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Vol. 36, No. 16

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Feb. 11, 2017

Drama Free

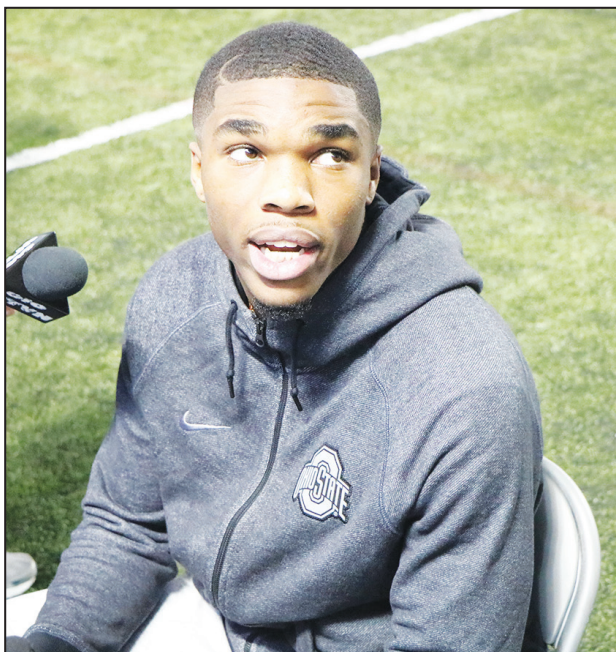
Buckeyes Receive 21 Letters Of Intent On National Signing Day

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor



ABOVE: JOSH WINSLOW; BELOW: TIM MOODY

WRAPPED UP – Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer (above) put together a top-five recruiting class that included a total of 21 signees, including five-star cornerback and early enrollee Jeffrey Okudah (below).



On the final day of 2016, the Ohio State football program was at a low point. It didn't take long after the calendar turned to 2017 for the Buckeyes to ring in the new year with a bang.

Or, as director of player personnel Mark Pantoni would say, a "Boom!"

Ohio State closed out last year with a resounding 31-0 loss to Clemson on Dec. 31 in the College Football Playoff semifinals at the Fiesta Bowl. On Feb. 1 of this year, the Buckeyes bounced back by inking 21 players to letters of intent for the most talented class in the nation, on paper at least. The Buckeyes, who finished with the fourth-best overall class in the team rankings on Scout.com, parent network of BuckeyeSports.com, had an average star rating of 4.19. Alabama was second in that category at 4.00.

Although a loss like the one Ohio State suffered in the desert could be tough to come back from, head coach Urban Meyer said the Buckeyes bounced back quickly, and it paid off on the recruiting trail.

"We did not play well, obviously – that's an understatement – in our final game," Meyer said on National Signing Day, Feb. 1. "Believe it or not, for me that left this facility very quickly. We delved into recruiting, finished off one of the best classes in history, and the team is at it and going at it with the intent that that will never happen again."

When the 2016 season concluded, Ohio State's class was already largely wrapped up. The Buckeyes secured a key commitment in December from five-star line-backer Baron Browning out of Kennedale, Texas, and four-star cornerback Shaun Wade reaffirmed his commitment to Ohio State. Both players spurned Alabama in order to end up as early enrollees in Columbus.

The first week of January, though, proved that recruiting classes can change at any stage in the process.

During U.S. Army All-American Bowl practices that week, Ohio State commits such as Browning, Wade and quarterback Tate Martell were often seen spending time with five-star defensive backs Jeffrey Okudah and Darnay Holmes. Okudah was long considered an Ohio State lean while Holmes was long considered likely to end up at UCLA. That week, though, it seemed that Holmes could end up as a Buckeye.

In the end, both players announced Jan. 7, and the surprise twist didn't come that day. Okudah became a Buckeye and arrived in Columbus the next day, while Holmes did, in fact, commit to UCLA. Though a Holmes commitment would have been a dramatic turn, a twist of even more drama still managed to come that week. On Jan. 11, four-star wide receiver Tyjon Lindsey, a high school teammate of Martell at Las Vegas Bishop Gorman, announced in the early morning hours that he was decommitting from Ohio State. The

**BSB'S 2017
RECRUITING
WRAP-UP**

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Buckeyes Filled Major Needs With 2017 Class

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move shocked pretty much everyone other than Lindsey himself.

On signing day, Martell, who was thought to be close friends with Lindsey, deflected a question regarding his former teammate.

"I mean, that's his decision," Martell said. "I'm not really going to talk about everything about it. But I'm not upset with him. If he felt like going to Nebraska was his best decision, that's what's best for him then."

Once Lindsey decommitted, Ohio State was left with 18 total commitments and holes to fill at receiver and offensive line (four-star tackle Jake Moretti had flipped to Colorado earlier in the process).

The Buckeyes got an almost immediate boost at receiver when four-star Cleveland

Heights product Jaylen Harris committed just two days after Lindsey reopened his recruitment, though Harris had been expected to be in the class regardless of Lindsey's situation. With mere weeks remaining until NSD, Ohio State was still looking for another wide receiver and visited a couple before settling on Elijah Gardiner out of Kemp, Texas, as the main target.

On Jan. 30, Gardiner committed to Ohio State, and the Buckeyes had also offered a scholarship to Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star offensive lineman Thayer Munford in the days before NSD, according to Scout.com's Bill Greene.

With Gardiner in the fold and Munford seemingly a lock to be in the class, the Buckeyes enjoyed a drama-free National Signing Day that included an afternoon announcement from Munford, who had actu-

ally faxed his letter of intent to Ohio State earlier in the day.

"Our class has been in place for quite a while, even Munford. Thayer signed today, but he's been committed for a few days," Meyer said. "A very good class."

Pantoni agreed that NSD ended up being relatively painless for the Buckeyes this year, and he noted that was the plan heading in.

"I'll just start off with one of (Ohio State cornerbacks coach Kerry) Coombs' favorite lines: Today wasn't a good day, it was a great day at Ohio State. It was exciting," Pantoni said Feb. 1. "I felt confident last night going to bed, and you guys probably saw my tweet, that we didn't want any drama here today and there wasn't. That was always a good sign on signing day."

Perhaps the only disappointment for Ohio

State on NSD was the fact that the Buckeyes missed on five-star defensive tackles Jay Tufele (USC) and Marvin Wilson (Florida State), but neither player was thought to be likely to end up in Columbus, anyway.

Checking The Boxes

While Ohio State's class is great on paper just from a talent perspective, the Buckeyes also filled their biggest needs with the 21 additions to their roster. Perhaps the largest hole to fill is at defensive back, where Ohio State lost three starters early to the NFL draft for the second year in a row (Malik Hooker, Marshon Lattimore and Gareon Conley this year; Eli Apple, Tyvis Powell and Vonn Bell the year before).

Included in the 21 signees was perhaps one of the greatest defensive back hauls any school has signed in history in one recruiting



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COVER STORY

class. That list is made up of Okudah (No. 2 CB), Wade (No. 5 CB), Amir Riep (No. 11 CB), Isaiah Pryor (No. 7 SAF) and Marcus Williamson (No. 14 CB). And that's not to mention Ohio State's only junior college signee, Kendall Sheffield, who was the No. 1 JUCO player overall for his class.

"Malik Hooker walks out, you'd better put someone back in, and you don't have to be overly intelligent to figure out if the guy you slide in that is not good enough, your team is not quite good enough," Meyer said.

"Two years in a row we've lost six out of eight secondary players to early entry into the NFL draft, and that's unusual. And then you replaced them with guys that we're really excited about, and they're here, and that's Jeffrey Okudah, Shaun Wade and Marcus Williamson. And they're already here training and working out. They're very good, young players. You also have Isaiah Pryor that's going to compete at the safety spot, as well."

With three starting spots open, Okudah, who could play safety or cornerback at Ohio State, said he has no plans on sitting out as a true freshman.

"That's my intention," Okudah said when

asked if he was competing for a starting spot. "I know a spot's open so it's just all about competition. I know the best two corners will get on that field, and so it's just whatever I make of it and I'm just going to try to take the opportunity and run with it."

"I'm trying to get here seven days a week, just trying to work. I know I don't have too much to do here, I don't know too many people around here, so I just try to come here and get as much extra work in as I can, work with Coach Coombs. I'm going to start watching a lot of film. Right now I'm just trying to get my technique down and learn the defense."

The Draft Effect

While losing so many players to the NFL draft in the span of two years could be a detriment to a program (the Buckeyes lost nine players early after 2015 and six more after this past season), it served as a boost for Ohio State's recruiting.

On the field, the Buckeyes will be without some of their most talented players from last year, but the success Ohio State has had in

the NFL draft, and the way former Buckeyes have played in the pros, proved to be a huge plus in recruiting. Winning a national title in 2014 hasn't hurt, either.

