you can create classics that will be around for a while."

Diebler Enjoying Life As Pro Player In Turkey

By **BLAKE WILLIAMS**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Though he now spends most of his year more than 5,400 miles from Columbus, Jon Diebler has never been far from Ohio State.

A star for the Buckeyes who lettered from 2008-11, Diebler still litters the Ohio State record book. The shooting guard is first in program history in three-point field goals made with 374 and has the two most prolific three-point shooting seasons in school history.

Despite attempting more shots from behind the arc than any Buckeye in history, he has the second-best career percentage from deep at 41.6 percent. He is fourth all-time in career free-throw percentage at 82.6 percent and remains the career leader in three-pointers in the Big Ten.

Living with his wife in Turkey, Diebler keeps his finger on the pulse of his alma mater despite the massive distance. The seven-hour time difference makes it difficult for the former Buckeye star to watch every game, but he follows as closely as he can, aided by the presence of his brother, Jake, on Thad Matta's staff.

A native of Upper Sandusky, the Ohio high school basketball all-time leading scorer and his wife spend their summers back in Ohio, and Diebler makes sure to spend some time at Value City Arena.

With his team in the midst of that playoff run, Diebler took some time to speak with BSB from his coastal home in Izmir, Turkey. Before being crowned a champion, Diebler spoke about a number of topics including his time at Ohio State, adjusting to life overseas, his bond with fellow former Buckeyes and his continued NBA dreams.



Jon Diebler

BSB: What was the biggest off-court adjustment to international basketball for you?

Diebler: "Well I didn't know a lot about Turkey. Obviously Istanbul is a massive city. We were in Greece our first year (overseas) and that was an adjustment, just being overseas itself. Then coming to Turkey, we Googled the city and everything. It looked nice. There are basic things – the language barrier, getting used to the cultural differences here. The city we are in is pretty easy to adjust to, I can say that."

"We have two big malls and a third going up all in like a two-block radius of where we live. They've got your Subway there, your Starbucks, your Burger King, your KFC, McDonald's, so as far as food goes they have a lot of American restaurants."

"The language barrier is probably the toughest when you're trying to ask questions and figure out where you need to be."

BSB: A lot of your roster is from the United States, but your coach is Turkish. What is the communication like with your teammates?

Diebler: "With our coach, he knows some English. He definitely speaks Turkish most of the time, especially when he's coaching, but our assistant coach speaks English pretty well and he translates everything. If he's talking to us during a game he can definitely yell at us in English. Our coach is awesome. He was a big-time player in Turkey, and he's been a lot of fun to play for."

"Our point guard, actually this is his third year as well. He and I came into Turkey at the same time, and then we've got three other guys who this is their first year but we all get along really well. It's unique actually because you don't find this a lot with professional teams, but our team chemistry is unbelievable."

"Our Turkish guys and American guys get along really well. There's no real divide. Obviously you are going to hang out with your American players more, but our

Turkish guys and American guys get along really well and our Turkish guys all speak English pretty well. It's been a pretty easy adjustment for me."

BSB: When a new guy comes over from the United States, what advice do you have to offer?

Diebler: "You kind of separate it from a basketball standpoint and then living. Juan Palacios, he played at Louisville in college and he texted me when he was deciding whether to come to Karsiyaka or not, and he just asked what's the atmosphere like, how's the coach, how's the team? Do they pay on time? Because that can be tricky sometimes in Europe. So I will tell him how the basketball situation is, and then he asked what it is like living there and then you just kind of go from there."

"There are always two parts to it. There's the basketball, and that's important because this is our job. You want to play for a coach that gives you freedom and is a player's coach, and our coach is. Our team is very professional. They pay on time – they haven't been late in the three years I've been here so that is a plus. And then the city is great. It's nice weather, it doesn't snow. Sometime it gets a little chilly, but not like Ohio. The coldest it will get is like low 40s. It's like 90 now."

"I feel like every American player when they are getting ready to come overseas, regardless of where it is, does their research and tries to reach out to former players and tries to get their agent to gather as much information about the place as far as living and basketball goes."

BSB: What about on the court? Are there any major adjustments to international rules?

Diebler: "Yeah there was. My first year in Greece, the whole what is a travel and what's not a travel. That's definitely something that all Americans need to adjust to. So I would just say the whole travel thing was one of the hardest things for me to get used to at first because you have to put the ball down first before you step and all this weird stuff. If it's a travel here it's not a travel in America, so it's something you have to get used to."

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE Jon Diebler

Diebler was selected by the Portland Trail Blazers in the second round of the 2011 NBA draft but, like many of the Buckeyes' best players over the past few seasons, has since built a successful career in international basketball, playing one season in Greece before spending the last three seasons as a starter with Pinar Karsiyaka (KSK) of the Turkish Basketball League.

Diebler was crowned a champion this past season, helping his team to the Turkish Basketball League title June 19. Diebler was KSK's second-leading scorer this season with 12.9 points per game while also contributing 3.4 rebounds and 1.6 assists. True to form he led the team in three-point percentage, connecting at a 41.6 percent clip. In the championship-clinching Game 5, Diebler scored 12 points on 4-of-7 shooting from behind the arc while hauling in three rebounds and dishing out two assists.

BSB: What is a week like for you during your season?

Jon Diebler: "For the last three years since I've been in Turkey, we've been playing twice a week because we are playing Eurocup – the European competition – and then in the Turkish league. So we would play a game on Wednesday which would be for the Eurocup, which is the second toughest (European league). We were playing on Wednesday and then on the weekends we play for Turkish league. We would practice, maybe a lifting and a shooting in the morning on Monday, practice that night, practice on Tuesday, play Wednesday, really light day of just lifting and shooting on Thursday, practice Friday, play Saturday, off Sunday."

