

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 23, No. 30

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

August 2004

Search Ends With A Thad

For Matta, Coming To Ohio State Is 'The Pinnacle'

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Taking more than a month — and absorbing criticism from local and national media outlets — Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger finally got his man, luring Thad Matta from Xavier to become the 13th head men's basketball coach for the Buckeyes.

"This is the pinnacle for me," Matta said during a July 9 news conference to formally announce his hiring. "I stand before you today to let you know I've accepted this position for one reason and one reason only, and that is to bring Ohio State basketball back into national prominence."

"I do realize that we've got challenges, but I'm here to roll up my sleeves, go to work and bring this thing back."

The Buckeyes had been searching for a new head coach since June 8 when Geiger fired Jim O'Brien for giving more than \$6,000 to former OSU signee Aleksandar Radojevic, who would end up never playing for the Buckeyes.

It took Geiger exactly 31 days from the time he fired O'Brien to Matta's formal introduction. In contrast, football coach Jim Tressel was hired just 15 days after John Cooper was fired in 2001.



TERRY GULIAM

BUCKEYE OF DESTINY — Thad Matta displays the buckeye given to him by a neighbor in 2001, a gift Matta told reporters prophesied his becoming coach of the Buckeyes.

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In This Issue Of BSB



Kevin Bemoll



Rob Schoenhoft

With all of the hubbub over Thad Matta becoming the next basketball coach, it's easy to lose track of football recruiting. Not to worry. We have all the information on Ohio State's two latest verbal commitments — OL Kevin Bemoll and QB Rob Schoenhoft — as well as a feature on WR Brian Hartline, who will sign with OSU in February.

Also inside, as always, you'll find the latest football and men's and women's basketball news, as well as what's up with Buckeyes headed to Athens for the

Reputation As Straight Shooter Precedes Former Xavier Coach

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer



TERRY GULIAM

INTERESTED LISTENERS — OSU players Terence Dials, Matt Marinchick and Tony Stockman were among those in attendance July 9 when Thad Matta was formally introduced as the Buckeyes' new head coach.

"Shocked" was the constant refrain when BSB set out in June to find out what Buckeyes past and present, members of the media and others thought of the sudden dismissal of Ohio State men's basketball coach Jim O'Brien.

Frustrated and discouraged probably could sum up the feelings of followers of the monthlong search for a new coach who were left with few and unsatisfying names to sort.

Now that highly successful Xavier coach Thad Matta has emerged from that pursuit as the winner, the reactions are a little broader, but all seem to go back to the same conclusion: great choice.

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OPINION

Matta Edged Knight As Best Choice

Given about a month to reflect upon the hiring of Thad Matta, it seems to me that Ohio State got it right — finally.

Despite the fact the hiring process seemed to take an inordinate amount of time, OSU athletic director Andy Geiger seemed to get the best guy he possibly could have hired.

I realize that Geiger neither wants nor needs validation from me or anyone else about hiring Matta. Still, from the stench that arose from the media circus that surrounded the search, Geiger needed an A-1, first-class hire. From all I can gather about Matta, Geiger achieved that goal.

Anyone who read my weekly columns on our BuckeyeSports.com Internet site during the search knows that I was initially in favor of hiring Bob Knight. My reasoning was that Knight would have been an instant shot in the arm to an Ohio State basketball program that languishes on the national sports scene somewhere between bass fishing and demolition derby.

I figured that if Geiger wanted to make an immediate splash in the national media — as well as fill an often-empty Schottenstein Center to the rafters — Knight was the only guy out there who could pull that off.

There is no doubt that my choice was a shortsighted one. Knight is 63 and who knows how much longer he'll want to coach after he breaks Dean Smith's all-time record for victories? He also comes with previous baggage — lots of it.

Still, I thought the best guy for the job at the time was Knight. Little did I know then that Matta was even interested in the job. When first contacted, he denied that he was. As it turned out, he was simply trying to protect what he had — job-wise and player-wise — at Xavier.

In Matta, the Buckeyes got an up-and-comer who is a budding superstar on the college basketball landscape. The last two times OSU has hired a men's basketball coach, they got a guy who had little better than a .500 record in three previous stops and a guy who had never been a head coach before.

On resume alone, Matta would appear to be an upgrade.

But it will be his work ethic, how he operates his program and what kind of players he can lure to Columbus — not to mention the bottom line of wins and losses — that will ultimately decide whether this was a good hire or not.

For now, it appears that it was. Stay tuned.

No August Football

If you have been paying attention, you will notice that this edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is the first since 2001 that hasn't had to use the August issue as the annual Football Preview.

That is because for the first time in three seasons, the Buckeyes — and all of college football, for that matter — have reverted to the traditional 11-game season. After starting each of the last two years (and six of the last 10 seasons) with an August opener, OSU

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

with
Mark Rea

returns to a September starting date in 2004.

This time last year, as the Buckeyes were preparing to defend their national championship, controversial running back Maurice Clarett dominated the headlines, first with his suspension from the team and later with his lawsuit against the NFL for inclusion into the draft.

This year, there has been precious little off-the-field turmoil for the Buckeyes. In fact, since the night Louis Irizarry and Ira Guilford decided it might be a good idea to relieve a fellow student of his wallet, and A.J. Trapasso decided he was thirsty — two different times — it has been a relatively quiet last two months for the Buckeyes. (That sound you hear is the faint knocking on wood by most of the OSU coaching staff.)

In fact, most of the news that has emanated from the Buckeyes during the past seven months since the Fiesta Bowl centered around staff changes.

Gone are Mark Dantonio, Tim Spencer and Bill Conley, guys with a combined 30 years of experience on Ohio State staffs. In their places, head coach Jim Tressel made three hires and shifted around the responsibilities of those assistants who stayed.

Linebackers coach Mark Snyder replaced Dantonio as defensive coordinator, and special teams coordinator Luke Fickell replaced Snyder as linebackers coach.

Spencer was replaced by Tressel's brother, Dick, who had been associate director of football operations. His vacated spot went to Stan Jefferson, an administrator and former coach from Mansfield, Ohio.

Conley's spot was taken by John Peterson, who was most recently at Arizona and played his college ball for the Buckeyes from 1987-90.

Meanwhile, Darrell Hazell came over from Rutgers to coach the wide receivers while Joe Daniels gave up that part of his duties to concentrate on quarterbacks as passing game coordinator.

Jim Heacock and Mel Tucker are still defensive line and secondary coaches, respectively, but picked up additional titles as assistant head coach and co-defensive coordinator.

It seems that only the other two Jims — Tressel and Bollman — have the same duties they had when the team flew home from Tempe. But a team in flux is certainly what the Buckeyes are in 2004 — from the coaching staff down to the last man on the end of the bench.

