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Vol. 35, No. 20

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 16, 2016



First, At Last

JOSH WINSLOW

ATOP THE CHART – Ohio State's junior quarterback J.T. Barrett (16) had never been the team's starter in spring practice before 2016.

Barrett Unquestioned As Ohio State's Top Quarterback

By RYAN GINN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For the first time in his college career, Ohio State junior quarterback J.T. Barrett is alone at the top.

Although he arrived as a heralded true freshman out of Wichita Falls, Texas, it's taken three years for the depth chart to sort itself out to the point where the starting job unquestionably belongs to him.

Barrett sat out 2013 as Braxton Miller and Kenny Guiton lorded over center. He had to beat out Cardale Jones in 2014 following an injury to Miller, but even as he put together a magical season, many still viewed the job as Miller's upon his return to health. And then Barrett went down and the rise of Cardale Jones forced a nearly season-long battle last fall for the right to direct the OSU offense.

But now Miller and Jones are gone, and Barrett is not. He's coming off a 42-13 thrashing of Michigan and a 44-28 walloping of Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl. This spring is the first time in his career that he's known the starting job belongs to him and that nothing short of an injury can displace him. Backup quarterback Joe Burrow is heralded in his own right, but Barrett realistically won't be challenged for the job.

That security could lead to either confidence or complacency, but offensive coordinator Ed Warinner said Barrett is driven enough to push himself to be better even when he's not fighting for playing time or practice reps.

"We look at it as he's a veteran quarterback who's played a ton of games here, and he needs to lead this football team and improve his game and continue to evolve his leadership and himself as a player and make others around him better," Warinner said. "He's self-motivated, so whether he's the heir apparent or not doesn't really matter to him. He's going to work his tail off no matter what."

That's nothing new for Barrett, who as a high schooler at Wichita Falls Rider impressed his head coach, Jim Garfield, with his work ethic. Garfield told BSB that in various points of Barrett's prep career, he didn't notice any difference in the righthander's preparation and practice intensity whether he was directing the first-team offense or playing with the backups.

"If he was running the No. 2 offense or if he was running the No. 1, you were never going to see any

difference," Garfield said. "That was probably the one big thing that made us so successful when he was in high school. He brought that attitude and everyone else just fed off that."

"If you're a class 5A Texas quarterback or one of the best college quarterbacks in the country, I think there's always room to grow. Whether it be improvement in his speed, or film or reading coverages, everybody has to improve. The game is changing every year, and you've got to be able to stay up on that."

Quarterbacks coach Tim Beck, heading into his second season of working with Barrett, said he's seen no issues with Barrett's effort to keep improving. Although much of that comes from within, Beck noted that having to practice against Ohio State's hyper-aggressive defense doesn't really give Barrett a chance to sit back on his heels.

"The biggest thing with those guys is the internal drive for them," Beck said. "The expectations here are to be the best in the country – not just to

Will Smith
1981-2016



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OPINION

Basketball Transfers Not A Bad Thing For OSU

The ink was barely dry on my BSB column defending Ohio State men's basketball coach Thad Matta when the radical departures of Daniel Giddens, Micky Mitchell and A.J. Harris were announced. Together with Austin Grandstaff – remember him? – that meant four of the five-member freshman class Matta signed just last year were suddenly former Buckeyes.

The exodus also begged a question. Shouldn't I be embarrassed by such an ill-timed column in support of a coach who had obviously lost control of his program?

Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather than the four departures signifying a loss of control, I believe the transfers by the aforementioned players are signs of a coach exercising firm control of his program.

I'll explain that in a minute. First, however, let's discuss what the OSU program lost in the four players who decided the grass is greener somewhere other than Columbus.

Grandstaff was the first to leave, moving on in mid-December despite having played in each of Ohio State's first 10 games. According to his father, however, when the Rockwall, Texas, native didn't get the number of minutes he thought he deserved, he decided to pull the ripcord on his freshman season.

There were no such pronouncements by Giddens, Mitchell or Harris as to their transfer rationale. Giddens even told reporters following the team's second-round NIT loss to Florida that he was looking forward to putting in the hard work needed to return Ohio State basketball to an elite level.

