

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 40, No. 20

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 24, 2021

## 'The Race Is On'

### QB Battle On Display During Spring Game

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Last year, Ohio State was not able to have its annual spring game due to COVID-19, but the major storylines from that game may have been focused on the running backs room: who could replace Chase Young, and how Shaun Wade looked in his move to the outside.

The game would not have been focused on the starting quarterback battle, with Justin Fields returning for his second season at Ohio State following a year when he led the Buckeyes to the College Football Playoff and was a finalist for the Heisman Trophy.

But for the 2021 edition of the spring game on April 17, Fields was gone, or at least he wasn't on the field. Fields was in attendance to pick up his Big Ten championship ring, and he was also there to see which of the three young quarterbacks on the roster could impress in their first throws in front of the Ohio State fan base.

What he saw was a combined 69 pass attempts between the trio of freshman Kyle McCord and redshirt freshmen Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud. With those pass attempts, they threw 45 completions (65.2 completion percentage) for 497 yards and four touchdowns to one interception, good for a combined quarterback rating of 142.0.

That was also what head coach Ryan Day saw, but he viewed the game through the lens of seeing 15 other spring practices prior to the event. With that in mind, Day said after



PHOTO COURTESY PAUL VERNON/ASSOCIATED PRESS VIA THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**THREE-WAY BATTLE** – Freshman quarterback Kyle McCord (right) made his Ohio State debut in the spring game, completing 12 of 17 passes for 184 yards and two touchdowns. He continues to battle redshirt freshmen Jack Miller (upper inset) and C.J. Stroud (lower inset) for the starting job this fall.

the game that what each quarterback showed was "very similar to what this whole spring has been."

"Some good, some not so good, a lot of learning opportunities there," Day said. "We tried to get a little bit of a two-minute going at the end of the half, some red-zone stuff, all learning. You can see when you watch, there's flashes here and there, and then there's just learning opportunities, and the more these guys can prepare and work in the film room and just grind in the meeting

rooms, the better they're going to prepare and be ready for those moments."

Of the three, McCord (6-3, 210) finished the day with a slight edge statistically. He completed 12 of 17 passes (70.6 percent) for 184 yards and two touchdowns, good for a 200.3 QBR. His completions that ended in the end zone were to sophomore wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba and redshirt

Continued On Page 9

## Fans Return To Horseshoe For Spring Game

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State couldn't keep its fans off the field the last time they were allowed into the hallowed walls of the Horseshoe. After Penn State quarterback Will Levis' last-chance heave on fourth-and-long fluttered short of its target and Buckeye quarterback Justin Fields knelt out a 28-17 victory over the Nittany Lions, Ohio State fans swarmed the turf.

Although Buckeye fans – just under 20,000 strong this time – didn't spill onto the field after Ohio State's 2021 spring game, the jubilation in the stadium on April 17, 2021, more than rivaled the last Buckeye home game that hosted fans, all the way back on Nov. 23, 2019 – 511 days prior.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day described that 2019 game, which secured a Big Ten East title for the Buckeyes, as a heavyweight battle.

"We talked about going into a big heavyweight match, and you have to take shots," Day said. "One of the things about playing in a game like this is you have to be willing to take punches and you have to not flinch when it happens. That was a great example. That was the first time we really were taking shots there."

He described the 2021 gathering, aptly, as

"almost normal" rather than a full return to form, but every bit as important as a return to normalcy after the devastation wrought by the coronavirus pandemic that touched every part of American life, including, but certainly not led by, the empty Horseshoe seen in Ohio State's last season.

"I think the most exciting part was getting back in the stadium and seeing the Best Damn Band in the Land, having some fans around, and it felt almost normal out there today," Day said. "I just want to thank the band for being out there. It made it feel like we were back in the 'Shoe again with a full crowd. I know usually we're used to about 85,000 for a spring game, but even 20,000 was nice. I know that there was a huge demand with the students. I really appreciate the students coming out and doing their part, even though there wasn't as many out there as they would have liked, and I know they sold a couple extra tickets. I appreciate the students coming out, but I'm just hoping that thing is full when we come back against Oregon here in not too long."

The Ohio State fans in attendance played their role in the affair to a T, hitting every note. An absent-minded observer might have assumed that Buckeye fans were reacting to a big play when they took to their feet as Ohio State took to the field for the first time. Later, when an actual big play was

delivered by way of a Kyle McCord pass to Garrett Wilson in the first quarter, that same absent-minded observer may have thought they were taking in a real game, rather than a spring scrimmage.

The scarlet and gray-clad crowd didn't quite hit decibels on that level for McCord's 55-yard bomb, but the toll that the time away took was apparent from the tunnel run and present through the entire spring-ending scrimmage.

"I'm happy for our fans," senior tackle Thayer Munford said. "Even though it was about a year and a half since we've had fans in the stadium, it was very good to have them back in the 'Shoe. I know everybody was happy to see our fans in the stadium instead of an empty stadium, so I'm happy about that."

That tunnel run was a moment that Ohio State's players and coaches have been looking forward to for more than a year. Just about every Buckeye who was asked about the return of fans in the lead-up to the spring game lit up at the opportunity, sharing their excitement to see fans in the stands again, or for the first time in the case of first- or second-year players. The Buckeyes rarely have to push to generate intensity in any form because of the nature of the program, but coaches were quick

Continued On Page 13

## OPINION

## Needless To State What We Already Know

You might forgive Ohio State head coach Ryan Day for his reluctance to name a starting quarterback when every indication worth indicating points to C.J. Stroud as the prohibitive favorite to become the successor to Justin Fields.

Stroud connected on 16 of 22 attempts for 185 yards and two touchdowns during the annual spring game/controlled scrimmage, played April 17 in front of some 20,000 fans socially distanced throughout Ohio Stadium. More importantly, it was the 6-3, 215-pound redshirt freshman from California who took the controls of the first-team offense when the game turned to a scrimmage, leading that unit to a touchdown against members of what was presumably the first-team defense.

Not that redshirt freshman Jack Miller or true freshman Kyle McCord appeared anything but worthy competitors for the starting job. Miller began the first series of the game part of the game under center and wound up completing 17 of 30 throws for 128 yards, while McCord attempted 17 passes and completed 12 of them for 184 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

McCord actually won the day in terms of a 200.33 quarterback rating to 173.36 for Stroud. Miller was far back at 85.84 mostly because he threw the only interception of the afternoon. But make no mistake – all three of these guys could start for just about any program in college football, and each of them knows it. That's why Day prefers to keep all of them interested only in starting at Ohio State before he actually has to name a first-teamer.

The last time the Buckeyes had such a glut of quarterback talent was in the spring of 2018 when Urban Meyer had to choose a successor to J.T. Barrett. Although it appeared that Joe Burrow had outplayed Dwayne Haskins in that particular spring game, Haskins was the favorite for the starting job and everyone including Burrow knew it.

I still remember watching Burrow's demerol or on the sideline of that spring game – that of a guy who knew he was spending his final afternoon with that particular set of teammates. About a month later, Burrow announced he was transferring to LSU, and the rest is national championship and Heisman Trophy history. I'm pretty certain the very last thing on Ryan Day's mind is naming a starting quarterback and then fielding transfer questions from the two guys who didn't win the battle.

With each of the quarterbacks wearing no-contact black jerseys during the game/scrimmage, it was impossible to get a feel for the kind of mobility any of them brings to the position. But we already know that while the ability to run with the football is an added dimension for any quarterback, the days are over when Meyer would rely on Barrett and the read-option to control the tempo of a game. Day learned fairly quickly with Fields that a running quarterback is much more susceptible to injury, and one still wonders how a 100-percent healthy Fields might have altered the outcome of the 2019 national championship semifinal against Clemson.

Therefore, how each of the quarterbacks performed in the passing game was paramount this spring.

Stroud showed an ability to stand and deliver in the pocket when he took a hit on his first spring-game attempt and still managed to complete the pass. He appeared to go through his progressions effortlessly and displayed accuracy on a number of different kinds of throws. He connected on a sprint-out pass with Chris Olave for a touchdown and threw a dart to Marvin Harrison Jr. for his other score, perfectly placing the ball between the safety and cornerback as Harrison raced to the post.

McCord showcased his big arm as soon as he got the chance, completing a 55-yard bomb to Garrett Wilson. That arm was a little too big later on when McCord overthrew Jaxon Smith-

time against the Buckeyes and just 1-8 lifetime against Big Ten opponents ranked among the top five.

What follows is a month-long breather that includes Tulsa, Akron, Rutgers and Maryland in succession before an open week to prepare for a two-week stretch at the end of October that might feature Ohio State's toughest tests of the season.

It begins Oct. 23 at Indiana against a team that seems to always give the Buckeyes fits these days. The Hoosiers return quarterback Michael Penix, who threw for 491 yards and five TDs in his team's narrow 42-35 loss to the Buckeyes last season.

That game is followed by a home contest with Penn State, a team that will supposedly give OSU a run for the East division title. Frankly, I don't see the Nittany Lions as contenders. They got off to a program-worst 0-5 start last year, and the schedule-makers did them no favors this time around. Penn State kicks off its 2021 campaign at Wisconsin and two weeks later entertains SEC power Auburn in Happy Valley.

The early November Buckeye slate features Nebraska, Purdue and Michigan State on the docket with the traditional regular-season finale against Michigan set for Nov. 27. Everyone would like you to believe the Wolverines will be much-improved over last year's 2-4 showing, but I'm hard-pressed to understand why. Defensive coordinator Don Brown was replaced after five seasons, and the offense remains a mess with quarterbacks transferring out of Jim Harbaugh's program at an alarming rate.

The bottom line is that Ohio State once again appears to enjoy a cavernous talent gap over most of the other teams in the Big Ten. But with a new starting quarterback and an overhauled defense that features scant experience at linebacker and the status of a pair of projected starters in the secondary very much up in the air – Cameron Brown rehabbing a torn Achilles and Marcus Hooker facing disciplinary action following an off-season OVI charge – the Buckeyes would do well to understand they will get every opponent's best shot and therefore act accordingly.

## More Spring Observations

Everyone, including me, has made mention of the abundance of talent among Ohio State receivers. The same can be said at running back, a position in which the Buckeyes have a number of players who could and most likely would start anywhere else in the Big Ten.

Anywhere else in the conference, fans would be positively giddy about a returning Master Teague and his career totals that include 1,409 yards, 13 TDs and a 5.5-yards-per-carry average on 256 attempts. But as Teague needed to do when J.K. Dobbins and Trey Sermon were around, he'll have to prove himself all over again in the face of competition from a group of former high school stars itching to show what they can do.

Marcus Crowley is finally healthy after tearing up a knee in 2019, a season in which he was averaging a cool 9.5 yards per carry before going down. Steele Chambers has an OSU career average of 7.9 yards per carry, and Miyan Williams came out of nowhere down the stretch last season to provide a power change of pace against the likes of Michigan State, Northwestern and Clemson.

And that doesn't even include true freshman TreVeyon Henderson, who some recruiting experts say reminds them of Dobbins. Henderson, a 5-10, 210-pound, all-everything from Virginia, led all OSU running backs in the spring game/scrimmage with 26 yards on six carries and added five receptions for 29 yards.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK  
Mark Rea

Njigba on a sure touchdown, but the freshman made up for that later by hitting Smith-Njigba on a slot fade in the end zone.

Miller was exceedingly accurate on short throws, including a couple of crisp sideline passes. That accuracy waned a bit on longer throws and when Miller was on the run, and he committed the cardinal sin of any quarterback when he was picked off by redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts at the goal line. Of course, if you are a glass-half-full kind of observer looking for any plus from a defense that underachieved last season, you can credit Watts for immediately recognizing what was going to be a back-shoulder throw and getting himself in position to make the interception.

Each of the three quarterbacks was helped by the tremendous talent Ohio State has at the receiver position. Stroud's percentage was aided by a 50-50 ball that Olave took away from receiver-turned-DB Demario McCall despite the fact McCall had fronted Olave and was waiting for the ball before Olave leaped and snatched it away. And both Wilson and Smith-Njigba made acrobatic catches while such true freshmen as Harrison and Emeka Egbuka proved Ohio State truly has an embarrassment of talent at the receiver position.

The bottom line is that no matter who the starting quarterback turns out to be, the Buckeyes are going to be an offensive juggernaut. Two years ago, with Fields coming in as a largely untested quarterback, the team won its first 13 games in a row and averaged nearly 50 points doing it.

What will set the 2021 team apart is whether Stroud or Miller or McCord can remain healthy and keep Ohio State on track to take care of some unfinished College Football Playoff business.

## A Look Ahead

Before entertaining thoughts of a third straight trip to the playoff, the Buckeyes will have to navigate their way through a schedule that includes a rare midweek opener as well as a marquee nonconference opponent in week two.

Ohio State kicked off its 2017 season with a Thursday night game on the road, and the Buckeyes will repeat that scenario at Minnesota against a Golden Gophers team that struggled to a 3-4 record last season. Tanner Morgan returns as quarterback, and Minnesota is getting a lot of preseason love as a West division dark horse. But most of that love comes as the result of a schedule that gets favorable after the opener. The Gophers haven't beaten OSU since 2000, and haven't beaten the Buckeyes at home since 1981.

