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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

May 2018

Always A Buckeye

Ohio State Coaching Great Earle Bruce Remembered For Passion On The Field And Off

 By MARK REA
 BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Earle Bruce often introduced himself as a football coach, and his Hall of Fame résumé suggests he was one of the best. But while the persona on display for much of his nine-year tenure as Ohio State head coach was mostly that of a one-dimensional Woody Hayes imitator, Bruce had many more layers and textures to a life that touched so many people in so many ways over the years.

Bruce, who died April 20 at his suburban Columbus home due to complications of Alzheimer's disease, was honored with a public memorial April 25 at St. John Arena and a private funeral service the following day. During each event, the impact the 87-year-old coach had on his family, friends and former assistant coaches and players was on full display.

Current Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, who was a graduate assistant at OSU under Bruce in 1986 and '87 and then a full-time assistant for three seasons during the 1990s on Bruce's staff at Colorado State, has often said his father and Bruce were the two most influential men in his life.

But Meyer has also recounted stories that underscore the kind of tough-love approach he received from Bruce, including the late September afternoon in 1990 when Meyer walked onto the practice field at Colorado State after the birth of his first child, Nicole.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," said Meyer, who was the Rams' wide receivers coach at the time. "We were working on a screen pass when one of the receivers blows a blocking assignment and Earle blows a gasket. I mean, he just undressed me."

Continued On Page 8


**Earle Bruce
1931-2018**

JOSH WINSLOW

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OPINION

Bruce Was Honest, Intense, Classy At Once



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Charter Member

I first met Earle Bruce almost 40 years ago. I was a scruffy, cocksure, 20-year-old sports-writer, and he was a 47-year-old grown-ass man who had been a football coach since before I was in diapers.

To say that our first encounter didn't go well for me would be akin to saying the Battle of the Little Bighorn didn't go well for Custer and the 7th Cavalry.

In those days, media members covering Ohio State football had almost unlimited access to players and coaches following games. As sports editor of a small newspaper in OSU quarterback Art Schlichter's hometown, I was used to having nearly unlimited *carte blanche* in terms of asking questions and receiving answers.

An emotionally-spent Bruce had just won his first game as successor to the legendary Woody Hayes, watching the Buckeyes systematically dismantle a pretty good Syracuse team by a 31-8 final score in the 1979 season opener. OSU enjoyed a lopsided 383-81 edge in rushing yardage – obviously something Woody would have liked – but Bruce had spent a large chunk of the summer claiming that he would bring a more updated and sophisticated offensive approach to Columbus.

So, naturally I asked why running the ball 69 times while throwing it on only 16 occasions could be interpreted as anything akin to a modern offensive attack.

That's when I got the look for the first time. Bruce had a way of simultaneously pursing his lips while raising his eyebrows to the point where you didn't know if he was angered by the question or simply pitying you for being so dumb.

Finally, after a few seconds that seemed like minutes, Bruce answered, "Well, I don't know. We threw the ball on the first play of the game. I think we threw it three or four times during that first series. Exactly how many times do you think we should have thrown it?"

Was there ever a time in your life when you wished you could have become invisible? That was one of those times for me. But it also taught me a valuable lesson that I have carried for the remainder of my journalistic career. If you're going to ask a question, make sure it's based upon facts and not opinion.

Bruce was the teacher, I was the pupil, and I never played a down for the man.

To be honest, I didn't think much of Bruce when he was head coach at Ohio State. I never thought he took as much advantage as he should have with such strong-armed quarterbacks as Schlichter, Mike Tomczak and Jim Karsatos at his disposal, preferring instead to rely upon traditional, ground-and-pound Big Ten football.

It was far from glamorous (much like the coach himself), yet it was a winning formula. When Bruce was fired, he enjoyed a .770 winning percentage against Big Ten competition that at the time ranked fifth all-time among conference coaches with at least five seasons in the league.

Class Personified

In the aftermath of the outpouring of love and admiration for Bruce following his April 20 death, it seems almost unbelievable that the Buckeye Nation that remembered the coach with such affection was the same one that was ready to pay for his one-way bus ticket out of Columbus after a string of 93 finishes during the 1980s.

Only through the prism of time do we begin to fully understand that Bruce's ouster the week of the Michigan game in 1987 came not wholly as a result of the product he put

on the field. Never one to suffer fools, the coach was no glad-hander or butt-kisser, and to his ultimate detriment he never understood how important those roles were to play in Columbus.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Still, how wounded Bruce must have been to have given his heart and soul to his alma mater only to see that university vindictively spit on him. I can only imagine the hurt he must have felt – not only at being dismissed from his dream job, but to have it come at the beginning of the most important week of the season.

It's difficult to put myself in that position, but it's not difficult to imagine I would not have handled the situation with such class.

Bruce somehow kept his emotions in check that week, showing them briefly only twice – when members of the Ohio State marching band showed up on the lawn at his house to play "Across the Field" and "Carmen Ohio," and when he triumphantly pumped his fist into the air while being carried off the field atop the shoulders of his players following the 23-20 victory against Michigan in his final game.

"I was kind of in awe that week as I watched how a man gets back up after he's been knocked down," said current Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, then a 23-year-old graduate assistant on Bruce's staff. "We were all kind of shell-shocked, but not Earle. He wouldn't let us get distracted. We had a job to do, and he was going to make sure we did it. That week, we all saw how a man – and I mean a *real* man – reacts when adversity knocks him to the ground."

In a kind of ironic way, the botched manner in which Bruce was fired by then-OSU president Dr. Edward Jennings helped turn public opinion in the coach's favor. Bruce suddenly became a martyr of sorts to many fans who had previously been apathetic toward him, and when the coach returned to Columbus several years later to become an OSU football analyst for WTVN Radio, the transformation became complete.

With his passion for anything and everything scarlet and gray firmly on display, Bruce became a beloved figure to an entirely new generation of Buckeye fans. He was approachable, seemingly indefatigable and eminently eager to discuss football in general and Ohio State football in particular for as long as anyone cared to listen.

My personal relationship with Bruce came full circle after Jim Tressel was hired in 2001 and welcomed Bruce and fellow former head coach John Cooper back to the program as honorary assistants.

Bruce became a regular at Tressel's weekly press luncheons, and it was always a privilege and honor to sit beside Bruce as he would regale media members with a litany of stories – some salty, some hilarious and every one of them more entertaining than the last.

One of the most enjoyable games I ever covered was the 2004 Fiesta Bowl. Ohio State survived a furious comeback from Kansas State to secure a 35-28 victory, but exceedingly more entertaining than the game itself was getting a chance to sit beside Bruce in the auxiliary press box on the roof at Sun Devil Stadium. I didn't need to watch that game. I

got a blow-by-blow description from the coach complete with priceless (and sometimes profanity-laced) analysis.

At the end of the game, I stood up, shook his hand and said, "Coach, that was the most enjoyable game I think I've ever had the pleasure to watch." A kind of mystified look came across his face as he replied with a somewhat bewildered, "OK."

Last year, as I interviewed him for what would be the last time, he seemed a little slower than usual. But I hadn't seen him for a while and I chalked it up to the fact that he was 86 years old. It wasn't until a few months later that it was revealed that he was in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease.

Anyone who has been touched by that disease knows how insidious it can be, but Bruce took the same approach to that fight as he did any other – with as much hard-nosed determination as he could muster. The fact that he attended an Ohio State spring practice session on his 87th birthday, just six weeks before his passing, probably tells you all you need to know about the man's grit.

Potent Quotables

I realize the foolhardiness of attempting in just a few words to convey the importance of a life such as the one fully lived by Earle Bruce, so I thought I would enlist the coach's help. Here are some of my favorite quotes from the series I wrote last year for BSB on his life and legacy.

- When asked about his non-sense personality: "I've never been one to blow smoke. I've never done that, and I don't think I could ever do that. But it's never been a problem. Not with me anyway."

- About working on Sundays as an OSU assistant: "It wasn't that Woody wasn't religious. It's just that Woody wanted everyone to work religiously. He was of the mind that there was simply too much to be done to take a day off – ever. Honestly, we never knew from year to year if we were going to get Christmas Day off."

- On dealing with adversity: "Every now and then, the lessons you learn on the football field come back. And when you get knocked down and hit real hard – if you stay down, that's sad. You can't always be taken aback by the fact you got hit. You can get hit, but you've got to do something about it. You can't fold up. When you try to teach that to your kids, how can you not do that when it happens to you?"