"In my opinion starting with the national championship and then almost a year ago in April at the NFL draft, seeing all those guys walk across the stage has really lifted our platform probably on a more national level to be able to open these kids' eyes a little bit more to Ohio State," Pantoni said.

Okudah and Pryor both noted that recent draft success at Ohio State – especially for defensive backs – did play a part in their decisions.

"It made me know that it's a great DB program and made

me want to be a part of something special," Pryor said.



Mark Pantoni

Staying Home

While Ohio State's 2017 class was a resounding success overall, there's one spot

Meyer said he would like to improve on in the future.

Of the 21 signees, just six played their senior years in Ohio. A seventh, Williamson, played at Westerville South before transferring to IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla., last year.

Meyer was adamant when asked if that was enough in-state players to sign in one class.

"No, it's not," he said. "No, 50 percent is kind of the mark that I've been trying to – I keep it right in front of me and I stare at it and make sure that we're doing right."

Pantoni had a similar sentiment.

"No, it wasn't, not enough Ohio," he said. "That's something we want our percentage to be much higher on. There's too much talent in this state, but at the same time, we're also searching for the best players in the country."

In 2017, it turned out those top players were out of state for the most part, so the Ohio number was small. But 2018? That could be a different story for the Buckeyes and in-state prospects as a new recruiting cycle gets fully under way.

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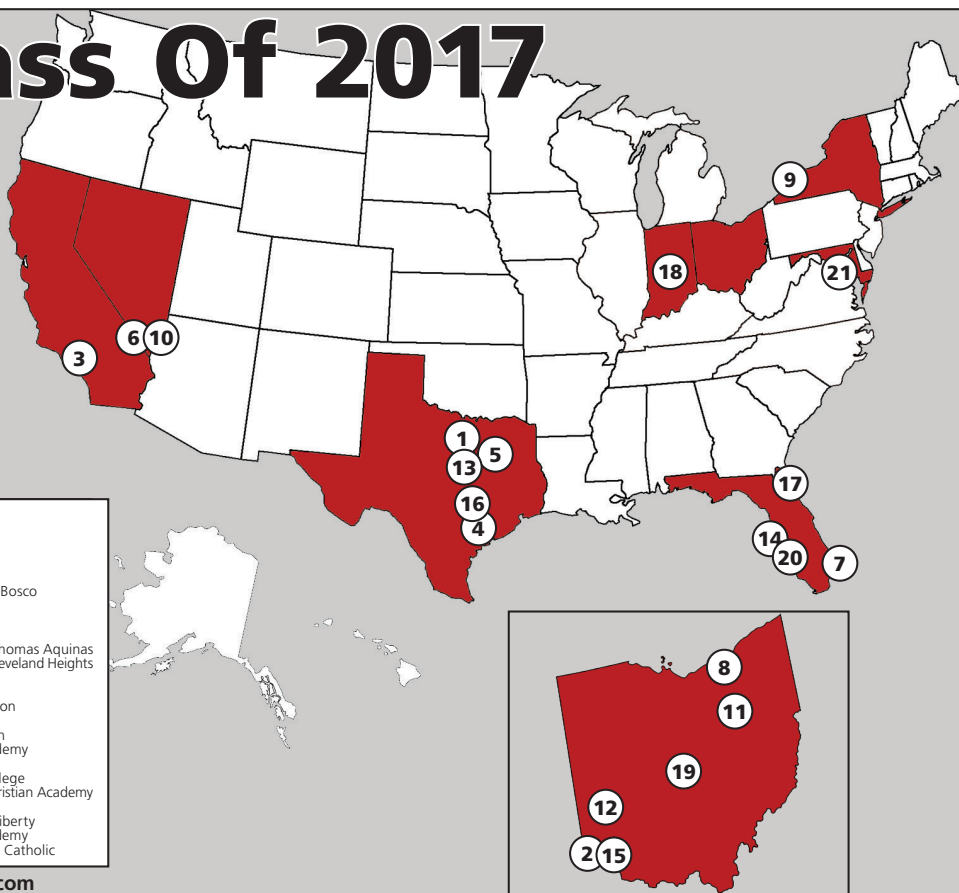
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OSU's Class Of 2017

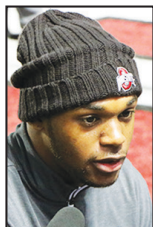
On Feb. 1, 21 players from eight states signed letters of intent to play at Ohio State. Here is a map featuring where they played football during the 2016 season.



Player Key (*Early Enrollee)

No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Previous School
1.	Baron Browning*	LB	6-4	230	Kennedale, Texas
2.	Jerron Cage	DT	6-3	280	Cincinnati Winton Woods
3.	Wyatt Davis	OL	6-4	310	Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco
4.	J.K. Dobbins*	RB	5-10	199	La Grange, Texas
5.	Elijah Gardiner	WR	6-4	200	Kemp, Texas
6.	Haskell Garrett	DT	6-2	286	Las Vegas Bishop Gorman
7.	Trevon Grimes	WR	6-4	202	Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas
8.	Jaylen Harris	WR	6-5	205	University Heights (Ohio) Cleveland Heights
9.	Blake Haubeil	K	6-3	200	Buffalo (N.Y.) Canisius
10.	Tate Martell*	QB	5-10	203	Las Vegas Bishop Gorman
11.	Thayer Mumford	OL	6-6	325	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
12.	Josh Myers*	OL	6-6	306	Miamisburg, Ohio
13.	Jeffrey Okudah*	CB	6-1	190	Grand Prairie (Texas) South
14.	Isaiah Pryor*	SAF	6-2	195	Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
15.	Amir Riep	CB	5-11	183	Cincinnati Colerain
16.	Kendall Sheffield	CB	6-0	183	Brenham (Texas) Blinn College
17.	Shaun Wade*	CB	6-2	175	Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy
18.	Pete Werner	LB	6-3	215	Indianapolis Cathedral
19.	Brendon White*	ATH	6-2	205	Powell (Ohio) Olen tangy Liberty
20.	Marcus Williamson*	CB	5-10	170	Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
21.	Chase Young	DE	6-5	240	Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic

All rankings and expert evaluations from Scout.com



BARON BROWNING

LB • 6-4 • 230
Kennedale, Texas
Rank: OLB 1, Overall 23



ACCOLADES: Browning was named a U.S. Army All-American and a finalist for the 2016 high school Dick Butkus Award as the top linebacker in the nation. He helped Kennedale make its first-ever appearance in the Texas 4A state semifinals in 2016. He was the state's 2016 Associated Press 4A defensive player of the year with 81 tackles, 10 tackles for loss and 10 pass breakups, in addition to being named a two-time first-team all-state honoree.

BROWNING SAYS: "I wanted to go somewhere where I could play at the highest level and get one of the best educations in the country. It was a close call. At one time I was thinking about going to Alabama, but when I remembered what was important to me it made the decision easy."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Browning is a big and physical presence on the field, especially intimidating at the linebacker position where you just do not see many guys with his size playing standing up. He moved all around the Kennedale defense. He played up on the line of scrimmage as an edge rusher and moved to the middle to stop the run." – Greg Powers

PERSONAL: Browning is the son of DeKisha and Barry Browning, who was a two-year football letterman at TCU. Baron's brother, Barry Jr., is a Stanford graduate who was a four-year football letterman for the Cardinal between 2007-10. Baron enrolled early at Ohio State.

COMMIT DATE: Dec. 1, 2016



JERRON CAGE

DT • 6-3 • 280
Cincinnati
Winton Woods
Rank: DT 16, Overall NR



ACCOLADES: Cage is a two-time AP Division II first-team all-state defensive lineman at Winton Woods as a three-year starter. For his career, Cage tallied 24 sacks in addition to 81 total tackles in his senior season alone. He also earned first-team All-Ohio honors from both MaxPreps and JJ Huddle.

CAGE SAYS: "It feels special. Ohio State was on me off the jump. They showed me the most love, and my heart was at Ohio State. Every big program has got something, but something for me was (defensive line coach Larry) Johnson. Coach Johnson is an unbelievable coach. Ever since I met him it was just automatic love from me to him and my family. As soon as my dad met him, he was just like, 'Oh, my God, yes, I love this man.'"

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He has a lot of physical tools and uses his size and quickness (well). As he continues to improve his technique, he's going to be tough to handle because of the athleticism he has at his size. When he puts it all together, he is rarely stopped." – Allen Trieu

PERSONAL: The son of Dionne and Adrian Cage, Jerron is also a stellar wrestler at the high school level. His brother Daniel plays defensive line for Notre Dame.

COMMIT DATE: July 21, 2015



WYATT DAVIS

OL • 6-4 • 310
Bellflower (Calif.)
St. John Bosco
Rank: OG 1, Overall 16



ACCOLADES: Davis was twice named a member of the American Family Insurance All-USA Football Team and was a U.S. Army All-American. He was named the U.S. Army's Glenn Davis Award winner "for epitomizing the Army's high standard for excellence in community service, education and athletic distinction."