Ohio State's home opening opponent will be an Oregon team fresh off a Pac-12 conference championship. The Ducks have ridden the quarterback merry-go-round during the off-season with former starter Tyler Shough transferring to Texas Tech and Boston College transfer Anthony Brown taking over. No matter who operates the offense, it should provide a big early-season test for OSU's defense. But it's also worth remembering Oregon is 0-9 all-

## BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

Vol. 40, No. 20  
April 24, 2021  
www.BuckeyeSports.com

Buckeye Sports Bulletin (USPS 705-690, ISSN 0883-6833.) is published 24 times a year (weekly September through November, biweekly mid-March through May and January through early March and monthly June through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications  
1350 W. Fifth Ave., Suite 30  
P.O. Box 12453  
Columbus, Ohio 43212  
(614) 486-2202  
bsb@buckeyesports.com

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$99.95/year.

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## 2020-21 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 40)

No. 13	Jan. 23	No. 19	April 10
No. 14	Jan. 30	No. 20	April 24
No. 15	Feb. 13	No. 21	May
No. 16	Feb. 27	No. 22	June
No. 17	March 13	No. 23	July
No. 18	March 27	No. 24	August

The 2021 Buckeye Sports Bulletin schedule is subject to change.

The next issue (May cover date) will be mailed on May 4.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is a privately owned newspaper and is not affiliated directly or indirectly with The Ohio State University.

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# Studrawa Pleased With New Faces Up Front

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State offensive line coach Greg Studrawa has to be feeling pretty grateful as he navigates through spring practice and surveys his room in his sixth season in charge of the big boys up front in Columbus. Although the Buckeyes lost a pair of future NFL draftees in offensive guard Wyatt Davis and center Josh Myers – both all-conference players – it's very easy to envision a world where Studrawa would be breaking in four new starters this offseason, rather than just two.

That scenario hinged on a pair of coin-flip decisions at offensive tackle, at least in the eyes of many draft analysts. Both Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere would have been drafted this season had they declared, leaving the Buckeyes with just one returning starter – Harry Miller, who's already missing spring camp with an injury. But the duo decided instead to return and bookend an offensive front that desperately needed experience and leadership on the edges with new faces inside.

That gives Ohio State the stability and proven commodities that it needs on the outside, while allowing for rising talents such as Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones, who came to Columbus as tackles, to make a move inside to guard this season. Those two will be competing for an open starting role on either side of Miller, the presumed starting center.

It's never going to be easy to replace the kind of production that Davis and Myers provided, but Ohio State certainly could have done worse than a race to replace them led by Miller, Johnson, Jones, junior Matthew Jones and the redshirt freshman duo of Luke Wypler and Josh Fryar.

"For us, our tackles set a great example of what it's like to be an impact player and be great at your craft," Wypler said. "With Nick on one side and Thayer on the other, they're a prime example of what everyone in the room is striving to be. Having them as the pillars, I feel like inside the competition is going great."

The Buckeyes are the beneficiaries, as well, of a talented room, buoyed by former blue-chippers across the board, but this is a group that's impressed Studrawa with its football IQ just as much as its athletic ability.

"I've got smart guys, and they study so much," Studrawa said. "Their attention to detail, especially for the young guys that are in there asking questions all the time and wanting to learn. They want to learn everything. When you have guys that are like



FILE PHOTO

**MOVING INSIDE – Offensive lineman Paris Johnson Jr. (77) will slide from tackle to guard for the 2021 season.**

that, you can move those guys around and still come up with a cohesive unit even if you have a couple of injuries.

"And that's what it should be. When you've got an offensive line room that has depth, those things can happen and instill confidence in everybody around them."

That's quite the development from 2016 and 2017, Studrawa's first two years with the Buckeyes, which he spoke about in irreverent terms on April 7 when breaking down his position group for the media.

"I know the state of the room, what it was when I got here," Studrawa said. "For the first two years, I had five people. I stayed up at night because if somebody went down, I was like, 'Oh boy. We better get the punt team ready.' Those were my feelings."

One of the new leaders in the room fits firmly into both camps, as a gifted athlete and a committed student of the game, and seems to be as entrenched as a future starter as he could possibly be at this time of year. Despite just one season – and a COVID-modified one at that – in the program, Johnson, the former five-star tackle from Cincinnati, has wrestled control of one of the two starting guard spots, likely on the right side to pair with Petit-Frere, the longtime blindside tackle. Although Johnson once thought that he could be taking over that

tackle spot this season, he's spent his time this offseason working on the shift inside as his quickest path to seeing the field as a full-time starter.

He's worked so hard at it that at times, he's even overstayed his welcome in his own coach's office.

"He is a kid that's very, very mentally tough," Studrawa said. "And without that first, you wouldn't be able to make that transition, because there's a little bit of difference sometimes between tackles and guards as far as athleticism and finesse and toughness and grit. Paris is such a student of the game. He studies the game."

"He's in my office, sometimes I have to kick him out because I'm sick and tired of seeing him. He's in there every day wanting to know this and wanting to know that. 'How do I get an edge on this?' His attention to detail and his toughness and 'I want to play, Coach' is why he's made the transition so smooth so far."

That kind of focus and dedication is key for Johnson to make a smooth transition to the inside. The differences between tackle and guard may not be huge to a fan or analyst on the outside looking in, but perfecting the minute details in the change will be key for Johnson's success and Ohio State's stability up front.

"You can't have a tackle mind-set at guard," Johnson said. "But I've learned to take the abilities that I've learned at tackle, as far as being able to read linebackers and safeties and corners. I've definitely tried to utilize that at guard, so I'm able to see the bigger picture."

Although it's not where he wants to spend the bulk of his career and it wasn't originally in his plans when he came to Ohio State, Johnson said that he's excited about the change and that he thinks adding that versatility to his game and to his résumé will help him and the team in the long term.

"When I first was recruited here, I took a look at the depth chart and I made some assumptions," Johnson said. "I saw that by my sophomore year, there would be a spot at tackle. But with everything that's happened, I'm more than happy to play guard. Coach (Ryan) Day said he wanted to have the best five people play, and he saw a fit with me

being at guard, and I'm more than happy to play at that position.

"The biggest opportunity that I have starting at guard is that I get to show versatility, and I feel like that adds a lot of value. And I feel like the biggest thing now – I'm not draft-eligible after this season – so my biggest thing this season and next season is, 'What does the team need so that we can get to where we want to be?'"

"Because when you play professional football, unless you're a veteran guy, you can't just say, 'I'm just a left tackle; I'm just a right tackle.' Somebody goes down, you're going to need to be able to play tackle and guard, left and right in the league, with the amount of people that travel. I feel like if anything, this is just preparation to being able to move around and be flexible, and I feel like the league would appreciate that when it's time."

The other guard spot is a bit more up in the air. Studrawa didn't tip his hand regarding a potential leader when discussing the group of players vying for the spot, though he did allude to a fairly defined group that is competing for that spot, led by the Jones pair, with Fryar and Wypler quickly finding their way as second-year players – though the latter seems to be destined to back Miller up at center this season.

That's not to say that the New Jersey native isn't impressing. Wypler has worked hard to find his way into the fold this offseason, kicking off the grind of the offseason as soon as he possibly could.

"That's what I love – that kid stayed here the entire time," Studrawa said. "Most guys went home for two weeks, saw their families. But this kid is in here (working) every single day. That's how important it is to him. I sat in here and watched drills of him every day. We watched film on Zoom and things like that. A guy that cares that much, is that dedicated and has the tools – he's got quickness, he's really good now at snapping the ball and stepping. He's got a rhythm now with the ability to do those things. And he studies the game. He knows every position. He knows all those things, and the time and effort he puts into it is something I love."

"A guy that works that hard, you're going to be successful, period."

That leaves the remaining three gunning for that guard spot, and although Matt Jones got the nod at the end of the season and seems to be the favorite this season, followed closely by Dawand Jones, Studrawa made it very clear that no one should count out Fryar this offseason.

"His athleticism is what excited me in his recruitment," Studrawa said of Fryar. "He was a basketball player. He's a guy who is 6-5 but has the ability to bend and play really low. Those two things were what intrigued me about him when we first got him in recruiting, and it's only gotten better through training with (strength coach) Mick (Marotti). Now he's getting stronger, he's got a little edge to him and he's a guy who has some grit. He's got some toughness, and he shows up every day."

"He's learning, putting things together, and he's got some grit. I like that, and that's what has got him going."

The race at guard will likely rage through the offseason, even at that left guard spot that seems to have a favorite in Johnson as it stands exiting spring practice. With stability outside and at center, Ohio State can afford a little bit of uncertainty and competition on the inside. And it may need that kind of fire and pressure to be the best that it can be up front in 2021.

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# QB Battle To Continue Into Preseason Camp

Continued From Page 1

freshman tight end Joe Royer from 15 and 12 yards out, respectively.

McCord opened his performance with a 55-yard completion to junior wide receiver Garrett Wilson and had another 35-yard connection to freshman wideout Emeka Egbuka. After starting the day 3 of 6, he competed his next five throws and nine of his last 11 overall attempts to end the day on a high note.

The freshman signal-caller out of Philadelphia St. Joseph's was always going to have to play catch-up to a pair of quarterbacks with a year in the Ohio State offense, but he certainly put his raw talent on display, showing why Day said back on Dec. 16 that McCord will compete for the job.

But it wasn't just the Kyle McCord show for the spring game. Stroud (6-3, 215) also showed why many believe he is the favorite to earn the job for this upcoming season. The Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., product showed plenty of promise, going 16 of 22 (72.7 percent) for 185 yards and a pair of touchdowns for a 173.4 QBR. The scores were to freshman Marvin Harrison, McCord's high school teammate, and senior wide receiver Chris Olave, both from 5 yards out.

Stroud also had a completion of 40 yards to Olave and another of 31 yards to Egbuka, who led the Buckeyes with 123 yards receiving on the day.

When asked specifically about the strong showings of McCord and Stroud, Day again emphasized the importance of the full scope of spring practices and upcoming summer workouts and fall practice. To him, it is not just about a spring game with no real tackling that happened to be the only spring practice televised to a national audience.

"We take the entire 15 practices and evaluate all those things, but when you're in the stadium and you're in a game environment with fans, how does that affect your performance? I mean if there's a change, then we have to figure out why," Day said. "There's a lot of things that go into a lot of positive things happening. What's going on in the game? If we're getting good protection, who the receivers are. I mean there's just many of those things. This is just a very small glimpse at a bunch of guys taking some reps, but there's a body of work that needs to be built from that first spring practice all the way through the first game that still has yet to be written."

The lone interception from the quarterbacks came off the right hand of Miller (6-3, 215), who threw a game-high 30 pass attempts in the most up-and-down performance of the group. He completed 17 of those attempts (56.7 percent) for 128 yards, no touchdowns and that one interception for a QBR of 85.8.

Miller was picked off by redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts in the red zone on the first drive of the game but stayed turnover-free the rest of the afternoon. He also improved as the game went on, starting 7 of 16 and finishing by completing 10 of his final 14 throws.

What the Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral product did not unleash was his deep-threat ability, with his longest completion of the game being a 13-yard connection with Wilson in the first quarter.

But Day was looking for, and has been looking for all spring, things from his inex-

perienced signal callers that go past completion percentages and impressive yardage. The Ohio State head coach said he is looking for the routines and the little things before he can worry about if these quarterbacks can make the big plays when it matters the most.

"When you're just starting and you're learning to play the position, you can't do anything out of the ordinary," Day said. "You can't try to do things other than make the routine plays routinely. Why? Because you have a really good offensive line, really good tight end, you have really good receivers, you have solid backs, so in that moment, you don't need to do anything more than just make the routine plays routinely."

"It's our job as coaches to put them in a situation to be successful and to show the best version of them. But somewhere along the line, when the game's coming down to the fourth quarter, they're going to have to make plays."

"It comes down to not just managing the game – that's a big part of it – but if you want to go win the tough games and the tight games in the fourth quarter, you're going to have to make plays in the two-minute drill, you'll have to throw really well in the red zone and you have to convert on third down."

"But we're hoping early on that, with the talent that's around the quarterback, he can just keep the offense moving and get the ball into the right skill player's hands and keep the chains moving. That's a great start, but eventually, somewhere along the line, they're going to have to step up and win games for us. But that's all part of the process."

Of course, the starting quarterback was not decided at the end of the spring game, which was a 14-7 game in favor of Team Brutus at halftime before the game became a scrimmage with no teams in the second half. Day knew the battle would not end here and said as much to the Big Ten Network prior to kickoff.

"I just want them to come in and run the offense," Day said. "I mean this is just another piece of the puzzle. We're not going to know who the starting quarterback is coming out of today. It's going to be pretty basic on offense and defense. But just to play in the Horseshoe and run the offense and get a feel for things – there will be good plays and bad plays. It's just another step in the progression."

The solution was not found in front of 19,180 fans at Ohio Stadium, but it was, as Day said, "another step" in Ohio State figuring out who will be taking over for Fields. In that decision, the Buckeyes will be replacing a two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year with a 20-2 record as a starter and who will almost certainly become a first-round pick in the NFL draft by the end of the month.