While we all boasted about OSU setting an NFL draft record with 14 players selected in April, the cold, hard truth of the matter is that Tressel and his revamped staff are going to have to find replacements for those 14 guys.

Half of those players logged 30 or more starts in their careers. In fact, the 14 combined to play 613 games for

the Buckeyes, of which 378 — 61.7 percent — were starts. It is little wonder why the program went 25-2 these last two years.

It is also little wonder why some fans enter the 2004 season with some trepidation. New players fill the starting slots at quarterback, split end, tight end, middle linebacker, strong-side outside linebacker, strong safety, cornerback, punter and six of the nine line positions on offense and defense.

You can add into that equation the fact that the starting tailback and fullback are prone to injury, and the collective blood pressure of the Buckeye Nation spikes upward.

Then again, it was much the same way two years ago when the Buckeyes embarked upon the 2002 season. There was a largely unproven quarterback under center, question marks at both receiver spots, a couple of holes on the offensive line and a freshman starting at tailback.

Somehow, Ohio State managed to win every game that season, although the results very nearly gave coronaries to Buckeye fans every Saturday.

Can the team catch lightning in a bottle again? The odds say no, of course. Then again, the odds were against them two years ago, too.

Heisman Hopofuls

Although there are plenty of Buckeyes who are on preseason watch lists for the various postseason awards, you really can't make much of a case for an OSU player being in the early race for the Heisman Trophy.

Most experts are focusing in on last year's winner, quarterback Jason White of Oklahoma, and Kansas State tailback Darren Sproles as early favorites. There are others such as Michigan receiver Braylon Edwards and LSU cornerback Corey Webster. Yeah ... right. Like a receiver or cornerback is going to win it!

Here are a couple of other players with legitimate chances, ones you might want to look out for once the season gets under way in a couple of weeks:

- Senior running back Cedric Benson of Texas, who rushed for 1,360 yards and 21 TDs last year. If the Longhorns can avoid their annual swoon, Benson could be in the thick of the Heisman race.

- Junior QB Matt Leinart of Southern Cal, who threw for 3,556 yards and 38 TDs last year. Anyone in Norm Chow's offense is going to put up numbers. And Heisman voters love quarterbacks (see USC's Carson Palmer in '02 and White last year).

- Senior running back Cadillac Williams of Auburn, who had 1,307 yards and 17 TDs last year. Williams could elbow his way into the race, but the Tigers are going to have to stay in the SEC hunt all year.

- And my dark-horse candidate — Wisconsin tailback Anthony Davis. He had just 682 yards and seven TDs during last year's injury-riddled campaign, but he is the real thing when healthy. Still, the Badgers need to fill several other holes — both offensively and defensively — for Davis to have a viable Heisman candidacy.

COVER STORY: SEARCH ENDS WITH A THAD

X Once Marked His Spot, But No Longer

Continued From Page 1

"It wasn't a race," Geiger told BSB after the formal press conference. "We wanted to be extremely deliberate, and we took our time on purpose. This program has taken a jolt, so we were not going to rush through this."

Although some had speculated that Matta was the central focus of the monthlong search all along, both Geiger and the new coach disputed that.

"My first contact with Andy was (June 24)," Matta said. "I know that I was in a lot of people's minds about this position early on. I was identified as one of the people who should be interested in this job. But I didn't know if I wanted to be interested. I had a job, and I had a great job."

Even after talking with Geiger by phone and meeting with him at an off-campus site, Matta just didn't think he wanted to leave Xavier, where his Musketeers have strung together three straight 26-win seasons which included a trip to the NCAA Tournament's Elite Eight last year.

Matta was scheduled to meet on the OSU campus with Geiger early on July 7 but struggled with that decision the night before the meeting.

"I still wasn't sure that I even wanted to come up here," he said. "But once I decided, it all just kind of fell into place from there."

Matta said the clincher came when he was driving home from the airport after meeting with Geiger and OSU president Karen Holbrook.

"I was not really paying much attention to my driving and was going 58 mph in a 40-mph zone," he said. "A police officer wanted to stop me and let me know that. So she got up to the side of the car, she said, 'Sir, you seem to be in a hurry.' And I said, 'Yes, ma'am, I am.' And she said, 'Is there a problem?' I said, 'Well, there is. Right now I'm kind of torn. I'm thinking about taking a new job.' She said, 'What do you do?' I said, 'I'm a basketball coach.' She said, 'Oh, really. Where?' I said, 'Xavier University.' She said, 'Really? I went to Ohio State.' I said, 'Well, I just took the job.' And she said, 'Have a great day!'"

Matta, who has had successful stints as head coach at Butler and Xavier universities over the past four seasons, signed a seven-year contract with the Buckeyes that increases incrementally after a first-year base salary of \$760,000.

There are also athletic and academic incentives contained in the contract as well as a \$300,000 signing bonus. It is expected most of that bonus will go toward the \$225,000 Matta has to give to Xavier to buy out the remaining nine years of his contract there.

Also included in the deal is a \$2 million annuity available only if Matta completes all seven years of the contract.

According to university records, O'Brien made more than \$1.159 million during the 2002-03 season.

Starting From Scratch

Matta inherits an underachieving Ohio State team that went 14-16 last season and missed the postseason. He

also takes over a program that will be under NCAA scrutiny as collegiate athletics' governing body looks into allegations of wrongdoing during O'Brien's regime.

The new coach insists the specter of an NCAA investigation did not weigh on his decision to take the job.

"We'll take whatever is given to us," Matta said. "I guess what I'm saying is that the job meant more to me than whatever NCAA sanctions may or may not be handed down. We'll deal with that as it comes."

Later, Geiger predicted any NCAA sanctions against the program would be minor.

"I would be very surprised if this coach and this team is penalized very severely," the AD told BSB.

Matta wasted no time putting his stamp on the OSU program. During the morning of his afternoon news conference, he met with his players and it didn't take him long to get his message across.

"The beauty is that they now have a clear understanding of what is expected of them," the new coach said. "They know that the players who work the hardest will get the most minutes."

"I think you'll find that we'll have a fun and exciting style. I want to play fast, but I want to play smart. We will be the hardest-working, toughest team you have ever seen. We will defend, play hard, play smart, and above all play as a team. We have a long, long road ahead of us, but it starts right now."

Coming from the Cincinnati area, it didn't take long for a reporter to ask Matta his opinion about Ohio State playing the University of Cincinnati, something that both Geiger and O'Brien were reluctant to do in the past.

"I don't mind playing other Ohio schools," Matta said. "What I want to do is sit down, look at our schedule and figure out what's best for our basketball team."

"As far as a Cincinnati game — you know, I've just gone through three years of all-out combat and war from the Crosstown Shootout (between Xavier and UC). (But) I think that would be a possibility. I think a lot of times coaches take heat for not playing a team when the other guy may not want to play either, and I don't know what Coach (Bob) Huggins' feelings would be on that."