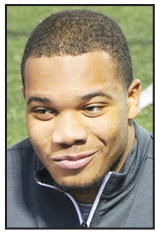
DAVIS SAYS: "Ohio State was my real dream school. What really stood out to me was the whole if football didn't work out what they will do for you. The programs that Coach (Urban) Meyer has and the type of people he brings in to speak to us, I felt like that was really big. It's also a great school. I didn't even know that. It felt like home."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Away from the gridiron, you won't find a more polite, good-natured, jovial kid than Davis. He always has a smile, is always accommodating to talk to anyone who asks and never has a bad thing to say about anyone. The second that whistle blows, however, something changes and Davis is able to flip that proverbial switch and turns into a completely different person." – Greg Biggins

PERSONAL: He is the son of Inge and Duane Davis. Duane is an actor and has played athletes such as Joe Louis and Buster Douglas over the years. Davis' grandfather, Willie Davis, is a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame who played defensive end for the Green Bay Packers. Wyatt also played basketball in high school, and his brother, David, played football at Washington State and Cal.

COMMIT DATE: June 24, 2016

RECRUITING WRAP-UP: OSU'S 2017 CLASS

**J.K. DOBBINS**

RB • 5-10 • 199
La Grange, Texas
Rank: ATH 3, Overall 67



ACCOLADES: Dobbins is a consensus four-star athlete who was named 4A all-state in 2015 by both the Texas Sports Writers Association and The Associated Press. He only played one snap as a senior because he broke a bone in his right leg. Prior to that, he compiled 5,149 rushing yards and 74 touchdowns during his first three seasons as La Grange's tailback. He helped La Grange to two state playoff appearances.

DOBBINS SAYS: "When I was younger I always watched Ohio State because it's a great school with great tradition, winning tradition. And I felt like, 'Man, it would be crazy to play here.' So whenever I got the opportunity I just couldn't pass it up."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Perfect fit for the spread offense. He is a bit of a different breed from a speed and agility perspective. He's one of those guys who seem almost impossible to bring down as he ducks and dodges tackles and at times makes defenders look silly as they end up just grasping at nothing but air where Dobbins used to be standing. He is versatile in the fact that you can line him up in the backfield or split him out wide as a receiver." – Greg Powers

PERSONAL: Dobbins' late father, Lawrence Dobbins, played for La Grange as well and was on the 1997 state semifinalist team. The younger Dobbins' mother is Mya Grounds. J.K. committed to the Buckeyes before seeing the campus and opted to enroll early.

COMMIT DATE: March 6, 2016

**ELLIJAH GARDINER**

WR • 6-4 • 200
Kemp, Texas
Rank: WR 146, Overall NR



ACCOLADES: Gardiner led Kemp High School to back-to-back appearances in the Texas 3A state playoffs playing multiple positions including wide receiver, quarterback, running back and cornerback. He was named an all-district 3A player as a senior.

GARDINER SAYS: "I am long and lanky, and I can outrun people down the field. Ohio State obviously is the best football team there is really in college football. The academics are outstanding. It is a good college and I love it up here."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Gardiner has a large frame and looks like he will definitely become even bigger by the time he hits the field in college, but he is very athletic and can cause matchup problems for defenders. He uses his body well to shield would-be defenders away from the ball. He is a great weapon in the red-zone with his size and leaping ability. He is not a fast-twitch athlete, but he is an excellent possession receiver and a guy who you can depend on as a blocker. He started to really come into his own throughout the course of his senior year, and that is what got him on the radar of some top college programs." – Greg Powers

PERSONAL: The son of Brandy Odell and Loyce Myers, Gardiner excelled in track and field as well as football, as he was a 3A state qualifier in the triple jump. He flipped to Ohio State after previously committing to Missouri.

COMMIT DATE: Jan. 30, 2017

**HASKELL GARRETT**

DT • 6-2 • 286
Las Vegas
Bishop Gorman
Rank: DT 4, Overall 47



ACCOLADES: Garrett is a consensus four-star athlete who went 43-0, winning three state titles and three national titles, during his three years at Bishop Gorman. As a senior, he recorded 54 tackles, 20 tackles for loss, 7½ sacks and an interception. He had 56½ TFL and 25 sacks for his career. He garnered first-team Nevada all-state recognition and was a U.S. Army All-American. He was also named the 4A Sunset and Southwest League defensive most valuable player.

GARRETT SAYS: "Everything (Ohio State does) speaks for itself. I've got a lot of family on the East Coast. I just thought it was the best fit for me. Ohio State, man, they're winning games. They prepare you on and off the field for everything – life, college, the next step and moving on past football."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Garrett is a versatile player who has the ability to play inside or outside depending on the scheme. He has the size and toughness to play as a true tackle or three-tech but moves well enough to move outside in a 3-4 system as well. He has a great combination of strength, burst off the ball and physicality. He has a nonstop motor, plays with superior technique and is a playmaker. He can take on a double team, penetrate and still make a tackle. His upside is tremendous." – Greg Biggins

PERSONAL: Garrett is originally from Vermont but lived in Hawaii for a short time after the death of his father when Garrett was 13. His mother is Maria Key. Garrett opted to commit to Ohio State before his first visit to campus.

COMMIT DATE: Feb. 9, 2016

**TREVON GRIMES**

WR • 6-4 • 202
Fort Lauderdale (Fla.)
St. Thomas Aquinas
Rank: WR 9, Overall 63



ACCOLADES: Grimes suffered a knee injury after the third game of his senior season and missed the rest of the year. In his limited action, he had 15 receptions for 274 yards and two touchdowns. For his career, Grimes registered 42 receptions for 770 yards with 11 touchdowns for a St. Thomas Aquinas teams that won state titles in 2015 and 2016. He was named All-Broward County as a junior after a 27-catch, 496-yard season and led the Raiders with seven scores. In addition to playing high school football, Grimes also ran track. He was the 300-meter hurdles state champion of Florida as a freshman and sophomore and was 110-meter hurdles runner-up as a freshman. Grimes was named the Sun Sentinel 2015 Class 4A-3A and All-Broward County track athlete of the year.

GRIMES SAYS: "Just a great coaching staff, a great atmosphere (at Ohio State). I grew up watching Ohio State as a kid when I lived back in Indiana. Great coaches and it's, I guess, close to home."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He's got all the tools. He's 6-4, 200-plus pounds. He's got to work on his route-running, expanding his route tree a little bit as a receiver. But he's got what you look for in a No. 1 receiver. He runs in the 4.5s in the 40-yard dash. He's not going to blow you away with his stats, but he's got the tools to be a special player. The potential is there." – Chad Simmons

PERSONAL: Originally from Indianapolis, Grimes moved to Florida in the sixth grade with his parents, Leah and Lebron Grimes. His favorite athlete is former Detroit Lions wide receiver Calvin Johnson.

COMMIT DATE: Aug. 22, 2016

**JAYLEN HARRIS**

WR • 6-5 • 205
University Heights (Ohio)
Cleveland Heights
Rank: WR 20, Overall 137



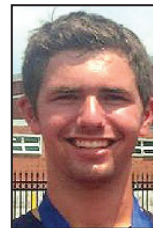
ACCOLADES: Harris caught 53 passes for 820 yards and eight touchdowns as a senior and was named first-team Associated Press Division I all-state. His 42 receptions for 796 yards and five touchdowns during his junior season led to him being named All-Lake Erie League, all-District and All-Cuyahoga County.

HARRIS SAYS: "Ohio State has always been my dream school growing up. They were one of the only schools I really knew about and watched throughout my childhood. The way I looked at it was I could not go wrong at Ohio State with football or my education. I built great relationships with the coaching staff throughout the recruiting process, and Ohio State felt like home."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He can be a different type of deep threat, not so much as (former Ohio State wide receiver) Devin Smith that runs by everybody. But just a guy that is a deep threat just because he can physically overpower guys and he can go up and get the football. He's a guy that you can throw him the ball even when he's covered. You can throw him open, he'll go get it and overpower guys. His deep threat won't be 4.4 speed, running by people. It will be just physically overpowering people for the football." – Bill Greene

PERSONAL: Harris is the son of Angela and Ronnie Harris. He plans to pursue the sports management field and possibly become an agent. Harris also excels on the basketball court, being named 2015-16 Associated Press All-Northeast District as a junior after averaging 14.8 points per game.

