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Reason To Celebrate

Ohio State's Athletic Department Is Cementing Its Spot At The Top

 By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

In competition and in the classroom, Ohio State had a stellar year athletically in 2016-17. There's nothing new about that.

The Buckeye football team stole headlines in the first half of the academic year, and the changing of the guard with the men's basketball program provided a bookend for the year, but there was a lot more that happened in the world of Ohio State athletics. The Buckeyes wrapped up the year with a second straight second-place finish in the Directors' Cup.

Ohio State welcomed back Olympic gold medal wrestler Kyle Snyder, who went on to win an individual national title, while the men's volleyball team hosted the national championship and won it all for the second year running. The synchronized swimming team won yet another national title, and the men's lacrosse team made it to the NCAA championship game for the first time in program history.

In the classroom, Ohio State athletes were successful as well, with record numbers of academic All-Big Ten honorees and OSU scholar-athletes honored.

Leading the charge from the top was athletic director Gene Smith, who sat down with BSB on June 15 to discuss Ohio State's athletic success, future plans for the department, the men's basketball coaching change and more.

BSB: Looking back at the 2016-17 academic year, how would you rate the state of Ohio State's athletic department?

Smith: "It was a great year. Our coaches and student-athletes did a marvelous job again. We ended up with an average GPA of 3.2, that's out of 1,089 athletes. Forty-five percent were resident athletes and 55 percent were not resident athletes. We had 291 minority athletes. It was just a good, good performance academically.

"Then we finished second in the Directors' Cup again, just found that out this week, two years in a row. They just per-

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TIM MOODY

CONSISTENT PERFORMANCE – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith oversaw a second straight second-place finish in the Directors' Cup in 2016-17.

formed extremely well, and I think we're like 140-some points away from catching Stanford, which is the goal. They've won it every year except one year since 1994. Great performances by our teams, three national championships and four teams were runners up. I'm really proud of them. Just an outstanding year from that perspective.

"Our donors were phenomenal. We were able to finish off our fund-raising campaign for the Schumaker and Covelli facilities, started construction on those already. So it was a good year from a lot of different perspectives.

"Anytime you have a gold medal winner coming back is really kind of cool. To host the national championship for men's volleyball and win it, it doesn't get any better than that. To have your lacrosse team work so hard, (head coach Nick Myers) has done a marvelous job of working the blueprint over the years that we talked about when he was hired nine years ago, and the culture of that team is just phenomenal. To be there in the hunt with the blue bloods of lacrosse is just really special – and to know that you can get back, because there's a lot of talent coming back.

"So as I go through kind of each sport I get excited. Wrestling is going to be – the national championship next year is in Cleveland. That's going to be cool. Not in our back yard, but kind of in our back yard. We'll claim it. Men's

gymnastics, they'll be really talented again. We've just got a good group of coaches, best I've ever worked with, that have their individual blueprints and they're working on them, and Buckeye Nation has given us the resources to help those coaches do what they do."

BSB: Wrestler Kyle Snyder and women's tennis player Francesca Di Lorenzo were the Ohio State athletes of the year. What was it like to see the success they had both for Ohio State and worldwide?

Smith: "Kyle, I mean, I don't know what you say. That guy is like top of the pyramid. He is setting a new standard for us as far as elite athlete. He's just special. He's a 3.8 student, smart guy, really smart, and just a grinder competitively. So to have him here inspires a lot of people. It inspires our wrestlers in the wrestling room, but it inspires a lot of our other athletes. We have a culture where our athletes go and support each other, they go to different matches or events that they're not competing in and to see them at a wrestling match cheering him on and Nate (Tomasello) and those guys is really cool. Having him around is really good.

"And then Francesca, right here from New Albany, she is a fireball. She's really competitive. I was blessed to have

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Adding WiFi Could Be Next Ohio Stadium Project

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time to go down to Athens and watch them compete in the Final Four, and she dusted off her competition pretty good there in the doubles with Miho (Kowase) and she's just a special young lady, talented academically, another grinder. We have to force her to stop practicing. I remember a conversation with her coach after the national championship, somebody asked her, 'How much time are you going to take?' She said, 'Maybe two days and I'll get right back after it.'

"Having those elite type athletes around inspires everybody. You want to work hard for them, you want to make sure they have what they need to be the best that they can be. And we have that across the board, but those are definitely our two elite ones and there was a lot of others that competed for that opportunity. Christy Blough, men's volleyball, won the Elite 90 award. A lot of good ones, but those two kind of rose, they emerged."

BSB: The men's volleyball team has won two straight national titles in a West Coast-dominated sport. What has watching their progress been like?

Smith: "It's so cool. That's stability. Stability and providing necessary resources for (head coach) Pete Hanson. He's been here since '80-something, '86 or somewhere in there. For him, to have the resources so he can recruit nationally or internationally, which is what he's doing more now, you've got somebody like (Nicolas Szerszen) so he can compete recruiting wise internationally is critical. But the other part is the academic performance of our institution has risen over time."

"We're recruiting top of the tier students, and in volleyball there's a lot of them. So that combination has allowed him to compete against the best to get the best, and so I'm happy for him. There will be a little transition next year, lost a lot of guys, but we've got some good ones coming back."

BSB: Since you mentioned Covelli, what's the timeline for that project?

Smith: "They've started construction, so probably somewhere in mid-2019 it will be done. Schumaker about the same time frame. We could get lucky and get done earlier, but probably mid-2019."

BSB: What other facilities projects do you have in mind?

Smith: "We're doing two studies right now. We're going to hire someone for an indoor tennis facility. It's currently off-site, so we're thinking about bringing that back on campus, and then an ice hockey facility. We're looking at two sheets of ice, 4,000 seats, don't know if we can pull it off. We're going to see. The long-range plan is to eventually vacate the site where St. John, French Field House and the ice rink is and that would become available for academic use. So we're looking to see how much those cost and see if it's even feasible for us to fund raise because we have to fund raise for all of our facilities."

BSB: Switching gears to Ohio Stadium, how did the first season of alcohol sales at football games go?

Smith: "We didn't have any behavioral issues that people would think. Actually our numbers were down on behavior issues, and I really think it's because there was less binge drinking just before you go in because you don't have to slam a couple anymore just before you go inside. So I think that was one of the contributing factors, but we didn't have any real issues and the revenue gener-

ated went to public safety. We were able to fund six police officers for them, and over time we'll continue to look at how do we contribute to the environment to make sure we have a safe campus, whether that be more people or whether that be dogs or devices or things of that nature. Our commitment is to use that money to help the safety of our community."

BSB: Is there a plan to implement WiFi at the stadium?

Smith: "We're trying to see if we can get that done. There's so many things. A few years ago we put in a digital antennae system and that helps with texts and phone calls, but we don't have good WiFi throughout the stadium. We have it in certain spots – the press area, the suites – but in order to try some of the new ideas for our fan engagement we just have too many WiFi issues, so we're looking at that. We'll be taking it back to the board in July for consideration, and we'll see from there. But yes, definitely, that's the next big thing."

BSB: What would that entail?

Smith: "It's really just a big wiring job, literally determining points throughout the stadium where you would put antennas to make sure you have coverage. So it could be underneath a seat, where they drill up through the cement and place an antenna, might be on a hand rail. The hand rails in the aisles, there might be an antenna hanging from some spots – so strategically as you get 1669 antennae that they put throughout the stadium – and it's an expensive venture."

"So it's something that I feel we need to do for us to be able to be in line to provide our fans what's in play now with some apps and then what's coming. Our concessionaires are very much a part of this. We haven't moved to mobile ordering yet, but one day we might. In certain sections where you can just pull up an app, order your food and go pick it up or have it delivered. A lot of stadiums do that right now. We can't even try that because we don't have the WiFi. So it's hard for people."

"There's an app now if you follow four teams or six teams those games are on, you can pull it up while you're at the game and watch. You can do it in spots, but not throughout, so I want to make sure that we make the 'Shoe as comfortable as we can so we don't get to the point where someone says, 'Well I'm just going to stay at home on the couch because I want to see that game.' You can see it at the 'Shoe, and that's what we'll get to."

BSB: Looking back at the 2016 football season with the way it ended in mind, how do you judge that campaign as a whole?

Smith: "It was still an outstanding season. We want to win it all, there's no doubt, but we put ourselves in position and that's what's so important. We didn't perform at the level we should have performed over in Happy Valley (against Penn State), we know that. That took away an opportunity for a championship performance in Indianapolis, so we know that and we learned from that."

"But still, we had a pretty successful year. You got into the College Football Playoff so you gave your kids a chance, and we had some weaknesses. They were exposed by Clemson, they did a good job of that. But still, I would deem it a very successful season because we won significantly more games than we lost, and when you go through those challenges, hopefully it makes you better for the future. And I think Urban (Meyer)

has done that. I think he's made some modifications, and I think we'll be much better executing next year. Whether or not we have enough talent, we'll see. I think our execution will be much better."

BSB: Was there a focus on getting NFL experience for the football coaching staff?

Smith: "I don't think Urban in our conversations went into it saying, 'I want to achieve that.' I think it happened based upon the guys that he was interested in. But that's a good point. That will help. I think it'll help with the guys who are trying to go pro. They can sit down and talk to a Greg Schiano or talk to Ryan Day and talk about, 'What's it like at the next level? What do I need to do to really do better in order to give myself a chance to get there?' So Ryan can sit and talk about that. I think it will be advantageous in certain spots."

BSB: After the way Kevin Wilson's career at Indiana ended, what made you comfortable enough to have him join Meyer's staff here at Ohio State?

Smith: "A couple things. Urban did a great job of background checks, calling his contacts. I did the same thing. But more importantly I sat down and he and I had a conversation and looked one another in the eye, and he shared with me from his perspective what occurred there and then I talked about how it goes here. We have a way we operate and I have an expectation of accountability and how we operate. And so we had a great conversation in my office, I felt comfortable and that was good."

BSB: Are you comfortable with the amount of national recruiting done by Urban Meyer or would you want more of a focus on in-state recruits?

Smith: "He and I talk about that a lot, there's a balance there. We need to make sure that we get the best and the brightest out of Ohio. So that's still our focus. It never changes."

"But we're a national institution, we really are – actually an international institution. So we need to understand that, we need to recruit that way, not just in football but in all sports. And so the best and the brightest in Ohio and the contiguous states, we want to get after hard. They should be here. But we also recognize that we have people in different parts of this country who want to compete here, who want to get an education here, so we need to get out there. But we cannot neglect our back yard."

"So he and I talk about that a lot. 'Let's make sure we're working with our high school coaches, let's make sure they're engaged, let's make sure we're not missing someone or something.' Probably more than anything is the thing that's challenging is that developmental Ohio player. We don't get as many of those as we used to get because we get so much talent nationally."

BSB: Shifting focus to the basketball program, what was the process of deciding to make a head coaching change and let Thad Matta go?

Smith: "It kind of happened organically. When Thad and I were sitting in my office and we were kind of talking about the goals and objectives that he and I had agreed upon at the end of the season and where we're going and I realized we weren't getting there. I literally, because we're so close and I could just feel it, I said, 'Thad, maybe it's

time to make a change.' And he paused and he looked at me and said, 'You're probably right.' And because of our closeness we just kind of moved into, 'OK, let's talk about it.'

"We just kind of moved into the conversation, and I just knew it was right. We weren't moving in the right direction with recruiting particularly, and I just felt like it was time. And so we began that process, had the conversation, had the plan for the position. We decided we wanted to do the press conference on Monday as opposed to the very next day because of family and all those type of things. I wanted to be humanistic and sensitive to that. He deserved that more than anybody, and so we were able to make that happen. It was not easy for a guy that's given us so much and setting a standard for us in basketball."

"Some people tend to forget about what we were blessed to have with his leadership. It's phenomenal. And a guy in a tough, tough part of what we do. Basketball recruiting is hard, it really is. But I knew I could put my head on the pillow at night because I trusted him. He was always going to do it the right way like our coaches, and so that was not easy. It wasn't an easy thing."

BSB: What was the process of looking for a new coach and what led you to Chris Holtmann?

Smith: "That weekend I had Big Ten meetings in Chicago that I had to be at. We couldn't move and do anything until the press conference on Monday, I couldn't make a phone call. Otherwise it would have got out, what we were doing with Thad. And so I did a lot of behind the scenes work, developed a profile, studied the financials, came up with the financial parameters, talked to the president that weekend, got his approval to move."

"I called my good friend Eddie Fogler and got him engaged. Just kind of chat with me about my list, already created a list. You always need somebody that's in the business to kind of challenge you on your thoughts. So he was good with that. And then Monday after the press conference, he got on the phone, I got on the phone and we started."

"You've got to get background information on people that you're going after, you've got to be sure. I called my good friends in the basketball industry ... I've been doing this for 30 years so I have a lot of basketball people I know, being on the basketball committee. I called in confidence and asked about people and he did the same thing, and then late Monday night we reconnected with one another and Chris' name just kept popping up because of the profile."