When a reporter informed him that Huggins has been in favor of playing the Buckeyes, Matta grinned and replied, "Is that right?"

Later, he was quizzed on playing Xavier and was not as receptive to that idea.

"Not right now," Matta said. "I don't know what the significance of that would be with all this going on. Both of us need some time to let us go through things in our respective programs."

Exhaustive Search

Geiger reportedly was stung by some of the criticism leveled at him for taking so long to hire O'Brien's replacement. But he insisted that he had a plan and merely stuck to it.



GREG RUST

ENERGY PERSONIFIED — Energetic both on and off the court, Thad Matta promised fans that his program will feature a "fun and exciting style."

"Our search was deliberate," he said. "Some of you can smile a little bit if you want to, (but) we have taken our time on purpose. This program has taken something of a jolt. It has been a little bit difficult, to say the least, in the past several days and months. So we were not, for a variety of reasons, rushing through this, as you all pointed out to us daily."

"We, however, had our eye on the ball and focused through all of this on getting the very, very best that we could get and we made absolutely sure about everything. We did exhaustive background checks. We did all of the due diligence that the Ohio State University should do, particularly in the circumstance in all candor in which we find ourselves."

"As far as the search committee was concerned, we started on our first day looking for the right characteristics for the ideal coach, and we were very impressed with Thad. We are overwhelmed with his sense of energy, his sense of focus."

"We wanted somebody who has enormous respect and love for the game," Geiger continued. "The game is a way of life, the game of basketball, for the right coach and we certainly have somebody with those characteristics. Integrity and compliance, obeying the rules — all of those kinds of things were very, very important aspects. We wanted intelligence and competence and somebody who is an incredible competitor. Thad Matta is all of those things."

Holbrook echoed her athletic director. "I have to tell you we were extraordinarily impressed when we met Coach Matta," she said. "We liked what he said, and we liked the way he said it. We liked the record that he had. We liked the fact that he's a winning coach."

"But he's a winning coach not only in terms of what the team does, but how the students working with him succeed." Holbrook also issued Matta a challenge.

"We haven't had a (national champi-

onship) team for the last 44 years," she said. "I know that's longer than you've been on this earth, but we expect that we're going to be working toward that as a goal and we know that you're going to lead the basketball team and lead the young men who play men's basketball with us to great successes in the classroom, on the court, and throughout the university."

Hard To Leave XU

Matta admitted that it was difficult to leave Xavier, where his teams won a school-record 26 games each of the three years he was head coach.

There also seemed to be some media conjecture about contentiousness between him and university officials because he first rejected the notion of taking the Ohio State job and then accepted it.

Matta said he was troubled by the way things were portrayed.

"My intentions were never to demean Xavier University or the program," he said. "Dawn Rogers, the athletic director there, is one of my dearest friends and she's a great athletic director. Through this process, she knew everything that was relayed to me. And I take great pride in the three years that I was there and what our kids were able to accomplish."

"But I think with that said, I'm closing the door on that and I'm opening the door at the Ohio State University."

Still, Matta — who turned 37 in early July — has accepted his third head coaching job in just five years, leading some to question how long he will be at Ohio State.

"I think that every move that I've ever made, I've felt better about it," he said. "I felt that it was a better opportunity for me to achieve things. There's no quick way to get to the top. You know, as an assistant coach, I did the same thing. I had to climb the ladder until I felt like I was at the top. And today I stand here and feel like I've reached the top."

And when a reporter asked if he imagined a little longer stay at OSU, Matta smiled and said, "You can ask my wife. I'm sure as hell she hopes so."

Destined To Be A Buckeye?

Early in Matta's July 9 news conference, he reached into his suit jacket pocket and produced a buckeye.

Holding it up for reporters to see, the new coach related a story that occurred in 2001 as he was leaving Butler University to take the head coaching job at Xavier.

"I had been a head coach at my alma mater, and as we were packing stuff up, one of my neighbors, a man named Mert Prophet, a man who had been in athletics for 60 years of his life, showed up at my door," Matta said. "He said, 'Thad, I hate to see you leave, but I'm proud of you and I know you're going to do well.' Then he said, 'I want to give you a going-away present.' And he reached into his pocket and put it in my hand and he closed it."

"As I opened it, I looked at this buckeye and I said, 'Mert, I'm not going to Ohio State.' And he said, 'You need to hang onto that. One of these days, it's going to work for you.' And remember — his last name was Prophet."

COVER STORY: REACTION TO MATTA'S HIRING

Coaches Foresee Matta Fitting Into Big Ten

Continued From Page 1

BSB begged the thoughts of coaches and national college basketball analysts at Nike All-America Camp in Indianapolis on July 8, the day after reports surfaced that Matta had accepted the job. At the July 9 press conference introducing Matta and at the McDonald's Summer League, BSB also rounded up as many current players as possible to get their thoughts on the hire.

A sampling of those reactions follow.

• **Yahoo.com sports columnist Dan Wetzel** — "It's surprising there were any allegations of wrongdoing in the last administration, but you've got to feel really good about bringing a guy like Thad Matta in.

"I think he's an exceptional coach, an excellent bench coach. I think he's very good at taking different types of teams and winning. He wins right away where he goes. Some coaches have to blow up a team and take three years, but I think he'll get the most out of Ohio State right away. When you look at the run to the Elite Eight, he had Duke right there. To get Xavier to an Elite Eight is an incredible accomplishment.

"He's a very serious guy. You're not getting a lot of nonsense with him. I think he's going to represent the school and the state real well. There's never been a hint of impropriety with the guy. I think (he's) a proven winner with a clean record.

"I think he's great. He was going to be a Big Ten coach at some point."

• **Illinois coach Bruce Weber** — "Thad came up through Xavier. One of my old assistants, Alan Major, left Southern Illinois and went to Xavier with him. He's a guy with a lot of energy who has had some instant success as a head coach. You know you're going to have a good coach at a school like Ohio State, and I know he will live up to that.

"He's had very good success. He's taken some pretty good players. He'll have a chance to work with some players at Ohio State who are a little bit seasoned now. I'm not cheering for him, but I think he'll do a good job."

• **Wisconsin head coach Bo Ryan** — "I coached against him when he was at Butler and also when he was at Xavier. My first year at Wisconsin, we had to go to Xavier and play. He's a great coach and a great guy. He's a student of the game and he studies the game as much as anybody I've come across. I think he'll do well in the Big Ten and he's good for the Big Ten. He can coach. He's developed guys. His teams get better as the season wears on. That's what I've noticed about his teams."

• **Gonzaga coach Mark Few** — "The more your team is successful, the more you believe in what you're doing. For me, I've been in the same spot for a long time. I've had a chance to grow and I know what we had to work with. For Thad, this is his third job in five years. That's tough because he has to integrate his system again with a bunch of new guys. It's going to be an interesting challenge."