COMMIT DATE: Jan. 13, 2017

**BLAKE HAUBEIL**

K • 6-3 • 200
Buffalo (N.Y.)
Canisius
Rank: K 3, Overall NR



ACCOLADES: Haubeil was named to the USA Today All-USA first team as a senior and was a USA Today first-team All-New York pick as a junior as well. He went 17 of 22 on field goals in high school and connected on a long of 61 yards in addition to making 89 of 91 extra-point attempts. The 61-yarder was the longest in New York state history. Haubeil set the Monsignor Martin Athletic Association record by going 56 of 56 on PATs as a senior.

HAUBEIL SAYS: "I was always with Ohio State and always will be. It's just the atmosphere. You get an atmosphere when you walk into a school like Ohio State. I did look at a few other schools, but as soon as Ohio State offered I was 99.9 percent sure I'm going there, and now it's 100 percent."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He's a big-legged kid. He was at Ohio State's Friday Night Lights camp. He was knocking them in from 50 yards. Two of them were from 55. He missed them but had the distance, plenty of leg. And the thing I like, it was under pressure – well as much as you can create at that time. Urban Meyer was standing just a few feet from him just making sure that Blake knew that every kick was being watched by him." – Brian Dohn

PERSONAL: He is the son of Brooke and Rik Haubeil. Haubeil also spent time at Amherst High School but transferred to Canisius for his final two seasons. He committed to Ohio State almost immediately after receiving an offer from the Buckeyes.

COMMIT DATE: July 25, 2015

RECRUITING WRAP-UP: OSU'S 2017 CLASS

**TATE MARTELL**

QB • 5-10 • 203

Las Vegas
Bishop Gorman
Rank: QB 2, Overall 27

ACCOLADES: A U.S. Army All-American, Martell was also named the Gatorade and MaxPreps national player of the year after finishing his high school career a perfect 43-0 as the starting quarterback for Bishop Gorman. In that span, he threw 113 touchdown passes to just nine interceptions and won a national championship each year he was the starter behind center.

MARTELL SAYS: "I'm not thinking about 12 months, I'm thinking about right now. I want to play. I know I'm just going to go out there and do everything I can, and if I don't play I know that's on me and I know that Coach (Urban) Meyer is going to play the best guy and if I go prove that, I mean, that's not my decision to make or anything. But I'm thinking about right now, I'm not thinking about 12 months."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "On the high school level, Tate Martell is Johnny Manziel. He uses his feet and his football smarts to beat defenses and make plays outside the pocket. While he does not possess a rocket for an arm, it is adequate enough for the college level. Martell has been a winner all throughout his career, and he should be a player that relishes pressure situations, not shrink from the spotlight." – Bill Greene

PERSONAL: The son of Tafi and Al Martell, Tate is originally from Southern California before his family moved to Las Vegas. He was committed to Washington and Texas A&M at different points in time before committing to Ohio State. Martell transferred high schools at the end of the fall semester in order to graduate and enroll early at Ohio State.

COMMIT DATE: June 12, 2016

**THAYER MUNFORD**

OL • 6-6 • 325

Massillon (Ohio)
Washington
Rank: OT 22, Overall 107

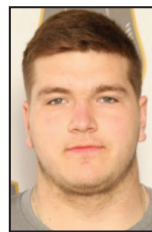
ACCOLADES: While Munford was ruled out for much of his senior season, he did play in the final regular-season games including a playoff game. Before transferring to Massillon, he played at Cincinnati LaSalle and helped the school win Division II state championships in 2014 and 2015. Munford was named third-team Associated Press all-state and first-team All-Greater Catholic League as a junior at LaSalle.

MUNFORD SAYS: "If I get the help that I need, I can be successful in my academic career. The thing I am looking forward to most is to better my academics. That is No. 1 and to better myself as a football player. I got to college and I (will earn) my degree. That is the most important thing for me."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "The size is evident and he looks like the type of lineman you find at Alabama, Ohio State or USC. He has good balance for someone his size, and the footwork has gotten dramatically better in the past year. Munford is a powerful run blocker and has the length and footspeed to be good in pass protection. He is a physical football player that plays with a chip on his shoulder." – Bill Greene

PERSONAL: Munford is the son of Melissa Thompson. He transferred to Massillon Washington when Nate and Becca Moore became his legal guardians. Moore is the Washington head coach and was Munford's coach at LaSalle. Munford also plays basketball for Washington High School, and he competed in track and field at LaSalle.

COMMIT DATE: Feb. 1, 2017

**JOSH MYERS**

OL • 6-6 • 306

Miamisburg, Ohio
Rank: OG 3, Overall 57

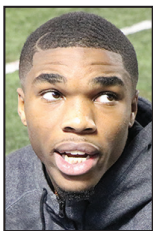
ACCOLADES: Myers, a U.S. Army All-American, was a first-team Associated Press Division II all-state pick as a junior and senior and helped Miamisburg make four state playoff appearances. He was also named first-team All-Greater Western Ohio Conference four times.

MYERS SAYS: "There's a lot of things that play into it, but when it came down to it I just knew. I just knew I didn't want to be anywhere else but there (Ohio State)."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He is a really strong kid, physically strong. He's got a great body, he's got a wide base, but he's really agile for such a big kid. He moves his feet really well. He bends really well, can really move people in the running game. That's what I like about him. So many times his team, when they get in trouble they line up and run behind him and everybody knows it's coming and he clears the way. He has just great physical skill to play that position." – Bill Greene

PERSONAL: Myers' mother, Julie, is in the University of Dayton Athletics Hall of Fame as a basketball player. His father, Brad, was an offensive lineman at Kentucky from 1984-87. His brother, Zach, also played football for Kentucky, capping his career as a Wildcat in 2016. Myers enrolled early at Ohio State.

COMMIT DATE: Jan. 25, 2015

**JEFFREY OKUDAH**

CB • 6-1 • 190

Grand Prairie (Texas)
South

Rank: CB 2, Overall 15



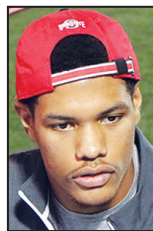
ACCOLADES: Okudah is a unanimous five-star prospect who was selected to play in the U.S. Army All-American Bowl, where he committed to the Buckeyes. He was also named an American Family Insurance All-USA defensive back after posting 43 tackles, five pass breakups and 795 yards of total offense as a two-way player for South Grand Prairie, which made it to the Texas class 6A state playoffs in 2016.

OKUDAH SAYS: "I like the DB development at Ohio State. They send a lot of guys to the NFL. The relationships that you build at Ohio State are tremendous – networking, a big alumni base. Coach (Urban) Meyer is great because of all the prestige he has in college football."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "I've said it before and I believe it today as well, that Okudah is a more physical (version of former Ohio State safety) Vonn Bell. When you are compared to guys like Malik Hooker and Bell, you're an elite prospect. And that's why Jeffrey Okudah is personally my highest rated member of the 2017 Ohio State recruiting class." – Bill Greene

PERSONAL: Okudah is the son of Marie Okudah, and his guardians are Jane and Patrick Obodo. He has spoken about Ohio State's business school in the past and cited that as one of his main reasons for choosing the Buckeyes. Okudah got an early start to his collegiate career as one of nine Ohio State recruits to enroll for the spring semester, which began Jan. 9.

COMMIT DATE: Jan. 7, 2017

**ISAIAH PRYOR**

S • 6-2 • 195

Bradenton (Fla.)
IMG Academy

Rank: SAF 7, Overall 70



ACCOLADES: Pryor helped lead IMG to a 12-0 record and a No. 1 ranking in Florida as a senior. IMG was also ranked fourth in the nation. He tallied 54 tackles as a senior and was an Under Armour All-American in addition to being named a finalist for the Watkins Award, which is given to the top African-American scholar-athletes in the nation. He began his high school at Archer High School in Georgia where he was named honorable-mention Class 6A all-state as a junior.

PRYOR SAYS: "I was born in New Jersey. I moved to Georgia when I was 10. I was just touring everywhere. I just really liked Ohio State a lot, and I have some family up here, too. I had more of a connection with the Big Ten because my dad played for Iowa so I watched the Big Ten a lot, not necessarily Ohio State."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He's a very instinctive player. He tackles well. For a big safety, he does a good job tackling low, wrapping up. And he may not wow you with speed, but he takes very good angles to the football and he really plays the ball in the air very well. So he's got a very, I would say, all-around good game. He's solid against the run. He can play in the box. He's been used in blitz packages before and he also tracks the ball to make a play on the pass." – Chad Simmons

PERSONAL: Pryor, who opted to enroll early at Ohio State, is the son of Lillian and Richard Pryor. Isaiah wrestled while at Archer before transferring to IMG, where he played with fellow Ohio State early enrollee Marcus Williamson. Richard Pryor played defensive end at Iowa from 1984-88.