- On his radio career: "I may not breathe into the microphone the right way and I may not talk just right. I may not be the most professional broadcaster you've ever heard. But I give it to you straight from the heart. I'm no phony. I'll tell you the way it is because that's the way I've always been."

- On following in the footsteps of a legend: "I never at all regretted being the guy who succeeded Coach Hayes. At the time, I felt I was the guy who could follow Coach Hayes and be successful, and if I hadn't felt that way, I wouldn't have done it. I was never going to be the guy who said, 'I want to be the guy who follows the guy who follows Woody.' A person with that attitude is a loser."

Earle Bruce was many things to many people – coach, friend, mentor, father, grandfather, storyteller – but one thing he was not was a loser. Earle Bruce was every bit a winner, and he was a winner by any definition of that word.

Aside from my father, Earle Bruce just might have been the most honorable man I've ever known.

As with his immediate family as well as all of Buckeye Nation, I'm going to miss him.

COVER STORY

Bruce Served As A Mentor To Many At OSU

Continued From Page 1

"All these years later, I can remember the night of the play we were working on and the defensive scheme we were working against. What was the lesson? No matter what else is going on, focus on the task at hand. Focus on what you're doing."

William White, who played four years at OSU for Bruce before embarking upon an 11-year NFL career that included an appearance in Super Bowl XXXIII as a starting strong safety for the Atlanta Falcons, had a similar brush with Bruce's wrath.

As a freshman out of Lima (Ohio) Senior, White earned a starting job at cornerback in 1984 and chalked up his first career tackles during a 22-14 victory against Oregon State in the season opener. Three weeks later, during his first road game in scarlet and gray, White snared the first of his 16 career interceptions at OSU, a second-quarter pick that set up a touchdown during an eventual 35-22 victory at Minnesota.

As the freshman danced his way toward the sideline, he was expecting a high-five or at least a congratulatory pat on the butt. What he got instead was rather unexpected.

"I'm a freshman, I'm all happy (and) Earle comes up and grabs me by the helmet and is yanking me and yelling at me," White told The Lima News. "I just got an interception, and he's talking about a tackle I missed two plays ago. I was like, 'Really?' But when you look back at it, it was to make you better. That was the passion he had. It was always that way."

"My first two years, I thought he hated

me, as much as he yelled. I'm starting as a freshman, and I'm thinking, 'You ought to be embracing me and trying to help me out.' But every time he talked to me, he was yelling about something. But it was to make me better and get better. When I was able to settle in and become a decent player, we actually became friends."

Not every recollection about Bruce contains tough love. Former quarterback Greg Frey remembered how the coach managed to sweet-talk Frey's mother – a devout Catholic who wanted her son to play football at Boston College – into allowing him to attend Ohio State.

"In January 1986, Ohio State was very late in the game to recruit me," Frey said. "(Quarterbacks coach Jim) Tressel had left the Ohio State staff in November or December to become head coach at Youngstown State, and the trail to recruit me went quiet."

"I remember telling my dad that I would at least like to know if they had an interest in me before it was too late. So, we reached out to a few alumni in Cincinnati and found out Ohio State was indeed still interested in me."

Bruce re-established contact with the quarterback prospect and his family and quickly scheduled an in-home visit.

"Coach quickly realized it was not me or my dad that he had to win over – it was my mom," Frey said. "And he knew he had his hands full."

"Growing up Catholic, I went to St. James Elementary School and St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati, and my mom wanted to keep that theme going for my future college education. Boston College was at the top of the list and

they wanted me. This was right after Doug Flutie won the Heisman, BC was a hot program, and Mary Ann Frey had her mind made up that BC was where I needed to be."

Taking a page from the legendary Hayes, who always placed as much or more emphasis on recruiting a player's parents than the player himself, Bruce placed a call to the Frey household, hoping Greg's mother would answer the phone.

"He always said he knew he would never totally win her over," Frey said, "but he at least wanted to connect with her, give her some peace of mind that I would be more than OK at Ohio State and that he really wanted to coach me."

After a 30-minute conversation, Bruce said he knew he was going to get his quarterback.

"Earle must have told me that story a dozen times over the years, and his face always lit up with a beaming grin of pride," Frey said. "He would say, 'Oh, boy, I got her to talk to me for 30 minutes! I got her! Do you hear me? I got her!'"

"A few weeks later, I signed with Ohio State, and although my mom didn't speak to me for three days, things worked out just fine and she came to love Earle and Jean Bruce and her new Buckeye family."

Passion From An Early Age

Ask anyone who spent any amount of time around Bruce to describe the coach and most likely the word "passion" would be uttered in the first few words of the reply.

"Earle was real," White said. "He was a guy who always spoke the truth, and he had a deep passion for players, the organization, the team."

Apparently, the deep seeds of that kind of passion were planted at an early age.

Bruce was born March 8, 1931, the first of four sons to Earle D. Bruce Sr. and his wife, Mildred. Bruce's father was a no-nonsense man of strong will and an even stronger constitution having toiled in the steel mills along the tristate area where the borders of Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia converge.

Young Earle inherited his father's grit and determination as well as a passion for sports. As one of the only left-handed players on his baseball team, Bruce quickly picked up the nickname "Lefty" as an homage to Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher Lefty Grove, who was a native of Lonaconing, Md., just 15 miles west of Bruce's blue-collar hometown of Cumberland.

Despite being only 5-9 and 155 pounds, Bruce was a high school star in track as well as football. He set the city scoring record in 1948 as a junior with 23 touchdowns and 138 points in 10 games, leading his team to a 9-0-1 season and earning all-state honors at fullback.

Several major programs were interested, but Bruce chose to attend Ohio State, beginning a self-professed love affair that lasted nearly seven decades.

"I was a Buckeye from day one," the coach told BSB last year. "When I got there, and I saw that band come out of the field for the first time, I jumped up and shouted, 'I'm a Buckeye! I'm a Buckeye!' It was just something I'd never seen before, and I still remember I got chills when that band came out on the field."

Bruce never played a single varsity down for the Buckeyes, suffering a career-ending knee injury about a month before the 1951 season opener against SMU. But Hayes offered him a chance to remain with the team – as well as keep his scholarship – as a student assistant on the Ohio State coaching staff. It was the

beginning of a career that lasted more than 40 years and went from the high school ranks to the professional level with the Arena Football League.

Bruce's first full-time coaching job came at Mansfield (Ohio) High School in 1953. He spent three seasons there, the first two under Bill Peterson, who went on to become head coach at Florida State for 11 seasons before spending a season and a half at the helm of the NFL's Houston Oilers. His third season came on the staff of Bob McNea, who would later become an assistant for Ara Parseghian at Northwestern. Years later, Bruce hired McNea as his recruiting coordinator at Ohio State where his duties included helping design the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

"I don't think Mansfield ever enjoyed a more successful three-year period than the Peterson-McNea era," Bruce said. "It was a privilege to be an assistant coach for those guys."

In addition to cutting his coaching teeth there, Mansfield was also where Bruce met a striking young lady named Jean French.

"She was a senior when I was a first-year teacher and I remember she used to bring me the attendance sheets," he said. "When she graduated, we began to date, and we were married the next August."

Earle and Jean Bruce were married for 56 years until Jean's death in 2011. The marriage produced four daughters – Lynn, Michele, Aimee and Noel.

Bruce got his first head coaching job in 1956 at Salem, Ohio, beginning a four-year stint that turned a previously moribund program into a winner. The Quakers posted a 24-4 record during the coach's final three seasons, earning him an undying love and respect from the small town of about 12,000 that, according to Tressel, continues to this day.

"Coach Bruce is still a legend in Salem," said Tressel, now the president of Youngstown State University, located about 25 miles northeast of Salem. "He hasn't coached there for more than 50 years, and people talk about him like he was coaching there yesterday."

Bruce's coaching career continued upward when he left Salem for Sandusky in 1960 and was promptly named Ohio High School Coach of the Year after nearly leading the Blue Streaks to a state championship. From there, he took over the legendary program at Massillon High School, where he posted back-to-back undefeated seasons as well as state titles in 1964 and '65.

With his second straight 10-0 record, Bruce joined Paul Brown and Chuck Mather as the only coaches in Massillon's long and storied history with back-to-back undefeated seasons. Brown did it in 1935 and '36 and had three in a row between 1938-40, and Mather posted back-to-back undefeated campaigns in 1952 and '53.

Following the 1965 season, Bruce and his 82-12-3 record in 10 seasons at the high school level began to attract college coaching offers. Miami (Ohio) head coach Bo Schembechler made an offer that might have been acceptable had the post not come with an \$11,000 annual salary, some \$2,000 less than Bruce was making at Massillon.