"I was looking for a recruiter, I thought I was pretty clear with people that recruiting is big. We have to get back to what Thad did so excellently for a long time – you look up this state and get into the contiguous states. But we've got to lock up this state. And so I was really, really pressing in my profile for a recruiter. You want a teacher, you want a person that's going to do it right compliance-wise, and that was another part of the vetting process that's really critical, particularly in basketball. So Chris' name just kept popping up, so that's when I called him Tuesday and said, 'Hey, you're my guy. Are you interested?' And I got why he wanted to take his time and – top recruiting class coming to Butler, they've done so much for



Thad Matta

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: GENE SMITH

him there, highly successful. He's kind of a high IQ, emotional guy. He had that bond with Butler, and I got it.

"So he wanted time to think about it, but in the meantime I had to go and see other people, which I did. So on Tuesday night and Wednesday I was gone and seeing other people and still staying in contact with him, and me or Eddie was constantly calling him, trying to move him along.

"I had Thad call him. I said, 'Thad, call him and get him off the edge, man.' And then on Wednesday I moved the offer from seven to eight years, and then Wednesday night he said he would meet me Thursday morning so we developed our little drive to Dayton early Thursday morning.

"That was so funny. I think I had three hours of sleep. So we got up early and drove to Dayton and we met, with his wife. I asked him if he could bring his wife and I was going to bring mine. Sheila went with me and Lori showed up, and we sat probably, maybe an hour and a half to two hours and just chatted, get to know one another, understand the state of the program. Look each other in the eye, it's so important, and he accepted right there on the spot. I picked up the phone and called Eddie and said, 'Hey, call everybody else and cancel everything else. Got my guy. I'm done.'"

BSB: How important was it to have a guy who has been recruiting in this region already?

Smith: "Critical. You hit on it. That was what I was driving for. In my profile I had community engaged. I wanted somebody that's going to get out in the community, obviously someone that's highly motivated by academic performance which is so important here. I had all these profile elements – recruiting was right at the top of the list. So the next two years in Ohio, maybe three, some of the best talent in the country is right here. So we needed someone that had familiarity and connections in Ohio, which he did."

BSB: Do you think it was a unique situation to have a guy like Thad Matta who was willing to be involved in the transition process?

Smith: "Yes, probably unique. And unique for him to be at the press conference. That speaks to the integrity and class that he has as a human being, just an unbelievable person. But also talks about our relationship when we say there Friday and talked about how we would move forward and do this. There was never any question of him not being at the press conference. That was the right thing to do and he was there."

"He was more transparent about himself than I thought he would be. So he was there and then he and I talked in our meeting on Friday about – we talked names of potential candidates, talked about where he could help me. And he was on board. So we had a long conversation after we made that decision that it was time for a change."

"He's the best of the best, classy as all get-out. He set a standard for what you want to look for in a leader. He's just a good human being, and somewhere along the line we've got to pay tribute to what he did here and give him the proper due and somewhere down the line we'll do that. Great guy."

BSB: Now that Coach Holtmann is here and has his staff in place, what kind of relationship do you expect Coach Matta to have with the program?

Smith: "It's really on him. I don't know. He'll probably want to get away for a while and chill. It's totally open, so it'll be up to him. And Chris will have an open door for him. So I'm not sure what he'll want to do. Sometimes you know I've seen it so many

times where people of his stature and presence ... they want to separate themselves for a little while and then maybe come back. But it's open arms for us."

BSB: Switching gears back to football, how will the early signing period in college football affect Ohio State?

Smith: "I've grown to respect that it's here, we've got to deal with it and that's OK, it will work. It won't affect us a whole lot except that the kid that develops late, the Darron Lees of the world, you can miss. So we've got to be really, really careful. He was a late bloomer. His senior year was so important to be identified and go after."

"But now your numbers games kind of moves back even more. So you've just got to, it becomes a numbers game. How many are you going to sign early? Who's going to come here? Who's going to sign in February? So it changes things a little bit for that developmental guy in their senior year."

BSB: Do you think it's a net positive or negative for the recruits themselves?

Smith: "I think it will end up being a positive. My concern is a small number, it really is. (Wisconsin AD) Barry Alvarez and I had a great conversation about it. He was for it. Certain areas of our country, if a kid wants to go to Madison, Wis., he's going to Madison, Wis., and that's OK. So when you look at the numbers and I might have them wrong, I think it was like 62 or 63 percent of the kids that made their verbal commitments went to that school, they ended up going there. The numbers say they're going to sign in February given that opportunity. So I think in the end it'll be highly positive. I'm just worried about kids being missed."

BSB: What was it like watching the men's lacrosse team make a breakthrough this year?

Smith: "That was so cool. We were fortunate watching Nick, our men's lacrosse coach, just grow over the years and just get better and better and recruiting. Then we hosted the Big Ten championships. We almost won it here against Maryland, one of the blue bloods in lacrosse. I actually told the guys after that game here, 'You might see them again.' We had already beaten them and then they beat us in the championship game here. And then to go to Gillette (Stadium) and be in that facility and just see Nick's vision become a reality, 'Hey, we can

be there.' It validates everything that we've done to help lacrosse grow in this state. And then to be in the game and, God we were so close to winning it. It was so much fun. Those kids are the best – great kids from Canada, Ohio, Alabama, everywhere else. Great guys."

BSB: How big would it be for the women's basketball team to make a Final Four run in Columbus next year?

Smith: "Our young ladies know, they know it's here. They're working hard. That would really be cool to be in it. We're glad we were able to win the bid and bring the Final Four here to this community. I know our community will rally, it will sell out. (Women's coach) Kevin (McGuff) understands that he wants to be in it and our kids want to be in it so I'm sure they'll work hard to do it."

BSB: What does it say about Mike Conley that he played here for one year and now he's in the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame?

Smith: "It says a lot about that particular year. It was special and everybody knows it. He – Greg (Oden) was a difference maker, but Michael was clearly the difference maker which is why he ended up just elevated in the draft status during that run. Great guy. He built a house here so in the offseason he lives here, he's embedded in this community. That run meant a lot to the years after that where we were able to have some success. So I think Varsity O committee probably looked at that, not just that year but it kind of helped catapult our basketball program a little bit."

BSB: Do you expect Thad to be in that HOF some day?

Smith: "I don't know how they can not put him in there. He's the winningest coach in our history in basketball. The draft picks, the conference championships and the tournament championships. Two Final Fours. I mean, a lot of people just love that short résumé. I'd be shocked if someday he's not in."



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Holtmann Considering All Roster Options

By RYAN McGLADE
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State welcomed its 14th men's basketball head coach in program history when Chris Holtmann was officially hired June 9. Holtmann, who replaced Thad Matta after his 13-year tenure came to an end on June 5, was the head coach at Butler the last three seasons. His head-coaching career began at Gardner-Webb, where he was at the helm from 2010-13.

It has been a whirlwind for Holtmann since getting hired in June. He has had to juggle getting settled into his new position, developing relationships with the players currently on the team and recruiting, along with countless other tasks.

Despite the busy schedule, Holtmann found some time to discuss the aforementioned items as well as other topics such as the addition of 2017 Massillon (Ohio) Jackson forward Kyle Young, who was at one time a Butler signee, and the outlook for the program going forward.

How are you getting settled in Columbus?

Holtmann: "It's coming. Yes, it's coming. I felt really welcomed here by (Athletics Director) Gene (Smith) and by all of the people here. It's been great. I've had some good time meeting people and meeting a lot of the staff at the Schottenstein Center and some athletic department staff.

"You hit the ground running whenever you get a new job. You really hit the ground running when you get that job in June and when you're looking at potentially adding to your current roster in June and then also catching up with '18 and '19 classes."

What can you do with the current roster at this point in the year?

Holtmann: "I think be really selective. I think priority No. 1 is we want to be deliberate and prudent in our decision-makings when it comes to who we could potentially add. I think that we're thinner than probably anybody would like to be right now in terms of numbers. I think we all recognize that. I think we've got some outstanding kids and some really good players returning, but numbers are thin.

"How do you address that in June when everything has kind of been picked over? You may add more walk-ons than you typically would. I think that is something that we will probably do. Obviously, the addition of Kyle makes a lot of sense for us for a variety of reasons but also really helps.

"Then if there is another guard that we could add that would make sense, we're certainly considering that. Right now, you make a lot of calls and it's not the right fit – we don't feel like it's maybe the right fit – or guys have made their decision."

Have you thought about the junior college route?

Holtmann: "We've thought about it. We have thought about it. We've discussed everything from graduate transfers to junior college options at guard to transfers in general. But we certainly don't want to compromise on them being what we feel like are Ohio State guys, and we don't to compromise on their talent or ability because that just handicaps you in the future.

"So because of that, I don't know that we'll add another one, but we'd like to. And if we feel like he can come in and play an important role and grow and help us not just

now but in the future, then we'll probably do that."

How hard is it to balance the current team with the 2018 and 2019 classes?

Holtmann: "It's hard. It's tempting probably to reach at this point. But I've been counseled by enough guys who have done this and reached and regretted it. I took over a different situation, but my first head-coaching job was massive in its scale of rebuild and all of that kind of stuff, so I learned something there. But I've talked to enough people who have reached and ended up regretting reaching.

"Whether it be because academically they weren't the right fit or they couldn't help them down the road compete at the level they wanted to compete at so that scholarship is tied up or the character piece. Unfortunately, in June, there are more of those issues that you have than you do at other times.

"I just think we're going to be really convicted in our belief that we just can't do that. If that means a third of our team, so to speak, is walk-ons, that might be the case. That might be the case."

Have you had much experience with the JUCO and graduate transfer routes in your time as a head coach?

Holtmann: "Yes, both. But at Butler, graduate transfers were really important for us. We got to the Sweet 16 because we recruited well last year, but part of that recruiting well was high school kids, a transfer who sat one (year) and played one (year) and then a graduate transfer from Memphis, Avery Woodson, who played a really important role for us. He was nearly a double-figure scorer. We went down that road, but basically all of those guys or most of those guys have made decisions at this point – graduate transfers."

Have you started to think about how to manage a roster where you have one experienced point guard (junior C.J. Jackson) and one other freshman point guard (Braxton Beverly)?

Holtmann: "I've tossed that around and have been discussing some ideas on what that would look like and what we could do and who we could potentially move there. I have looked at that. I think I realize, I think our guys realize that that's going to be the focal point of our team, that position. Just because we have, more than anything, some inexperience there.

"But I think I'm excited about the guys we have in that position, I really am, going through some workouts here. Obviously, C.J. and Braxton, I'm excited about those guys.

"Most guys would tell you they'd love to be able to have three point guards on their roster at all times – that was kind of Thad's deal as well. He wanted to have three point guards. I could anticipate that we will play J.T. (senior forward JaeSean Tate) there some for sure. To what capacity? I don't know. But he's going to play all over, right? He's going to play probably four positions at a time, but that will certainly be one of them I would think."

(Editor's note: Beverly was granted his release from the program on June 30.)

Have you spoken to JaQuan Lyle and is there any chance he could end up back with the program?

Holtmann: "I have not spoken with him.

I have not had that conversation. Gene and I have discussed our roster multiple times and different options, but at this point I don't anticipate that."

What is Derek Funderburk's status in regard to his suspension that was issued June 15, and what does he have to do to earn his way back if he's not there yet?

Holtmann: "As of today (June 23), it continues. I think the biggest thing that I want for him is, coming in as a coaching staff, I really want him to be successful. I really, really want him to be successful.

"He's talented but he has some work to do in some areas outside of basketball. He has some work to do. I'll let you guys kind of figure that out. Obviously, one of them is in the classroom. He has some definite work to do, and when we see progress in that area – significant progress – then we'll reevaluate things. But we need to see definite progress, and that's kind of our responsibility as well to his family.

"I spoke with his dad (Derek) last week and his dad was like, 'Coach, he's got to grow in some of these areas,' and that's what we're hoping to see here. I think he's really talented and those that know him know he's got a great way about him – he's got an outgoing personality. So I'm optimistic, but at this point we'll see."

(Editor's note: Funderburk was dismissed from the team on June 30.)

Whether the team names them or you do, will you have captains?

Holtmann: "We will. It's like at Butler, the guys that went out before games and shook the referees' hands, they kind of decided that on their own. That's great, that's kind of a ceremonial thing but it doesn't really impact winning at all. But I think we will probably name, 'Hey, these are the captains,' for sure."

Based on what you've said and what the previous staff said, it seems like Keita Bates-Diop and JaeSean are lining up for significant roles. Are those guys that you're leaning on a little bit?

Holtmann: "Yes, for sure. Those two guys have been outstanding, and they're going to be really important for us. Those two guys have been terrific."

What have you seen so far from Keita now that he's back from season-ending surgery on his leg?

Holtmann: "He's getting in shape, he's getting in better shape. This has been our first full week of skill workouts. Now, I've had a chance to go back and watch some game footage but it was more from last year and he wasn't playing much because he was injured. But I'm excited about him, excited about his approach right now.

"He's fresh and has just gotten back into workouts so his conditioning is impacted, but he's extremely coachable right now. I can see why people would look at him and say, 'Wow, he's really intriguing in terms of what he can eventually be.' Because you look at his frame (6-7, 235), his length and his versatility, and you say, 'Wow, that's a young man that, as he continues to grow, can really have an impact.'"

"He's been great so far, and he's 100 percent cleared and healthy. He had a really, really good workout yesterday so you're

asking me on a good day. I thought he had a really good workout and he's getting in a little bit better shape.

"I spent some time with his mom (Wilma) when she came over last week. It was great to see her. I'm really excited about Keita."