"Basically this summer is going to decide where the program is going to go," Giddens said. "Either we're going to bring it back to the glory days when (Jared) Sullinger and Lenzelle (Smith Jr.) and those guys went to the Final Four or it's going to be another year of NIT. We're planning for a national championship run over here."

Let's be honest. The four players leaving the program don't exactly represent the latest incarnation of Sullinger or Smith.

Grandstaff averaged 4.4 points and 0.3 rebounds during his 10 games of action and failed to record a single assist. Giddens played in 33 games and averaged 3.8 points and 3.6 rebounds while committing a team-high 108 fouls. Mitchell missed the first 10 games of the season while awaiting his NCAA eligibility to be cleared and then averaged 2.0 points and 2.8 rebounds in 23 games. Harris averaged 2.8 points and 1.7 assists in 35 appearances.

All told, the four players combined for a grand total of 317 points, a figure that amounts to only 12.9 percent of Ohio State's scoring. Conversely, the quartet managed to commit 31.4 percent of the team's fouls as well as 22.0 percent of its turnovers despite combining to average only 20.9 percent of the overall minutes played.

There was also an undercurrent of malcontent that seemed to permeate the program, a problem that began early in the season and manifested itself with back-to-back losses to the likes of UT-Arlington and Louisiana Tech, teams that finished the season with respective RPI rankings of 107 and 129. It wasn't just the losses that were difficult to swallow; it was the effort (or lack thereof) the Buckeyes displayed in those games. Inexperience is one thing but laziness is another, and those two performances ushered in what would become one of the most painful seasons to watch in recent history.

The argument can be made that the team improved from those first missteps, but with the exception of that out-of-nowhere victory against Kentucky in mid-December, the

Buckeyes never seemed to hit on all cylinders at any time during the season. That was especially true during a Big Ten schedule (including the conference tournament) that included 12 victories by an average margin of 9.7 points and eight losses by an average of 18.5 points.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

There was evidently some dissension in the ranks as well, although we'll probably never know how much and whether it manifested itself team-wide or was confined to a few individuals.

Grandstaff's father confirmed that his son and Matta didn't exactly see eye-to-eye when it came to basketball fundamentals such as playing defense, blocking shots, rebounding – basically anything other than shooting.

"I didn't watch Ohio State play enough before we committed," Wes Grandstaff told Cleveland.com writer Bill Landis in December. "If I knew that (Marc) Loving and (Keita) Bates-Diop were going to be the two and three, we probably wouldn't have went there. Do I think Austin can score the ball like they can? Absolutely. But they do a lot of things like blocking shots and rebounding that Austin doesn't do."

"(Ohio State) taught him a lot on and off the court. They demanded that he play defense, and he became a much better player. I really believe Coach Matta and his staff made him a lot better of a player than he was when he got there. But guys want to play."

And therein lies the problem. Many guys want to play regardless of what that means in terms of the team dynamic, and that's usually what separates those guys from the unselfish ones such as Villanova senior guard Ryan Arcidiacono. He's the four-year captain who gave up the ball and made a subtle move to block off a potential defender so that teammate Kris Jenkins could take the buzzer-beating shot that won the national championship for the Wildcats.

I don't know Grandstaff personally nor have I ever met Arcidiacono, but I know which one I'd rather have on my team.

And that brings me to the explanation I promised about Matta exercising control.

Rather than believing the transfer of four players represents a coach who has lost control of his program, I think Matta perhaps saw the writing on the wall and didn't particularly like what he saw. Perhaps he suggested to certain players that significant playing time was not going to be in their immediate future.

It's not like the program hasn't seen its share of transfers during the Matta era. Remember Eric Wallace, Anthony "Noopy" Crater and Walter Offutt? How about Jordan Sibert and J.D. Weatherspoon? A couple of those players went on to productive careers elsewhere, but it became clear during their time in scarlet and gray that they did not fit in the framework of what Matta was trying to accomplish. Likewise, better days may or may not be on the horizon for Grandstaff, Giddens, Mitchell and Harris.

In the end, though, it really doesn't matter whether those players bolted the program of their own accord or were nudged in the direction of one of the Schottenstein Center's many exit doors. None of them appeared to be a vital part of the future of Ohio State men's basketball.

Senseless Tragedy

The number of Ohio State athletes I have covered over the years numbers into the thousands, but only a handful are as memorable as Will Smith. He was soft-spoken and articulate as well as one of the most tactical and ferocious defensive ends in program history.