That is not a decision that will be taken lightly, and it is a decision that may not be made until deep into fall camp as Ohio State prepares for its opener against Minnesota on Sept. 2. Day has liked what he has seen from McCord, Miller and Stroud thus far, but this battle is a marathon, not a sprint.

"They've learned a lot, but now, the race is on over the next few months to figure out who can make the next stride," Day said. "Spring's been good. There's been a lot of progress made across the board, but there's still a long way to go before we play against Minnesota."



PHOTO COURTESY PAUL VERNON/ASSOCIATED PRESS VIA THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**GOOD FIRST IMPRESSIONS** – Ohio State's top three quarterbacks, including redshirt freshman Jack Miller, all looked solid at the spring game, combining for 497 yards and four touchdowns.

## Comparing The Quarterback Play

How did the completion numbers from the spring game for Kyle McCord, Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud compare? Yardage below is from the line of scrimmage to the point of the catch.

 McCord	Miller	Stroud	
<b>20+</b>	<b>2/3</b>	<b>0/2</b>	<b>1/1</b>
<b>16-20</b>	<b>1/3</b>	<b>0/1</b>	<b>2/4</b>
<b>11-15</b>	<b>0/1</b>	<b>5/11</b>	<b>2/4</b>
<b>6-10</b>	<b>5/5</b>	<b>6/8</b>	<b>3/4</b>
<b>1-5</b>	<b>4/4</b>	<b>5/7</b>	<b>5/6</b>
<b>0</b>	<b>0/1</b>	<b>1/1</b>	<b>3/3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>12/17</b>	<b>17/30</b>	<b>16/22</b>

# Early Enrollees Take Advantage of Spring Practices

By **CRAIG MERZ**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A record 15 signees from the class of 2021 enrolled early at Ohio State to have the opportunity to better prepare themselves for their first season at a big-time program.

The group features the cream of the crop such as five-star quarterback Kyle McCord, five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer and receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. (four-star) and Emeka Egbuka (five-star).

No matter their star rating, the goal for each athlete is to take advantage of the extra time afforded them by being on campus. It's something that can't be taken for granted after the experiences of the incoming freshmen a year earlier.

That group of early enrollees lost invaluable training because the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the winter of 2020 forced the closure of the school in mid-March and cancellation of the spring game.

Fortunately, the Buckeyes got through all their scheduled workouts this year, culminating in the April 17 spring game in Ohio Stadium.

Now, coach Ryan Day and his staff have data to analyze as they prepare for the season.

While those freshmen who arrived in Columbus in January may get a leg up on their peers in the battle to earn playing time, Day said young players must learn that it's the process of reaching that point that matters.

"When you come to Ohio State, typically you're highly recruited, and there's an expectation that comes with that," he said. "Sometimes it's for the player but a lot of times for the parents and the people back home and the public. To me, when guys come in, the No. 1 thing they have to worry about is getting developed. That's it."

Here's a look in alphabetical order at the 15 enrollees:

## Wide Receiver Jayden Ballard

The Massillon (Ohio) Washington product enters a deep and talented room that includes Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and Jaxon Smith-Njigba, not to mention newcomers Egbuka and Harrison. Ballard (6-2, 192) is the Tigers' career leader in touchdowns (37) and receiving yards (2,636).

Receivers coach Brian Hartline said all three of his freshman pass catchers show maturity beyond their years.

"Jayden is coming along," he said. "All of these guys are performing at a very high level. They don't carry themselves like freshmen. They don't act like freshmen. So, at this point, my job is to throw as much at them as possible because they have shown me they can pretty much handle it."

Ballard had two catches for 11 yards in the spring game.

"I do think the young guys have had a great work ethic," Day said afterward of his new receivers. "They have a great mentality and approach. I'm impressed with all the young guys. I think Marvin, Emeka and Jayden have all shown that they have the ability to play this season."

## Defensive Back Denzel Burke

Hailing from Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguario, Burke (6-0, 192) was recruited as an athlete because he can play in the secondary or be a

receiver. He's shown in the practices that putting him at cornerback was the correct call.

"It's actually uncanny how natural he does a lot of things at corner for not having played there very much," secondary coach Matt Barnes said.

"I don't know if it's 7-on-7 development or he just had a trainer or somebody he worked with, but he does a lot of things naturally very well. It's been fun to watch."

With OSU having one of the worst pass defenses nationally last season, there may be an opportunity for Burke this season. He had two tackles during the spring game.

"He has elite feet and patience that you don't see from many people regardless of their age but particularly for a young guy to sit at the line of scrimmage and have the patience that he has to play press technique and some other techniques," Barnes said.

"Not that we're surprised, but I am, to a degree, just kind of blown away by how far along he looks at times. Now, he still has a long way to go."

## Linebacker Reid Carrico

Ranked by 247Sports as the third-best prospect in Ohio, he will be the first player from Ironton to don the scarlet and gray since halfback Marcus Williams from 2006-09.

Carrico (6-2, 228) has already made an impression by being among the first five freshmen to lose their black stripes from their helmets, signifying they are full-fledged Buckeyes.

"He's going to have a great career here just because of the way he takes care of himself in the classroom, on the field," Day said in December. "He's one of the toughest guys I've seen on film running sideline to sideline."

Ohio State lacks depth and experience at linebacker, so Carrico is a welcome addition. He assisted on a tackle in the spring game.

"The linebackers are the glue that hold the defense together," said junior defensive end Zach Harrison. "They're making plays and giving a lot of effort."

## Offensive Lineman Ben Christman

There are a lot of veterans along the line, but Christman (6-6, 312) out of Richfield (Ohio) Revere has the tools to be a factor down the road. He was the top-rated lineman in Ohio for the 2021 class and committed to the Buckeyes on June 26, 2019.

He and fellow early enrollee Zen Michalski will be under the tutelage of offensive line coach Greg Studrawa.

"The foundation of technique and how to be tough and how to use your hands to block - that's where I am with those guys," Studrawa said.

## Defensive Back Jantzen Dunn

The four-star from Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren had offers from the likes of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Oklahoma, Penn State and Southern Cal but hopes to find a home in the Ohio State secondary.

He's been getting reps at safety, and in the spring game he had two tackles (one solo).

Day said players such as Dunn (6-1, 188) who excelled in high school must learn patience at the next level.

"One person's timetable is maybe different than another person's timetable, because of



PHOTO COURTESY PAUL VERNON/ASSOCIATED PRESS VIA THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS  
**ON THE BOARD** – Freshman wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. celebrates his first touchdown in a Buckeye uniform in the first quarter of the spring game.

where they grew up, how they grew up, what they were exposed to, their physical, mental makeup, maybe the position room," Day said. "There are a lot of things that come into play, and there's a fine line. You can't wait around for anybody. There has to be urgency to get on the field, but you also have to have the mind-set of, 'I have talent, but I also have to have skill and discipline in my life.' And that's the goal."

## Wide Receiver Emeka Egbuka

The No. 1-rated receiver in the nation from Steilacoom, Wash., had a five-star career and is expected to someday in the not-too-distant future provide a one-two punch with Marvin Harrison similar to what the Buckeyes have now with Olave and Wilson.

Egbuka (6-1, 203) led all receivers in the spring game with 123 yards on seven catches while Harrison's seven receptions produced 49 yards and a touchdown.

The two were among the first to get their black stripes removed.

"It's not just about on the football field," Hartline said. "It's how you carry yourself off the field, and these guys embody all of that."

"I don't see anybody that spends more time on the Jugs machine or more time in the room and doing extra than I do those two young men at this point."

## Wide Receiver Marvin Harrison Jr.

Harrison, the son of eight-time NFL Pro Bowl wide receiver Marvin Harrison, teamed with McCord to win the past three Pennsylvania 6A state championships at Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep.

Day said it's easy to see how Harrison (6-3, 202) has had so much success, including 37 TDs in high school.

"He has lots of discipline, excellent attention to detail with his routes and is somebody who cares a lot," Day said. "He's in here after hours. He's here early in the morning. He takes a lot of pride in his work, and he's making plays. He's just a freshman who has a long way to go, but early impressions have

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Ohio State's 2021 Early Enrollees

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Previous School
10	Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	192	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
29	Denzel Burke	CB	6-0	189	Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro
28	Reid Carrico	LB	6-2	228	Ironton, Ohio
71	Ben Christman	OL	6-6	312	Richfield (Ohio) Revere
24	Jantzen Dunn	SAF	6-1	188	Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren
12	Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-1	203	Steilacoom, Wash.
18	Marvin Harrison Jr.	WR	6-3	202	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
81	Sam Hart	TE	6-5	240	Aurora (Colo.) Cherokee Trail
32	TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-10	210	Hopewell, Va.
14	Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	210	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
65	Zen Michalski	OL	6-9	295	Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central
29	Jesse Mirco	P	6-4	210	Fremantle, Australia
21	Evan Pryor	RB	5-10	197	Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough
33	Jack Sawyer	DE	6-4	240	Pickerington (Ohio) North
91	Tyleik Williams	DT	6-3	330	Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed

Running Back Evan Pryor

Like Henderson, Pryor (5-10, 197) had his senior season of football canceled at Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough because of COVID-19. As a junior, he rushed for 1,130 yards and 11 TDs, and he added 646 receiving yards and eight scores.

Junior running back Master Teague, who will be challenged for carries by Pryor and Henderson, likes what he's seen of the pair.

"They're doing great so far, just in the detail," Teague said, "They've been learning quick, and they love the game. Everybody has a process, and they've come here and they're going through their process. We have a great room, and everybody's just making each other better."

Running backs coach Tony Alford said Pryor and Henderson are eager to learn.

"They're both extremely, extremely coachable kids," he said. "They're always on a quest – give me more, give me more."

"When you start coaching, you start to correct. And they don't take it personally. It's not a personal attack at them. They want to know, 'What can I do better here?'"

Pryor had 1 yard in three carries and two catches for 12 yards in the spring game.

Defensive End Jack Sawyer

The top player in Ohio and fourth overall from nearby Pickerington North made a splash at the spring game when he had four tackles (three solo), including three sacks for 14 yards.

"All the things that stand out are pretty obvious," Zach Harrison said afterward. "He's going to be a great player at Ohio

State. Jack's real. Jack's legit."

Sawyer (6-4, 240) is expected to be one of the freshmen to make a major contribution this season. He and Marvin Harrison were the first freshmen to have their black stripes removed.

"He's off to a great start, for sure," Day said of Sawyer after the spring game. "He's earning more and more reps. He's working his way up the depth chart. I think across the board our D-line was solid this (spring). We have some good depth there. But Jack in particular came in with a lot of confidence. He's made a lot of plays."

"What you saw today was pretty much most every practice out there. If he can keep building and getting stronger and keep building, then hopefully he's going to have an impact and be able to participate here early in the season."

Defensive Tackle Tyleik Williams

The four-star Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed product could push for playing time to replace Tommy Toggia. Williams (6-3, 330) is raw but has an upside with his athleticism and desire to improve.

"You have to spend time and you have to work at it, and everybody has a different journey in that along the way," Day said. "You look at different guys and different stories, maybe it took five years, one year, two years. Everybody is on a different (path)."

"Sometimes these guys just need the room to grow and to understand that it takes time, but on the other side of that, let's not wait around. Let's try to get on the field as fast as you can."



Jack Sawyer

been excellent."

Harrison had a 5-yard touchdown pass from C.J. Stroud in the spring game.

"Marvin Harrison is the real deal," Olave said. "Route runner. Technician. All that. He's a deep threat. He's a real good receiver."

Tight End Sam Hart

The former standout wrestler at Aurora (Colo.) Cherokee Trail enters a room that has senior Jeremy Ruckert; senior walk-ons Corey Rau and Mitch Rossi; sophomore Cade Stover, who switched last season from playing defense and looks to be the backup to Ruckert; and redshirt freshman Joe Royer, who had a TD catch in the spring game, all in the mix.

Rossi has been impressed with how Hart (6-5, 240) and Royer are trying to add to the depth chart of tight ends coach Kevin Wilson.

"Those guys have been working really hard, getting with Coach Wilson," Rossi said. "(This is a) big-time development position, so in the offseason they are trying to work on everything – body position, hands, feet – to get ready to help us out."

Running Back TreVeyon Henderson

The No. 1-ranked running back in the nation out of Hopewell, Va., Henderson did not play in the fall of 2020 because of the pandemic. In 2019, he was Virginia's Gatorade Player of the Year when he rushed for 2,424 yards and 45 touchdowns.

Henderson (5-10, 210) has had his black stripe removed.

Said Day: "He's still really young and didn't play last year, hasn't played football in a while. That's the other thing. He and a few other guys who are young freshman last year didn't play high school ball. But he has done a good job. He's had a good attitude, he has a good work ethic. He's done everything right so far."

"Now, he still has to play more and learn every day – he needs a million reps – but the talent is there, the work ethic is there. I think he's going to have a really bright future for us. He's done everything we've asked him to do so far. He's flashed at times already, and we're excited to see what that looks like during the spring game."

Henderson gained 26 yards on six carries and had five catches for 29 yards in the spring game.