You mentioned Kyle Young earlier. Can you take us through the process of him deciding to come to Ohio State?

Holtmann: "It really came down to Butler and Ohio State for Kyle. There were a ton of other schools, pretty much every other – you guys know the number of schools that really wanted him. I would sit down at events and he was the focal point for a lot of people this year. It really ended up coming down to these two places.

"Kyle's story is unique because he's had some personal tragedy, so I think the relationship that was formed over a couple years of recruiting him by (assistant coach) Ryan Pedon and myself at the end of the day was probably the deciding factor – even though I know this place had real pull for him initially.

"I did not speak with him after my initial phone call to him as I called all the players and told them I was leaving (Butler). I had no contact with him or his family – none whatsoever. I just told him that he needed to see this thing through with Butler, and then at that point if he decided that Butler was not the place for him then we can kind of go from there.

"I think it was unique because he's an hour and a half away, it was unique because of his personal story. Those things make this situation, but he really needed to drive the bus completely on that decision – he and his family completely on that decision. Then when we got the release, I called him that afternoon (June 19). You could tell, he was set in his mind pretty early on."

Given your head-coaching experience and what happened to the guy who had the job before you, what gives you the confidence you're going to have this eight-year contract and maybe another contract? What gives you the confidence that this is going to work?

Holtmann: "Overall, I believe in the way we do things. I believe in our philosophy and how we go about things – I have a strong belief in that. But listen, when you're at this level, you've got to prove it every day. We're not going to shy away from that. We have to prove this every single day, and that's what it's going to be about.

"As I spoke in my press conference (on June 12), it's going to be about doing today well. If you do enough of today's well, then tomorrows will take care of itself. I really believe that. I think anyone who says that there won't be times of self-doubt, they're lying to you. Believe in the process and the plan we have in place, but eventually we're all going to have to prove that our plan is successful.

"I will tell you this, of all the opportunities that came my way, there was not one that appealed to me nearly to the degree that this one did. I never seriously considered one. My wife (Lori) knew when I got the call on Tuesday (June 6) that this one had some weight and gravity to it because I think The Ohio State University is really special. I think it's a really special place. If I was going to leave a special place, it needed to be to a really special place.

"I think for all of those reasons, we're going to have some challenges in front of us – I get that. We'll have some ups and downs and some rocky days, but I believe ultimate-

CHRIS
HOLTMANN

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: CHRIS HOLTMANN



TIM MOODY

HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING – After being hired in early June, Chris Holtmann had a busy first few weeks as Ohio State's head basketball coach.

ly that if we stay committed to what we're doing, good things will happen."

How much of a challenge will it be to prove the principles that you guys have that allowed you to be so successful at Butler in recruiting? How important is it to show that those can also be successful recruiting at this level?

Holtmann: "I see a lot of similarities. The waters that we were recruiting in those last couple years were pretty deep. The guys that we were getting could pretty much play anywhere in the country – a lot of places. I think most importantly we just don't want to get away from the kind of kid that we've recruited. And the kind of kids I observed here from a distance that I was like, 'Whoa, those are impressive people, they're impressive players, they're impressive in their approach.'"

"And it's not just the pros – we could rattle off all of the names – but you look at during Thad's tenure, which is the tenure that I probably followed the closest, there were obviously great players before, great coaches before, but that's the one I follow the most. And you say, 'Those are very similar to the kind of guys that I coached and recruited in the past. Hopefully we can continue to do that.'"

"The challenge is in front of us in '18 and '19, and there's no question about it. That's exciting and we're digging in. When you get the job in June it puts you a little bit behind. You have to reidentify the new relationship with recruits – particularly in the '18 class. That's the work ahead of us right now."

You have enough space to bring in five players for the 2018 class. You have said you may bring in three or four in '18. Why wouldn't you use all five?

Holtmann: "Good question. Very rarely will we have 13 players on scholarship. Say that 13 guys are eligible to play on scholarship ... it's too hard to keep that number happy (in terms of playing time). You can't do it. So it leads to turnover. You're going to have turnover anyway because it's the nature of the beast right now. So that might be why. There could be some unique circumstances that could lend to us using all of them."

"But I think once we feel really good about where we're at in recruiting and where our roster is numbers wise and once we feel like it's really healthy, we may not have more

than 10 or 11 players. You might have 10 that are eligible to play and then one who's a transfer that's sitting out. Having said that, early on we could end up using all of them and maybe potentially redshirting one. We have more flexibility here early because we need to have more flexibility."

Is adding another big-man a priority with just Kaleb Wesson and Micah Potter on the roster?

Holtmann: "I like our guys there at that position. I think that's good depth. You'd like to maybe have a third that could play both the power forward and the five spot that has some versatility. But I think Micah has some versatility there, too, so we will add definitely another."

"I don't know that it will be strictly a five in this class. Obviously, people look at our team and they say, 'Hey, the focal point is guards and wings.' And I get that, that is our focal point. Beyond that we'll add somebody on the frontline."

Did you have any ties to Ohio State going in?

Holtmann: "I was born in the state. I'm trying to think here. What could I tell you? Like a personal story that somebody from Columbus saved my life or something. More than anything, I've recruited this state for 20 years, so I've been through it a lot and I have an appreciation for, obviously, this university. I have an appreciation for this athletic department and what it's been able to do. I have great respect for, obviously, what (OSU football head coach) Urban Meyer has done."

"I think all of that combined with my just feel for the Midwest, my appreciation for the Midwest, for being in this state, for being at Ohio University and then following Thad's tenure here. I certainly didn't anticipate that I'd be sitting in this chair in June, but I've always thought it's a terrific place."

You brought your three assistants over from Butler with you. Will you be making any more changes to the support staff?

Holtmann: "We will be adding to the support staff. I think you guys know (director of basketball operations) David Egelhoff has been retained."

In the same position?

Holtmann: "Same position, yes. Thad called me and said, 'Whatever you do, keep David Egelhoff.' I said, 'OK, Thad. I'm going to listen to you and I'm going to do that.' He repeated it so I was like, 'No, Thad, I'm really going to do this. You made my decision for me.' I knew David a little bit. We knew his family a little bit."

"Then we'll figure out some things from there. There will be probably one or two additions to kind of the support staff. Obviously, we had a player development role (at Butler) and there might be another role that I add. Whether it's a special assistant to the head coach, it's going to be kind of a position to be named."

Did you guys have a strength coach at Butler?

Holtmann: "Yes, we did. Jim Peal did a great job. I will be bringing in a strength coach here. I've got great appreciation for Dave Richardson, Coach Richardson and what he's done – I've heard great things – but we'll be bringing in a strength coach here."

Gene Smith said the No. 1 item on

his list for when he was looking for a new coach was recruiting. When you look at your personal skill set, where would you rank recruiting?

Holtmann: "I feel like it's a collective effort. You have to have a staff that is really competent and good in that area. It's something that I enjoy, quite honestly. It's something I enjoy. I enjoy the challenge of it, the relationship building. I enjoy both the evaluation process of who you're adding to your program and how important that is. So I'll let others kind of evaluate how we do."

"Everywhere I've been relative to our league and our level, we've had good success in that area. Any coaching success or honors I've had have been because we've first been able to recruit effectively, and we all know how important that is."

You played in Puerto Rico and in the Bahamas when you were at Butler. Do you think that's something you'd like to get Ohio State involved in?

Holtmann: "Yes, it is. I would like to. The schedule was basically finished – a couple contracts coming in – before we arrived. So it's in place and I think it will be released maybe in the next month or so. I didn't have any flexibility over this year's schedule. But moving forward, I would like to do that. I think those tournaments are fun."

"Portland (vs. Gonzaga in the 2017 Phil Knight Invitational) will be a terrific challenge this year. That will be a lot of fun for our fan base. Buckeye Nation, I think, is going to enjoy that. Those are fun tournaments to be a part of, whether it's Maui or the Battle 4 Atlantis (in the Bahamas) or any of them."

"I think, and you'll see this and you can hold me to it, but I think if I'm going to err, it's going to be err on the side of it being more challenging than not challenging in the non-conference. I thought to myself last year that I might have made a mistake by doing it, but it ended up allowing us to have a four-seed in the NCAA Tournament, and it was all a byproduct really of the nonconference schedule."

"Hopefully, we can get to that point. I think that's important. Hopefully, we can have some games that will attract our fan base."

"One of the things I'm so excited about is the energy that has been in the Schottenstein Center during some of the games that I watch and during Thad's tenure was just incredible. I'm excited about getting to that."

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Fickell All In At Cincinnati After Long OSU Run

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Luke Fickell grew up in Columbus. He went to high school in Columbus. He played college football in Columbus. Then he coached in Columbus for the better part of two decades.

After all of that, Fickell decided to take the opportunity of a lifetime this year, moving down I-71 to become the head football coach at Cincinnati after a long and storied career with the Buckeyes.

The DeSales High School graduate played defensive line for Ohio State under John Cooper from 1992-96, capping his career with a school-record of 50 consecutive games started. The 50th came when the Buckeyes defeated Arizona State in the 1997 Rose Bowl.

After leaving Ohio State, Fickell spent the 1999 season as a graduate assistant in Columbus before joining the Akron coaching staff as the defensive line coach from 2000-01. In 2002, he returned to Ohio State as the special teams coordinator before moving up the ranks, ultimately being named the interim head coach for the 2011 season after Jim Tressel left the program.

From there, Fickell moved back to his position as defensive coordinator and linebackers coach under head coach Urban Meyer from 2012 through the 2016 season, at which point he decided it was the right time to lead his own program.

After his first few months at Cincinnati, Fickell sat down with BSB to discuss how he got his start in football, his career at Ohio State and the first steps to building his Bearcat program.

BSB: What was growing up in Columbus like for you? Any early memories of Ohio State football?

Fickell: "To be honest I was a wrestling guy myself, so a lot of the stuff I was over there (at Ohio State) for was wrestling as a



TIM MOODY

BUILDING HIS PROGRAM – Former Ohio State defensive coordinator – and one-time interim head coach – Luke Fickell opted to leave Columbus to take over as Cincinnati's head coach this offseason.

young kid until (former OSU lineman) John Hicks became a part of my life, became a good friend of my dad's and coached

us in little league football and took us to an Ohio State-Michigan game when I was probably 10.

"Other than that I was a little kid going to a game because my grandfather was a cop or a police chief and they would sell the concession stand or something. But I didn't have a whole lot of recollection until then of really, truly being involved in it and a fan of it."

BSB: Wrestling was your favorite sport growing up?

Fickell: "Yeah. So I was more at the wrestling camps at Ohio State or wherever. Chris

Ford, the old wrestling coach, and things like that over there that I was a little bit more connected to."

BSB: How good were you as a wrestler in high school?

Fickell: "I don't know, not bad I guess. It was something I had done a long time in my life. Obviously you like things you're more successful at so I had some good success with it."

BSB: Did you consider wrestling in college?

Fickell: "Yeah. That was a big part of even a decision, it was something I wanted to have an option to do."

BSB: As a 9 or 10-year-old kid, what was that like having John Hicks as your coach?

LUKE FICKELL

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Fickell: "It was nuts. He showed up on our doorstep. His car broke down in front of our house in Westerville, Ohio, in a snowstorm, and I let him in and my dad and him became really good friends from there on out. Just by random chance, his car broke down right in front of our house. Dad helped him out and next thing you know next year he's coaching our little league football team, and they were great friends from there on out."

BSB: Were you close with John the rest of his life?

Fickell: "He was always somebody that was close – obviously being in Columbus, Ohio, and then being a part of Ohio State, he was around a bit more. But I mean he coached us for three years in football and was a part of helping us out in baseball. Everything. He just became a really, really good friend of the family."

BSB: Growing up as a wrestler, when did you really start taking football seriously?

Fickell: "I started wrestling when I was probably 5 or 6 years old. Then you start playing football when you're in third grade and it becomes something that you love to do and you're excited about doing but not until probably high school, probably sophomore year that you started to say, 'Maybe football is the other way to go for me.' You start having some success in that and having opportunities that it became something that was more of a passion of yours as well."

BSB: What was your recruitment like?

Fickell: "It was so much different back then. But it was you got recruited your senior year. You played a little bit your senior year and that's when you started to get your offers. I got a lot of recognition, probably more because of the wrestling. People saw you as a wrestler and saw you as an athlete, had a little bit more attention in the wrestling side of things. And then it kind of grew in the football side of things going into your senior year."

BSB: How different is the way you recruit now as a coach to the way you were recruited as a high school prospect?



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Fickell: "Really the core to it is no different, it's about relationships. It takes time to build relationships, and it takes honesty to build relationships. But the ways of doing it are so much different now. From social media, all you had back then was a phone call and face-to-face. But now there's so much more from social media to different ways to get to communicate with guys to FaceTiming them.

"But it hasn't changed in the sense that it's still about relationships. It's still about finding out what's important to the kid and who's important in his life. I think back then it was much more just the parents whereas now it's probably a lot stronger with the high school coach and the people of the community that give you other opportunities."

BSB: How seriously did you consider schools other than Ohio State?

Fickell: "Unfortunately I did. I thought I wanted to get away from home. That was one of those things where, 'Hey, I've been here my whole life, I want to get away.' And it had to be something that was – not away, away – wrestling was something that had to be an option for me. I wasn't going to go someplace that I didn't have an opportunity to at least be able to wrestle. A lot of the Southern schools didn't have wrestling, so that was never something that was a true reality for me.