COMMIT DATE: July 27, 2015

**AMIR RIEP**

CB • 5-11 • 183

Cincinnati
Colerain

Rank: CB 11, Overall 99



ACCOLADES: A four-year starter at Colerain, where his college position coach Kerry Coombs used to be the head coach, Riep missed three games with an injury in 2016 but helped lead his team to an 11-1 finish as a senior. In four seasons, he recorded 15 interceptions and was the Greater Miami Conference Player of the Year in 2015, the same year he also earned second-team AP all-state honors.

RIEP SAYS: "It has always been a dream to play for Ohio State, but to me when I think about it, without football, Ohio State would have still been my decision. It's a great feeling being on the Ohio Stadium field and just imagining all the people screaming, that's a great feeling."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Long, quick and with great ball skills, he's a top-notch cover man with everything you could want in a cornerback prospect. He has the size you want in a cornerback, but he also has some of the best feet. His ball skills are excellent, and he is also a competitive kid." – Allen Trieu

PERSONAL: Son of Katherine Gowdy and Maurice Riep, Amir had more than 40 scholarship offers before choosing Ohio State. He earned an invite to The Opening Nike Camp final in Beaverton, Ore., prior to his senior season.

COMMIT DATE: July 23, 2016

RECRUITING WRAP-UP: OSU'S 2017 CLASS



KENDALL SHEFFIELD

CB • 6-0 • 183
Brenham (Texas)
Blinn College
Rank: JUCO 1



ACCOLADES: In his one year at Blinn College, Sheffield finished with 31 tackles, two forced fumbles and two interceptions in nine games. He also handled kick- and punt-return duties, returning one punt and one kick for touchdowns. He was originally a five-star prospect and the No. 9 overall player in the class of 2015.

SHEFFIELD SAYS: "I would describe my game as physical, up-to-beat and just going 100 percent and just having fun out there. One thing I do well is just having a knowledge of the game. I study a lot of film and read the quarterback and read my keys."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Sheffield has about everything you are looking for in a cover corner and may be the best at what is a loaded position in the JUCO ranks in the Class of 2017. The transfer from Alabama shows tremendous quickness in and out of his breaks and closes on the football in an instant. He was considered more of a finesse corner coming out of high school, but it does not take long to see that he has the ability to come up and be a sound tackler, so there are not many question marks surrounding his game. He is one of the fastest players in the nation regardless of position." – Greg Powers

PERSONAL: Sheffield transferred to Blinn College in Texas after redshirting for a season at Alabama in which the Crimson Tide won a national title. The son of Shelia and Cecil Sheffield, Kendall Sheffield chose Ohio State over Texas A&M.

COMMIT DATE: Jan. 10, 2017



SHAUN WADE

CB • 6-2 • 175
Jacksonville (Fla.)
Trinity Christian Academy
Rank: CB 5, Overall 55



ACCOLADES: Wade was named the 2017 Lockheed Martin defensive back of the year and was selected to play in the U.S. Army All-American Bowl. He was also named the American Family Insurance All-USA defensive player of the year. As a senior at Trinity Christian, Wade tallied 63 tackles, seven interceptions (two returned for touchdowns) and nine pass breakups on defense. He also starred on offense in high school.

WADE SAYS: "When I took the visits I was just making sure it was the right place, making sure Ohio State was the right place. I took the visits to Alabama, Virginia Tech, a couple other schools, just seeing if O-State was the right place and God led me to the right place, so I'm here now and I'm a Buckeye."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "The physical skills are not in question as Wade has the ability to compete with any defensive back on the roster from that standpoint. As with every newcomer, Wade needs to throw himself into Greg Schiano's playbook and learn as much as he can before he puts on the pads this spring." – Bill Greene

PERSONAL: He is the son of Gwen and Randy Wade. Shaun comes from one of the top high school football programs in the nation, and Trinity has been especially dominant recently by winning the past four state championships. He enrolled early at Ohio State.

COMMIT DATE: Jan. 12, 2015



PETE WERNER

LB • 6-3 • 215
Indianapolis
Cathedral
Rank: OLB 18, Overall 266



ACCOLADES: A first-team Associated Press Class 6A all-state pick as a senior, Werner originally committed to Notre Dame before flipping to the Buckeyes in mid-December. He missed three games due to a hip injury but tallied 64 tackles and eight sacks in 2016 as a safety and finished third in the voting for Mr. Football honors in the state of Indiana. He was rated by Scout.com the No. 1 outside linebacker in the Midwest region.

WERNER SAYS: "I chose The Ohio State University because of its winning tradition and strong academic reputation. I have discovered through this process that Coach Meyer and his staff outwork their competition. It is clear that they love to win and hate to lose. So do I. That is what drives me to be great."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "This (commitment) was done the day after the Michigan game. Werner is one heck of a player, and I wish the excitement level was higher with him among the recruit-niks. He can play linebacker at a high level, and Ohio State wanted him very badly." – Bill Greene

PERSONAL: Werner is the son of Nancy and Greg Werner, and his father played football and baseball at DePauw University where he is in the school's athletics Hall of Fame. Greg also played two seasons in the NFL with the New York Jets and Philadelphia Eagles. Pete's older brother, Dan, plays football for Harvard.

COMMIT DATE: Dec. 11, 2016



BRENDON WHITE

ATH • 6-2 • 205
Powell (Ohio)
Olentangy Liberty
Rank: ATH 11, Overall 161



ACCOLADES: White played multiple positions during his high school career, including quarterback, defensive back and wide receiver. As a senior, he led the Patriots to the Ohio Division I state semifinal game. He finished his senior campaign with 11 passing touchdowns, 10 rushing touchdowns and four receiving touchdowns after earning AP all-state honors as a defensive back in 2015 as a junior.

WHITE SAYS: "I have two numbers right now for offense and defense. Right now I am just working out and working hard, and they will put me where it best fits me so I can be successful. When I first got here, Coach Meyer brought me in as offense. Noah Brown left and that was a shock to him. At the end of the day, I am just trying to get on the field."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "I love the size, length and overall athletic ability of Brendon White and think he is the type of player that will flourish at Ohio State. While he could easily play either side of the football, it appears he will be starting out at wide receiver. He could also be successful at linebacker or safety, but he has the skills to contribute at Ohio State at whatever position they see fit." – Bill Greene

PERSONAL: White is the son of Nikol and William White, who was a captain on Ohio State's 1987 team as an All-Big Ten defensive back who played 11 years in the NFL. Brendon graduated early from Olentangy Liberty and began practicing with the Buckeyes in December during bowl prep.

COMMIT DATE: October 3, 2015



MARCUS WILLIAMSON

CB • 5-10 • 180
Bradenton (Fla.)
IMG Academy
Rank: CB 14, Overall 123



ACCOLADES: Williamson helped IMG to a second consecutive undefeated season in 2016 with a 12-0 mark. In his one season at IMG, he returned an interception for a touchdown, recovered two fumbles and returned one for a touchdown, and recorded 36 tackles and two pass breakups. The Under Armour All-American was named special-mention Division I all-state as a junior in 2015 for Westerville (Ohio) South.

WILLIAMSON SAYS: "I just think, for Ohio guys, (playing at Ohio State) means a little more to us. We're from here, we're playing in front of our families, we grew up watching (former Ohio State quarterback) Terrelle Pryor and all of those guys. It's a different feeling. It's hard to explain. I'm just glad to be here."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Williamson is a speedy cover corner that does a nice job of locking down his man and staying in their back pocket. He has to continue to get stronger and add weight but plays light on his feet with loose hips to go along with it. He's not a big talker in the secondary either, but Williamson certainly doesn't lack confidence once it's time to clock in and man up." – Chad Simmons

PERSONAL: Williamson is the son of Tamar and Marlon Williamson. He joins safety Isaiah Pryor as the two prospects from IMG in Ohio State's 2017 recruiting class. He plans to major in history and to eventually go into law school. Williamson enrolled early at Ohio State in January and spent three years at Westerville South before transferring to IMG for his senior season.

COMMIT DATE: April 18, 2015



CHASE YOUNG

DE • 6-5 • 240
Hyattsville (Md.)
DeMatha Catholic
Rank: DE 2, Overall 12



ACCOLADES: Young led DeMatha to a 12-0 record and a state title in 2016 by recording 118 tackles, 37 tackles for loss and 19 sacks as a senior. He forced five fumbles and returned a strip sack and an interception for touchdowns. The Washington Post named Young the all-metropolitan defensive player of the year, and he was named a U.S. Army All-American.

YOUNG SAYS: "I think I'm the best D-end in the nation and I was their only target. Ohio State is the best football team in America. If you're their only target, you better go, so that's what I did."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Young is a force on the edge coming off the blind side. He is cat-quick and changes direction well. He fires off the ball and plays with a low pad level. Young knows how to use his hands to disengage, and he plays with a great motor. He has the speed to chase down plays on the back side. Young is not asked to drop into coverage, but he has the athleticism to do that as well. Once he gets stronger, he will dominate games regularly." – Brian Dohn

PERSONAL: He is the son of Carla and Greg Young. Before going to DeMatha, Chase played for two years at Pallotti High School in Laurel, Md. He was one of the standouts at the U.S. Army All-American Bowl and competed at The Opening finals.