Quarterback Kyle McCord

McCord (6-3, 210) was the No. 3 pro-style QB at St. Joe's Prep and finished his career as Philadelphia's career leader in passing yards (6,687) and TD passes (88).

He will battle Stroud and Jack Miller to

replace Justin Fields. McCord's first pass in the spring game went 55 yards to Garrett Wilson. He was 12 of 17 for 184 yards with a 15-yard TD to Smith-Njigba and a 12-yarder to Royer.

Day sees the unlimited potential in McCord.

"I just think it's about getting more reps and trying to get better with each play," Day said. "The thing you can't do is that you can't run every single play into all different coverages every practice. What you have to do is be able to play the plays in your mind, play with an imagination, put the work in off the field."

"Because if you can solve some of those problems on your own, not just when you're in the building and when you're out at practice, you're going to accelerate your learning. I think he's done a good job of that. I think he can continue to get better at it because that's a huge part of the game."

Offensive Lineman Zen Michalski

Michalski (6-9, 295) is part of the long-term future along with Christman and five-star lineman Donovan Jackson, who will join the team this summer.

The trio might not see much playing time right away but eventually they'll add depth.

"I've got smart guys, and they study so much," Studrawa said. "Their attention to detail, especially for the young guys that are in there asking questions all the time and wanting to learn. They want to learn everything, and when you have guys that are like that, you can move those guys around and still come up with a cohesive unit even if you have a couple of injuries."

"And that's what it should be. When you've got an offensive line room that has depth, those things can happen and instill confidence in everybody around them."

Punter Jesse Mirco

Mirco, like former OSU punter Cameron Johnston, is a former Australian rules football player who got his apprenticeship from ProKick Australia, which has delivered numerous kickers to U.S. colleges from Australia.

Mirco (6-4, 210) was the No. 6 punter in the class of 2021.

"Had a great winter to get stronger," special teams coordinator Parker Fleming said. "There's a lot of things that specialists need – mentally, physically, all that – and then getting with the team and doing our drills."

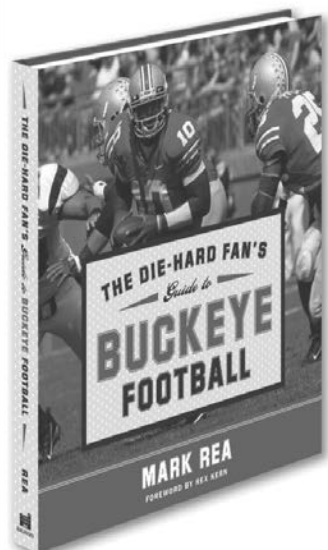
Mirco had five punts for a 33.8-yard average in the spring game.



TreVeyon Henderson

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

## Buckeye WR Room Has Talent From Top To Bottom

By LORI SCHMIDT  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State senior receiver Chris Olave surprised ESPN draft analyst Todd McShay when he declined to turn pro after the 2020 season.

"I thought worst case, he was going somewhere in the second round in what shapes up as a pretty deep wide receiver class," said McShay on the ESPN "First Draft" podcast Jan. 19.

Olave shocked even teammate Garrett Wilson.

"I'm not going to lie, I was surprised," Wilson said. "When you're as good as Chris, you think those (players) are as good as gone."

Olave was the team's leading receiver a year ago, averaging 104.1 yards per game, good enough to rank No. 12 nationally in that category. Wilson's average of 90.4 yards wasn't far behind. With their performances against Nebraska and Penn State, they became the first Buckeye duo in school history to account for 100 receiving yards each in consecutive games. Conference coaches ended up voting them both first-team all-Big Ten.



Chris Olave

Add in senior tight end Jeremy Ruckert, who was third on the team in terms of receptions (13) and receiving touchdowns (five), and head coach Ryan Day knows he has players who are capable of catching the ball.

"The positive is we have a lot of weapons, and it's going to be hard for teams to single up, man-to-man in certain situations any of those guys, because they can be a mismatch," Day said. "The negative is I think they all want the ball, so understanding that we're a team, there's only one football, and doing a great job when the ball is not in your hands is critically important."

Wilson's reaction to Olave's return certainly makes it sound as if he's more than willing to share, if that's what it takes to duplicate the success of a campaign that had the Buckeyes reach the national championship game, although he's undoubtedly

hoping for a better fate than their 52-24 loss to Alabama in that game.

"When he told me, I knew that we were going to be right back," Wilson said, "hopefully, right back where we were last year with a chance to compete for everything we want."

Ohio State plans to deploy Wilson in a slightly different manner in 2021, however. Unlike this past year when he mostly played inside as a slot receiver, Wilson will be moving outside to play the X-receiver position.

Among the candidates to take over Wilson's former spot is Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who has impressed receivers coach Brian Hartline with a skill Hartline has long prized.

"He may be our best blocker in the room," said Hartline. "His desire, his physicality is much needed."

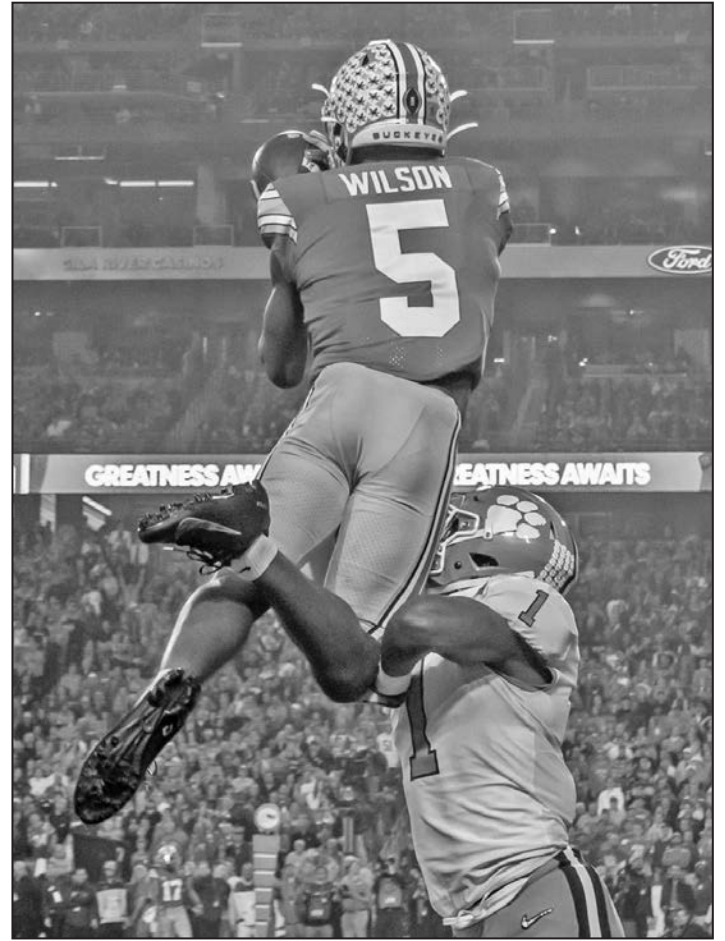
Smith-Njigba, a former five-star recruit out of Rockwall, Texas, had catches in six of the seven games he played in as a freshman, including two receptions each in 2021 College Football Playoff matchups with Clemon and Alabama.

"We want him to be in the mix with the first group," Day told reporters. "He can do so many great things. He just needs to be more consistent, but we're excited about this year. He's had a good, solid spring. He needs to now have a great summer so he can have a great preseason going into the year, but he's flashed."

That's all before mentioning Jameson Williams, who started the last six games of his sophomore season, was third on the team in receiving yards and receiving yards per game, and says he is ready to make an even greater impact as a junior.

"This offseason, I feel like I got a lot better - better routes, catching the ball more consistently, basically playing around with my speed," Williams said. "I'm a fast guy. You know, sometimes I have to tempo it down a little bit and get a better route in."

Having that type of top-end talent is important, but the Buckeyes have more than that. They have depth, and that will aid in the development of a new starting quarterback with Justin Fields moving on to the NFL,



FILE PHOTO

**INSIDE (TO) OUT** - Ohio State wide receiver Garrett Wilson (5) will move from the slot to the X-receiver position for the 2021 season. Wilson averaged 90.4 yards per game last fall.

because whomever the signal callers target in practice will be minding the minutiae of their position.

"I love the situation with a young quarterback," said Hartline. "It just asks us and demands us to be more detailed than ever."

The Buckeyes will have to wait until this fall to get a better idea of how junior Kamryn Babb and sophomore Julian Fleming fit in the depth chart, because both have been hurt. Babb has missed several weeks of spring workouts with an undisclosed injury. Fleming was seen by reporters working off to the side of spring drills during open sessions, indicating he was banged up. That was not a complete surprise, given that he had hip surgery while at Southern Columbia High School in Pennsylvania, and Hartline indicated he's been playing with a linebacker's strap on an ailing shoulder while at OSU.

"He needs to get ultra-healthy first so he can maximize what he's capable of doing," declared Hartline. "Unfortunately, we did not have enough time with him through the spring, because of getting things fixed since high school."

"The guy's been operating at 75 percent for the last couple years."

When Fleming is 100 percent, he's an intriguing talent.

Hartline called him a "special individual" and added that Fleming's combination of

size (6-2, 205) and speed are unlike anything he's ever personally seen in college football. That's what made him the No. 1 receiving prospect in his recruiting class and the third-ranked player overall.

Incoming freshmen Emeka Egbuka and Marvin Harrison Jr. were also highly regarded as recruits and have impressed since arriving on campus. In fact, Egbuka, like Fleming the year before, topped the 247Sports list of high school receivers. Both Egbuka and Harrison have had their black stripes removed, making them official members of the team.

"I don't see anybody spend more time on the Jugs (machine) more time in the room coming in extra than I do those two young men at this point," Hartline said. "They don't carry themselves like freshmen. They don't act like freshmen."

Hartline also praised the work ethic of yet another freshman, Jayden Ballard, a four-star recruit who recorded 141 receptions, 2,636 yards and 37 touchdowns during his career at Massillon (Ohio) High School.

The 2021 additions helped make the wide receiving corps so deep that super senior Demario McCall has moved to practicing with the defensive backs, and sophomore Gee Scott is learning to play tight end.

"We expect to have one of the best rooms in the country," said Wilson.

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## COVER STORY

# Cheers Ring Out At Ohio Stadium Once Again

Continued From Page 1

to mention that the presence of fans was providing a boost in energy.

"They're excited," defensive line coach Larry Johnson said on April 8 of the players. "This is going to be fun for our players to get a chance to be (out there with) fans in the stands, and especially for the parents. That's what's most important. They get to see them for the first time, and I know the young guys are excited about that. It's a good feeling to be able to walk into the stadium, look around and see people instead of posters. That's going to be pretty cool."

Others pointed out that the stands weren't technically empty last season, with pockets of the stands populated by family pods, but that did little to simulate the true impact the Horseshoe can have on a game. The roughly 20 percent capacity crowd didn't capture that energy either – Ohio State's first- and second-year players will have to wait until Oregon comes to town on Sept. 11 to feel that if restrictions are lifted – but it did serve as a fun return for the Buckeyes.

"It's really exciting. From family to friends, everybody is just happy to go to the stadium and to be back in there, and we're happy to have Buckeye Nation back in the stadium," defensive tackle Haskell Garrett said. "It's a little bit different when you have just your family (in there). Having your family is awesome, but having the whole Buckeye Nation, having fans back in there so that they can experience what we experience is even more enticing. We're just happy to have everybody back in."

That's not to say that the now-populated Horseshoe didn't live up to expectations for those young Ohio State players, either. Freshmen could be seen on the sidelines playing up to the crowd, asking for more noise and being quickly obliged by those in the nearest sections of the football cathedral. Wilson flashed a huge grin at the crowd after a first-quarter snag.



PHOTO COURTESY PAUL VERNON/ASSOCIATED PRESS VIA THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**HAPPY RETURN** – For the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, fans were welcomed into Ohio Stadium for the 2021 spring game. Nearly 20,000 fans jumped at the chance to see the Buckeyes in action.

It was a blast for those in attendance, too. Cheers rang out as Buckeye fans flooded into the stadium and filed into their seats – socially distanced and sporting masks, of course. BSB caught up with Zach Fleer, a fan in attendance, who shared the same sentiment as the players: It's good to start getting back to normal.

"It's wonderful," said Fleer. "For us (Fleer attended the game with his wife), we met at a game in 2016. She's pregnant now too, so for our baby – he's not here yet – but to be here with him was really cool. To be back in the stadium, it felt normal. Hearing the band, hearing the crowd, it was all just really cool."

Although Ohio State is delighted about the increasing odds for a normal fall and a full house this upcoming season, the

Buckeyes – always considering a competitive edge and plotting out contingency plans – are still working to make sure that they're prepared for that return of rocking stadiums and belligerent road crowds. If everything goes according to plan, they'll run into one such crowd to open the 2021 season, with a Thursday night trip to Minnesota's TCF Bank Stadium on Sept. 2.

The Golden Gophers aren't known for their raucous crowds, though the 50,805-seat stadium will likely be packed and hopping if state laws allow for it by the time September rolls around. It was the last time Ohio State came to town on Nov. 15, 2014, when 45,778 fans took in a 31-24 Buckeye victory in freezing temperatures.

