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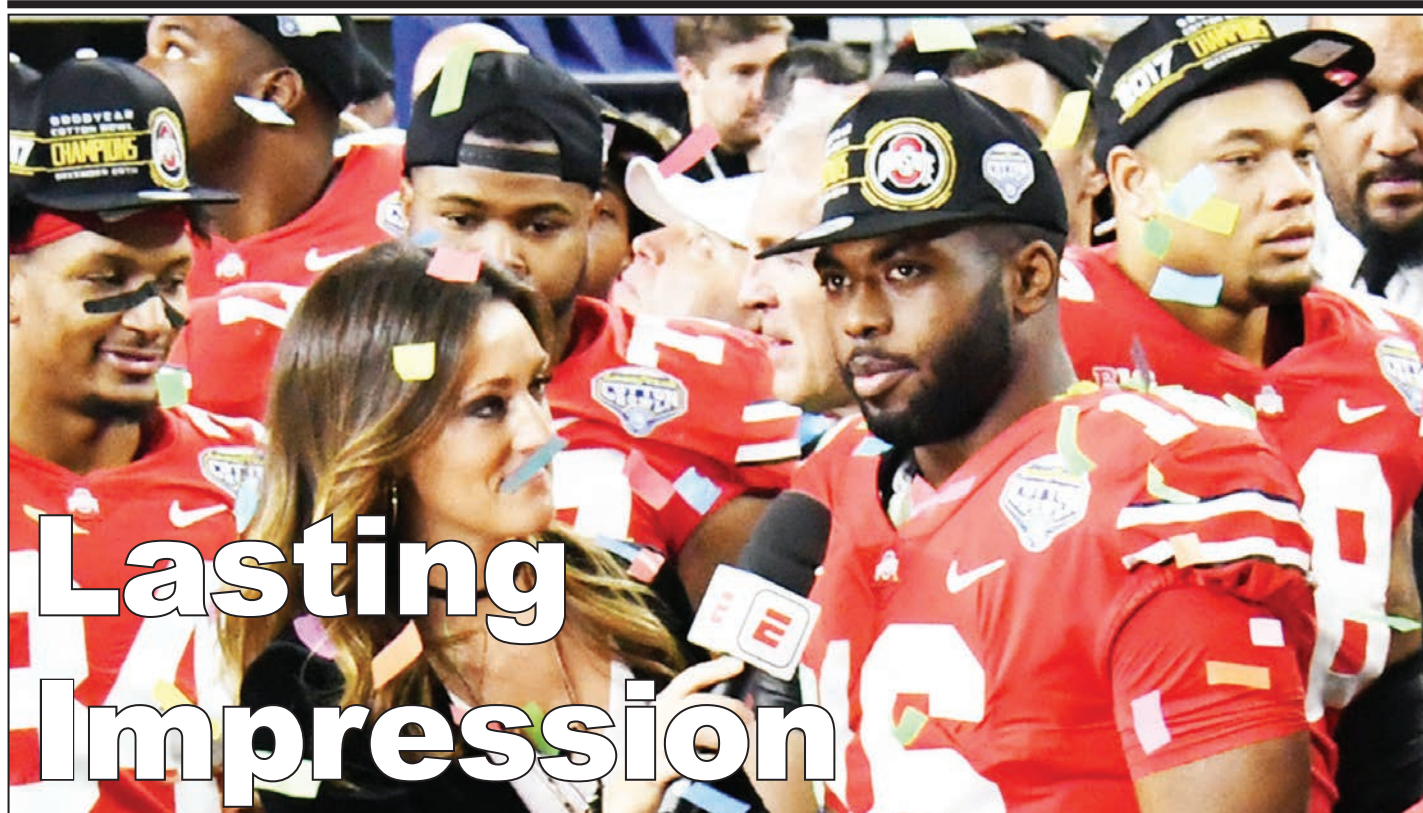
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Vol. 37, No. 14

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Jan. 20, 2018



SONNY BROCKWAY

**ONE LAST WIN** – Fifth-year senior quarterback J.T. Barrett (16) led Ohio State to a Cotton Bowl win over USC in his final collegiate game.

## *2017 OSU Senior Class Caps Decorated Tenure As Cotton Bowl Champs*

By RYAN McGLADE  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's 24-7 Cotton Bowl victory over No. 8 USC in Arlington, Texas, on Dec. 29 did more than end a seven-game losing streak to the Trojans that dated back to the 1974 Rose Bowl. It did more than secure a top-five finish in the Associated Press poll for the 2017-18 college football season. It did more than improve the Buckeyes' record to 4-1 against top-25 competition in 2017.

It culminated the illustrious careers of 19 seniors, including seven fifth-year players.

The 2017 senior class leaves Ohio State with a national championship and two Big Ten titles. The 12 fourth-year seniors depart with four pairs of gold pants representing the 4-0 mark against Michigan while the seven fifth-year seniors walk out with five medallions. The former contingent of seniors went 49-6 as Buckeyes, and the latter experienced 61 wins to just eight losses while donning the scarlet and gray.

Needless to say, some of Ohio State's most successful years in program history have occurred over the past four or five seasons. It also goes without saying that no one is prouder of the latest group of outgoing seniors than head coach Urban Meyer.

"We just had every senior say a few words," Meyer said after the Cotton Bowl. "And I can't get enough of those guys. They're everything that you want

in a young person. They lead the team. They live right off the field. And, obviously, they're winners. They won a lot of games here, and they're champions. We just had a lot of not very many dry eyes in the locker room."

Of course, one of the most, if not the most, prominent figures in the 2017 senior class is fifth-year veteran quarterback J.T. Barrett. As a redshirt freshman in 2014, he was thrust into the starting role less than two weeks before the season started after Braxton Miller went down with a season-ending shoulder injury. Barrett guided the Buckeyes to a 10-1 mark that year before breaking his ankle in the Michigan game. Cardale Jones finished off the 42-28 win over the Wolverines and led OSU on its magical postseason run to a national title.

Jones and Barrett then shared playing time the following year before Jones was taken by the Buffalo Bills in the fourth round of the 2016 NFL draft, thus opening the door for Barrett to regain sole possession of the starting quarterback duties the last two seasons.

In the four years he played, Barrett broke countless school and conference records. The Lone Star State native put a Texas-sized stamp in the history books in the Cotton Bowl when he became the Big Ten's all-time leader in total offense with 12,697 career yards. He surpassed the previous record of 12,692 set by former Purdue quarterback Drew Brees from 1997-2000. With a pair of touchdown runs, Barrett also set the single-season school record for

Continued On Page 8

## OPINION

## Meyer Must Adjust To Changing Times In CFB

I can't believe I'm thinking this much less committing it to the written page, but at the tender age of 53, Urban Meyer is in serious danger of watching the ever-evolving game of college football pass him by.

Like many of you, I watched the College Football Playoff national championship game as Alabama head coach Nick Saban rolled the dice by changing quarterbacks at halftime and then watched that decision pay off when freshman Tua Tagovailoa threw for three touchdowns, including the game-winner in overtime, to lead the Crimson Tide to a 26-23 victory against Georgia.

Also like many of you, one thing popped into my head while watching Saban flash a Cheshire cat grin as big as AT&T Stadium: Would Meyer have pulled a struggling J.T. Barrett in favor of redshirt freshman Dwayne Haskins in a national championship game?

We'll never know, of course, but that doesn't stop us from conjecturing as to the answer, and I think we all know what that answer is.

Meyer developed a deep and abiding loyalty for Barrett as the Ohio State quarterback racked up a program-record number of victories, yardage and touchdowns. But loyalty can sometimes become a double-edged sword, and it is difficult to imagine any scenario – discounting injury – where Meyer would have benched Barrett.

There is little doubt in my mind that Saban and Meyer are the best college football coaches in the game today. Their respective records speak for themselves as do their impeccable recruiting successes year after year.

