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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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New Challenge

Warinner Takes Reins Of Ohio State Offense

By RYAN GINN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It's no secret what Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer fears most in the aftermath of championships.

The price that comes with success is complacency, but there's something even more complex that Meyer has had to deal with after each of his national championships. For a man who places heavy trust in his assistants in the film room, on the practice field, on the sidelines and out on the recruiting trail, the loss of such coaches as offensive coordinator Tom Herman and running backs coach Stan Drayton can loom large.

"I think the biggest issue is every time (you win a title), you have staff transition," Meyer said.

While Meyer still had to make an outside hire to replenish the loss of Herman, who piloted the two highest-scoring offenses in Ohio State history, his elevation of offensive line coach Ed Warinner to the vacant offensive coordinator role is the first time at OSU that Meyer has been able to promote from within.

Every other change – hiring Larry Johnson Sr. to mentor the defensive line, Chris Ash as safeties coach and co-defensive coordinator, Tony Alford at running back and Tim Beck to fill Herman's quarterback coaching duties – has come from outside the program.

"Ed Warinner is certainly deserving, experienced and well-qualified for the offensive coordinator position," Meyer said when the decision was made official on Jan. 14, the same day Ohio State announced the hiring of Beck from Nebraska. "I'm pleased to be able to promote from within our program, and I believe he is going to be an excellent coordinator for us."

All signs point to that being the case. In his three seasons at Ohio State, Warinner has developed a cult following among the Ohio State fan base for the work he's done in churning out quality offensive lines. After losing four starters from the 2013 season – three of whom went on to start in the NFL as rookies – Warinner turned a young unit into possibly his best line to date. The five starters, who never missed a game, committed a combined two holding penalties in 15 contests in 2014.

He's done the job at offensive coordinator, too. Warinner oversaw the offenses at Army from 1998-99 and Kansas from 2007-09. His Kansas offense in 2007 set a program record in yards per game (479.8) and was the second highest-scoring offense in the nation that season (42.8 points per game) as the Jayhawks finished the season with an Orange Bowl victory.

Now he'll get his third chance at running an offense. Warinner,



JOSH WINSLOW

THE ONE – Ed Warinner has fared well as the offensive line coach under Urban Meyer and now leads the entire unit as OSU's new offensive coordinator.

whom players describe as a relentless perfectionist, was asked how he'll balance the task of running the entire offense while also holding his linemen to the same high standard he's always employed. His answer came in vintage Warinner fashion.

"I just do that with everybody now," he said with a laugh.

That's right – Warinner's miracles are coming to the masses.

Balancing Duties

Warinner has had the success that he's had with the offensive line because of his demanding standards. Junior right guard Pat Elflein might be one of the best examples of Warinner's work. His first start came in the 2013 Big Ten title game as a redshirt freshman, and he handled Michigan State's talented defensive line all night.

The reason he and his fellow teammates have been so successful, Elflein said, is that Warinner doesn't tolerate mistakes on the practice field. If he sees mistakes being made, he fixes them. If they reoccur, he finds someone who will do it correctly. It's that approach that Warinner will attempt to bring to the entire offense now.

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NCAA Defeat Leaves Buckeyes With Questions

By BLAKE WILLIAMS
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With a 73-58 loss to Arizona on March 21, Ohio State failed to survive the first weekend of the NCAA Tournament for the second consecutive season.

In the grand scheme of things, that is no indictment of the program and certainly not of head coach Thad Matta, but it does leave one wondering what might be next for a program that says goodbye to five seniors and likely the team's best player in freshman D'Angelo Russell.

Ohio State has made 15 appearances in the Sweet 16, and five of them have come under Matta. The Buckeye coach has missed out on the Sweet 16 three consecutive years only one time in his career, and that came during his first three years as a head coach, his lone season at Butler and first two at Xavier. In his 11 seasons at Ohio State he has never failed to pilot a team to the Sweet 16 for three consecutive seasons.

That puts some pressure on the Buckeyes next year.

Gone will be starters Sam Thompson, Shannon Scott and Amir Williams while reserves Trey McDonald and Anthony Lee also saw their eligibility expire in the Moda Center in Portland, Ore. Russell has yet to make his intentions known, but the Buckeyes' leading scorer will likely depart for the NBA after one season as a projected top-five pick.

What's left is an extremely young roster with a lot of question marks.

"We've got a young team next year – I think we've got one junior, freshmen and sophomores," freshman Jae'Sean Tate said immediately after the loss to the Wildcats. "Just taking it from our seniors, definitely the guys that played this year are going to have to be leaders with such a young team. Just coming here in Portland just made us all hungry."

Tate entered the starting lineup in late January and started the final 16 games of the season for Ohio State, replacing Marc Loving in the five-man starting unit after the sophomore started the first 19 games. When the 2015-16 season begins, those two players will be the only ones on the roster with any starts in their Ohio State careers.

Tate averaged 8.8 points per game as a freshman while Loving tallied 9.4 each contest despite sluggish play following a three-game suspension in February. They will be the two leading returning scorers next season on a team looking to replace a lot of offense.

Kam Williams and Keita Bates-Diop will also return for the Buckeyes, but those players averaged just 14.3 and 9.9 minutes per game this season, respectively. Along with Tate and Loving they will be called on to replace departing players who logged 66.4 percent of Ohio State's minutes played, assuming Russell does not return. That will also mean the departure of 64.9 percent of the team's scoring.

"Next year we are going to have a whole new team, a whole new feel," Tate said. "More athletic and younger I think. Toughness is going to be one thing to work on, and with such young guys we're just going to have to run the system."

Next season the Buckeyes will have just one junior in Loving with three sophomores in Tate, Bates-Diop and Kam Williams. Those four will have to help guide a young team that features five incoming freshmen along with Dave Bell, who redshirted this past season, and Virginia Tech transfer Trevor Thompson.

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OPINION

Coaches Jealous Of OSU's QB Conundrum



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Charter Member

The already-taut tendons in Jim Harbaugh's square jaw probably got even tighter when the Michigan head coach learned about his Ohio State counterpart's springtime dilemma.

While Harbaugh sifts through an eight-man quarterback roster that has a combined two games of college experience, Urban Meyer enjoys an embarrassment of riches at the QB position that includes a two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year, the fifth-place finisher in the 2014 Heisman Trophy balloting and a fearless gunslinger who came off the bench to lead the Buckeyes to victories in the conference title game, Sugar Bowl and national championship game.

And that doesn't include three youngsters (Stephen Collier, Torrance Gibson and Joey Burrow) waiting in the wings, a trio that combined to run and throw for more than 25,000 yards and account for nearly 350 touchdowns during their high school careers.

Most college football coaches would gladly make any deal the devil himself could concoct for a tiny fraction of the talent Meyer has hoarded at the quarterback position. Therefore, that sound you undoubtedly heard March 24 was the collective groan of coaches around the country – probably Harbaugh chief among them – after Meyer said he was approaching a decision on naming a starting quarterback with a certain amount of dread.