COMMIT DATE: July 22, 2016

RECRUITING WRAP-UP: CONSENSUS POLL

'Bama Tops Consensus Poll For 6th Straight Year

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Alabama has dominated college football on the field and on the recruiting trail for years. That didn't change a whole lot in 2016-17, either.

The Crimson Tide, which ended the season as runners-up to Clemson in the national title game, claimed the top spot in the annual Buckeye Sports Bulletin consensus poll for the sixth year in a row, and there wasn't much competition this year from anyone other than Ohio State.

The Buckeyes, though, ended up signing just 21 players for 2017, leaving them at No. 2 in the consensus poll. Rounding

out the top five were Georgia at No. 3 and Michigan and USC tied for fourth.

The consensus poll, which is based on the final team rankings from Scout.com, CBS Sports recruiting analyst Tom Lemming, ESPN and Bleacher Report, is decided on a points system with 25 points awarded for being first in a poll and one point awarded for being 25th.

This year, Alabama was rated No. 1 by each of the outlets involved, while the Buckeyes were rated second by Lemming, ESPN and Bleacher Report and fourth by Scout.com, the parent network of BuckeyeSports.com.

"I think most people assume they're sort of just in cruise control at this point, that Alabama can just wave their hand and

bring in top classes," Scout.com recruiting analyst Allen Trieu told BSB. "They have a ton of advantages, but they still have to go out and recruit these guys and (head coach Nick Saban) does a good job and his staff does a good job. They get these guys on campus early, and they don't rest on their laurels. I think they could easily just let the reputation recruit the kids, but they don't."

Lemming told BSB it was a no-brainer to put Alabama No. 1 after the Crimson Tide signed 28 players, but the Buckeyes were an easy choice for second as well.

"You've got to go when they signed more talented players than Ohio State then you have to put them up there," Lemming

said. "When they get seven more players, and all those players are blue-chip, four-star types just like Ohio State. So it was pretty simple to put Alabama No. 1."

Before Alabama rounded up a few late additions to its class, though, the Buckeyes were looking like the top team in Lemming's eyes.

"A couple months ago I didn't think anybody was going to beat Ohio State with that great secondary they're bringing in and everybody else. But then you never rule out Alabama because they seem to – some guys will leave because they want them to leave the class and then they'll bring in some greater players at the end."

Alabama's class included the No. 1 over-



Nick Saban



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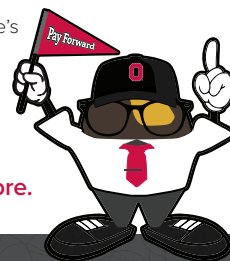
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RECRUITING WRAP-UP: CONSENSUS POLL

BSB Consensus Poll

1.	Alabama	100
2.	Ohio State	94
3.	Georgia	91
T-4.	Michigan	86
T-4.	USC	86
6.	Florida State	81
7.	LSU	76
8.	Oklahoma	74
T-9.	Texas A&M	65
T-9.	Auburn	65
11.	Florida	51
12.	Miami (Fla.)	47
13.	Penn State	45
T-14.	Notre Dame	44
T-14.	Tennessee	44
16.	Maryland	42
17.	Clemson	38
18.	Stanford	35
19.	UCLA	33
20.	Nebraska	25
T-21.	Oregon	21
T-21.	South Carolina	21
23.	Washington	13
24.	Virginia Tech	9
25.	Michigan State	7

Teams received points based on their placement in each of the four top-25 polls above. Points assigned to teams are in inverse proportion to their placement in a poll (25 points for first, 24 points for second, etc.) First-place votes in parentheses.

Also receiving points in the poll were Mississippi State (3), Colorado (2), Arkansas (1) and Texas (1).

all player, according to Scout, in running back Najee Harris, as well as the No. 9 player, offensive tackle Alex Leatherwood. The Crimson Tide also signed two of the top 10 junior college prospects – defensive end Isaiah Buggs and offensive tackle Elliot Baker – and three other five-stars in linebacker Dylan Moses, wide receiver Devonta Smith and linebacker VanDarius Cowan. Alabama even went all the way to Honolulu to sign one recruit – quarterback Tua Tagavailoa, who was the No. 38 player in the nation.

Ohio State's class, on the other hand, included 12 of the top 100 players nationally while Alabama had 13. Each team signed six five-star prospects, but Alabama got a boost in the four-star range with 17 to Ohio State's 13. The Buckeyes, though, were greatly limited by tight scholarship numbers for next season.

Unlike Ohio State, Michigan had plenty of room in its class, and the Wolverines signed 30 players to their haul. Even so, Michigan was rated ahead of Ohio State by Scout only, and ESPN and Bleacher Report each had the Wolverines dropped down to sixth in the nation while Lemming had them third.

"Michigan had big numbers, they had (30), but not quite the talent of the first two, although they'll say they did," Lemming said. "I liked them because they brought in stars at just about every single position. Even quarterback, I thought Dylan McCaffrey was the second-best quarterback in the country."

National Recruiting Experts' Rankings

SCOUT.COM

- Alabama
- Georgia
- Michigan
- Ohio State
- USC
- Oklahoma
- LSU
- Florida State
- Texas A&M
- Florida

TOM LEMMING

- Alabama
- Ohio State
- Michigan
- USC
- Georgia
- Florida State
- LSU
- Oklahoma
- Texas A&M
- Auburn

ESPN

- Alabama
- Ohio State
- Georgia
- Florida State
- USC
- Michigan
- LSU
- Oklahoma
- Auburn
- Clemson

BLEACHER REPORT

- Alabama
- Ohio State
- Georgia
- USC
- Florida State
- Michigan
- LSU
- Oklahoma
- Auburn
- Texas A&M

Joining Ohio State and Michigan in the BSB consensus poll out of the Big Ten were Penn State (13th), Maryland (16th), Nebraska (20th) and Michigan State (25th).

In general, the consensus poll proved the idea that "the rich get richer," Lemming said, but a pair of Big Ten schools that had been down on their luck bounced back in a major way.

Maryland and Nebraska, neither of which finished in the consensus top 25 a year ago, both signed talent-heavy classes to try to fight back against the Big Ten's best.

While reading his top 25 aloud, Lemming was audibly surprised by his own ranking for the Terrapins – he had them all the way up at 13th.

"I thought they'd never be there," Lemming said.

The 2017 class marked head coach DJ Durkin's first full recruiting cycle in charge of the program, and Lemming said the difference was obvious.

"Without a doubt it's DJ Durkin and his staff, he's got an excellent recruiting staff," Lemming said.

"DJ has learned from (Michigan coach) Jim Harbaugh, I can tell. He's got that way of recruiting, which is just nonstop, and that's the way you have to recruit nowadays. Your hobby cannot be golf, it's got to be recruiting. And DJ has taken a page from (Ohio State coach Urban Meyer) and from Saban and Harbaugh and (Penn State coach James) Franklin of just day after day after day, recruiting. Just pound away."

The gem of Maryland's class was four-star running back Anthony McFarland out of Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic, where he played with Ohio State five-star signee Chase Young. The Terrapins signed a total of 28 players, 10 of whom were four-star prospects.

Lemming noted that Nebraska had a surprise recruiting cycle as well. The Cornhuskers finished with 20 signees, including nine four-star prospects. The biggest get of that group was four-star receiver Tyjon Lindsey, the No. 58 player in the nation, who had been committed to Ohio State mere weeks before NSD.

As far as Ohio State's class is concerned, Lemming said there are countless players who could make a big impact in Columbus, which is the main reason the Buckeyes were able to finish second in the consensus poll despite signing just 21 players. But despite the depth of talent, Lemming did single out one player who might not be the biggest name in the class.

"There's too many to really pick one guy, but keep an eye on (four-star running back) J.K. Dobbins," Lemming said. "He reminds me a lot of the Dallas Cowboy back (and former Ohio state running back Ezekiel) Elliott. He's about 200 pounds, he's not really tall. I went out to La Grange (Texas) to see him and I was really impressed. He runs low to the ground, he's got real strong legs, breaks tackles. He fits perfectly into Ohio State's offense."

"This is like a who's who class, and in almost any normal year Ohio State's

No. 1. If Ohio State signed 28 players like Alabama, there's no doubt they'd be No. 1."

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RECRUITING WRAP-UP: MICHIGAN

Harbaugh's Antics Land No. 3 Class For U-M

By RYAN McGLADE
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A year after Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh engaged in unusual recruiting tactics such as climbing trees during a home visit with a recruit, playing bare-chested in a shirts and skins football game and partaking in sleepovers at recruits' homes, the peculiar behaviors continued for the 2017 recruiting cycle.