"We're very blessed. I've really enjoyed playing for my coach here. I've had the same coach for three years, same team and it's not bad at all. When we're fortunate enough to get a couple of days off we have some nice spots by the sea here in Turkey that we can go to when the weather is warm. It's good."

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THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: JON DIEBLER

"I think that's why when you watch the Olympics and stuff those guys get called for travels and they're like, 'How is that a travel? It's not a travel in America.' It's just those things that you have to pick up on. Now it's like second nature, I haven't been called for a travel in a while. My first month and a half out here I was called for travels all the time."

BSB: Do you keep in touch with the OSU guys playing overseas?

Diebler: "We talk all the time. (Evan Ravel) was in Poland this year, Deshaun (Thomas) is in Barcelona – I got to see him play on TV because they play some of the teams in Turkey and he is doing really well. Dave (Lighty) is in France. I talk to him a lot. I talk to P.J. Hill a lot. He was in Latvia last year. I talk to Othello Hunter, who is in Greece."

"There are Buckeyes everywhere. It's cool. We all keep in touch. We talk almost every other day. I actually played against Dave last year twice, so that was kind of crazy. He was in France last year and we played his team in Eurocup. First time I ever played against Dave in a real game and it was kind of weird."

BSB: How did that matchup go?

Diebler: "I think we were guarding each other for the first game, maybe the second. His team beat us. They were pretty good. They were in Euroleague and had just dropped down to Eurocup. They had Trent Meacham and Deshaun was on his team so they had two Buckeyes on the same team so I got to play against him and Deshaun. It was fun. It was just good to see those guys. It's crazy to think, you know, I was teammates with Dave for four years and for one year with Deshaun, and to cross paths in Europe a couple of years later is pretty crazy."

BSB: What are the crowds like in Turkey?

Diebler: "Our fans are awesome – awesome-slash-crazy. We have some very, very passionate fans. I would say in Turkey our fans are the best and one of the teams in Istanbul, they are really big in soccer and basketball – our two fans are crazy. They do not like each other. When we play that team they actually don't allow the other fans to come. We played there my first year and our fans started fighting in the gym and they delayed the game for like two hours and then we played with no fans. While we were warming up they were fighting."

"I've seen a lot of things be thrown on the court, our fans have been suspended. The league will literally suspend our fans so they can't come to games. They are passionate, man, and I love it. As far as safety goes, obviously I want everyone to be safe and be smart, but you can't control everybody. They love our basketball team."

"We have like a 5,000-seat arena and we sell it out and it gets loud in there. If you were to YouTube our fans you will find some stuff for basketball. It's super crazy and they are passionate. They're like Ohio State football fans except there are no real rules. You can kind of do whatever you want without any repercussions. I've seen it all. They support us every game, it doesn't matter if we are winning or losing. It gets loud in our gym."

"These are some of the best fans, minus our fans in college, that I have been around. They are right up there with Ohio State fans. It's a blast. It gets pretty rowdy in our gym."

BSB: Speaking of Buckeye fans, what is your fondest memory at Ohio State?

Diebler: "Oh my gosh, I have so many memories. We still talk about college. We have a little group message – Dave, P.J., Evan (Ravenel), Dallas (Lauderdale) and I – and we reminisce about ridiculous stuff that would happen in games. We talk about that stuff all the time. We'll send a video to our group message of me doing something ridiculous like getting dunked on and then we'll just start talking about it. That's just what we do."

"There is no real one specific thing because I have so many great memories from my time at Ohio State from my freshman year to my senior year. Obviously my last few years were some of the most enjoyable teams that I've been on as far as how close we were as a group."

"I'm sure if you ask Coach Matta, especially my senior year, that group that we had, it was pretty amazing how close we were. It was special and that's what I remember more than any of the wins and losses is the friendship that we have. That's what makes the summer so fun because we all come back to Columbus and we all work out together in the summertime and we just kind of pick up where we left off. It's something special."

"You look at this last summer, we all get together and have Monopoly night. We are grown men playing Monopoly. That's just how we are, we like to hang out and enjoy each other's company. It's fun. We did that a couple times last summer and that is going to happen again."

"That just shows the guys that we have. Coach Matta always says it – he's going to recruit high-character guys – and he's done that. We formed these relationships in college and they all last. That's why we like coming back to Columbus in the summer, why we all work out together and hang out with each other."

"I'm still the best at Monopoly. I got cheated one day, but that's all right."

BSB: Do you still think about the NBA? Where are you going to be in five years?

Diebler: "Oh man, I don't even know. It's definitely something I think about. Houston owns my rights now, and every year I'm weighing my options of playing summer league and then if I play well in summer league getting an invite to camp against coming back to Europe where I have a really good offer from a good team in Europe. There are a lot of factors that go into it. Going to summer league and going to camp there is a lot of uncertainty. Coming over here, if I get a good job offer financially, that's kind of hard to turn down."

"There are just a lot of factors, but it is definitely something I weigh every summer when I talk to my agent. We talk to Houston and kind of see where we are at. I've been in contact with them and we are going to go through the same process this summer. Hopefully, maybe I'll play summer league and go from there, but if not I think I've done pretty well over here in Europe and we'll see what kind of offers I get from European teams."

"At the end of the day I am just very blessed and thankful to be able to play basketball for a living, wherever that is. Obviously everybody has dreams and my dream is to play in the NBA, but I'm absolutely loving my time in Europe and I know my wife is. We enjoy being able to spend every day together and see the world. Being able to live in Greece your first year and live in Turkey your last three is quite an experience for us. We are very thankful for these opportunities."

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