"That's the only thing that's starting to eat away at me a little," the OSU coach replied to the umpteenth springtime question regarding the pecking order of Braxton Miller, J.T. Barrett and Cardale Jones. "Now that I'm seeing what I'm seeing, I have such great respect for all three guys. ... Everything is positive. Talent, quality people, value to their program, investment in their program – check, check, check, check. The only negative is (that) two people are going to have to watch."

Not necessarily.

Because Meyer is one of the best coaches of the current era when it comes to tailoring the players on his roster to fit his particular system, one has to believe that since each of the three quarterbacks brings a little different skill set to the table, Meyer will figure out a way to get at least two of them on the field at the same time.

Imagine being an opposing defensive coordinator and looking at an alignment that features Jones calling the signals in a backfield that includes running back Ezekiel Elliott and Miller coming in motion from a slot receiver position. Imagine Barrett taking a shotgun snap in an empty backfield with Miller split wide in a bunched receiver formation with Michael Thomas and Jalin Marshall. Or how about this one: Miller standing in the shotgun with Jones and Barrett on either side of him in a futuristic kind of T-formation.

The possibilities seem endless.

Of course, it's easy for the imagination to run wild with video-game style formations. When it comes down to brass tacks, however, the best football teams achieve when the quarterback position is the domain of a solitary player.

Even when Meyer won his first national championship at Florida in 2006 by utilizing the widely divergent quarterback talents of Chris Leak and Tim Tebow, there was never any doubt that senior co-captain Leak was the starter. There was also little doubt that the Gators would never have won that title

without Tebow providing a change-of-pace physicality at critical times.

No one knows how the Ohio State quarterback situation will unfold. Miller's shoulder could be better than ever after surgery or the joint might be so damaged that he can never again play the quarterback position. Barrett could rehab following ankle surgery only to find that Jones has earned the right to start based upon his magical postseason run. Or Barrett could once again pass Jones on the depth chart as he did in fall camp last season.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

There are only two things we know for sure. One, sometime in the very near future, Meyer is going to have to make a decision regarding the seemingly bottomless depth of his quarterback pool, and two, it doesn't seem the coach can go wrong no matter what he decides.

Talent Flow Keeps Going

Recruiting has always been the lifeblood of college football, and it is no coincidence that the best talent evaluators are usually the most successful coaches. But what Meyer has done in his relatively short time in Columbus is nothing short of remarkable.

Nearly any coach at any school can put together one or two stellar recruiting classes. What many college coaches cannot do, however, is put together outstanding recruiting classes year after year after year.

Today's elite high school players don't want to sit on the bench when they go to college. Therefore, they typically select a program whose environment provides them with an opportunity to play as freshmen. As a result, even the best recruiters can usually put together only one or two top-rated classes per four-year cycle.

Former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel recruited what Scout.com rated the nation's No. 3 class in 2002 and then celebrated that fall with a national championship. The following spring, with the Buckeyes fielding a roster full of young talent, Tressel managed to sign only the No. 25 class in the nation.

Former Texas head coach Mack Brown signed the nation's top recruiting class in 2002 according to Scout, a 28-player contingent that included future national title quarterback Vince Young. The following year, the Longhorns dropped to No. 14 in class rankings.

Fast-forward to what Meyer has been able to do with his four classes so far at Ohio State – No. 3 in 2012, No. 1 in 2013, No. 5 in 2014 and No. 8 this past spring as rated by Scout – and you begin to see a roster assembled not just for the pursuit of one national championship but for multiple title runs.

A good example is what has happened to the Buckeyes in terms of their defensive secondary depth. Despite the loss of All-Big Ten cornerback Doran Grant to graduation, Ohio State has more good defensive backs on its 2015 roster than nearly any team in the country. If you are not yet familiar with the likes of Marshon Lattimore, Gareon Conley, Erick Smith or Malik Hooker, you will be soon because it's not much of a stretch to believe that the Buckeyes' sec-

ond-team DBs are the second-best secondary in the Big Ten.

There are only two coaches in college football who have put together four consecutive seasons with national top-10 recruiting classes according to Scout. Is it any wonder, then, that Nick Saban and Meyer have seven national championship rings between them?

Some Final Thoughts

• Flying under the radar of the NCAA Tournament was the news that Texas had parted ways with basketball coach Rick Barnes after 17 seasons. Barnes, who was an Ohio State assistant on Gary Williams' staff for the 1986-87 season, compiled a 402-180 record with the Longhorns during a tenure that produced three Big 12 regular-season championships. Barnes and his record at Texas (which included 15 seasons of at least 20 victories) will undoubtedly be used by some Thad Matta critics who believe the Ohio State program has reached a plateau. Those critics should be careful of such comparisons, however. OSU's incoming recruiting class is ranked No. 6 in the country by Scout while Texas is nowhere to be found in the top 25.

• In case you're thinking D'Angelo Russell could pull a Jared Sullinger and return to Ohio State for one more college season, think again. With most mock drafts forecasting him to be taken by Philadelphia with the third overall pick of the June 25 draft, Russell will be Matta's latest one-and-done player. Most observers believe Russell is far from a finished product, but that won't prevent the 76ers (or the Lakers if Philly decides to pass) from making a multimillion-dollar bet that the 6-5 guard will someday become an elite NBA performer.

• Would it surprise you that Mike Conley leads all former Buckeyes in NBA scoring average this season? Through March 28, Conley was averaging 16.1 points per game for Memphis. That ranked No. 42 in the league, 17 spots higher than Sullinger, who was averaging 14.4 points for Boston before sustaining a season-ending foot injury in February. Conley was also averaging 5.3 assists per game, good for 19th in the league.

• Within days of one another in mid-March, current San Francisco 49ers and former Wisconsin linebacker Chris Borland and Michigan center Jack Miller announced they were walking away from football because of their fears regarding concussions and head trauma. Whether you believe Borland and Miller are to be commended for their decisions or you think they're looking for a convenient excuse to walk away from a game which they no longer want to play, there is growing debate regarding the physical price paid by young men for our entertainment pleasure. And no matter which side you choose, the debate is going to continue to forever change the game of football as we know it.

• Several times over the years, I have wondered aloud why Ohio State does not build a Hall of Fame and Museum to honor the nearly 400 men and women the school has inducted into its athletics Hall of Fame since the entity's 1977 inception. Now, I discover that three Big Ten schools have no halls of fame at all – physical or symbolic – to honor their former athletes. Nebraska is remedying that situation this year with its inaugural class of inductees, leaving Penn State and Illinois as the lone conference schools with no halls of fame to celebrate athletic achievement.

OHIO STATE WRESTLING



OSU MEDIA RELATIONS

PARTY TIME – Members of the Ohio State wrestling team, including head coach Tom Ryan (far left), pose with the NCAA championship trophy it won at the national meet March 19-21 in St. Louis.

Their Time Has Come – OSU Wins National Title

By JEFF SVOBODA
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Last March 23, one day after the conclusion of the 2014 NCAA wrestling championships, Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan sent a text to members of his team.