• **ESPN analyst Jay Bilas** — "I think that Andy Geiger made a great hire. I've been fortunate to know Thad for a while. His Ohio ties and his understanding of how to recruit in that state should give him a running start. I think the world of him as a teacher and a coach. He

is a really good recruiter.

"I think at the end of the day, as long as you get the right guy, it doesn't matter if it takes you 10 minutes or 10 days or two weeks. That's the important thing. The important thing is getting the right guy. I don't know all the things that were said in the process. But if it were me I would simply say, 'I do not discuss my job status.' That way you're not always put in a position to confirm or deny anything because you just don't discuss it.

"You can't hold guys to a standard of, 'Will you take it?' or 'Are you interested?' That's not the way it works. I think Thad did the right thing by taking that job. It's a better job. I think Ohio State and Illinois are the two best jobs in the Big Ten. I don't know how you could, as a Midwest guy and a Big Ten guy, say no."

As for the notion that Matta's success at XU came with players Skip Prosser recruited, Bilas added, "You can always detract from what somebody does. But he did have his own players in there, too. Players develop under him. They did at Butler. He makes kids better and he gets guys to play together, which is a hard thing to do. Everybody looks at basketball as an individual enterprise. To get guys to give up their individual interest for the interest of the team, it's easy to say but it's hard to do. I think Thad does as good a job as anybody with that."

• **Penn State coach Ed DeChellis** — "I think it's a great hire. Obviously, Thad has had a lot of success both at Butler and at Xavier. His teams have made the NCAA Tournament. He has Midwest roots. It's a great opportunity for him and a great opportunity for Ohio State.

"Xavier has lost some great coaches over the years, and for them, it's a tough situation. I don't think it's anything against that university. Sometimes, it's the league that you're in. I think Ohio State may be one of the top 15 jobs in the country. It's nothing against Xavier. It's just a matter of what Ohio State was offering."

• **Minnesota coach Dan Monson** — "Thad has proven he can coach at the highest level. He's taken teams to the NCAA Tournament. He's competed with the best. He's going to fit right into the Big Ten. He's going to do a great job.

"He's had some great teams here the last couple of years. He's from the state of Ohio. He's proven that he knows people in that state. He's proven himself in the ranks."

• **Iowa coach Steve Alford** — "He's a great guy and a good friend of mine. He's had an unbelievable run at Butler and at Xavier. I'm sure he will continue that at Ohio State. It should be a good recruiting situation."

On Matta moving up to the Big Ten, Alford added, "I played in it and I coached in it. He knows that coming in that it is arguably the best league in the country, year in and year out. The big thing is when I was at Manchester and Southwest Missouri State, in each league you've got games that you think will win at home or on the road. In the Big Ten, you can never go in and think that way. You have to bring your best every night."

• **North Carolina coach Roy Williams** — "I was just like Thad — I had real good players and I just sat over there and clapped for them and smiled and looked good. Thad will do a great job

there. He did a great job at Xavier. It's a great job. It's a hard job, I think everybody has to understand that. But I think he will do a fantastic job there.

"He had a great run at Xavier and he thought it was best to leave. I'm not one to second-guess somebody else. But Thad is a great guy. The fact that we each won 100 games in our first four years, it turned my hair gray and his vanished."

• **Nebraska coach Barry Collier** — "I think it's a great job and it's a great fit for both parties. Thad is a high-energy, relentless type of guy. We used to have a slogan at Butler (where Collier coached Matta and preceded him as head coach) which was, 'We want to be like a bulldog on a pork chop.' Well, that would describe Thad Matta.

"I don't know that he's a workaholic; I just think he's tremendously limited in his scope of things he does. He's got family that he loves and spends time with, but he can't golf a lick and he doesn't really do much of anything else. He couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. He's a basketball guy."

Collier is not surprised at Matta's fast ascent in the coaching ranks.

"He was a guy that played really hard and smart," he said. "He knew the game, he knew time and score, all those kinds of things. He was somewhat limited physically and he also had a bad back his senior year. I'll give him that."

"He developed a passion for coaching, which I don't think he really had with the intensity that he has now. He got that during his first few years out, and I think he'd probably tell you that."

"When the job opened I thought that Thad definitely would be contacted — although you never know what road a school would like to go down. If they were looking for a high-energy guy that has got the ability to recruit and coach and implement an entire program and have the academic backing, then that's what they got."

• **Junior post Terence Dials** — "All college basketball players watch the tournament and his team did really well — and they've been doing well the past couple of years. If he had that success with this team, we can become great."

"He's just an energetic coach. He's young, he relates to his players real well, and he gets them to play real hard and play team basketball. That's what Ohio State needs right now."

Dials, who served as a representative of the team on the school's search committee, added that Matta's stellar record with graduating players may have put him over the top.

"I can tell you that was huge for the committee," he said.

• **Junior guard Ricardo Billings** — "It was a long month. We were curious and Terence wouldn't tell us anything. We didn't know what was going on and were like, 'Man, would they just hurry up and get someone.'

"I was just happy that we had gotten a coach and everything was settled. At first I didn't know a lot about Coach



Roy Williams

Matta, but I know a little bit about his track record and his teams, how tough they were. I was excited. I'm ready to go and I'm ready to learn. Coach Matta always has good guards for him and hopefully we can play like that."

• **Freshman forward Jermyl Jackson-Wilson** — "I didn't know much about Coach Matta coming in, but I've sat down and talked to him a couple of times and I'm around the office all the time. He's a nice guy. It seems like he's going to push us real hard and get after it. He's guaranteed us the tournament, and now I think we'll make the tournament, too.

"He just said if we play the Ohio State way we'll be back in the tournament. That's what he keeps saying — 'the Ohio State way' — and he said it's starting right now. That got everyone excited."

"Coach O'Brien was a great coach, but we got another great coach. (Hiring) Coach Matta made up for everything."

• **Senior center Matt Marinchick** — "It's a mixed feeling because it's real exciting but it's a big change. There's something to get acquainted to now. This will be my fifth year and it's a shock what all happened, but I think we picked a great guy. I haven't known him that long but everything he's saying and his attitude, it's the right attitude to have to have a winning season."

• **Junior forward Matt Sylvester** — "I just like it because it's a perfect fit. He's a young guy, I think he's going to be easy to relate to, and he's energetic and just seems like he has a lot of youth left in him. From what I hear he's a great coach. He took a team like Xavier, that had talent but not more talent than anybody out there, to the Elite Eight, which is a step away from the Final Four. So in my eyes he's got to be a great coach."

A product of Cincinnati's Moeller, Sylvester was recruited by Prosser and said Xavier was his runner-up.