This time around, Harbaugh and his daughter went go-kart racing with a recruit, the head coach jumped in a pool with another prospect, and he even showed off hip-hop dance moves during another home visit.

"It worked last year so I'm not surprised that he would do it again," said Allen Trieu, who is a recruiting analyst based out of Michigan for Scout.com, parent network of

BuckeyeSports.com. "I think some of it is recruiting sticks schticks but I think a lot of it is just him, too. For these kids, if that's who you're going to play for, I guess you get used to it a little bit during the recruiting process with him just being a quirky guy."

In an attempt to land a commitment from five-star defensive tackle Aubrey Solomon, Harbaugh and his daughter Addison took a trip down to Leesburg, Ga., in mid-January.

The group spent the day go-karting and bowling. Solomon (6-3, 305) had committed to the Wolverines in July 2016 but decommitted the next month. The No. 11 overall prospect and the second-rated defensive tackle according to Scout returned to his original deci-

sion, however, and signed his letter of intent with the Maize and Blue on Feb. 1, National Signing Day.



Jim Harbaugh

"He was a heck of a get," Trieu said of Solomon. "Not covering the South, I hadn't seen him a lot. Then I saw some of his film and it was obviously really, really good stuff. The thought was, 'He's not in Atlanta, he's not at one of the big powerhouse schools. How would he do against good competition?' Then at the U.S. Army All-American Bowl (on Jan. 7), I thought he was one of the more impressive defensive linemen that we've seen there in the last couple of years. So it was obvious that he was a big-time player. He rose in the rankings steadily through the process, I think because of performances like that one."

Another infamous Harbaugh-recruiting moment occurred while visiting four-star defensive tackle James Hudson out of Toledo Central Catholic. Harbaugh showcased some dance moves he picked up from R&B singer Usher. A video of Harbaugh's performance went viral on social media.

Sure enough, Hudson inked his LOI on signing day as well. The 6-5, 294-pounder is considered by Scout the 15th-best defensive tackle in the 2017 class and is rated No. 273 among all prospects.

These two aforementioned episodes were done in efforts to garner commitments from high school grid players. The next one was done to commemorate a recruit pledging to the Wolverines.

Four-star receiver Oliver Martin of West Senior, Iowa, met with Harbaugh and Pep Hamilton, Michigan's new assistant head coach and pass-game coordinator, on Jan. 30 to announce his commitment. To celebrate, all three of them jumped fully clothed into the pool the university's swim team uses. Harbaugh took Addison there to go swimming, and Martin and his parents were there as well.

"That's the moment he committed," Harbaugh told The Detroit News. "We shook hands while we were standing on the pool deck. I've always watched (Michigan swim coach)

Mike Bottom and his teams, when they win the Big Ten champion they all jump in the pool. We all jumped in the pool. It just happened."

Martin (6-1, 185) is considered the 30th-best receiver in the 2017 class by Scout and checks in as the No. 216 prospect overall.

The pool-jumping moment, along with the countless other recruiting methods Harbaugh uses, has led to some labeling his approach "crazy," Harbaugh begs to differ.

"First of all, I certainly don't categorize it as crazy," Harbaugh told a Detroit sports-talk radio show. "It never feels like work to me. You're having fun. There's a lot of great people in this world, and you've got to go out and meet them."

"You can't just sit on your couch and think great people are going to come by your house, knock on your door and say, 'Hey, I'm a great person, I want to meet you.' You have to get out and find those great people, and they're everywhere."

Crazy or not, Harbaugh and his staff reeled in Scout's third-best 2017 recruiting class. Alabama and Georgia claimed the top two places, respectively. Michigan placed one spot ahead of Ohio State in Scout's team rankings, despite the Buckeyes having a half dozen five-star signees and 12 from Scout's top 100 compared to Michigan's two and six, respectively.

"In general, the more talent and the more bodies you can bring in, the better, and that's why we figured quantity in a little bit more than maybe some of the other sites do," Trieu explained as to why Michigan finished just ahead of OSU, which has 21 signees from the 2017 class.

The Wolverines received letters from 30 total recruits, including Brad Robins from nearby Westerville (Ohio) South who tweeted on signing day that he was joining the Wolverines as well.

"I am honored to announce that I have received and accepted a scholarship offer to the University of Michigan!" punter Brad Robbins posted in a Tweet.

Before signing day, Robbins was expected to join Illinois before hearing from the Wolverines on NSD. Michigan confirmed his signing Feb. 6. Michigan lost senior punter Kenny Allen to graduation last season, leaving redshirt freshman kicker Quinn Nordin as the only other kicker on scholarship right now.

As for the rest of Michigan's class, joining Solomon as the other five-star prospect is wide receiver Donovan Peoples-Jones. Scout ranks the 6-2, 190-pounder out of Detroit Cass Tech the top receiver in the 2017 class and the No. 22 overall prospect.

In addition to Peoples-Jones and Solomon, Michigan has four other signees rated in Scout's top 100. Those players are four-star defensive back Ambry Thomas (No. 56), four-star wideout Tarik Black (No. 90), four-star linebacker Drew Singleton (No. 93) and four-star offensive lineman Cesar Ruiz (No. 98).

"I think they filled a lot of their needs, got some guys that they really targeted," Trieu said. "They did well in-state, which was important this year. It was a really good year in the state of Michigan, and really, they won every battle for in-state kids."

The Wolverines gathered eight signees from the state of Michigan. The Maize and Blue has now finished in the top 10 of Scout's team rankings in the two years Harbaugh has been at the helm in Ann Arbor – unusual antics and all.

"He's a competitive guy to the point of doing anything it takes to win, and I think winning a recruiting battle is like that too," Trieu said of Harbaugh's actions. "I am not surprised it happened for a second year, and I will mark it on my calendar to expect him to do it again next year."

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Buckeyes Look Ready To Replace Departed DBs

Urban Meyer isn't one to throw out hyperbole very often, so when he says that his latest recruiting class could be "one of the great classes," you stand up and take notice.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Meyer, brutally honest but passionately loyal about his players, was the ringleader behind another banner recruiting class for Ohio State. The Buckeyes will, once again, lose a bunch of talent to the NFL draft but should be able to reload with the talented new faces.

OSU took a huge hit in the secondary, losing corners Marshon Lattimore and Gareon Conley and safety Malik Hooker a year early, so it stood to reason that Meyer and his staff would focus their attention on the back end of the defense. Mission accomplished, as OSU snagged a pair of highly rated high school corners in five-star Jeffrey Okudah and four-star Shaun Wade, both of whom are already enrolled and who each have a very good shot at being in the starting lineup against Indiana Aug. 31. Add to that four-star safety Isaiah Pryor and five-star junior college corner Kendall Sheffield, and you have the makings of a secondary loaded with newcomers.

"Two years in a row we've lost (a total of) six out of eight secondary players to early entry into the NFL draft, and that's unusual," Meyer stated. "As a matter of fact, I don't recall ever hearing that before with Tyvis (Powell), Vonn Bell and Eli (Apple) leaving the year before, and this year Malik, Marshon and Gareon stepping away from one of the best pass defenses in the country. And then you replaced them with guys that we're really excited about, and they're here, and that's Jeffrey Okudah, Shaun Wade and Marcus Williamson. And they're already here training and working out. Very good young players. You also have Isaiah Pryor that's going to compete at the safety spot, as well."

If you can't stop the pass, you aren't going to win very many football games, so Meyer made sure that if nothing else, he had the athletes to defend the football when it's in the air.

The Ohio State brand certainly does a lot to sell recruits, but name alone isn't going to be enough. They want to compete for championships, want to be part of something special, but also want to see camaraderie and everyone pulling in the same direction. There are plenty of schools that have talent yet fail to win games (I'm looking at you, Brian Kelly) because too many things are going on inside and outside the program.

Meyer knows what it takes to connect with elite players, but he also feels that his experience as a head coach and time in Columbus have also played major roles.

"I'd say just because I'm an old hat at this now, I'm not the new guy," he said when asked why so many top-notch players signed with Ohio State this season. "Your best salesmen, to see Zeke Elliott's father and family, and to see Josh Perry's mom and dad, they're around. They speak to players when they're allowed to, on official visits. And the greatest salespeople we have are the people in that locker room and our parents because everybody is going to have nice facilities, everybody is going to have a big stadium.

"I don't know if it's just a generational thing that's going on right now, but I am so impressed by the young people coming out of high school in these last two years. I hope

that's nationally and in other sports, as well. We're getting very good students, very good people and people that are so interested in life after football, and that wasn't the case. A lot of times it's what – hey, I'm going to the league. Great, go to the league, but someday the league is going to be gone. And that's what – I think those kind of people are naturally attracted to Ohio State, and those kind of people are very much attracted to our program."