"It's going to be an adjustment phase

again," Day said, "We had to adjust with no fans, and then we got used to that, and now we have to adjust to having fans again. It's fun though. Thank goodness that we're able to get some people in the stands. I'm looking forward to having our guys play in front of a crowd and get back to some normalcy here. We're very excited about that. We're hoping that we can get a packed house here when Oregon comes to town, depending on how things are going here in the state, because that's a huge deal for us. That's a huge advantage, and I know our guys are excited about it."

"But like I said, there's going to be a little bit of an adjustment again, getting people back in the stands. But I know our guys love that because they're all show-offs. That's what I call them."

## Top Performers At The Spring Game

**Freshman wide receiver Emeka Egbuka** – The No. 1 wide receiver in the 2021 class, Egbuka exemplified why he was so coveted across the country in the spring game. He hauled in seven receptions for 123 yards, including an extremely difficult catch where he sprawled out to snag a pass thrown behind him.

**Freshman wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr.** – He received rave reviews throughout spring camp and backed up the praise in the spring game. Harrison reeled in seven receptions for 49 yards and one touchdown, consistently finding openings in the secondary and displaying his sure hands.

**Sophomore safety/bullet Ronnie Hickman** – After taking a redshirt as freshman due to injury, Hickman spent his first active season as a backup. Now in his third year, Hickman is ready to take the next step in the Buckeye secondary, evidenced by his eight-tackle outing in the spring game, which included five solo stops.

**Freshman quarterback Kyle McCord** – In his first live action in front of fans since arriving at Ohio State as an early enrollee in January, McCord flashed the ability that made him one of the highest touted prospects in the country for the 2021 class. The true freshman threw just five incomplete passes on his way to a 12-for-17 passing performance for 184 yards and two touchdowns in the spring game.

**Senior linebacker Teradja Mitchell** – After sitting behind a slew of veteran

linebackers for his first three seasons, Mitchell is poised to emerge as a force at linebacker for the Buckeyes. Although the hard-hitting linebacker could not display his pop due to the no-tackling rule, he was frequently in the right place to make the play in the spring game. Mitchell finished with 10 tackles (seven solo) and one tackle for loss.

**Freshman defensive end Jack Sawyer** – Perhaps no one looked more impressive in the spring game than the highest-rated member of the Buckeyes' 2021 class. Sawyer stood out for the Buckeyes, recording four tackles and three sacks with a forced fumble, demonstrating what all his recruitment hype was about.

**Redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud** – After displaying his ability as a runner with a 48-yard touchdown against Michigan State in 2020, Stroud showed part of his playmaking ability, but his passing skills had not yet been showcased. The second-year signal caller answered any doubters by making on-time and on-target throws all day to the tune of 185 yards and two touchdowns on 16-of-22 passing.

**Redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts** – It was far from a perfect showing for Watts, but the young cornerback flashed promise for the future in the spring game. In addition to his six tackles (five solo), Watts put his playmaking ability on display when he grabbed the game's lone interception.

– Joe Dempsey

## OHIO STATE SPRING GAME RECAP

# No Candidate Springs To Front Of QB Race

By **CRAIG MERZ**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The focus of Ohio State's spring game in Ohio Stadium on April 17 was the competition to replace star quarterback Justin Fields, who will be an early pick in the NFL draft later this month.

Redshirt freshman quarterbacks Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud and true freshman Kyle McCord are competing for the spot to not only replace Fields but meet the high expectations brought to the position by third-year head coach Ryan Day.

Although each had his moments, it was clear there is more work needed before one of them wins the starting job.

Miller was 17 for 30 for 128 yards and an interception. Stroud completed 16 of 22 for 185 yards and two touchdowns, and McCord hit on 12 of 17 passes for 184 yards and a pair of TDs.

"All learning, flashes here and there," Day said afterward. "The more these guys can prepare and work in the film room and just grind, the better they're going to prepare. Now the race is on."

First-year receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeke Egbuka and true freshman defensive end Jack Sawyer also stood out with their performances.

What was more notable was just having the game after it was canceled a year ago because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were real fans, not cardboard cutouts, and The Best Damn Band in the Land performed.

On a partly cloudy 58-degree afternoon the reduced capacity crowd of 19,180 – which included some 10,000 caregivers and health care workers from the Wexner Medical Center and select entities on campus – brought a sense of normalcy, even if it wasn't a normal game.

The format was two 10-minute quarters for the first half with the rosters split among Team Brutus (coached by defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs) and Team Buckeye (coached by offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson). In the second half it was the more traditional offense vs. defense scrimmage.

For the record, Brutus won 28-13.

To prevent injuries, tackling was prohibit-



PHOTO COURTESY PAUL VERNON/ASSOCIATED PRESS VIA THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS  
**CENTER STAGE** – Ohio State football coach Ryan Day (center) speaks to a trio of quarterbacks during the 2021 spring game. The spotlight was on the quarterbacks, who are battling for the starting job this fall.

ed and there were no kickoffs. The quarterbacks wore black jerseys and were off-limits to being hit. Nonetheless, it was still football.

## First Quarter

Team Buckeye got the ball first and Miller took the first snap at his own 25. He drove them to the 15 with the big plays being completions of 11 yards to junior wideout Jameson Williams and 13 to junior receiver Garrett Wilson.

On 1st-and-10 from the 15, Miller was intercepted by redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts at the 1, and Watts had a return of 29 yards. Miller on the drive was 6 of 9 or 51 yards.

Stroud immediately got Brutus rolling by hitting Egbuka for 15 yards and then connected with senior wide receiver Chris Olave for 40 yards to the Buckeye 15. Redshirt freshman Miyan Williams ran for 3, caught a pass for 5 and rushed for 2 more to place the ball at the 5.

From there, Stroud found Harrison for the TD at the 3:44 mark for a 7-0 lead by Brutus, which had the ball for 1:43 with six plays and 70 yards.

When Team Buckeye got the ball back, McCord wowed the crowd with a 55-yard strike to Wilson to the 20. The series stalled at the 23 when Sawyer was credited with the strip "sack" of McCord, who recovered his own fumble for a 4-yard loss. Redshirt freshman Jake Seibert missed a 40-yard field goal.

Later, Australian true freshman Jesse Mirco had a 43-yard punt.

## Second Quarter

Team Brutus took a 14-0 lead at 5:03 of the second when Stroud connected with Olave for a 5-yard score at the end of a 13-play, 61-yard series that used 3:35. Egbuka had receptions of 12, 8 and 10 yards to help set up the TD for a 14-0 lead.

McCord then guided Buckeye on a 13-play, 75-yard, 3:52 march that was capped with a TD toss of 15 yards to sophomore receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba in the right corner with 1:11 left.

Heralded true freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson had a 9-yard run and a 4-yard catch, and Wilson moved the ball 10 yards to the Brutus 37 with his catch. On the next play, third-year back Marcus Crowley

took a McCord throw for 12 yards and Smith-Njigba added 10 more with his reception to the 15. Two plays later he scored to make it 14-7.

On the final Brutus possession of the first half, fifth-year senior defensive end Jerron Cage sacked Miller for a 10-yard loss to the Buckeye 45 to force a Mirco punt on the final play.

## Second Half

There was no clock for the controlled scrimmage as Day mixed and matched the personnel from both teams to get a true offense vs. defense feel.

Stroud used a 31-yard pass to Egbuka to the Buckeye 21 to ignite the first series. Egbuka also had a grab for 12 to the 5 followed by redshirt sophomore Steele Chambers' runs of 4 and 3 yards for the touchdown to put Brutus ahead 21-7. The series consisted of 75 yards on 11 plays.

On the next series, Henderson had a catch from Miller for 12 yards and a 14-yard run on a drive that ended in Seibert missing a field-goal try from 45 yards.

Brutus redshirt freshman tight end Joe Royer caught a 12-yard TD pass from McCord for a 28-7 lead during a drive that Egbuka had a 35-yard reception and third-year back Marcus Crowley ran for 8 and 13 yards and had a 7-yard catch.

The final score came when senior Jagger LaRoe took over for Stroud during the eight-play, 75-yard drive to end the scrimmage. LaRoe threw a 20-yard TD to fellow senior walk-on Sam Wigusz for the 28-13 final. There was no extra-point attempt.

LaRoe was 5 of 6 for 75 yards in the drive. Senior wide receiver Austin Kutscher had catches for 13 and 30 yards, and sophomore wide receiver Marvin Davies hauled in two passes for 12 yards.

## Numbers

Egbuka had seven catches for 123 yards. ... Harrison gained 49 yards on seven catches, including a TD. ... Wilson had four catches for 85 yards. ... Smith-Njigba made five catches for 50 yards plus a TD, and Olave's three receptions went for 57 yards and a score. ... Henderson carried six times for 26 yards while the other promising true freshman halfback, Evan Pryor, had three runs for a yard and two catches for 12 yards. ... Sawyer had four tackles (three solo) and three sacks.

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OHIO STATE SPRING GAME

# Spring Game Box Score

**Brutus 28, Buckeye 13**

April 17, 2021 – Ohio Stadium, Columbus

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
TEAM BRUTUS	7	7	7	7	28
TEAM BUCKEYE	0	7	0	6	13

**First Quarter**

**BRUTUS** – Harrison, 5-yard pass from Stroud (Seibert kick), 3:44; 6 plays, 70 yards, 1:43 TOP.

**Second Quarter**

**BRUTUS** – Olave, 5-yard pass from Stroud (Seibert kick), 5:03; 13 plays, 61 yards, 3:35 TOP.

**BUCKEYE** – Smith-Njigba, 15-yard pass from McCord (Seibert kick), 1:11; 13 plays, 75 yards, 3:52 TOP.

**Third Quarter**

**BRUTUS** – Chambers, 2-yard run (Seibert kick), 7:00; 11 plays, 75 yards, 3:00 TOP.

**Fourth Quarter**

**BRUTUS** – Royer, 12-yard pass from McCord (Seibert kick), 5:00; 7 plays, 75 yards, 5:00 TOP.

**BUCKEYE** – Wiglusz, 20-yard pass from LaRoe (Seibert kick), 0:00; 8 plays, 75 yards, 5:00 TOP.

Att. – 19,180

Weather – 58 degrees, partly cloudy; wind 2 mph.

**Team Statistics**

	BRUTUS	BUCKEYE
First Downs	19	20
Rushing	5	2
Passing	14	17
Penalty	0	1
Rushes-Yards	16-40	16-27
Passing Yards	277	295
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	23-36-0	27-39-1
Offensive Plays	52	55
Total Net Yards	317	322
Third Down Efficiency	6-9	9-13
Punts-Avg.	3-116	2-53
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	1-0
Penalties	1-4	0-0
Time of Possession	15:55	24:05

**Individual Statistics**

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – BRUTUS:** Crowley 2-21; Williams 5-18; Chambers 4-10; Stroud 2-3; McCord 1-0; Pryor 2-(-2); Miller 1-(-10). **BUCKEYE:** Henderson 6-26; Crowley 4-8; Pryor 2-3; McCord 3-(-4); Stroud 1-(-6).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – BRUTUS:** Stroud 14-19-0-175-2; Miller 5-11-0-40-0; McCord 4-6-0-62-1. **BUCKEYE:** Stroud 2-3-0-10-0; Miller 12-19-1-88-0; McCord 8-11-0-122-1; LaRoe 5-6-0-75-1.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – BRUTUS:** Egbuka 7-123; Harrison 7-49; Olave 3-57; Williams 2-7; Royer 1-12; Williams 1-11; Pryor 2-12; Crowley 1-7. **BUCKEYE:** Smith-Njigba 5-50; Henderson 5-29; Wilson 4-85; Kutscher 2-43; Crowley 2-21; Davies 2-12; Ballard 2-11; Wiglusz 1-20; Williams 1-11; Hart 1-7; Stover 1-5.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – BRUTUS:** Mirco 3-38.7. **BUCKEYE:** Mirco 2-26.5.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – BRUTUS:** None. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) BRUTUS:** None. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**MISSED FIELD GOALS – BRUTUS:** None. **BUCKEYE:** Seibert (40,45).

**FORCED FUMBLES – BRUTUS:** Sawyer. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES – BRUTUS:** None. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**INTERCEPTIONS – BRUTUS:** Watts 1-29. **BUCKEYE:** None.

**SACKS – BRUTUS:** Sawyer 3.0-14. **BUCKEYE:** Cage 1.0-10.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS – BRUTUS:** Sawyer 3.0-14. **BUCKEYE:** Cage 1.0-10; Cowan 0.5-1; Vincent 0.5-1.

