

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 31, No. 15

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Jan. 28, 2012



## The Urban Meyer Effect

KEVIN DYE

**BUILDING MOMENTUM** – New Ohio State football head coach Urban Meyer (center), seen here addressing the crowd at Value City Arena during halftime of the Jan. 15 men's basketball game against Indiana, has found plenty of recruiting success since taking the job.

### *Recruiting Fortunes Have Turned Under New Coach*

By **ARI WASSERMAN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Experts have a simple two-word explanation for how perhaps the most trying year in Ohio State football history is about to be capped off with what appears to be the most impressive two-month stretch run of recruiting success the program has ever seen.

Urban Meyer.

Not yet on the job long enough for the magnitude of his hire to fully sink in for even the program's closest followers, Ohio State's new head coach has already earned a string of verbal commitments for a 2012 recruiting class that has stormed back from being considered by experts as fairly average to one of the nation's best.

Recruiting experts expected an uptick in OSU's recruiting when Meyer was officially introduced as head coach Nov. 28, but they have been surprised with how quickly the Buckeyes have padded their class with seven highly sought-after verbal commitments.

"Before Meyer came, Ohio State's class was just viewed as a solid workmanlike class built on guys that didn't have a ton of hype or were in-state guys that just committed to the program for more than

just the previous staff," said Allen Trieu, Midwest recruiting analyst for Scout.com. "Then, all of a sudden, Meyer comes in and it is a star-studded top-five class.

"I don't think we were surprised that Ohio State bounced back, but what I am surprised about is how quickly he was able to seal the deal on some of the best recruits in the nation. What he is doing is fairly unprecedented from what we've seen even from some of the best recruiting coaches in college football."

During Meyer's introductory press conference in late November, he said he didn't believe the Ohio State program was broken even after transgressions from former head coach Jim Tressel and a few of the team's former players left the Buckeyes in disfavor with the NCAA.

That was quite the testament given that Ohio State was coming off a regular season plagued by six losses following the firing of Tressel and the loss of one of the most talented quarterbacks in college football in Terrelle Pryor. On top of that, Ohio State's NCAA sanctions – which have since been finalized – had yet to be handed down.

Instead, Meyer said he was energized to prove that Ohio State was still one of the top programs in the nation, mentioning his eagerness to start the

recruiting process multiple times during his first minutes in front of the media.

Not even an hour passed from the time he was at the Fawcett Center lectern before Meyer started making phone calls to all sorts of prospects, many of whom were either committed to other programs or had long ago written off Ohio State as a potential destination.

Some prospects were surprised to hear from him. Some had hoped they'd be on his call list. Others didn't even want to hear from him. But to Meyer, as he had promised only moments earlier, each of the nation's top prospects was worth at least a shot.

"When Urban Meyer calls, they're all answering," said BuckeyeSports.com recruiting analyst Bill Greene. "They're not all coming, but they are all taking his calls. They are all talking to him and they're all impressed with him. He has instant credibility and success, so even kids Ohio State didn't seem to have a chance with wanted to hear what he was going to say."

So far Meyer has proved he fully buys into his thought process that every prospect – regardless of where he stands in the recruiting process – is fair game until he signs a national letter of intent.

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## OPINION

# Paterno's Passing Brings Memories Of Hayes

*"Every day I'm more confused as the saints turn into sinners; all the heroes and legends I knew as a child have turned into idols of clay."*  
– Dennis DeYoung, 1990.

People have a funny way of deciding who and who isn't worthy of their adoration. That seems especially true in the provincial world of college football where following your favorite school is akin to a religious exercise and every opponent is an archrival to be loved and scorned.

Penn State fans and alumni, blindsided by the scandal that has threatened to rip apart everything they came to know and love about their university and football program, are now mourning the passing of legendary coach Joe Paterno, who succumbed to lung cancer the morning of Jan. 22.

But as the Nittany Lions, the Happy Valley community and the entire Blue and White Nation begin the grieving process, they are essentially left to grieve alone – shunned by much of the current college football universe Paterno helped to create and nurture. While the coach's legion of supporters attempt to highlight a life filled with laudatory accomplishment, many others are quick to point out the feel-good story had a decidedly sorrowful ending.

Ohio State fans know how Penn State fans feel. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the death of the most iconic coach in OSU history, yet when the obituaries were written for Woody Hayes, all of the victories, all of the championships and all of the young men whose lives he positively impacted were mere footnotes to the blink-of-an-eye incident that occurred on a rainy December night in Jacksonville, Fla., in 1978.

There is no disputing Hayes and Paterno are two of the most successful coaches in college football history. Yet outside the confines of their own particular constituencies, legacies rich not only in winning but in philanthropy are forever tarnished by the way their careers ended.

A half-hearted slug at an opposing player abruptly ended Hayes' 28-year tenure in Columbus, and an even more half-hearted response to what would become a burgeoning child sexual abuse scandal at Penn State brought Paterno's career to an end after 61 years on campus, including 46 as head coach.

It seems odd the careers of the two coaches could have ended in such ignominy since there couldn't have been two more divergent personalities than Hayes and Paterno.

One went to a small Baptist college with the thought of becoming a teacher; the other attended an Ivy League school with aspirations of a law career. One stressed the importance of blood and sweat; the other took a more cerebral approach to his profession. One had all the subtlety of a sledgehammer; the other preferred a genteel approach.

Both were consummate winners, however, and had a positive impact on the lives of thousands of young men for the better part of the last three-quarters of a century. Hayes began his coaching career as an assistant at Mingo Junction (Ohio) High School in 1935, while Paterno first arrived at Penn State in 1950. But there was much more to each man's life than win-loss records or dusty awards locked away in the corner of some trophy case. Hayes and Paterno were real men – men's men, if you will – who lent their considerable celebrity to worthy causes without ever asking what was in it for them.

Hayes gave his time and efforts to the March of Dimes, an organization that helps

promote the health of mothers and their babies, as well as the Muscular Dystrophy Association long before comedian Jerry Lewis began hosting star-studded Labor Day telethons in 1966. Almost from the time Hayes arrived in Columbus in 1951, the charitable cause in Ohio was a rare one that didn't have the coach serving as honorary chairman or celebrity spokesman.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

He was also legendary for helping his players financially. Of course, that is and always has been a violation of NCAA rules, and Hayes served a one-year probationary period in 1956 and the Big Ten ruled Ohio State ineligible for the 1957 Rose Bowl because the coach had given some of his more impoverished players money from his own pocket.

Hayes never made more than \$35,000 during his 28 seasons as Ohio State head coach – not that he ever seemed interested in money. After his death in 1987, his wife Anne cleaned out his desk and found a number of checks given to him for various speaking engagements. The coach had never cashed them. Whenever he did endorse one of those checks, the money usually went to a former player who has having financial difficulties.

Paterno, of course, made much more money than Hayes during the course of his career, but he was no less benevolent with it. He and his wife donated more than \$4 million of their own money to Penn State, and helped raise more than \$13.5 million toward renovation of the school's library that bears their names.

Yet for all the acts of compassion and generosity each man did behind the scenes, for all the joy they provided their fans as they reached the pinnacle of their profession, all their triumphs and successes, all their achievements and all the goodwill they generated will always provide only a historical postscript to how their careers ended.

The same holds true for former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, who enjoyed a 25-year career of unparalleled success marked by five national championships – the same number of consensus titles Hayes and Paterno combined to win. Tressel also became known as a generous benefactor, donating money for renovation of George Finnie Stadium at his alma mater Baldwin-Wallace and helping to fund a new indoor practice facility at Youngstown State.

At Ohio State, Tressel and his wife Ellen donated more than \$1.1 million to Ohio State for various projects including renovation of the OSU Library and James Cancer Hospital. They also created a fund that has grown to more than \$1.4 million for cancer prevention research.

And yet, a temporary lapse in judgment regarding improper benefits accepted by some of his players will forever taint everything else Tressel has achieved and likely everything else he ever will achieve.

Is that fair? Probably not, but there is simply no getting around the transgressions each man made. You can lead an exemplary life, but if in the flash of a nanosecond you take another person's life, it is pretty much guaranteed your heretofore exemplary life won't matter much to a jury of your peers.

Of course, none of the aforementioned

coaches committed any crime. But the mistakes they made were amplified by the fact of who they had become. They had become our champions, our heroes, our idols – and that made their respective falls from grace that much more difficult to accept.

Rather than lionizing these men and making them the subject of our hero worship, perhaps we should simply take stock of the hard lessons taught by idolizing such admirable yet flawed men. Maybe the problem wasn't that Woody Hayes slugged an opposing player or that Joe Paterno didn't personally seek a resolution to what he was told was going on in his own team's locker room. Maybe the problem wasn't that Jim Tressel thought he could micromanage his way around blatant NCAA violations.

Perhaps the real problem rests at our own doorsteps. After all, we are the ones who made demigods of these flesh-and-blood individuals. If they turned out to be anything less than perfect, can we really blame anyone but ourselves?

## Some Final Thoughts

- On more than one occasion during the final years of his career, Paterno said one of the reasons he never entertained thoughts of retirement was because fellow coaching legend Bear Bryant didn't last very long after he walked away from the game. The old coach proved to be chillingly accurate with that prophecy. Bryant died in 1982, just 28 days after coaching his final game at Alabama, a 21-15 win over Illinois in the Liberty Bowl. Paterno died only 20 days after Penn State played its final game of the 2011 season, a 30-14 loss to Houston in the TicketCity Bowl.

- Super Bowl XLVI will have a slight scarlet and gray tinge when the New York Giants and New England Patriots square off Feb. 5 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. The Giants have two former Ohio State players on their roster – starting tight end Jake Ballard (2006-09) and backup offensive lineman Jim Cordle (2007-09). Meanwhile, New England enjoys the services of former two-time OSU captain Thomas "Pepper" Johnson (1982-85), who is completing his 12th season as a Patriots assistant, the last eight as defensive line coach.

- I made a mistake in the Jan. 14 edition of this column when I wrote the Ohio State defense had finished among the nation's top eight in total defense each season from 2005-10. In truth, the Buckeyes finished 12th in the nation in total defense in 2006 and 14th in 2008. They were seventh or better in every other season during that span, including finishing No. 1 in 2007. OSU was also sixth or better nationally every year from 2005-10 in scoring defense. This past season, the Buckeyes dropped to 19th in total defense and 27th in scoring. Those were the lowest rankings for the unit since finishing 30th in total defense in 2004 and 48th in scoring in 1999.

- Ohio State finished the 2011 season unranked, the first time the Buckeyes had failed to appear in the final rankings of a season since 2001. That was Tressel's first year as head coach and the team finished 7-5 following a 31-28 loss to South Carolina in the Outback Bowl. The following season, the Buckeyes were ranked No. 13 in the preseason and went on to win the national championship.

- Speaking of rankings, hardly any of the early preseason publications have Ohio State among the nation's top 25 teams for 2012. The Buckeyes have not entered any season unranked since 1989.

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Charter Member



# Penn State's Struggles Have Aided Buckeyes

Continued From Page 1

And it has paid off in ways perhaps even Meyer didn't think were possible in such a short amount of time. The Buckeyes' class, ranked in the high teens by Scout before he took over, had jumped to No. 3 in the nation with just over a week before National Signing Day on Feb. 1 – and it could go even higher.

"Without Meyer, none of this would be happening," Greene said. "If you would have hired Mark Dantonio, Tim Beckman or Bo Pelini, this would not be happening. This is Urban Meyer. He loves it. He is rejuvenated, he's recharged and he did most of this without a staff because they were prepping the team for the Gator Bowl when the ball first started rolling."

Just two weeks after Meyer was hired, the head coach made his first bold statement when he landed verbal commitments from Canton (Ohio) McKinley defensive end Se'Von Pittman and Glen Ellyn (Ill.) Glenbard West defensive tackle Tommy Schutt.

