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Finishing The Puzzle



TIM MOODY

THROUGH THE FINISH LINE – Ohio State head coach Ryan Day completed his first recruiting class by adding two offensive line prospects on National Signing Day.

Buckeyes Add 2 Linemen On NSD To Complete Day's 1st Recruiting Class

By GARRETT STEPIEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's second time through the early signing period was supposed to bring a better sense of what to expect on National Signing Day, but the Buckeyes had anything but ordinary circumstances between December and February.

Despite the Dec. 4 announcement of head coach Urban Meyer's retirement and offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Ryan Day's promotion, OSU overcame a potential disaster and kept its 2019 class, for the most part, intact.

In nine weeks since athletic director Gene Smith introduced Day as Meyer's successor, Ohio State lost three commitments but signed 17 prospects, adding two at the buzzer Feb. 6 to get the group the Buckeyes needed before spring camp starts the week of March 4.

"I think the biggest challenge early on is getting to know everybody," Day said. "Then when the staff

got put into place, we still wanted those guys to make sure they built relationships with 2019s. The loyalty there was off the charts, the families we made connections with, recruiting, has been awesome. Then going with the 2020s.

"When you look at what we've done as a culture since August, with the coaching change, we've only had two guys leave the program – (senior linebacker) Keandre Jones, (sophomore quarterback) Tate Martell. One was a grad transfer, one a quarterback. When you keep the retention, it shows about the culture in the coaching change, but also it isn't about signing 27 guys because you're retaining guys. Guys want to stay in the program. That's the strength of our team right now."

**BSB'S 2019
RECRUITING
WRAP-UP**

Filling The Void

OSU inked 15 letters of intent Dec. 19 with Day leading the way in the two weeks after his introduc-

Continued On Page 8

QB Fields Granted Immediate Eligibility

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Even before he officially took over as head coach, Ohio State's Ryan Day knew he'd have a huge hole to fill for 2019.

Quarterback Dwayne Haskins hadn't announced his decision to leave for the NFL just yet, but the writing was on the wall. Haskins was projected as the top quarterback in the draft, meaning his stock wouldn't improve with another year in school.

After succeeding Urban Meyer on Jan. 2, Day needed just two days to secure his quarterback of the future. The problem at the time was that there still was no guarantee Georgia transfer Justin Fields, the highest-rated prospect ever to enroll at Ohio State, would be allowed to play this year.

By Feb. 8 – two days after Day had finalized his first recruiting class as head coach – his most important recruit became official when the NCAA granted Fields' waiver request for immediate eligibility. Now the signal caller can enter spring camp knowing what everyone thought they knew all along: If all goes to plan, he'll be leading the Buckeyes onto the field Aug. 31 against Florida Atlantic.

"I am happy for Justin and his family," Day said in a statement. "I also want to express my appreciation to the NCAA for its assistance in getting this matter resolved efficiently and with such a positive outcome for Justin."

Overall, the process was quick, but it was still Day's biggest recruiting win of the year, even if Fields doesn't count toward the 17-man class. Day still identified a target – Fields entered the NCAA transfer portal in mid-December – then he vetted that target and convinced him to commit. It had to be a

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COVER STORY

Nester Flips To Virginia Tech After Late Battle

Continued From Page 1

tory press conference and as he prepared the offense for its Jan. 1 Rose Bowl against Washington. Ohio State lost two pledges during the Dec. 19-21 early signing period – Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star safety Jordan Battle (6-1, 187) to Alabama and Oak Park, Mich., four-star quarterback Dwan Mathis (6-6, 205) to Georgia. Then OSU's long and winding re-recruitment of Huntington (W.Va.) Spring Valley four-star offensive guard Doug Nester ended with the 6-6½, 305-pounder's flip to Virginia Tech on National Signing Day.

But with the Buckeyes' addition of Georgia transfer quarterback Justin Fields (6-3, 225) on Jan. 4 and a pair of top targets in the trenches on National Signing Day, needs were addressed. OSU earned signatures from Kahuku, Hawaii, four-star offensive guard Enokk Vimahi (6-4½, 263) and Indianapolis Ben Davis three-star offensive tackle Dawand Jones (6-8, 360) on Feb. 6, softening the blow of Nester's departure.

"O-line was an area of concern for us," said Day. "We had to go out there and kind of uncover all the stones."

Vimahi, whom Ohio State offered Jan. 4 before a Jan. 25-27 official visit sealed the deal and allowed the Buckeyes to beat out Oklahoma and Southern California in just one month, announced in favor of OSU about 30 minutes before Day took the lectern at 1 p.m. in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center team room, 7:30 a.m. in Hawaii. Five hours later, Jones followed suit during a ceremony at Ben Davis in Indianapolis.

"He is a terrific, two-sport athlete who was offered scholarships in both football and basketball," Day said of Jones, who nearly committed to Kent State in the fall for basketball before a football offer spree exploded in November and December, including Ohio State on Nov. 21. "We love his athleticism and length. He comes from one of the premier high school programs in Indiana and the Midwest."

Vimahi marked an extraordinary recruitment for Day, who gave credit to several 247Sports composite's No. 124 overall prospect and No. 7 offensive guard from Hawaii to Ohio in four weeks. OSU offered Vimahi one day before the All-American Bowl at the Alamodome in San Antonio, eventually delaying his Jan. 19 commitment announcement before he officially visited Columbus the weekend prior to National Signing Day.

"It started honestly in the All-American game when (Vimahi) got around some of our guys, including (wide receiver) Garrett Wilson, (center) Harry (Miller) and (defensive end) Zach Harrison," Day said. "The feedback we got about him was through the roof, he and his family. That proved to be true. We thought he'd be a great fit here."

"We wouldn't just go over to Hawaii if it wasn't a good fit. It was. Then he came up for a visit, (and) we all hit it off. That was great. Then we were able to spend some time out at school with he and his parents. We all hit it off. There were some connections with some of the guys on our team, too, that knew each other. That was really good."



TIM MOODY

CHANGE OF HEART – Huntington (W.Va.) Spring Valley four-star guard Doug Nester flipped from Ohio State to Virginia Tech on National Signing Day.

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COVER STORY

Setting The Stage

Ohio State's finish for 2019 was going to be small by design. After the Buckeyes signed 26 recruits in 2018, finishing second in the 247Sports composite team rankings behind only Georgia, they saw their 17-member group for 2019 slide to 14th despite an elite haul in terms of quality.

According to the 247Sports composite's average player rating, OSU finished third at 91.87, which topped the Big Ten and trailed only Alabama (94.38) and Georgia (93.32) nationally.

"The quality is what I keep going back to," Day said. "A couple people asked how come it's not a bigger class. I think some people may not understand you only have 85 scholarships every year. You can only sign up to 85. Again, going back with we don't have a lot of guys leaving the program voluntarily – we only had so many spots this year, only two going into this last signing day."

Among the additions, six are already enrolled early. Harrison, Wilson, Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian four-star running back Marcus Crowley (6-1, 200), Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic four-star safety Ronnie Hickman (6-1, 200), and the Mentor, Ohio, four-star duo of offensive tackle Ryan Jacoby (6-5, 270) and defensive end Noah Potter (6-5, 250) are on campus with Fields.