But while Saban appears more than willing to adapt to changing tides, whether from year to year or within a game itself, Meyer appears to have become comfortable with the expediency of doing what has worked in the past. And while it's difficult and borderline foolhardy to take exception to a six-year record at OSU that includes a division title every year, one national championship and a .940 winning percentage in regular-season conference games, there seems to be something missing.

While Barrett was setting and resetting new program records each week, it kind of got lost that 2017 was supposed to be the season when Ohio State became the most feared offense in college football. Kevin Wilson, who coached a Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback at Oklahoma and then turned a founding Indiana program into a potent offensive machine, came in as offensive coordinator while quarterbacks coach Ryan Day also joined the staff armed with a résumé that included coaching receivers at Boston College the last year current Atlanta Falcons QB Matt Ryan was in Chestnut Hill.

What transpired, however, was a slightly different version of the same quarterback-run oriented offense the Buckeyes have been using since Braxton Miller took his first snaps as a freshman in 2011.

Ohio State averaged 41.1 points and 506.0 yards per game this past season, its best totals since the 2014 national championship run, but Barrett was still called upon to run the ball 165 times, second only to freshman tailback J.K. Dobbins, who had 194 carries.

Barrett also threw the ball 371 times, and completed 64.7 percent of his attempts, a single-season best for the three-time captain. But there were times during the season when Barrett appeared anything but accurate, and that was especially true in

the games after he sustained a knee injury against Michigan.

Despite leading the Buckeyes to victory against Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game and against USC in the Cotton Bowl, Barrett completed only a combined 23 passes on 43 attempts (53.5 percent) in those two games for 325 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions, including one pick-six.

EDITOR'S  
NOTEBOOK  
Mark Rea

That included a decidedly pedestrian performance in the Cotton Bowl when the Buckeyes utilized their withering defense to smother USC while the offense appeared to be something ripped from the pages of the Jim Tressel playbook. OSU generated zero points and only 94 yards in the second half against the Trojans – not exactly numbers one might expect from what was purportedly going to be an offensive juggernaut.

## Who Takes Over?

But now Barrett has exhausted his eligibility, paving the way for Haskins to take over under center next year.

Or will he?

The strong-armed redshirt freshman from Potomac, Md., seemingly fortified his standing as Barrett's heir apparent after coming on in relief of the injured starter and engineering a come-from-behind victory against Michigan. Haskins completed 6 of 7 attempts for 94 yards in that game and looked pretty cool, calm and collected while doing it.

And yet, if you listen to some of the whispers emanating from Ohio State preparations for the Cotton Bowl, you might get the idea there will be open auditions for the starting quarterback job during the spring.

With Haskins and junior-to-be Joe Burrow (if he doesn't transfer) more of the classic, drop-back passers, it would be prudent to remember that throughout his head coaching career, Meyer has seldom employed that kind of quarterback as his starter.

Dating back to Josh Harris at Bowling Green and Alex Smith at Utah, Meyer has typically tailored his offensive attack around a mobile quarterback who can run with the football. During his first national championship season at Florida, Meyer stayed with Chris Leak as his starter, a holdover from the Ron Zook era. But while Leak had some mobility, he still had to share playing time with then-freshman Tim Tebow, a quarterback in a linebacker's body who went on to win the 2007 Heisman Trophy a year before giving Meyer his second career national title.

Therefore, there seems to be little doubt that Tate Martell will get every chance this coming spring and fall to become Meyer's latest mobile quarterback. Observers have swooned over Martell's playmaking ability, describing him as "a Johnny Manziel type without the baggage."

The 5-11, 205-pound Martell, who redshirted this past season, was a perfect 45-0 as a starter at Bishop Gorman High School in Las Vegas and enjoyed a prep career that featured such eye-popping numbers as 2,362 yards and 41 touchdowns passing and

1,257 yards and 21 TDs rushing during his senior season.

With Dobbins returning next season, and apparently Mike Weber as well, the Buckeyes should not have to rely too much on their quarterback to run the football. Likewise, with an ever-improving receiving corps that features Parris Campbell, Austin Mack, Terry McLaurin, Binjimen Victor and Johnnie Dixon, it would seem prudent to feature a quarterback who can sit in the pocket, plant his back foot and throw darts all over the field.

Just don't assume that means Haskins will be that quarterback.

## Some Final Thoughts

• I guess I don't have a problem with the new wave of college players deciding to skip their team's bowl game to protect their NFL draft stock. It was, however, strange to say the least that Ohio State cornerback Denzel Ward went through all of bowl practice only to decide to sit out the Cotton Bowl. I'm left wondering if Ward felt a tweak somewhere during the week before the game and decided not to leave anything to chance.

• What I do have a problem with was OSU defensive end Sam Hubbard being allowed to participate in Senior Tackle. Hubbard, just a junior eligibility-wise, knew he was headed for the NFL early, and he was granted a chance to participate in one of Ohio State's most cherished traditions – a tradition heretofore reserved only for seniors. I have nothing whatsoever against Hubbard and appreciate his contributions to the OSU program. But no ifs, ands or buts about it – he should never have been allowed to participate in Senior Tackle.

• What a difference a coaching change makes. The Ohio State men's basketball team has shown a kind of intensity under first-year head coach Chris Holtmann that was seriously lacking during the end of the Thad Matta era. As a result – plus the return of Keita Bates-Diop, who missed all but nine games last year with a stress fracture in his left leg – the Buckeyes were the surprise team of the Big Ten and perhaps all of college basketball through mid-January.

• On the women's side, OSU senior Kelsey Mitchell eclipsed another career milestone Jan. 13 during her team's 77-62 win at Indiana. Mitchell, already Ohio State's all-time leading scorer, pushed past the career 3,000-point mark, becoming only the 13th player in NCAA history to reach that plateau. The all-time leading scorer in women's college basketball history is another Kelsey – Kelsey Plum of Washington, who totaled 3,527 points during her career from 2014-17.

• Although he had no official connection to Ohio State, longtime ABC broadcaster Keith Jackson provided the call for many memorable Buckeye victories over the years, including the 2003 Fiesta Bowl against defending national champion Miami (Fla.). For my money, though, Jackson – who died Jan. 12 at the age of 89 – was at his best during a double-overtime basketball thriller against Indiana in 1991. As the Buckeyes closed out the win, while analyst Dick Vitale breathlessly uttered his usual babbling nonsense, Jackson signed off with a simple, "Double overtime. Ohio State 97, Indiana 95. I would assume you enjoyed it." We enjoyed it almost as much as we enjoyed listening to that distinctive Georgian drawl every Saturday afternoon in the fall. Keith Jackson represents a bygone era that will never be seen again, and like that era, may he rest in peace.



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Charter Member



## COVER STORY

# Meyer: Barrett Has Open Invite To Coach At OSU

Continued From Page 1

touchdowns responsible for in a season with 47, eclipsing the 45 he accounted for in 2014.

"I love him," Meyer said of Barrett, who ended his Ohio State career with a 38-6 record as a starter. "He's a member of the Meyer family, as I've said many, many times. He's a legend at Ohio State, and he'll go down as one of the winningest quarterbacks ever to play here and go on his endeavors and go do whatever he's going to do. But know he has a home at Ohio State for the rest of his life."

Meyer went on to say that he'll have a spot on his staff reserved for Barrett, should he ever get into coaching.

"I know he says he doesn't want to coach, but I'm not done trying to get him to coach because he should do that," Meyer

said of the first three-time captain in OSU history. "He should be in a position someday. I know he's going to go play in the NFL and that might be his platform, but he should be in a position someday. God made a special guy there, a very unique guy. And he's got a skill set that I haven't come across very often."

Barrett set the school record for total yards in a season during the Cotton Bowl as well. He completed 11 of 17 passes for 114 yards and ran for 66 yards on 16 carries for 180 yards of total offense against the Trojans, pushing his season total to 3,851 total yards and edging the 3,772 he compiled in 2014.

"It's been a blessing," Barrett said of his OSU career. "I'm very grateful for everybody that's been a part of my dream here at Ohio State. I can't say thank you enough as far as the mentors, the family members, peo-

ple from church. I mean, everybody's been a part of my life to help me through this journey – coaches, my teammates that were here tonight and then people I played with in the past. There's so many people to thank. I'm just very grateful for those people. They made me who I am."