Not only were the four-star Pittman and five-star Schutt considered to be two of the best defensive linemen in the country, each abandoned verbal commitments to other Big Ten schools – Michigan State for Pittman, Penn State for Schutt – before joining Ohio State's class.

Momentum took over from there. Six days later, Meyer received a commitment from five-star defensive end Noah Spence, the nation's No. 2 player at his position out of Harrisburg (Pa.) Bishop McDevitt.

Spence, rumored to be a strong Penn State lean and perhaps even a silent commitment to the Nittany Lions, was one of the most coveted prospects in all of high school football and his pledge made arguably an even bigger statement than the commitments from Pittman and Schutt.

Meyer wasn't finished flipping prospects from his rivals, either, doing it three more times in a four-day span in mid-January.

The Buckeyes landed a commitment Jan. 15 from four-star offensive tackle Taylor Decker of Vandalia (Ohio) Butler, who was previously committed to Notre Dame, and two days later received a verbal from offensive guard Joey O'Connor of Windsor, Colo., a three-star prospect who was once committed to Penn State. That was followed Jan. 18 by a pledge from four-star linebacker David Perkins of South Bend (Ind.) Washington, a former Notre Dame commitment.

Two days later Meyer took another commitment from Penn State and added it to Ohio State's class when receiving a pledge from four-star linebacker Camren Williams out of West Roxbury (Mass.) Catholic Memorial.

Grabbing the pledge from Williams, a 6-2, 200-pound outside linebacker ranked by Scout as the No. 16 overall outside linebacker in the 2012 class, capped a six-week run unlike anything seen in recruiting in recent memory.

"Urban Meyer may be the best recruiter

in the country," said CBS College Sports recruiting analyst Tom Lemming. "The success he's already enjoyed has basically erased all the issues they were facing in recruiting the past year. It's like it didn't happen."

## Finishing Strong

Following Williams' verbal, Meyer had 23 commitments in this year's class, but he could be eyeing five more pledges before National Signing Day.

Though the total number Ohio State can afford to take is somewhat subjective given the scholarship reductions imposed by the NCAA and the uncertainty of future attrition on the current roster, Meyer still has offers out to many prominent prospects. And even more could be on the way.

"There could be new names popping up yet," Greene said. "He's not done. It's not like he is limited to the talent pool out there that we're aware of. He may go after other kids.

"(When he was) at Florida, you'd see new names pop up three days before signing day. Someone would come in for a late visit and he'd sign that kid, too. There is no ceiling here yet. He's not done. I can guarantee you that."

But even if there are only five spots remaining in the 2012 class, the known prospects with Ohio State offers are enough to keep the average fan on the edge of his seat until signing day.

The Buckeyes are currently heavily pursuing a wide range of prospects, all of whom are at different points in their recruiting process. The top names on Meyer's current radar are three-star safety Bam Bradley of Trotwood (Ohio) Madison; four-star athlete Joel Caleb of Midlothian (Va.) Clover Hill; five-star offensive tackle Jordan Diamond of Chicago Simeon; four-star offensive tackle Kyle Dodson of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, a current Wisconsin commit; three-star defensive end Jamal Marcus of Durham (N.C.) Hillside; four-star speedster Davonté Neal of Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral; four-star linebacker Dalton Santos, a current Tennessee commit from Van, Texas; and four-star cornerback Armani Reeves, a teammate of Williams at West Roxbury (Mass.) Catholic Memorial who is still currently a Penn State commitment.

"He's got a reasonable shot at every one of the kids still on their board," Greene said. "A lot of those names are going to be a part of this class by the time it is all said and done, so in actuality all the things he's accomplished is just the beginning.

"All the kids he's still in on are highly rated kids. They're definitely going to finish this class off strong, and I predict it will be a top-five class or even higher by the time all the dust settles. It is less than two weeks before signing day, so this is when the fun begins."

Many of the aforementioned names came onto the scene late in the process for Ohio State, and Greene said that developing a close enough relationship with

top-rated prospects this late is borderline impossible.

"With 99 percent of the coaches, it is impossible, but with Urban Meyer anything is possible," Greene said. "He's that good."

On Jan. 19, Meyer secured his first commitment for 2013, landing a verbal from safety Cameron Burrows of Trotwood-Madison. That has experts predicting Ohio State's top finish in 2012 will continue into the following year without a hitch. It doesn't hurt, of course, that in-state talent in 2013 is arguably the best it has been in years.

"Next year, he'll put the fence around Ohio and get almost everybody he wants. Then he'll go into Florida and get another good number of guys," Lemming said. "As long as he has the numbers, it isn't unreasonable to expect he'll have a top-10 class on a yearly basis. He is that good."

Greene agreed, adding, "He's going to finish big this year with a top-five class, and then next year they'll probably be the top class in the country. It is pretty easy to say that even though it is over a year away. I would imagine he is going to have three or four in the bag by mid-February – all of which are going to be highly rated kids – and then he is just going to go from there."

## PSU Loss, OSU Gain

Ohio State has grabbed the headlines in adding commitments to its 2012 class from players all but set to go to Penn State. Those players – Schutt, Spence, O'Connor and Williams – could wind up being only a portion of this year's OSU class who otherwise would have been locks to play for the Nittany Lions.

As previously mentioned, Meyer is still recruiting Reeves, who would be an instrumental get if the head coach can secure a commitment from him.

Off-the-field issues at Penn State with a child sexual abuse scandal involving former defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky that eventually cost longtime head coach Joe Paterno his job have gone a long way in helping Meyer take some of the most talented players in the nation out of the grasp of the Lions.

"If we're sitting here right now and that Penn State stuff never happened, Noah Spence is going to Penn State, and Camren Williams and Armani Reeves aren't even in the conversation. It's a done deal to Penn State," said Pennsylvania-based Bob Lichtenfels, national recruiting analyst for Scout. "Is (the recent success) all because of Urban Meyer? No. It was kind of a perfect storm.

"Meyer is a good recruiter and a good person, so I don't want to take it away from him, but he came in at a perfect time because of what was going on at Penn State."

Meyer, like all good recruiters, took the Nittany Lions' vulnerable position as an opportunity to introduce himself while giving the elite prospects the option of looking at Ohio State.

"They're like fish in the water when there are sharks out there," longtime SuperPrep magazine publisher Allen Wallace said. "People prey on certain



Camren Williams



Urban Meyer



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## COVER STORY

programs and that's the way it is in recruiting.

"When there is a sign of weakness within a program, the vultures swoop in. It is just like the stock market or American business. When competitors perceive a weakness, they're ruthless. They go in and they rip you apart. A team like Penn State is ripe for the pickings right now."

Though Meyer seized an opportunity to land some of those prospects, he still had to outrecruit Penn State and other programs continuing to pursue the prep stars. It was there where Meyer found even more success, which allowed Ohio State's new head coach to take full advantage of the opportunity.

"It is not just that Penn State has struggled because everybody has gone after Penn State's recruits," Trieu said. "Ohio State has been competing against other schools for those commitments. They were the first to get those guys on campus and they closed the book on them. Again, it was just another example of great recruiting by the Buckeyes' staff."

#### Anatomy Of A Great Recruiter

Perhaps the reason there was a point in Meyer's career when he thought he couldn't physically handle coaching anymore was because of the nonstop speed at which he approaches his profession.

Meyer has never completely elaborated on the extraneous things that caused him to burn out while at Florida, but recruiting must not have been one of them if the pace at which he's attacked that portion of the job at Ohio State is taken into consideration.

"He is so good because of his overall effort," Trieu said. "You can tell he really enjoys recruiting and he puts a lot of time

into it. I think he comes in with some built-in advantages like his name recognition and the things he's accomplished, but then you put in on top of that kids feel really comfortable around him and their parents seem to be comfortable with him. It is really the perfect storm of elements that come together for a successful recruiter."

Meyer wasn't bashful about reaching out to any recruit he'd like to see in his program, which is something many other coaches may have been apprehensive to do when starting a new job so late in the recruiting year.

But his success on the field on a national level while at Florida and the tradition of Ohio State have been a deadly combination for other coaches butting heads with Meyer on the recruiting trail.

"They're scared," Lemming flatly said of other head coaches. "His reputation follows him and there has never been one word about him doing anything underhanded. The other schools have to be worried because he's not only relentless, his assistants under him have to be relentless on the recruiting trail or they won't last."

Meyer's ferocity while tackling recruiting was evident from the beginning when he called Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward offensive tackle Kyle Kalis, the high-profile prospect who changed his commitment from Ohio State to Michigan in July when the NCAA ratcheted up its investigation into the Buckeyes.

Though Kalis reaffirmed his commitment to the Wolverines, the confident manner in which Meyer carries himself was perfectly illustrated when calling a recruit widely regarded to be a lost cause for the Buckeyes.

"Ohio State wouldn't be where it is right now if it wasn't for Urban Meyer," Wallace said. "He could take any program and immediately jump-start it, but when you add the tradition of Ohio State with the prominence of Urban Meyer, the energy he brings, the know-how, the commitment, the name recognition, you're going to see the results in a big way."

All of the experts have noticed one thing when talking to the countless prospects being recruited at the national level on a weekly basis – Meyer's relentlessness shines through every time.

"If Urban goes after a kid, you'd better be ready to strap up the boots and be ready for the long haul because he will stop at nothing to get the kid," Lichtenfels said. "He is going to work his butt off until he gets the prospect or they say no."

#### Upgrade From Tressel?

With the success Meyer has already enjoyed in such a short time, the memory of Tressel already seems to be fading into what feels like the distant past.

Greene, however, isn't so quick to call Meyer an upgrade on the recruiting trail from the previous regime, referring to Tressel as one of the best recruiters in college football in the past decade.

"Jim Tressel was a great recruiter and I wouldn't say Meyer is an upgrade yet," Greene said. "If you look at the recruiting rankings for the six years Urban Meyer was at Florida, Ohio State outrecruited them more than once. For now, I won't say he is an upgrade (from Tressel) but he is getting off to a fast start."

Though Tressel did draw some grumbles from fans at times – most notably for his perceived lack of ability to close on the

high-level prospects on National Signing Day – the former coach did put together perhaps the best class in the history of Ohio State football in 2008.

Tressel got the signatures of six five-star prospects – offensive linemen Mike Brewster, Mike Adams and J.B. Shugarts, linebacker Etienne Sabino, wide receiver DeVier Posey and Pryor. That class was ranked No. 4 in the Scout team rankings that season despite having only 20 players. Alabama led the rankings that year but had 32 commitments on signing day. Notre Dame and Miami (Fla.) finished second and third with 23 and 33 commitments, respectively.

"That class was amazing to me," Greene said. "Tressel signed so many highly-rated stars and they were spread out on position groups, too. He almost recruited a whole team. Don't mistake some of those classes Tressel had. Those were legendary."

Though Meyer is already predicted to secure the top overall class in 2013 – something Tressel accomplished in 2009 while at Ohio State – Greene said the new head coach has a lot to prove before eventually being regarded as an upgrade.

However, it can be done. "He's different," Greene said of Meyer. "He is going to do things differently than Tressel did, and in 10 years we'll look back and decide if it was an upgrade or if it was better."

"Jim Tressel just did it differently, but his way was pretty darned good. That was a 10-year run at Ohio State that you'd be hard-pressed to match in the team's history."

"I expect similar things from Meyer, but you can't tell if he is going to be better this early."

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# Bright Spots There Despite Struggles

By JEFF SVOBODA  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The final Ohio State offense overseen by Jim Bollman finished in the bottom half of the country in yards per game for the eighth time in 11 years, but that's not to say there weren't some positives for the Buckeyes during the 2011 season.

The main one was probably that the young unit got better throughout the season. Three times in the final five Big Ten games, the Ohio State offense topped the 33-point barrier. In addition, after a pair of contests in the first half of the season during which the team couldn't reach double digits in points, Ohio State's lowest output of the last seven games was 14 points.