One of the biggest difference makers for the quality of the class was Harrison. As the 247Sports composite's No. 12 overall prospect, No. 2 strongside defensive end and No. 1 player in Ohio from Lewis Center Olen tangy Orange, he chose to stay home over Michigan and Penn State.

Scheduled to arrive in June are Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic four-star running back Steele Chambers (6-2, 215); Cleveland St. Ignatius four-star linebacker Tommy Eichenberg (6-3, 225); Memphis (Tenn.) Whitehaven three-star tight end Cormontae Hamilton (6-2, 263); Wake Forest, N.C., three-star defensive tackle Jaden McKenzie (6-3, 285); Miller; Lexington, Ohio, four-star linebacker Cade Stover (6-4, 225); St. Louis Cardinal Ritter College Prep four-star wide receiver Jameson Williams (6-2, 170); Fort Wayne (Ind.) Wayne three-star athlete Craig Young (6-4, 200); Jones; and Vimahi.

Out of those anticipated arrivals, the Buckeyes' in-state haul comprised just two

players in Eichenberg and Stover, one of whom was nearly a five-star talent in national recruiting analyst Tom Lemming's eyes.

"He was almost a five-star player," Lemming said of Stover. "I gave him four stars-plus. He's an athlete who plays a lot of positions, and he's still, I think, able to gain 20 more pounds because of his length and frame. He can run, he's got tremendous football instincts, and I think he's going to have a tremendous career at Ohio State. He's got all the tools to be a major, major talent."

Day echoed those sentiments, adding that Eichenberg and Young – a versatile addition from nearby Indiana – give OSU's linebackers a solid boost.

"Those three guys right there, really good athletes," Day said. "Cade Stover, Gatorade Player of the Year, excellent athlete. Tommy comes from a great program. We were happy to get him down the stretch in December. Then Craig Young, an excellent athlete that can do a lot for us."

Now the focus shifts to 2020, when Ohio State is projected to have a much bigger class with around 25 scholarships likely to open up. While the Buckeyes' finish in 2019 had questions, Day smoothed things over, setting up for top-ranked potential in each of the next two cycles with stability and time on OSU's side.

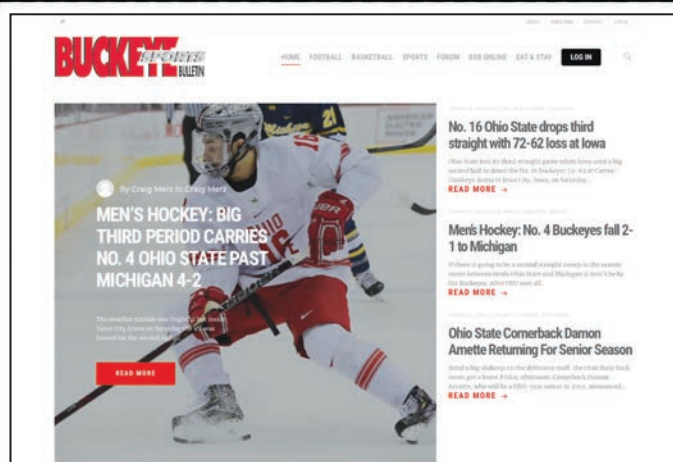
"When you're walking in these shoes, you notice things you didn't notice before," Day said. "More than when I was an assistant coach, I realized what great kids we have, from all the way across the board. When you're just in the offense, working with the quarterbacks, you're in the offensive world, you know those guys. You see the guys on defense, wider picture, you realize what great kids they are."

"What a great university this is, the power Ohio State has all over the country. Whether I'm in Hawaii, Seattle, New York, Cleveland, it doesn't matter. There's Buckeyes everywhere. When you walk in, have that block 'O' on your shirt, people respect you. People pull for Ohio State."

"You shouldn't have to compromise when you go to recruit a student-athlete here. You should be able to recruit a great player, great families and a great student. We've done that here and will continue to do that."

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

Rankings Not A Concern For Multitalented Young

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Which position Craig Young will play at Ohio State is yet to be determined, but that isn't because there is not a spot for him on the field. The three-star Buckeye signee from Fort Wayne (Ind.) Wayne can play a number of different positions.

Wayne head coach Derrick Moore used the versatile Young in a variety of ways on the way to a 9-3 season and a 4A sectional title.

"We played him at defensive end, outside linebacker, corner, safety – wherever we felt like we needed to shut a team down," Moore told BSB.

Not only was Young a staple on the

Wayne defense, he also impacted the game on offense. Standing 6-4, 200 pounds, he used his combination of size and speed to thrive at wide receiver, hauling in 35 receptions for 700 yards and 12 touchdowns as a senior.

Young also rushed for a score and averaged a stellar 20.0 yards per catch, but despite his success at wideout, he was mainly recruited to play defense at Ohio State.

"I'm not sure where they will put me at, but it really doesn't matter to me," Young told BSB. "I just want to get on the field."

While making plays all over the field, Young recorded 42 tackles, including 10 tackles for loss and 5½ sacks. He added two pass deflections, one forced fumble, one blocked field goal and one fumble

recovery that he returned 45 yards for a touchdown.

In addition to his success on the football field, Young is a standout track athlete. As a junior, he won the sectional finals in the 100-meter and 200-meter dashes, and he eventually took third place in the state final with a blazing time of 10.58 seconds in the 100.

"Explosive, very fast," Moore said when describing Young. "A word that comes to mind is versatile. He's very versatile, can play a lot of positions – wherever they choose to put him. He's the type of player that listens, works hard and he's a big-play guy."

When an athlete is extremely physically gifted concerns may arise regarding his or her work ethic. Those who are inherently athletic often do not have to work as hard as others to achieve success, but Young does not take his ability for granted.

"Me running that fast is just a blessing, just God-given athletic ability. I'm really thankful for that," Young said. "I know that everything comes easy to me, and I always keep something in my head. I always believe that there's somebody out there that's the same as me, but also working. And if I keep that in my head, I just know I have to keep working harder and just to be the best I can be."

Young's athletic prowess does not end on the gridiron or the track. He averaged 17.4 points and 7.5 rebounds for the Wayne basketball team as a junior.

Initially, Young had decided to sit out his senior seasons for basketball and track, but ultimately he had a change of heart.

"I was just thinking to myself that I was being selfish to the seniors I came in with," Young said. "We've been playing with each other ever since seventh grade, and I was just being really selfish with myself and just not finishing out my high school career. It's not all about me, it's also about the people I came in with so I just decided to play with them and have fun with the rest of my senior year."

While competing with his high school teammates for the last time, Young pre-

pares to join a talented crop of incoming freshmen in Columbus. Within an Ohio State recruiting class featuring three five-star recruits and nine four-star prospects, Young represents one of five Buckeye commits with a three-star rating. The Hoosier State native is the No. 611 overall prospect, No. 34 athlete and No. 11 player in Indiana for the 2019 class, according to the 247Sports composite.

"It doesn't really mean anything to me," Young said. "I don't really get into all that rankings like I used to. Rankings don't show anything but what people say about me. And the people that rank the people, half of them haven't ever played football before, so rankings don't mean anything."

"You have to show me that you're a five-star in the game, so I don't really get into all the rankings. But I am very thankful to be that prospect in the country that's really getting looked at."