About the same time, Hayes was looking for a replacement for defensive backfield coach Max Ulrick, who had left the OSU staff after four seasons.

"Woody told me he couldn't afford me," Bruce said with a chuckle. "My negotiating didn't go well from that point on. He offered me the same \$11,000 that Bo had offered me. But

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COVER STORY

I wanted the job, so I left everything, paid my own moving expenses and came to Columbus for \$11,000.

"I took a pay cut to leave high school and come coach college ball. And you know what? I'd do it again."

To OSU And Back Again

Bruce spent six seasons as an assistant coach on Hayes' staff, a stretch during which the Buckeyes won an undisputed national championship in 1968 and the National Football Foundation's version of the national title in 1970.

After the 1971 season, Bruce secured his first head coaching position at the college level, beginning with a 10-2 campaign at the University of Tampa. That led to a six-year stint at Iowa State, a job that served as a springboard for returning to Ohio State to succeed Hayes.

On the evening before Bruce was formally introduced as Hayes' successor, the new coach was treated to dinner at the residence of then-university president Harold Enarson. During the evening, OSU athletic director Hugh Hindman interrupted the proceedings to say that Bruce had a phone call.

"It was Woody," Bruce said. "I was struck by how upbeat he sounded. He said he was happy that I'd been chosen and he would be there for me whenever I needed support. To this day, I have no idea who called Woody to tell him I was at the president's house. I just know it was a gracious gesture and gave me a great feeling about coming to Ohio State."

Bruce made an immediate mark on the Ohio State program, leading the Buckeyes to the 1979 Big Ten championship and a berth in the 1980 Rose Bowl, earning national coach of the year honors from the American Football Coaches Association. He spent nine seasons as head coach of the Buckeyes, leading the team to an 81-26-1 record and four Big Ten titles before being fired the week before the Michigan game in 1987.

Stints at Northern Iowa and Colorado State followed before Bruce finished his college coaching career with a 154-90-2 record. He later spent five seasons in the Arena Football League with several different teams before finally giving up coaching for good in 2004.

The list of those who played and/or coached for Bruce during his illustrious career reads like a who's who of football. Mike Tomczak, Cris Carter, Keith Byars, Chris Spielman and Jim Lachey are considered some of the finest players in Ohio State history at their respective positions, while Bruce's coaching tree includes Meyer, Tressel, Alabama head coach Nick Saban and Michigan State head coach Mark Dantonio as well as Seattle Seahawks head coach Pete Carroll. In fact, 11 of the last 16 college football national championships have been won by teams with a former Bruce assistant at the helm.

In addition to his coaching career, Bruce spent more than 20 years as an Ohio State football analyst for WTVN Radio in Columbus, something that introduced the coach's passion and affection for his alma mater to a whole new generation of fans.

In 2000, Bruce was inducted into the Iowa State Athletics Hall of Fame and followed that honor in 2003 with induction into the College Football Hall of Fame. A year later, he was inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame.

His final public appearance at Ohio Stadium came Oct. 1, 2016, when he was honored by the Ohio State marching band as one of only a handful of non-band members to dot the "I" in Script Ohio. During halftime of an eventual 58-0 win against Rutgers, the coach again donned a dark-colored suit, walked out on the Ohio Stadium turf one

more time, and doffed his trademark fedora to a crowd that responded with a thunderous standing ovation.

The coach received a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease last August but still made an appearance at his annual Beat Michigan Tailgate Party in November, looking determined to meet his newest adversary with every bit of the grit and determination he leveled against any opponent.

He celebrated his 87th birthday March 8 with a visit to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center to watch a spring practice session then returned to his home in Dublin, Ohio, where he passed away early in the morning of April 20.

Current OSU running backs coach Tony Alford, who played for Bruce at Colorado State, echoed many others when he said, with the exception of his father, no other person had more influence on his life than Bruce.

"He changed the culture of Colorado State football in just two years," Alford said. "He took a bunch of underachievers and forced us to believe in ourselves and each other. He had this way about him that you not only heard

what he said, but you also listened to what he said. I think that's important."

Alford crossed paths with Bruce several times after both left Colorado State, including in 2015 when the Akron native had been contacted by Meyer and offered the running backs position at Ohio State. After six years at Notre Dame, Alford didn't know if he wanted to make a change – that is, until his phone rang on a Friday afternoon.

"It was Coach Bruce," Alford said with a smile. "He asked if I had been offered the job, and when I said that I had, he asked, 'Well?' I told him I hadn't made a decision, and that's when he said, 'Stop thinking, son. You know what to do. It's time to come home. I'll see you on Monday.' And then he hung up."

"I looked at my wife and said, 'Call the realtor.' That's how big an influence Coach Bruce was in my life."

Longtime Ohio State football historian Jack Park said the coach's passing marks the end of an era that many consider the program's golden age.

"In a lot of ways, Coach Bruce represented one of the last links to Woody Hayes," Park

told BSB. "Down through the years, there have been many players and coaches who have been important to the Ohio State football program, but in my opinion, Coach Hayes is one of, if not the most important."

"But when Coach Hayes was fired after the 1978 season, Ohio State football was at a crossroads. Replacing an icon the likes of Woody Hayes, who had been the head coach for 28 years, was going to be difficult enough. But when you add the circumstances under which Coach Hayes was to be replaced ... well, I think the university needed a unique man to fill that void, and in my opinion, Coach Bruce was the perfect choice."

Perhaps former OSU All-America lineman Jim Lachey, who played for Bruce and later coached with him in the arena league, put it best when he said, "No matter what happened along the way, Coach Bruce always represented Ohio State with so much humility and so much dignity. He was just a class act."

"If Coach Bruce has a legacy, that's it. He was a class act all the way."



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EARLE BRUCE: 1931-2018

Bruce's Passion Carried Over To All Aspects Of Life

By RYAN McGLADE
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Cloud cover above the Ohio State campus on April 25 cast a gloomy backdrop as people gathered at St. John Arena that morning to celebrate the life of former OSU football head coach Earle Bruce, who died April 20 after an extended battle with Alzheimer's.

Upon entering the venerable hall, however, videos of Bruce being played on the scoreboard depicting his unyielding passion for Ohio State football offered a moment of joy for those in attendance.

Longtime Columbus WBNS 10-TV sports director Dom Tiberi emceed the ceremony, which lasted about an hour. Former Ohio State cornerback William White, who was a 1987 team captain and All-Big Ten Conference selection for Bruce, delivered the invocation.

From there, former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, current Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford, sports director of Columbus radio stations 610 WTVN and 105.7 The Zone Matt McCoy, current OSU wide receivers coach Zach Smith, who is Bruce's grandson, and current Buckeye head coach Urban Meyer each took a few minutes to share their memories of Bruce.

Tressel opened his speech by pointing out that Bruce had love affairs throughout his life, starting with OSU when he was a player and student assistant for Woody Hayes in the early 1950s, to his wife, Jean, and his family, to his career as a high school football head coach, to his time as a college football head coach at Tampa, Iowa State, Ohio State, Northern Iowa and Colorado State, circling back to his affinity for the Buckeyes once he retired from coaching.

"With Coach Bruce, love affairs never end, that's just the way it is," Tressel said.

Tressel was the head coach at Ohio State from 2001-10. He was an assistant on Bruce's staff at OSU from 1983-85. But in Tressel's mind, he said he was always an assistant for Bruce, who had a resounding presence around the Ohio State campus once he retired from coaching in 1995.



TIM MOODY

REMEMBERING A MENTOR – Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, who coached under Earle Bruce at Ohio State and Colorado State, was the final speaker at a memorial held for Bruce at St. John Arena on April 25.

"Somebody asked me earlier in the week, 'How many years did you coach for Coach Bruce?' " Tressel said. "I said, 'Thirteen.' They said, 'You were an assistant coach for 13 years for Coach Bruce?' I said, 'No, I was an assistant coach for three years, but I was the head coach here for 10 years. But he was in the building, so really, I was an assistant

coach for Earle for 10 more years.' That's just the reality of the situation."

Alford, who was a running back at Colorado State from 1987-90, played for Bruce as a junior and senior in college. It just so happened that Meyer was an assistant on Bruce's staff at Colorado State in 1990, Alford's senior year.

Roughly 25 years later, Meyer interviewed Alford and eventually offered him the running backs coach position at Ohio State prior to the 2015 season. Alford said Bruce called him and told him to take the offer.

After Alford accepted the job, he said Bruce took him out to dinner to celebrate.