Center Mike Brewster, the main senior leader of the offense who didn't miss any time to suspension on the season, said he saw a few reasons the team was able to make more plays near the conclusion of the campaign.

"Probably confidence I think is the biggest thing – just knowing that we can put points on the board," Brewster said. "Getting DeVier (Posey) back has really opened some things up for us. They've had to call off the dogs a little bit up front and made it a little easier for us."

In addition to the return of Posey, Ohio State saw the maturation of true freshman quarterback Braxton Miller as the year went on. Miller took every snap from center in the second half of the season and saw his passing abilities grow as he got more experience in the team's offense. The one-time five-star prospect out of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne never lost his ability to use his legs to make plays as well.

"I think the big thing is Braxton kept getting better through the season, and I think he plays best when he's just out there being natural," Brewster said.

Despite those improvements, the offense still had its share of struggles, but there were some obvious reasons. The youth the team had to deal with at the start of the year never really got better, as the Buckeyes started a freshman at quarterback, a number of youngsters at wide receiver and two sophomores on the offensive line.

In addition, the team was undermanned throughout the season. Posey, running back Boom Herron and offensive lineman Mike Adams missed between five and 10 games with suspension, while wideouts Verlon Reed and Philly Brown, tight end Jake Stoneburner and offensive tackle J.B. Shugarts were sidetracked by injuries of varying significance throughout the campaign.

"It's still the same kind of situation where we all have to deal with the cards that we have," Bollman said. "I know that everybody in the staff is working hard to do the very best that we can with the guys we have. (The offense) wasn't as good as any of us would have liked. There are no excuses for anything. It just needed to be better than it was."

The end result was that the Buckeyes' final game left a sour taste in a lot of mouths. Ohio State scored 17 points, including a last-ditch touchdown against a prevent defense, in the 24-17 loss to Florida the

Gator Bowl to close the campaign and couldn't carry momentum from a 34-point showing to finish the regular season against Michigan.

"We just couldn't get a nice rhythm going today," Posey said after the Gator Bowl. "We were trying to get some momentum going (but) it was kind of rough."

The following are BSB's grades of the team's offensive position groups throughout the season.

## Quarterback

All eyes were on the development of Miller once he took over as the starter four games into the regular season, and the No. 2-rated quarterback in the class of 2011 showed both development and some areas in which he will need to improve going forward.

There wasn't much question that Miller improved as a passer in his time as the No. 1 signal caller. In his first six games as the starter, Miller was trusted to throw the ball no more than 13 times in a game, and he was 28 for 58 (48.3 percent) for five touchdowns and two interceptions. He didn't top 100 yards passing in any of those games, either.

Then in the last four games, Miller's passing started to improve. With the team behind in all four contests and needing him to make plays through the air, the freshman improved his completion percentage to 56.6 percent while throwing seven touchdowns against just one interception.

He showed improvement at commanding the huddle, something that was a bit of an issue for the soft-spoken Miller at the start of the season. He also became more confident at taking the game into his own hands, such as the times in the Michigan game when he checked into quarterback draws that gained first downs.

"I think throughout the season he's gotten a lot smarter, reading coverages and stuff like that – even checks," fullback Zach Boren said. "At the beginning of the year, he was having trouble making checks and things like that, but now from the last couple of games of the season, he was really stepping up and taking everything into his own hands."

"I feel like he's been getting better every week even since the season started. You guys can see that."

Miller often used his legs to his advantage as well, topping 90 yards on the ground against Nebraska, Wisconsin, Indiana, Penn State and Michigan. He ran for a pair of scores against both the Hoosiers and Badgers.

One other attribute that impressed the Ohio State coaching staff was his ability to take things in stride and stay humble.

"What you see on Saturdays with Braxton was obviously a process, but the thing that you really saw as a coach was how he handled the week," said Luke Fickell, who served as head coach in 2011. "I think that's the biggest difference in a young guy – the ability to prepare and get that performance on Saturday."

"Sometimes when you're a young guy and you've been very successful and things have come pretty easy to you during your



SONNY BROCKWAY

**HERE IT GOES** – Freshman quarterback Braxton Miller (5) had some ups and downs during his first season as a Buckeye, but he showed signs of development as the season progressed.

high school career because you're better than everybody, your preparation doesn't always match your performance. When you get to college, you start to realize that everybody is better and your preparation has to be a lot greater to get the performance you want on the field."

On the other hand, Miller's deficiencies were also obvious to those who watched the team throughout the season. As good as he was at some points in the last couple of games, the freshman QB could have been even more dynamic and produced even more offense had he hit Posey a handful of times for big gains when the receiver was open.

Pocket presence will also be an area of concern going forward. Though Miller was able to make players miss once he got into the open, he was too often a sitting duck in the pocket, at times caught between taking off with the ball and also wanting to keep his eyes downfield looking for a receiver. That's one reason Ohio State gave up 46 sacks on the year, one of the worst totals in the nation.

Still, on the whole, the Buckeyes were encouraged by the progress Miller showed throughout the season.

"The Braxton that I have under center as opposed to the Braxton I had at the beginning of the season is night and day," Brewster said before the Gator Bowl. "I think that's awesome that he's grown so much and he's more confident now. He's really just a different player."

Senior Joe Bauserman, who started the first three games and played in the first six contests of the season, didn't see action in the final seven games and finished a disappointing 40 for 86 (46.5 percent) for the year.

Though he did throw five touchdowns against only one interception, Bauserman's reticence to throw into tight windows caused the offense to sputter against Miami (Fla.) and Nebraska.

**BSB Midterm Grade: C-**  
**BSB Second-Half Grade: C+**  
**BSB Final Grade: C**

## Running Back

What was supposed to be a position that went five deep for Ohio State coming into the 2011 season ended up with only three players sharing most of the load with Herron stepping to the fore as he concluded his senior campaign.

The Warren, Ohio, native was the go-to guy among the running backs upon his return in the seventh game against Illinois, averaging 19.3 carries and 96.9 yards per game. Herron didn't show much rust after his six-game suspension, topping the 100-yard mark in his first three games and putting up 160 yards in the thrilling win against Wisconsin.

However, his effectiveness was dulled a bit near the end of the year – he dipped to 4.0 yards per carry in the last four games of his career. He did, however, close on a high with 82 yards on 12 carries as the offensive line often creased Florida in the Gator Bowl.

Sophomore Carlos Hyde finished as the team's second-leading rusher among tailbacks with 566 yards and six scores on 106 carries and had his moments. Beginning the year as the team's starter, Hyde topped the 100-yard mark against both Nebraska and Indiana. He showed the ability to break

big runs thanks to good speed for a 238-pound back, and his ability to pick the right hole seemed to improve during the year.

Junior Jordan Hall might have gone the other way. After missing the first two games of the year because of suspension, he came back and steadied the running game but got banged up and was just a bit player in the second half of the year. Hall finished with 99 carries for 405 yards and two touchdowns.

"All those guys have looked good all season," Boren said near the end of the year. "Obviously Boom is going to be a big loss (next year). I honestly think he's going to end up being one of the best running backs ever to come through Ohio State with his work ethic and his toughness and leadership."

## Rating The Offense

Here is where the OSU offense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally for the 2011 season.

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Offense	191.15	27th	4th
Passing Offense	127.00	115th	12th
Total Offense	318.15	107th	11th
Scoring Offense	24.46	81st	8th
Turnover Margin	0.38	30th	4th
Third Down Con.	38.73	81st	9th

**FINAL GRADES: OFFENSE**



SONNY BROCKWAY

**GIVING A BOOST – Fifth-year senior tailback Boom Herron (1) rushed for more than 100 yards in his first three games back after sitting out the first half of the regular season because of NCAA suspension.**

“It’s going to be hard going through next year without him, but we’ve got guys competing every day in bowl practices. Hopefully that will come out next year.”

The Buckeyes didn’t get the production out of redshirt freshman Rod Smith and sophomore Jaamal Berry as hoped. Smith had 98 yards in his first two games, but he fumbled twice in those games and got only four carries the rest of the year. He also played special teams and dabbled at linebacker. Berry dealt with off-the-field issues and had only three carries for 5 yards.

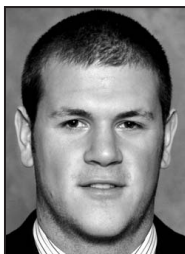
Ohio State’s fullback position continued to be in good hands with Boren, who was rarely spelled by backups Adam Homan – who was banged up at times and missed four games – and David Durham. Boren was one of the most consistent players on the squad and showed his versatility, lining up in a number of different spots while still providing solid lead blocking and catching six passes for 60 yards.

**BSB Midterm Grade: B-  
BSB Second-Half Grade: B-  
BSB Final Grade: B-**

**Receivers**

There’s little question the Ohio State passing game struggled throughout the year, finishing ranked 115th in the country, and the team’s inexperience at wide receiver combined with Miller’s youth was a major factor.

Ohio State’s only upperclassman among the wideouts was Posey, and he missed all but the last three games. Injuries to Brown and Reed sapped the position of more juice.



**Jake Stoneburner**

In the end, the results weren’t pretty. Brown, tight end Jake Stoneburner and freshman wideout Devin Smith tied for the team lead with 14 receptions, the lowest total to lead a Buckeye squad since wingback Jim Harrell had the same number in 1976.

“We knew it was going to be a matter of growing throughout the season,” receivers coach Stan Drayton said. “Our deal is as an offensive unit we’re going to play into our strengths. Right now, the strength of this football team offensively is to make sure that we get the proper amount of run calls in. That’s where our explosive (plays) are coming right now.”

“These receivers have to understand that when their opportunity comes they have to be ready for it. Most times we have been ready, but there’s times where we have not.”

Certainly, missing Posey was one of the key limiting elements in the offense throughout the season. He proved that upon his return, catching 12 passes for 162 yards and two touchdowns – totals that would have been higher had Miller put a few more passes on target. Posey’s excellent combination of size and speed allowed him to both get open and to open things for other targets.

Brown had a solid year and finally made a big play after coming close numerous times in his career, snagging a 54-yard pass from Miller on the opening possession at Michigan. He showed speed throughout the year but still struggled at turning that into consistent big plays.

The rest of the group was a mixed bag. Reed had nine catches in the first five games and showed good hands but had troubles with getting separation from top-flight corners before tearing his ACL late in the Michigan State game. Devin Smith showed the ability to make catches down the field, averaging 21.0 yards and scoring four touchdowns on his 14 catches, but his inability to stay on the field was puzzling.

Sophomore Chris Fields contributed little, grabbing only eight passes for 114 yards and committing a number of mental errors, while freshmen T.Y. Williams and Evan Spencer saw little time as the year went on.

The season Stoneburner put up from his tight end spot included a team-high seven touchdown catches, and his blocking skills continued to mature in his junior season. Reid Fragel added five catches for 64 yards and was a very good end blocker in his final season at the position. Fragel is scheduled to move to offensive tackle in the spring.

**BSB Midterm Grade: D+  
BSB Second-Half Grade: C-  
BSB Final Grade: D+**

**Offensive Line**

Ohio State’s line had to go through a few iterations because of suspensions to Adams, Marcus Hall and Corey Linsley, but by the end of the year, the Buckeyes had settled on a starting five that was pretty good at opening holes in the run game but struggled in pass protection.

Adams anchored the left side as a dominating run blocker and proficient pass protector while sophomore Andrew Norwell slid inside upon Adams’ return and provided another big body who helped the Buckeyes in the run game.

Brewster struggled with bigger foes at center and had his fair share of issues delivering accurate snaps, but he was still one of the better players at the position in the country and often used his excellent athleticism to his advantage.