"I chose Ohio State for Jim O'Brien," he said, "and as sad as it is to see him go, we really have a great opportunity and a great coach in Thad Matta."

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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Matta Plucks Huggins' Former Top Aide

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With apologies to Jim O'Brien and Paul Biancardi, you could say no men's basketball coach is having a worse time at the expense of the proceedings at Ohio State these days than Bob Huggins.

When Huggins didn't even receive a phone call about the opening at OSU seven years ago and O'Brien got the job instead, Huggins reportedly was put off by the whole affair. When many asked Huggins why his Cincinnati Bearcats never schedule Ohio State, he blamed the hierarchy in Columbus.

In recent years, Huggins has lost his next-door neighbor (Matt Sylvester) to OSU and also the reigning "Mr. Basketball" in Ohio (Jamar Butler), who de-committed from UC and is now enrolled at Ohio State.

Huggins probably expected his name would come up when O'Brien was fired June 8 and Biancardi was linked to a scandal involving a former player. Instead it came off the board almost as fast as he was arrested for DUI that evening and subsequently suspended by the school. To add insult, OSU hired Xavier coach Thad Matta, Huggins' old Crosstown Shootout nemesis.

That was followed by the latest blow: Dan Peters, Huggins' longtime assistant and best friend in the business, took the last full-time opening on Matta's staff at Ohio State. OSU announced the hiring of

Peters and Brandon Miller, Matta's new director of basketball operations, July 19. They were added to a staff that already included full-time assistants John Groce and Alan Major.

Peters had been serving as interim head coach at UC in place of Huggins, who was suspended in mid-June after the drunken driving arrest. To accommodate the loss of Peters, and to stick to the plan to reinstate Huggins Aug. 27, the school made the ultimate public relations move by tabbing former UC and NBA great Oscar Robertson as the interim coach.

While Huggins was nonplused about losing the 50-year-old Peters, Matta was ecstatic to land someone with so much experience and knowledge of Ohio basketball.

"Dan is a terrific addition to our staff," said Matta, who was named Ohio State's head coach on July 7. "He is an Ohio guy who has enjoyed success at virtually every level. He has a tremendous passion for the game of basketball and is one of the great teachers in the game."

Peters, who has spent the past five years as an assistant and later the associate head coach at the University of Cincinnati, was born in Cleveland, grew up in Canton and is a 1976 graduate of

Kent State. Prior to Cincinnati, Peters spent six seasons as the head coach at Youngstown State. He also has been the head coach at Walsh College and St. Joseph's College of Indiana, amassing a combined record of 237-140 in 14 years at those three schools.

"I am thrilled to be part of the Ohio State staff and have the opportunity to work with Coach Matta," said Peters. "This is one of the top programs in college basketball and I can't wait to get started. This is a great day for my family and me."

While Peters was able to reflect on his move northeast to Columbus, Groce and Major, who gained immediate approval as new OSU staff members, weren't afforded the time. Groce accompanied Matta to the Reebok ABCD Camp in Teaneck, N.J., July 8 while Major headed directly to Nike All-America Camp in Indianapolis and was one of the first coaches to sign in at the event.

Both also were on hand at the Schottenstein Center auxiliary gym July 9 for Matta's formal introduction as OSU coach.

Groce is considered Matta's most trusted aide and top recruiter. The 32-year-old Danville, Ind., native began his collegiate coaching career in 1993 at his alma mater, Taylor University in Upland, Ind. He got his first shot at the Division I level three years later when he joined Herb Sendek's staff at North Carolina State.

Matta hired him at Butler in time for

the Bulldogs' Midwestern Collegiate Conference regular-season championship in 2001.

When Groce followed Matta to Xavier the following year, Matta said, "John is a high-energy guy. He has tremendous passion for the game of basketball."

Groce also is no stranger to success. He is a perfect 11 for 11 as an assistant in helping his collegiate team to the postseason.

Similarly, Major knows what it's like to build momentum at a program. The 35-year-old grew up in Indianapolis, served as a team manager at Purdue for Gene Keady and graduated from PU in 1992. He started his coaching career as an assistant at Cal Lutheran and helped the Kingsmen make the Division III NCAA tournament all three years he was there.

With a master's degree in education in his pocket, Major went on to join the staff at Pacific and helped mold center Michael Olowokandi into the top pick of the NBA draft. He served one year under Bruce Weber at Southern Illinois in 1998-99 and then returned to Pacific to stir another turnaround under head coach Bob Thomasen.

Matta hired him to XU in 2001, stating, "Alan's a guy who brings great experience with not only recruiting but also



Dan Peters



John Groce



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OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Former Assistants Left In The Lurch

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Fans and followers of the Ohio State men's basketball program weren't the only ones who were rocked by the news that head coach Jim O'Brien had been fired June 8.

His own assistant coaches had found out about a damning deposition alleging wrongdoing by O'Brien and former assistant Paul Biancardi only in late April — just before O'Brien addressed the issue with athletic director Andy Geiger — and had precious few hours notice when Geiger lowered the boom.

Geiger moved swiftly in naming associate head coach Rick Boyages interim coach, but he took an entire month to hire Thad Matta as O'Brien's successor.

Suffice it to say that was not a wonderful period of time for Boyages, full-time assistants Monte Mathis and LaMoita Stone, director of basketball operations Randy Shroat and video coordinator Dave Egelhoff.

"Andy met with all of us and promised us he would take care of us, which was nice to hear but left me thinking, 'What does that mean?'" Stone told BSB. "I mean, you have to go on almost like nothing's happened. We still came to the office, made what calls we could and planned to head to all the camps (in July). That's all you can do."

coaching and working with players. He's worked under some great coaches and teachers of the game."

As he prepared for a long July on the road, Major told BSB that successful recruiting evaluation simply is a result of hard work.

"The first thing you have to identify is skill level," he said. "You want to see what a guy's strengths are and what he's capable of. You have to make sure you do a great job with that. Don't just watch a guy once — make sure you do it two or three times. You have to make sure you're thorough."

Dan Wallenberg, associate director of athletics communications at Ohio State, said the staff roles had yet to be outlined but that he was to meet with Matta the first week of August to discuss the matter. OSU has not yet put out official releases or bios for any of the coaches other than Matta and Peters.

Some expect that Peters' role could be similar to that of former OSU assistant Bruce Parkhill — a strong teacher and practice planner who only occasionally, if at all, will be involved with the recruiting process. Under relaxed NCAA rules, however, any of the full-time staffers can handle recruiting chores so long as they meet guidelines for evaluation periods and don't exceed the number of coaches allowed off campus at a given time.

Meanwhile, the hiring of the 25-year-old Miller as director of basketball operations could be a good sign for Dave Egelhoff, OSU's incumbent video coordinator. A Butler grad, Miller carried the title of video and equipment intern at XU, but he isn't expected to work in that capacity at Ohio State.