"But it really came down to the Midwestern schools. It was Ohio State, Notre Dame or Michigan. You can throw Penn State maybe in there a little bit later, but they weren't early on into the mix. It really came down to the best feel and the best fit, and from visiting Ohio State and really it was the kind of kids that were there and the people that were there. More so the players that I got the best feel for."

BSB: You played on some Ohio State teams that came up just short of their ultimate goal. How good were some of those teams – like the 1996 Buckeyes?

Fickell: "Ninety-six was as good of a football team as I've been around. I coached better football teams than we had in 2002. Truly talent wise and things like that wise, but 2002 we obviously won it all. Ninety-six is as talented of a football team as I've ever been around. We had some great teams, we had some great players. It was incredible success that we had. Obviously everybody would say we never beat Michigan, didn't do a great job with that one. But really the reality is there were some great teams there."

BSB: What was John Cooper like as a coach?

Fickell: "Great man. Great guy. Still close to me today as a guy that's one of those guys that you rely on and lean on and call and communicate with still. He was a great guy. He was different in some ways in how he led and the things that he did than some of the other guys that I've been around, but nonetheless he's a Hall of Famer and did an unbelievable job."

BSB: If the 1996 Michigan game had a different result, do you think Cooper's career at Ohio State could have gone differently?

Fickell: "Oh yeah. I don't know that his career would have went much different. Obviously he would have a national championship under his belt. I think it would be more the perception of John Cooper would be different because there's a fine line between perception and reality. And the perception of John Cooper is he wasn't really great because he didn't beat Michigan and he didn't win a national championship when in reality he was great, he did some incredible things and he's a great man.

"So I think the biggest difference would be just a little bit of the perception of him

inside this state, in Columbus, Ohio, but nonetheless everybody says Shawn Springs slipping (to allow a Michigan touchdown in the 13-9 Wolverine victory). Nobody remembers that they held the ball for 7½ minutes and kept it away from our offense in the last drive that if we could have gotten a stop it would have given the offense another chance. It wasn't that Shawn Springs just slipped."

BSB: You had a torn pectoral heading into the Rose Bowl that year. Was there a time when you thought you might not be able to play in the game?

Fickell: "I did it two or three days before the game, two days before the game. So yes, we didn't know. But (defensive coordinator) Fred Pagac ... and those guys and Coach Coop really kind of put it on me. They had enough respect and trusted me enough to say, 'Hey, you're going to start the 50th game of your career. So you're going to go ahead and start and you've got to tell us what it is that you can do. And if you don't feel like you can help the team and do what you need to do to be successful in this game then I'm going to trust that you'll tell us after a play or two.' So I said, 'OK, I will, I'll be honest with you and if I can't do it I'm not going to put our team in jeopardy.' So they bandage you up and put you in a harness so you couldn't move your arm a ton but gave us the opportunity, and I played probably 95 percent of the game."

BSB: From the time you arrived at Ohio State as a player to your final year as a coach in Columbus, how much has the program changed?

Fickell: "I think it has grown. The world has changed and everything becomes so much smaller. The expectations from when I walked in the door there in 1992 is no different than that group of guys that's going to walk in the door early in June here and that's to win it all. That's a great thing, the support and everything like that is no different.

"Obviously facilities and those things. Honestly the culture is no different. There's different leadership styles but still really the same type of kid is going to be attracted there, whether he's from Texas, Florida, California or Ohio. The things that have changed are the different leaders, and then the facilities have changed incredibly."

BSB: Do you have a favorite Ohio State football tradition?

Fickell: "I don't know. The rivalry has got to be still the greatest, whether you were 1-3 as a player in it, which sucked. But that rivalry and what it means and the excitement behind it is to me the greatest tradition and the thing that makes people so passionate about the place."

BSB: What'd you do with your first pair of gold pants?

Fickell: "I gave them to my mother."

BSB: The rest since then?

Fickell: "Gave them to my wife. So that tells you I only had one as a player and then 13 as a coach I think. So my wife – I gave them to my mother first because I figured I'd get a few more and unfortunately that didn't happen."

BSB: What was your transition into coaching like after your playing career ended?

Fickell: "I never had intentions of being a coach. Football ended sooner than I wanted it to. I blew my knee out and the opportunities to continue to play were very limited. That's when I started to realize the people that had such an impact on my life beside just my family, whether it was a wrestling coach or a football coach.

"And then I remember Fred Pagac always telling me that he never once felt like he

went to work a day in his life. And my dad always told me to find something that you love to do because if you're passionate about something you'll have success in it. Those are the kind of things that stuck in my mind, and that's all of a sudden when I say that, this is what I think I want to do."

BSB: In some capacity you coached under Cooper, Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer. How do those three compare and contrast?

BSB: "Well, very different in their leadership styles. All three Hall of Fame coaches. But very different leadership styles. Coop is much more – he's a recruiting guy and he allowed his coaches to coach and he knew that he needed different people to be able to do things, it wasn't like he needed clones to be like him.

"Jim Tressel was just a different leadership style, very positive, upbeat. Everybody was pretty much the same. He treated them all the same – very fair, very real, and his leadership style was all about consistency.

"And then Coach Meyer was much different. He was much more of on-edge and very aggressive, and ultimately all three of them got guys to believe in and buy into the way they do things and that's why they're very successful."

BSB: Are you taking aspects from each coach into your career as a head coach now?

Fickell: "Part of all three of them, yup. That's who you are. The environments that you've been in, the situations that you've grown from help shape who you are and who you will be as a leader, and every single one of those guys has a part that I've learned from."

BSB: What was it like in 2011 when

you first found out you would be the coach for part of a season and then for the full season?

Fickell: "Initially we were going to be I think two games or three games and then Memorial Day when it all kind of came down. It was a shock, obviously everybody was in shock. The program was in shock. The players were in shock. The coaches were in every bit of shock as anybody. It was just a unique situation. There was nothing I could say was exciting or fun about it just because of the turmoil and the situation and how it all went about. But nonetheless it was the greatest learning experience, eight months of my life."

BSB: What was the biggest challenge you faced that year?

Fickell: "I think the ability to keep people all going in the same direction with so much uncertainty and so much turmoil, the reality, the human elements that all settle in. As I realize, I think 18- to 22-year-olds handle things a hell of a lot better than 45- and 50-year-olds. Just because they're more resilient, they're not set in their ways nearly as much. So in order to get everybody kind of aligned and headed in the right direction I think was probably the most difficult thing."

BSB: Was they're anything you did in 2011 that was a mistake that you can learn from now as a head coach?

Fickell: "Holy shit, there's a lot of things. I could write a book about the mistakes we made or I made. But I think the No. 1 mistake was trying to be somebody you weren't and that's hard as a leader. In the midst of how you go about it I thought I had to be like Jim Tressel, and in reality you can't be like Jim Tressel. Nobody can. But I thought that was what was

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Fickell 'Could Write A Book' On 2011 Mistakes

Continued From Page 13

best to give us an opportunity to be successful and not have a bunch of different changes on people, whether they were the players or the coaches. That was just the conscious decision that I made, and it was probably the one that is detrimental because you can't be consistent being somebody that you're not."

BSB: You had a 27-6 lead before losing to Nebraska in 2011. Was that a turning point for the season?

Fickell: "That will be the one you never, ever forget. That was truly, I don't know that we ever recovered from that. We were in pretty good shape, we were doing pretty well, we were coming on and we never, ever as a team recovered from that."

"And I can't exactly tell you, yes we can say that Braxton went out with a twisted ankle and they rattled off maybe 30 unanswered points (actually 28). All I can tell you is I walked and ran to the locker room afterwards and I couldn't talk, couldn't speak, barely could stand up. I just remember my best friend Mike Vrabel just kind of grabbing me at the coach's locker and just saying, 'Hey, this is when they need you the most, you've got to be at your best.' And I couldn't tell you what was really said or whatever, but that's one of those memories that you'll never forget and one of those things I could never thank him enough for grabbing you, picking you up."

BSB: In contrast to that, what were your thoughts while Braxton Miller's pass to Devin Smith at the end of the Wisconsin game was in the air?

Fickell: "Oh hell, I don't know. Just a crazy, crazy game. We had it won, then we had it lost, then we had it won again. That's when you just realize it's about players. When you've got guys like that that you've always got an opportunity to win no matter what the situation is. It's a funny game."

"If you look at it, I think they ended up being the Big Ten champs that year and they were I'd say the best team in the league. We not only beat them on the last second, we had them beat handily before and then they hit a big shot on us. It just happened to be we come back and Braxton hits Devin Smith for a freaky play. Those things are all kind of blurs."

BSB: In your first few months as the head coach at Cincinnati, how much do you look back at that 2011 season?

Fickell: "All the time. Again, we've got a book of things of mistakes that we made, that I made. Got them saved and just making sure that we learn from those experiences. If something comes up, I try to look back to say, 'OK now hold on, did we ever have one like that? Because if we did I'm sure I made the wrong choice in that situation.'"

"But you always reflect back on the things that for me weren't successful and try to figure out why, and that's an eight-month process that hopefully will last me 10 years as a head coach that I can't get all the things that happened in that eight months."

BSB: When did you start really seriously considering pursuing a head coaching job?

Fickell: "A year ago probably now. Legitimately, so it was the summer before

this that I legitimately put my thoughts down and built basically a base to running a program and how do we go about it. Not just from who you hire but to what would be your core values and what would be the things emphasized in your program and how you would implement them and all the different things that go into an entire program. Maybe one-eighth of what we've implemented now because it's not what's most important now, but did that through an entire summer because I knew that if I was going to do it it was something that was going to be important to me and I had to be prepared."

BSB: What made this year the right time and Cincinnati the right fit for you?

Fickell: "Again, my passion changed. Once I put that pen to paper and knew this was something I wanted to do – it didn't mean I took away from my team being a defensive coordinator and those things because I didn't allow it, but in all the off-season and any of the time we had breaks you started focusing on how you build your program and how you build your culture and with who you would want to do it."

"And then it just happened to be that six, seven months after you had that plan one of the places that you would have pinpointed as an incredible fit for you happened to be open. It's a fit for many reasons. I think you can be really successful here because of the community that it's in and because of the football that it's around. The relationships you have in the community and then being the right fit for the family. A place that we truly, truly feel like we could raise our kids and live for 10 years."

BSB: Did you consult Kerry Coombs about Cincinnati before making the decision?

Fickell: "I talked to Kerry, there's no doubt. When I had the opportunity it was out of respect to him. I know that this is a place that's near and dear to his heart that he's one of the guys who I went to his house and visited with."

BSB: Were you hoping Kerry might come with you to Cincinnati to be on your staff?

Fickell: "There was an opportunity but again Kerry had to take a step back and do what was best for him, and if it wasn't the right thing and the best thing at the right time for him then it wouldn't be for us and our program either."

BSB: I know former Ohio State line-backer Marcus Freeman is on your staff – his office is right next door. If you could have one more former player on staff, who would it be?

Fickell: "We were going to have James Laurinaitis. He actually was going to be our quality control, and he was going to do it. But it ended up being at the last minute it just wasn't the right thing, wasn't the right time and the right thing for him."

"But any of the guys like him, him or Anthony Schlegel. Guys like that that are incredibly passionate about kids and young kids and growing men is what's important. Not the smartest guy in the world, but those guys that truly do it for the right things are the people that you want to be a part of. Those are two guys I knew would do it for the right reasons and aren't doing it for the right reasons because it's not the true passion of what they're doing and they're man enough to know they have an opportunity but know it's probably not right."

BSB: Who have you leaned on most for advice in these first few months?

Fickell: "I don't know that there's anybody in particular. I talk to probably (former OSU defensive coordinator and current Michigan State head coach) Mark Dantonio as much as anybody. But the ability to – I can call John Cooper who has been here and Jim Tressel and Coach Meyer at any point in time. But there's just some things you know deep down inside that you've got to make decisions and you've got to do them your way. Sometimes too many opinions can be the worst thing you can get."

BSB: What's your relationship with Urban Meyer like now?

Fickell: "It's good. Again, I don't know that when you first walk away that you want to be reaching back all the time just because you know darn well that you've got to do some things your own way and you've got to do some things on your own. But there's an incredible respect there that when there is a real situation that you've got an opportunity to reach out to somebody who's been doing it for a long time and at the highest level. But there is a competitive nature to that, too, that I want to make sure that we have."

BSB: After recruiting for Ohio State for so long, what's it like to sell a different school to some of the same kids you had been recruiting to Ohio state?

Fickell: "It's easy for me because this is what I believe in and it's my program, our program and we're developing it the way we want it and I really, truly feel like this is a place that we're going to be for 10 years to build a legacy. Anything that you're passionate about and you really truly deep down inside believe in is easy to sell because it's yours and you own it."

BSB: Do you think Cincinnati can go head to head with Ohio State for recruits?

Fickell: "Yes, and that's got to be a mentality that starts with our coaches. Because if they don't then we're going to play those teams and our kids are going to feel that same mentality. If our coaches don't think that we can compete with them, whether it's recruiting or on the field, then why the hell would we?"

BSB: Looking ahead to this season, is that week two game up at Michigan going to be special for you?