Sophomore Jack Mewhort had an admirable first season as a starter, beginning the year at left guard before moving to the right side. At right tackle, senior J.B. Shugarts gutted through injury but continued to be plagued by false starts and was an occasional liability in pass protection. True freshman backup Antonio Underwood was no better, however, in a spot start against Purdue.

On the whole, though, Mewhort was impressed by the way the senior trio of Adams, Brewster and Shugarts – all part of the famed Block “O” recruiting class – performed.

“In my eyes, they played well every game,” Mewhort said. “They’re just consistent. I think one big emotional boost for us was when we got (Adams) back at Nebraska. He came out killing guys and that was good to see. I like to watch him play, his intensity. Same with J.B. and same with Michael Brewster.”

“That’s why those guys have been so good over the last four years. It’s because they give it their all. They work hard. They hone their technique. I’ve learned a lot from them.”

Linsley and Hall began the year splitting time at right guard with Adams out, and the former looked good in his first major action as a sophomore and seemed ready for increased playing time going forward. Hall had his moments as well but struggled when asked to pull in some of the team’s run-blocking schemes.

**BSB Midterm Grade: B  
BSB Second-Half Grade: C  
BSB Final Grade: C+**

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# Defense Dipped During Disappointing Season

By **MARCUS HARTMAN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

By just about any measure, the 2011 Ohio State defense did not match up to the high standard set in the previous six years of Jim Heacock's tenure as coordinator.

After finishing first or second in the Big Ten in scoring defense every season from 2005-2010, the most recent version checked in at sixth. The 21.0 points per game were the most since 1999, when the Buckeyes gave up an average of 23.9 while posting a 6-6 campaign. That year they finished 48th in the nation in points allowed, the last time Ohio State failed to finish in the top 20 in that category until this season, when they checked in at No. 27.

The final numbers across the board were pedestrian at best, and several marked significant decreases from the middle of the season.

The rushing defense allowed 141.5 yards per game for the season, representing a jump of nearly 25 yards from the numbers at the middle of the year (116.7). While the passing defense improved in terms of yards (from 191.5 to 182.0 yards per game), it was likely as a result of the run-stopping deficiency.

Overall, Ohio State allowed 323.5 yards per contest, the worst since giving up 332.0 in 2004. That was the last time a Buckeye defense allowed more than 300 yards per game, and it represented a regression of about 15 yards per game from the middle of the season.

The defense also gave up a preponderance of big plays – 13 runs and 24 passes of 20 yards or more – often as a result of someone being out of position or taking a poor angle to the ball.

"Pursuit angles are so critical," Heacock said. "That's the name of the game. What the pursuit angles do are prevent the long runs. That's where we've had a little bit too much of this year, and I think that's the one area where we've probably given up too many big plays. In the past we've been ... at the end of the season you look at the big plays and they've been minimal."

The biggest change in the second half of



JOSH WINSLOW

**NOT GETTING AWAY** – Ohio State defensive lineman John Simon (54) recorded 53 tackles en route to earning first-team All-Big Ten and third-team All-America honors in 2011.

the season, however, came on third down as the Buckeyes went from one of the best in the nation in getting off the field to one of the worst.

They checked in at midseason with a 31.4 percent opponents' success rate on third down, a figure good for No. 2 in the Big Ten and 13th nationally. But they found themselves allowing a 40.2-percent success rate by the time the season was over. That was good only for seventh in the Big Ten and 65th nationally.

Opponents were an even 50.0 percent (27 for 54) during the season-ending four-game losing streak to Purdue (9 for 18), Penn State (7 for 13), Michigan (5 for 11) and Florida (6 for 12).

The Buckeyes finished seventh in the Big Ten with 20 takeaways and sixth in the conference in sacks (1.8 per game).

In part because of youth and injuries, the defense lacked play-makers and suffered too many fundamental breakdowns. That was a bad combination.

"The word confidence is the word we keep coming back to," Heacock said late in the season. "We just don't have a real confident group. You're probably not going to when you have four or five freshmen out there and some young guys. When something goes wrong or it doesn't look real good at a particular time, they kind of panic a little bit. I think that's where if you had some of those guys we had last year, they would take care of it and be fine and everything would be all right."

"That's confidence and swagger or whatever you want to call it. The question is what

comes first – the confidence or playing well? I think we need to find ways to play better and when you do that you get a little more confidence."

Teams were often able to move the ball consistently, and Ohio State did not come up with enough game-changing moments to offset its own breakdowns.

"One thing we talk about with the defense is consistency," senior defensive back Tyler Moeller said. "If you look at, for example, the Nebraska game. We were one of the best defenses in the first half in college football in my opinion, and we were one of the worst defenses in the second half. We haven't been very consistent. We were a great defense at times and at other times we haven't been so good at it."

Heacock admitted his final group of Silver Bullets had a tough year, but he expressed optimism that the growing pains will have been worth it someday.

"We were young at the beginning of the year and I think we had some busted coverages and we had an issue with some fundamental things – pursuit angles and tackling," he said.

"I think we understand the importance of the little things and the importance of doing fundamentals – not getting too caught up in the scheme as much as we are execution. Eleven guys doing their job. That's what we've always been based on. I'm not sure we did a great job this year. We've been a little bit inconsistent in that category, but I think we'll be better."

The following features BSB's evalua-

tion of the defensive by position group, including our midterm, second-half and final grades.

## Defensive Line

Despite the presence of two standouts, this group never had the overall impact expected or needed of it.

Heacock prefers to rely on a strong pass rush from his front four to allow the rest of the defense to be sound and make plays, but that never materialized due at least in part to the loss of senior Nathan Williams to a week one knee injury.

Williams' exit caused a ripple effect through the defense as it forced John Simon to play out of position. A natural strongside defensive end, Simon took over Williams' weakside position, also known as the Leo. He found some success, leading the team with seven sacks, but Simon was the only consistent threat for teams when they dropped back to pass. That let opposing coaches scheme to slow down the high-motored junior without fear of an attack from the opposing side. He finished the season with 53 tackles, including a team-high 16 for loss, and earned first-team All-Big Ten and third-team All-America honors for his efforts.

Simon's move to Leo might have been temporary, but neither redshirt freshman J.T. Moore nor true freshman Steve Miller had much impact in limited action at that position early in the season. They played primarily in nickel and dime situations but saw their playing time essentially eliminated after the 34-27 loss at Nebraska on Oct. 8. Moore logged nine tackles for the season, including one for loss, while Miller had one stop.

Senior Solomon Thomas also took a turn at Leo but was ineffective. He had four tackles – all assists – after returning from suspension and recovering from a broken leg.

"Nate threw a wrench into things basically because of what his position was and what we were going to ask him to do and what we thought we had," Heacock said. "All during the offseason, we're thinking we have Nate on one side and he can be that drop guy. Then you put Johnny on the other side and we're going to get pressure."

The other bright spot on the defensive line was Johnathan Hankins, a sophomore who logged 67 tackles while playing inside and out. Showing surprising quickness and agility for a player listed at 335 pounds, he was both a big body at the point of attack and effective at running down plays from the back side.

A late-season knee injury slowed him somewhat, but he still appears to have a bright future as he continues to refine his technique and work on his body. Hankins finished second on the team with 11 tackles for loss.

Nose guard Garrett Goebel turned in a solid junior season with 33 tackles, including four for loss, and tackle Adam Bellamy took advantage of the minutes opened by Williams' injury by logging 25 tackles. Bellamy spent a lot of time at the strong-side end spot Simon vacated to fill in for Williams.

Freshman tackle Michael Bennett also saw his role expand as the season went on and left the impression he could be a star of the future after notching 17 tackles. He had three sacks among his five tackles for loss



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## Rating The Defense

Here is where the OSU defense ranked among the Big Ten and nationally for the 2011 season.

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Rushing Defense	141.54	50th	5th
Passing Defense	182.00	14th	4th
Total Defense	323.54	19th	5th
Scoring Defense	21.00	27th	6th
Sacks	23.00	T72nd	6th
Third-Down Def.	40.22	65th	7th

## FINAL GRADES: DEFENSE

and looked adept at stopping the run and rushing the passer.

**BSB Midterm Grade: B+**  
**BSB Second-Half Grade: B-**  
**BSB Final Grade: B**

### Linebackers

This was by most accounts the most disappointing group on the team.

After years of excellence, Ohio State struggled all season to find adequate linebacker play, something that was the result of multiple factors.

Andrew Sweat became an every-down player for the first time in his college career and was one of the team's best defensive players – when healthy. He started the season slowed by nagging injuries and then missed half of the Purdue game and all of the Penn State game because of a concussion. He also sat out the regular-season finale at Michigan after suffering a dislocated elbow in practice the week before, but the senior still wound up the leader of the linebackers with 72 tackles. He made five stops for loss, intercepted one pass and forced a fumble.

Juniors Etienne Sabino and Storm Klein shared the middle linebacker spot most of the season, but neither performed on a consistent basis. Klein had 45 tackles, a sack and an interception, but he struggled to close ground in space against teams that like to spread the field. Sabino had 6½ tackles for loss among his 62 stops, but he fought bouts of poor tackling and did more reacting than attacking. Sabino also saw some time at the Sam outside linebacker position when the team played its base defense.

Freshman Ryan Shazier piqued the interest of fans from the beginning of the season with his speed and athleticism, but the slender (6-2, 210) Florida native played only sparingly until the last quarter of the season when Sweat went down.

Once afforded full-time action, Shazier showed both his youth and his potential. He logged 40 tackles in the last four games, including 15 against Penn State in his first career start. He made big plays (three sacks, two fumbles forced) but found himself out of position at times as well. He also battled a knee injury that limited his mobility for much of the last two games.

Sweat, Klein and Sabino all played well in the upset of Wisconsin, but that was the high-water mark for Klein and Sabino. Meanwhile, Shazier's athleticism did not offset the leadership of Sweat when the senior went down, and the linebackers had a lot to do with the team's collapse in November.

The group's play fell off down the stretch as missed tackles and missed assignments led to far too many big plays. Those went a long way toward the Nittany Lions rushing for 239 yards and Michigan piling up 277 on the ground.

**BSB Midterm Grade: C-**  
**BSB Second-Half Grade: D**  
**BSB Final Grade: D+**

### Secondary

To no one's surprise given the loss of three starters from 2010, this group suffered some ups and downs throughout the season.

The top performer was unquestionably

Bradley Roby, a redshirt freshman cornerback who was named the team's outstanding first-year defensive player after logging 47 tackles. He had three interceptions to go with 3½ tackles for loss, and he showed no timidity in attacking the ball in the air or a ball carrier on the perimeter.

Roby was a sticky man-to-man defender and flashed good reaction times when playing zone. He also brought some swagger to the position, and more good things can be expected from him in the future.

Roby had the type of season many expected from veteran Travis Howard, a junior who looked during spring and pre-season practices to be ready for a breakout campaign. That never materialized, however, as he was frequently targeted by opposing quarterbacks and gave up numerous important catches, particularly on third down. He broke up five passes and intercepted two more, but he was inconsistent as a tackler even as he racked up 41 stops.

Safety was a source of frustration for much of the season as a pair of talented sophomores endured numerous growing pains.

C.J. Barnett had a strong start to the season but struggled with pursuit angles and tackling later in the year. He finished with a team-high 75 tackles and picked off two passes. He also broke up six other throws.

Classmate Christian Bryant led the team with eight pass breakups and logged 68 tackles, but a penchant to go for kill shots led to several big plays being made at his expense.

Most notably, Bryant missed an open-field tackle on Nebraska running back Rex Burkhead that turned into a game-tying touchdown reception. He was also caught out of position on a deep touchdown pass that started the Cornhuskers' rally from a 27-6 deficit. Three weeks later, he did not see Wisconsin receiver Jared Abbrederis running a vertical route and could not recover in time to keep him from hauling in a fourth-quarter touchdown that put the Badgers ahead late in the game.