"WELCOME to the 1st Day of our National Championship season," Ryan wrote.

It's not out of character for Ryan to send such messages – in fact, some members of the team seemingly forgot that it even happened.

"He sends texts every day about the national championship," junior Kenny Courts said with a laugh.

But Ryan did remember this one when asked a year later. He was on the way back to Columbus from Oklahoma City, where OSU had finished sixth at the 2014 national meet,

and wanted his team to focus on what could be possible over the next year.

"On the way back I'm thinking, 'What's next?' " he said. "I think we were sixth – all I know is we weren't first. So how do you get to first?"

Since Ryan had taken over at Ohio State in 2006-07, the Buckeyes had been close a few times. They took a distant second to Iowa in 2008, Ryan's second season, behind championships from J. Jagers and Mike Pucillo, All-America showings from J.D. Bergman and Lance Palmer, and not much else.

A year later, the Buckeyes gave Iowa a much bigger scare but again finished second, this time by just 4½ points. Jagers repeated as NCAA champion while Pucillo and Reece Humphrey finished second and Palmer repeated as an All-American, but the Buckeyes came up just short.

Still, it looked like Ryan had the program quickly on the rise. "Second is not the standard" became the team rallying cry, and top recruits from around the nation were showing up in an effort to push the Buckeyes to the top.

But momentum stalled and – thanks in large part to injuries – just two years later the Buckeyes were eighth in the Big Ten and 29th in the nation. Ohio State bounced back to fifth in the NCAA in 2012 and sixth each of the past two seasons, but more injuries and some departures from the program left the team short of the depth needed to mount a serious charge toward a title.

So going into last season, Ryan and the Buckeyes took a realistic look at the program and made the tough choice to redshirt three key wrestlers – junior Hunter Stieber and freshmen Nathan Tomasello and Bo Jordan. The plan was to have all three ready for national title runs in 2015, a year in which star Logan Stieber would be a senior, highly recruited freshman Kyle Snyder would join the group and a number of the other veterans would provide the depth for a title push.

And then Ryan sent the text.

A year later, the plan didn't work to the letter, but it worked well enough that Ohio State captured the first national championship in school history March 19-21 at the NCAA meet in St. Louis. Logan Stieber became just the fourth wrestler in NCAA history to win the maximum of four titles, Tomasello joined him as a national champion and both Snyder and Jordan finished in the nation's top three.

Add in an All-America performance from Courts and OSU finished with 102 points, 18 clear of second-place Iowa. Ohio State led after every session and clinched the national championship before the final session even kicked off.

"It's so many emotions," Ryan told BSB a day after Ohio State clinched the win. "One of them is just joy. I'm just really happy. It's been eight years, but it's been another 13 coaching at other institutions so personally, it's been a long time. It's eight years here, and I thought we'd win it earlier.

"The other part is it's just relieving. There's

a sense of relief. In a week, it will be back to, 'We have to get another one,' but right now, I'm not there yet. I was hired to do a job and I knew we could do it and I knew we would do it, but it was just a matter of when. The when is over."

Of course, this year's plan still had roadblocks. Hunter Stieber never was healthy and could wrestle only three regular-season matches because of torn ligaments in each elbow that were extremely painful. Heavyweight Nick Tavanello, who fell just shy of All-America status a season ago, also fought through an injury-plagued season, and neither he nor Stieber could chip in any points at the NCAA meet.

Those injuries as well as an injury that kept Jordan out of the lineup during the first half of the season contributed to a dual season that was less successful than the Buckeyes expected. Ohio State lost matches to Virginia Tech and Missouri in the nonconference season and lost to Iowa at home in Big Ten action before perhaps the most shocking result, a Feb. 21 loss to No. 11 Lehigh in the quarterfinals of the NWC National Duals in the team's last match before the postseason.

Ryan admitted at the time that he never would have expected Ohio State to drop four duals during the season, but in the end, the Buckeyes felt that adversity helped the team come together when it needed to most.

College wrestling is a lot like college basketball in that what happens in March is what gets remembered, and the Buckeyes began the month by thrilling the home crowd on the way to sharing the Big Ten title with Iowa. Then came the national meet, at which the team's mettle was shown yet again with the wire-to-wire win.

"We've had a lot of ups and downs this year," Tomasello said. "I think as we've lost as a team, for me individually, it's really helped us become more humble as a team and continue to get more focused and have a chip on our shoulder. Losing at the National Duals, I think, was the best thing for us. I felt like the next two tournaments we competed our best. We just put it all together.

"I think every team has to go through



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OHIO STATE WRESTLING

adversity to find out truly what their identity is, and I think we've shown that the last couple of weeks."

With the win, the Buckeyes broke into an exclusive club. Ohio State became just the fifth program to win the national title in the past 25 years, joining Iowa (1991-93, 1995-2000, 2008-10), Oklahoma State (1989-90, 1994, 2003-06), Minnesota (2001-02, 2007) and recent royalty Penn State (2011-14).

"It means everything," Jordan said. "It's never been done before in wrestling, so to be a part of something like this and do it first is awesome."

In a way, the championship could be traced to the entire line of wrestlers Ryan has brought in since his arrival, including those who starred for Ohio State and others who have trained at the Ohio Regional Training Center, making the Ohio State wrestling room one of the most competitive in the country.

But only one group finally did enough to outpace the rest of the NCAA field over one weekend, and it now owns a national championship trophy to prove its impact.

"The first man wore a singlet at Ohio State in 1921," Ryan said. "That's 94 years ago this program started, and to think that in 2015 we win our first national championship for this institution, it's a great feeling in this state. Only five schools have won this thing since 1989, so it's been in few hands, but it's where it belongs now."

Team Effort

Most of Ohio State's points came from the five wrestlers who earned All-America status – Stieber and Tomasello as champs, Snyder with his second-place finish, Jordan with his third-place standing and Courts by earning fifth place.

For many, Stieber was the story of the tournament, as the superstar cemented his place in NCAA history along with four-time winners Pat Smith of Oklahoma State (1990-92, 1994), Iowa State's Cael Sanderson (1999-2002) and Cornell's Kyle Dake (2010-13).

He was barely challenged through the tournament as the top seed at 141 pounds, ripping his way through the bracket with four bonus-point wins before downing second-seeded Mitchell Port of Edinboro in the final, 11-5.

While Stieber's title was expected by most, the one captured by Tomasello was not. He entered the tournament as the No. 4 seed, but that meant he'd have to get by undefeated and top-seeded Alan Waters of Missouri in the semifinals to reach the top of the podium.

After starting the meet with three bonus-point wins, he did just that, using a late takedown of Waters to notch a 4-2 semifinal victory. The Parma, Ohio, native then dispatched unseeded Zeke Moisey of West Virginia by a 9-5 score in the final to earn his crown.

"It was crazy," he said. "Zeke threw everything at me, and he competed as hard as he could. We both wrestled really hard, and he did a great job. I mean, he was tough to score on. I thought he was a great opponent. I'm glad I was able to come out on top."