While Meyer expressed his unending gratitude for everything Barrett gave as

member of the football team, the head coach also recognized what the other 18 seniors sacrificed over the last four or five years.

"Respect is not given," Meyer said. "Respect is earned. And at a place like Ohio State, what those kids have done not only for our football program – just think about the way they act, the way they behave,

## Ohio State's 2017 Senior Class

Name	Position	Hometown
J.T. Barrett	Quarterback	Wichita Falls, Texas
Marcus Baugh	Tight End	Riverside, Calif.
Stephen Collier	Quarterback	Leesburg, Ga.
Trevon Forte	Defensive Back	Youngstown, Ohio
Elijaah Goins	Wide Receiver	Concord, N.C.
Cin'quan Haney	Defensive Back	Dayton, Ohio
Jackson Hayes	Linebacker	Dublin, Ohio
Michael Hill	Defensive Line	Pendleton, S.C.
Jalyn Holmes	Defensive Line	Norfolk, Va.
Jamarco Jones	Offensive Line	Chicago
Tyquan Lewis	Defensive Line	Tarboro, N.C.
Billy Price	Offensive Line	Youngstown, Ohio
Clay Raterman	Safety	Dublin, Ohio
Nick Seme	Defensive Line	Wadsworth, Ohio
Erick Smith	Safety	Cleveland
Tracy Sprinkle	Defensive Line	Elyria, Ohio
Zach Turnure	Linebacker/Fullback	St. Louis
Damon Webb	Safety	Detroit
Chris Worley	Linebacker	Cleveland

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## COVER STORY

the way they represent the great state of Ohio and Ohio State University. Not just the football program, the university. I love those guys."

Joining Barrett as members of the 2013 class departing the program this year are defensive end Tyquan Lewis, center Billy Price, linebacker Chris Worley, defensive tackle Tracy Sprinkle, tight end Marcus Baugh and defensive tackle Michael Hill. The rest of the scholarship seniors were safety Erick Smith, safety Damon Webb, left tackle Jamarco Jones and defensive end Jalyn Holmes as well as former walk-ons Elijaah Goins (wide receiver) and Zach Turnure (linebacker/fullback), each of whom earned scholarships ahead of the 2017 season. The remainder of the 19-player senior class included a group of well-respected walk-ons and former quarterback Stephen Collier, who was a student assistant within the program after ending his career early due to injury issues.

## Delayed Reaction

During the half hour the Ohio State locker room was open to the media after the Cotton Bowl, many seniors were asked if it had hit them that their time as a Buckeye was complete. A handful of them, including Barrett and Holmes, admitted it would take a couple of weeks for reality to take hold.

Holmes said no longer being in the team's group text message is when he would begin to understand that his playing days at Ohio State were behind him. He added that he would fully comprehend that the Cotton Bowl was his last game as a Buckeye when he would not be required to

be at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center at 6 a.m. this offseason for mat drills, which are grueling workouts strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti designs that have featured tug of war between two players using a rope



Jalyn Holmes

or tire, push-ups, sit-ups and other rigorous exercises.

"I'm not going to be in the group message anymore," Holmes said after the game. "They're going to move on, and I'm not going to be at the team meeting that's going to be in two weeks. They're going to be doing mat drills, and I'm going to be asleep. That's when it's going to hit me."

Holmes, a product of Lake Taylor High School in Norfolk, Va., played in 49 games during his four-year Ohio State career. The 6-5, 270-pounder recorded 84 tackles, five sacks, 14 tackles for loss, three forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries during that time. He also was a key member of Ohio State's Rushmen package primarily used when opposing offenses are in obvious passing situations. Against USC, he had four tackles, including one sack, and a forced fumble.

Barrett echoed Holmes' thoughts, saying that not participating in winter workouts is when he would totally grasp that his time as an Ohio State quarterback has come to an end.

"I think it will (hit me) when we get back to Columbus or in two weeks when Coach Mick asks people to go in the weight room for offseason workouts and I'm not going," he said. "I think that's when it's going to sink in. It's been a great time."

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—Urban Meyer  
Head Football Coach,  
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# Buckeye Defense Shuts Down Prolific Trojans

It was no secret the Ohio State defense had a tall task in its Cotton Bowl matchup Dec. 29 with No. 8 USC in Arlington, Texas. Understanding that Trojans quarterback Sam Darnold was deadly when given time in the pocket but susceptible to mistakes if hurried, the Buckeyes knew they had to get after him.

## GAME NOTEBOOK

### Ryan McGlade & Garrett Stepien

That's exactly what they did.

Ohio State (12-2) swarmed to eight sacks, fueling the 24-7 victory over USC (11-3). Fourth-year junior defensive end Sam

Hubbard, who later declared for the 2018 NFL draft, led OSU with 2½ sacks. The defensive line was responsible for seven of the eight sacks.

"We've got the best D-Line coach in America, and he had them ready to rock and roll," Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer said of position coach Larry Johnson. "You saw what I saw. I mean, if you don't let (Darnold) set his feet, you have a chance. You saw at the end of the game that quarterback never set his feet."

Eight sacks were the most Darnold was brought down in a game all season. Notre Dame got to him for four Oct. 21.

"We just kept going," said senior defensive end Jalyn Holmes, who sacked Darnold once. "I feel like we just didn't stop getting after him. He's a great quarterback. There were times where we didn't get him and he was out of the pocket and made a perfect pass. We didn't put our heads down. We just

kept going the whole game and kept working our best moves."

Darnold completed 26 of 45 attempts (57.8 percent) for 356 yards but didn't throw a touchdown.

"I said earlier in the week that you never really know the poise and composure of a player until you play him," said fifth-year senior linebacker Chris Worley. "We kind of sensed that on film that no matter how much we hit him or how many plays we make, if you don't go out there to make a play, he's going to make a throw. He lives up to the hype. I have nothing but respect for him."

The Ohio State defense forced four turnovers on three fumbles and one interception. Three of them led to touchdowns.

On the third play from scrimmage, sophomore cornerback Kendall Sheffield stripped Deontay Burnett before senior safety Damon Webb recovered and returned the fumble to the USC 19. Five plays later, fifth-year

senior quarterback J.T. Barrett scored for the Buckeyes with a 1-yard plunge.

Webb was in on another takeaway early in the second quarter on his 23-yard touchdown return of a Darnold interception. It gave Ohio State a 17-0 lead. Darnold turned it over again when Tyquan Lewis stripped him with just over six minutes left until halftime.

The Buckeyes then needed two plays – a 16-yard reception by Mike Weber, which ended as a 31-yard gain after Isaiah Langley was flagged for a face mask, and a 28-yard scamper by Barrett – to take a 24-0 lead.

The Trojans' lone touchdown came following a muffed punt return by K.J. Hill late in the second to make it a 24-7 contest at halftime. Neither team scored in the second half.

For the game, USC produced 413 yards of total offense to Ohio State's 277. The Trojans also had 23 first downs to the Buckeyes' 13, possessed the ball for nearly 10 more minutes (34:56 to 25:04) and ran 81 plays compared to OSU's 55. Despite the lopsided stats, the Silver Bullets never slowed down, limiting the Trojans to 57 total yards rushing.

"We always try to take ownership in winning a game," Holmes said. "I felt like the offense did a great job. They missed some opportunities, but it's football. There's been times where they've had to pick us up. ... We did what we had to do. When the offense couldn't make the plays, we tried to make them for them. We picked them up as best as we can, and I feel like they did a great job."

Meyer gave all the credit to his defense.

"USC is a heck of a football team," Meyer said. "Their defense really did a good job against us. Our defensive line won that game. And secondary. That quarterback, I have a lot of respect for him, but the best way to disrupt a quarterback is get after him and we did."

The 2017 season didn't go quite as planned for the Buckeyes, but they ended their season on a five-game win streak capped by the program's second Cotton Bowl championship. In 1987, they beat Texas A&M, 28-12.