Bryant replaced Orhian Johnson as the starter early in the season, but Johnson continued to play a regular role in the team's dime package. Johnson was another Buckeye who had a problem with pursuit angles and tackling at the outset of the season, but he showed some improvement late in the year before suffering a knee injury at Michigan. He had 32 tackles and three interceptions.

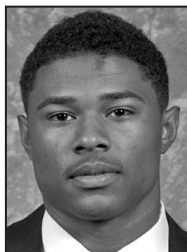
Finally, there was Moeller, who played the Star position in the nickel defense, a look the coaching staff opted to use almost exclusively in the last 10 games. In his return from a pectoral injury that ended his 2010 season prematurely, Moeller never quite regained the playmaking skills he once displayed. He finished the season with 44 tackles, including two for loss. His lack of production was at least in part a result of a shift in strategy as well. Moeller frequently blitzed during his high-impact junior year but usually was asked to stay home and defend the perimeter as a senior.

The secondary improved statistically in the second half of the season, but that might have been in part because of the decreased effectiveness of the run defense.

**BSB Midterm Grade: C**  
**BSB Second-Half Grade: C**  
**BSB Final Grade: C**



Andrew Sweat



Christian Bryant

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FINAL GRADES: SPECIAL TEAMS

# Uneven Specialists Mirrored Rest Of Buckeyes

By ARI WASSERMAN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If Ohio State played on special teams during the regular season like it did in its loss to Florida in the Gator Bowl on Jan. 2, the team likely wouldn't have been playing in the postseason.

After all, the Buckeyes weren't just plagued by an inability to find an offensive rhythm in their 24-17 loss to Florida. The Gators, of course, took command of the game with two touchdowns on special teams plays.

Florida took a crucial 14-7 lead when Andre Debose returned a kickoff 99 yards for a touchdown, going all the way to pay dirt untouched, a score that answered a 5-yard touchdown strike from Braxton Miller to DeVier Posey to tie the game.

Though Ohio State went to the locker room down only four – Drew Basil knocked through a 37-yard field goal right before halftime – Florida delivered what was likely the knockout blow with another big play on special teams.

The Gators blocked a Ben Buchanan punt attempt early in the second half and Graham Stewart returned the loose ball 14 yards for another touchdown, giving Florida a 21-10 advantage. It was a lead the Buckeyes wouldn't be able to overcome.

"When two good teams play each other, special teams is usually the difference," said OSU defensive back Tyler Moeller. "As you saw (in the bowl game), that was the difference. They had a good



SONNY BROCKWAY

## Rating The Specialists

Here is where the OSU specialists ranked among the Big Ten and nationally for the 2011 season.

Category	Stats	NCAA	Big Ten
Net Punting	37.44	41st	4th
Punt Return Avg.	10.19	40th	4th
KO Return Avg.	24.64	15th	3rd
Punt Return Def.	6.58	43rd	4th
KO Return Def.	20.21	33rd	2nd

**BETTER RESULTS** – Sophomore kicker Drew Basil (24) made 16 of 19 field-goal attempts in 2011, a year after missing both of his attempts in long-range situations.

kickoff return and a blocked punt for a touchdown. That was the difference in the game. We didn't get it done on special teams."

Though Ohio State's special teams were typically reliable after a 2010 season in which a kickoff coverage miscue set the stage for a loss at Wisconsin that cost the Buckeyes a chance at playing for the national title, players admitted they didn't perform up to par on special teams in this year's final contest.

Newly hired head coach Urban Meyer

has indicated he will likely oversee the special teams next year, something he's prided himself on doing in his previous jobs. Before looking forward to what Meyer may change, what follows are BSB's final grades for the Ohio State special teams for the past season.

### Kicking

Basil's opportunity to be Ohio State's kicker was a source of apprehension at the beginning of the year, especially after his stint as the team's field-goal kicker on lon-

ger attempts in his freshman year was brief and unsuccessful.

Still unsure if the sophomore would be able to take on the role with consistency – especially with a youthful offense in no position to miss out on points when they were attainable – Basil went from being a kickoff specialist to a reliable scoring option in his second season with the Buckeyes.

Basil, who had both of his attempts blocked during his freshman season, didn't get off to the smooth start he would have hoped for in the Buckeyes' season opener against Akron. The sophomore kicker missed both of his attempts, although only one counted. Basil missed his first attempt of the year from 45 yards out, but an offside penalty on the Zips gave the OSU kicker another shot. But he also missed his do-over from 40 yards, hooking the attempt to the right.

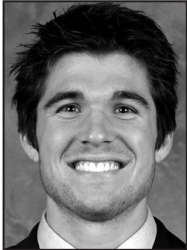
The second game, a 27-22 win over Toledo, came and went with Basil failing to get a single three-point attempt, and the sophomore entered the third game of his second season – a road contest at Miami (Fla.) – having never made a collegiate field goal.

That's when Basil turned things around for good. Though the Buckeyes lost a 24-6 decision to the Hurricanes, he knocked through both of his field-goal attempts, including one that was true from 47 yards out.

Those two field goals turned into a streak to remember for Basil, who finished the first half of the season having made seven consecutive field goals. Moving forward into the second half, he eventually knocked through five more, increasing his streak to 12 in a row.

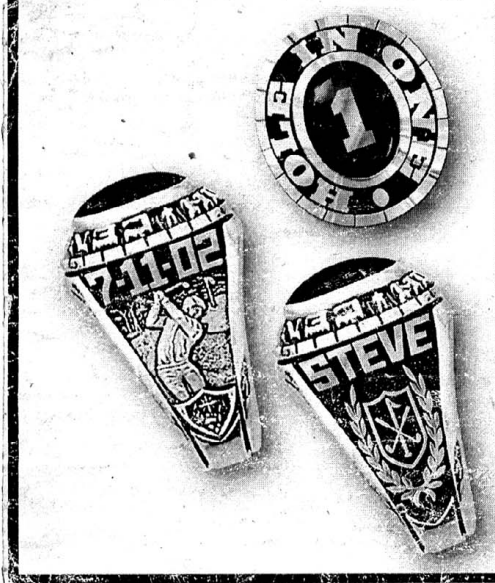
Then there was the game he'd like to forget.

During Ohio State's 26-23 overtime loss



Ben Buchanan

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**FINAL GRADES: SPECIAL TEAMS**

at Purdue, Basil missed his first attempt against the Boilermakers – ending his streak – and had an extra-point attempt blocked in the final seconds of the game. Had Basil made either the field goal or the extra point, the Buckeyes would likely have won the game in regulation.

Basil made his field-goal attempt in overtime to cap Ohio State's first possession, but the Boilermakers scored a touchdown in their rebuttal possession to win the game.

Basil didn't miss on his final three attempts of the season, finishing the season having made 16 of 19 attempts (84.2 percent), which tied him with UAB kicker Ty Long for the 12th-best percentage in college football this season.

In his second full season handling the kickoff duties for the Buckeyes, Basil averaged 63.5 yards per attempt and had 14 touchbacks. Though the distance was only good enough for No. 61 nationally, for reference the best kicker in terms of length in the nation – Cody Parkey of Auburn – averaged 5 five yards more per attempt.

Basil did have five more touchbacks than he posted in 2010 despite kicking off 14 more times during his freshman season.

**BSB Midterm Grade: B**  
**BSB Second-Half Grade: B**  
**Final Grade: B**

**Punting**

It was a rather unfortunate ending to what was otherwise a very successful junior season for Buchanan. The block he suffered against Florida – a definite breakdown on the part of his protection – served as the exclamation point for what was the most trying season at Ohio State in recent memory.

The goal for Buchanan was to build off a sophomore season he described as marginal. He wanted not only to become a more consistent performer, but he viewed himself as a weapon that could consistently punish the opposing team by burying them deep in their own territory whenever the offense stalled.

Through the team's first six games Buchanan averaged 41.6 yards per attempt, which was only sixth best in the Big Ten. But distance, the OSU junior often explained, isn't always the best way to tell the efficiency of the punter.



JOSH WINSLOW

**BECOMING A WEAPON – Junior Ben Buchanan (17) helped the Ohio State defense by forcing an opponent to start inside its own 20-yard line on 27 of his 70 punts during the 2011 season.**



JOSH WINSLOW

**RUNNING FOR PAYDIRT – Junior Jordan Hall (7) averaged 26.3 yards per kickoff return. His best was a 90-yard return against Colorado.**

"Punting is pretty misunderstood by a lot of people," Buchanan told BSB. "It's not hard to be impressed by a punter who has a booming leg and can boot it clear across the field. Even though I'd like to think I am capable of getting big distance, I like to think I am about as reliable as they come when pinning opponents deep."

Buchanan's average stayed roughly the same through the end of the season at 41.3 yards per attempt, which landed him fifth in the Big Ten and No. 46 in the nation. Of his 70 punts this season – which included eight of at least 50 yards and a season-long 60-yarder – he pinned opponents inside their 20-yard line on 27 occasions, and in all of those attempts he had only three touchbacks.

However, Buchanan did have two punts blocked, including the glaring play against Florida in the Gator Bowl. While the punter gets the blame, however, he is rarely the one at fault.

"We just had to block our guys," Moeller said. "We had to do a better job of holding them up. Florida did a great job of squeezing in, using their speed to get in there and they got one on us."

The other block was accomplished by Toledo and it set up the Rockets for an early touchdown that eventually kept the Mid-American Conference squad in the game until the final moments of the contest.

But Buchanan's mission was accomplished in becoming a weapon. When looking at how all 13 opponents punted against Ohio State, they managed to land only 16 of 69 attempts inside the Buckeyes' 20-yard line.

"I think they've seen what that can do when you don't have a super-powerful offense," Buchanan said of his punting. "It is those things that are taken to by our team (and) the guys have understood that."

**BSB Midterm Grade: B+**  
**BSB Second-Half Grade: C**  
**Final Grade: B-**

**Return Game**

Though Jordan Hall likely didn't have the kind of impact on Ohio State's offense that

he had hoped before the season, there's no question he helped the Buckeyes' return game.

Ohio State has always emphasized big plays in the return game since every extra yard on kickoff and punt returns can help give the offense better field position. Though the plays that stand out most are ones returned a long way, a return man who can consistently squeeze out an extra few yards is an instrumental weapon.

For Hall specifically, he was able to do that on kickoff returns. His average of 26.3 yards per return was good enough for fifth in the Big Ten and No. 17 in the nation. The best return man in the conference was also tops in the nation. Purdue freshman Raheem Mostert averaged 33.5 yards per return on kickoffs.

Though Hall missed the first two games of the season while serving a suspension, the junior immediately made plays upon his return. Perhaps his biggest play of the season came against Colorado, when he took one back 90 yards before being tackled inside the Buffaloes' 10-yard line.

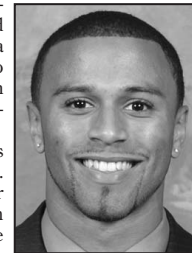
On punt returns, Hall wasn't nearly as dynamic, averaging only 5.8 yards per attempt. That was sixth in the Big Ten but only No. 46 on the national charts. The country's best performer was Texas A&M junior Dustin Harris, who averaged 18.6 yards per return.

Perhaps the best play on the punt return unit in 2011 belonged to sophomore Chris Fields, who helped the Buckeyes in the win against Toledo.

Down 15-14 with less than a minute remaining in the first half, Fields returned a punt 69 yards for a touchdown to give the Buckeyes a 21-15 advantage at the half. The play took away any momentum the underdog Rockets had going into the break.

Had the Buckeyes not been able to get that score before halftime, the Rockets – who wound up scoring on their first possession of the second half even after the deflating return – likely could have engineered the upset in Ohio Stadium.