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EARLE BRUCE: 1931-2018

When they arrived at the restaurant, Alford said everyone inside stopped what they were doing to meet Bruce and take pictures with the former Buckeye coach, gestures that struck a chord with Alford.

"I'm 46 years old and I had never looked (Bruce) in his eyes and told him how much he meant to me," Alford said. "So, I promptly told him how much I admired him, how much I trusted him, how much faith I had in him, and I thanked him for being the influence that he was on my life. I looked him in the eye and I told him I loved him.

"What I would ask all of you to do – I took too long – if there is anybody in your lives who has influenced you, has helped you, has guided you, let them know. Thank them, thank them as often as you can."

McCoy then took the stage and shed light on Bruce's time in the media. McCoy worked 23 years alongside Bruce at 610 WTVN doing pre- and postgame shows for Ohio State football, as well as other responsibilities.

McCoy recalled one particular instance when he and Bruce were in the studio together watching Ohio State play Notre Dame in the 2016 Fiesta Bowl. The Buckeyes received the kickoff to begin the second half leading 28-14, largely due to Ezekiel Elliott, who finished the game with 149 yards rushing and four touchdowns, three of which came in the first half.

Ohio State's drive at the start of the second half featured nine plays – five rushes and four passes. Despite the play-calling slightly favoring the ground game, McCoy said Bruce was not pleased.

"Whenever (Ohio State) would throw, even completed passes, Earle would say,

'Run the ball. They can't tackle Zeke,' " McCoy said. "As fate would have it, this particular drive ended with an interception, and Earle lost it. He stood up, shouted at the TV, 'What are you doing?'

"Before I knew it, Earle had his phone out and was scrolling down his contact list. He looked at me and said, 'I'm calling Urban.' I told him, 'Coach, two things: One, I'm pretty sure he doesn't have his phone with him right now and two, even if he does, he's a little busy and I'm pretty sure he's not going to answer.' Earle looked at me and said, 'He'll answer if it's from me.' "

McCoy's speech dovetailed into Smith's. The oldest of Bruce's 12 grandchildren, Smith said Bruce grandfathered like he coached.

"He loved his players, he loved his coaches who coached for him just like he loved his daughters (Lynn, Michele, Aimee and Noel) and loved his grandchildren," Smith said. "It was the same to him, believe me, I can tell you. Being a teenage grandson of his and not renewing your license plates, he reacted about how I would imagine he reacted when, Tony, you fumbled (at Colorado State). It was the same man – passionate with energy."

After Smith shared a few memories about his grandfather, the memorial then shifted to what was termed, "The Fourth Quarter," signaling the last portion of the proceedings. To open the final act, the marching band played "Hang on Sloopy," the song that is played at the beginning of fourth quarters of Ohio State football games.

After "Hang On Sloopy," Meyer opened his speech by saying, "Heaven just got a little more intense."

Meyer was a graduate assistant for Bruce

at Ohio State in 1987, Bruce's last season as the Buckeyes' head coach. As previously alluded to, Meyer also was the wide receivers coach at Colorado State while Bruce was there.

Meyer eventually became a head coach, and his last stop before Ohio State was at Florida. He led the Gators to a match-up against Arkansas in the 2006 SEC Championship Game, what Meyer called the first big game of his career as a college football head coach.

Reflecting on that contest against the Razorbacks, Meyer remembered sending his players to their hotel rooms after they finished their pregame meal to get ready to go to the stadium. What Meyer didn't know was that Bruce was in the room where the team ate.

"As the players leave, I sit down, I feel a nudge, I look over and say, 'Oh, hey, Coach,' " Meyer said, referring to Bruce. "He said, 'How are you doing?' I said, 'I'm not doing very good, not very good at all.' "

"By then, the servers are picking up the dishes, probably 25 around us picking up the dishes. And here's this older coach basically verbally assaulting and attacking a coach. He stands up and starts pounding me with the famous finger. He pounds me in my chest and starts screaming at me in front of these young ladies to the point where they went and got security. They didn't know who this guy was.

"He says, 'You've gotten your team to this point because you've let them play and you let the MF'er go.' Now he's at the top of his lungs. He starts pounding on my chest, 'Let the MF'er go.' He just kept screaming at me. So like any coach who worked for Earle Bruce, I grabbed my

pen, I write on my game-plan sheet right at the bottom, 'Let the MF'er go,' in big, bold letters."

Meyer then transitioned the anecdote to the game. Florida took a 17-7 lead into half-time. While in the locker room, Meyer said the team found out that USC had just lost to UCLA. That result meant the Gators would be in the national championship game if they beat Arkansas.

"The team feels it, and I did not do a great job of calming the team down," Meyer said. "Sure enough, we went out and we played like we were playing for the national championship. Turnover, touchdown Arkansas. Turnover, touchdown Arkansas. Next thing you know it's 21-17 and we're losing."

Following Arkansas' go-ahead score, Florida managed to return the ensuing kickoff only to its own 8-yard line. The Gators were unable to move the ball on three plays and faced a fourth-and-10.

"What do I do?" Meyer said. "Like any coach, I grab my folder, I stare at the game plan, and what do I see? 'Let the MF'er go.' So I called a fake punt on fourth-and-10 from my own 8-yard line. Obviously, I'm telling you this story because I'm not sure I would have survived down in Florida if that would have not happened. We got a first down and the game changed. I can speak on many here today that Coach Bruce has influenced many former players and coaches with decisions such as that."

Florida went on to beat Arkansas, 38-28, and shellac Tressel's Buckeyes in the national title game, 41-14.

The service observing Bruce's life concluded in fitting fashion, with the playing of Ohio State's alma mater, "Carmen Ohio."

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Remembering Earle Bruce

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer: "Buckeye Nation lost one of its own. Thoughts and prayers to the Bruce family. My mentor and friend, thank you for all you did for the Ohio State University, and all those players and coaches whose lives you made a difference in."

Former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel (2001-10): "He was just so loyal to his family and coaches, his players, Ohio State, the game of football and his colleagues in the media when he became a part of that family. You just knew he was there for you. You would get a phone call from him when you needed it. He just had a sense of when someone that he loved needed a shout-out. There are memories for all of us. We all have different memories, different times, different impacts, but you always knew he was there for you."

Ohio State wide receivers coach Zach Smith, Bruce's grandson: "RIP to one of the finest men I've ever met. The impact he had on those he loved, cared about, coached and mentored has left a legacy that will pay forward for generations. No greater example than the impact he's had on me. He will be missed, but his presence here lives on."

Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford, former Colorado State running back (1987-90) under Bruce: "He was much more than a coach. He was a father figure, mentor and, most importantly, a leader of young men. He will be missed."

Michigan State head coach Mark

Dantonio, former Ohio State graduate assistant under Bruce (1983-84) and defensive coordinator under Tressel (2001-03): "RIP to one of college football's finest coaches and mentors. Will never forget his wisdom, humor and grit."

Texas head coach Tom Herman, former Ohio State offensive coordinator (2012-14): "My heart goes out to the Bruce family. It was a joy and a privilege to be around Coach Bruce and his wisdom for three years. He will be missed."

Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh, who played quarterback for the Wolverines while Bruce was coaching Ohio State: "The U of M football program and Harbaugh family send our prayers and condolences to the Earle Bruce family on the passing of a football icon. Simply said, Coach Bruce was a respected husband, father, friend and football coach."

Former Ohio State assistant Glen Mason (1978-85): "Earle was very demanding. You better pack your lunch when you go to work every day. It was always a constant push to get better. But you knew his heart was always in the right place. You knew it was about having the well-beings of the players and coaches, first and foremost, in mind. The way he went about it with his work ethic, his integrity and his passion for the game of football and his love for Ohio State was second to none."

Former Ohio State defensive lineman Matt Finkes (1991-94): "One of the best to ever

roam the sidelines. Great coach and better man. Will miss you and your stories, Coach."