Tomasello improved to 33-4 on the year, notching takedowns in the first and second periods to take a 4-2 lead and the riding-time advantage into the third. He escaped early in the period to make it 5-2, but disaster nearly struck when Moisey got him in a headlock and put him on his back. However, Tomasello wriggled free before he could be pinned and added a late takedown to clinch the win.

"He's really good at getting big moves, and wrestling him throughout high school and college, I've been put on my back before with him," Tomasello said. "I knew I had to get off as quickly as I could, and I knew I'd still have

NCAA Championship Meet Results

Top 10 Team Standings

1. Ohio State.....	102
2. Iowa	84
3. Edinboro	75½
4. Missouri	73½
5. Cornell	71½
6. Penn State	67½
7. Oklahoma State	65
8. Minnesota	59½
9. Nebraska	59
10. Virginia Tech	56

OSU National Champions



Logan Stieber
141 Pounds



Nathan Tomasello
125 Pounds

OSU Individual Results (Seeds in parentheses)

125 pounds: (4) Nathan Tomasello – pinned Joe DeAngelo of North Carolina State in 2:25; won 11-3 major decision against Ben Willeford of Cleveland State; earned 16-1 technical fall in 5:25 against (12) Kory Mines of Edinboro; won 4-2 decision against (1) Alan Waters of Missouri; won 9-5 decision against Zeke Moisey of West Virginia to earn NCAA championship

133: (4) Johnni DiJulius – won 4-2 decision against Ian Nickell of Cal State Bakersfield; lost 9-1 major decision to (13) Cody Brewer of Oklahoma; won 11-1 major decision against Robert Deutsch of Rider; lost 7-4 decision to Eric Montoya of Nebraska.

141: (1) Logan Stieber – earned 18-1 technical fall against Jordan Laster of Princeton in 3:33; pinned (16) Mike Morales of West Virginia in 2:10; earned 16-1 technical fall against (9) Anthony Abidin of Nebraska in 5:31; earned 12-2 major decision against Kevin Jack of North Carolina State; won 11-5 decision against (2) Mitchell Port of Edinboro to earn NCAA championship.

149: Hunter Stieber – lost 9-7 decision to (14) Cody Ruggiello of Hofstra; took injury default against Clayton Ream of North Dakota State at 3:39.

157: (6) Josh Demas – won 7-3 decision against Mike Kelly of Iowa; lost 4-3 decision to (11) Brian Murphy of Michigan; lost 8-3 decision to (5) Cody Pack of South Dakota State.

165: (5) Bo Jordan – pinned Garrett Sutton of Michigan in 4:03; won 7-2 decision against (12) Dylan Palacio; pinned (13) Cooper Moore of Northern Iowa in 3:56; lost 6-1 decision to (1) Alex Dieringer of Oklahoma State; won 6-2 decision against (4) Nicholas Sulzer of Virginia; pinned (9) Jackson Morse of Illinois in 1:00 to earn third place.

174: (10) Mark Martin – lost 5-3 decision to Kurtis Julson of North Dakota State; won 6-3 decision against Sean Mappes of Chattanooga; lost 10-4 decision to (9) Cody Walters of Ohio.

184: Kenny Courts – won 6-4 decision against (6) Hayden Zillmer of North Dakota State; won 12-8 decision against Scott Patrick of Davidson; won 7-5 decision against (14) Matthew McCutcheon of Penn State; lost 4-0 decision to (7) Nathaniel Brown of Lehigh; lost 6-2 decision to Blake Stauffer of Arizona State; won 4-3 decision against Zillmer to earn fifth place.

197: (4) Kyle Snyder – won 12-4 major decision against Braden Atwood of Purdue; won 14-5 major decision against (13) Shane Woods of Wyoming; won 3-2 decision against (5) Scott Schiller of Minnesota; won 3-2 decision against (1) J'Den Cox of Missouri; was pinned in 4:24 by (3) Kyven Gadson of Iowa State to place second.

HWT: Nick Tavanello – lost 5-3 decision to Ty Walz of Virginia Tech; lost 6-5 decision to Brooks Black of Illinois.

one or two points of cushion so the only thing was just not getting pinned."

The fourth-seeded Snyder appeared set to win the crown at 197 when, like Tomasello, he upset top-seeded and unbeaten J'Den Cox of Missouri in the semifinals. He was more than halfway home in the title match against No. 3 Kyven Gadson of Iowa State, taking a 1-0 lead on an escape against Gadson to start the second period.

As the match ticked into the second half of the middle period, Snyder grasped Gadson's right leg and appeared set for a takedown, but Gadson wriggled free and immediately put Snyder on his back for a stunning pin that left the Buckeye having to settle for second place.

"He's just so heartbroken," Ryan said. "He was up 1-0, he clearly is controlling the pace of the match, he clearly is gaining momentum. He has the kid's leg to go up 3-0, and the next thing you know he's pinned. He wanted to be a four-time national champion, and that's off the table now."

Jordan also fell short of his goal of a title, as the Big Ten runner-up couldn't get past defending national champ Alex Dieringer of Oklahoma State in the semifinals. Seeded fifth, Jordan came back and won both matches on the final day against top-10 foes to win the consolation bracket and take third.

"The coaches got my head on straight and I beat the first guy, and they told me if I went out there and got a pin (in the placing match) it would pretty much seal (the team win)," he said. "It almost made me tear up because I did lose in the semis but had a chance to help make history for Ohio State. I went out there and got the pin, and it was one of the best feelings in the world."

Courts, meanwhile, bounced back from an eighth-place finish at the Big Ten meet. Late in the season, Ohio State adjusted Courts' training methods after some physical tests, determining some ways to get the most out of the 184-pounder.

Courts was just 22-9 entering the tournament but beat sixth-seeded Hayden Zillmer of North Dakota in sudden-victory fashion during the opening round. He reached the semifinals from there until two straight losses put him in the consolation bracket, but he bested Zillmer again with a late takedown to win the fifth-place match 4-3.

"It means a lot for me and for the team because the team stepped up for me at different parts of the season when I was really down on myself," he said. "It feels great. It's a team effort, and for me to pull through for them, it's great."

The injury-plagued seasons of Hunter Stieber and heavyweight Tavanello came to a close with two-and-done performances, though the former's efforts while dealing with intense pain in his elbows helped push the rest of the team to greatness.

"The amazing thing is despite the fact that Hunter didn't score any points, I think he inspired the entire group," Ryan said. "You've got a guy that's willing to wrestle with no arms just to score one point for his team. I think it helped the mentality of the entire team. He's one of those kind of guys."

Three other seeded wrestlers failed to match their pre-tournament rankings. Fourth-seeded Johnni DiJulius went 2-2 at 133 pounds, while No. 6 Josh Demas (157) and No. 10 Mark Martin (174) each went 1-2.



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OHIO STATE WRESTLING

Stieber Takes Place Among Ohio State Legends

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Chic. Archie. Woody. Jack. Jesse.