"I don't use it very often, but I love this team," Meyer said of this year's squad. "I love the leaders on this team. To send them out Cotton Bowl champions, arguably maybe a top-five finish, that's a heck of a year."

## Ward Misses Cotton Bowl, Declares For NFL Draft

For all of the action that happened on the field Dec. 29 in Ohio State's 24-7 Cotton Bowl win, perhaps the biggest news of the night came off the field before the game.

As the Buckeyes went through pregame warmups, Denzel Ward was nowhere to be found. With the writing on the wall minutes before kickoff at AT&T Stadium, the junior cornerback published an announcement on Twitter stating that he would skip the bowl game before forgoing his senior season at OSU and declaring for the NFL draft.

"This was a very difficult decision that I ultimately had to make," Ward said in the tweet. "But at the end of the day I feel that this is the best decision for my family and I."

OSU confirmed Ward's decision in a subsequent statement released to the media moments after he posted the tweet.

"Ohio State junior cornerback Denzel Ward will not play in tonight's game against USC, and he will not return for his senior season with the Buckeyes in 2018," the statement read. "Ward wrestled with the decision to play (or not) throughout the bowl



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## OHIO STATE VS. USC

## Game Analysis

**What Worked Well**

The Ohio State pass rush. The Buckeyes' front seven was swarming around all night and constantly forcing USC quarterback Sam Darnold to move his feet and run out of the pocket. Fourth-year junior defensive end Sam Hubbard led the charge for Ohio State, logging 2½ sacks and 3½ tackles for loss. As a team, the Buckeyes sacked Darnold eight times, seven coming by the defensive linemen.

One of the bigger sacks occurred midway through the second quarter when USC was trailing, 17-0, but had the ball inside Ohio State's 25-yard line. As Darnold dropped back to pass, fifth-year senior defensive end Tyquan Lewis blew past freshman offensive guard Andrew Vorhees, sacked Darnold from behind and forced him to fumble. Junior linebacker Jerome Baker scooped it up, and Ohio State scored two plays later to go ahead, 24-0.

For the night, Darnold completed 26 of 45 passes (57.8 percent) for 356 yards, but none of his throws went for a touchdown. In addition to the eight sacks, the Buckeyes hurried the third-year sophomore three times and didn't allow him to get his feet set on many other occasions.

**What Didn't Work**

Ohio State's running back tandem of J.K. Dobbins and Mike Weber was absolutely stymied by the USC defense. Dobbins and Weber combined for 18 carries and just 57 yards, good for a 3.2 average and their lowest output in a game all season. In a 31-16 loss

to Oklahoma in week two, Dobbins and Weber combined for 16 carries and 101 yards. They even compiled 78 yards on the ground on only 11 attempts in a 55-24 loss at Iowa on Nov. 4. USC did an excellent job of clogging up the middle and disrupting the two tailbacks before they could get their momentum going. If they tried to bounce it to the outside, more often than not the Trojans were right there waiting for them. Each back's longest run was a mere 7 yards, proving that neither could even break off one big gain let alone find the end zone.

**Play Of The Game**

With all of the game's scoring taking place in the first half, Damon Webb's interception returned for a touchdown early in the second quarter to put Ohio State up, 17-0, gave his team all of the momentum. The pick-six came on the first play from scrimmage following Sean Nuernberger's 26-yard field goal, which provided OSU a 10-0 cushion. Webb, a senior safety, read the eyes of Darnold, who – on one of the few had times he wasn't rushed – threw a telegraphed pass intended for junior wide receiver Deontay Burnett. Webb jumped the route, caught the ball and ran 23 yards untouched for a touchdown and the second pick-six of his career. He previously had returned an interception 36 yards against Nebraska in 2016 for the opening score of the contest. Webb's final theft while wearing an Ohio State uniform aided him in being named the Outstanding Defensive Player of the Game.

– Ryan McGlade



SONNY BROCKWAY

**TAKEAWAY – Sophomore defensive tackle Robert Landers (67) had one of three fumble recoveries for Ohio State against USC.**

prep practices, leaving open his decision until game day. So he practiced, but he also helped the younger players in the program who were getting additional reps at cornerback this past month. The coaching staff was aware that Denzel's decision to play or not play would not be made final until game day. He elected today to sit out."

Ward watched from the sideline in his No. 12 jersey and street clothes as sophomores Sheffield and Damon Arnette started the game, while freshman Jeffrey Okudah saw a spike in game action off the bench.

Sheffield stepped up with three tackles, a tackle for loss, four pass breakups and his forced fumble that allowed the Buckeyes to take over in Trojans territory.

With increased first-team defensive reps, Okudah played a key role in the rotation. He discussed the approach that came during the week of practice with Ward's status in the air.

"It was last second," Okudah said. "(Ward) tried to go all bowl prep, but just some injury was lingering around and he didn't want to risk that."

Meyer addressed the process that led

up to Ward's decision. The head coach indicated that Ward neared his decision 24 hours before kickoff. Regardless, he had nothing but praise for Ward and his family.

"You're talking about not a good young man, but a great young man," Meyer said. "And his mom is not a good mom, a fantastic mom. They were asking our opinion."

"It went everywhere from a play to maybe third downs to maybe special teams to he was practicing. The decision wasn't made until, I don't know, probably (Dec. 28). It went all the way to, 'I'm going to play the whole time,' to, 'What do you think?' So that's it."

Cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs summed it up.

"I love him," Coombs said. "What a great career he's had at Ohio State. He's a first-team consensus All-American. He's going to be a first-round draft pick. He played his heart and soul out for this team and for this university."

"It was a hard decision for Denzel because Denzel loves his teammates. He loves them so much that he didn't just go spend the

month of December getting ready for the draft. He practiced every day, he worked with his team. He wasn't sure about what he was going to do, and he coached those guys up on the sideline tonight. I said to him five times at least, 'Denzel, I need you to help me with this.' And he went and talked to those guys like only a player can."

"I was really, really proud of him. He's like a son to me."

**Barrett Breaks Records In OSU Finale**

It was somewhat of a pedestrian performance for Barrett, but the fifth-year senior quarterback ultimately went out on top.

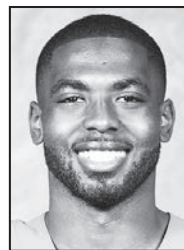
The Wichita Falls, Texas, native scored two touchdowns and totaled 180 yards to lead the Buckeyes past USC on the way to the Cotton Bowl win.

After the game the win – not his legacy – was what mattered most to him.

"I didn't think of that," Barrett said of his legacy. "My time here at Ohio State is very precious to me and I think I wouldn't be who I am today if it wasn't for Ohio State and the people at Ohio State who came across my journey, so I'm very grateful for that."

"There's not going to be a time like this in my life ever again, so I just try to cherish and be grateful for every moment."

Barrett broke his own single-season record with 47 touchdowns responsible for after previously setting the mark at 45 in 2014. He also surpassed former Purdue quarterback Drew Brees (1997-00) for the Big Ten's all-time lead in total yards with 12,697, breaking the previous record of 12,692.



J.T. Barrett

"It's pretty crazy," Barrett said. "Since I was little, I looked up to Drew Brees. To be able to pass a record like that, I'm just very grateful the people that were around me, coaches that have been part of my journey, O-line, receivers, tight ends, running backs, receivers, everybody that helped me achieve that. It's definitely an honor and a blessing."

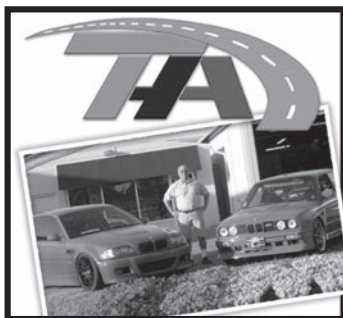
**USC Keeps OSU Rushing Attack Quiet**

When Barrett finishes the game as the leading rusher for Ohio State, it has often spelled misfortune for the Buckeye offense. Although OSU emerged from the Cotton Bowl with the win over USC, the unit struggled at times once again with Barrett leading the ground attack.