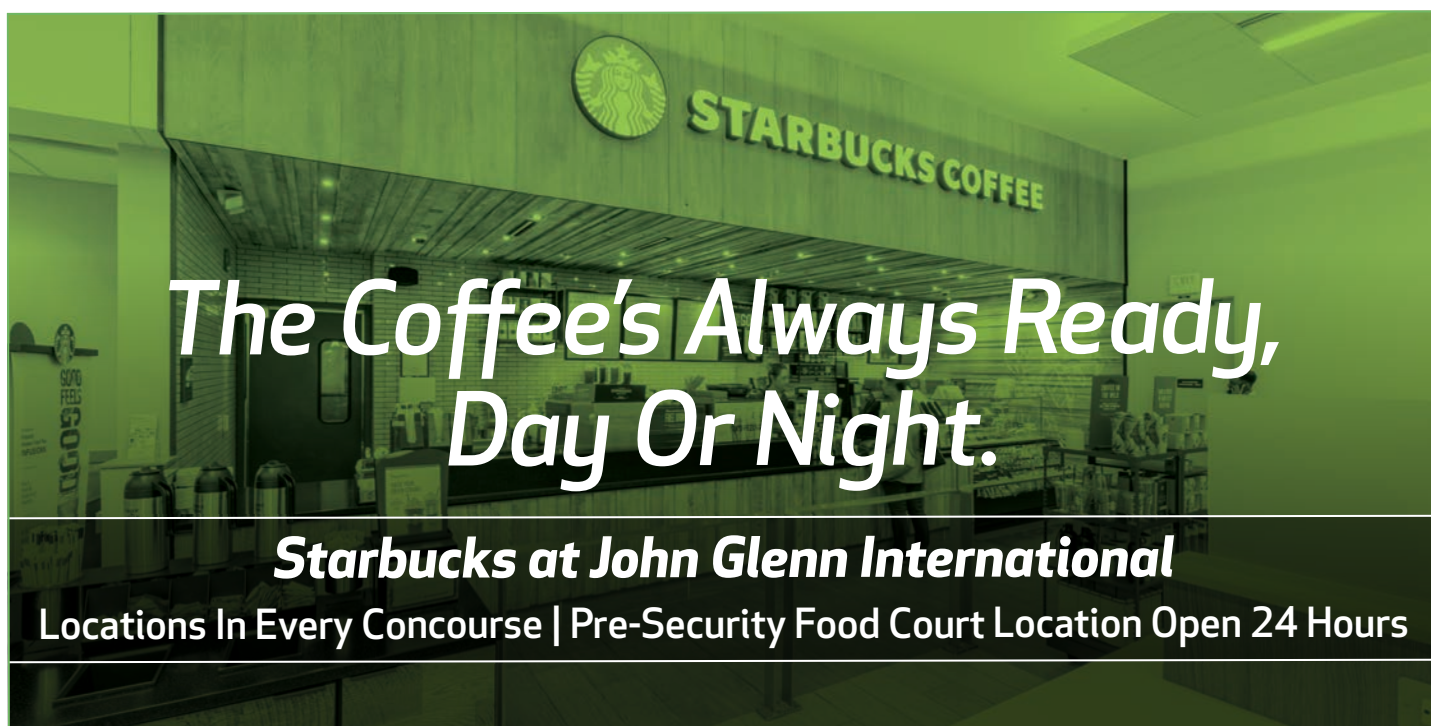
Former Ohio State fullback Vaughn Broadnax (1980-83): "My freshman year was real tough for me. Both my parents were hospitalized throughout the season and that year, and then my father passed away that Thursday before my spring game. I kept a lot of it in throughout the year. It affected my grades, it affected my practice but I actually played in the spring game. It was that following Monday that we had my father's funeral, and Earle Bruce showed up with the captains – Doug Donley, Art Schlichter and those guys. That meant the world to me. Some of the things he did trying to be that surrogate father will always, always stand out in my mind."

Former Ohio State quarterback Mike Tomczak (1981-84): "Sad to share the passing of Earle Bruce. One of my favorites! I'll miss our talks, Earle."

Former Ohio State wide receiver Dee Miller (1995-98): "Rest in heaven, Coach Bruce, it was an absolute honor to work with you for two years at 610 (WTVN). Those times were some of my most memorable Buckeye memories. Don't think you knew how much that meant to a young kid from the south side of Springfield, Ohio."

Former Ohio State linebacker Joshua Perry (2012-15): "Rest in heaven, Coach Earle Bruce!"

Northern Iowa head coach Mark Farley: "Our thoughts and prayers for the family of Earle Bruce. Once a Panther always a Panther."



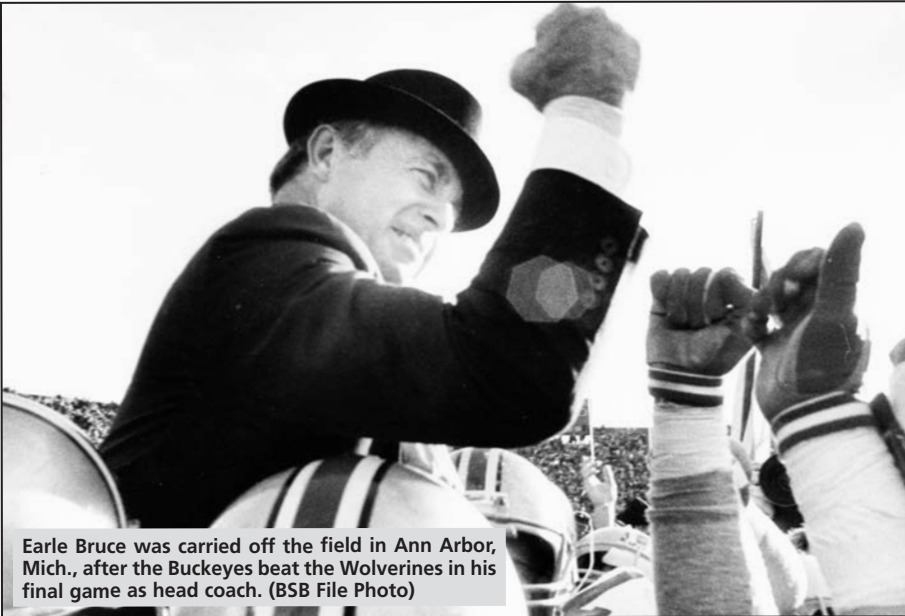
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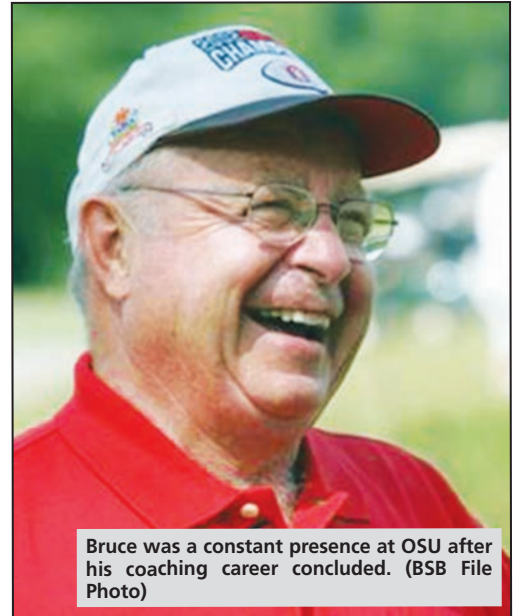


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In Memory Of Earle Bruce



Earle Bruce was carried off the field in Ann Arbor, Mich., after the Buckeyes beat the Wolverines in his final game as head coach. (BSB File Photo)



Bruce was a constant presence at OSU after his coaching career concluded. (BSB File Photo)



Bruce coached the Buckeyes to 81 victories during his Hall of Fame career in Columbus. (BSB File Photo)



Bruce's grandson, Zach Smith (right), followed in Bruce's footsteps and became the wide receivers coach at Ohio State, a position he still holds. (BSB File Photo)



Bruce concluded his Ohio State career with a 5-4 record in The Game. (BSB File Photo)

OPINION

Passion, Toughness Defined Bruce On And Off The Field

This August would have been 50 years of my association with Coach Earle Bruce. I knew Earle first as a player, then as an assistant coach, and even later as a fellow football analyst for 610 WTVN.

COACH'S CORNER With Bill Conley

When asked to describe Earle as a position coach, words like passionate, tough and intense come to mind. As a matter of fact, the same words can also describe him as a head coach and as a football analyst behind the microphone. As most coaches, he demanded perfection on every technique and every play. Most of all, he expected his players to play physical, win the battle in the trenches, and never let up. He expected his coaches to be good teachers and good recruiters, and to be responsible for their players' actions on and off the field. That's a sure formula for success and for winning championships; Earle Bruce was a winner and a champion.

Earle Bruce truly loved Ohio State. Coach Wes Fesler recruited him as a scholarship running back. He played his freshman year but got hurt in August practice prior to his first season of varsity competition. Earle Bruce could never play the sport he loved after that injury.