Messrs. Harley, Griffin, Hayes, Nicklaus and Owens – the most iconic names in Ohio State history – need no introduction. They are the ones who accomplished extraordinary things, putting Ohio State on the map with their contributions, and whose names will forever be linked to Buckeye athletics.

Now, Logan can join them.

Mr. Stieber entered wrestling immortality and put himself in the discussion for Ohio State's athletics Mt. Rushmore on March 21 when he captured his fourth NCAA individual championship, completing a quest that captured the attention of college sports and making him just the fourth wrestler to accomplish the feat.

Even sweeter, Stieber's 11-5 victory against Edinboro's Mitchell Port in the 670th and last match of the NCAA championships put the cherry on top of a dream weekend for Ohio State, which pulled away from traditional power Iowa to win the program's first national championship.

History repeated itself for Stieber, who won four titles while at Monroeville High School in northwest Ohio and led the Eagles to the school's first-ever state title his senior campaign.

"I'm extremely proud of my teammates," he said. "As an individual, to win is amazing. For the team, it's something I dreamed of ever since I came to Ohio State, and when I was a freshman in high school I dreamed of doing it in my senior year of high school. We did it and I've been dreaming of it for four years here at Ohio State, and to finally do it – unbelievable."

For head coach Tom Ryan, the individual accomplishment was so impressive it could be summed up in historical terms.

"More people have been on the moon than have won four national titles," he said. "To think that this little kid from a small farm town in Monroeville, Ohio, did what he did is pretty awesome, pretty amazing."

The Numbers

Picking the most impressive stat about Stieber is really left up to the imagination.



OSU MEDIA RELATIONS

UNBEATEN – Ohio State senior Logan Stieber capped a perfect 29-0 season by claiming his fourth individual national championship with an 11-5 championship-round victory over second-seeded Mitchell Port of Edinboro.

Over his last four years at Ohio State, Stieber earned more national championships – four – than he had lost matches – three. He never dropped a postseason match in his time as a Buckeye, and finding a more dominant wrestler might be impossible. In his 119 wins at OSU, 96 came via bonus points – major decision, technical fall or pin – and he captured this year's NCAA Most Dominant Wrestler honor.

He was still that good at this year's NCAA meet while finishing a perfect 29-0 season against the best in the country. Coming off a comprehensive 16-1 beating of Iowa's Josh Dziewa to win this year's Big Ten title, the 141-pounder at the national meet earned a first-period pin in one match and beat his other four opponents by a combined score of 57-9.

The championship match came against

the second-seeded Port, a decorated wrestler in his own right who racked up his third All-America honor. Stieber took the match to Port, earning two first-period takedowns and an escape to grab a 5-1 lead he never gave away.

Afterward, the ever-confident and never-nervous Stieber said the match unfolded just as he expected.

"The match played out how I wanted it to," he said. "I wanted to score two takedowns in the first period and then just control the match from there, score the takedown when I could and ride and get away. I got actually the opportunity to get away to end the first period because he took injury time, so it was nice. It was a nice lead, 5-1 lead, and I kept building my lead."

"It was pretty much how I expected it, how I wanted it to go."

The victory was so dominant, so assured from the early going, that it almost took the air out of St. Louis' Scottrade Center. There was no drama, especially after Port suffered an apparent knee injury in the first period, just a nearly reverent appreciation for Stieber's abilities.

"He made it anticlimactic," Ryan said. "You work so many years for this moment and it was kind of like, 'Well, he's going to crush him.' It was very quiet in there. He did it then everyone was excited, it was great, but there was a spot in there where it was like, 'Wow.'"

That ability to handle the big stage, to be supremely confident but not cocky no matter whom he faces, is one of Stieber's defining characteristics.

"That's why he owns four," his brother, Hunter, said. "Nationals is a hard tournament, and it's not just who's the best wrestler. It's about who can keep their emotions in check the entire time, and he's the master at it. He doesn't let it affect him."

Logan Stieber took a redshirt because of an injury his first season at Ohio State before proving his mettle each of the past four years. He won the 133-pound title against Oklahoma State's Jordan Oliver in 2012 then captured the same weight class a year later vs. longtime

rival Tony Ramos of Iowa. Stieber was rarely tested at 141 each of the past two years, losing just one match over those two seasons and dominating his way through both national tournaments before wins vs. Virginia Tech's Devin Carter last year and Port this year.

"It's all the hard work I've done, all the sacrifices I've made to complete one part of my dreams," he said. "I can't thank my teammates, my coaches and my family enough. It's been an unbelievable journey."

The Impact

Hunter Stieber pointed out that the Ohio State wrestling room was a good place to be when the two arrived, Logan in the fall of 2010 and Hunter a year later. The Buckeyes finished second in the nation in 2008 and '09, and recent national champions such as Mike Pucillo and J Jagers were still constants in the training room.

That was one reason Logan first pulled the trigger to become a Buckeye. There were others, as well.

"It was the easiest decision in my life," he said. "I've had to make a lot of tough decisions, whatever, but going to Ohio State, I always joke that I really committed in 2002 when they won the football title. I love Ohio State. I honestly don't know where I would go if I didn't go to Ohio State."

But while those earlier members of the Ryan era put Ohio State on the precipice of great things, the Stiebers helped push the boulder over the hill. Ryan calls it the "law of attraction," that one or two great wrestlers will help bring more into the fold, and that appears to be what happened with the Stiebers.

That's particularly true with Logan, whose early national championships showed that quick success is possible at Ohio State. Nathan Tomasello, who won the NCAA title this year as a redshirt freshman, trained with the Stiebers growing up and said Logan's earlier success played a part in his decision to attend Ohio State.

"I've learned so much from him," Tomasello said. "He's been such a great role model and leader for this team. He's really put Ohio State on the top level for a program. Going into it, he was one of the big reasons I came here, just talking to him and seeing how much he developed through this program. I wanted to do the same."

Now, Ohio State seems poised for continued success. The team boasted three freshman All-Americans this year, including a first-year champ in Tomasello, and should continue to be a national player for years to come.

"I think they're going to be a better team next year, honestly," Logan said. "We're losing a couple of seniors, but these freshmen are such great leaders that they're going to build everyone else up."

If more titles do come, Ryan will know where to give some of the credit. Stieber helped turn his theory into testimony, proving that Ohio State is a place where teams and individuals can reach the pinnacle of college wrestling.

"Logan left us in a good place, a really good place, a way better place than he found us," Ryan said. "Ultimately that's what you expect from a four-time champion, someone that is at that level. They should leave you in a better place. Then the staff has to choose the right people and the right men to bring in, but that is a lot easier when you have a guy that wins four and your team wins so there's excitement around the program."

"This is a defining moment. We're really in the glory days of Ohio State wrestling."

Continued From Page 1

JOSH WINSLOW

Warinner has shown he can bring those traits to the offensive line. Now, he'll get a chance to spread his success throughout one of college football's most prolific offenses.

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

'Slobs' Find Success On OSU's Offensive Line

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

Billy Price walked up behind Pat Elflein slowly after practice on March 26. Elflein was talking to a gaggle of reporters about the chemistry of the offensive line and the expectations of that unit for the 2015 Ohio State season. Price saw an opportunity.