I can still remember how Smith and his defensive teammates schooled a supposedly impenetrable Miami (Fla.) offensive line and continually abused quarterback Ken Dorsey during the 2002 national championship game. Three-time All-American Mike Doss was named defensive MVP of that game, but the award just as easily could have gone to Smith, who set the tempo early by sacking Dorsey on the Hurricanes' first offensive play of the game.

If you leaf through the "Legends and Greats" portion of the Ohio State Football Media Guide, you won't find a profile of Smith although you probably should. He was a team co-captain in 2003, the same year he earned first-team All-Big Ten and first-team All-America honors as well as being named Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year.

Smith went on to become the first-round selection of the New Orleans Saints in 2004, anchoring the team's defensive line for eight seasons and winning a championship ring in 2009 when the Saints beat the Indianapolis Colts in Super Bowl XLIV. During his time with the Saints, Smith was a team captain, and according to multiple sources, whenever head coach Sean Payton had a problem in the locker room, he would seek out Smith and the problem would get resolved.

Smith remained active in his hometown of Utica in upstate New York as well as the New Orleans community where he chose to remain following his retirement from the NFL. And that is also where he lost his life, shot dead April 9 in an apparent road rage incident following a minor traffic accident in the Lower Garden District of New Orleans.


In the hours following the news of Smith's death, countless fans, former teammates and coaches took to social media outlets to offer condolences to Smith's family, but I was struck by the fact that precious few of the posts expressed outrage that another productive life had been snuffed out much too soon due to gun violence.

According to police records, the alleged shooter was arrested in 2010 for illegally carrying a weapon, a case that dragged through the courts until 2014 when he pleaded guilty to reduced charges and received a suspended six-month jail sentence. Twenty-seven months later, he ran his Hummer H2 into the back of Smith's Mercedes SUV, exchanged words with the former NFL Pro Bowler and then whipped out a handgun and shot Smith dead, wounding Smith's wife in the process.

Senseless doesn't even begin to describe Smith's death, but senseless is usually the word I use to describe such acts in a society that long ago stopped caring about the body count produced by firearms, the number of which in circulation far surpasses the U.S. population.

Just as with mass shootings at Virginia Tech, the Washington Ship Yard, Fort Hood, Sandy Hook Elementary School and countless others, I realize that Will Smith's senseless death is not going to change the mind of anyone who reads the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and interprets it as meaning any 7-year-old has the right to own an Uzi.

I also realize just how disingenuous that kind of interpretation is for a country that supposedly prides itself on the value of each and every human life.



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Charter Member

Buckeye Great Will Smith Shot Dead In New Orleans

What started as a minor traffic incident ended in a tragic death.

Following a car accident around 11:30 p.m. on April 9, former Ohio State All-American and New Orleans Saints star defensive end Will Smith was shot and killed in the Lower Garden District in New Orleans. Smith, 34, died on the scene, and the shooter remained on the scene and was arrested by New Orleans police.

Smith, who remained in New Orleans after his NFL career ended following the 2014 season, had spent the day at the French Quarter Festival, an annual event in the city, according to his Instagram account. The former Buckeye star and his wife, Racquel, then went to dinner at Magazine Street with former NOPD officer Billy Ceravolo, former Saints teammate Pierre Thomas and a sports agent, according to CNN.

Shortly after leaving the restaurant, Smith's Mercedes was rear-ended by a Hummer driven by Cardell Hayes. According to the police report, Hayes, 28, and Smith "exchanged words" before Hayes fatally shot Smith in the back and right torso while he sat in the drivers seat. Racquel Smith, 33, was shot in the right leg. She was hospitalized and recovering after surgery to repair the gunshot wounds.

Hayes never left the scene and was booked on second-degree murder charges early the next morning with bond set at \$1 million.

Prior to his time with the Saints, Smith was a star for the Buckeyes, helping power Ohio State to the 2002 national championship and earning All-American honors as a senior in 2003. He finished his college career with 45½ tackles for loss, good for fifth all-time, and his 22 sacks ranked sixth in Ohio State history.

Former Ohio State assistant coach Bill Conley helped recruit Smith, a native of upstate New York, and was horrified by the tragedy.