Ohio State's new head coach, Woody Hayes, demanded he get an education and kept him on scholarship. Woody even had Earle serve as a student coach to keep him involved in the game and work toward his degree. Ironically, it would be Earle Bruce, nearly thirty years later, who would take over for his mentor as head coach of the Ohio State Buckeyes.

Earle loved being the head coach of his alma mater and everything that came with it. He always reminded everyone of the many traditions associated with the program such as senior tackle, the "Horseshoe," the gold pants, the marching band and, most importantly, the great rivalry against the "team up north." The team which he held a winning record over, and a team he would coach his last game at Ohio State against.

Just like in his coaching, Earle Bruce handled his unjustified firing like a champion. He fought through all the emotions of this untimely action by staying focused on the task at hand – beating Michigan. He wouldn't let us coaches and players get sidetracked. It was

business as usual. Earle coached hard that game but the players played even harder that November day in Ann Arbor, Mich. They were not going to let the man they respected so much go out losing to the greatest rival of them all. The "Earle" headbands were the symbol that the Buckeyes used to show support for their coach, but the way they played is now legendary. They took on the character of the man himself as they played with toughness, determination and Buckeye pride.

Earle Bruce had every justification to turn his back on the university that mistreated him, but he had too much class for that. He not only would return to Columbus when his final coaching days were over but embraced Ohio State University once more. He became a great ambassador for the school, a mentor for future head coaches and a great friend to all of us. He had come up through the ranks as a former Ohio high school coach, and those coaches knew they always had an ally in Earle Bruce. Under that hard shell that Earle displayed was a man of compassion for others.

A great family man who truly adored his wife, Jean, and his wonderful daughters. He never showed arrogance or selfishness and was as honest as the day is long. He wasn't always the most diplomatic of individuals, but you always knew where he stood. Earle Bruce stood for all the right things in coaching and in life itself.

Need For Speed

Perhaps the biggest news coming out of the spring scrimmage this year is the fact the Buckeye squad that takes the field this fall may be actually the fastest and most explosive team ever at Ohio State, at least on the offensive side of the football. The running back and wide receiver units are made up of athletes who can burst through the line of scrimmage or catch a short pass then turn it into a big play. It is true the defense was limited on what they were allowed to do during the scrimmage, but they also were given the benefit of the doubt with the tag for a tackle rule and don't touch the black shirts at quarterback. No matter the rules, speed is speed and the offense displayed plenty of that all day long. Although starting running back Mike Weber had only one carry, he went 63 yards and took it down inside the 5-yard line. The trio of Weber, J.K. Dobbins and freshman Master Teague give the Buckeyes depth to go along with the speed factor.

Especially impressive was the maturity and emergence of several newer faces to the

receiver corps. Parris Campbell is already known for his athleticism and acceleration, so he was used sparingly in the scrimmage, but he still hauled in four passes for 40 yards. Binjimen Victor is quickly becoming a go-to guy. His 91 yards are just a taste of things to come. The real star of the scrimmage as a receiver was Demario McCall. He showed his versatility by playing multiple positions, and his big-time potential was displayed when two of his 11 receptions went for 50- and 42-yard touchdowns. Add in Austin Mack and Jaylen Harris to the mix and, just as at running back, you've got speed and numbers.

Quarterback Dilemma

Most of the talk the entire spring boiled down to who will be the starting quarterback. Tate Martell is an athletic zone-read quarterback who is quick and a definite run threat especially in the red zone. He is limited, however, in his ability as far as the passing game is concerned. Due to his height, he is limited to quick passes, crossing patterns between the hashes or the sprint-out passing game that ties in with his running ability. The trouble with sprint-out passes is you have a restricted area to throw and the passes have to leave the quarterback's hands in a timely manner. As talented as Tate Martell is, I do not believe he's really in the mix to be a starter. He can, however, be given a special package of plays to be used in given situations and in specific areas of the field.

Dwayne Haskins has the strongest arm of all. He displays the ability to put the football in tight places and to throw it downfield. He is not as good a runner as his competition for the position, but he has proved the ability to pull the ball down when necessary in the heat of battle. Perhaps his biggest advantage is the fact he has the most game experience and has proved worthy when called upon. The players have seemed to respond to his presence on the field.

Joe Burrow is the most versatile of the three quarterbacks. He has a good arm, makes good decisions the majority of the time, and can make yards with his feet when stepping up or bouncing out of the pocket. He is steadily improving in terms of accuracy and timing, and like Haskins, his teammates seem to have confidence in his leadership. The dilemma for Burrow is how long will he wait to find out if he is the starter. He has the ability to go to another big-time program and play right away, thus enhancing his chances of playing at the next level.

The final choice for the coaching staff will probably center around the intangibles each man possesses – elements we have mentioned such as leadership, making the right decisions, handling pressure, and the confidence the players and staff have in them. Urban Meyer would love to go into the season with all three quarterbacks, but part of the decision is not

to make. If Haskins or Burrow doesn't get the nod soon, it may lead to a major distraction going into August camp, and no head coach wants that situation.

Offensive Line

The offensive line is a work in progress and always will be, and it has little to do with talent. What I mean by that is that defensive linemen are generally quicker and more athletic, and they are constantly moving. Just check out the times of the various NFL combine events – defensive linemen score better than offensive linemen time wise on the sprints and shuttle drills. Defenses incorporate a scheme of various line stunts, twists, slants and angles in order to make it tough on offensive linemen who have to win their battles physically as well as mentally.

The key to the offensive line puzzle is to make the pieces fit – getting the players in the right position. Two solid centers in Brady Taylor and Josh Myers are fighting to replace Billy Price at that spot. It's also imperative that the Buckeyes determine who starts at left tackle, the guy who protects the quarterback's back side. Isaiah Prince and Thayer Munford appear to be the starting tackles, but who will hold down that coveted left tackle position has yet to be determined.

Defensive Expectations

Probably the biggest area of recruiting significance since Urban Meyer came to the helm at Ohio State is the emphasis on the quality number of talented defensive linemen. The ability to rotate fresh and quick defensive linemen into the game is devastating to opposing offensive lines. Despite losing players such as Sam Hubbard, Jalyn Holmes, and Tyquan Lewis, there are more than adequate replacements. If the spring scrimmage was any indication, Chase Young can be a special player. Buckeye quarterbacks are lucky they were off limits to getting hit during the spring game or Young would have had a field day. Young, Dre'Mont Jones, Nick Bosa and Robert Landers are four guys who have the talent to be dominant up front in 2018 – a common theme the past few seasons.

The secondary and linebacking corps look to be on solid footing with good quickness and athleticism, but it will be tough to replace Damon Webb as a leader and as a playmaker. Jordan Fuller and Isaiah Pryor appear to be ready to answer the call at safety. Damon Arnette and Kendall Sheffield were impressive in man-to-man coverage at corner in the scrimmage, and with Jeffrey Okudah coming back from shoulder surgery, the secondary should be solid. Like the case with Okudah, Tuf Borland missed spring practice with an injury, so the reps went to guys like Baron Browning and Pete Werner who combined for 10 touch tackles in the scrimmage. All in all a more than respectable afternoon for a defense that was handcuffed most of the afternoon.



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OPINION

Bruce's Legend Has Little To Do With Coaching Record

Earle Bruce is a Buckeye legend. No. His record doesn't say it. Bruce was a good coach, not a great one, at Ohio State.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

He was 81-26-1 in nine seasons, averaging just under three losses a year. His best team was his first, taking an 11-0 record to the Rose Bowl before losing to USC and finishing fourth nationally.

Never again did a Bruce team finish in the top five nationally. He never won a Rose Bowl. He won two Big Ten titles outright, and his teams were co-champions two other times. Importantly, he had a winning record (5-4) against Michigan.

By today's standards, standards raised considerably by the work of Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer, Bruce's record wasn't great at Ohio State. It was good.

But Bruce is a legend because of the complete package – most notably when it came to Ohio State, but also when it came to anything that had to do with football.

After Ohio State fired Bruce near the end of the 1987 season, he didn't quit. He coached at lesser programs – Northern Iowa and Colorado State – for five more years.

The last time I talked to Bruce, he was coaching the Cleveland Thunderbolts in the Arena Football League back in 1994. You would have thought he was getting ready for an Ohio State-Michigan game based on the passion in his voice.

Earle Bruce loved football – football at any level.

Bruce called it quits in 1996 at the age of 65 after two more seasons in the Arena Football League with the St. Louis Stampede.

That's when Buckeye Nation really got to know Bruce, lover of the Buckeyes and the game of football. He gave impassioned speeches to the players before Michigan games. He poured out his heart with evaluations of games on the radio. He wasn't afraid to say when he thought

the Buckeyes needed to play harder and smarter.