He approached his line mate and went to poke him in the side while he was in the middle of an answer. Elflein feigned indignation at Price before laughing and returning to his answer.

Moments later Elflein lurked behind Taylor Decker as he spoke with reporters about how seriously he considered forgoing his senior year and entering the NFL draft after the 2014 season.

"How can I leave guys like this? We've got the slob house," Decker said referencing the nickname given to the offensive line in 2012, one that remains to this day. "How are we not going to play with each other for my senior year?"

"He's not leaving me," Elflein interjected. "I won't let him."

They were small moments following the Buckeyes' fourth practice of the spring, but they were reflective of a group of offensive linemen who know where they stand with one another and, for the most part, know where they will stand alongside one another when the Buckeyes take the field next fall.

Four starters return from the 2014 season as center Jacoby Boren joins Elflein at right guard, Decker at left tackle and Price at left guard as linemen who started all 15 games for Ohio State last season, and all of those players are entering at least their third year in the program. It's a stark contrast to the predicament the Buckeyes faced entering the 2014 season.

A year ago the Ohio State offensive line had more question marks than perhaps any unit on the roster, but in 2015, it has answers. Last year four spots along the line were up for grabs entering spring practice with Decker the lone returning starter, and he was assuming a new position, switching from right tackle to left.

This spring the linemen know where they stand with the exception of right tackle, a spot that has fifth-year senior Chase Farris as the early leader after serving as the sixth man along the line last year. That experience has fostered camaraderie within the group.

"Our room, we've got a lot of chemistry in it and it really helps with the play," Elflein said. "Coming out here every day, you're coming out here with your best friends. If you can do that, it's fun. I like coming out here. When you like what you're doing it is so much easier to get better and be here. Taylor is my roommate, Jacoby, Billy, Chase, we are all really good friends. It just makes practice easier and we love coming out here together and going to work."

With the starters largely set, Farris is battling with sophomore Jamarco Jones for the right tackle spot. Decker and Elflein, meanwhile, are not participating fully in team drills as they are both part of what head coach Urban Meyer has called the 2,000-rep club. Since both have played more than 2,000 competitive reps in games and in practice since arriving on campus, they aren't being pushed as hard in spring ball. Boren is also missing some drills as he recovers from nagging injuries.

That has opened the door for some of

the younger players, such as Evan Lisle and Marcelys Jones, to see some first-team reps. While all the linemen welcome the development of some depth, it doesn't mean those players are automatically a part of what might be the closest group on the team – the slobs.

"We're hard on the young guys," Decker said. "That's how it was for me when I was a young guy, and it got me to where I am at. They were hard on Pat, Jacoby is still hard on Billy – he doesn't take it too well – but it's all in good fun. We're just like brothers to them. Yeah, we're hard on them but we know in the end it will make them better."

Price, the youngest of the returning starters as he will be just a redshirt sophomore this fall, clearly had to earn his status as a slob and he wants to make sure the team's less experienced linemen know that it isn't easy to earn the nickname symbolic of the unit's bond, a name as much about friendship as anything else.

"You've just got to be one of the boys," he said. "You don't automatically because you're on the offensive line become part of the slobs. It's guys like freshmen like Brady Taylor, Kyle Trout, guys like that really don't understand it yet. Once you've kind of embraced the culture, that's when you get your slob title."

Last season, the slobs weren't truly the slobs until late in the season. With four new starters, the Buckeyes offensive line got off to a rocky start to the season, highlighted by the team's lone defeat, a 35-21 loss to Virginia Tech in which the line allowed seven sacks.

With more and more reps, the line grew from five individuals to one cohesive unit over the season, helping propel the Buckeyes to the national championship. Now, Ohio State must simply find a replacement for the departed Darryl Baldwin to complete the unit.

Offensive line coach and coordinator Ed Warinner acknowledged that Farris is probably the leading candidate for that role, though he spoke highly of Jamarco Jones as well. Regardless of who fills the fifth spot on the line, Warinner couldn't be happier with the devotion the players in his position group have to one another.

"I love the chemistry of those guys, they're great people," Warinner said. "I love being around them. They are part of a family that we are all a part of. Those guys are great kids, and that's why we have a great room."

Whether it's Price messing with Elflein mid-interview, Boren continuing to give the younger Price a hard time or Decker sticking around for his senior year in part because of his devotion to his fellow offensive linemen, that brotherhood is evident when studying the unit's interaction.

Last spring, the offensive linemen were on edge as they fought for positions in the starting group. This season, with four of the five spots solidified, they are comfortable in their own skin and clearly united as slobs.

"A slob isn't what you look like, a slob is how you act, it's what you are, it's what you do," Farris said. "When we go eat, we slob. When we're together in the meeting room, we slob. When we are on the field, we slob. When you slob, you slob together. There is no single slob, it's a group of slobs."



SONNY BROCKWAY

STANDING TALL – Ohio State offensive linemen such as tackle Taylor Decker (68) were a big reason the Buckeyes won the inaugural College Football Playoff.




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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Linebackers Look To Remain Hungry Group

By MARCUS HARTMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In only two years the Ohio State linebackers have gone from a group that was constantly questioned to one whose coach has to work on ways to make sure they don't get too comfortable.

Yes, it would seem things have come full circle for Luke Fickell, the Ohio State defensive coordinator and linebackers coach who was known for churning out great linebackers year after year – until he wasn't.

Fickell took over mentoring the linebackers in 2004 and had an All-America performer in each of his first five seasons. There was at least one Buckeye linebacker named to the All-Big Ten first team in six of seven seasons from 2004-2010, too, and the group was often known for its depth beyond the standout performers such as A.J. Hawk and James Laurinaitis.

But from 2011-13, the refrain could have been, "We've got Ryan Shazier, so let's hope they run here." An All-Big Ten pick in 2012 and '13 and an All-American the latter season, Shazier was a tackling machine, but he did not get much help. He also was known to get out of position at times, leaving the defense more susceptible to giving up big plays.

His best support came from a converted fullback (Zach Boren) in 2012, and concerns began to reverberate through Ohio State fandom that Fickell had lost the touch that turned out not only Hawk, Laurinaitis and Brian Rolle but Bobby Carpenter, Marcus Freeman and Ross Homan throughout the second half of the previous decade.

Ohio State signed 11 linebackers from 2011-13, but Shazier was the only one to do anything that resembled the type of player Buckeye linebackers had been known to be, something head coach Urban Meyer lamented on more than one occasion.

Then came 2014, when a returning starter evolved into a stalwart, a senior stepped up and a redshirt freshman came out of nowhere to become one of the team's biggest playmakers.



JOSH WINSLOW

STEPPING UP – Former top-50 recruit Raekwon McMillan (5) is projected as the lone new starter at linebacker this fall, taking over at middle linebacker after the graduation of Curtis Grant.