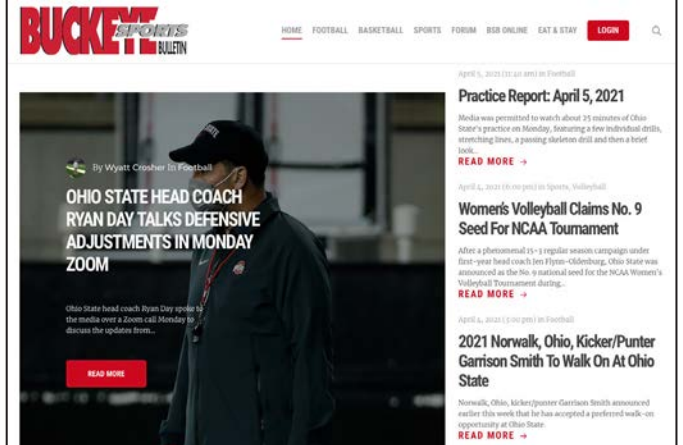
**TACKLES (Solo-Asst-Tot.) – BRUTUS:** Hickman 3-3-6; Watts 5-1-6; Simon 5-1-6; Martinez 3-2-5; Mitchell 3-1-4; Sawyer 3-1-4; McCullough 2-1-3; Ransom 1-0-1; Carrico 0-1-1; Jean-Baptiste 1-0-1; Johnson 1-0-1; Moore 1-0-1; Henry-Young 1-0-1; Cowan 0-1-1; Potter 1-0-1. **BUCKEYE:** Mitchell 4-2-6; Eichenberg 3-3-6; Hamilton 2-1-3; Hickman 2-0-2; Dunn 1-1-2; Cage 2-0-2; Young 1-1-2; Shaw 2-0-2; Burke 2-0-2; Pope 1-1-2; Cox 2-0-2; Henry-Young 2-0-2; Cowan 0-2-2; Ransom 1-0-1; Kittle 0-1-1; Vincent 0-1-1; McCullough 0-1-1.

**Players In The Game**

**BRUTUS** – Harrison, Ransom, Martinez, Hickman, Watts, Mirco, DiMaggio, Carrico, Olave, Mitchell, Jameson Williams, Stroud, Jean-Baptiste, Jack Miller, Egbuka, Johnson, McCord, Andrade, Pryor, Chambers, Crowley, Miyan Williams, Simon, Sawyer, Moore, Henry-Young, Royer, Cowan, McCullough, Potter, Seibert.

**BUCKEYE** – Hickman, Ransom, Mirco, Dunn, Mitchell, Kittle, Wilson, Jameson Williams, Vincent, Stroud, Cage, Jack Miller, Ballard, Smith-Njigba, McCord, Young, Stover, Shaw, Andrade, LaRoe, Pryor, Crowley, Burke, Simon, Henderson, Eichenberg, Pope, Davies, Cox, Henry-Young, Hart, Wiglusz, Hamilton, Kutscher, Cowan, McCullough, Seibert.

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# Healthy Vincent Poised For Breakout Season

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Taron Vincent came to Columbus as one of the most highly touted prospects in the country in 2018, but the former five-star defensive tackle has not enjoyed as much success as expected through his first three seasons.

As a true freshman in 2018, Vincent earned his way into the rotation of a talented group of defensive tackles that included Dre'Mont Jones, DaVon Hamilton, Haskell Garrett, Jashon Cornell, Antwan Jackson and fellow freshman Tommy Togiai.

Despite all the elite players ahead of him on the depth chart, Vincent flashed toward the end of the season. In the 2018 Big Ten Championship Game, Vincent broke through the Wildcat front and took down Northwestern quarterback Clayton Thorson for a sack and a loss of 10 yards.

Making a big-time play with the Big Ten title on the line demonstrated the impact Vincent can have, which was part of what made him such an attractive recruit. Jones was the only defensive tackle who went on to the NFL following the season, and Vincent seemed poised to step up in his absence.

However, Vincent's sophomore season ended before it began due to a torn labrum, which forced him to take a redshirt and miss the 2019 campaign. The setback was tough for the talented defensive tackle, but discussing it with his father, Troy, who was a five-time Pro Bowl cornerback with the Philadelphia Eagles, helped give him perspective.

"Injuries are a part of the game," Vincent said. "I struggled with it at first, but I talked to my dad. And he was just telling me, 'Man, it's football. Injuries come with the sport. This is what you signed up for.' Once I had that conversation, I really just realized, 'You've just got to get healthy. Once you get healthy, you know what you can do.'"

Vincent was eager to return to his team in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all sports activities at colleges across the country, hindering his rehab.

"I wasn't really able to get the full amount of treatment that I possibly needed," Vincent said. "We were shut down and stuff, so I wasn't in the facility. That was just a little struggle with everything. It kind of delayed everything. So when we got back, I was kind of behind a little bit."

After missing the entire 2019 season, Vincent was poised to prove why he was the No. 1 defensive tackle and No. 20 overall recruit in the 2018 class. However, he had been away from the field for a long time, and his rehab had been interrupted by circumstances outside of his control.

"With the injury and being out of football for a long time, then the pandemic hit, and he couldn't practice," said defensive line coach Larry Johnson. "You don't just jump back in and get to the same level you were when you got here. That's why we've done a great job of developing him and getting his skill set back to where it needs to be. Being out of football for a year, it's tough for anybody to come back and be ready to go."

"But I think the potential is there, no doubt about that. Now it's just about getting him ready to have the opportunity to go play in a game and play some live football. We're working really hard to make sure that happens."

As a third-year sophomore, Vincent missed the first two games of the 2020 season while still recovering from his shoulder surgery. Though he played in the final six games of the COVID-shortened campaign, Vincent did not quite return to his top form.

"He wasn't healthy last year and couldn't play, and so he played late in the season when he got really healthy, but he didn't play a lot of football last year," Johnson said. "Now he's a healthier player, and he's going through spring ball, he's gone through a winter workout, and he's in a really great position right now. He's what we thought he would be when we brought him here in recruiting. He's having a great spring right now, he really is, because he's healthy. He's playing fast, he's strong at a point of attack, all the things we look for from a three-technique."

The physical prowess of Vincent (6-2, 300) does not come as a surprise. As a prep star, he was the 2017 Maxwell Football Club Defensive National High School Player of the Year at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy after moving from his hometown of Baltimore.

The talent has always been there, but Vincent's mentality has been what has impressed his defensive line coach the most through all his trials and tribulations.

"It wasn't easy for him because he wanted to be a part of it," Johnson said. "He kept telling his dad, 'I'm letting the team down. I'm letting Coach Johnson down,' and I think that says a lot about who he is. His dad's a great guy, so he understands the game. But I'll just tell you what he did. He went to work. He didn't sit around and pout about it. He went to work at it and rehabbed."

For Vincent, venting to his dad helped him deal with the pain of not being 100 percent and feeling like he was disappointing the brotherhood in a season when he totaled nine tackles (one solo), two tackles for loss and one-half sack.

"He just knows what to do to get there," Vincent said of his dad. "He's already



FILE PHOTO

**BREAKOUT POTENTIAL – Junior defensive tackle Taron Vincent has been projected as a possible new star for the Buckeyes up front.**

somewhere where I want to get to. He just gives me knowledge and everything I need."

With the talent Vincent possesses, he was seen as a player who could potentially head to the NFL after just three years of college. Due to injury, that hasn't happened, but he is finally healthy entering his fourth-year junior season in 2021.

"I've been fully healthy this whole off-season," Vincent said. "And I've been able to compete with everybody and develop my skill set that I need to take me to the next level."

While Jones, Hamilton, Cornell and Togiai have all moved on to the NFL, Vincent, Jackson and Garrett have remained at Ohio State. During spring practice, Vincent has turned more heads than just Johnson's, also impressing his longtime teammates.

"He didn't play last year, which felt very bad because he had that surgery on his shoulder," Jackson said of Vincent. "I'm really happy playing with him right now because we didn't play with each other last year. And us two, we'll just wreck the line of scrimmage, and I just like him right now. We're alike. We get off the ball and we just attack. And I like how he attacks the offensive guards in practice. It's ridiculous. I give him the utmost respect for what he has been doing in practice."

Wreaking havoc in the backfield has also caught the attention of Garrett, who emerged as an All-American at defensive tackle in 2020 after recovering from an off-season gunshot wound.

"There's a lot of guys developing, and especially Taron, he's done really well," Garrett said of Vincent. "He hasn't played ball for almost three years, and just like me, he came back the same time I did, and so he's finally getting that fresh, healthy year of playing ball and being able to really develop himself injury-free for the most part. I think he has a chance to have a great season this upcoming season."

In addition to earning praise from his defensive-line mates, Vincent has thoroughly impressed head coach Ryan Day and Mickey Marotti, who is the assistant athletic director for football sports performance, after reaching the team's top tier for offseason workouts.

"Taron Vincent has a chance to have a breakout year for us," Day said. "It started off in the offseason with Coach Mick. (Vincent) was gold in the strength and conditioning this quarter for champions. His play has been excellent. He's definitely playing his best football, and it all started in the offseason. He gave himself to Coach Mick, he got the gold and now he's about to take off. If you were asking me about the most improved, I'd probably say Taron up front."

Now a veteran, the soft-spoken Vincent is solely focused on being the best he can be to make sure he does not feel like he is letting down his team again.

"I feel stronger, faster, just more explosive off the ball and stuff like that. I can just feel it physically," Vincent said. "And the game is kind of slowing down now. I'm older now. I can see stuff happening before it happens."

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# Proctor's Versatility Gives Buckeyes Safety Net

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Josh Proctor described himself in November as a "Swiss army knife" for his ability to play different positions. The senior shared starts at free safety with Marcus Hooker in the shortened 2020 season but also saw action at slot cornerback and cover safety in passing situations.

With Hooker currently suspended by the team after his arrest for operating a vehicle while impaired on March 13, the free safety spot appeared to be Proctor's to lose as Ohio State's spring practices ended April 17.

The former four-star recruit from Owasso, Okla., gladly accepted the challenge.

"I think it will mean basically getting used to that one spot and I can actually sit and learn what I need to learn," he said on April 1. "As far as moving around in other spots, I'm still the same person. Wherever you need me, I'll be there. It doesn't matter."

As Proctor (6-2, 195) sees it, the Buckeye defensive backfield needs to redeem itself after a poor 2020 that included getting torched for 464 passing yards out of 621 total yards in the 52-24 loss to Alabama in the College Football Playoff championship game on Jan. 11.

"I feel like coming into these workouts, we came in with a chip on our shoulder," he said. "I would not say everybody has let that game go. That is something that has pushed us a lot and it's in the back of our minds every day. We just go out and go to work."

The Buckeyes last season ranked 122nd out of 127 teams in pass defense (304.0 yards per game) and 59th in total defense (401.6 ypg) due in part to losing secondary standouts Damon Arnette, Jordan Fuller and Jeff Okudah to the NFL.

Hooker began last season as the starting free safety, but Proctor used that as motivation to improve his overall game at the prodding of secondary coach/defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs.

"He kind of talked to me about multiple spots. He basically sat me down and told me that he wanted me to learn every spot in the back end," Proctor said last fall. "He said versatility is our biggest threat. I think I took that to heart, and I felt like that was my biggest chance of getting on the field."

That was the positive side of being able to play different positions.

"I'd say I'm pretty comfortable. I'm confident in what I do and my abilities, and I know I work hard," Proctor said.

The problem was that soaking in all the information and schematics was difficult under the most trying conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic that curtailed spring ball in 2020, nearly forced the cancellation of last season's schedule and reduced practice time.

All that left Proctor overwhelmed on occasion, and chemistry was lacking in the secondary.

"Sometimes my eyes get going everywhere, and I think about it a lot," he said. "I think I've slowed down. I feel like communication goes a big way. Sometimes you know your job, but if you don't know what the other person is supposed to be doing, or you don't know what the whole point of the defense may be, breaking those things down and actually learning those things has kind of helped us improve this year."

"It was our biggest difference from last year. Last year just kind of seemed like everything was so fast."

He said playing through the pandemic – and seeing the virus hit the team in a big way in the latter stages of the season – was unsettling. Three of the eight regular-season games were canceled, and players up and down the roster were quarantined.

"Not knowing who you're going to have the next week or the next day, everything just felt weird," Proctor said.

In a way, Proctor was ahead of the curve with his willingness to try different positions on the field.

"We're going to have some guys that are going to be able to do more than one job in the back end," Coombs said on March 19. "We're going to have to. That's one thing COVID taught you. You've got to have guys that can do it. Well, same thing is true if injuries or anything else arise."

The coaching staff has proved to be flexible as well, with Coombs relinquishing his secondary coaching duties to Matt Barnes, whose primary responsibilities had been special teams though he also worked with the DBs.

"The biggest change right now is the extra details and being detailed in everything we do as far as footwork and the way we may flip our hips," Proctor said. "It's just breaking down the game and understanding what we need to do and when we need to do it."

"I don't think it's a big change. Coach Barnes has taken over the role of explaining things to us. It feels like he is better at explaining things to us. He breaks things down in different ways. Coach Coombs is still very much a part of everything we do. He doesn't miss anything."

Fifth-year senior cornerback Marcus Williamson said whether it's Barnes or Coombs, the message has been one of returning the Buckeyes' secondary to the "Best In America" as they like to call it.

"I'd say – and this is an emphasis from Coach Barnes along with Coach Coombs – that we really wanted to bring back that BIA mentality, that culture," Williamson said. "And we've got so many young, inexperienced guys that even if they were here last year, you didn't have that full offseason with (strength) Coach Mick (Marotti), that spring ball, all those push-ups and sit-ups we do preparing for The Team Up North game. You didn't have those experiences."