Part of the reason the half-time margin of 24-7 stuck was because the two-headed monster of running backs J.K. Dobbins and Mike Weber never got going, leaving Barrett to shoulder the load with 16 rushes for a game-high 66 yards.

Dobbins and Weber combined for 57 yards on 18 carries, including just eight tries for 24 yards in the second half. After the game, tears of joy streamed down the face of Weber as the third-year sophomore reflected on his emotional year.

"Just more what I've been through, especially this season," Weber said. "I wasn't supposed to play this year. I was supposed to get surgery and be out for the season. Guys that love me and my family, they came in and got me through this situation. I did what I could toward the end of the season because that's when I got healthy."

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# Big 1st Half Leads OSU To Cotton Bowl Win

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State defense jump-started an offense than never hit full throttle, but it didn't matter in the end for the Buckeyes against the Trojans as a 17-point halftime lead stood down the stretch.

The OSU defense yielded plenty of yards but forced four turnovers and produced a touchdown of its own in a 24-7 victory for the No. 5 Buckeyes over No. 8 Southern California in the Cotton Bowl at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on Dec. 29.

"Our offense didn't play very well, but our defense was dominant and controlled the line of scrimmage," OSU head coach Urban Meyer said.

The victory ended the Trojans' (11-3) seven-game winning streak vs. the Buckeyes since OSU (12-2) took the 1974 Rose Bowl, 42-41. USC still leads the series 13-10-1.

Senior safety Damon Webb had a pick-six and a fumble recovery as the Buckeyes converted three turnovers into 21 first-half points for the 24-7 lead before a pro-Buckeye crowd of 67,510 inside the home of the Dallas Cowboys.

OSU thwarted a scoring chance in the second half with another takeaway and also had eight sacks for a loss of 47 yards on USC quarterback Sam Darnold, a possible top-five pick since declaring for the 2018 NFL draft. Junior Sam Hubbard, in his final game before turning pro, had 2½ sacks, and Nick Bosa added 1½.

The Buckeyes totaled 14 tackles for losses of 60 yards. Sophomore safety Jordan Fuller led the team with 10 tackles (eight solo).

OSU did its job despite junior All-America cornerback Denzel Ward announcing prior to the game that he would not play for fear an injury could hurt his stock in the upcoming draft.

The defense bailed out an offense that totaled just 277 yards (163 rushing, 114 passing) compared to USC's 413 yards (356 passing, 57 rushing). USC led in first downs 23-13 but was 1 for 4 in the red zone while OSU was 2 for 2.

Darnold was 26 for 45 for 356 yards with an interception and two fumbles lost. Deontay Burnett led USC with 12 catches for 139 yards.

OSU fifth-year senior J.T. Barrett, playing in his final game in his home state, was 11 for 17 for 114 yards and also led all rushers in the game with 66 yards and two TDs on 16 carries.

Barrett surpassed Drew Brees' Big Ten career mark of 12,692 total yards of offense with a 20-yard pass to Marcus Baugh in the fourth quarter. Barrett finished with 12,697 yards and was 38-6 as a starter.

"It's pretty crazy. I mean, since I was little, I looked up to Drew Brees," Barrett said.

Baugh had four grabs for 40 yards, and Austin Mack three for a team-high 56 yards.

H-back Parris Campbell had 42 rushing yards on three attempts, and J.K. Dobbins added 39 yards on 13 carries for



SONNY BROCKWAY

**EARLY LEAD – Fifth-year senior quarterback J.T. Barrett (16) scored two first-half touchdowns to spark the Buckeye offense.**

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the Buckeyes. Mike Weber had 18 yards on five attempts.

## How It Happened

The Buckeyes created a turnover on USC's opening drive of the game and five plays later had a 7-0 lead on Barrett's 1-yard keeper with 12:25 left in the first quarter. OSU got there after Burnett fumbled the ball after a 16-yard reception. Kendall Sheffield knocked the ball loose, and Webb returned it 20 yards to the USC 19.

On third-and-6 from the 15, Barrett hit Baugh for a 9-yarder. After a Dobbins rush to the 1, Barrett completed the drive with his 46th TD accounted for of the season for another school record, surpassing his 2014 mark.

A 26-yard field goal by Sean Nuernberger on the first play of the second quarter gave OSU a 10-0 lead.

Barrett was the catalyst again. Starting at a third-and-8 from the OSU 10, he connected across the middle with Mack for 33 yards to the 43. He later went back to Mack for 15 yards and a first down at the USC 40. Barrett followed with runs of 10 and 16 yards (the latter on fourth-and-2 from the USC 32) before the 13-play, 83-yard drive stalled.

Just 13 seconds after Nuernberger's boot, the Buckeyes increased the lead to 17-0 on a 23-yard interception return by Webb with 14:42 left in the second quarter. USC had returned the kickoff to its 18 and Darnold was looking for Burnett on the first play, but Webb stepped in front and went untouched for the score for his team-best fifth interception and the first pick-six for OSU this season.

The OSU defense bent but made the Trojans break later in the second quarter. On third-and-5 from the OSU 23, Darnold was sacked by Tyquan Lewis. The ball came

loose, and Jerome Baker scooped it up and ran for 13 yards to the Buckeye 41.

OSU didn't need long to make it 24-0. Barrett passed 16 yards to Weber, and a facemask penalty added another 15 to the USC 28. Barrett on the next play scooted down the left side for a 28-yard TD and a 24-0 lead with 5:27 remaining in the quarter.

The Buckeyes were in complete control, especially after a 7-yard sack of Darnold on third down. But the turnover pendulum switched to the Trojans when K.J. Hill muffed the punt, giving USC the ball at the OSU 15.

David Imatorbhebhe made a 14-yard catch to the 1, and two plays later Ronald Jones II scored from there to make it 24-7 with 1:59 left in the first half.

After a scoreless third period that featured the Buckeyes turning the ball over on downs and four punts, USC was poised to make it a two-score game early in the fourth quarter when Tyler Vaughns made a great toe-dragging catch for 37 yards to the OSU 16 on third down.

However, three plays netted 6 yards and Chase McGrath's 28-yard field-goal attempt hit the right upright and bounced back to keep the score 24-7 with 13:03 to play.

The OSU defense then came up with another big play to frustrate the Trojans again after they reached the Ohio State 12 on a pass interference call on Jeffrey Okudah following Vaughns' 30-yard grab.

Jalyn Holmes got to Darnold as he attempted to pass, and the ball squirted free for Robert Landers to pounce on at the 13 for the Trojans' fourth turnover.

USC had one final chance to score by getting as far as the OSU 9 with just over a minute to play, but Darnold suffered a 7-yard sack by Hubbard followed by a pair of errant passes that gave the Buckeyes the ball with 31 seconds left to take a victory knee.

# The Numbers Game

## Ohio State 24, USC 7

Dec. 29, 2017 • AT&amp;T Stadium; Arlington, Texas

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
USC (11-3)	0	7	0	0	- 7
OHIO STATE (12-2)	7	17	0	0	- 24

### First Quarter

OSU – Barrett, 1 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 12:25; 5 plays, 19 yards, 1:12 TOP.

### Second Quarter

OSU – Nuernberger, 26 yard field goal, 14:55; 13 plays, 83 yards, 5:06 TOP.

OSU – Webb, 23 yard interception return (Nuernberger kick), 14:42.

OSU – Barrett, 28 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 5:27; 2 plays, 59 yards, 0:45 TOP.

USC – Jones, 1 yard run (McGrath kick), 1:59; 3 plays, 15 yards, 0:56 TOP.

Att. – 67,510.

Weather – Indoors.