"Shocked and heartbroken," Conley told BSB of his feelings. "He was one of those guys, a great leader by example. He carried himself well in everything he did. Look at what he did for the people of New Orleans down there. He genuinely cared about other people and really drew the respect of everyone he came into contact with."

"First of all he was a real pleasure to recruit, just a class young man. He was a guy that when he came on his official visit, everyone just fell in love with him. Just top-notch in every way, shape and fashion. He was a coach's dream, and we never had any issues with him off the field or in the classroom or anything."

Conley said Smith, who served as a captain both for the Buckeyes and the Saints, should be remembered first and foremost as a leader by example.

Smith was one of three Ohio State players drafted in the first round of the 2004 NFL draft, selected 18th overall by the Saints. He played 10 seasons in New Orleans, earning a Pro Bowl nod in 2006 and helping the Saints win Super Bowl XLIV over the Indianapolis Colts to end the 2009 season.



COURTESY OF OSU ATHLETICS

ALL-TIME GREAT – Former Buckeye defensive end Will Smith (93) was an All-Big Ten and All-America selection, a team captain and a national champion during his time at Ohio State.

"We are devastated and saddened by Will's tragic and preventable death due to a senseless act that will leave a lasting scar on our community forever," Saints owners Tom Benson and his wife, Gayle, said in a statement. "Will was more than an exceptional football player. He was a father, a husband, a son, a brother and teammate to so many and an inspiration to countless more."

The former Buckeye stayed in New Orleans with his wife and three children after his playing days were over, founding the Where There's A Will, There's A Way charity that mentors at-risk children in Louisiana and upstate New York. Smith indicated on his personal website that he was interested in becoming an FBI agent, putting to use the criminology degree he earned from Ohio State in 2005.

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer never coached Smith but was still impacted by the loss of a great Buckeye and spoke about it with his team before practice April 11.

"Luke Fickell sent me a text," Meyer said. "Coach Fickell knows him as well as anybody. I believe I met him. He was very unassuming, didn't expect the world to stop when he walked in the room – just a wonderful guy and all that, wonderful family. We had a moment of silence and lifted up his family in prayer this morning. Just tragic."

Hayes, meanwhile, appeared with his lawyer, John Fuller, in Orleans Parish magistrate court April 11 with Fuller indicating that the incident was not the tragic case of road rage that it appeared.

"My client was not the aggressor, in terms of the behavior that happened after the accident," Fuller said according to nola.com. "My client is of the opinion that toxicology should be conducted of all the parties involved in this incident, and that would shed some light on the behavior of some of the participants."

Hayes filed a lawsuit against the city of New Orleans and six police officers a decade before the incident with Smith after police fatally shot his father. Ceravolo, whom Smith dined with at Magazine Street, was one of the officers named in the suit. According to CNN, authorities are investigating if that lawsuit, which sought \$4 million, is connected to the murder of Smith. There is no indication that Smith and Hayes knew each other prior to the incident.

Hayes also pleaded guilty to illegal possession of a weapon and possession of drug paraphernalia in 2014, though the case stemmed from a 2010 incident. He received a suspended sentence of six months.

Regardless of the exact circumstances surrounding the event, the shooting death of a former Ohio State and New Orleans football star who was heavily involved in the community and well-respected by his coaches and peers came as a shock.

"He was always out to help other people," Conley said. "It's just a shame that he was getting ready to start his second career, giving to others, and to be cut down like that is an absolute shame."

– Blake Williams

Next, Meyer transitioned into a week of calm. No practices were open the week of April 4 as the head coach was looking for more focus from his team.

"Last week was about chaos, you had 3,000 students in there the entire time screaming, yelling and we on purpose try to create certain environments," Meyer said April 5. "I'll probably shut down practice for everybody Thursday and Saturday this week because I want to. We have to get better right now. We still have a hard time putting together our depth chart."

"There's a theme to every week that we do around here. The first one is install, then spring break. The next one is first to normal and just getting used to practice. Last week was creating as much chaos as we could throughout the week of practice to watch kids respond. Then this one because of where we are at just shutting it all down and finding out. We have to make some hard decisions coming up here."

\$42M Stadium Renovations Slated To Begin In 2017

Just two years after Ohio Stadium renovations expanded the south stands, Ohio State announced plans for another face-lift for the Horseshoe.