"So being able to bring that mind-set to the practice field has been a benefit to me and Josh and some of the older guys and the younger guys as well so that they can see how we do things and how we operate the right way here."

Proctor has been playing in the shadows of others throughout his career, but if he wants to follow his predecessors to the NFL he knows what's needed.

"It's just being consistent and always being in the right spot and knowing what I'm supposed to do and not trying to make that big play and do everything by myself," he said. "That's communication, staying in the film room, just learning everything I can and taking as much as I can away from Coach Barnes."

"I've improved on my leadership in bringing the younger guys along and helping them out. I've tried to become a leader and take over that role."



FILE PHOTO

**HIS TIME IS NOW** – Ohio State senior Josh Proctor (41) could be the starting free safety when the 2021 season kicks off this fall.

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## NFL DRAFT PREVIEW

## Ohio State To Be Well-Represented At Draft

By WYATT CROSER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

It may not be surprising after a season that ended in the national championship game, but Ohio State is once again expected to have a large number of players selected in this year's NFL draft.

That number is likely to be at least five, which would make this the eighth consecutive draft with five or more former Ohio State players selected. But much of the talk this year has been on one specific Buckeye who is a near certainty to be the first Ohio State player drafted on April 29.

That player is Justin Fields, who has been projected to a handful of teams at various points in the opening half of the first round – anywhere from the New York Jets with the No. 2 pick all the way to the Pittsburgh Steelers at No. 24. He has been the topic of discussion for months, with the conversation covering anything, from his ability to go through progressions to questions about his work ethic.

These potential negatives have been called out by head coach Ryan Day as things that he does not worry about at all when it comes to his former quarterback. Day emphasized Fields' drive to come back in 2020 despite his likely placement as an early draft pick even without a return for his junior campaign and his gutsy performance against Clemson this season as arguments against the poor work ethic rumors being banded about by reporters and television talking heads.

"The season gets canceled, and this is a guy who could have easily at that point

opted out, been in the draft like so many other guys," Day said. "I don't hear people talking about them. And what did he do? He just kept working, and he petitioned, went on national TV and fought to have football. You don't do that if you don't absolutely love football and are an unbelievable competitor.

"He comes into the season, competes really well and gets all the way back to that same game that he lost the year before, gets nailed in the back and very easily could have come out. He didn't. He threw six touchdowns and wins that game. If you're talking about a body of work over one year of unbelievable work ethic and competitive toughness, I'm not sure that there's someone better out there in the country, and that's what you're getting if you're drafting Justin Fields."

Fields is certainly not the only player expecting to hear his name called during the 2021 NFL draft, hosted in Cleveland from April 29-May 1. There are plenty of other names along the offensive and defensive sides of the ball who are expected to go in days two and three of the draft, though Fields will likely be alone in the first round.

One of those players is defensive end Jonathon Cooper, who elected to redshirt in 2019 in order to play at full strength for a full year. While that "full season" ended up being only eight games long, Cooper impressed in his fifth-year senior season, and his position coach, Larry Johnson, is excited to see what he can do at the next level.

"I mean his work ethic is off the charts," Johnson said of Cooper. "He's a guy that comes to work every day, from the day he showed up in the building, and he has not



FILE PHOTO

**DESTINATION TBD – Quarterback Justin Fields will likely be Ohio State's lone first-round pick in the 2021 NFL draft, but his future professional home is subject to debate.**

stopped working. He deserves a chance, and I think he's going to have a chance to play in the NFL, no doubt about it. He's a locker-room guy, great leadership guy. He can play 10 or 15 years because he's going to do it the right way. He's a lot like Sam Hubbard, in the sense of how (he) goes to work every day. I see Coop in the same position here, and I'm really thrilled and happy for him. I can't wait to see where he ends up playing."

All in all, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is looking at 12 players who hope to be selected in the 2021 NFL draft. The following capsules feature quotes from players, either at Ohio State's pro day or, for Tuf Borland, at the senior bowl.

The capsules also feature analysis from The Athletic's Dane Brugler, whose NFL draft guide features breakdowns on 415 players across the country looking to be selected in this year's draft.



## TUF BORLAND

Linebacker  
6-0 • 229

Recruit Rank: Overall 324; OLB 22  
Pro Day 40: 4.98 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Borland finished his last season at Ohio State second on the team with 48 total tackles. He was three-time team captain, the second in Ohio State history (J.T. Barrett).

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Seventh round to undrafted free agent

**BORLAND SAYS:** "My football intelligence, my ability to read and react, play inside the box, I think I do that at an elite level. As for weaknesses, you can never stop improving, with the pass rush, plays in space, coverage. I have some work to do there, but I'm confident I can do that and adjust to the NFL game."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Borland plays with the diagnose skills and adequate chase speed to make plays, although the difficulty level increases when he is asked to quickly change directions. He looked improved in coverage as a senior, but his lack of range and twitch will make him a liability in that area versus NFL athletes. Overall, Borland is likely a run-down only player at the next level, but his instincts and intangibles give him a fighting chance to make an NFL roster." – Dane Brugler



## BARON BROWNING

Linebacker  
6-3 • 245

Recruit Rank: Overall 11; OLB 1  
Pro Day 40: 4.58 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Browning tallied 30 tackles while forcing and recovering a pair of fumbles in 2020. His efforts landed him on the All-Big Ten third team.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third round

**BROWNING SAYS:** "I think (the pro day) helped me a lot. I think teams know my versatility, but they just wanted to verify what I could do testing-wise, so I'm glad I did what I did and made it out healthy."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Browning's next level role will be different from team to team because of his athletic versatility to play physical or hold up in space. The mental side of the position is still a work in progress as he shows inconsistent vision and block/fit recognition as an inside backer. Overall, Browning doesn't consistently play with anticipation, but he is physically impressive with the size, length and athleticism to rush the passer or drop in coverage. He projects best as a Sam linebacker or designated pass rusher with down-the-road starting potential."

– Dane Brugler



## JONATHON COOPER

Defensive End  
6-3 • 253

Recruit Rank: Overall 33; WDE 3  
Pro Day 40: 4.69 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Cooper returned for a fifth year in Columbus and had a third-team All-Big Ten season, finishing with 24 tackles, 3½ sacks and a forced fumble.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Sixth to seventh round

**COOPER SAYS:** "With all the teams I've been talking to, they kind of see me as an outside linebacker, Sam-type position, which is my body type. I just wanted to make sure I showed the scouts and everybody that I can play linebacker and that I feel really comfortable in space and that I'm ready for the next level."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Cooper goes full speed on every play and flashes the pop in his hands to convert his speed to power as a downhill rusher. While he plays alert and urgent, he is average athletically and plays with too much wasted motion, which will be tougher to mask vs. NFL-level blockers. Overall, Cooper rushes more with energy than sequence or skill, but his relentless, hard-charging style and uplifting locker room presence give him a fighting chance in the NFL. He projects as a rotational rusher." – Dane Brugler

## NFL DRAFT PREVIEW

**WYATT DAVIS**Offensive Guard  
6-4 • 315Recruit Rank: Overall 24; OG 1  
Pro Day 40: Did not run

**ACCOLADES:** Davis finished his last two seasons at Ohio State by being named a consensus All-American in 2019 and a unanimous All-American in 2020.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Second to third round

**DAVIS SAYS:** "Rehab has definitely been the priority for me, especially after going down in the national championship game. I'm just making sure that I did everything possible to make sure my knee was fully ready and 100 percent ready to go (for my pro day), and I feel like I executed that."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "In pass protection and as a run blocker, Davis is quick to get the upper hand due to his striking power, body control and competitive nature. While his physical appetite is a strength, he can be too eager to initiate contact without getting his feet underneath him, leaving him off-balance and on the ground. Overall, Davis must play under control and improve his snap-to-snap consistency, but his forceful hands, powerful anchor and finishing skills are NFL-ready. He projects as a guard who will compete for immediate snaps." – Dane Brugler

**LUKE FARRELL**Tight End  
6-6 • 251Recruit Rank: Overall 191; TE 7  
Pro Day 40: 4.79 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Primarily a blocking tight end, Farrell still made an impact through the air, hauling in 34 passes for 380 yards and four touchdowns on his career.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Undrafted free agent

**FARRELL SAYS:** "I really just had to do what I knew I was capable of. There's no place like Ohio State to prep you for that kind of pressure, so it was really like approaching a game and just doing what you know you can do, and I was happy with the result."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Farrell has workable size for an inline tight end and although his (block sustaining) skills are average at best, he uses his hands well to engage and leverage the point of attack. As a receiver, he has solid hands, but lacks the quickness/elusiveness to uncover and doesn't show the speed to be a seam threat (longest play at OSU was 24 yards). Overall, Farrell is a gritty, assignment-sound blocker, but his acceleration and playmaking skills are non-threatening." – Dane Brugler

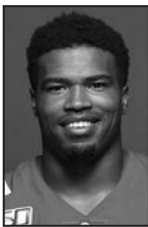
**JUSTIN FIELDS**Quarterback  
6-2 • 227Recruit Rank: Overall 2; DUAL 1  
Pro Day 40: 4.45 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Fields was a 2019 Heisman Trophy finalist and two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year, amassing 5,373 passing yards and 63 passing touchdowns at Ohio State.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** First round

**FIELDS SAYS:** "Overall, I had a solid day. I think everybody knows my goal in that 40-yard dash was at least to be in the 4.3s, so of course I'm kind of mad about that. But other than that, I thought I threw pretty well. I thought I had a few missed throws, but that happens. Every pro day isn't going to be perfect, but overall, I thought I had a pretty solid day."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "He shows excellent tempo when the play is on-schedule, but he must speed up his target-to-target progression reads and improve his urgency when the initial target is taken away. Overall, Fields' decision-making is more methodical than spontaneous, but he has high-ceiling traits with his athleticism, accuracy and intangibles. He projects as a high-end NFL starter if he can quicken his reads and process." – Dane Brugler

**JUSTIN HILLIARD**Linebacker  
6-1 • 229Recruit Rank: Overall 35; OLB 3  
Pro Day 40: 4.81 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Hilliard played in six games during his sixth season with Ohio State, finishing with 33 tackles, a team-high five TFL, an interception, a forced fumble and three fumble recoveries.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Sixth to seventh round

**HILLIARD SAYS:** "After coaches get to know me, I notice a lot of them want to know more about my injury history. And what I tell them is pretty much the facts. I had tons of injuries that kept me off the field, but the vast majority of my injuries have been to my upper body, and that's not going to really affect me playing the game of football."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "While inexperienced in some areas, he is a twitchy mover in space with the trigger to unlock and go in a flash, finishing with a closing burst that surprises the ball carrier. Overall, the medical evaluations from teams will be the key to Hilliard being drafted, but he has unquestioned NFL talent, intangibles and determination tailor-made for the next level." – Dane Brugler

**JOSH MYERS**Center  
6-5 • 310Recruit Rank: Overall 53; OG 2  
Pro Day 40: Did not run

**ACCOLADES:** Myers was a two-year starter for Ohio State and earned third-team All-Big Ten honors in 2019 before jumping to the first team in 2020, when he also served as a captain.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Second to third round

**MYERS SAYS:** "It seems like the two years of tape is enough (for evaluation). I think it helps that the recovery time (on the foot surgery) is only four months, so I'm supposed to be 100 percent recovered with no restrictions by the end of May."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "Myers is a square, instinctive blocker with the core strength and competitive juices that allow him to consistently finish blocks. A guard in a run-only offense in high school, he is still developing his pass protection skills and will struggle at times vs. quickhanded rushers. Overall, Myers isn't an elite athlete for the position and needs to cut back on the aggressive leaning, but he brings the desired levels of toughness, smarts and execution. He projects as a starter in the NFL at a guard or center." – Dane Brugler

**TREY SERMON**Running Back  
6-0 • 215Recruit Rank: Overall 191; RB 12  
Pro Day 40: 4.57 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** After three seasons at Oklahoma, Sermon transferred to Ohio State and led the Buckeyes with 870 rushing yards, including a program-record 331 against Northwestern.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third to fourth round

**SERMON SAYS:** "I felt like I did pretty well. I showed what I am capable of, along with my game film, so I'm happy with my performance. I'm not satisfied because I feel like I could have done better, but I'm still happy (with) and proud of what I did today."