While Egelhoff waits, head trainer Vince O'Brien, strength and conditioning coach Anthony Glass and equipment manager Brice Westfall have trudged on with assurances their jobs are safe. All three also are involved in Olympic sports at the university.

Xavier Marches On

Ohio State wasn't the only school

As the search dragged on into July — and Boyages remained a candidate with a behind-the-scenes interview with the OSU brass — the rest of the staff could only nose around about other job openings and otherwise march on in the hope they could stay at Ohio State.

After weeks of floating in limbo, things moved quickly for the assistants. In a matter of three days in early July, Matta interviewed for and accepted the job and hired two of his XU assistants.

At the news conference to formally introduce Matta as head coach, Geiger announced that he had offered Boyages a position within the athletic department as an administrator.

Boyages accepted, although his role had yet to be determined. "Actually I'm supposed to meet with Andy sometime in the next couple of weeks to discuss that," Boyages told BSB Aug. 2. "I really don't feel like I should discuss it right now."

Boyages, however, said he was grateful for the consideration. "It's a great gesture on his part, and I'm appreciative of it," he said. "I'm flattered by it."

However, it isn't easy for a coach to get basketball out of his blood. Boyages returned to the East in late July for a fami-



Rick Boyages

ly getaway but also to run a couple of basketball clinics.

"We plan to have Rick as part of the Ohio State University for a very long time," Geiger said. "Rick is a very unique individual and we want him to stay with us. In fact, we are looking forward to having him with us for as long as he wants to stay."

Geiger, however, has told a couple of reporters and others publicly that he expects Boyages to be back in coaching within a year and that he would aid that transition. Boyages posted a three-year record of 35-52 from 2001-03 at William & Mary, but he had inherited a weak program.

As for the other assistants, post-O'Brien life has been even less seamless.

Matta ironically landed a job on the staff at Xavier, but at press time Stone and Shroat were looking for work and Egelhoff was still waiting to see if he would be retained by Matta.

Stone is a rising name in the profession with strong ties to his native area of Detroit, a basketball hotbed. However, he appears to be a victim of timing right now.

"There'll be some more movement in August after people come back from the road," he said. "I've got some prospects but nothing concrete. In our profession, trying to find a job in July is like trying to find a needle in a haystack."

Geiger reportedly offered three months severance pay to staff members in need, which should help. So should the reassurance that they are not alone.

The changeover at Ohio State and Xavier marked the 33rd and 34th schools to name a new head coach since the start of the 2003-04 season.

adding a glut of 30-somethings to its men's basketball coaching staff.

Xavier responded swiftly to the loss of Matta by hiring 35-year-old Sean Miller, a Matta assistant already well-respected by his peers and praised for his likability with recruits.

In fact, when Matta addressed reporters in Columbus July 9, Miller already had been named his successor at XU.

"Sean was our first choice from the start," XU athletic director Dawn Rogers said at a news conference held at the school the evening of July 8. "We were very fortunate to have a national-caliber coach available who also has a clear understanding of the program and who supports the mission of our university."

"Sean has been a big part of our success over the past three years, and I know he is the right choice to build on that success for our future."

"This is where I want to be," said Miller, a former star point guard at Pittsburgh and XU's associate head coach the past three seasons. "We're looking forward to moving on at

Xavier."

Miller became the school's 16th men's basketball coach and followed the three with the most success in Pete Gillen (202-75 from 1985-94), Skip Prosser (148-65 from 1994-2001) and Matta (78-23 from 2001-04).

The Associated Press reported that Miller had been signed to a five-year contract, but details of the deal were not released. Matta, who had been under contract at Xavier through 2013, reportedly was paid close to \$800,000 annually at XU.

Some Xavier followers berated Matta for leaving the Musketeers high and dry for what was a perceived last-minute jump to OSU. Matta tried to deflect the criticism by proclaiming a deep affection for XU. He also said he would work with Miller as the two set their staffs, which apparently was true since Bill Comar attended Matta's press conference but ended up staying on as the Musketeers' director of basketball operations.

"Sean and I are working right now," Matta said July 9. "As Sean and I have

said, we're a family. We want to take care of everyone in our family and see what they want to do through Xavier and Ohio State."

Also staying within that pipeline was Miller's hire of former OSU assistant Monte Mathis. Reports had Miller favoring bringing on his brother, Archie, from Western Kentucky, but that may have breached the school's policy against nepotism.

Miller also hired N.C. State director of basketball operations Kenya Hunter as a new full-time assistant, snagged Wake Forest assistant Chris Mack (a former player at Xavier), and retained graduate assistant Mario Mercurio.

Comar, Mack and Mathis are in their 30s while Hunter and Mercurio are in their 20s. Mathis is now the elder statesman of the staff at 37.

Miller, by the way, was a record-setting prep star for his father, John, at Blackhawk High School in Beaver Falls, Pa. Who broke several of his school records? Ohio State point guard Brandon Fuss-Cheatham.



Alan Major

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OHIO STATE RECRUITING PROFILE

Success Vs. Fox Gave Hartline Confidence

By ERIC LOUGHRY

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

He had heard it before, but when Brian Hartline was told by Dustin Fox that he undoubtedly had the ability to play for Ohio State, it was all he needed to hear.

Hartline, a receiver entering his senior season at Canton (Ohio) GlenOak High School, the same school that produced Fox, attended OSU's senior advanced camp in late June.

Fox spent some time with Hartline that weekend, and Hartline had the opportunity to go one on one with Fox, considered a candidate for postseason honors at cornerback for the Buckeyes.

Hartline's younger brother, Mike, the quarterback at GlenOak and one of the top junior QB prospects in the country, was on hand to throw for the drill.

A decent amount of the time, he was able to connect with his brother.

"Dustin's an amazing athlete, and when I was able to go up against him — and in all fairness, I think I did pretty decent — he reassured me how I could play at Ohio State," Hartline said.

The vote of confidence went a long way.

"I know for a fact that (Dustin is) going to be playing at the next level if he just stays healthy," Hartline said. "And for him to say, 'You impressed the heck out of me,' and then talk to the coaches and tell them that (I'm) a good athlete, that meant more than anything to me. It reassured me, too, that this is the place for me."

The OSU coaching staff evidently was as impressed with Hartline as Fox. The day after attending the Buckeyes' senior advanced camp June 26, Hartline was told by offensive coordinator Jim Bollman that the scholarship offer was on the way. Soon after, Hartline verbally committed to the Buckeyes.

GlenOak head coach Jack Rose knew Hartline had the ability to garner an opportunity to play major college football as far back as the player's freshman year. And though Hartline knew he had ability, it took some convincing from Rose for him to see he had a future in football beyond high school.