Despite his rare combination of size and speed, he had just one Big 12 offer (Iowa State), two MAC offers (Toledo and Central Michigan) and six Big Ten offers (Ohio State, Michigan State, Wisconsin, Purdue, Iowa and Indiana).

With Young's physical gifts and versatility, there's a good chance he would have received more offers had he dragged out his recruitment until the Feb. 6 deadline. However, Young wanted the opportunity to be pushed toward reaching his lofty potential and he committed to OSU on June 15.

"I think Coach Urban Meyer had a lot to do with it," Moore said of Young's decision. "I think after speaking with him, sitting down with his parents, I think when we walked out of that office, his decision was made. I think he challenged Craig to be the best Craig that he can be, instead of just settling for coming someplace where he wouldn't be pushed, he wouldn't be challenged."

"And then I think ultimately, you have, if things work out, the opportunity to be drafted into the NFL. And that's what Ohio State has done in the past. They do a great job of preparing their players both, not only physically, but mentally and then financially for teaching them the ropes of our financial literacy going into the NFL, and that was big for his father."

Young said the recruiting process was great, but also long and stressful. He added that Meyer challenging him sparked a lightbulb above his head that maybe Columbus was where he belonged, regardless of if Meyer was at the helm or not.


"Ohio State is going to be Ohio State without Coach Urban Meyer," Young said. "Even though he's a great coach, Coach Ryan Day is also a great coach."

Young is excited to get on campus and compete during fall camp. In the meantime, he will continue to lead Wayne's basketball and track teams as a senior, which he cherishes as more opportunities to compete.

Moore expects the three-sport standout to succeed in the competitive atmosphere at Ohio State.

"He and I share a desire to win," Moore said. "I hate to lose, and I think he might be, in 16 years of coaching, one of the kids who shared that the most with me. He hates to lose, whether it's pitching sticks or playing basketball or video games or an argument or whatever it is, he wants to beat the person that he's facing."

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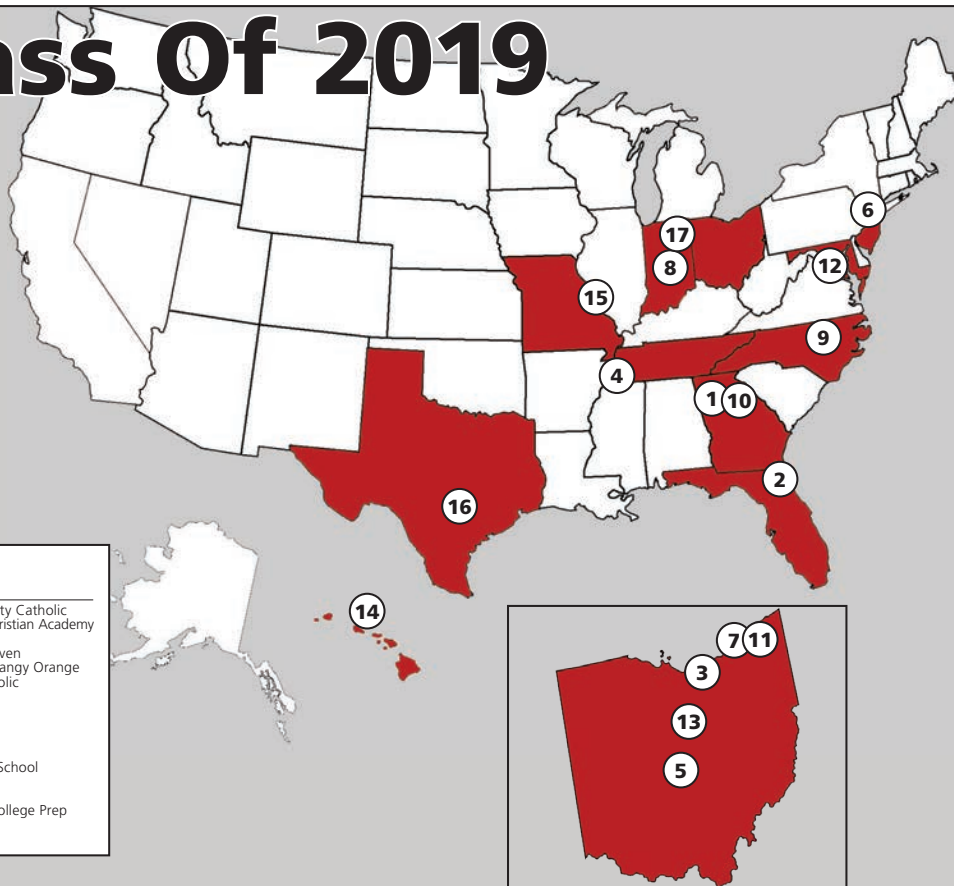
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RECRUITING WRAP-UP: OSU'S 2019 CLASS

OSU's Class Of 2019

After receiving 15 letters of intent during the early signing period in December, Ohio State added two more commits Feb. 6 to complete a 17-man recruiting class spanning from Hawaii to Florida.



Player Key (*Early Enrollee)

No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	High School
1.	Steele Chambers	RB	6-2	215	Roswell (Ga.) Blessed Trinity Catholic
2.	Marcus Crowley*	RB	6-1	200	Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy
3.	Tommy Eichenberg	LB	6-3	225	Cleveland St. Ignatius
4.	Cormantae Hamilton	TE	6-2	263	Memphis (Tenn.) Whitehaven
5.	Zach Harrison*	DE	6-5	243	Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy Orange
6.	Ronnie Hickman	S	6-1	200	Wayne (N.J.) DePaul Catholic
7.	Ryan Jacoby*	OL	6-5	270	Mentor, Ohio
8.	Dawand Jones	OT	6-8	360	Indianapolis Ben Davis
9.	Jaden McKenzie	DT	6-3	285	Wake Forest, N.C.
10.	Harry Miller	OL	6-4	310	Buford, Ga.
11.	Noah Potter*	DE	6-5	250	Mentor, Ohio
12.	Bryson Shaw	S	6-2	175	Potomac (Md.) The Bullis School
13.	Cade Stover	LB	6-4	225	Lexington, Ohio
14.	Enokk Vimahi	OG	6-4	270	Kahuku, Hawaii
15.	Jameson Williams	WR	6-2	170	St. Louis Cardinal Ritter College Prep
16.	Garrett Wilson*	WR	6-1	180	Austin (Texas) Lake Travis
17.	Craig Young	ATH	6-4	200	Fort Wayne (Ind.) Wayne

All rankings from the 247Sports composite



CLASS OF 2019



STEELE CHAMBERS

RB • 6-2 • 215

Roswell (Ga.)

Blessed Trinity Catholic

Rank: ATH 11, Overall 231, GA 26



ACCOLADES: Chambers started for three years at Blessed Trinity Catholic for coach Tim McFarlin. He rushed for 244 yards and three scores in addition to throwing a touchdown pass in a prelim to the Georgia 4A state championship game, where he ran for 98 yards and tallied five tackles on defense in a victory. He totaled more than 1,500 yards and 25 scores as a senior after being the Region 7AAAA Player of the Year as a junior. He was an All-Georgia selection by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and an all-state linebacker pick by the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association.