The university announced plans for a \$42 million, four-year renovation project that will restore and recoat concrete in C-deck, upgrade power systems, upgrade B-deck to improve seats with obstructed views and add 12 luxury suites and 35 loge boxes. Construction on the project, which is still subject to approval from the university Board of Trustees, will begin in 2017.

"We knew we had to get some of this done to avoid future erosion of the concrete in C-deck," athletic director Gene Smith said. "At the same time, we have a number of fans who have been asking for more and more upgraded seating options. We see this as a great opportunity to accomplish both."

Some seats in B-deck, Smith admitted, are "less than ideal" as sightlines are disrupted by the pillars holding up the stadium's top level. The efforts on that level of the stadium will include improved lighting, larger televisions, an improved sound system and better scoreboards. That construction will start on the stadium's east side and spill out from there, the athletic director said.

"This is in response to concerns that people have shared over the years," Smith said. "There's places where people can't see the scoreboard. We're trying to address that issue."

The construction will be completed in phases from 2017 until 2020 and will slightly reduce the capacity of the stadium by the time it is finished, though the estimated Ohio Stadium capacity when the project is finished will still be higher than it was prior to the 2014 expansion. The current capacity for a football game is 104,944, and the athletic department projects that the new plan

will reduce it to 102,854, 525 more than the Horseshoe's 2013 capacity.

Construction during the 2018 season will make some seats unusable and will cost the university an estimated \$1.8 million in revenue. Those losses, however, are expected to be recouped through the more costly suite and loge seating which will be completed for the 2019 season. The significant waiting list for the stadium's current suites makes the university confident that selling the new luxury seating will not be an issue, Smith said.

Ohio State is also confident that the loge seats will be unique in Ohio Stadium and that they will be attractive options for Buckeye fans.

Smith acknowledged that the renovations will also pay dividends in the university's concerted effort to bring concerts and other non-football events to Ohio Stadium. The suites located near the south end of the

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COVER STORY

Barrett Gives OSU Stability At Quarterback

Continued From Page 1

be the best in the Big Ten, it's to be the best in the country. So you challenge them with that all the time.

"And you go against a great defense every day. There are great players on the other side of the ball. If they don't come to compete every day, they're not going to do well. It's not going to be a good day for them."

In some ways, though, it's been hard to gauge Barrett's improvement through spring practice because of the losses sustained by the offense. The Buckeyes are missing four of their top receivers, and the offensive line is breaking in a pair of young tackles and is also limiting the reps for starting guard Billy Price to minimize his wear and tear.

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer said it's not ideal that Barrett (who wears a black noncontact jersey in practice to protect him) is facing more pressure than usual while throwing to unfamiliar receivers. However, Beck tried to turn the increased degree of difficulty into a positive.

"Listen, anybody can play quarterback when it's sunny and 70, 7-on-7," Beck said. "Even I look good doing 7-on-7, you know what I mean? But what happens when guys are hitting you and the pass rush is coming and it looks like dragsters coming at you? How do you handle that? I was really pleased. Joe's done a nice job with it. Same with J.T."

Added Barrett: "I think the main thing is control what you can control. I think that's something that Coach Beck helps us out



JOSH WINSLOW

KEY PLAYER – Quarterback J.T. Barrett (16) is one of just three offensive starters returning for Ohio State in 2016.

with. Like, yes we know we've got young guys in and young receivers and all this. Those are I guess excuses that you want to make for yourself, but that's not the point of it. The point of it is trying to get better as a quarterback."

Even though Barrett and the Ohio State offense would have benefited from a spring with healthier playmakers and a more experienced offensive line, his presence still beats the alternative. Miller was unable to practice in the spring of 2014 following shoulder surgery, and Barrett and Miller both missed spring practice in 2015 because of health problems. This is the first time since Meyer's

second spring in Columbus that he has a chance to work with the presumed starter in spring drills.

"It's invaluable, and I'd put Pat Elflein in that same category," Meyer said. "If you were trying to break in a new quarterback and a new center, you're probably not – you have no shot. The fact that you have some stability, when you think about when we did have some injuries in 2014, like our quarterback spot, to throw J.T. in there, if you had a new center and

new offensive line, that wouldn't have been fair. The fact that those two guys are back, we have a shot and I think we have a decent shot to be good on offense. It's really mostly to do with those two guys coming back."