Those players – Joshua Perry, Curtis Grant and Darron Lee, respectively – played no small part in helping the Buckeyes win their first national championship since 2002, and now two are left to try to carry the mantle forward and make sure it is left in good hands when they are gone.

How do they do that? By forgetting all they accomplished and remembering what it was like to be a hungry up-and-comer.

"We've got to find a way to create some discomfort so they can continue to grow," Fickell said. "That's one of the things about that never satisfied attitude. We're always going to push and push. What it comes down to is what they truly believe in their head. That's what we're working on. You have to understand how you got to where you are and what you had to go through."

That figures to be easier for some than others, Fickell reasoned, because while the youngsters on the roster have known only success, that is not true of some of the veterans.

Perry endured some ups and downs as a first-year starter in 2013 before becoming the team's leading tackler last year with

124 stops. A former five-star recruit, Grant arrived on campus with huge expectations that were not met in his first three seasons, but he made 69 stops and helped function as a stabilizing force in the middle last year even as younger players got more attention.

Then came Lee, a redshirt freshman a year ago who came seemingly out of nowhere after signing with the Buckeyes as a low four-star recruit who primarily played quarterback and safety in high school. He made 81 tackles last season, including 16½ for loss and 7½ sacks.

Perry and Lee are back with championship rings and a group of youngsters to bring along, including a highly regarded sophomore in Raekwon McMillan.

The two veterans joked they have taken to calling McMillan, who played quite a bit last season and ended up with 54 tackles in 14 games, "The Chosen One."

The Georgia native tolerates the moniker, but he admitted it is not his favorite.

"It's kind of a joke to make me laugh about it, but it's getting old now," McMillan said. "It is what it is."

His coach said he doesn't mind because he knows what kind of relationship the trio has overall.

"It's good for him," Fickell said. "There are a lot of things these guys do that make this unit very special. They humble each other. They can get on each other, and that creates a tighter bond."

Perry explained the ribbing of McMillan is just meant to make sure he does not get complacent because it appears the middle linebacker spot is his to lose following Grant's graduation.

"We've just got to make sure he's pushing

himself and we're all pushing him and that he doesn't try to put too much on his shoulders to the point it slows him down because we know what Curtis brought to the table, and that was a lot of great leadership and the enthusiasm for the game," Perry said.

"Raekwon brings a lot of the same things, it's just not as boisterous sometimes. So that's one thing we're both going to have to step up in that role to be able to do that."

The pair of veterans knows it will need to rely on the youngster to play a big role on defense this season, and he sounds ready.

"Coach Fickell puts trust in me as the Mike linebacker to have everybody around me in the right position, the right spots," McMillan said. "Just being out there on the field, I have to be the coach on the field like Curtis Grant was last year for us. Just being out there as the Mike, you've got to make sure everything's right."

"The guys beside me, Joshua and Darron, they put trust in me all the time, so when we're on the field I feel like those guys trust me so anything I say we'll all be on the same page and work together. Coach Fick wants all three of us to work together on the field."

He described his freshman campaign as "decent." While McMillan appeared to be on the verge of taking over as a starter near the middle of the year, Grant ended up getting the lion's share of the reps down the season's final stretch.

"Toward the end of the year, Curtis was getting more of the reps in the game because he was playing better and he was practicing better," McMillan said. "So my reps fell off at the end of the season. At the beginning of the year, I felt like I was practicing harder because I was working my way up. But I have to keep that up now and work harder."

To make sure McMillan does not feel like he has the job in the bag, Fickell mentioned trying different lineup configurations, including perhaps trying Perry in the middle.

The coach and the veteran linebackers also mentioned sophomore Dante Booker, who was Ohio's Mr. Football two years ago at Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary, has had a good spring so far and could end up pushing for playing time.

"Athleticism, aggression – just kind of a freak skill set," Perry said when asked to describe what Booker brings to the field. "Those are all things he's learning to harness right now and be able to play. He does a great job of being aggressive. He's done a great job, too, of learning the game a lot more because that's something all young guys struggle with."

"A big thing for him is just playing under control and confident. He's done that this spring. He's going to be an exciting guy to watch because any opportunity he gets he's kind of freakish to watch."



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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Buckeyes Bounce Back From Lackluster Practice

By BLAKE WILLIAMS
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After its first two practices of the spring, the Ohio State football team took a week off as the university went on spring break. It showed when the Buckeyes returned for their third practice of the season March 24.

"It wasn't a great day," head coach Urban Meyer said following the practice, acknowledging that the week off could have had an impact.

"I don't like excuses, but I'm sure there is (an effect). It was awful today. I go to tackling and just watched and was like, 'Is this the same team that had the fewest missed tackles in college football (last year)?' So there are reasons and we can come up with excuses, but the bottom line is today's Tuesday. Thursday better be better."

By all accounts it was.

The first hour of practice March 26, the fourth day of spring practice and second following spring break, was open to the media. While those observing had nothing to compare the effort to as March 24's practice was closed, those competing said they felt a difference.

"The big thing I felt today is that there was a lot more energy," left tackle Taylor Decker said. "I just felt energy. There were guys yelling, screaming and having fun. With that I think the level of play will rise."

"The thing that they are going to stress is our effort. They know that a ton of mistakes are going to be made, but they just want to see the effort."

As they have since the start of spring football March 10, the Buckeyes got things started early in the morning, beginning with stretching at 8:30 a.m.

The injured players, including quarterback Braxton Miller, participated in stretching before being limited to varying degrees throughout the remainder of the open practice. Miller did not participate in any throwing activities while the media was observing and left the field after stretching, presumably to work on his rehab. That behavior matched Meyer's comments two days prior that indi-

cated the team was dialing back Miller's participation as a precaution.

Fellow injured quarterback J.T. Barrett, however, participated quite a bit in practice March 26. The quarterback is recovering from a broken bone in his ankle but was still able to throw alongside Cardale Jones and Stephen Collier, though his mobility was limited and he wasn't exposed to any full-team scrimmaging or drills.

"J.T. is good," Meyer said. "He's doing more than I thought. I thought he would be much more limited, but he is getting every 7-on-7 rep."

Barrett did throw an interception in a goal-line 7-on-7 drill as the ball was popped up in the air and picked off by safety Erick Smith on a crossing route. That came two throws after Jones tossed a pick to starting safety Vonn Bell.

Data Collection Influences Plan

More than ever before, Meyer and his staff are monitoring every conceivable piece of data on players. As a result, the team is limiting the spring action of the 2,000-rep club – players who have taken at least that many competitive reps in practice or in games – in order to give those players rest.

That meant that offensive linemen Decker and Pat Elflein, linebackers Josh Perry and Darron Lee, and defensive linemen Joey Bosa and Adolphus Washington were among those to sit out many of the team reps during practice March 26. Instead those players participated in individual skill work. Perry and Lee worked with Bosa and Washington on pass-rushing drills while sitting out team reps.

With Decker and Elflein getting added rest and Jacoby Boren nursing injuries, the first-team offensive line looked very different than it is expected to look when the season starts this fall. Jamarco Jones filled Decker's left tackle spot with Billy Price at left guard, Marcelys Jones at center, Evan Lisle at right guard and Chase Farris at right tackle.