CHAMBERS SAYS: "(The Buckeyes) preach about the brotherhood, which connects with me because we have that same thing here at (Blessed Trinity). It just felt like one big family over there. (Game day in Columbus) is just crazy, almost out of hand. So many people in the crowd and just amazing."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "At running back he brings a lot of physicality, plays with lean, has very good contact balance and light feet. He's more of a long-strider and not overly sudden. He has average length on defense and doesn't showcase dynamic breakaway ability on offense." – Barton Simmons, 247Sports

PERSONAL: During a 2017 interview with Born to Compete, Chambers mentioned that he was taking dance lessons to help with his footwork. He played in the All-American Bowl. Chambers' parents are Stacy and Eric Chambers.

COMMIT DATE: April 18, 2018



MARCUS CROWLEY

RB • 6-1 • 200

Jacksonville (Fla.)

Trinity Christian Academy

Rank: RB 26, Overall 370, FL 44



ACCOLADES: While committed to Miami (Fla.) for most of his senior season at Trinity Christian Academy, Crowley exploded with 2,325 yards and 28 touchdowns as he led the team to its 13-1 campaign that ended in the state final. For his efforts, Crowley was named Florida's Gatorade Player of the Year.

CROWLEY SAYS: "I'm perfectly fine (with being under-recruited). I'm glad I got the chance to play here. I'm glad (running backs coach) Tony (Alford) reached out to me. I wouldn't want to be any other place, and I'm not mad that I was I guess under the radar. I still did what I did. I had to grind, and I'm just happy."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He had a terrific senior season gaining over 2,000 yards for one of Florida's top programs. Good vision, power, he breaks tackles at the line of scrimmage and downfield and had a lot of big runs on film en route to averaging 10.5 yards per carry in his final campaign. He is a decisive runner that can get around the edge on the prep level, not sure he has the athleticism to be an elite back on the next level. But he's a smart, hard-nosed downhill player." – Steve Wiltfong, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Crowley played high school football with Shaun Wade and Tyreke Johnson, a pair of Ohio State cornerbacks, at Trinity Christian Academy. His parents are Shelly and Michael Wright.

COMMIT DATE: Nov. 4, 2018

RECRUITING WRAP-UP: OSU'S 2019 CLASS


TOMMY EICHENBERG

LB • 6-3 • 225
Cleveland
St. Ignatius

Rank: ILB 19, Overall 327, OH 8



ACCOLADES: Eichenberg was a first-team All-Ohio selection. He had 126 tackles (80 solo), including 23 tackles for loss and eight sacks as a senior. Eichenberg made big-time plays for the Wildcats, adding seven quarterback hurries, five forced fumbles, five pass breakups and one interception.

EICHENBERG SAYS: "I've always wanted to go there, my entire life. That's my dream school. I couldn't pass up the opportunity. Growing up, my entire family watched Ohio State every Saturday. I always wanted to play for them."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He's a thicker bodied prospect, not quite as long as other linebacker prospects, who will begin college with a good muscle base. He's a very explosive hitter, strong, takes on blockers with the same violence, and is a strong tackler. He has good closing speed and plays at full speed consistently. He runs through contact and attacks ball carriers with good angles. He shows instincts and headiness in dropping into zone coverage but still needs additional experience in man to man." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Eichenberg is also a standout track and field athlete, finishing eighth in the state in the shot put as a junior. He was originally committed to Boston College but decommitted in November. His parents are Heather and Gregg Eichenberg.

COMMIT DATE: Dec. 6, 2018


CORMONTAE HAMILTON

TE • 6-2 • 263
Memphis (Tenn.)
Whitehaven

Rank: TE 25, Overall 586, TN 18



ACCOLADES: Hamilton was named to The (Memphis) Commercial Appeal's All-Metro team as a junior. He helped his school to the Class 6A semifinals that year as well while playing for coach Rodney Saulsberry. He averaged more than 20 yards per catch and was a 2018 preseason 6A all-state honoree before leading his team to the state finals.

HAMILTON SAYS: "The reason that made me choose Ohio State is because their great education program for their student-athletes. I just loved when I went up there twice – spring game and I went back up there for a camp – and ever since I've just been loving it. They love me, I love them. I'm ready to rock and roll."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He has soft hands and rugged after-the-catch ability. He wins one-on-one balls in the red zone on the high school level and is fearless and dependable over the middle. He plays faster than he is on film and accelerates quickly after catching the ball. He doesn't have that ideal frame or length at the position but has the skill set to contribute in every facet at tight end, including as a blocker." – Steve Wiltfong, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Hamilton took a 12-hour Greyhound bus ride to Columbus for Ohio State's Friday Night Lights camp in July before earning his offer on the visit. Hamilton's mother is Nikki Gilmore.

COMMIT DATE: July 27, 2018


ZACH HARRISON

DE • 6-5 • 243
Lewis Center (Ohio)
Olentangy Orange

Rank: SDE 2, Overall 12, OH 1



ACCOLADES: Rated the consensus top player in Ohio, Harrison has been clocked at 4.47 seconds in the 40-yard dash and 10.7 seconds in the 100 meters. He was a first-team All-Ohio honoree by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association in addition to being the Delaware County Defensive Player of the Year. During his senior season, Harrison tallied 14 tackles for loss and seven sacks in just seven games played.

HARRISON SAYS: "I don't think I've scratched the surface (of my athletic potential). I have a long way to go, which is exciting. I'm decent right now, but I'm waiting for it to take off."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Has generational testing numbers at his size and the athletic versatility to play wide receiver. He uses his hands effectively to read and shed in the run game. He eats up space in the zone-read game, possesses twitch and suddenness and can bend the edge as a pass rusher. His speed in pursuit is elite. He is very raw as a pass rusher." – Barton Simmons, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Harrison committed to Ohio State in December after seriously considering Michigan, where his main recruiters were Greg Mattison and Al Washington, who are now on Ohio State's staff. He was invited to The Opening in 2017 and 2018 and was a finalist for the All-American Bowl Man of the Year award. Harrison is the son of Tracey and Jimmie Harrison.

COMMIT DATE: Dec. 19, 2018


RONNIE HICKMAN

S • 6-1 • 200
Wayne (N.J.)
DePaul Catholic

Rank: S 10, Overall 115, NJ 3



ACCOLADES: As a two-way standout at DePaul Catholic, Hickman excelled at wide receiver and cornerback. A torn ACL ended his senior season early, but not before he racked up 609 yards and nine touchdowns on just 26 catches. In addition to averaging 23.4 yards per reception, Hickman recorded 19 tackles and five pass breakups. As a junior, he reeled in 44 receptions for 809 yards and 10 touchdowns. Hickman also contributed 44 tackles, two interceptions and nine pass breakups to help DePaul Catholic win New Jersey's Non Public Group III state title.

HICKMAN SAYS: "I think you can't go wrong with this place. And they're not just a football program. They're dominating in the world outside of football, and I think that I can succeed if football doesn't work. I can succeed off the field just as well."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He runs well with elite acceleration. He hits hard in the running game, reads games well and sheds blocks. He fills run gaps quickly and correctly. He has loose hips and can quickly change direction in coverage, plus stop-start ability. He also has good ball skills." – Brian Dohn, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Hickman is nicknamed "The Rocket," and although it is often assumed the nickname is for his speed, the moniker came before he could even run. When he was young, Hickman loved to pretend to take off like a rocket ship, and his father coined the nickname. Hickman was also a standout for the DePaul Catholic lacrosse team. His parents are Hanifah Crawley and Ronnie Hickman Sr.