There's also finally some continuity in the offense now that Warinner has settled in as the offensive coordinator who will coach from the booth and Beck is now in his second year coaching Barrett. Given time to adjust, Garfield said, Barrett is better than most when it comes to adapting to different teaching styles.

"J.T.'s probably more of a chameleon than most kids because he can really adapt to a lot of different situations," Garfield said. "He was a member of the band and a member of the basketball team, so he's had to adapt to very different coaching styles. J.T. can adapt to any style of coaching."

As the Buckeyes came down the final stretch of spring practice, Barrett was just glad for the chance to finally be able to spend a spring in control of his role on the team with an eye on improving as an individual.

"I just want to keep on building mentally, being more of a student of the game and helping myself in that aspect," he said. "I think I'm heading in the right direction. I don't believe I'm where I want to be or where I need to be, but I think it's one of those deals – you just take it a day at a time and that's all I'm trying to do."

2016 AGONIS PERSON OF THE YEAR

MR. CLARK KELLOGG

Let Us Honor Him



GOLF OUTING & BANQUET

Please join The Agonis Club, its proud members and past OSU greats as we honor OSU Legend Mr. Clark Kellogg as our 2016 Person of the Year On Monday May 23rd, 2016 at The Medallion Club.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Running Back Could Be By Committee In '16

By **TIM MOODY**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Tony Alford arrived at Ohio State in the spring of 2015, he didn't have to worry about who the workhorse in the running back room would be.

Sure enough, in Alford's first season as the Buckeyes' running backs coach, Ezekiel Elliott powered his way to 1,821 yards and 23 touchdowns on the ground while his backup, Bri'onte Dunn, carried the ball just 14 times for 91 yards and a score. Heading into 2016, Elliott is off to the NFL, leaving Dunn – a fifth-year senior – and redshirt freshman Mike Weber as the only scholarship running backs on the roster who were in Columbus last season.

Behind Dunn and Weber is early enrollee Antonio Williams, but there's no guarantee any of those three players will become an Elliott-esque feature back who receives a majority of carries.

"Will we get to that point? I don't know," Alford said.

That sort of one-back system has become the norm in recent seasons, first under Stan Drayton with running back Carlos Hyde and then Elliott leading the way, then under Alford with Elliott continuing his assault on opposing defenses. The last time Ohio State didn't have a 1,000-yard rusher was 2011, when starting running back Dan Herron was suspended for the season's first six games.

If it does come down to having a committee of running backs splitting carries, Alford said he won't have any problem adjusting.

"If we need to, absolutely," Alford said. "We're going to do whatever it takes to win football games. If it's by committee, it's by committee. If it's not, it's not."

Alford went on to stress that running backs at Ohio State have to be complete players. To use Elliott as an example, he excelled as a ball carrier between the tackles and to the outside, as a pass blocker and as a pass catcher.

Even if Dunn, Weber and Williams aren't all excelling in each of those areas just yet, Alford said they have to strive for that kind of complete game every day in practice.



PHOTOS BY TIM MOODY

FRESH FACES – Redshirt freshman Mike Weber (20) and early enrollee Antonio Williams (3) are both vying for playing time at running back this season.

"The one thing we have to make sure that we're doing is that everyone always has to be preparing themselves to be complete football players," Alford said. "They can run, they can catch, they can block, they can run routes, they can cut block, they can run block, they can pass block, they can do it all. That's part of the preparation and how you go to work every day."

Alford noted that Weber excels in pass protection while Dunn has taken a leadership role in the running backs room and Williams has displayed the tendency to be a perfectionist on and off the field.

To look at each back individually, there simply might not be a feature player in that group – this season at least – meaning the Buckeyes could revert to techniques head coach Urban Meyer employed at Florida and his other early coaching stops. Before he arrived in Columbus, Meyer had never had a running back rush for 1,000 yards in a season.

"When we had Carlos Hyde and then Zeke Elliott, at Florida I didn't have those guys," Meyer said. "You know, we had to create running with some other guys."

Meyer finished that statement off by saying he expects to see Ohio State's H-backs – including Dontre Wilson and Curtis Samuel, who played as a running back during his freshman year in 2014 – more involved in the running game this year. He noted that Wilson and Samuel have worked with the running backs this spring, though neither is fully healthy.