Another area of concern was receiver – just ask J.T. Barrett, who saw his numbers decline due to a combination of sometimes erratic passing, an unimpressive offensive line and receivers who could not gain separation. Last year the Buckeyes signed a pair of touted pass catchers in Binjimen Victor and Austin Mack, and they added three true receivers to the group this year in Trevon Grimes, Jaylen Harris and late flip Elijah Gardner. OSU signed Brendon White, who could play receiver or in the secondary, and also gained the services of former cornerback Eric Glover-Williams, who will move to offense for spring football and beyond.

Though it's pretty much a foregone conclusion that Barrett will be under center when the 2017 season dawns, the Buckeyes did bring in some competition in the form of five-star dual-threat quarterback Tate Martell – and he will battle with holdovers Joe Burrow and Dwayne Haskins for the backup role. A bit undersized (5-10, 203) for my liking, especially with the contact the quarterback takes in Meyer's offense, Martell won the coaching staff over with his ability to win games. That aspect sometimes gets lost on OSU fans, who love flashy stats but forget that Barrett is 264 as a starter for the Buckeyes.

"We are a very evaluation friendly business as a coach and as a quarterback," Meyer said. "Some people measure it by throwing yards, or some thing with a coach. Some people measure their success. However we measure it, very simply, how do you win? Tate is a winner. J.T. Barrett is a winner. Braxton Miller was a winner. Obviously Cardale Jones is a winner. Tim Tebow was a phenomenal winner.

"So those guys, the way we evaluate quarterbacks I understand is a lot different than others. He's a winner. So obviously that's where he fits. He's a winner. He comes from a winning program, a winning sense of – the way he is, personality. You see the way he walks around here, so that's what he brings to us."

There will be a little bit of harping on the fact that only seven of the signees are from Ohio, but that is good and bad.

Sure, you want to put a fence around your state, especially when they have a chance to go to rival schools in the conference and possibly play a role in beating you in future seasons. But you have to take the best players possible, and some years Ohio isn't quite as good as others.

Take Texas, for instance – OSU snagged Okudah, Baron Browning and J.K. Dobbins, all among the top six players in the state. Texas churns out world-class players on a regular basis, and getting one is a coup. But with the University of Texas still being down, there was an opportunity for Meyer and the staff to make inroads. Meyer admitted he was a bit disappointed about not signing more in-state players, but I don't believe you turn away top-notch out-of-state talent just to ink homegrown players.

There are also players from talent-rich California and Florida as well as numerous other states, so the Buckeyes are doing a great job selling themselves around the country.

"I think our success maybe has helped that," Meyer said. "You know, Zeke Elliott in the NFL draft. There's a variety of things

that kids look for. I think our Real Life Wednesday program that we do for people, that's caught the eye of many people. Ohio State is a national brand and will always be and always has been. But I think the success we've had recently and the exposure that this program has had for the right reasons has really been beneficial.

"The one area, too, that they see that these kids not only leave this program and go to the NFL, they start, and we have rookie of the year (Elliott and Joey Bosa). We have Mike Thomas goes in, he's dominant Pro Bowl, I think, and I lose track of them. I'm watching the Pro Bowl, a Buckeye carries the ball, a Buckeye is blocking for him, and a Buckeye tackles him. You know, it's a lot of good stuff out there."

And it appears that there's a lot of good stuff – albeit young – in the Ohio State football program.

Scoping The B1G

It was another solid – not great – year for the Big Ten, which finished third as a conference in rankings compiled by Scout.com. The league averaged 3.19 stars per recruit, a pretty solid number, just slightly behind the SEC (3.37) and Pac-12 (3.26).

Ranking programs by recruit's average stars, Ohio State comes out on top and first overall, ahead of Alabama. The Crimson Tide had more signees, but the Buckeyes made the most of their 21 signatures, averaging 4.19 stars per player. Only the Buckeyes and Crimson Tide averaged at least 4.0 stars per player, a pretty heady accomplishment, and both schools signed a half dozen five-star players. The rich get richer.

In terms of actual points, Scout has Michigan first in the Big Ten and third nationally, but the Wolverines signed a nation's-high 30 players. Most recruiting services reward quantity over quality, which is why their rankings aren't always shown as average stars per player – the best measure of a class when signee totals are not equal.

For the purpose of this space, we are using the average star rankings, and we've already determined that the Buckeyes are first. Michigan is second (3.89), followed by Penn State (3.57), Nebraska (3.45) and Maryland (3.29).

The Terrapins would have to be considered something of a surprise since they are not regarded as one of the league's power programs, but kids have seemed to gravitate to DJ Durkin. Maryland snagged a top-100 player and signed 10 four-star kids total, a pretty impressive haul. Look for Maryland to begin an ascent sooner rather than later.

Nebraska's success is also surprising, though less so as the Huskers are at least still a name brand. They may not have stayed at the heights scaled when Tom Osborne was in charge, but Mike Riley is finally putting his fingerprints on the program and increasing the talent level.

Nebraska inked a top-100 player and nine four-stars, including a trio of receivers – former OSU commit Tyjon Lindsey, Keyshawn Johnson Jr. (yes, son of the former NFL star) and Jaevon McQuitty, the latter two already enrolled in Lincoln. Nebraska could be a consistent competitor for the Big Ten West crown with more hauls such as this one.

A few other schools of note include Michigan State at a somewhat disappointing sixth (3.27 average, zero top-100 players, just six four-stars) and Wisconsin at eighth (3.06, zero top-100, two four-stars). The Spartans and Badgers go about things in kind of the same way, relying on players who have grit and a

chip on their shoulder. But at some point you have to have better talent, and it's uncertain whether Michigan State will get back into contention in the Big Ten East – especially with the resurgence of Michigan and Penn State – and whether Wisconsin will have the run of the West with Nebraska putting together such a solid class.

A couple of other notes of interest – five of the top six Big Ten classes come from the East (Nebraska being the only West intruder), and most schools relied almost solely on high school talent. One big exception is Purdue, with first-year coach Jeff Brohm combing the JUCO ranks and signing five players. Bad teams can't get better without talent, and when you lack talent the next best thing is experience. Kansas State used the JUCO blueprint to improve under Bill Snyder, and Brohm figures it can't hurt to do the same with the Boilermakers.

A Rose By Any Other Name ...

Those of you who have followed this space know that I am a firm believer in the old adage that you cannot rate a recruiting class for two to three years, as that's when the bulk of the players from a class will basically show whether or not they have it.

You also know, then, that the one caveat to not being able to rate a class is when it comes to names – that can be ranked immediately, and I'm not sure why some savvy recruiting service hasn't come up with that. Maybe that will be something I endeavor to complete for 2018. In the meantime, I have scoured the signing day lists for the best appellations from this year's group. As usual, this will be done by position – though there is a slight tweak to the list, with two players from the FCS being named honorary captains. This list is typically limited to signees in the FBS, but there were two names that were so great, so beyond everything else, that it could not go without mention. You'll see them at the end of the list.

Offense

QB – Hendon Hooker/Virginia Tech
RB – Chuba Hubbard/Oklahoma State;
Xazavian Vaday/Wyoming
WR – Evidence Njoku/Miami (Fl.);
Charleston Rambo/Oklahoma; Whop Philyor/Indiana

TE – Cameron Sir Louis/Air Force
OT – K'Rohnj Calbert/Tennessee;
Onesimus Lutu-Clarke/Oregon State;
Woodlyson Alcius/Southern Miss
OG – Quazzel White/TCU; Rakavius Chambers/Duke; Justice Oluwaseun/UNLV
C – Cutter Leftwich/Texas El Paso
ATH – Wryryor Noll/Idaho; DeeJay Dallas/Miami (Fl.)

Defense

DE – K'Lavon Chaisson/LSU; Luiji Vilain; Michigan; My-King Johnson/Arizona
DT – Phidarian Mathis/Alabama; Sincere David/Ole Miss; Royal Silver/Minnesota
OLB – K'Jakyre Daley/Oklahoma; Corvin Moment/Western Michigan; Garbentz Josue/Georgia Southern

ILB – Zikerrion Baker/Ole Miss; Maverick Wolfley/West Virginia; Kemonte Yow/Army
CB – Latavious Brini/Georgia; Deommodore Lenoir/Oregon; Javelin Guidry/Utah

S – Chaz Ah You/Brigham Young; Gervarius Owens/Kansas State; Kendarian Holly-Handy/Minnesota

Specialists

P – Pressley Harvin III/Georgia Tech
K – Briggs Bourgeois/Southern Miss
Honorary Captains (FCS) – Kobe Buffalomeat/Illinois State; Ye'Majesty Sanders/Jacksonville State.