Brian Hartline

After all, Hartline grew up playing quarterback, where he played for the Golden Eagles freshman team before moving to running back for the varsity the second half of his sophomore season.

"I still, to this day, don't understand how I did that," he said. "And that was a huge difference — going from freshman football and playing at quarterback, where you know it's the least contact probably out of all of them, to varsity the next year and playing running back, where you get hit every single play whether you're blocking or running."

It was not until last season, when Hartline moved out to receiver, that he began seriously entertaining the notion of playing big-time college ball.

"I got settled in at receiver, and I knew that was the position for me," he said. "And it came along really fast, so I knew I could make that step."

Rose recalled another player he coached who didn't fully realize his own ability and potential: Fox. The coach sees parallels beyond athletic ability between the former standout at GlenOak and the current one.

"I told Jim Tressel that (Hartline's) cut

The Hartline File

NAME — Brian Hartline

HIGH SCHOOL — Canton (Ohio) GlenOak

POSITION — Wide receiver

HEIGHT, WEIGHT — 6-2, 174 pounds

40-YARD DASH TIME — 4.59

BENCH PRESS — 300 pounds

GRADE-POINT AVERAGE — 3.80

COLLEGE ENTRANCE TEST — Scored a 21 on the ACT. He plans to take the test again to gain a better score in order to obtain the required number for various majors he might consider.

VITAL STATISTICS — Bill Kurelic of BuckeyeSports.com and The Ohio Football Recruiting News ranks Hartline the 14th best prospect in Ohio. He totaled 40 receptions and six touchdowns as a junior in what amounted to roughly six games at receiver.

COACH'S COMMENTS — "He's humble but he knows he has ability. He's a great competitor. He wants to be good. He wants to be a great player (and) takes coaching. He's kind. I think he's very sensitive to other people's feelings." — GlenOak High School head coach Jack Rose

HOBBIES — Hartline enjoys water sports, such as skiing and knee boarding, as well as snowboarding.

SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN — Committed to Ohio State June 28. He also was offered by Michigan State, Iowa, Pittsburgh, Stanford and Vanderbilt.

out of the same cloth as Dustin Fox, the same type of kid," Rose said. "He and Dustin are so similar. You know, sometimes I want to almost shake Brian and tell him, 'You're really, really good.'"

"I used to want to do that with Dustin, too. I used to tell him, 'Dustin, I don't think there are too many players better than you in the state of Ohio.' They look at you like they're almost in shock."

Though Hartline entered last season as GlenOak's No. 1 quarterback, it was evident to Rose in the summer that the younger Hartline brother would eventually take over at QB that season.

Hartline and the coaches agreed that Mike wasn't quite ready at the outset of the season, and the plan was to have the younger Hartline relieve his brother at QB for a quarter or so the first couple of games with Brian shifting to receiver.

The move for each became permanent midway through the third game of the season when GlenOak trailed Austintown 7-20 at halftime.

A Hartline-to-Hartline aerial assault ensued in the second half, with Mike connecting with Brian time and time again as the Golden Eagles waged a furious comeback before eventually falling 28-20.

"Those two are the missing piece of the puzzle," Rose said. "They get the offense going. From that point on, Brian really saw that if he goes to receiver he's helping the team, and having his brother play quarterback was really helping the team."

"From that point in time, we knew we had to go with Mike at quarterback and Brian was going to go to receiver."

Brian excelled at wideout, finishing his junior campaign with 40 receptions and six touchdowns.

Though he had played quarterback the majority of his football life, he was ready for the move. As a kid, playing in the back yard, he had always preferred catching passes to throwing them.

"Deep down, I always knew that I was going to be a receiver because I didn't feel that I could play at the next level as a quarterback," he said. "I just didn't think so, and I was just biding my time until I could be a receiver. And then I knew it would happen eventually. My brother came out of the woodwork, and I was like, 'This is my time,' and we made the switch."

His time at quarterback has benefited Hartline at receiver, though. He realized that he had a feel for what the quarterback would be expecting in different situ-

ations and on different routes. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the quarterback shares the same last name.

"I don't think you can get much more chemistry, at least the chemistry between a quarterback and a receiver, than brothers," Hartline said. "And a lot of people have to go to practice and they have three hours a day to get that chemistry or practice."

"Well, we get to go out in the back yard and throw around the football for fun. And he gets a feel for how I move, and my speed, just little things like that. But I also get used to his throwing the ball, and just catching it, and that kind of stuff, so I love it. I think it's awesome. It's fun and I have the privilege to be able to play with a good quarterback."

While Hartline will play mostly at receiver his senior season, he most likely won't play there exclusively.

"As I told him, he'll probably be in some situations where he's going to run the football, be a running back, and we may even look at him at quarterback," Rose said. "But 90 percent of his play this year will be (at receiver)."

Hartline also will play at strongside cornerback on defense. He saw spot duty in the secondary last season, coming in as an extra back in nickel and dime packages. But he will be a two-way starter for the first time.

He's picking up the position and had an interception in a recent seven-on-seven scrimmage.

"I'm just getting the hang of it, but it just comes with experience, and it's slowly coming along," Hartline said.

Rose was hesitant to overextend Hartline, but the GlenOak coaching staff came to the simple conclusion that Hartline was clearly the Golden Eagles' best defensive back and they had to utilize him.

"I talked to him about it, and he's more than willing to play it," the coach said.

Hartline considers himself a receiver first, but he wouldn't be averse to playing in the secondary at Ohio State if that's what is asked of him.

"I feel that I have the mentality of a receiver, but if the coaches honestly think that I will be a better corner or safety or whatever it may be — and from that position I get to the next level — I will give it all I've got," Hartline said. "But from my standpoint, I feel like I'd be a better receiver."

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THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Can't Get Coach K? Then Matta's Just Fine

No one can predict the future. New Ohio State basketball coach Thad Matta may be a complete bust in Columbus. But it is the view from this corner that Ohio State ended up with the best man available for the job.

I say best "available" because let's face it: Coaches like Mike Krzyzewski or Roy Williams weren't going to take the job. The only "name" coach who would have considered the position would have been Bobby Knight, and his candidacy was rejected pretty quickly.

Buckeye fans sometimes see the head coaching job at Ohio State as a little more prestigious than it might be considered within the coaching community. Even under better circumstances back in 1997, Ohio State ended up with what most perceived as AD Andy Geiger's approximate fifth choice in Jim O'Brien — and that time around, the specter of NCAA sanctions against the program was not looming.

Such "names" as South Carolina's Eddie Fogler, Georgia's Tubby Smith and Clemson's Rick Barnes seemed to be the coaches at the top of the list then, with Pete Gillen of Providence, Rick Majerus of Utah, Mike Montgomery of Stanford, Tim Floyd of Iowa State, Xavier's Skip Prosser, Mike Jarvis of George Washington and Steve Alford of Southeast Missouri State also linked to the job. Then, as this time around, Cincinnati's Bob Huggins was also mentioned as a possibility.