Fickell: "I can't put it ahead of anything else. I think it's going to be great for our program because it's a measuring stick to find out where we really are. But is it that much different? No. Is it the one team on the schedule that I know more about? Damn right it is."

"So it'll be something personal but I don't want to make this about personal. This is a new era, this is about what's best for our program and Cincinnati, and that means that we've got to treat every game as something that's special. And I won't let the kids in on the personal feelings that I have about that one because is that what it's really about or is it really about us having a measuring stick against a top-10 program to find out where we really are?"

BSB: How much thought have you given to week two in 2019, going back to Columbus to play Ohio State as a head coach for the first time?

Fickell: "I've been there. I was at University of Akron, I think our second year the opening game was at Ohio State. So I know it was a very unique situation. But I'm probably not too focused on where we are in 2019 as opposed to right now, but it will definitely be something that we can use as a measuring stick but also something to promote our program."



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OSU Great Nugent Aiming For NFL Resurgence

By JAMES GREGA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There is no denying that Mike Nugent is one of the best, if not the best kicker in Ohio State football history.

During his career as a Buckeye, Nugent won a Big Ten title, a national title and the Lou Groza Award as the best placekicker in college football in addition to being named All-American and first-team All-Big Ten in 2002 and 2004. He holds the Buckeyes' career record for kicking points with 356, and his 2002 total of 120 points was the third most in program history. Nugent also holds the record and second place for field goals in a season with 25 in 2002 and 24 in 2004 and the most 50-plus-yard field goals in a career (8). From 2001-02, he set a school mark with 24 consecutive field-goal attempts made in a span of 13 games.

The Centerville, Ohio, native was selected in the second round of the 2005 NFL draft by the New York Jets and has spent 12 years in the NFL with the Jets (2005-08), the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (2009), the Arizona Cardinals (2009) and the Cincinnati Bengals (2010-16). In his NFL career, Nugent has converted 231 of 286 field goals with a long of 58 yards.

BSB caught up with Nugent to discuss his recruitment to Ohio State, reflect on the 2002 season and see what Nugent has planned for 2017 as he is currently an NFL free agent.

BSB: What was your recruitment to Ohio State like?

Nugent: "I will be honest, I wasn't one of those highly recruited guys. I had a few offers late in my senior year, but I was actually going to walk on at Pitt. That is where I felt I had the best opportunity. I was actually on my way to Pitt on my official visit when I got a call from Ohio State with a scholarship (offer). I didn't know if that offer was going to come through because they already had a guy who was a redshirt freshman under Dan Stultz. I figured, 'Why would Ohio State sign me?' They don't need to have two freshmen, so I didn't think it was ever going to happen.

"I actually did some kicking at Michigan State's camp before my senior season for Coach (Mark) Dantonio, who was the recruiting coordinator at Michigan State. I got on his radar a little bit, but they actually ended up offering Dave Rayner, who I competed with in Cincinnati seven years ago. Then Coach Dantonio came to Ohio State and I think they had a staff meeting and went over a few guys that Coach had seen in the past and my name came up and I was lucky enough to get a scholarship from Coach (Jim) Tressel and that staff. That was about two weeks before signing day. Better late than never, and I was very lucky that it happened."

BSB: Who called you from OSU with the offer?

Nugent: "It was Bill Conley. He was the tight ends coach and recruiting coordinator at the time. He was the coach I got to know really well. He was great. I went to Ohio State's kicking camp all four years that I was in high school, and it was great to get to know a couple people on staff that were at the camp and recruiting. He was one of those people that was really nice to have cheering for you."

BSB: How long did it take for you to flip from Pitt to Ohio State?

Nugent: "It wasn't even something I was giving a thought to. I sat there thinking like, 'I am on my way to Pitt, what do I do here?' Once I was offered that scholarship, I didn't just turn around and say, 'My decision is made, everything is over.' Basically, Pitt told me they didn't have any scholarships left, but they would have loved for me to walk on. I still went on my visit just to see what a different school was like and compare it to Ohio State. In my final meeting with the head coach (Walt Harris) I told him, 'Hey, I really want to come here, but I just got a scholarship offer from my dream school. There is no way I would turn that down to walk on here.'

"About two days later, they had a schol-

arship sent to me. It was one of those situations where, it wasn't a good feeling because I was told there was none left and then all of a sudden one showed up at my doorstep because Ohio State offered. There were no hard feelings. Once I got the call from Ohio State, everything was off the table and I was fully committed."

BSB: Moving forward, you won the starting job in 2001, but the 2002 season you won the national title. Is there any one memory from that championship year that sticks out above the rest?

Nugent: "It wasn't a normal Ohio State game if we didn't have everyone on the edge of their seats every single week. If it wasn't the late touchdown at Purdue, it was an interception off a tipped pass against Cincinnati at Paul Brown Stadium. There were so many different things that went on. On a personal level, I just felt much more comfortable my second year than I did my first year. I think I went on a pretty good run of 24 or 25 made field goals straight so that was a lot of fun to see how far I could go with that. I missed my first field goal at Illinois but it was still one of those games where it came down to the wire and we came out on top. Finishing the season at home with Will Allen getting that pick inside the 5 (against Michigan) to seal it was just great. Everything adding up to get us to the national championship, every game was so much fun."

BSB: Coach Tressel was known for playing conservative a lot, but he called a fake field goal in the title game against Miami (Fla.) and the Hurricanes stopped it. Did you expect that call from him on that stage?

Nugent: "He always had a conservative mind-set, so it was one of those things that at the time seemed like a great idea. This was way out of left field in a national championship and a close game. It was funny because we had it in the playbook for a long time. Andy Groom was an incredible athlete. He was a quarterback in high school and a very fast, very athletic guy. We thought it would be an easy first down. Worst case scenario, we get a first down. Hats off to Miami, they played it amazing. They didn't take anything for granted. They just got the best of us on that one."

BSB: You were a finalist for the Lou Groza Award in 2002 and won it in 2004. Where does winning that award rank on your long list of accomplishments?

Nugent: "It was one of the coolest things I have ever gotten to experience. I went 7 of

14 my freshman year and I battled back and forth to win the job, and when I first found out about the Lou Groza Award in high school I asked myself what can I do to be the best? I put in so much work to get there and I felt confident in my stats my sophomore year. I felt I played a big part in the success of our team so when I didn't hear my name called (in 2002), I was pretty bummed out. Nate Kaeding from Iowa had a fantastic season, so it was one of those things where either of us could have won.

"It gave me extra motivation. I had a solid year my junior year, but I came back my senior year and really hit the ball well. It was a good culmination of my college career, and to be able to hear my name called my senior year, I felt like I made my family proud. They got to be there with me to hear my name called."

BSB: Your 55-yard kick against Marshall in 2004 was your first walk-off winner. What were your emotions during that moment, and what was your max distance at that time?

Nugent: "We didn't have one of our best days in terms of scoring touchdowns and putting the ball in the end zone, but Marshall played great. I was just really happy to get the opportunity to go out and hit a game winner. I thought the guys did a good job of getting the ball downfield. It doesn't matter how you win, as long as you come out on top.

"I was very comfortable. I think every kicker has their line where they want to hit every ball the same. I hit that ball the same way I would an extra point or a 35-yarder. I think at that point, I got to a level where I was thinking upper 50s was where I would have to put a little more on it. In a game you have adrenaline going, so anything under 60 I think it was a situation where I would just hit the ball the same. I think every kicker has their limit and a number in their mind. I think at the time for me, my number was about 57 or 58 where I would have to put a little more into it to make sure it gets there."

BSB: How much do you think a kick like that played into your winning the Lou Groza Award?

Nugent: "I think a kick like that helps your numbers when it comes to stats. They look at how a guy does from over 50. Being a winner of the Groza Award, I am able to vote so I look at certain stats and that is one of them. It definitely helps. Maybe a lot of people don't know that was a game winner, but if they find out it was to win a game it might put extra emphasis on it being a pressure kick."

BSB: Not only did you win the Lou Groza Award in 2004, you became Ohio State's all-time scoring leader. Which accolade means more to you?

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THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: MIKE NUGENT



FILE PHOTO

Nugent: "My No. 1 goal was to be the best (kicker) and win (the Groza Award). I would say overall, that is definitely my favorite because I feel like it says I had the best season that year. I barely missed out winning it my sophomore year. I would have liked to join Sebastian Janokowski as the only two-time winner, but I wasn't able to do that and that always bummed me out a little bit. But I can't be upset about winning it my senior year. It was a great moment and something I will always cherish."

BSB: You got the all-time points record in your final game, the 2004 Alamo Bowl. How badly did you want the opportunity to break the record, in addition to finishing your career with a win?

Nugent: "I went into that game thinking it would be really cool to get that record but also knowing that it's pretty much out of my control, whether I score 18 points or I score two. I just thought I needed to pull through on those opportunities, and if I got enough opportunities, the record would come. All I know is, when it's my time I have to make the ball go straight. I think I needed like eight points (for the record). I was lucky enough that I was able to be put in those situations to break that record."

(Editor's note: Nugent needed eight points to tie the record and ended up with 15. He made four field goals and three extra points in Ohio State's 33-7 win over Oklahoma State.)

BSB: On to your NFL career. You were a second-round pick. Did you expect to be drafted that high?

Nugent: "I really didn't. Going through the whole process, I was thinking to myself that hopefully I did well enough in college and at the combine where I would

be the first kicker taken. Not a certain round, just the first kicker taken. That was the best I could have done. I didn't think the Jets were going to make a move like that. Their kicker, Doug Brien, had a great season and was having a great career, but he missed a couple of field goals in the playoffs against Pittsburgh. The timing worked out great, and I was able to play in New York for four years and go in the second round."

BSB: What was it like to play for the Bengals, so close to where you grew up?


Nugent: "I got a bit of a hint of it in either 2006 or 2007 when I was with the Jets. We came to Cincinnati and played them. It was cool to be able to play in front of that crowd. I grew up cheering for them with season tickets as a kid. I think my parents had season tickets for 20-25 years. Just being able to play there was cool enough, but then I got the call in February or March of 2010 and my agent said the Bengals wanted to work me out. A couple days later, they said they wanted to sign me. It was honestly a dream come true. I got to play for the team that I grew up cheering for and got to watch so many games as a kid."

"It was so much fun to be able to play for them and I was treated amazing and I had a great time doing it."

BSB: Are you still actively trying to make an NFL roster?

Nugent: "Oh yes, absolutely. I am about to go kick today. I have 12 years in, but my goal has always been 20. I still want to hit that 20-year mark. I have eight to go so I am absolutely looking forward to the next opportunity to keep going, and hopefully with my next team, I will spend the most of my entire career. Eight more years on the next team would be amazing."

GOLDEN LEG – Mike Nugent played for Ohio State from 2001-04 and left the school with his name all over the program's record books.



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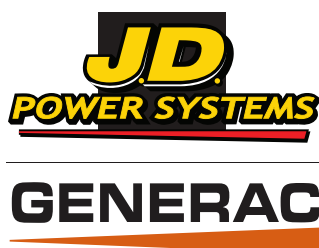
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Olympic Champ Snyder Isn't Close To Being Done

By RYAN MCGLADE
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At the age of 21, Kyle Snyder has accomplished more feats than many do in a lifetime. In addition to winning two individual NCAA national championships and two solo Big Ten titles, the Ohio State wrestler took home a gold medal at the 2016 Summer Olympics to become the youngest Olympic champion in United States wrestling history at 20 years old.

The decorated heavyweight grappler caught up with BSB to talk about these achievements and his wrestling career so far.

BSB: How did you get started in wrestling?

Snyder: "I started wrestling when I was 5 years old. I was an aggressive kid and always wanted to wrestle around with my older brother and my little brother. My parents eventually decided that I should try out the sport, and I've been wrestling ever since."

BSB: In high school, you won 179 straight matches. What do you remember about that streak, and how were you able to pull that off?

Snyder: "I just was competing well. I worked hard, I tried to surround myself with the best coaches and training partners that I could. I don't really remember it too much. It wasn't like I was up in Heaven, that type of high. It was just good and having fun competing and wrestling well for my team."

BSB: Why did you decide to come to Ohio State?

Snyder: "I visited all of the other schools that I wanted to visit unofficially. Ohio State had the best regional training center, some of the best partners outside of college that I could train with that would push me. I felt that my teammates and the other recruits would create a team that could compete for a team title every single year, and the coaching staff couldn't have been better."

BSB: In the summer of 2015, you became the youngest world champion in USA wrestling history by beating defending champion Abdu salam Gadisov of Russia in the gold medal match of the Senior World Championships. What were your emotions going into that match and after winning it?

Snyder: "It was interesting because a couple months before the World Championships I got pinned in the NCAA finals (by Kyven Gadson of Iowa State). So I was motivated to train and work hard. I would've been anyways if I would have won the NAAs but it's just interesting to look back and see how I get pinned in the NCAA finals by a college wrestler and then go on to make the senior world team and win the world championship. It's the happiest I've ever been after a wrestling match."

BSB: Your next year at Ohio State, the 2015-16 season, you were planning to redshirt as a sophomore but returned to competition in January. What led to that decision?

Snyder: "The decision was made because I could compete, I was training hard and the team needed me to try and get a team

trophy. The coaches asked me to come out because they thought it would help the team. It ended up working out well."

BSB: That year you win your first Big Ten title and first NCAA title. What was that run like?