COMMIT DATE: April 13, 2018


RYAN JACOBY

OL • 6-5 • 270
Mentor, Ohio

Rank: OT 23, Overall 283, OH 7



ACCOLADES: First-team All-Ohio as a junior and senior, Jacoby secured Mentor's offensive line, holding down the blind side in each year as the starting left tackle. With Jacoby plowing ahead up front, Mentor's offense soared with averages of 41.2 and 36.9 points per game, respectively, during the 2017 and 2018 seasons as the Cardinals reached the state finals in consecutive campaigns.

JACOBY SAYS: "I don't think there was ever a doubt in my mind that I was coming here after I committed. Coach (Urban) Meyer is a great guy and I'm going to miss him a lot, but Coach (Ryan) Day brings a new face to the program, new opportunities and a new energy that I think is going to be good for the program."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He checks off nearly every box I look for in an offensive lineman, in that he has great feet, a nasty attitude, and is highly intelligent. Jacoby is very athletic for his size and is a great pass blocker already, a rarity in high school offensive linemen." – Bill Greene, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Born and raised a Buckeye fan, Jacoby started out as a hockey player before trying football in the seventh grade. Since then, he has stuck to the latter sport, becoming a rock and leader on Mentor's offensive line under head coach Steve Trivisonno. On the football team, Jacoby became teammates with defensive end Noah Potter, who also signed with Ohio State. As a freshman and sophomore in high school, Jacoby wrestled as well. His parents are Lisa and Michael Jacoby.

COMMIT DATE: March 1, 2018


DAWAND JONES

OT • 6-8 • 360
Indianapolis
Ben Davis

Rank: OT 84, Overall 1,022, IN 13



ACCOLADES: In his first year as a starter in 2017, Jones helped lead Ben Davis to an undefeated 6A state championship. The Ben Davis offense was electric, averaging 47.3 points per game and scoring 50 or more points six times. The Indianapolis native was an Indiana Football Coaches Association Top 50 team selection as a senior. He was also effective as a junior, earning a 6A All-State selection by paving the way for an offense that averaged 28.5 points per game.

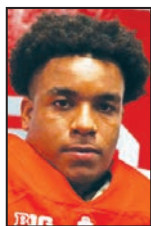
JONES SAYS: "Ohio State has been my No. 1 since I left that practice I went to of their Michigan week. It looks like the best fit for me for the next three or four years. When I went there it was a brotherhood. I get to go against the best of the best every week. Once I visited I fell in love."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "I saw Jones and he's a big kid. He'll benefit from a redshirt year at Ohio State. But I like his overall athletic ability. Once they get him and work with him for a year, nutrition-wise and weight-wise, I think they will feel like they got themselves a real steal." – Tom Lemming, CBS Sports

PERSONAL: A two-sport standout, Jones was averaging 18.2 points, 9.2 rebounds and 1.8 blocks, and making 79 percent of his shots through the first five games of his senior season. Jones took his recruitment down to the wire, weighing both Division I football and basketball scholarships before eventually signing on National Signing Day. His mother is Deanna Jones.

COMMIT DATE: Feb. 6, 2019

RECRUITING WRAP-UP: OSU'S 2019 CLASS



JADEN MCKENZIE

DT • 6-3 • 285
Wake Forest, N.C.

Rank: DT 58, Overall 769, NC 35



ACCOLADES: McKenzie recorded 71 tackles and 10½ sacks as a senior, earning a selection to play in the Shrine Bowl of the Carolinas, an annual all-star game between players from North Carolina and South Carolina. As a junior, he compiled 97 tackles, 23 tackles for loss and nine sacks. The four-year letter winner totaled 28½ sacks over his final three seasons at Wake Forest. McKenzie finished his high school career on a 45-game winning streak. He was a key cog in a dominant defensive line that led Wake Forest to three consecutive 4A state championship victories.

MCKENZIE SAYS: "I feel like it drives me to be better, and that's why I knew I want to take on that challenge of going to Ohio State because I know they recruit some top, top-of-the-line dudes and so I wanted to go over there and try to compete."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He is a great run defender and can eat up blockers to free up his teammates to make easy tackles. Expect him to make an impact after getting acclimated to the strength and conditioning program in Columbus." – Marc Givler, Buckeye Grove

PERSONAL: McKenzie is originally from New Orleans. He pledged to the Buckeyes during the early signing period after becoming a focus of defensive line coach Larry Johnson late in the process. His mother is Quandra McKenzie.

COMMIT DATE: Dec. 19, 2018



HARRY MILLER

OL • 6-4 • 310
Buford, Ga.

Rank: C 2, Overall 30, GA 6



ACCOLADES: Miller helped Buford reach the Georgia Class 5A quarterfinals in a 10-3 senior season. He paved the way for Buford's high-powered offense, which averaged 41.6 points per game in 2018 and scored 50 or more points on four occasions. He helped lead Buford to an 11-2 record and an appearance in the state semifinals as a junior. The Buckeye signee participated in Nike's The Opening in June with other elite prospects and was named the camp's most valuable offensive lineman.

MILLER SAYS: "To me, I always try and prove my worth, but it's up to me to put in work to do it. Rankings don't affect my work, but my work affects my ranking, that's how I view it."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Solid, barrel-chested build with little bad weight. He is developed from a weight-room and strength standpoint. He possesses average athleticism and length. He plays left tackle in high school but projects on the interior at the next level. A strong run blocker who plays with a nasty disposition. He does a great job getting a push in the run game and has a knack for finishing blocks." – Charles Power, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Miller is a straight-A student and likely class valedictorian. He is very dedicated to helping out the less fortunate, taking multiple mission trips to Nicaragua. He was scheduled to announce his commitment in the Central American country before that trip was canceled. Miller was a finalist for the All-American Bowl Man of the Year Award. His parents are Kristina and Sean Miller.

COMMIT DATE: June 10, 2018



NOAH POTTER

DE • 6-5 • 250
Mentor, Ohio

Rank: SDE 23, Overall 334, OH 9



ACCOLADES: Potter was an All-Ohio selection as a junior and a senior at Mentor for head coach Steve Trivisonno. He finished with more than 25 tackles for loss as a senior to lead the Greater Cleveland area. He also helped Mentor to the Division I state title game in 2017 as a junior.

POTTER SAYS: "It's a little different being at the bottom (when I enrolled early), but I knew coming in I wasn't going to be on the top anymore. Any guy came from the same background I did – a highly-recruited guy and I am just going to try and work hard."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Twitchy when the ball is snapped, terrific hands, outstanding hips, has a bevy of pass rushing moves, also torques his way between offensive linemen as a run stuffer. He is an aggressive football player, physical, and a finisher as a tackler." – Steve Wiltfong, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Potter's older brother, Micah, played basketball at Ohio State before transferring to Wisconsin before of the 2018-19 season. He was one of six players to enroll early in January after signing in December. Potter is the son of Ronda and Tim Potter.

COMMIT DATE: April 16, 2018



BRYSON SHAW

S • 6-2 • 175
Potomac (Md.)
The Bullis School

Rank: S 45, Overall 577, MD 10



ACCOLADES: Shaw was named the Bullis School's most valuable player and the Defensive Player of the Year in the Interstate Athletic Conference as a senior. The speedy safety had a propensity for the end zone as a junior, catching five touchdowns, rushing for a score, and also returning a fumble and a kickoff for six. Defensively the conference MVP made his presence felt with 30 tackles, 2½ tackles for loss, 1½ sacks and two forced fumbles.