### Team Statistics

	USC	OSU
First Downs	23	13
Rushing	5	6
Passing	16	5
Penalty	2	2
Rushes-Yards	36-57	38-163
Passing Yards	356	114
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	26-45-1	11-17-0
Offensive Plays	81	55
Total Net Yards	413	277
Third Down Efficiency	6-19	2-12
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-3	1-2
Punts-Avg.	6-34.3	7-45.9
Fumbles-Lost	3-3	1-1
Penalties	3-35	3-30
Time of Possession	34:56	25:04

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** – USC: Jones 19-64; Ware 3-9; Malepeai 1-2; Carr 2-0; Darnold 11-(-18). **OSU**: Barrett 16-66; Campbell 3-42; Dobbins 13-39; Weber 5-18; TEAM 1-(-2).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** – USC: Darnold 26-45-1-356-0. **OSU**: Barrett 11-17-0-114-0.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** – USC: Burnett 12-139; Vaughns 6-119; Pittman 3-69; Imatorbhebhe 2-25; Malepeai 1-3; Petite 1-2; Carr 1-(-1). **OSU**: Baugh 4-40; Mack 3-56; Weber 1-16; K. Hill 1-3; McLaurin 1-2; Campbell 1-(-3).

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** – USC: Budrovich 6-34.3-52. **OSU**: Chrisman 7-45.9-54.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – USC: Harris 2-2. **OSU**: K. Hill 1-1.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – USC: Jones 5-78. **OSU**: None.

**MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.)** – USC: McGrath 28. **OSU**: None.

**FORCED FUMBLES** – USC: None. **OSU**: Lewis; Holmes; Sheffield.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds)** – USC: Tell 1-0. **OSU**: Webb 1-20; Baker 1-13; Landers 1-1.

**INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.)** – USC: None. **OSU**: Webb 1-23.

**SACKS (No.-Yds.)** – USC: Nwosu 2.0-16; Green 1.0-6. **OSU**: Hubbard 2.5-16; Bosa 1.5-10; Young 1.0-5; Holmes 1.0-5; Lewis 1.0-4; Baker 0.5-4; Harrison 0.5-3.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.)** – USC: Nwosu 2.0-16; Green 1.0-6; Smith 1.0-3. **OSU**: Hubbard 3.5-18; Lewis 2.0-6; Bosa 1.5-10; Baker 1.5-5; Young 1.0-5; Holmes 1.0-5; Landers 1.0-4; Cornell 1.0-3; Sheffield 1.0-1; Harrison 0.5-3.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.)** – USC: Smith 6-4-10; Houston 2-6-8; Langley 4-2-6; Hawkins 3-3-6; Tell 2-4-6; Marshall 4-1-5; Nwosu 4-0-4; Harris 3-1-4; Fatu 1-3-4; Green 1-3-4; Iosefa 1-1-2; Vaughns 1-0-1; Pittman 1-0-1; Lobendahn 1-0-1. **OSU**: Fuller 8-2-10; Borland 4-2-6; Harrison 3-3-6; Webb 5-0-5; Arnette 4-1-5; Lewis 3-2-5; Baker 3-2-5; Okudah 4-0-4; Hubbard 3-1-4; Holmes 3-1-4; Sheffield 3-0-3; Worley 2-1-3; Landers 2-0-2; Bosa 1-1-2; Turnure 1-1-2; McLaurin 1-0-1; Campbell 1-0-1; Hilliard 1-0-1; Cornell 1-0-1; Young 1-0-1; Mack 1-0-1; Haubeil 1-0-1; Browning 0-1-1.

**PLAYERS IN THE GAME** – USC: Offense, Vaughns, Petite, Imatorbhebhe, Edoga, Voorhees, Falah, Brown, Lobendahn, Pittman, Darnold, Jones, McGrath. Defense, Nwosu, Green, Fatu, Iosefa, Smith, Houston, Marshall, Harris, Hawkins, Tell, Langley, Budrovich. Reserves, Carr, Mitchell, Lewis, Bolden, Ware, Peters, Austin, Jones, Imatorbhebhe, Cook, Jones, Jones, Malepeai, Lopes, Falaniko, Dorton, Schmidt, Johnson, Hemsley, Jackson, Burnett, Falo, Krommenhoek, Rector, Murphy, Pili, Jimmons. **OHIO STATE**: Offense, J. Jones, Jordan, Price, Knox, Prince, Baugh, Barrett, Dobbins, Campbell, Mack, McLaurin, Nuernberger. Defense, Lewis, Sprinkle, D. Jones, Hubbard, Booker, Borland, Baker, Ward, Webb, Fuller, Sheffield, Chrisman. Reserves, Cornell, Okudah, Young, Riep, Dixon, Williamson, Arnette, Browning, Victor, Holmes, Berry, K. Hill, Cooper, Werner, Weber, Williams, Smith, Worley, Turnure, Backenstoe, Harrison, Hilliard, McCullough, Barrow, Woidke, Pridgeon, Landers, Burrell, M. Hill, Saunders, Farrell, Haubeil, Bosa.

## Season Statistics

2017 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	
Aug. 31	(2) at Indiana	W, 49-21	52,929	
Sept. 9	(2) OKLAHOMA (5)	L, 31-16	109,088	
Sept. 16	(8) ARMY	W, 38-7	108,414	
Sept. 23	(10) UNLV	W, 54-21	106,187	
Sept. 30	(11) at Rutgers	W, 56-0	46,328	
Oct. 7	(10) MARYLAND	W, 62-14	107,180	
Oct. 14	(9) at Nebraska	W, 56-14	89,346	
Oct. 28	(6) PENN STATE (2)	W, 39-38	109,302	
Nov. 4	(6) at Iowa	L, 55-24	67,669	
Nov. 11	(13) MSU (12)	W, 48-3	107,011	
Nov. 18	(9) ILLINOIS	W, 52-14	105,282	
Nov. 25	(9) at Michigan	W, 31-20	112,028	
Dec. 2	(8) vs. Wisconsin (4)*	W, 27-21	65,886	
Dec. 29	(5) vs. USC (8)#	W, 24-7	67,510	

OSU's gameday CFP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name. (AP ranking used through Penn State game.)

\* – Big Ten title game at Lucas Oil Stadium (Indianapolis).

# – Cotton Bowl at AT&T Stadium (Arlington, Texas).

Team Statistics		OSU	Opp
First Downs		354	235
Rushing		173	77
Passing		151	127
Penalty		30	31
Average Per Game/Rush		243.2	105.1
Average Per Game/Pass		262.8	195.9
Total Offense		7,084	4,213
Total Plays		1,029	948
Average Per Game		506.0	300.9
Average Per Play		6.9	4.4
Penalties-Yards		97-943	83-721
Fumbles-Lost		17-9	16-11
Third Down Efficiency		86-185	69-215
Percentage		46%	32%
Fourth Down Efficiency		15-22	13-27
Percentage		68%	48%
Sacks-Yards		45-314	22-131
Time Of Possession Avg.		28:24	31:36

### Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	150	204	124	98	-	576	41.1
Opponents	52	79	72	63	-	266	19.0

Rushing		Individual Statistics		Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
J.K. Dobbins	194	1,403	7.2	7	77			
J.T. Barrett	165	798	4.8	12	37			
Mike Weber	101	626	6.2	10	82			
Antonio Williams	57	290	5.1	3	18			
Parris Campbell	10	132	13.2	1	44			
Demario McCall	14	111	7.9	1	48			
Dwayne Haskins	24	86	3.6	0	22			
Jared Drake	3	7	2.3	0	4			
Marcus Baugh	1	5	5.0	0	5			
Jordan Leasure	1	5	5.0	0	5			
K.J. Hill	2	1	0.5	0	1			
Joe Burrow	3	-5	-1.7	0	4			
TEAM	14	-54	-3.9	0	0			
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>3,053</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>82</b>			
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>1,471</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>55</b>			

Passing		Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD	INT	Eff.
J.T. Barrett	240	371	64.7	3,053	35-9	160.1		
Dwayne Haskins	40	57	70.2	565	4-1	173.1		
Joe Burrow	7	11	63.6	61	0-0	110.2		
TEAM	0	1	0.0	0	0-0	0.0		
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>65.2</b>	<b>3,679</b>	<b>39-10</b>	<b>160.2</b>		
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>55.0</b>	<b>2,742</b>	<b>16-13</b>	<b>112.6</b>		