Snyder: "It was cool. That was a really cool season. It was probably pretty unique. Not many people redshirt and then come out half-way through the season. We actually had Myles Martin also come out of his redshirt and become a true freshman national champion, so it was kind of like a year of the redshirts. It's hard to describe the way that I felt. I was just happy to compete well, score a lot of points."

BSB: In the NCAA championship match that year, you won in sudden victory, 7-5. How were tensions in that match?

Snyder: "I wrestled a guy from North Carolina State named Nick Gwiazdowski. He's actually on the senior world team this year with me. It was a very good match, the last match of the night, heavily anticipated, heavyweight final and it lived up to the hype. There was a lot of action, a lot of scoring. It was very cool."

BSB: After that season was the 2016 Summer Olympics. What were your goals or mind-set heading into the Olympics?

Snyder: "My goals are never really focused on obtaining something – gold medals, championships, titles, my goals are never really focused on that. I don't really speak out that way, and I don't really think about it that way. I'm more so just focused on wrestling and becoming a better wrestler and developing a better mind-set so that I can compete at 100 percent of myself."

BSB: When you were getting ready for the gold medal match, were you aware that you could become the youngest Olympic champion in United States wrestling history?

Snyder: "I knew if I made the 2016 Olympic team back when I was like 12 years old that I would be the youngest champion to ever do it, so I knew for a while. And then when it all happened it kind of happened fast. It was definitely a great experience."

BSB: It was a low-scoring match, 2-1. What about that match made it so low scoring?

Snyder: "This guy that I wrestled from Azerbaijan (Khetag Gozumov) in the Olympic finals, he's just really difficult to score on. You could wrestle him for 100 minutes and it would still be hard to score multiple points on him. He's got really good defense, he's really strong. That was his eighth world medal, third Olympic games so he competed a lot and felt a lot of wrestling. It's difficult to score on a guy like that."

BSB: Was that your toughest match to this point in your career?

Snyder: "He's a very tough opponent. My toughest match would probably be the 2015 world championships (against Gadisov)."

BSB: What's it like now that you're an Olympic champion?

Snyder: "It's pretty similar to before when I was the youngest world champion."

Not much has changed, just continue to work, continue to be thankful for the opportunities that I've had and do what I love to do."

BSB: This past season at Ohio State, you won your second Big Ten championship and second NCAA title, and you beat the same wrestler in both matches. How unique was that?

Snyder: "Connor Medbery from Wisconsin, I wrestled him a lot in practice and at training camps, so we knew each other pretty well, and he was undefeated except for his losses against me. He had a great season. He's a pretty good heavyweight. We're in the same conference so we just had to wrestle each other a couple times."

BSB: Before you won a Big Ten title and national title this past season, you were in Russia, Ukraine and Iran for various international competitions. Because of that, you missed some of the OSU season. How difficult or easy was it to juggle the international aspect and the collegiate aspect of your career?

Snyder: "It was not too difficult for me because I'm good with managing my time. I know how to do my work and adjust well over there. It was no big deal."

BSB: How has wrestling internationally helped you here at Ohio State?

Snyder: "It's helped me a lot. I compete against better competitors so I'm learning about my weaknesses, I'm learning what I do well. Every time you compete, you learn a little bit about yourself and the way that you approach it. Mentally, I think about the sport and things like that. I learn a lot every time I compete."

BSB: Along with winning an Olympic gold medal, conference titles, NCAA titles and other championships, you've been named the Ohio State Male Athlete of the Year two times (2016, 2017). What's it like to take home that honor not just once but twice?

Snyder: "It's a great honor. It's a great honor. A lot of great athletes have come to Ohio State, and there's a lot of great athletes here right now. I'm definitely very grateful for the award, and maybe I'll get it a third time. That would be pretty cool."

BSB: You were just named the 2017 Big Ten Jesse Owens Male Athlete of the Year. Do you have similar feelings about being given that award?

Snyder: "Yes, the same feelings. These awards are really cool. I'll probably look back on them when I'm older. Right now, it's kind of like I hear it, I'm happy for a second but then I want to get back to training and try to become a better wrestler."

BSB: The last year to year and a half has been a remarkable run for you. How would you describe the journey?

Snyder: "The journey has been quick. It's been a lot of fun doing what I love to do. The titles and the awards and accolades, I'm very thankful for them but it's not something that I focus on at all. I just try to spend all of my time focusing on things I can control, which are becoming a better wrestler, scoring more points,

attacking, learning new setups and things like that. I focus on that stuff and let the rest take care of itself."

BSB: To have as many accomplishments as you have, you have to be motivated, obviously. Where does the motivation originate from?

Snyder: "My motivation is because I love what I do. I love wrestling. I feel like the purest form of motivation is loving what you're doing while you're doing it, and that's what it's like for me."

BSB: What's it been like to see so many different parts of the world?

Snyder: "It's really cool and an eye-opening experience. Every time I leave, I'm excited to come back. There are other places that are really nice, but there's no place like America."

BSB: Outside of the United States, which place have you enjoyed the most?

Snyder: "The place I've enjoyed the most other than here is Cuba. Nice beaches, got to look around a little bit. Normally when I'm over there I compete, train and leave, so it's not much looking around. I like Russia too because that's where the best competition is."

BSB: What's your schedule like right now?

Snyder: "On July 1, I'm leaving for camp. I'll be back and forth from camp in Colorado Springs, Colo., throughout the summer. I compete in Spain July 16, and then I compete in the World Championships Aug. 26, (in Paris, France)."

BSB: You were in Nebraska a few weeks ago for the World Championships trials. You qualified, obviously, but how would you assess your performance?

Snyder: "I wrestled well at the trials. I wrestled against a guy that had beaten me in college (Gadson in the 2015 NCAA finals). I competed against him, wrestled really well, scored a lot of points (23 in two matches combined), ended the matches quick and made another world team. So now it's just the team will get together, train together and I always improve a lot around high-level competitors and coaches like that."

BSB: You're always busy it seems, but when you get free time what do you do with it?

Snyder: "Just hang out with my friends and do homework. I've got homework in a class right now so I do homework and hang out. I like any form of competition, so volleyball or pingpong. I shoot the basketball a little bit, too."

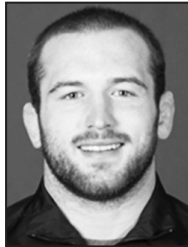
BSB: Your last season at Ohio State is coming up. What are your goals for it, and how do you want to leave your mark on the program?

Snyder: "I don't expect any wins or losses from anybody or anything like that. I just expect them to compete as hard as they can and expect myself to compete as hard as I can. Take care of the things that we can control and at the end of March – the NAAs are in Cleveland – hopefully we have a good enough team to win a team title and end it like that."

BSB: What are your plans once you leave Ohio State?

Snyder: "After I leave Ohio State, I plan to continue to train and pursue as many world and Olympic teams as I possibly can. I want to wrestle for as long as I possibly can, however long God allows me to and allows me to stay healthy and keep loving this sport to train and compete."

KYLE
SNYDER



Kyle Snyder

Stokes Has Kept Busy After College Hoops Career

By RYAN McGLADE
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Former Ohio State basketball player Ron Stokes has certainly been able to keep himself occupied since he finished his collegiate career. The one-time Buckeye guard, who played for OSU from 1982-85, is the father of four children. Along with being the color analyst for Ohio State men's basketball radio for 20 years, Stokes has been a business owner the last 14 years.

Despite the jam-packed schedule, Stokes found time to sit down with BSB to discuss his playing days and life since his basketball career ended.

BSB: Once you got to Canton (Ohio) McKinley, was it a goal of yours to go to Ohio State?

Stokes: "As a young person growing up it was football. I remember watching Archie Griffin and he had that streak of 100 yards or more – I'm not sure how many games it was. I remember watching, I think it was against Michigan when it was broken, where he didn't get it. So I thought of Ohio State first as football.

"Then as I got in high school, the big thing with Herb Williams, that (1977) recruiting class with him and then Clark Kellogg, who at the time was coming through Cleveland. It was my first time seeing this guy (Kellogg) dribbling a basketball at 6-8, 6-9. I'm like, 'Man, this guy can play.' Then he went to Ohio State. That's when Ohio State kind of got on my radar with the Herb Williams and the Clark Kelloggs."

BSB: It seemed like you and Troy Taylor were forever linked to each other, playing together at Canton McKinley and Ohio State. Did you want to go to Ohio State together? Or was it more of a coincidence?

Stokes: "He's the reason why I went to Ohio State because he was more advanced than me in high school and Ohio State was right on him. He was sought after by all of the schools in the Big Ten. He committed early to Ohio State, and at the time I was still developing. I had some schools looking at me at the (Mid-American Conference) level – Kent State, Akron, so forth, Cleveland State.

"Once (Troy) committed to Ohio State, all of the other Big Ten schools stopped recruiting him. The only school that was coming to watch him was Ohio State. So as they were watching him, they were watching me, too. And they saw me as a kid getting better and better and better. But they didn't really have a spot for me.

"Late in the year of my senior year, I went and played in an All-Star game after our year was over and Ohio State either was there or they heard about it and they said, 'Man, we've got to offer him a scholarship.' Then they offered me a scholarship at that point."

BSB: When you got to Ohio State, one of the things people were blown away by was how high you could jump. Have you always had that ability?

Stokes: "When I was a kid I had a love for a couple things. One was sports, I loved playing basketball, but I also was a big fan of cherries. So I would go and pick cherries all over the city of Canton. I would get up early in the morning and pick my cherries, bring them home and then go play basketball.

"I had this little kid who would go and pick cherries with me. He would sit on the handlebars, and I would bicycle all over the city with him on there. I really thought that helped me develop my leg strength because I was going up hills. I don't know if it was that or a combination of God-given ability, but once I started playing basketball – everyone had a challenge of who could touch the rim.

"So I would get up there and everyone would be like, 'Wow! This guy can jump!' I just thought it was natural because it was easy for me. Obviously, in the game of basketball the more athletic you are, it helps you. I could jump, I was quick, I felt that I was a student of the game so my basketball I.Q. was pretty solid. Those things gave me a little edge when I was on the court so I took advantage of them."

BSB: So you had an afro when you first got to Ohio State.

Stokes: "Well, it wasn't a 'fro. I had Care Free Curl. It had these chemicals in it. It was a curl. That was an 'in' thing for me and so that's what I had."

BSB: From what I've heard, there was some discrepancy about what your actual height was or is. Can you provide some clarity to that?

Stokes: "I was a legit 5-11. Obviously, with the curl it put me over 6-foot. But I listed my true height in the yearbook. I was legit 5-11. I'm 5-11½ now, but I was legitimately 5-11."

BSB: What made you decide to get rid of the curls?

Stokes: "Two reasons. It was expensive. I was a college student. Those chemicals that you had to put in your hair every day were very expensive. You couldn't work (as a student-athlete) so I didn't have the money so I got rid of those things. Plus, it was burning my scalp. My head didn't take too well to it."

BSB: Rumor has it that you were or still are a really good Pac-Man player. Is that true?

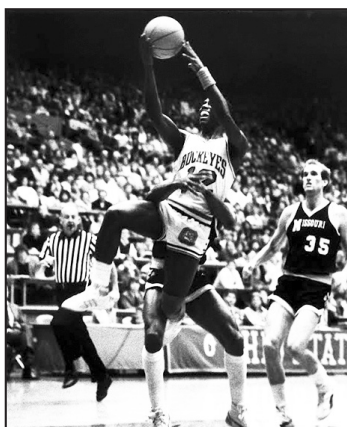
Stokes: "I love Pac-Man. I'll never forget this, somebody had a contest on my street (in Canton) at this restaurant and they had a Pac-Man machine. They said, 'All right, whoever beats this record gets a cash prize.' I beat it, then I beat it again and after I beat it a second time they stopped the contest.

"I played it at Ohio State of course. I took a class at Ohio State that taught you how to study. What it did was say, 'OK, what you should do is put three blocks where you study for two hours, take a break, study for an hour and a half, take a break and then study for a half an hour.' That allows you to retain the information plus rewards you to study for a certain time frame.

"So what I would do is go to the library and I would study for two hours. I'd take a break and walk over to the student union and play video games for like 15 minutes. Then I'd go back to the library, study for an hour and a half, come back to play video games as a reward and then go back to the library. That was my Saturday in between practices. That's what I did to get by and keep my grades up."

BSB: Do you still play Pac-Man?

Stokes: "No, I don't because I'm a business owner so I don't have as much time. I don't play video games anymore, I just don't have the time. I think I stopped playing maybe four or five years after I graduated. I love the game."



COURTESY OF OSU ATHLETICS

HOOPS STAR – Ron Stokes (12) played basketball at Ohio State from 1982-85 after completing his high school career at Canton (Ohio) McKinley.

BSB: So you played for Eldon Miller while you were at Ohio State. Where would you rank him in Ohio State basketball coaching history?

Stokes: "When people ask me about history, I always preface it by saying, 'I only can rate a coach or player based on what I see.' I'm not a big proponent of rating someone just on stats.

"If you're asking me this question about Ohio State, I didn't see Fred Taylor coach. Clearly, when you look at his résumé he was a darn good coach. I'm going to preface this based on from the year I started watching Ohio State, which was in the late '70s. I really didn't watch it prior to Eldon Miller.