SHAW SAYS: "Big plays are my thing. Every time I get the ball in my hands, I want to get into the end zone."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He's a pure athlete. He has tremendous acceleration and body control and is built to play free safety but has a linebacker mind-set. He is physical in run and pass game. He breaks on ball well in front of him and has speed to cover to sideline in zone. He has impressive closing speed, takes great angles and can change direction at a high rate of speed. Must add strength and upper-body mass. Technique needs improvement in man coverage. He must work on backpedal and transition after opening his hips." – Brian Dohn, 247Sports

PERSONAL: He was once committed to Maryland as a lacrosse player. Shaw was originally targeted by former Ohio State co-defensive coordinator/safeties coach Alex Grinch, who departed for Oklahoma after Shaw signed in December. Shaw was committed to Wisconsin before flipping to the Buckeyes. His parents are Jill and Bryn Shaw.

COMMIT DATE: April 28, 2018



CADE STOVER

LB • 6-4 • 225
Lexington, Ohio

Rank: OLB 7, Overall 114, OH 4



ACCOLADES: Named Ohio's Mr. Football by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association and Gatorade Player of the Year, Stover was all over the field for Lexington. Stover's senior season showcased his versatility as he racked up 163 tackles and four interceptions on defense as a hybrid linebacker/safety and 1,477 yards and 17 touchdowns on offense as a running back.

STOVER SAYS: "They have only talked about linebacker. They tell me outside linebacker. Of course I would like to go in and play, but I'm just working to get bigger, faster and stronger. If they need me on the field, that would be amazing to be out there. But if not, then I'll be working to get out there. If it's just me – if I'm the one linebacker in the class – or if I'm one out of 60, I just need to keep working."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Tall with a frame that can add significant weight. Plays multiple sports for much of the year and should get significantly bigger once in a college strength program. Not out of the question he could grow into an edge player in time. A highly productive two-way player, working at safety/linebacker and running back. Oftentimes plays deep safety, showing high-level movement and coverage skills for a player of his size." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Also a star basketball player for Lexington after earning second-team All-Ohio honors as a junior, Stover has set his school's all-time scoring record, shattering a 1,329-point mark that had stood since 1954. Stover's parents are Chelsi and Trevor.

COMMIT DATE: April 29, 2018



ENOKK VIMAHI

OG • 6-4 • 270
Kahuku, Hawaii

Rank: OG 7, Overall 124, HI 2



ACCOLADES: Vimahi played in the All-American Bowl and the Polynesian Bowl after participating in The Opening over the summer. Kahuku went to three straight state title games from 2015-17 and averaged nearly 300 yards and 30 points a game during his senior season. He comes from a high school that has produced 17 NFL players.

VIMAHI SAYS: "I want to go to a program that is competitive as well both on and off the field – academically challenging as well as their conference and their schedules."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "One of the top-five offensive line prospects in Hawaii, Vimahi is a terrific offensive lineman. He'll be an offensive guard prospect for Ohio State. He's a big, physical kid with good straight-ahead speed." – Tom Lemming, CBS Sports

PERSONAL: Vimahi, a Mormon, is planning to take a two-year mission trip after his first season in Columbus before returning to complete his college career. He's just the second player from Hawaii ever for Ohio State and the first to sign a letter of intent. The other was punter Scott Terna of Punahou High School, who walked on in the mid-1990s. Vimahi is the son of Lori and David Vimahi and has an older brother, Alik, who signed a letter of intent with Utah in 2017.

COMMIT DATE: Feb. 6, 2019

RECRUITING WRAP-UP: OSU'S 2019 CLASS

**JAMESON WILLIAMS**

WR • 6-2 • 170
St. Louis Cardinal Ritter
College Prep
Rank: WR 13, Overall 82, MO 1



ACCOLADES: Williams led his team to a Class 3 state title as a senior while catching 68 passes for 1,626 yards and 22 touchdowns. He had eight 100-yard games along the way, including one with 257 yards and five scores. He was selected for the Under Armour All-America Game as well.

WILLIAMS SAYS: "The environmental part of the city, it wasn't just football. I loved the city in general. ... It's going to feel great playing in front of 100,000 every home game in the 'Shoe.'"

EXPERT'S TAKE: "He has exceptional explosiveness and speed and is one of the faster players in the country with the track times to back that up. He eats up cushion quickly and is fluid in his breaks. He can make cuts without needing to throttle down too much and can take short passes and go the distance from anywhere on the field. He is also a dangerous return man." – Allen Trieu, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Williams also starred in track for Cardinal Ritter. He broke former Ohio State running back Ezekiel Elliott's state record in the 300-meter hurdles and won two state track and field titles as a junior. He's the son of Tianna and James Williams.

COMMIT DATE: Sept. 28, 2018

**GARRETT WILSON**

WR • 6-1 • 180
Austin (Texas)
Lake Travis
Rank: WR 2, Overall 20, TX 3



ACCOLADES: As an all-around receiver, Wilson starred at Lake Travis, ending his senior season with 1,151 yards and 19 touchdowns despite missing time due to injury. Before enrolling early for Ohio State's spring semester, Wilson spent Jan. 5 at the All-American Bowl in San Antonio, where he capped his high school career by catching two touchdown passes and being named the game's Man of the Year for excellence in community service, academics and athletics.

WILSON SAYS: "Two years ago, I went in and I trusted what Coach (Ryan) Day said to me about the passing game, because they haven't completely done it yet. He told me that they plan to pass the ball a lot, so seeing it this year, it was just awesome to watch and fun to watch and I can't wait to be a part of it."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Not the biggest receiver, but plays bigger than listed size thanks to good athleticism and above-average bulk relative to frame. Strong-handed wideout who plucks the ball consistently. Dangerous in the vertical game. Stretches the field with initial burst and above-average downfield speed. Very good route-runner. Can line up in multiple spots." – Gabe Brooks, 247Sports

PERSONAL: Wilson was a three-sport athlete – football, basketball and track – with Division I basketball offers. He averaged 21 points per game in his junior season and received first-team All-Central Texas honors. Originally from the Columbus area before moving to Austin. He is the son of Kenny and Candace Wilson.

COMMIT DATE: April 29, 2018

**CRAIG YOUNG**

ATH • 6-4 • 200
Fort Wayne (Ind.)
Wayne
Rank: ATH 35, Overall 609, IN 11



ACCOLADES: Originally recruited by Ohio State as a wide receiver, Young shot up the Buckeyes' board as an athlete when he flashed his versatility at multiple defensive positions during a one-day camp in June, committing days later. His ability on both sides of the ball showed on the football field for Wayne when he caught 35 passes for 700 yards and 12 touchdowns on offense as a wide receiver and added 27 tackles, three interceptions and 1½ sacks on defense as an outside linebacker. Young totaled over 600 all-purpose yards.

YOUNG SAYS: "The (OSU) coaches are real. They don't sugarcoat anything. Everything they do is – it's a winning program. You can't fail here. You've got to come and bust your butt. They're going to be on you. That's what I want. I want them to be on me."