As a coach decades earlier – while some might have questioned his success – there was no questioning his commitment to his players, the game of football or Ohio State University.

He was in his third season as coach when Buckeye Sports Bulletin began publishing in 1981. He was the first coach above the high school level I ever covered.

I probably didn't realize it in 1981, or over the next few years. But looking back, he really was a model example for a college coach, carrying himself with integrity and doing what he thought was right for his players, assistant coaches, school and fans (even if he did fire a young assistant named Nick Saban after that 1981 season).

The example for his commitment to his team that I remember most was from 1983. The Buckeyes blew a late lead and lost on the road to Illinois, 17-13 – OSU's first loss to Illinois since 1967.

Many of the old Big Ten stadiums, at least then, had very limited space for locker rooms and media areas.

So while Bruce was giving a postgame talk at a heartbreaking time to his team in one corner of the locker room, the small group of traveling media from Ohio was in another corner. Bruce noticed the eavesdropping. Considering his talk a private matter with his team, Bruce angrily ordered the media away.

A little while later, Bruce calmly answered the typical postgame media questions until Tim May of the Dispatch noted that we really couldn't hear clearly what he was telling his team. May asked Bruce to summarize the talk. Bruce exploded. That was the end of the postgame Q&A.

Bruce wasn't picking a fight, or really even being rude. He was showing the sensitivity he had for his private relationship with his players.

It's no wonder that when Bruce was fired before the 1987 Michigan game, band members went to his front yard to perform and players donned "Earle" headbands for the Michigan game in support of their coach and in defiance of the school's sloppy work in firing Bruce.

Thirty-one years later, Buckeye Nation lost a legend when Earle Bruce died at the age of 87.

The All-Bruce Team

My favorite players from the Earle Bruce era are Art Schlichter, Keith Byars, Chris Spielman and John Frank. But there are many others worth noting, some who starred on the field and some who didn't.

Below are the 51 players from Bruce's OSU teams who went on to be drafted into the NFL:

- 1980 – Jim Laughlin, Mike Guess and Ken Fritz.
- 1981 – Doug Donley, Al Washington, Todd Bell, Calvin Murray, Keith Ferguson, Vince Skillings, Robert Murphy and Ray Ellis.
- 1982 – Art Schlichter, Anthony Griggs and Bob Atha.
- 1983 – Jerome Foster, Gary Williams, Joe Lukens and Tim Spencer.
- 1984 – William Roberts, John Frank, Rowland Tatum, Shaun Gayle and Thad Jemison.
- 1985 – Jim Lachey, Kirk Lowdermilk and Mark Krowicz.
- 1986 – Keith Byars, Pepper Johnson, Byron Lee and Larry Kolic.
- 1987 – Sonny Gordon, Jamie Holland, Scott Leach, Jim Karsatos and Cris Carter.
- 1988 – Eric Kumerow, Chris Spielman, Alex Higdon, Tom Tupa, William White, George Cooper, Ray Jackson and Henry Brown.
- 1989 – Jeff Uhlenhake, Vince Workman,

Derek MacCready and Everett Ross (Juniors on Bruce's last team in 1987).

- 1990 – Jeff Davidson, Joe Staysniak and Tim Moxley (sophomores on Bruce's last team in 1987).

- 1991 – Vinnie Clark (a freshman on Bruce's last team in 1987).

Logo In Campaign Literature

Almost anyone who follows Ohio State knows how aggressively the school protects the use of its logo. But OSU apparently took a pass recently when questioned about photos former Buckeye Anthony Gonzalez used in his campaign literature as a Republican candidate for a northeast Ohio congressional seat.

A Gonzalez campaign mailing showed him in an Ohio State uniform with Ohio State and Nike logos, and the recognizable Buckeye leaves on his helmet. University officials contacted by Andrew Tobias of cleveland.com declined to say whether Gonzalez sought permission to use such photos or whether they have declined similar requests in the past, Tobias reported.

The story also noted that records show OSU Athletic Director Gene Smith gave Gonzalez a \$2,500 campaign donation in August.

The University of Michigan's policy, Tobias reported, states that "as a general principle, candidates for office and political organizations" may not use its trademarks," citing the school's tax-exempt, nonprofit status, and may not use terms such as "Go Blue" or "Hail to Michigan" in campaign signs or posters.



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Ohio State vs. Penn State: Sept. 28-30 – 2-night motorcoach trip to State College/Bedford Springs area with 2 nights hotel at the Omni Bedford Springs Resort in Bedford County, Pa., with breakfast daily and game tickets. See website.

Ohio State vs. Purdue: Oct. 19-21 – 2-night motorcoach trip to Indianapolis/West Lafayette, Ind., with hotel accommodations at the new Drury Inn located in Carmel, Ind., with breakfast daily and Drury Inn's famous "kick-back party" on Friday night with game tickets. Pricing on website.

Ohio State vs. Michigan State: Nov. 9-11 – 2-night motorcoach trip to Mt. Pleasant/East Lansing.

Mich., with accommodation at the Soaring Eagle Casino Resort and Hotel in Mt. Pleasant with daily meal allowance and casino credit and game tickets. See website for pricing.

Ohio State vs. Maryland: Nov. 15-18 – 3-night motorcoach trip (or land only) to Washington, DC/College Park, Md., with accommodations at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Georgetown with breakfast daily and full day of DC touring on Friday and game tickets. Pricing and inclusions on website.

Macy's Day Parade Package for TBD BTL First Ever Parade Performance: Nov. 21-23 – 2-night air package from Columbus (land only available) leaving on Wednesday with Friday return and accommodations at the Sheraton Times Square with breakfast, daily airport transportation and private outdoor parade viewing on parade route with private brunch included. Full program on our website.

Indians vs. Yankees: Sun, July 15 – Same-day motorcoach trip to Cleveland to see the Indians vs. the Yankees for 1:05 pm game with club-level seating and all-you-can-eat from 1 hour before game until end of 7th. All info on our website.

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Bruce's Legend Only Grew After OSU Departure

It's funny. Earle Bruce's path to being a Buckeye legend started when he was fired as coach at Ohio State.

Termination – unless you are a coach with the type of built-up cachet as a Woody Hayes, who won three national championships and was part of the legendary “10-Year War” with Michigan – usually starts you on the path to oblivion among a school's fan base. But Bruce, who passed away on April 20, seemed to start on his path to Buckeye lore when he lost the Ohio State job the week of the 1987 Michigan game.

His time as Ohio State head coach started positively enough in 1979. He led Buckeye football out of the depths reached by Hayes' firing following the punching of a Clemson player in the previous season's Gator Bowl by leading OSU to an undefeated regular season and its first trip to the Rose Bowl since 1975.

But the first chink in the Bruce coaching armor also occurred that season, when the Buckeyes lost to USC in Pasadena, denying the program its first national championship since 1968 – a Buckeye team that had Bruce as an assistant on its legendary coaching staff. A win at the Rose Bowl might have changed the trajectory of his tenure. Instead he quickly fell into the rut that earned him the moniker “Ol' 9-3 Earle.” With each passing season, his status within Buckeye Nation deteriorated.

By the time the '87 season rolled around, many of the team's fans were ready to see him go, and the situation only got worse as that fateful season unfolded.

First there was a humiliating 31-10 loss to Indiana in a game Bruce himself famously called “the darkest day in Ohio State football.” The Buckeyes had been 30-0-1 against the Hoosiers, a team that Hayes had famously vowed would never beat Ohio State again, in the previous 36 years against OSU.

A couple of weeks later, the optics were bad again, when Ohio State lost to Michigan State. The Buckeyes, with Bruce serving as his own offensive coordinator, scored on the game's first play from scrimmage with a surprise 79-yard bomb from Tom Tupa to Everett Ross. A great start! But the Buckeyes gained only 68 yards the rest of the way in a 13-7 loss to the visiting Spartans, including just 2 rushing yards.

During Bruce's postgame interview, an irate Buckeye fan could be heard yelling outside the interview room: “You stink, Bruce! Do something. Why don't you quit?” I am sure he spoke for many from the crowd of 89,915 in the Horseshoe that day.

But things would get worse.

The next week, the Buckeyes were guilty of six turnovers in the second half, giving up a 24-13 halftime lead and falling to Wisconsin – a team that entered the game at 2-6, 0-5 in the Big Ten – 26-24.