"If you say from Eldon Miller on, you've got to put Thad (Matta) at one because of what he's done in all-time wins (337). Based on getting the furthest, I say Jim O'Brien two, and then Randy Ayers, I would say three and then Eldon Miller would be four.

"The reason why I rank Eldon Miller at four is because he's like a 3B. There's a 3A and a 3B. In defense of my coach, he was close. The year with Kelvin Ransey when they lost to UCLA (72-68 in the Sweet 16 of the 1980 NCAA Tournament), that team was definitely good enough to win a national championship. Guess what? They didn't get to the Elite Eight. Our team was one game away two years from winning a Big Ten title, but we didn't win. Same thing with Kelvin Ransey. So I think those are marks against my head coach because he didn't win those big games."

BSB: Speaking of Jim O'Brien, what do you remember about Ohio State's run to the Final Four in 1999 when he was the head coach?

Stokes: "You think about the year before,

which was my first year as an analyst, I don't have the exact number but I think we won like seven games or something crazy (8-22 for the 1997-98 season). In fact, we lost 17 games in a row. It was ugly. We were just not that talented.

"But I knew we were going to be better the next year because that is the year Scoonie Penn came over with Jim O'Brien (from Boston College). I saw Scoonie and I said, 'This kid can play.' Then more importantly, in addition to his athleticism, mentally, he was just a strong leader. It was just a matter of him taking over.

"I didn't expect them to go to the Final Four, but I knew they were good enough to potentially make the tournament. The key to that team was when we went to the Puerto Rican Shootout and we won it (vs. UAB, 71-64). I think we came out of there 9-0 or 10-1 and I said, 'We're going to be good.'

"Then we just got better and better and better. We came into that Sweet 16 as, I think, the No. 4 seed, Maryland was two, Auburn was one and St. John's was three. We beat St. John's and ultimately went to the Final Four."

BSB: Randy Ayers was an assistant coach while you were at Ohio State. What was that like to have Ayers as an assistant before he became the head coach?

Stokes: "My junior and senior year, Eldon Miller was the head coach and Jim Clemons and Randy Ayers were the two assistant coaches. Jim Clemons worked with the guards quite a bit in the two years that I was under him when he was an assistant coach.

"I was not surprised that Ayers was going to be the head coach at Ohio State because he was one of those assistants that was in the office early. He cared about the players. He had a phenomenal relationship with the players. He could talk to them, relate to them, and he had great work ethic. You just knew that sooner or later he was going to be a head coach. I just knew that about Coach Ayers, no question about it."

BSB: Obviously, you played at St. John Arena when you were at Ohio State. What are your memories of playing there?

Stokes: "I think the biggest thing, as I compare St. John Arena to the Schottenstein Center, is that St. John Arena had the intimacy and the uniqueness of it, too, because it had the scoreboards right on the floor, the wooden seats. It was just like an old-school gym.

"St. John Arena was special. I just think the crowd there was – 13,500 was the seating capacity – and when it got loud, it got loud. It was a great place to play.

"Let's face it, the Schottenstein Center is not strictly for basketball, it's made to be able to do a number of things. One, it's hockey. That in itself creates the sightlines to change how the seats are set up because you've got to have them set at certain angles so folks

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Stokes: OSU Deserves A Hoops-Specific Arena

Continued From Page 19

can see the ice. Then, of course, it's set up to have concerts and things like that, so that tells you it's not 100 percent. If it was just made for basketball, it would be completely different."

BSB: Do you wish the basketball team would play at least a couple of its games at St. John Arena?

Stokes: "What I would wish is that, from my understanding, what they did was they went out – based on the purpose – they wanted a multifaceted facility. So they went out and tried to take the best of both worlds."

"Whenever I go to the United Center (in Chicago) I see some of the Schottenstein Center in it. From that standpoint, it's phenomenal. But selfishly, what I would like Ohio State to have done is go out and find the best facility that they could copy but it was a basketball facility vs. a multifaceted facility with hockey and things like that. Selfishly, that's what I would have wanted. Obviously, the leaders had a different vision, which is OK. But for me personally, let's build the best basketball arena because I think Ohio State basketball deserved that. But it is what it is."

BSB: A few years after you left Ohio State, you played for the Verich Reps, who defeated Ohio State in an exhibition. To be clear, what exactly was that team and how did you get involved with it?

Stokes: "As you know, the exhibition season has changed. Colleges can no longer play independent teams. They can only play NCAA Division II teams or smaller. Back then, they could play anyone."

"I was approached by this state representative, Michael Verich. He felt it was a way to brand his name and also have fun as a quasi-general manager. So what he did was he went out and got former players who he felt were pretty good and put together a team. He contacted colleges and said, 'Hey, we would like to be on your schedule,' and Ohio State was one of them. I was on the team. I was the only Ohio State guy. There was a number of really solid players who were not pros or NBA guys, but they were really good at their respective schools. They were unselfish and it was a good team."

"The other thing that helped us, too, is that a lot of the guys were local, so we played against those guys (who were playing for Ohio State at the time) in the summer leagues. There was no intimidation because we kind of knew them. So when we were out there playing, even though it was in front of 13,500, it was like we were playing at a gymnasium. We shocked the world (with a 97-86 win) because Ohio State was No. 4 in the country (in 1991) and had Jim Jackson, Lawrence Funderburke and Chris Jent."

"Typically, those (exhibition) teams didn't beat (Ohio State). They always lost. So for us to beat Ohio State, it was kind of unique. Then after we beat Ohio State, Michael Verich's phone just started ringing off the hook like, 'Hey, we want you to come and play.'"

BSB: You were also in the Worthington Summer League?

Stokes: "I played a half a year with the Columbus Horizons, which was equivalent to the NBA Developmental League right now. The Worthington Summer League was huge. One of the best summer leagues in the entire country at the time. On any given day, you could have at minimum two or three pros on most of the teams. Charles Oakley, Spud Webb came down, Ron Harper played. Obviously Brad Sellers, Dennis Hopson. We had NBA guys playing, we had European professionals coming in, then you had all of the Ohio State players and you had former guys like me who could still play."

"It was a very, very competitive summer league. The Worthington Summer League was just something that was put together and everybody just came together to play in it. It just turned into a monster. It was incredible playing in that."

BSB: How significant was that Worthington Summer League from a fan's perspective?

Stokes: "I thought it was a great way for Ohio State to brand itself because you had all these former Ohio State players playing in the league, then you had the recruiting class that was coming in was playing in it. So you would have these packed out summer league games twice a week, and you had all the Ohio State products out there. I just thought it was phe-

nominal branding for the university to see the old, the current and the new."

BSB: You were also on the TV show "American Gladiators." How did that come about?

Stokes: "What happened was, at the time, 'American Gladiators' was a show that was doing very well in the ratings and they took it out on tour. They took their gladiators, if you will, and they did a 100-city tour. They went to different cities and they put on these exhibitions where you would try out and they selected, I think, six women and six men to compete. So they came to Columbus and I wasn't even going to try out but my wife (Lavita) was going to do it. She said, 'Why don't you come down and do it with me?' So I went down there and there was like 4,000 people."

"They had you do all of these agility and you had to sprint. My wife and I were two of the finalists they picked. We practiced and then we had the actual show downtown. It was a big turnout. I kick myself because I wish I would have taped it. I ended up winning. I set a record in the power ball."

"They couldn't touch me. They did not touch me. They had two little baskets at the end of each area, and the goal as a contestant was to run and put a ball in the basket – a little ball. Their job was to prevent you from doing that, and they could tackle you, throw you down, whatever. I think there was a total of three or four gladiators and they didn't touch me. They were tackling the other contestants but they didn't touch me. I was zigzagging, it was so easy for me."

BSB: So you became a color analyst 20 years ago. How did you get started in that?

Stokes: "Obviously, being an Ohio State athlete, you're going to be interviewed. That's just because it's a big thing. I just loved it. Whenever I get a chance to get interviewed for whatever reason I just have the ability to articulate my thoughts. I enjoyed talking about basketball and I had a pretty good memory."

"Once I graduated, I would get a call from the station, WBNS, they would say, 'Hey, Ron, do you mind coming on and doing an interview?' I said, 'Yes.' Then one day I got a call and they said, 'Hey, we've got this position for pre- and postgame. Are you interested?' I said, 'Yes, absolutely.'"

"So I did that for one year, and then for whatever reason they made a change and they asked me to be the color analyst and I said, 'Of course.' I cut my teeth the first four or five years, and hopefully over time I kept trying to get better and better and polish what I was trying to say and do. So 21 years later this is it."

BSB: When you first started as a color analyst, was Paul Keels the play-by-play man?

Stokes: "No, Dwight Burgess was the play-by-play, and he's a soccer guy. That's what he does now is soccer. At the time, he was work-

ing at the station and they paired us up. That happened to be the first year Jim O'Brien was here (the 1997-98 season)."

"It was just a terrible year. I'm selfish because I'm glad we had a tough season so hopefully not too many people listened. I was cutting my teeth. Then the next year we go to the Final Four and that's when Paul came. So Paul's first year was the Final Four year."

BSB: What really stands out to you as things you enjoy as an announcer? On the flip side, what are some aspects of the job that are not enjoyable?

Stokes: "Being an analyst, it's really fun when the team is winning because you know you have a chance to be a part of some exciting games and some great atmospheres. I had a chance to go to three Final Fours (1999, 2007, 2012) as an announcer, multiple Sweet 16s and called Big Ten championship games. That is the fun part, being a part of that unbelievable atmosphere."

"I'll never forget the Final Four in 2007 where you had Georgetown, UCLA, Florida and Ohio State – pretty good programs. We played Georgetown and we beat them and then Florida beat UCLA, so we're playing in the national championship. That was just a phenomenal atmosphere."

"The tough moments are just personal. Being an announcer, you know that's from October to March so I miss a lot of games for my kids. That was the tough part of it, missing those games and not being there."

BSB: So you've been working with Paul Keels for 19 years. What are some of your favorite stories about him that you can share?

Stokes: "The funniest one was when we were in Puerto Rico. We had a rental car, and Paul and I were coming back from the game to the hotel. From a security standpoint, the folks would say, 'Hey look, guys, you're driving back in the dark. Make sure you don't stop at the stop signs or the stoplights. Just drive through them because if you stop you could get robbed or something.'"

"I don't know if this is true, I'm just telling you what they told me. I'm not talking negatively of the city or anything like that. This is what the locals told us."

"So we're coming back and we're doing what they said, we're not stopping. Then all of sudden we got lost. We turn down this one street and the further we went down the street we knew we were really going the wrong way and it was not a good place. We saw some cars without tires and on blocks."

"We ended up hitting a dead end, and you've got to remember there's no GPS. I pull out a map and I turn on the light and Paul said, 'Ronnie, don't turn on that light!' with his deep voice. So I turn the light off real quick, and thank goodness we got out of there and we were able to make our way back to the hotel."

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THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: RON STOKES

Oh man, that was funny. That was just an all-time classic."

BSB: In your opinion, is Paul a better basketball or football announcer?

Stokes: "I'll answer it this way, some of his superlatives with football are unbelievable. There was one with Ted Ginn who returned it and he didn't get touched, and Paul said, 'He went through there quicker than Mexican water through a tourist,' or something like that.

"I'm like, 'Oh my gosh.' Some of his lines are just – I'll say this, I can't say which one he is better at, but I'll just say that I think I've heard some more unique descriptions in football than in basketball. I think he's darn good at both of them."

BSB: For you as an announcer, what have been some of your favorite games or favorite plays?

Stokes: "The first biggest play was when Brian Brown stole the ball against St. John's (in 1999) that secured the win because I knew we were going to the Final Four. I'll never forget that. It was just a special moment because of where the program was and how quickly it turned from the year before. That one was very special. That was, obviously, with Jim O'Brien.

"Then under Coach Matta, the first – this is an easy one (points to a photo hanging in his office of Matt Sylvester's game-winning shot against No. 1 Illinois in the final game of the 2004-05 season, Matta's first year). That's an easy one. That shot right there, I will never forget because it turned everything around for us. When I look at that picture, I always tell people, 'Yeah, the screen set by Terrence Dials was great and the pass by Brandon Fuss-Cheatham was awesome and the shot by Matt had to be made.'

"But there's another key element in that photo that people don't realize. To the left of Thad, there's a recruit there and his name is Daquan Cook. After that win, Thad had him hemmed up in the corner saying, 'Don't you want to be a part of this?' and got his commitment. Of course, we got Michael Conley and Greg Oden, and that kind of set us off to the races. That shot was so instrumental. That play is right up there."

BSB: Seeing as you announced all of the games during the Matta era, what is your perspective on Thad's time at Ohio State?

Stokes: "I thought he just was very respectful in terms of he never criticized his players publicly. Someone asked a question about what they didn't do and he'd always deflect it and tried to either put it on himself or talk about it in terms of the team didn't do something. He never threw his players under the bus. He's just that kind of guy."

"Just interacting with him and his staff, they did it the right way. They didn't cheat, worked and elevated our program to a level that I don't think has ever been there since the Fred Taylor days in terms of consistently winning Big Ten championships or being in a position to get to the national championship game."

"He worked hard, doing it the right way, being respectful of the other coaches and working with Paul and I behind the scenes with his coaching shows. He was just awesome to work with. It's tough because you kind of take it for granted that every coach does that, but from what I've heard, every coach is not that easy to work with. He was."