But even if Meyer hinted that he expects something closer to a committee than a feature back next season, someone still has to take the

first snap when the Buckeyes open their 2016 campaign against Bowling Green on Sept. 3.

Meyer is on record saying he hopes Dunn rises to the occasion, but the former five-star recruit said he doesn't want that pressure to get to him.

"It's not pressure," Dunn said. "When he says that, I listen but at the same time I stay focused and keep working on everything that I've got to work on, that Coach Alford says I've got to work on. I watch film and want to fix my mistakes quick."

There's no telling just yet if Dunn will fulfill his coach's hopes and start against the Falcons or if he, Weber or Williams will emerge as a lead back this season. The one thing for sure in Alford's running backs room this spring is that Elliott is gone and the current Buckeye backs have a chance to make an impact – whether it be as a committee or not.

"It's their turn to play, and they better step up and play," Alford said. "It's my job to get them ready as the unit leader. Those guys are hungry to play ball, too. It is what it is. It's time to go."



Bri'onte Dunn

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Defensive Line Moving On Without Bosa

By **BLAKE WILLIAMS**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

When the conversation turns to the Ohio State defensive line, there's one player everyone wants to talk about and he's not even on the roster anymore.

Such is life in the shadow of Joey Bosa. The two-time consensus All-American concluded his Ohio State career following the 2015 season, leaving a year of eligibility on the table to likely become a top-five pick in this spring's NFL draft. His departure hasn't stopped the Bosa chatter around the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. If anything, the prospect of finding a replacement for the defensive end – who in three years amassed 50½ tackles for loss and 26 sacks – has only increased the talk.

"My philosophy is you don't try to replace them, you just try to find a guy to raise their game to the next level," said defensive line coach Larry Johnson. "If you can get a guy to raise the bar a little bit, you're good. I think the talent is there. I think the talent is there, they want to be really good and that's special. As a coach I try to get them to raise their game, and that's what I'm working on right now."

That message was delivered not just by Johnson but also by the individual players tasked with filling Bosa's role in the starting lineup when the defensive linemen spoke to the media April 7. No one is expected to step in and be Joey Bosa for the Buckeyes next season, and luckily for Ohio State, if players simply play to their own capabilities, the team could be all right.

Ohio State does return Tyquan Lewis, who started at defensive end opposite Bosa last season and finished with a team-high eight sacks, but the North Carolina native is sitting out spring practice as he rehabs from offseason shoulder surgery. In his absence, Sam Hubbard and Jalyn Holmes have been working at end with the first-team defensive line. Those two are clearly capable – Hubbard exploded onto the scene last year with 6½ sacks in a reserve role after transitioning from safety early in his Ohio State career, while Holmes registered one sack in limited time as a sophomore – but the expectations that come with the



TIM MOODY

NEW-LOOK LINE – Defensive linemen Sam Hubbard (left), Tracy Sprinkle (center) and Jalyn Holmes (right) worked together in drills during practice March 22.

Ohio State first-team defensive line aren't easy to meet.

"It's been a bit of a challenge just because of the youth we have on the defensive line," Hubbard said. "Tyquan recovering from his surgery, we don't really have much experience coming out this spring. We have really had to lean on guys like Tracy (Sprinkle) and Jalyn and myself to get the young guys going and

show them. It has been a challenge, but we are making progress that we are happy with.

"I used to watch the older guys, and now the younger guys are watching me so I can never take a play off. Finding the motivation to come out every day and lead the way is the hardest thing to do, I think."

While finding that motivation this spring may be difficult, things are also expected

to be harder on the returning defensive linemen next fall. In addition to Bosa, the Buckeyes lose a trio of interior players in two-year starter and future NFL draft pick Adolphus Washington as well as starter Tommy Schutt and dependable reserve Joel Hale. All of those losses led head coach Urban Meyer to call the defensive line "the area of most concern in our program."

Complicating matters further is the fact that Bosa is no longer around to occupy multiple offensive linemen. No. 97 was certainly keeping offensive coordinators up at night as they tried to draw up ways to limit his impact, and without him on the field teams will instead scheme for the likes of Hubbard and Lewis.

The departure of a great player such as Bosa will not change what the Buckeyes are trying to do schematically, Johnson said, adding that his unit will have to lean on each other to be successful.