Many of the candidates who actually ended up speaking to Geiger secured big pay raises from their existing employers and the selection process ultimately came down to O'Brien of Boston College and Kevin Stallings of Illinois State.

No such list of familiar names accompanied the search this time around. In fact, after Matta had initially said he wasn't interested in the job, the selection process seemed to be centered around Los Angeles Lakers assistant Jim Cleamons, Rice coach Willis Wilson, Penn coach Fran Dunphy and Stallings, who is now at Vanderbilt.

While those four names were being bandied about, I was constantly asked who my first choice would be. Among those four, I really had no choice as each seemed as unimpressive as the next (though Cleamons at least was an ex-Buckeye, albeit one with a dismal record as a head coach).

Against the backdrop of those four, Matta is an extremely attractive candidate. He is young and energetic and has a sparkling record in his brief career as a head coach, including leading Xavier to the Elite Eight at the NCAA Tournament last season. Coming from Xavier, he also has the Ohio recruiting ties that everyone seems to look for in a Buckeye coach, ties that O'Brien never seemed to fully develop.

Still, the hiring of Matta doesn't guarantee the coming of a basketball dynasty in Columbus. While the Atlantic 10 is a fine basketball conference, the Big Ten is a definite step up for the coach. Don't forget that O'Brien also led Boston College to the Elite Eight and even Eldon Miller, the season before taking the Ohio State job, led Western Michigan to a 25-3 record and a trip to the NCAA's Sweet Sixteen.

Neither built a dynasty at OSU.

Given the realistic list of candidates, however, you really have to like the

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

choice of Matta as Ohio State's head man.

How Long Will He Stay?

One of the keys to building a dynasty — or even just a strong program — is consistency at the head spot. Will Matta, assuming he is successful at OSU, stay or move on to what he may perceive as a better position?

Since the legendary Fred Taylor's 18-year tenure ended in 1976, the Buckeyes have had five coaches counting Matta. Remarkably, it was the bland Miller who, at 10 years, served the longest time at OSU of the other four. Randy Ayers lasted eight, O'Brien seven and Gary Williams three.

Williams, who never seemed completely comfortable at football-crazy Ohio State, was the only one of the four to leave of his own volition, taking the job at his alma mater, Maryland, and eventually leading the Terrapins to a national championship.

If Matta is able to have the success needed to avoid the fate of Miller, Ayers and O'Brien, it will be interesting to see how long the youthful coach ends up in Columbus.

A quick check of Big Ten schools from the time of Fred Taylor's departure to the hiring of Matta shows that only two schools — Wisconsin and Northwestern — have had more coaches than OSU in that time frame. The Badgers, now led by fourth-year coach Bo Ryan, have had seven coaches, while the Wildcats, coached by fourth-year man Bill Carmody, have had six.

Michigan and Penn State have had the same number of coaches — five — as the Buckeyes.

The leaders in continuity in the Big Ten conference since 1976 are Indiana and Michigan State which have had just two coaches each — Knight and Mike Davis for the Hoosiers and Jud Heathcote and Tom Izzo with the Spartans. Interestingly, each of those schools has been national champion during that time frame.

Minnesota and Purdue have had three coaches and Illinois and Iowa four.

Interesting Items From '97

In researching the last OSU basketball coaching search, I came across some interesting tidbits from this space during that spring of 1997.

I had this to say about Cincinnati coach Bob Huggins:

"It seems that Buckeye fans either love the guy as a potential coach or hate him. There appears to be little middle ground. These strong negative emotions from some of the fans might be a reason Geiger elects to look elsewhere. On the other hand, if Geiger is looking to make a media splash in addition to building a winner, Huggins might be an ideal choice."

Huggins quickly eliminated himself from the derby this time around when he was stopped for alleged drunken driving in mid-June. But this description of his potential candidacy in 1997 sounds like the situation with Knight in this search.

During that '97 search, Columbus' The Other Paper ran an informal poll to

determine their readers' choice as the next OSU coach. Majerus was the leader, followed by Cleamons, Huggins and P.J. Carlesimo were tied for third, followed by a tie between Alford, Jim Harriek and "Nor Huggins."

While Geiger took heat during this search for taking so much time in selecting (I personally never felt there was a need to rush and in the end the deliberate search paid off), he took heat last time because he seemed to promise a "name" coach and ended up with O'Brien, little-known beyond the East Coast.

"I think it's Geiger, not O'Brien, who is on the hot seat," I wrote back then. "He's the one who gave the impression that he was going after a big-name coach. He's the one who elected to not talk to some of the obvious candidates."

Popular choices Majerus, Huggins and Gillen apparently were never contacted by Ohio State.

"He's the one who appeared to settle for a coach with a record barely above .500 at his most recent job."

"Geiger has lived a pretty charmed life at OSU so far. His ambitious building projects have been cause for great excitement. His decision to fire Ayers and (women's basketball coach) Nancy Darsch was met with little criticism. But now he finds himself having to justify his recent hiring."

"One thing I'm pretty sure about is that O'Brien won't spur any great jump in seat license sales (at the unfinished Schottenstein Center) in the upcoming months. He's going to have to prove himself to the basketball fans of Columbus before sales really surge."

"If O'Brien struggles and sales continue to lag, Geiger will be remembered as the one who hired him and will probably be held more accountable than the coach himself."

It's funny how both then and now, ticket — or in that case seat license — sales were an issue. O'Brien, of course, led Ohio State to the Final Four in his second year in Columbus (and first in the new building) and attendance soared.

The Buckeyes drew an average of 17,223 in that first year and 18,702 in the glow of the Final Four the following season. Then the decline started, with 17,540 in 2000-01, followed by 16,603, 16,057 and last season's disappointing average figure of 14,521. Many fans in even that low figure appeared to come to games disguised as empty seats.

Matta has to not only win games but hopefully bring more people out to see the Buckeyes. The good news is that he is bound to initially help sales more than Willis Wilson or Fran Dunphy.

Take Me Out To Alumni Night

The OSU Alumni Association and the International League's Columbus Clippers have joined forces for four alumni association events at Cooper Stadium Aug. 5-8 against Indianapolis and Durham.

Any fan presenting their alumni card can buy one ticket and receive a second ticket of equal value for free, good for up to four free tickets.

And there will be more than just baseball for Buckeyes in attendance. On Aug. 6, the Famous Chicken will be in the house. The game against Durham on Aug. 7 will be followed by an HWA pro wrestling show, and those in attendance on Sunday, Aug. 8, will have a chance to receive a Nolan Ryan bobblehead doll.

For more information, call the Clippers at (614) 462-5250.

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