Receiving		Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
K.J. Hill	56	549	9.8	3	29	
Parris Campbell	40	584	14.6	3	74	
Terry McLaurin	29	436	15.0	6	84	
Marcus Baugh	28	304	10.9	5	31	
Austin Mack	24	343	14.3	2	36	
Binjimen Victor	23	349	15.2	7	48	
J.K. Dobbins	22	135	6.1	1	18	
Johnnie Dixon	18	422	23.4	8	70	
C.J. Saunders	17	221	13.0	1	50	
Mike Weber	10	94	9.4	0	53	
Rashod Berry	6	100	16.7	2	38	
Antonio Williams	5	25	5.0	0	6	
Trevon Grimes	3	20	6.7	0	8	
Demario McCall	2	51	25.5	1	35	
Jaylen Harris	2	27	13.5	0	16	
Luke Farrell	2	19	9.5	0	14	
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>3,679</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>84</b>	
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>2,742</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>77</b>	

Scoring		TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Sean Nuernberger	-71-71	-	-	-	-	-	122
J.T. Barrett	12	-	1-2	-	-	-	74
Mike Weber	10	-	-	-	-	-	60
J.K. Dobbins	8	-	-	-	-	-	48
Johnnie Dixon	8	-	0-1	-	-	-	48
Binjimen Victor	7	-	-	-	-	-	42
Terry McLaurin	6	-	-	-	-	-	36
Marcus Baugh	5	-	-	-	-	-	30
Parris Campbell	4	-	-	-	-	-	24
K.J. Hill	3	-	-	-	-	-	18
Antonio Williams	3	-	-	-	-	-	18
Austin Mack	2	-	-	-	-	-	12
Demario McCall	2	-	-	-	-	-	12
Rashod Berry	2	-	-	-	-	-	12
C.J. Saunders	1	-	-	-	-	-	6
Damon Webb	1	-	-	-	-	-	6
Jerome Baker	1	-	-	-	-	-	6
TEAM (1 safety)	-	-	0-1	-	-	-	2
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>71-71</b>	<b>1-4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>576</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33-34</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1-1</b>	<b>7-13</b>	<b>266</b>	

FG Distance		0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Sean Nuernberger	10-11	6-6	1-4	0-0	0-0	17-21
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>10-11</b>	<b>6-6</b>	<b>1-4</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>17-21</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>2-3</b>	<b>4-5</b>	<b>1-3</b>	<b>0-1</b>	<b>7-13</b>	

Punting		No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Drue Chrisman	51	2,256	44.2	0	62	
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>2,256</b>	<b>44.2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>62</b>	
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>3,757</b>	<b>41.7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>67</b>	

Interceptions		No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Damon Webb	5	74	14.8	1	47	
Jordan Fuller	2	51	25.5	0	40	
Damon Arnette	2	35	17.5	0	35	
Denzel Ward	2	0	0.0	0	0	
Dante Booker	1	0	0.0	0	0	
Amir Riep	1	0	0.0	0	0	
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>47</b>	
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>65</b>	

Punt Returns		No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
K.J. Hill	26	144	5.5	0	22	
Demario McCall	2	6	3.0	0	7	
Denzel Ward	1	10	10.0	0	0	
Terry McLaurin	1	0	0.0	0	0	
Dante Booker	0	6	0.0	0	6	
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>	
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>42</b>	

Kickoff Returns		No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Parris Campbell	9	329	36.6	0	82	
Mike Weber	9	143	15.9	0	21	
K.J. Hill	6	150	25.0	0	32	
Demario McCall	2	29	14.5	0	15	
Jared Drake	1	14	14.0	0	14	
Antonio Williams	1	13	13.0	0	13	
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>82</b>	
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>1,428</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Jerome Baker	42	30	72	8.0-35	3.5-25
Jordan Fuller	57	13	70	3.0-12	-
Damon Webb	44	17	61	2.0-3	-
Tuf Torland	35	23	58	3.5-14	1.0-10
Chris Worley	35	21	56	5.0-20	1.0-13
Damon Arnette	35	9	44	3.0-3	-
Sam Hubbard	27	15	42	13.5-72	7.0-49
Kendall Sheffield	31	9	40	2.0-6	-
Erick Smith	26	14	40	0.5-2	-
Denzel Ward	30	7	37	2.0-3	-
Malik Harrison	22	14	36	3.0-20	2.0-18
Nick Bosa	19	15	34	16.0-74	8.5-61
Dante Booker	21	10	31	5.0-26	2.0-13
Jalyn Holmes	17	12	29	3.0-14	2.0-10
Dre'Mont Jones	10	10	20	5.0-13	1.0-4
Tyquan Lewis	12	8	20	9.5-48	7.0-42
Chase Young	12	7	19	6.0-24	3.5-20
Jeffrey Okudah	13	4	17	-	-
Tracy Sprinkle	7	9	16	3.0-7	-
Keandre Brown	11	4	15	0.5-1	-
Jonathon Cooper	11	4	15	3.0-19	2.0-17
Justin Hilliard	10	4	14	-	-



# Early Signing Period Is Uncharted Territory For All

The initiation of an early signing period for college football recruiting this season created uncharted territory for coaches across the country. None of them knew what to expect. Ohio State coach Urban Meyer acknowledged confusion for him and his staff at a press conference on the first day of the inaugural period, Dec. 20.

"My understanding was early signing was for the Jaeden Gills of the world, a kid that grew up in Columbus, Ohio, wants to be a Buckeye his entire life, and he's going to sign so you don't have to babysit him for the next two months, which I think that's very appropriate and admirable," the veteran coach and noted recruiter said.

"But what I felt happened and something that we deal with and other schools deal with is that the NFL entry deadline is Jan. 15. Our kids just got done playing two of the biggest games in their career and won a championship, and we're getting ready to play in a big-time bowl game against a heck of a team at USC, so there's been very little, if any, conversation about NFL entry and all that yet."

"We're trying to fill a roster that I don't know. I can't tell you who's leaving, who's coming, and I have some ideas, and there's been preliminary talk, but certainly you talk about life-changing decisions for those guys and life-changing decisions for young people, the prospects."

It doesn't sound like a ringing endorsement by Meyer for the new period, though the coach would seem to have little reason to complain, given his Buckeyes signed 21 players and found themselves with the No. 2 class in the nation, with the traditional signing day yet to come.

I am sure Meyer is not alone among coaches with his questions and concerns about the early signing period and it would not surprise me in the least if there would be changes upcoming.

What is interesting is that this was also uncharted territory for people and organizations that cover recruiting such as Buckeye Sports Bulletin. We had no idea what to expect. Like the coaches, we will need to re-evaluate how we do things with regard to recruiting, how we schedule both print and electronic issues to maximize the flow of information to our readers.

The annual recruiting wrap-up in February has traditionally been one of our biggest issues in terms of interest from both readers and advertisers. Is February still the best time to publish this popular issue? Since the rise of the Internet, we have been publishing electronic recruiting newsletters on Fridays in January and February to keep BSB readers up-to-date. Are these now the best use of our allotment of 36 annual issues of our electronic BSB Quickly?

These are the things that we will be evaluating, just as the coaches are using knowledge gained in this first go-around to map their plan of recruiting attack for the future. One thing I am sure of is that Meyer will be looking at every detail of the process to make sure that Ohio State continues to be a recruiting powerhouse.

As for BSB, for now we will still be publishing our Recruiting Wrap-Up in February this year, and it will include the features you have become accustomed to, including bios of the players, coaches' comments and team rankings. And we are posting our Friday Recruiting Newsletters in January and early February. For instructions on how to access these newsletters, free with your BSB print subscription, see page 5 of this issue.

We will be closely monitoring what the NCAA does moving forward with early recruiting and welcome any reader input on how best

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

### Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

to serve you once the 2018 recruiting schedule is announced.