EXPERT'S TAKE: "One of the fastest prospects in the Midwest, he could play anything from receiver to safety to linebacker on the next level. He's a long athlete with intriguing upside, but very raw and inconsistent. He will need nurturing but has flashed crazy potential, a blow-by-you receiver with the traits to develop into a top pass rusher. Boom-or-bust prospect for the Buckeyes. Should be able to contribute immediately on special teams." – Steve Wiltfong, 247Sports

PERSONAL: As a three-sport athlete at Wayne, Young starred in basketball and track on top of football. As a junior, he averaged 17.4 points and 7.5 rebounds per game and won the sectional 100-meter (10.7 seconds) and 200-meter (22.43 seconds) sprints. His parents are Antoinette and Shabaka Young.

COMMIT DATE: June 15, 2018



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COVER STORY

Fields, Baldwin To Fight For Starting QB Spot

Continued From Page 1

good fit for both sides, and it was clear off the bat that would be the case.

"When he became available, we investigated it, felt like it was a great fit, so he's done a nice job so far," Day said Feb. 6, two days before Fields' eligibility request was granted.

The fit was certainly right for Day. He was getting a highly-rated player at his biggest position of need. The fit was right for Fields, too, as he'll be learning from Day, who developed Haskins into a top NFL prospect despite having just one season as a starter. That's the goal for Fields, too – to get to the league as soon as he can.

"I think I made more of a business decision, and Coach Day, he's been in the NFL so he knows what it takes to get there," Fields said Feb. 6. "Just the offense and how successful it was last year, I just hope to do the same thing again."

"It's really all in God's plan, but I hope I can get there (the NFL) as soon as I can."

The term "business decision" might sound impersonal, but college football is a business. The players want to get to the NFL, and the coaches – especially at a school like Ohio State – are fine with that. It's one of the biggest recruiting pitches the Buckeyes have at their disposal.

"We don't apologize for developing guys," Day said. "To see Dwayne's development the last two years is pretty remarkable. I think that's one of the selling points that we have."

Now it's up to Fields, a Kennesaw, Ga., native, to prove he can live up to the lofty expectations that come with being a former five-star recruit and one of the hottest names in college football. The 6-3, 225-pound signal caller acquitted himself nicely in limited action at Georgia, going 27 of 39 for 328 yards and four touchdowns without throwing an interception. He ran 42 times for 266 yards and four more scores as well.

But that was as a backup to Jake Fromm, a second-year starter firmly entrenched in his position. Now Fields will be learning a new offense on the fly as spring practice approaches, and he'll still have to compete with redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin to win the starting job.

That battle gets started in earnest in early March when spring practice begins. For now, it's about attacking winter workouts with full effort and trying to master a complicated offense while learning from a position coach – Mike Yurcich – who is still learning the offense himself.

"Well, this offense is kind of different from Georgia," Fields said. "But I also think being in that Georgia pro-style offense, that has prepared me for this offense. And of course I have some things to learn, but I hope I can get them down and get started quickly."

As Fields learns the offense, Yurcich is learning Fields as well, in addition to Baldwin, fifth-year senior Chris Chugunov and walk-on Daniel Vanatsky, the other two signal callers in the room. Like Fields, he's in a new setting after Day hired him away from Oklahoma State to be quarterbacks coach and passing game coordinator. He's learning a new offense and building relationships with an entirely new position room.

But that's just part of the process – part of the new challenge.

"It's a process, and nowhere near where it needs to be, obviously," Yurcich said. "It takes time. It takes time, and it takes an



TIM MOODY

READY TO PLAY – Quarterback Justin Fields, a transfer from Georgia, was awarded immediate eligibility by the NCAA after a waiver request was granted, meaning he can take the field for Ohio State in the fall.

investment on both ends and an openness and just trying to create a dialogue.

"For me as a quarterback coach, I have to try to learn how the quarterbacks learn the best, and everybody processes information a little bit differently."

By the time Ohio State does get Fields on the practice field, a lot of that process could be complete. He'll be just over two months into his time in Columbus, he'll have had a chance to learn the offense off the field and he'll have an opportunity to prove himself as a leader.

Then comes year one for Fields, and

for the second season in a row, Ohio State will have a first-time starter at quarterback. Haskins, of course, shattered the expectations for such a situation, but the Buckeyes are set to get at least two years out of Fields.

"I think there's a lot of things that you save in the first year," Day said. "I think it's all about what you put on a quarterback's plate. I think they can handle so much in the first year, then you get into year two and three, they start to be able to take more on as it goes."

Now it's time to sit back and see what Day and a quarterback of that talent level can do.



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RECRUITING WRAP-UP: CONSENSUS POLL

OSU Slides In Consensus Poll Despite Quality Class

By GARRETT STEPIEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The annual arms race for college football recruiting supremacy between Alabama, Georgia and Ohio State ended with two of the three teams atop the 2019 recruiting class while one fell out of the top 10 entirely.

After the Bulldogs knocked off the Crimson Tide for the class of 2018's top spot last February, Nick Saban returned to his throne as he guided 'Bama back to No. 1 in BSB's annual consensus poll.

The combined rankings take final polls from Rivals, ESPN, Bleacher Report and national recruiting analyst Tom Lemming of CBS Sports Network and Prep Football Magazine. It is based on a system with 25 points awarded for finishing first in a poll while one point is awarded for coming in 25th.

"Alabama and Georgia are the two teams that almost won it the past couple of years when it comes to recruiting. Alabama has been at it for eight years," Lemming told BSB. "They just keep going. I love their philosophy – just going after nothing but blue-chip athletes. They also have a lot of guys, but they know how to pick the right ones. Alabama offers a ton of people, but they never really recruit the weaker guys at the bottom of that offer list. They always go after the top targets. I love how they handle their recruiting."

"They still had a top-five year (in 2018), but it wasn't what it had been. The reason

for it was they were taken by surprise by the early signing period. With all of the kids signing early, they weren't able to steal as many kids as they normally could at the end of the year. This year, they were more prepared."

While the Buckeyes nearly claimed the title in the past cycle, tying UGA with 26 signees but finishing in second place in the consensus poll, the same could not be said this time around. With a smaller class by design due to fewer available scholarships, Ohio State's 17 signees brought quality but lacked numbers as the Buckeyes finished 15th in the consensus poll.

"All of them stand out," Lemming said of OSU's class. "When Ohio State recruits, they're bringing in all blue-chippers. It would have been a sure top-10 team if they had the same numbers as everyone else, so it's a different story, number-wise, but I can't think of any reaches at all. It looks to me as if they're all blue-chippers."

But unlike Alabama, Georgia and every other team in the consensus poll's top 25, OSU underwent a coaching change. Head coach Urban Meyer's retirement was announced Dec. 4 – 15 days before the early signing period – and Ryan Day took over Jan. 2 with just over a month remaining before National Signing Day on Feb. 6.

Despite the scramble for OSU, Day held onto the majority of Meyer's recruits, losing three but keeping 15 who signed in December before adding two more in February. Going from second to 15th in the span of a cycle gives off the idea that Ohio

State's efforts on the trail took a hit, but that is not necessarily true. In fact, Lemming said, Day's two-month stretch was impressive.