"Tyquan is back – we're going to have to protect him a little bit and then hope Sam and Jalyn can come in and change the pace and then Tracy Sprinkle on the inside, so they can't (double-team) too much," the coach said. "Obviously it benefited last year because Tyquan played really well. Hopefully this year going in there will be another guy with a chance to let go.

"I think that's why you build a front four, you don't just build one guy. You build a front four so everybody has a job responsibility so if they take this away, this guy has got to add to the value of what we're doing. That's what happened last year – they take

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Joey away and Tyquan was running loose. You can't do both, so somebody is going to have the freedom to do something inside because you can't double-team everybody on the line of scrimmage."

As Ohio State's spring practice winds down, the Buckeyes are still formulating that front four with hopes of rotating freely on the defensive line, a philosophy that Johnson has had throughout his career but that the Buckeyes truly began to implement only last season.

As part of that rotation Lewis, Hubbard and Holmes are expected to lock down the edges with the help of younger players such as early enrollee Jonathon Cooper and Bosa's younger brother, Nick, who will join the team in the summer.

Both Cooper and Nick Bosa come to the Buckeyes after standout prep careers and with high expectations in their first year of college.

"(Cooper) has come a long way, and this is the best thing for him. He's grabbing it really good. He's a really smart player, so the sky is the limit for him," Johnson said, adding that even though the younger Bosa has yet to arrive on campus he is "in our thought process" when figuring out the defensive line rotation.

While the expectations are high for the two freshmen, the pressure is greatest on Hubbard, Lewis and Holmes as they work to replicate what Bosa brought to the table over his three history-making years in the program.

Holmes said he knows no one defensive end is going to replace Bosa, even if that's all anyone wants to talk about.

"I get that so much, man. You really can't

replace him," Holmes said. "He's Joey, I'm Jalyn. Sam is Sam, Tyquan is Tyquan. So we've just got to go hard every day and work on fundamentals. We're going to make a name for ourselves and fill our own shoes."

DT Search Continues

While the questions surrounding Ohio State's defensive ends seem to be about how good those players can be, the interior Buckeyes are plagued by the question of if they can be good at all.

Johnson is replacing both of his starters on the inside, including a player who contributed seven tackles for loss and four sacks in Washington. The leading contenders to fill the interior void are Michael Hill, Donovan Munger and Sprinkle as those three occupied the defensive tackle spots during the Fiesta Bowl while Schutt and Washington were unavailable.

Hill is expected to fill the thankless role of nose tackle for the Buckeyes, a position whose job it is to take up blocks and free up the defensive end and the 3-technique defensive tackle to rush the passer. At 6-3 and 295 pounds, he seems well equipped for the job.

"He's the force inside, big guy inside, can take on the double team and that's what we want inside so the other guys can go free," Johnson said. "That's his job and he does it really well. He's having a really good spring."

Johnson has options for the other defensive tackle spot and for filling out his rotation along the interior, and nearly all of them came into the program as defensive ends.

Sprinkle was once an outside player, and Ohio State has also moved redshirt freshmen Dre'Mont Jones and Jashon Cornell to the inside. Those decisions, Johnson said,



JOSH WINSLOW

FIGHTING FOR TIME - Donovan Munger (52) could be a factor at defensive tackle in 2016.

was in part because of the need at defensive tackle but also because those players' traits made them a fit in the interior of the line.

"I felt that when we recruited them that they were defensive ends but you knew they were going to be big," Johnson said. "You take a quick guy like that and move him inside, he gets all those one-on-one blocks. So you've got a chance for a guy to really play end while playing on the inside, and that's a bonus for us and what we do defensively."

"You always have to fill the need first, and these guys really fit what we're looking for."

Johnson added Sprinkle's biggest asset was also pass rushing from the inside, a skill he showed in spot duty toward the end of last season.

Like the rest of the Ohio State defensive line, Sprinkle knows that things will be harder in 2016 without Bosa constantly drawing double and sometimes triple teams, but the junior thinks his unit is up to the challenge.

"It makes it kind of fun because we're a bunch of no-name guys and guys that people may not be used to so we just want to go out there and attack and make a name for ourselves," Sprinkle said. "Joey started off and they didn't know who he was, so you start off and you keep making plays and making plays and it brings more attention to you."

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