**BSB Midterm Grade: B+**  
**BSB Second-Half Grade: C**  
**BSB Final Grade: B-**



Chris Fields



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## BIG TEN NOTES

# Paterno Succumbs To Cancer Complications

Two months after he coached his final game – a contest in which he became the all-time winningest coach in major college football – and then was dismissed for his part in the Jerry Sandusky sexual abuse scandal, longtime Penn State head coach Joe Paterno died the morning of Jan. 22.

Paterno, 85, passed away at the Mount Nittany Medical Center after being admitted Jan. 13 to deal with the effects of lung cancer.

## BIG TEN NOTES

### Jeff Svoboda

"It is with great sadness that we announce that Joe Paterno passed away earlier today," the Paterno family said in a statement. "His loss leaves a void in our lives that will never be filled. He died as he lived. He fought hard until the end, stayed positive, thought only of others and constantly reminded everyone of how blessed his life had been."

Paterno is survived by his wife of 50 years, Sue, five children and 17 grandchildren.

Reports one day before the legendary coach's death indicated that the family had been summoned to State College as his health deteriorated. That same day, students dug the Paterno statue outside of Beaver Stadium out of a winter snowfall and began leaving flowers and notes at its base.

Paterno was known for turning Penn State from a regional team into a national powerhouse and shepherding the football program from a lonely outpost in the center of the Keystone State to a Big Ten stalwart. He went 409-136-3 in 46 seasons, earned the paternal nickname "JoePa," pushed players academically and was thought of by many as the old guard of college football in his later years.

However, his reputation was sullied this past fall when former defensive coordinator Sandusky was arrested on charges that he sexually assaulted at least 10 boys, including some within the Penn State football facilities. One incident, witnessed by an assistant coach, was reported to Paterno, but little came of the allegation even after Paterno chose only to pass it up the chain of command.

When the scandal blew up in early November – just days after Penn State downed Illinois on Oct. 29 to earn the coach his 409th career win, enough to pass Eddie Robinson for the top mark in Division I football – Paterno was among the power brokers at the university who found themselves without a job.

Though he faced no legal repercussions, Paterno was criticized by many for not doing more given the head coach's spotless reputation and high standing in the State College community.

That wasn't on the mind of those in college football, though, as tributes to Paterno's career and legacy immediately began to flow in.

"I am deeply saddened to learn about the passing of Coach Joe Paterno," Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer said. "He was a man who I have deep respect for as a human being, as a husband and father, as a leader and as a football coach. I was very fortunate to have been able to develop a personal relationship with him, especially over the course of the last several years, and it is something that I will always cherish."

"My prayers and thoughts go out to his wife, Sue, and to their family, and also to the family he had at Penn State University. We have lost a remarkable person and someone who affected the lives of so many people in so many positive ways. His presence will be dearly missed. His legacy as a coach, as a winner and as a champion will carry on forever."

Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany and new Penn State head coach Bill O'Brien, among others, had similar thoughts.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of Joe Paterno," Delany said. "His passing marks a tremendous loss for Penn State, college football and for countless fans, coaches and student-athletes. Our condolences go out to the Paterno family and to the entire Penn State community."

O'Brien added, "First, on behalf of Penn State football, we offer our sincerest condolences to the Paterno family for their loss. We also offer our condolences to the Penn State community, and in particular to those who wore the Penn State colors, our Nittany Lion football players and alumni. Today they lost a great man, coach, mentor and in many cases a father figure, and we extend our deepest sympathies."

Paterno grew up in Brooklyn and played college football at Brown before accepting an assistant coaching position at Penn State in 1950 under Rip Engle. Upon Engle's retirement, Paterno ascended to the head coaching spot and never relinquished it, coaching through nine U.S. presidential administrations.

Paterno followed a 5-5 record in his first season in 1966 with an 8-2-1 mark a year later. After that, Penn State posted consecutive 11-0 seasons in '68 and '69 that ended with Orange Bowl victories. The Nittany Lions followed with only one losing record during the rest of the 20th century, winning 10 or more games 16 times in that span and going undefeated in 1973, '86 and '94. That 1994 season saw Paterno lead Penn State to its first Big Ten title in just its second year of league membership.

The Nittany Lions also won national championships in 1982 and '86, beating Georgia in the Sugar Bowl to conclude the '82 season and Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl to cap the '86 campaign.

Penn State struggled from 2000-04, posting only one winning season and going 26-33 during that span, but that only set up a final revival. Paterno's Nittany Lions went 11-1 in 2005, losing only to Michigan on a last-second touchdown, and captured a share of the Big Ten crown. The Nittany Lions went on to go 40-12 during the next four seasons, winning a share of the 2008 Big Ten title.

Paterno was among the most decorated coaches of his era. He was named Sports Illustrated's Sportsman of the Year in 1986 while also capturing five AFCA Coach of the Year honors. He won the Amos Alonzo Stagg Award, given by the AFCA to an "individual, group or institution whose services have been outstanding in the advancement of the best interests of football" in 2002, and was elected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 2006.

His impact was also felt off the field. Paterno donated more than \$4 million to Penn State, and he and his wife spearheaded the campaign to renovate the university's library, which was named after Paterno in 2000. The Paternos also worked extensively with the Special Olympics and donated to the Mount Nittany Medical Center.



Joe Paterno

## BIG Men's Basketball

	Conf.			Overall		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Ohio State	5	2	.714	17	3	.850
Michigan State	5	2	.714	16	4	.800
Michigan	5	2	.714	15	5	.750
Wisconsin	5	3	.625	16	5	.762
Illinois	4	3	.571	15	5	.750
Purdue	4	3	.571	14	6	.700
Indiana	4	4	.500	16	4	.800
Minnesota	3	4	.429	15	5	.750
Iowa	3	4	.429	11	9	.550
Northwestern	2	5	.286	12	7	.632
Nebraska	2	6	.250	10	9	.526
Penn State	2	6	.250	10	11	.476

### Jan. 17 Games

Michigan 60, Michigan State 59  
Purdue 75, Iowa 68

### Jan. 18 Games

Nebraska 70, Indiana 69  
Wisconsin 77, Northwestern 57

### Jan. 19 Game

Penn State 54, Illinois 52

### Jan. 21 Games

Ohio State 79, Nebraska 45  
Michigan State 83, Purdue 58  
Arkansas 66, Michigan 64

### Jan. 22 Games

Indiana 73, Penn State 54  
Wisconsin 67, Illinois 63  
Minnesota 75, Northwestern 52

### Jan. 24 Game

Michigan at Purdue, 7 p.m.

### Jan. 25 Games

Penn State at Ohio State, 6:30 p.m.  
Minnesota at Michigan State, 8:30 p.m.

### Jan. 26 Games

Nebraska at Iowa, 7 p.m.

Indiana at Wisconsin, 9 p.m.

### Jan. 28 Games

Purdue at Northwestern, 2 p.m.

Illinois at Minnesota, 8 p.m.

### Jan. 29 Games

Michigan at Ohio State, 1 p.m.

Iowa at Indiana, 6 p.m.

## BIG Women's Basketball

	Conf.			Overall		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Purdue	6	0	1.000	16	3	.842
Ohio State	6	1	.857	19	1	.950
Nebraska	5	2	.714	16	3	.842
Michigan	5	2	.714	16	4	.800
Penn State	5	2	.714	15	4	.789
Michigan State	4	2	.667	12	7	.632
Iowa	3	4	.429	11	9	.550
Minnesota	3	4	.429	11	10	.524
Northwestern	2	5	.286	12	8	.600
Wisconsin	2	5	.286	6	13	.316
Illinois	0	7	.000	6	14	.300
Indiana	0	7	.000	5	15	.250

### Jan. 16 Game

Northwestern 59, Illinois 58

### Jan. 19 Games

Ohio State 82, Nebraska 48  
Michigan 58, Northwestern 48  
Purdue 82, Indiana 60  
Minnesota 71, Michigan State 65  
Penn State 71, Illinois 65  
Iowa 69, Wisconsin 57

### Jan. 22 Games

Ohio State 96, Illinois 84  
Michigan 66, Indiana 48  
Penn State 68, Iowa 52  
Wisconsin 75, Northwestern 55  
Nebraska 64, Minnesota 49

### Jan. 23 Game

Michigan State at Purdue, 7:30 p.m.

### Jan. 26 Games

Illinois at Michigan State, 6 p.m.  
Penn State at Michigan, 7 p.m.  
Purdue at Northwestern, 8 p.m.  
Ohio State at Indiana, 8 p.m.  
Wisconsin at Minnesota, 8 p.m.  
Iowa at Nebraska, 8:05 p.m.

### Jan. 28 Game

Purdue at Iowa, 3 p.m.

### Jan. 29 Games

Ohio State at Minnesota, 1 p.m.  
Nebraska at Illinois, 1 p.m.  
Indiana at Northwestern, 3 p.m.  
Penn State at Michigan State, 3 p.m.

### Jan. 30 Game

Michigan at Wisconsin, 7:30 p.m.

Paterno's work at Penn State was known as "The Grand Experiment," as he believed in making his players well-rounded citizens in addition to just football players. His players achieved in the classroom, with 47 being named Academic All-Americans, and Paterno's program annually placed among the best in the nation in NCAA academic measures.

"As the last 61 years have shown, Joe made an incredible impact," said the family statement released upon his death. "That impact has been felt and appreciated by our family in the form of thousands of letters and well wishes along with countless acts of kindness from people whose lives he touched. It is evident also in the thousands of successful student-athletes who have gone on to multiply that impact as they spread out across the country."

But his legacy will always include the situation with Sandusky, which led to harsh criticism and his eventual firing the night of Nov. 9. Paterno, who had announced his retirement effective the end of the season earlier in the day, was still employed as a tenured professor at the time of his death.

The decision to let him go resulted in brief student riots on the Penn State campus, but Paterno was also scolded relentlessly by national media members for not doing more in the Sandusky situation.

A little more than a week before his death, Paterno told The Washington Post that he wasn't sure how to handle what he had been told by the assistant coach who had allegedly witnessed Sandusky with a young boy in the showers in 2002, so he simply forwarded it up the chain of command.

"I'm sick about it," Paterno said. "I didn't know exactly how to handle it and I was afraid to do something that might jeopardize what the university procedure was. So I backed away and turned it over to some other people, people I thought would have a little more expertise than I did. It didn't work out that way."

Two Penn State administrators, including athletic director Tim Curley, have been charged with failing to report the situation to authorities along with perjury.

As Pat Forde of Yahoo! Sports wrote, "Now the postscript is suddenly conflicted and complicated. ... Joe Paterno's life cannot be viewed in black and white anymore. It ends with a sad shroud of gray placed over the prism of our perspective."

### Larkin Makes Hall

Former Michigan baseball standout Barry Larkin has been elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in voting by the Baseball Writers Association of America. The honor was announced Jan. 9.

Larkin spent his entire career in his hometown of Cincinnati, earning 12 All-Star bids in 19 seasons for the Reds along with the 1995 National League MVP award.

Larkin was originally recruited out of Cincinnati Moeller High School by legendary football coach Bo Schmebeckler in 1982. But after redshirting his first year in Ann Arbor, Larkin switched to baseball and never looked back. Larkin was a two-time All-American for the Wolverines on the diamond in 1984 and 1985 and his No. 16 was retired in 2010.

## YEAR IN REVIEW



SONNY BROCKWAY PHOTOS

**NEW BOSS, OLD BOSS** – Urban Meyer (left) was named Ohio State's new head football coach on Nov. 28, nearly six months to the day that Jim Tressel (right) and OSU parted ways.

# Hello & Goodbye

## *Year Full Of Drama Saw End Of Tressel's Era, Start Of Meyer's*

By **MATTHEW HAGER**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Winning a Bowl Championship Series game is usually a big deal. In almost any other year at almost any other school, it would be among the top stories – if not the top one – of the year.