#### Beating The Trojans

I thought Ohio State's 24-7 win over USC was a solid one, capping what I consider a successful season and snapping a seven-game losing streak to one of the Buckeyes' traditional nonconference rivals that dated back to the Rose Bowl following the 1973 season, when OSU last beat the Trojans, 42-21. It added to a string of wins over top-10 teams this season, a season really only damped – I concede the Buckeyes' early-season loss to playoff-qualifying Oklahoma and Heisman winner Baker Mayfield – by the inexplicable loss in Iowa City, Iowa.

I know many will disagree with me, but I found the Cotton Bowl to be the first game this season that was completely dominated by OSU's ballyhooed defensive line from opening whistle to final gun. Oh, there have been plenty of moments for the Rushmen, especially the final quarter in the thrilling win over Penn State. But this game was a dominant performance by the big guys from start to finish.

"The entire Ohio State defense was superb, but it was the front that set the tone by completely owning the Trojan offensive line for four quarters," former OSU assistant coach Bill Conley says in his column elsewhere in this issue.

While some might have projected the outcome of the game based on how Buckeye quarterback J.T. Barrett fared vs. USC's Sam Darnold, soon to be a very high pick in the upcoming NFL draft, it ended up being Darnold vs. the OSU defensive line, which harassed him relentlessly, ultimately recording eight sacks.

The Southern Cal signal caller was so harried that I have to admit that when the game was over, I was surprised that his passing line of 26 completions on 45 attempts for 356 yards was as respectable as it was.

But how many times have you heard coaches say that games are determined by turnovers?

That was certainly the case in the Cotton Bowl as Darnold delivered a pick-six and gave up two fumbles, one of which set up a Buckeye touchdown and the other stifling a promising 70-yard drive – both fumbles were caused by defensive linemen. Trojan wide receiver Deontay Burnett also coughed up the ball on Southern Cal's first possession, allowing the Buckeyes to set the tempo of the game with a short TD drive their first time with the ball.

Barrett, on the other hand, had a fairly pedestrian game, going just 11 of 17 for only 114 yards passing and no TDs through the air. But he did not throw an interception. In fact, the Buckeye offense did not turn the ball over at all.

Unfortunately, Ohio State's lone turnover played an important part in the momentum of the game and led to USC's only score. The Buckeyes were in complete control late in the second quarter, leading 24-0, and appeared to have stopped the Trojans for an eighth straight time when Jerome Baker and Sam Hubbard sacked Darnold on a third-and-11. K.J. Hill mis-handled the ensuing punt and USC recovered at the OSU 15, setting up an easy score.

While the Buckeye defense continued to hold Southern Cal in check for the rest of the game, the Buckeye offense, which gained 183

of its modest 277 yards in the first half, could never get untracked again in what could easily have been a rout.

With running backs J.K. Dobbins and Mike Weber available, I was disappointed that the Buckeyes talked just four first downs in the second half and were unable to eat up more clock. USC had the ball for 17:16 in the second half, while the Buckeyes had it just 12:44 with their longest drive their first after the intermission – six plays for 33 yards. That march stalled at the USC 42 when Barrett was stopped cold on a fourth-and-1.

Dobbins carried six times for 17 yards in the second half and Weber twice for 7. Some of the blame for those numbers has to go to the "big uglies" (*whoa Nellie*, we'll miss you, Keith Jackson) up front. They play a big part in establishing the run game and wearing down an opponent.

Defense ruled the day for the Buckeyes this time around.

Many Buckeye fans I spoke to described the game, especially the second half, as dull. I'll take a dull win over an exciting loss any day of the week!

Speaking of Hill's momentum-changing turnover, I thought Ohio State, which has struggled with punt returns for some time now, had finally found their return man in the sophomore from Little Rock, Ark., and he may still prove to be the solution to the problem back there. While the jury may still be out on one facet of OSU's special teams, another source of concern may have finally turned the corner.

The much-maligned kickoff defense unit played a key part in Ohio State's first-half surge. Following kickoffs in the first half, USC's average starting point was just shy of the Trojan 18 with four of the returns ending at the 14, 16, 18 and 13. That left Darnold and his mates a lot of real estate to cover while facing Ohio State's relentless rush.

As far as OSU's running game, the biggest highlight to me was that the offensive brain trust finally used Parris Campbell, one of the most dangerous players on the team, as a true H-back. He carried three times for 42 yards with a long of 21. Frequently, he has been just another receiver. Campbell finished the season with 40 grabs for 584 yards, a 14.6-yard average and three scores, but he ran the ball just 10 times for 132 and an impressive 13.2-yard average on the ground.

Ideally, Ohio State will find more ways to get the dynamic Campbell the ball in 2018.

Finally, I know that corporate sponsorship is now a big part of college football. But if you are going to have a benefactor do the opening coin flip, an actual function of the game that can have an impact on the outcome, can you make sure that person knows what they are doing? The honor at the Cotton Bowl was given to Gail Ewing, whose auto group has provided cars for the game for many years.

She gently tossed it, not flipped it. As one comment I saw online said, "USC had more turnovers in the first quarter than the coin did."

A flip of the coin is supposed to be an impartial way to start the game. The Trojans got jobbed on this one, but what are you going to do, humiliate a benefactor in front of 67,510 in attendance and a television audience of millions and re-flip it?

This one was on the game organizers, not Ms. Ewing.

#### Playoff Musings

While I heard plenty of complaints, I had no problem with two teams from the SEC – Alabama and Georgia – being selected for the College Football Playoff and ultimately squaring off for the national championship. If the object is to determine the best four teams in the country, then pick the best four teams in the country. What difference does it make in which conference they play? Now if you want to question whether those are the best four teams, that's another story. There will never be a consensus on who those teams are. Just ask Ohio State and USC.

Of course I remain on record as favoring the old bowl system that entertained us for so many years and, really, with a lot less controversy. If we had been under that system, the game between the Buckeyes and Trojans – which would have been in the Rose Bowl – would have been as anticipated and relevant as the games in the playoff, rather than just another space filler for ESPN.

Once we finally got to the championship game with the Crimson Tide and Bulldogs, I suspect that every Buckeye fan had the same thought when Meyer rival Nick Saban switched quarterbacks at halftime. "Urban Meyer would have never done that with J.T. Barrett," we all thought.

This wouldn't be still such a topic of conversation among Buckeye fans if Alabama hadn't stormed back for the win and the championship behind freshman quarterback Tua Tagovailoa.

Who is to say that if Saban had stuck with Jalen Hurts, his starting quarterback wouldn't have led a Tide comeback? Who is to say that if Meyer had benched Barrett in the Iowa or – perhaps more importantly – the Penn State game, those outcomes would have been different?

Saban and Meyer are arguably the two best coaches in college football. If they elect to do things differently from the other, who are we to question them, though Saban has the ring this year and Meyer doesn't.

Although the Buckeyes did not make the playoff, they had a connection in the championship game. Georgia defensive coordinator Mel Tucker was an assistant to Jim Tressel at OSU from 2001-05 working with the defensive backs and serving on the national championship staff in 2002.

Among the Buckeye backs the Cleveland native worked with were Will Allen, Mike Doss, Dustin Fox, Chris Gamble, Donnie Nicky, Nate Salley, Donte Whitner and Ashton Youboty – an all-star cast.

Tucker left the Buckeyes in 2005 to work for the Cleveland Browns and later kicked around the NFL with Jacksonville and Chicago before joining Saban, for whom he had worked previously at Michigan State and LSU, at Alabama. He then moved to Georgia with head coach Kirby Smart in 2016.

And a final thought on the bowl season.

For a conference that never seems to get the respect it is due, the Big Ten certainly had reason to pat itself on the back with its impressive 7-1 mark in bowl games. While a clean sweep would have been nice, I took joy in the fact that the one loss was posted by Michigan. Sorry, a rival is a rival and I have not liked Jim Harbaugh since his guaranteed victory in 1986, and so far at least, he has proved to be overrated as coach of the Wolverines. An 8-5 season? Big whoop!

My only regret is that Michigan's loss was to an SEC school.