While Decker wasn't fully participating, he was one of the players sporting a heart rate monitor during the practice.



KEVIN DYE

MOVING AROUND – Curtis Samuel (4) caught passes from wide receivers coach Zach Smith (left) during Ohio State's March 26 practice.

"It monitors your heart rate, your heart-rate recovery, how fast you're breathing, stuff like that," Decker said. "I'm a science experiment around here."

Notes

- Curtis Samuel, who was the No. 2 running back during much of the 2014 season, spent the entire hour that was open to the media practicing with the wide receivers. With Ezekiel Elliott dealing with a wrist injury, that left juniors Bri'onte Dunn and Warren Ball to take all the snaps at running back.

"He's a guy we're trying to evaluate as

a playmaker," offensive coordinator Ed Warinner said of Samuel. "We think he's very talented. You've got to get your playmakers on the field. He has good hands, can run routes, so his role could be a lot of different places."

- After watching the field-goal kicking unit, Meyer seemed most engaged with the defensive line, even pulling members of that unit aside individually to give notes.

- While Barrett and Jones were in black, non-contact jerseys, Collier was in a live-action scarlet jersey for practice.



KEVIN DYE

DISPLEASED – Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer (right, foreground) did not like how his Buckeyes practiced March 24.

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COVER STORY

Good Recruiting Class Could Boost Buckeyes

Continued From Page 1

That leaves a lot of uncertainty for the Buckeyes next season as Matta hopes to guide the team back to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2013. The last time the coach was dealing with a two-year Sweet 16 drought was in 2010 when he was returning a strong junior class featuring Evan Turner, Jon Diebler, Dallas Lauderdale and David Lighty along with reigning Big Ten Freshman of the Year William Buford.

The Buckeyes will not have the luxury of that many older players next season, but the returning players they do have were able to get some valuable experience in the NCAA Tournament.

Tate started both tournament games for the Buckeyes, recording a total of 60 minutes while scoring 19 total points and hauling in 12 rebounds, second on the team in the two games. It was enough of a taste of March Madness to get the Pickerington, Ohio, native eager for more.

"I'm ready right now," he said in the post-game locker room. "Just to develop, to work on my game, to come to the second round made me even more hungry."

Tate wasn't the only freshman to gain valuable experience. Bates-Diop played just five minutes against the Wildcats, but he more than got his feet wet in the Buckeyes' tournament-opening win over VCU.

Bates-Diop took just two shots in the tournament, and both came against the Rams. The lengthy freshman nailed both of them, a pair of threes that would go a long way

toward making sure the Buckeyes weren't one and done in 2015.

His first three helped send the game to overtime, giving Ohio State a 62-60 advantage with 3:36 remaining. His second ensured that the Buckeyes got the win.

Confident after nailing his first try, Bates-Diop caught a pass from Scott in rhythm on the right wing, right in front of Ohio State's bench with the score tied midway through overtime. The freshman drilled the shot, giving the 10th-seeded Buckeyes a 71-68 lead that they wouldn't relinquish over the final 2:34 of overtime as they held on for a 75-72 win over the seventh-seeded Rams.

"I mean NCAA Tournament, first game, overtime," Bates-Diop said, smiling ear-to-ear in the locker room after the win. "This is a big game. That's what we ask for."

"It's a lot of pressure, but we practice those shots every day in practice. You have to clear your mind, shoot it and make the shot."

Bates-Diop was quiet in the 15-point loss to the Wildcats, but he will have the positives from the win over the Rams to take with him into his second season in Columbus, the highlight of an up-and-down season in which many expected more from the five-star recruit and 24th-ranked player in the 2014 class.

Loving and Williams played 41 and 12 NCAA Tournament minutes, respectively, but both will be expected to play significantly next season and bolster the Buckeyes' scoring. The good thing for them and the Ohio State program is that they won't have to do it alone.



SONNY BROCKWAY

BIGGER ROLE COMING – Freshman Jae'Sean Tate (1) started both of Ohio State's NCAA Tournament games and could be a key player for the Buckeyes next season.

Help Is On Way

While the Buckeyes say goodbye to the senior class and likely to Russell, the program welcomes in a five-man recruiting class currently ranked the sixth-best group in the country by Scout.com.

"It's a class that helps restock the cupboard and brings in a lot of talent," Scout national recruiting analyst Brian Snow said.

The talent starts with four-star point guard Jaquan Lyle, the 42nd-ranked recruit in the country. The Evansville, Ind., native is finishing his high school career at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy and chose the Buckeyes in large part because of the number of minutes that will be available in his first season on campus.

"The opportunity to come in and play right away and have the ball in my hands, to me it is the best situation for me," Lyle told Snow. "You have D'Angelo probably leaving, which he should, then you have Shannon Scott leaving and Sam Thompson leaving, and they are losing most of their ball handlers, so the opportunity is there for me to come in right away and also play with great players coming in as well as who they have returning."

As Lyle pointed out, the Buckeyes will have to rely on the incoming class to do the bulk of the ball-handling next season. Williams is the best returning ball handler for Ohio State, but he is certainly not a point guard.

At 6-4 Lyle is probably better suited to defend college shooting guards than quicker point guards, but he could certainly start for the Buckeyes next season. The team's other point guard option is fellow four-star recruit A.J. Harris, a Dayton Dunbar prospect who stands just 5-9. Lyle's size and ability to play off the ball may lead to those two freshmen playing alongside one another.

The program's other four-star reinforcements include shooting guard Austin

Grandstaff, center Daniel Giddens and small forward Mickey Mitchell.

Grandstaff is the highest ranked of those three at 48th in the nation. He is one of the best high school shooters in the nation, further along in that regard than Diebler – the Buckeyes' all-time three-point leader – was as at the same stage of his career, according to Matta.

Giddens, meanwhile, will compete with Thompson and Bell for the starting center position, and the 6-10 big man may step on campus as the favorite. Expected to be a defensive presence immediately, Giddens will likely have to bring his offensive game along more slowly.

"I think with Daniel Giddens, you're looking at a tremendous athlete with great toughness," Matta said. "I've seen him dominate basketball games with his defense and his rebounding and his shot blocking. Just watching him from when we first started recruiting him to where he is today, his skill level just continues to grow."

Mitchell is the only member of the class not ranked in the top 100 nationally, but Matta said he likes what the 6-7 forward brings to the table as a passer, operating as something of a point forward at times. The Texan, however, will have to fight for minutes as he enters a forward rotation that will already include Tate, Bates-Diop and Loving.

The Buckeyes didn't want to be back in Columbus contemplating the 2015-16 season after just two games. Matta and his team surely harbored ambitions to play deeper into the NCAA Tournament than they did, but that dream came to a resounding end at the hands of Arizona in Portland.

Now, it's time for the remaining members of the team to pick themselves up and work with a talented incoming group to attempt to end Ohio State's current drought of postseason success.