But 2011 was a year unlike any other at Ohio State. The Buckeyes defeated Arkansas in the Sugar Bowl in dramatic fashion, yet that story ranked only 10th among Buckeye Sports Bulletin's annual countdown of the top OSU sports stories of the calendar year.

From the ouster of longtime head football coach Jim Tressel following a scandal-filled handful of months and the subsequent hiring of Urban Meyer to yet another Big Ten title for both the men's and women's basketball teams, the past year was full of noteworthy stories.

Here is BSB's list of the top Ohio State sports stories of 2011 as voted on by the staff.

### **1. Tressel's Tenure Ends Amid NCAA Scandal**

A scandal that started to rear its head as 2010 came to an end resulted in the shocking departure of Tressel as Ohio State's head football coach.

"After meeting with university officials, we agreed that it is in the best interest of Ohio State that I resign as head football coach," Tressel said May 30 in a signed letter. "The appreciation that (wife) Ellen and I have for the Buckeye Nation is immeasurable. We have been blessed to work with the finest group of young men in America and we love them dearly.

"We know that God had a plan for us and we will be fine. We will be Buckeyes forever."

The Tressel saga began Dec. 23, 2010,

when he announced that six of his players had been suspended for the start of the 2011 season. Quarterback Terrelle Pryor, offensive lineman Mike Adams, running back Boom Herron, wide receiver DeVier Posey and defensive lineman Solomon Thomas were suspended five games for selling memorabilia, and linebacker Jordan Whiting earned a one-game punishment for receiving improper benefits.

Then on Jan. 13, Ohio State discovered that Tressel had been alerted to the situation on April 2, 2010, by former OSU football player and Columbus attorney Christopher Cicero. The one-time walk-on emailed Tressel to inform the coach that a recent federal raid as part of a drug trafficking investigation showed that local tattoo parlor owner Edward Rife was in possession of Ohio State memorabilia of current players and selling it for profit. In addition, the email said OSU players had been given free tattoos at Rife's Fine Line Ink parlor in Columbus.

Tressel replied, "I will get on it ASAP."

Cicero emailed Tressel again on April 16 with more information and for the first time requested confidentiality. The final communication between Cicero and Tressel came in June 2010 when the coach asked the attorney if he knew of any other student-athletes involved with Rife. Cicero responded that he did not.

Ohio State launched a nearly two-month investigation after the university uncovered the emails. It came to an end in March when OSU announced that Tressel had violated his contract, athletic department protocol and NCAA bylaw 10.1 by failing to report information that some of his players were potentially involved in NCAA rules violations.

Even so, Tressel was initially going to keep his job. His punishments – a two-game suspension (later extended to five games), a \$250,000 fine and a mandate that Tressel attend a compliance seminar

– were announced in a press conference with Tressel, athletic director Gene Smith and OSU president Dr. E. Gordon Gee on March 8.

"I want to make sure everyone understands, wherever we end up at the end of the day, Jim Tressel is our football coach," Smith said. "All the speculation about him being terminated is pure speculation. This case, in my view, does not warrant it."

Gee also came out in support of Tressel but did so in a way that drew ridicule and ire from national commentators.

"Are you kidding me?" Gee said when asked if he considered dismissing Tressel. "Let me just be very clear: I'm just hopeful the coach doesn't dismiss me."

Tressel continued to coach through spring football, but negative publicity continued to surround the Ohio State program. The Columbus Dispatch reported that while Tressel had not alerted anyone at OSU, he had in fact forwarded the emails to Ted Sarniak, Pryor's mentor from his hometown of Jeannette, Pa.

Finally, Tressel was gone the morning of May 30.

Smith did not hold a press conference that day but did release a three-minute video statement about the decision. In the video, Smith said he met with Tressel upon the coach's return from a vacation on May 29 and the two came to a mutual agreement.

"We did meet with part of the team this morning and those who were not there, they were contacted by their position coaches, but Coach Tressel did what we all knew that he would do," Smith said. "He did an eloquent job of explaining to the young men what transition really means and what they need to focus on. We met with the team and exited."

"Prior to the team meeting, we did meet with the coaching staff and the support staff

around our football program and shared with them that Jim had decided to resign."

Tressel's 2011 story did not end with his resignation. Five days after he resigned, hundreds of Ohio State fans marched to Tressel's house in the Columbus suburb of Upper Arlington. He met the group at his doorstep, posed for pictures and briefly addressed the crowd.

"We're going to be Buckeyes for life," said Tressel, who was accompanied by Ellen. "What's that old saying, 'Buckeye born and bred, I'll be a Buckeye 'til I'm dead.'"

Tressel did not stay out of football for long. On Sept. 2, he was hired to be a game-day video consultant for the Indianapolis Colts. He served a seven-game suspension for his involvement in the NCAA investigations before starting the job.

### **2. Meyer Takes Over As Football Coach**

Two days after the Ohio State football team capped a disappointing 6-6 regular season with a loss at Michigan (more on that later), Buckeye fans got an early Christmas present and a much-needed boost when Meyer was announced as the 24th head football coach in program history.

Meyer – he of a 104-23 record and two national championships over 10 seasons at Bowling Green, Utah and Florida – returned to his native state after a year away from coaching. He was born in Toledo, raised in Ashtabula and educated at the University of Cincinnati.

"It's great to be back home," the coach said during his Nov. 28 introductory press conference.

Meyer spent the 2011 season as an ESPN broadcaster after stepping down at Florida, hoping to find balance in his life. He allowed stress to get the better of him at UF and negatively affect his health, but is deter-



## YEAR IN REVIEW

mined not to make the same mistakes at Ohio State.

"I call it the pursuit of perfection," Meyer said. "I think at the end of the day we all know there's no such thing. I fell victim to that. I've been to a place (that) I'm not going to go back."

In addition to his broadcasting duties, Meyer reconnected with his family during his year away from the game. He spent time watching his daughters play volleyball – Nicki at Georgia Tech and Gigi at Florida Gulf Coast – while coaching his son's baseball team.

But the coaching bug never left Meyer.

"I know he missed it so achingly bad," Meyer's wife, Shelley, said. "He made it clear to me for several months now that he couldn't not coach again. I just wanted to make sure that he had the energy. We had family discussions. We fired hard questions at him – even the kids – and at the end we all knew it was the right thing."

Meyer said he felt good and learned during his time in the broadcast booth how other coaches found the right balance between work and family. That knowledge helped him decide to take the OSU job – that plus a piece of paper the coach had in his pocket during his introductory press conference.

"This is a contract that my kids made me sign before I was allowed to sign a real contract," said Meyer, who pulled out a pink sheet given to him by Nicki that required him to stay in good health. "It's tougher than any other contract I've signed in my life. I will be the same guy that I was at the beginning of (my Florida) tenure, and that was a guy that did have balance, a guy that took care of himself, a guy that did not try to get involved and change everything."

Smith said he first contacted Meyer on Nov. 20, one day after Ohio State lost its final regular-season home game against Penn State. The two met three days later, and Smith offered him a contract on Nov. 27.

The following day, Meyer officially accepted the deal.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity," Meyer said. "But for the coaching position at The Ohio State University, I would not have coached this coming year."

### 3. Posey, Herron Among Players In More Hot Water

The Buckeyes already knew they were going to start the 2011 season without Adams, Herron, Posey, Pryor and Thomas for the first five games and Whiting for one contest. Those suspensions were not the only ones that affected the Buckeyes during a difficult campaign, however.

Two days before the season opener against Akron, Ohio State announced cornerback Travis Howard, running back Jordan Hall and safety Corey Brown were not going to play against the Zips for receiving impermissible benefits of \$200 at a charity event in February.

Ohio State self-reported the violations and hoped the trio would miss only one game. Unfortunately, the night before the second game of the season, the university announced Howard, Hall and Brown would be unavailable.

"The nature and scope of the violations merit a two-game suspension," read an NCAA statement released Sept. 9. "In addition, the facts submitted by the university have raised further questions that need to be answered before the reinstatement process is complete."

Documents released by the school revealed three players received \$200 apiece from Cleveland businessman Robert DiGeronimo while attending a charity event Feb. 19 in Cleveland. Two other players attended as well but did not receive money. The names of all the players as well as the charity, Cornerstone of Hope, involved were redacted from news releases by the university.

An unidentified former player invited the current players to the event, and the play-

ers attended without seeking permission from the OSU compliance department as they are required to do. The players might have been confused about being allowed to attend because team members were approved for the same event in 2007 and again in 2010.

In the course of interviews, the NCAA found disagreement among the players about where the money came from that they received and what they felt they received it for. Ohio State believed the players were invited to help promote the charity and fundraising activities, but two of the players thought they were working the event and entitled to receive compensation.

Howard, Hall and Brown were cleared to return to the field for the third game of the season at Miami (Fla.). Offensive lineman Corey Linsley also made his season debut against the Hurricanes after the sophomore was sidelined for an undisclosed violation of team rules.

DiGeronimo's name popped up again Oct. 3 when Posey, Herron and offensive lineman Marcus Hall were all ruled out indefinitely after Ohio State and the NCAA determined the players were paid by the Cleveland businessman for summer work they did not perform.

The payments to Posey, Herron and Hall from the OSU booster constituted a violation of three NCAA bylaws concerning employment, extra benefits and preferential treatment.

"This was a rigorous investigation collaborative with the NCAA enforcement staff and the institution," Smith said during an Oct. 8 press conference. "The dollar amounts for each student-athlete determine the penalty that will ultimately be levied by the NCAA."

That penalty was handed out four days later. Posey was suspended for five games, meaning he would suit up for only the final two games of the regular season. Herron and Hall each got one-game punishments, delaying Herron's season debut by another week.

Ohio State released a testy statement following the NCAA announcement.

"I am extremely disappointed with the NCAA's decision regarding DeVier Posey," Smith said. "This penalty is harsh considering the nature of the violation and the five-game suspension already served by this student-athlete."

Posey, Herron and Hall were not the only players involved in the DiGeronimo case. Defensive lineman Melvin Fellows and linebacker Etienne Sabino were also cited, but Fellows' playing career had already ended because of injury and Sabino was reinstated by the NCAA without missing any games.

The NCAA determined through phone and bank records as well as through interviews with the players that Herron, Posey, Hall, Fellows and Sabino were paid more than they earned. Work responsibilities generally included day labor such as clean-up work at a car wash or picking up scrap metal, responsibilities for which each player was paid \$15 per hour.

Posey first was overpaid in June 2009, while the other players all worked for DiGeronimo in either the summer of 2010 or the spring and summer of 2011.

In addition to the player suspensions, DiGeronimo was disassociated from the university.

### 4. NCAA Hammer Falls On OSU With Bowl Ban

A scandal-filled year ended on a sour note Dec. 20 when the NCAA levied sanctions against Ohio State, including a one-

year postseason ban for the football team.

Three days shy of the one-year anniversary of the press conference during which OSU announced that six of its student-athletes had broken NCAA rules and faced suspensions for the 2011 season, Ohio State received the ban as well as additional scholarship reductions and a third year of probation to go with the university's self-imposed penalties.

Smith, who publicly maintained throughout the process that he did not expect major sanctions or a postseason ban, was stunned by the NCAA's ruling.

"We are surprised and disappointed with the NCAA's decision," the AD said.

The ban, which barred the Buckeyes from not only a bowl but a chance to play in the Big Ten Championship Game in 2012, was levied for several reasons, according to a 34-page report released by the NCAA Committee on Infractions. Among those reasons was the failure-to-monitor charge given to Ohio State stemming from the DiGeronimo incidents, the school's status as a repeat offender under NCAA bylaws and the fact that the university knowingly played ineligible players during the 2010 season and the 2011 Sugar Bowl.

The NCAA had allowed the suspended players to participate in the Sugar Bowl under the belief that no one at Ohio State knew of their violations. It was later determined that Tressel did know of the violations.