BSB: What is your advice to the current guys on the team who are experiencing a coaching change?

Stokes: "It's the same thing I tell my kids: Approach every practice and game like it's your last because you don't realize how quickly it goes. Sometimes you're there and it could be the end of your freshman year and you think it's going to last forever and it doesn't.

Whenever I get a chance to talk to the guys, I say, 'Every day you should try to play as hard as you can and study as much as you can so that you can give it your best because it's not going to last that long.'

"And have fun because life after basketball, whether you're going to work for someone or have your own business, it's hard. Going to college, it's fun. You've got your school paid for, you're traveling in a jet like an NBA guy, you get fed, you play in some of the best arenas, you stay in some of the best hotels, eat in some of the finest restaurants – have fun."

"And respect your teammates because people 20 years from now will not remember how many points you averaged – they're not. They're going to remember the moments, they're going to remember whether or not you were a good teammate, were you a jerk or whatever."

BSB: What are your initial thoughts on Chris Holtmann?

Stokes: "In terms of Chris Holtmann, I met him but haven't had the chance to have any kind of true interaction with him. I think it's everything that we saw in Thad Matta 13 years ago. A young coach who's had recent success, he's had success recruiting in Ohio, he's from a neighboring state with Butler (in Indiana), so I think there's a lot of similarities. If we can get maybe half of what we got from Thad it would be pretty good. Remember, Thad won a Big Ten championship in year two and then a Final Four in his third year. I'll take that."

"I see a young, energetic coach that wants to win. I think this is a great place to have an opportunity to win because you think about the last two coaches that were here. Between the two of them, you're talking about three Final Fours. O'Brien got to the Final Four in year two, and Matta got to the Final Four in year three."

"You can win here, you can win here. The resources are here, which makes it exciting. If you've got a staff that's energetic and ready to work and get kids on campus, you've got a chance to win here."

BSB: You mentioned your kids earlier. I know Amber went to Ohio State. How special was that for you?

Stokes: "It was fun. Obviously, you want your kids to go where they're going to be best suited. There were three schools she was looking at hard: Ohio State, Illinois and Louisville. All of our kids are homebodies so I think that had the biggest (influence). I know I went there but I think the proximity was it."

"The fact that we could get to all of their games and the fact that we were so close. I think it played even bigger role because of the injuries that she had her first couple years, dislocating her shoulder her freshman year. It was really cool."

BSB: Did you get involved much with coaching Amber? Or did you more so step aside?

Stokes: "I guess there's a difference of opinion. If you ask some coaches, they'd probably say I was too involved. I tried to coach her more from a mental standpoint than a physical. I worked with her early on, obviously, when she was growing up as a kid."

"But once she got to the college ranks it was more mental. I always had this thing with her, being that she was a good defensive player, I said, 'Don't get two fouls in the first half and don't get any fouls in the first five minutes of the second half. Don't do that. If there's a possible steal and it's questionable don't do it, there's going to be other plays.' Because if you get two fouls in the first half you're going to sit on the bench and it's going to disrupt your flow."

BSB: How much did your schedule conflict with Amber's games?

Stokes: "It wasn't as bad because with the women, they played on Sundays. With the men, you play your games somewhere between Monday to Saturday, very rarely did you play Sunday games. I know the schedules are all over the place now, but back then when Amber played (2008-13), the men didn't play on Sunday unless it was a national televised

game on Sunday CBS. So I went to all of her Sunday games."

"It was tough because with Ron Jr., who was playing at Gahanna Lincoln High School, my daughter Sydney playing at Gahanna and Amber and then my basketball schedule with Ohio State. Then I had another daughter, my oldest (Laurel), playing at Kenyon College. I was basically in a gymnasium every night from Sunday to Sunday. It was crazy, it was nuts. I enjoyed it, but it was crazy."

BSB: What are all of your kids up to now?

Stokes: "My oldest is married. She's back at her alma mater, Kenyon, and she's working there and coaching a little bit part time. Amber is playing professionally overseas. She just finished her fourth year – she was in Italy. She works in the business during the summer. Ron Jr. just finished Walsh, and now he's working in the business and then he's going to make a decision on what he wants to do. Our youngest, Sydney, is running track at Akron. She did not play basketball. She's the only child that did not play basketball in college, which is OK."

BSB: What are you doing now?

Stokes: "I own several businesses. Three Leaf Productions is a marketing and printing company and has been around since 2003. Then we also have a company called LARS. Those initials are each of my kids' initials – they're part owners of the company, which is a painting company. Those are the two entities that I run."

BSB: How do you juggle being a business owner with announcing?

Stokes: "The biggest challenge is you have to give up things. When people talk about TV shows and things like that, I look at them like, 'What are you talking about?' I don't watch TV. I spend my time working on my businesses and being with my family. I read and I'm a big movie guy. That's what I do in my free time. I don't watch a lot of TV, and I don't golf. I used to golf a lot. So those are things I gave up to manage my time and be efficient."

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Hayes Led BSB's 1st Subscriber To OSU Fandom

By DAVID BREITHAUP
BSB Editorial Assistant

Look at the mailing label on this Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Above your name on the left is a number. If you are a recent subscriber, that number is in the 160,000s. The number on BSB subscriber Norman Maki's label is 2. Label No. 1 belongs to the Edmund Burke School Library. That is the school in Washington, D.C., where BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz's mother, Faye Moskowitz, taught at the time Frank started the paper in 1981. He sent a complimentary subscription to the school then and still does, though Faye has long since moved on to her noted career at George Washington University. That leaves Mr. Maki, of Holden, Mass., as BSB's first actual paid subscriber.

Maki, 73, was born and raised in Holden, and he worked for 33 years in the design industry and has taught driver's education for the last 18 years. We caught up with him recently to find out his thoughts on BSB and Ohio State sports.

BSB: How did you ever find out about Buckeye Sports Bulletin, having lived outside of Ohio for most of your life?

Maki: "I've been an Ohio State fan

since the late '50s. I don't remember how I found your magazine. Maybe I saw an ad in a sports magazine. I get a lot of magazines like the Sporting News, and they never really had much on Ohio State. Then I hear about your magazine and I thought, 'This is great, I can get all the Ohio State news I want.'"

BSB: You were living in Ohio at the time?

Maki: "No, I've never lived in Ohio. I've lived in Massachusetts my whole life. I've flown over it. I've never been there. It's on my bucket list though."

BSB: What was the attraction to Ohio State then?

Maki: "I loved Woody Hayes. I followed the rivalries since the late '50s. I had a friend for a long time here in Massachusetts who was an Ohio State fan too. He bought me a shirt (OSU) and he had his gear and we'd put it on and we'd go to a bar and watch the game every year. It was great. We'd run into people from Ohio which was nice."

"I'm also a big Cleveland Browns fan too. I was a big OSU basketball fan also. I loved watching back in the early '60s with Jerry Lucas and his teammates. I'm glad to see we have a new coach. I love (Thad) Matta but he couldn't recruit anymore. It's a tremendous job with all the 'one-and-done' players. You have to recruit.

You go to a school like OSU, you've got to produce. You can't produce, you're gone."

BSB: You've followed BSB since day one in 1981. What are some of the things you have liked most about the publication over the years?

Maki: "You are very thorough. You cover everything. You started out fine but have gotten even better over the years. I have no complaints. You have great writers who go into depth about all facets of OSU sports. That's what I am looking for. I want good information."

BSB: It was an especially good year for many OSU sports, men and women's tennis, wrestling, another volleyball championship. Baseball needs some work.

Maki: "I'm not just interested in football, you guys cover everything. I want to know about all the other sports."

BSB: How do you feel about print vs. the online version of BSB?

Maki: "I've never really hooked up to the online version but it's something I've got to do. I've always loved the printed edition because I can sit there and read it. I've never really gotten into the electronic thing. I've got to do that. I'm old. Growing up we didn't have computers. I like to sit and read."

BSB: I like to ask some of our subscribers if they have been to the Snow Bowl, but since you have never been to Ohio, probably not.

Maki: "No. But I was a youngster back then. But I did almost go to Woodstock but that's another story. I missed it but that's OK."

BSB: What are some of your favorite OSU memories then, since you missed Woodstock?

Maki: "Oh I don't know. I have so many of them. I can give you a list a mile long. I'm not a golf pro but I love Jack Nicklaus. I've followed him forever. I used to watch golf just because he was playing. And like I said, I followed OSU basketball since back in the early '60s. I'm a Celtics fan of course, but I loved when John Havlicek played for them. There are so many memories. I remember seeing Hopalong (Cassady) play. Maurice Clarett, Jack Tatum, Rex Kern, Jim Stillwagon. So many great players it's hard to pick. I of course loved the more recent championship wins."

BSB: What's it like being a Buckeye in Massachusetts?

Maki: "Great! I have no problem. I get the rivalries. People ask me, 'Why are

you an OSU fan? Why aren't you a Boston College or UMass fan?' I tell them I've been a fan since the 1950s and am going to continue to do so. I had the friend down the street that was a big Michigan fan. He was like me in that he didn't go to Michigan, he just liked them. We used to go to each other quite a bit - in a friendly way. There's no problem being a Buckeye in Massachusetts."

BSB: What do you think of Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh?

Maki: "I don't think much of him. One of my sons is a big 49ers fan, and he was a great coach for them. He's a good coach but he cries too much. If Urban (Meyer) loses he might get a little excited, but Harbaugh just goes nuts on people. I wouldn't send my kids to Michigan. I just like the way Urban does things. You don't see him ranting and raving. I don't know. I know you have to protect your team, but I cringe when I watch him."

BSB: I love his meltdowns.

Maki: "He was the same way with San Francisco. I suspect he loses a lot of players that way."

BSB: He's fired up.

Maki: "I get that. You've got to be fired up, but I don't know, he just goes overboard."

BSB: Prediction time. Are the Buckeyes going to have a good season?

Maki: "I don't know. I'm a little worried about the defensive backfield. We lost a lot of good kids last year, but the recruiting has been really great. I watched the spring game, I taped it and watched it again. I liked it. But we have two new coaches, the guy from Indiana (Kevin Wilson) which I don't know how they will work out, I don't know what they are going to bring to the table. I hated to see Luke Fickell go. He was a loyal Buckeye, and like I said I'm a little concerned about the new guys (coaches) coming in."

"J.T. (Barrett) underperformed last year so he has to perform this year. If he falters I have no problem putting (Joe) Burrow in. I like him. I like the other guy (Dwayne Haskins) too. (Mike) Weber's back, I think we are going to be all right. One thing I hope they do more is use their tight ends. I don't know if you watch the Patriots but they rely on their tight ends. We don't do that at Ohio State. Occasionally we do it. I think the key this year is Barrett throwing down the field. I'm optimistic, we will just have to wait and see."



Norman Maki

NORMAN MAKI



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OSU vs. Indiana: Aug. 30-Sept. 1 — 2-night motorcoach trip with accommodations at the French Lick Resort and Casino with breakfast daily, game tickets in OSU section and visit to Churchill Downs Museum with lunch en-route to French Lick. **\$569** per person based on two to a room.

OSU vs. Oklahoma Home Game: Sept. 8-10 — 2-night land only package with accommodation for two nights at the Hilton Polaris Hotel including taxes, breakfast daily and transportation to the game and a game ticket. **\$699** per person based on two to a room. We are very limited on this offering. We are also offering a 3-night air package from Oklahoma City and is on our website.

OSU vs. Rutgers: Sept 28-Oct. 1 — 3-night motorcoach or air to New York City with 3 nights at the Sheraton Times Square Hotel including hotel taxes and breakfast daily, tour of Manhattan on Fri. including One World and Ellis Island-Statue of Liberty, transportation to Rutgers and game tickets in OSU section. Motorcoach is **\$1,239** per person based on two to a room and air is **\$1,539** per person based on 2 to a room. Land only packages are also available.

OSU vs. Nebraska: Oct. 11-16 — 5-night motorcoach trip with 1 night in each direction accommodations at Embassy Suites in Peoria, Illinois and 3 nights at Embassy Suites Old Market in Omaha including all taxes and breakfast daily, Manager's Cocktail Party each night but game day and city tour of Omaha on Friday and transportation to Lincoln and game ticket in OSU Section. **\$1,189** pp based on two to a room. Also offering air trip for Oct. 12-15 at Embassy Suites Old Market in Omaha, same tour of city on Friday, breakfast daily and hotel taxes, transportation roundtrip from Airport to Hotel and to game in Lincoln, game tickets in OSU section. **\$1,449** per person based on two to a room.

OSU vs. Iowa: Nov. 3-5 — 2-night motorcoach trip with accommodations at the Radisson Quad Cities for two nights including hotel taxes, Welcome buffet dinner and breakfast on Saturday and Sunday, roundtrip transportation to Iowa City for the game and game tickets in OSU section. **\$649** per person based on two to a room.

OSU vs. Michigan: Nov. 24-25 — 1-night motorcoach trip with accommodations on Friday night at the MGM Resort and Casino in Detroit including taxes and breakfast on Saturday and game ticket in OSU Section and return to Columbus when game is over and cost is **\$599** pp based on two to a room.

Reynolds Travel is also offering a 5-night trip to London with sightseeing and game tickets to see the Cleveland Browns vs Minnesota in October and this is on their website.

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