"In talking to the kids, they don't see

any difference between Ryan and Urban," Lemming said. "They mention that Ryan was recruiting them all year anyway. It looks like he's learned well from Urban, and I would expect Ohio State, no doubt, to finish in



TIM MOODY

TOP OF THE CLASS – Austin (Texas) Lake Travis five-star wide receiver Garrett Wilson was Ohio State's highest-rated out-of-state 2019 signee.

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RECRUITING WRAP-UP: CONSENSUS POLL

BSB Consensus Poll

Rk.	Team	Pts.
1.	Alabama (3).....	99
2.	Georgia (1).....	97
3.	Texas	88
4.	Oklahoma.....	87
T-5.	LSU.....	84
	Texas A&M	84
7.	Oregon.....	72
8.	Michigan	71
9.	Florida	67
T-10.	Clemson	62
	Tennessee	62
12.	Penn State.....	57
13.	Auburn.....	52
14.	Notre Dame.....	48
15.	Ohio State	43
16.	Washington.....	38
17.	Florida State	34
18.	South Carolina.....	32
19.	USC	30
20.	Nebraska	24
21.	Arkansas.....	20
22.	Ole Miss	18
23.	Stanford	13
24.	Mississippi State.....	9
25.	Wisconsin	3

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

Also receiving points in the poll were Miami (Fla.) (2), Virginia Tech (2), Purdue (1) and N.C. State (1).

the top 10 next year. They've got the power of Ohio State behind them, but also he's learned how to recruit from Urban Meyer and how to be a relentless recruiter because that's what it takes. To get five-star players, you've got to recruit them two or three years these days and understand. He's picked up a lot from Urban."

While the Buckeyes are in line for a monster 2020 group under Day, two Big Ten rivals took advantage of OSU's low numbers and recruited well enough to finish higher in the consensus poll. Michigan signed 26 and finished eighth while Penn State took 23 to check in at No. 12.

Although the Wolverines lost out on Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy Orange five-star defensive end Zach Harrison (6-5, 243), who stayed home and signed with Ohio State, U-M managed to keep Tulsa (Okla.) Booker T. Washington five-star safety

National Recruiting Experts' Rankings

TOM LEMMING

- Alabama
- Georgia
- Texas
- LSU
- Oklahoma
- Texas A&M
- Florida
- Michigan
- Clemson
- Oregon

RIVALS

- Georgia
- Alabama
- LSU
- Texas
- Oklahoma
- Texas A&M
- Oregon
- Florida
- Clemson
- Michigan

ESPN

- Alabama
- Georgia
- Texas A&M
- Oklahoma
- Texas
- Oregon
- LSU
- Michigan
- Florida
- Clemson

BLEACHER REPORT

- Alabama
- Georgia
- Oklahoma
- Texas
- Texas A&M
- LSU
- Michigan
- Tennessee
- Oregon
- Ohio State**

Daxton Hill (6-0½, 186) and Norcross (Ga.) Greater Atlanta Christian five-star defensive tackle Chris Hinton (6-4, 280) to headline Jim Harbaugh's top-10 class.

"You have to count the numbers – that's why they're No. 8 in the country – but their class is big," Lemming said of Michigan. "Also, they landed some pretty big ball players. I think their major loss was Zach Harrison to Ohio State, but everything else was them getting what they wanted. In spite of a couple big losses at the end of the year (62-39 to Ohio State on Nov. 24 and 41-15 to Florida on Dec. 29), they really did well in recruiting. I think that's a testimony to Harbaugh because he lost (linebackers coach Al) Washington and (defensive line coach Greg) Mattison (to Ohio State) but didn't skip a beat in January.

"They went out and got whom they needed, so you've got to give them a lot of credit because everyone was kind of playing down the idea of Michigan finishing well after the end of the bowl season. They came around and did a great job. With their numbers, they almost got twice as many as Ohio State did, and that's the reason for the difference."

However, the Buckeyes were ahead of the Wolverines in terms of pound-for-pound quality, Lemming added. Particularly with Harrison, U-M's loss was OSU's gain.

"He's a local kid, but more important, he's a great player," Lemming said of Harrison. "The way Ohio State's been recruiting local kids, they're not putting much of an emphasis on them like the old previous several coaches – Jim Tressel, John Cooper and Earle Bruce – had done. But to get a five-star player like that, it was super important, particularly since Michigan was the other school recruiting him. But they went out and got him, so they got a great player and kept that great player away from Michigan. That's a win-win situation."

Similar to OSU, the Nittany Lions took somewhat of a step back but still strung together a solid class under James Franklin. Since settling in Happy Valley five years ago, Franklin's efforts on the trail have put PSU's talent level up there with the likes of Ohio State and Michigan in the Big Ten East.

"He's one of the great recruiters nation-

ally, James Franklin," Lemming said. "They didn't have a great year like they thought they would. But they got two of the top five running backs. Franklin is phenomenal. I put him up there with Urban Meyer, Nick Saban, Phil Fulmer and Mack Brown and Pete Carroll. Those are the best of the past 20 years, and I throw him right in there. He's also got a relentless style of recruiting. It picked up in the Southeastern Conference (at Vanderbilt from 2011-13) like Urban did (at Florida from 2005-09). He's a step above what Bill O'Brien did at Penn State. He's taking it to another level."

Florida's ninth-place finish in the consensus poll might have the Gators on the rise sooner rather than later after Dan Mullen took over for Jim McElwain following the Gators' dreadful 2017 season that ended at 4-7. Mullen is from the Meyer coaching tree, serving as an offensive coordinator on Meyer's staff at Florida from 2005-08 before he started his head-coaching career at Mississippi State from 2009-17 and then took over the Gators in 2018. Mullen guided UF to the Sunshine State's best group with 25 signees after down years for Florida State (17th with 22 signees) and Miami (28th with 17 signees).

"Florida, if you remember, finished poorly last year," Lemming said. "They rebounded well. Everyone else is the usual suspects in the top 10. They're always doing well.

"In that job, you should always do well. There's so much talent in Florida, so to me, that's not that big of a surprise.

"(Mullen) came from Mississippi State.

He had been at Florida before. He understands recruiting. It would have been a bigger surprise had he not done well because he knows how that conference recruits and knows Florida. He was there with Urban. He's a terrific recruiter himself. Florida had such a good year beating out Miami and Florida State. They went out and won that in-state recruiting."

Another surprise was Arkansas, which went 2-10 on the field but finished 21st on the trail in the consensus poll and 19th for Lemming. The Razorbacks received 25 signatures, including one-time Ohio State target and Murfreesboro (Tenn.) Blackman four-star wide receiver Trey Knox (6-5, 215).

"They had a horrible year on the field, but the key to recruiting, the great ones – they just go after it," Lemming said. "(Little Rock [Ark.] Pulaski Academy four-star) Hudson Henry, one of the top tight ends in the country – out of Arkansas – stayed home. But they also hit Dallas hard. That's what really made them good. (Head coach Chad) Morris came from SMU last year, and that's part of a big reason why that happened."

As the Buckeyes turn the page to 2020, they do so after their momentum mounted on National Signing Day with last-second additions of Kahuku, Hawaii, four-star offensive guard Enokk Vimali (6-4½, 263) and Indianapolis Ben Davis three-star offensive tackle Dawand Jones (6-8, 360). The pair of offensive linemen filled a major need for OSU and provided quality assets to cap the 2019 class as Day leads the program forward.



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