**EXPERT'S TAKE:** "With his vision and agility, Sermon is skilled at settling his feet, dropping his hips to center his gravity and making coordinated jump cuts – all in a fluid motion to force missed tackles. He tends to be a long-striding, upright runner in space, which will make it tough for him to create chunk plays versus speedy NFL defenders. Overall, Sermon is inconsistent as an inside power runner, but his combination of vision, balance and cutting skills are intriguing traits for an outside zone scheme. He projects as a quality rotational back with third-down value." – Dane Brugler

NFL DRAFT PREVIEW



**TOMMY TOGIAI**

Defensive Tackle  
6-2 • 296

Recruit Rank: Overall 55; DT 3  
Pro Day 40: 4.97 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Togiai was a second-team All-Big Ten selection in his final season with Ohio State, finishing with 23 tackles and a forced fumble. He also claimed three sacks – all of which came against Penn State.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third to fourth round

**TOGIAI SAYS:** “Everyone thinks of me just as strong and big and that’s it, but I’ve also got the speed along with it. I can move and just wanted to put that on showcase today.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “Togiai is a bully in the trenches and has outstanding strength and flexibility through his hips to anchor, shed and make plays at the line of scrimmage. He takes the ‘hard work always beats talent’ mantra to heart, never taking plays off and competing with relentless effort. Overall, Togiai needs to develop his handwork and timing as a pass rusher, but he boasts developed power, physical hands and budding instincts. He projects as a stout run defender with pass rush upside.” – Dane Brugler



**SHAUN WADE**

Cornerback  
6-1 • 196

Recruit Rank: Overall 17; CB 2  
Pro Day 40: 4.43 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Wade returned after a third-team All-Big Ten season in 2019 and became a consensus All-American, as well as Big Ten Defensive Back of the Year in 2020.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Fifth round

**WADE SAYS:** “Every coaching staff, every team is different. They have a unique style how they coach and how they promote things and stuff like that, so that’ll be the No. 1 thing for me. But at the end of the day, I’m just enjoying (the draft process). Just trying to have fun, smile through it and just show them who I am since we’re not doing everything in person.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “Wade has the athletic traits and length to stick with routes up and down the field, but his fundamentals quickly break down and he is too reactionary at the top of routes. While his versatility to play anywhere in the secondary is a positive trait, he hasn’t shown a natural feel at any specific position. Overall, Wade is an intriguing talent with his size, athleticism and ball skills, but his lax technique/awareness and uneven compete skills make him an enigma regarding his ideal NFL position and development trajectory.” – Dane Brugler



**PETE WERNER**

Linebacker  
6-3 • 238

Recruit Rank: Overall 277; ILB 14  
Pro Day 40: 4.58 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Werner led Ohio State with 54 total tackles in 2020 and became a first-team All-Big Ten honoree in the process.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third to fourth round

**WERNER SAYS:** “I thought it was a great day all the way around. You talk about two months of solid training just for days like this. I thought I came out here and used those months of training well and thought I had a great day.”

**EXPERT’S TAKE:** “Werner is an athletic, heady player with great eyes, which allows him to play at full speed as a blitzing or chaser. I wish he was more of a playmaker in coverage, but he is smooth in his drops with a natural sense for play development. Overall, Werner needs to clean up some inconsistent tendencies, but he has outstanding lateral range and his sights are always on the football. He projects as a versatile linebacker with four-down potential.” – Dane Brugler

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# Defense Is Secondary To QBs In Spring Game

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH  
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Ohio State spring games generally don't show much of substance, but for whatever reason – OK, primarily because of the format – this most recent one seemed to reveal even less than usual. While all attention was on the quarterbacks – and we got an eye full with 75 passes – the patty-cake format left it particularly difficult to evaluate the defense, which you may recall was a problem area for the Buckeyes last season.

But we've got all summer and the fall camp to worry about the defense. We were curious about the completely inexperienced – though highly rated by recruiting analysts from coast to coast – quarterbacks.

This was just a glorified practice. I'll even go so far as to say there were probably other practices that were more intense. This one simply had fans (hallelujah!). Still, I am going to go ahead and take Ryan Day's word when he said after the game that what each quarterback showed was "very similar to what this whole spring has been."

If that is true, and Lord knows coaches have been known to bend the truth on things like this, here's how I would rate the quarterbacks coming out of spring ball.

1) C.J. Stroud, based on not just his performance but his modest experience and a fact that I can't ignore: When Justin Fields was knocked out of the Clemson game, Day went right to Stroud, indicating that he was performing better than the also present Jack Miller in last year's practices.

2) Kyle McCord. He caught everyone's attention when he connected with Garrett Wilson for 55 yards on his first play from scrimmage. He also showed nice touch on his TD passes to Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Joe Royer. McCord looks like he has the highest upside of the three contenders.

3) Miller. Other than pitching the lone interception of the afternoon, he didn't do a lot wrong. He really didn't do anything to distinguish himself from the other two, however.

And while we're talking about quarterbacks, this may be the only time I get to give him his props in this space, so what about Jagger LaRoe, previously best known for his great name? I have no idea who was in on defense to close out the game, but LaRoe came in and completed a sharp 5 of 6 passes for 75 yards and a 20-yard touchdown strike to Sam Wiglusz. I think most people enjoyed the performance as much as I did.

LaRoe will never be Fields, but if Ohio State were to have a horrible run of bad luck and lose its top three signal callers, Buckeye fans would probably feel a little less anguish with QB No. 4 now that they have seen the senior out of Colleyville, Texas, show his wares.

Whoever ends up winning the starting quarterback job will have the benefit of the incredible receiving corps that was on display in the spring game. Chris Olave and Wilson did their usual thing, which I believe will be at All-American caliber in 2021. The two combined for seven receptions, 142 yards and a touchdown. That's a 20.3-yard average if you are keeping count. Then comes the parade of young receivers, led by – but certainly not limited to – Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka with seven receptions each and Smith-Njigba with five.

In this department, the Buckeyes have an embarrassment of riches, if ever there was one.

But the new quarterback would also be aided by a strong running attack. This was an area where the spring game's format, along with the absence of presumed – at least for the time-being – front-runner Master Teague, limited the ability of the fan or observer to make much of a judgment on the pecking

order or progress of the veteran and freshmen contenders.

On thing I did notice, however, is that the quarterbacks were quick to throw to highly rated freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson out of the backfield. It may have been hard to get a sense of his running ability, though he was credited with 26 yards on six carries, but he looked quite comfortable on the receiving end. He caught five passes for 29 yards with a long of 12, and the other freshman phenom, Evan Pryor, added two receptions for 12 yards.

If Day and offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson make passing to Buckeyes coming out of the backfield a big part of the offense, it could make the learning process and success of the eventual starting quarterback a lot easier with the availability of safer targets. Last season, Teague and the departed Trey Sermon combined for 17 catches for 141 yards out of the backfield, just over two receptions per game.

While the four quarterbacks were throwing the ball all over the yard with mostly positive results, one needs to remember that the 50 completions on 75 attempts came against an Ohio State defense that ranked 122nd out of 127 teams while yielding 304.0 passing yards per game last season. Also, the secondary presumably lost its best defensive back in Shaun Wade, though the effectiveness of Wade was a source of debate among Buckeye fans. Maybe we should have been watching the play of the secondary as closely as we were watching the quarterbacks who were racking up 572 yards through the air and five touchdowns against just one interception.

Even in a spring game which may have been designed to feature the quarterbacks, that's a lot to give up by a unit in desperate need of improvement.

About the only play that stood out to me on pass defense was a pass breakup by Craig Young, where he swatted the ball away with ease. We have been hearing a lot about Young, though he has yet to really have an opportunity to show his ability. He is listed as a linebacker, but his big play against the pass in the spring game may be an indicator of the evolving Ohio State defense, where he may end up playing more like a safety – the "bullet" in departed defensive coordinator Greg Mattison's scheme.

Ohio State's lone interception was turned in by redshirt freshman cornerback Ryan Watts.

In thinking about it as I write, it is kind of amazing that Ohio State made it to the national championship game with such a porous pass defense. Of course, the main reason the Buckeyes didn't go on and win the championship is because of that same porous pass defense.

The 2021 defense won't have Fields to help keep Ohio State one step ahead of the opposition, so keep as sharp an eye on the secondary going forward as you do on the quarterbacks.

Obviously, if the pass defense had excelled in the spring game we would probably be fretting about the quarterbacks. Buckeye fans are such worrywarts.

Speaking of the defense, I don't think anyone would disagree with the notion that a big winner in the spring game was Jack Sawyer. The defensive end from nearby Pickerington was credited with three sacks in the game. He came to the team highly touted and did nothing to dispel that notion in his first public appear-

ance as a Buckeye.

One thing that I found very encouraging and exciting coming out of the spring was the fact that Sawyer and several other of the most highly touted freshmen were among the first to lose their black stripes, making them full members of the football team. Along with Sawyer, Harrison, Henderson, Egbuka and linebacker Reid Carrico were all quick to shed their stripes. These are guys the Buckeyes need for success in 2021, and it's a good sign that they have the maturity to be so honored so early.

One last thought about spring football.

I have never understood why coaches are so unwilling to display things in a spring game. I know some of the restrictions put in place are to avoid injury, but you are going to have to have contact at some point and injuries in practice are inevitable. How much of the dummied down of the spring game has to do with not tipping any hand to the opposition?

Check out our From the Pages of BSB feature on page 6. As far back as 1986, Earle Bruce was trying to hide things from Ray Perkins, coach of Alabama, the Buckeyes' first opponent that season. Perkins was in attendance for the spring game.

"I think the only thing we wanted Ray Perkins to see was the Horseshoe, and that's about it," Bruce said, smiling. "There was no offense today, no big plays."

That was in preparation for the opener. I sort of get it.

Does Day think Jim Harbaugh or Nick Saban is going to break down the tape of Ohio State's spring game? They have position battles and preparation of their own to worry about. By the time the Buckeyes face the Wolverines, Harbaugh will have 11 actual games to break down, and if they get to Saban, the Crimson Tide will have 12, 13 or 14.

I think it's kind of a waste of a valuable practice to put such restrictions on a scrimmage. You must go live at some point. Give the fans their money's worth.

## QB Battles No Rarity

We tend to get caught up in the moment. This year's quarterback battle is on all our minds. However, it's not like quarterback battles are uncommon in college football. It's not as if you can tie up a great quarterback like Fields with a long-term contract. Quarterbacks come and go, just as players do at all positions.

Maybe the QB combatants in other years brought a little bit more experience to the fight than this year's trio, but if you again check From the Pages of BSB, you'll see that there were spring battles in 1991 to replace Greg Frey, 1996 to replace Bobby Hoying and an unexpected one in 2011 to replace the suspended Terrelle Pryor.

The battles didn't seem to bother John Cooper, who was at the helm in both 1991 – when senior Kent Graham, junior Kirk Herbstreit and redshirt freshman Joe Pickens were battling it out – and in 1996, when juniors Stanley Jackson and Mark Garcia and sophomore Joe Germaine were the participants.

"Even if I knew in my own mind right now who the quarterback was, I wouldn't tell you," Cooper joked with the media after the spring game in 1991. "I wouldn't tell them either. I think the best thing we can do is let those guys work hard the rest of the spring, stay here in the summertime and work in the conditioning

program, and compete early next fall.

"In our situation of not having an experienced quarterback I think that's the best thing that can happen to us. And it will happen because that's the way we have it planned."

Cooper sounded similar in 1996.

"I'm not troubled," said Cooper after that year's spring game. "You guys (the media) will worry about that more than I do. We'll have a quarterback to start the first ballgame."

"It's been my experience that a lot of progress can be made between the end of spring ball and the start of fall practice. Our players, obviously, will all stay here this summer, and we'll have a lot of seven-on-seven drills. A lot of stuff (quarterbacks coach) Walt Harris has been preaching to those quarterbacks all spring long will hopefully sink in."

Decades later, Day didn't sound all that different after the most recent spring game and his own quarterback battle.

"We're not going to know who the starting quarterback is coming out of today," Day said.

"They've learned a lot," he added of his young quarterbacks. "But now, the race is on over the next few months to figure out who can make the next stride. Spring's been good. There's been a lot of progress made across the board, but there's still a long way to go before we play against Minnesota."

## Practice Makes Perfect

Elsewhere in this issue, Mark Rea reviews the latest book from Ohio State basketball legend Jerry Lucas. I have not read "Middle Magic and Mind Magic," but I was fascinated by a drill Mark recounts that Lucas, also a noted memory expert, invented and repeated over and over again when he was learning the game.

"I was going to try to miss shots and make the ball rebound to where I wanted it to go," Lucas wrote. "There were two purposes for this drill. First of all, I had to hit the intended spot on the rim, and secondly, I watched where the ball rebounded on every missed shot. If I knew where the ball was going to go on a missed shot, I felt it would give me an advantage as a rebounder."

The drill must have worked.

Lucas averaged 17.2 rebounds a game for his career at Ohio State. To put that in perspective, Illinois' 7-0 Kofi Cockburn led the Big Ten in rebounding with 9.5 per game this past season.

After helping the Buckeyes to three NCAA Final Four appearances and Ohio State's lone national championship in 1960, Lucas moved on to the NBA, and he kept on rebounding. He averaged 15.6 off the boards in his 11-season career. That mark ranks fourth all-time behind only Wilt Chamberlain, Bill Russell and Bob Pettit, three of the NBA's greatest players ever.

There are many out there who are gifted athletes. But the truly great are usually the ones willing to give that extra effort. This drill was one of many things that helped make Lucas arguably the greatest Ohio State basketball player of all-time.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers can order "Middle Magic and Mind Magic," online at MiddleMagic.com.

## Letter Topics

The Letters to the Editor continue to come in. Perhaps some of you want to share your recollections of Jerry Lucas. And I know many of you have an opinion on the quarterback derby.

Send your letters to BSB at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212, or email them to bsb@buckeyesports.com.