The straw that broke the camel's back came the following week, when Iowa visited Columbus. The Hawkeyes were down to their last out, trailing 27-22, facing a fourth-and-23 at the Buckeye 28 with just six seconds remaining in the game. A field goal was of no use. One stop by the Buckeye defense and the game was over.

Instead, somehow, Chuck Hartlieb completed a pass to Marv Cook – the 13th completion to a tight end – at the 8 and he barreled into the end zone with Buckeyes Mark “Bo” Pelini and David Brown in tow.

I think everyone knew that Bruce's days were numbered after those three straight losses.

To understand what happened next, you have to understand what the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry was back then. Oh sure it's big now, but back then it was sacred. This is

before John Cooper's 2-10-1 mark against the Wolverines and the run of Ohio State success against its rivals that started under Jim Tressell and continues today under Urban Meyer. This was the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry of Woody Hayes and Bo Schembechler – and of Earle Bruce. You could fire Bruce after the season. There would have been little uproar. But you didn't fire an Ohio State coach the week of The Game. President Ed Jennings and the OSU board of trustees *did*.

Bruce said it best himself, the afternoon he was fired.

“I think they have a right to fire a person,” he said, “but I think it's very poor timing – right before the Michigan game. I don't think that's quite fair. They can do it anytime, but not before the Michigan game.”

Buckeye fans apparently agreed.

Fans and members of the OSU marching band came to Bruce's home that evening to show their support. A telephone poll by Columbus' WCMH TV, in which 12,000 people responded, showed 90 percent opposing the firing. Fans rallied at a Buckeye practice that Bruce opened to the public – unheard of in an OSU-Michigan week (unheard of, period, today). A plane flew overhead pulling a banner that read “Keep Earle, fire Jennings.” This after planes had flown over Ohio Stadium during the Iowa game with the such messages as “Noose Bruce” and “Earle Call Eldon,” a reference to Buckeye basketball coach Eldon Miller, who had been terminated the year before.

All this outpouring of support came from a group that would have happily bid Bruce farewell at the end of the season.

Yet this is a story that still could have gone in an entirely different direction. That week's saga wasn't over.

Bruce's last team, the team that had all but collapsed down the stretch that season, went up to Ann Arbor and, wearing “Earle” headbands, defeated its archrivals in a hard-fought game, 23-20, battling back from a 13-0 deficit. The players carried Bruce, pumping his fist in his trademark suit and fedora, off on their shoulders into what could have been his Buckeye sunset.

“There's no sweeter victory in the world than one over Michigan in your last game at Ohio State,” Bruce said after the game. “But the real thrill of that football game was for our football team, down 13-0, to come back and win after the week they've had. They showed me a lot by sticking together and playing as a team. You talk about coming back from adversity, coming back from almost disaster. Most certainly, they're made of the right stuff.”

According to BSB's own Bill Conley, who was on the Ohio State coaching staff for that game, Bruce had the right stuff, as well.

“Just like in his coaching, Earle Bruce handled his unjustified firing like a champion,” Conley writes on page 40 of this issue. “He fought through all the emotions of this untimely action by staying focused on the task at hand – beating Michigan. He wouldn't let us coaches and players get sidetracked. It was business as usual.”

“Earle coached hard that game, but the players played even harder that November day in Ann Arbor, Mich. They were not going to let the man they respected so much go out losing to the greatest rival of them all. The ‘Earle’

headbands were the symbol that the Buckeyes used to show support for their coach, but the way they played is now legendary. They took on the character of the man himself as they played with toughness, determination and Buckeye pride.”

That week, that game, were the turning points in Earle's relationship with Buckeye Nation. After the win he uttered words that he would prove true every day for the rest of his life.

“I will always be a Buckeye,” he declared. “This win is one for the Buckeyes. God bless them. I love them.”

Oh sure, Bruce kicked around coaching for several years after that. But it was in his position as an analyst for WTVN radio in Columbus that he gained fame and adoration disproportionate to his success – albeit part of a Hall of Fame career – as Buckeye coach. Fans loved his obvious passion for the Buckeyes, his love of hard-hitting, rock'em, sock'em football, his willingness to criticize the team he loved if he thought they needed criticizing.

Fans realized that when he had said things like calling that 1987 loss to Indiana “the darkest day in Ohio State football,” he meant it. That's how passionate he was about the Buckeyes and their traditions.

Along with Archie Griffin, but in a completely different way, Bruce became the leading ambassador for Ohio State football.

The fact that such successful coaches as Tressell and Meyer, both of whom served under him, touted Bruce's virtues on a regular basis only helped his standing.

On a personal note, back when we first started Buckeye Sports Bulletin, Bruce took the time to do a personal interview with me, a young journalist with photographer Jim Kirkpatrick in tow, just a few weeks into our existence. Today, some 37 years later, I don't know that I could get a private audience with Meyer.

We reprinted the story I generated from the early interview in the April 24 issue of the electronic BSB Quickly.

Bruce provided many great victories in his time at the Buckeye helm, including the '83 win over Oklahoma, the amazing comeback win over Illinois in 1984, the 1985 victory over top-ranked Iowa and his five wins over Michigan and the immortal Schembechler.

After his coaching career, I got to know him as a tremendous – and animated – storyteller. I will never forget the day he regaled me and big Buckeye fans Bruce Peterson and Wally O'Dell with tales of the Massillon-Canton McKinley rivalry after a Buckeye Boosters dinner. He had us in stitches. I know that Bruce and Wally remember that night as well as I do because it was vintage Earle.

Each year over the last decade or so, I got to spend an evening with Earle at the annual gathering of the Atlanta OSU alumni in Columbus, organized by another great Buckeye fan, Bill Gue. He was always animated and entertaining at these events, and I am appreciative of the kind words he would say about Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

In fact, the last time I saw Earle was at the Atlanta dinner this past November. His health was already in decline and he didn't say much. He certainly didn't get up and speak, as was his custom.

But you could tell by his smile he was happy to be among Buckeye fans – among his people.

No Get Well Wishes

Just a few days ago I thought I would be sending get well wishes to my mother, the noted writer and educator Faye Moskowitz, in this space. I don't find that necessary now, as she has battled back from a very serious eye infection and eye surgery with a vengeance. She may look a little like she went 15 rounds with Muhammad Ali, but I can assure you that in that mythical fight with the champ, Faye was never knocked off her feet. She went from major surgery on Saturday, April 21, to teaching her final class of the semester at George Washington University on April 26. Her positive outlook throughout her fight to retain sight in her eye (sadly unsuccessful) and through her surgery and recovery has been an inspiration to me and my entire family. I know there will be some tough moments ahead for Faye, but with her positive outlook and her huge support system, I am sure she will work through them.

By the way, if you are part of that large support system or her loyal legion of fans, no need to send food or flowers. There is enough food in the refrigerator and now creeping into the freezer to feed Faye and my father, Jack, for a month, and there are enough flowers in the house to open up a flower shop. No fooling.

I love you, Faye!

Extra, Read All About It!

This is the last BSB print issue until June 5. But there is no need to miss out on any of the Buckeye sports action. Buckeye Sports Bulletin's revamped website, BuckeyeSports.com, is up and running with all the breaking news, as well as features and commentary, recruiting news, videos and much, much more, 24/7/365.

BuckeyeSports.com is free to all BSB print subscribers and *only* available to BSB print subscribers. This helps keep our new Forum free of some of the clutter and rancor that pops up on other sites open to the public.

Be sure to check in on the site daily to keep up on any breaking news, especially on the recruiting front, and monitor the Forum as well as this is where a lot of the breaking news can be found – again, especially on the recruiting front. The Forum also offers you a chance to interact with the BSB staff and other Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers. Our readers have a variety of opinions, which they are more than willing to share, and with subscribers in all 50 states, we in effect have correspondents all across the nation, posting relevant tidbits that they see or hear. Remember, if you see something, say something on the Forum.

In just the short time the Forum has been on line, there have been threads about Earle Bruce, self-proclaimed super-fan Buckeye-I-Guy, Buckeyes in the NFL draft, OSU basketball sanctions, the design of the floor at the Schott, wrestler Kyle Snyder winning the Sullivan Award and our quest to determine the greatest quarterback on OSU history.

Jump in. Your two cents' worth has the same value as anyone else's.

If you previously signed up to access the electronic BSB Quickly, you are already signed up for BuckeyeSports.com. Sign in with the same user name and password as before. If you have not already signed up for this exciting new service, simply send your name and preferred email address to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com and we will send back simple instructions.

The final BSB Quickly was posted on April 24, but all previous editions of BSB Quickly are archived on the new site, as are all print editions dating back several years.