"I think it's important to keep in mind that the failure of the former head coach to divulge the information that he received related to preferential treatment resulted in those matters not being properly dealt with in a proper fashion," said Greg Sankey, NCAA Committee on Infractions member and associate commissioner of the Southeastern Conference, during a Dec. 20 teleconference.

"That related to a competitive advantage that was gained that played out in access to a BCS bowl game, which is one of the most high-profile team awards in the Football Bowl Subdivision. The combination of those factors in the committee's judgment justified the postseason ban."

The 2011 Buckeyes finished the regular season 6-6 and had already agreed to participate in the Gator Bowl. Sankey refused to speculate whether the postseason ban would have been levied if Ohio State had self-imposed one for the 2011 season.

The postseason ban and additional year of probation were tacked on to OSU's self-imposed penalties. Those included the vacation of the 2010 season, the return of \$338,811 for participating in the Sugar Bowl at the close of that campaign, the forced resignation of Tressel in May and the disassociations of DiGeronimo as well as Pryor.

Ohio State had also stripped itself of five scholarships over a three-year span, a number the NCAA increased by four. The Buckeyes will be reduced to 82 scholarships each of the next three seasons, down three from the maximum 85.

In addition to Ohio State's penalties, Tressel was also given a five-year show-cause penalty, meaning any school that would hire the former coach during that span would be subject to NCAA scrutiny.

"Although the former head coach provided rationalization for his failure to report violations resulting from the involvement of student-athletes with the tattoo parlor owner, the committee found them not to be credible," the Committee on Infractions wrote.



JOSH WINSLOW

**TOUGH YEAR** – Senior wide receiver DeVier Posey (8), seen here about to embrace head coach Luke Fickell on Nov. 19 before the Senior Day game against Penn State, played in only two regular-season contests in 2011 because of NCAA suspensions.

Continued On Page 22

# Men's Basketball Team's Run Ends In Sweet 16

Continued From Page 21

"The former head coach's inaction on four different occasions was in the committee's view a deliberate effort to conceal the situation from the institution and the NCAA in order to preserve the eligibility of the aforementioned student-athletes, several of whom were key contributors to the team's highly successful 12-1 season in 2010."

## 5 (tie). OSU Finishes 6-6; Miller Takes Starting Job

The football team's 6-6 season and the emergence of freshman Braxton Miller as Ohio State's starting quarterback tied for the fifth-most important story of 2011. More often than not, the success Miller saw on the field directly affected the Buckeyes' chances of winning.

The season started off well enough for the Buckeyes, who blasted hapless Akron by a 42-0 score on Sept. 3 behind a solid performance by fifth-year senior quarterback Joe Bauserman. The former minor league baseball player beat out Miller and sophomore Kenny Guiton for the starting job in preseason camp. Bauserman completed 12 of 16 passes for 163 yards and three touchdowns – all the scores to junior tight end Jake Stoneburner.

Miller also saw playing time during the rout, completing eight of his 12 attempts for 130 yards and a score.

The game against the Zips would be Bauserman's season highlight, however, as he and the Buckeyes struggled the following week in a 27-22 win against Toledo. Bauserman looked shaky at times against the Rockets while completing 16 of 30 passes for 189 yards and a score. Miller did not play.

The downward trend continued over the next four weeks.

OSU lost three of its next four contests, and after the Buckeyes lost a 24-6 decision Sept. 17 at Miami (Fla.) – a game in which Bauserman and Miller completed a combined 4 of 18 passes for a mere 35 yards with no touchdowns and two interceptions – Miller was named the new starter.

The freshman's first start was Sept. 24 against Colorado at Ohio Stadium, and the Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne product combined for 167 yards through the air and on the ground during a 37-17 win. Miller also threw two TD passes, both to freshman wide receiver Devin Smith.

Miller's next start a week later against visiting Michigan State was not as good. He was eventually relieved by Bauserman, but both QBs had plenty of trouble against the Spartans' talented defense. The pair combined for 143 yards passing and were sacked a total of nine times during a 10-7 loss.

Arguably Miller's best start came in the next game. It was also likely OSU's most excruciating defeat of the season. In Ohio State's first trip to Lincoln to take on new Big Ten foe Nebraska, the Buckeyes raced out to a 27-6 lead behind Miller's rushing and passing efforts. He sprained his right ankle in the third quarter, however, and did not return. With Bauserman under center, the offense went stagnant and Nebraska rallied for a 34-27 victory as the senior QB completed only one of his 10 pass attempts. Before leaving the game, Miller had rushed for 91 yards and completed 5 of 8 passes for 95 yards.

The Buckeyes were sitting at 3-3 after leaving Nebraska but responded with a three-game winning streak after the disap-

pointment in Lincoln. Ohio State earned a 17-7 victory at Illinois, a dramatic 33-29 triumph at Ohio Stadium vs. eventual Big Ten champion Wisconsin and another home victory against Indiana by a 34-20 margin.

The most notable game, of course, was the upset win against the No. 12 Badgers in a prime-time contest. Miller contributed three touchdowns in the win, and the final one was the most important.

After Wisconsin quarterback Russell Wilson found wide receiver Jared Abbrederis all alone for a 49-yard touchdown with 1:18 remaining in the fourth quarter to give UW a 29-26 lead, Miller led a final scoring drive and connected with Smith for the game winner – a 40-yard, on-the-run touchdown heave with 20 seconds remaining.

Unfortunately for Miller and the Buckeyes, the upset over the Badgers was the season's best moment. After struggling against the Hoosiers, Ohio State ended the season with three straight losses to fall out of Big Ten title game contention.

A blocked extra point in the final seconds of regulation led to a 26-23 overtime loss at Purdue, and that was followed by a 20-14 loss to Penn State and a 40-34 defeat at Michigan to end the season. The loss to the Wolverines was the first since 2003 but saw Miller have his best passing performance of the season. He threw for 235 yards and rushed for 100 more. The freshman QB also scored three touchdowns but could not complete a last-minute comeback.

With that final defeat, Ohio State finished its first non-winning regular season since 1999. The Buckeyes' 3-5 Big Ten record was their first losing conference mark since the same season.

## 7. Matta's Men Win Big Ten, Fall To Kentucky In Sweet 16

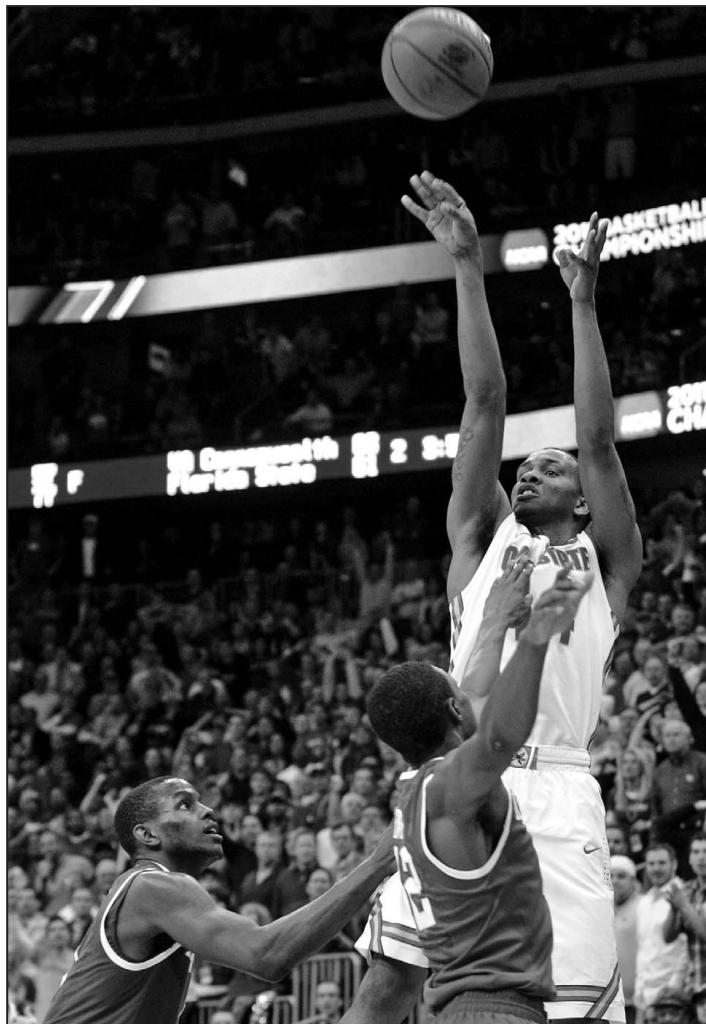
A special season ended with a clank March 25 when William Buford's last shot drew only iron in the final seconds, sending Ohio State to a 62-60 defeat against Kentucky during a Sweet 16 showdown at the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J.

Buford's three-point attempt hit the front of the rim and bounced upward but not forward. The rebound fell near the hoop, and the Wildcats knocked the ball toward midcourt as the final seconds ticked away. When the final horn sounded, UK players erupted while the Buckeyes saw their season end in a flash.

"I had a great look," said Buford, who missed 14 of 16 shots from the field on the night. "It just didn't fall for me (tonight). I felt like I had great looks coming off ball screens and coming off curls, but I just wasn't able to knock shots down."

The disappointing end overshadowed an impressive campaign for Thad Matta's charges. The Buckeyes finished the season with a 34-3 record and opened the season with 24 straight victories. Ohio State cruised to the Big Ten regular-season championship before beating Northwestern (67-61 in overtime), Michigan (68-61) and Penn State (71-60) en route to the conference tournament championship at Conseco Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

The Buckeyes were selected as East Region's No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament, and Ohio State opened play in Cleveland with a 75-46 rout against No. 16 Texas San Antonio. Two days later, the Buckeyes advanced to the Sweet 16 with a 98-66 victory against eighth-seeded George Mason. OSU set a school NCAA Tournament single-game



SONNY BROCKWAY

**BOUNCED OUT** – Then-junior William Buford's final shot March 25 failed to fall, sending Ohio State out of the NCAA Tournament in the Sweet 16. Kentucky bested the Buckeyes by a 62-60 final thanks to a Brandon Knight jumper with 5.4 seconds remaining.

record in the win by shooting 61.5 percent (16 for 26) from three-point range.

Then came the clash against fourth-seeded Kentucky, one that featured 19 lead changes and 11 ties. The Wildcats earned the victory thanks to a midrange jumper by Brandon Knight with 5.4 seconds remaining that broke a 60-60 tie.

Emotions flowed after the loss. In the Ohio State locker room, senior Jon Diebler pulled his jersey over his mouth and screamed while freshman Jared Sullinger glumly stared ahead. Matta looked for words to tell his team and came up empty.

"He pretty much couldn't say anything," Sullinger said. "He was in tears."

The end of the season also marked the end of the collegiate careers of Diebler, David Lighty and center Dallas Lauderdale.

Sullinger took home a host of honors following his first college season. He was a consensus first-team All-Big Ten selection and also received Big Ten Freshman of the Year honors. Additionally, he garnered the Wayman Tisdale National Freshman of the Year award and earned several first-team All-America accolades.

Buford and Lighty were named to the all-conference second team, and Diebler received third-team honors. Freshman point guard Aaron Craft was named Sixth Man of the Year by conference coaches and joined Lighty on the Big Ten's all-defensive team.

## 8. Fickell Follows Tressel, Stays At OSU Under Meyer

Luke Fickell ended 2011 the same way he began the year – as an Ohio State assistant. In between, he got a taste of the head coaching job, taking over the program on an interim basis following Tressel's departure.

When Tressel was initially suspended for two games in early March, Fickell was named the man who would replace him for the Akron and Toledo contests. Tressel's suspension was later extended to five games, and when Tressel and Ohio State split for good, Fickell was announced as the man who would lead the Buckeyes.

The former Ohio State defensive lineman who started for four years in the mid-1990s was left with the task of overseeing a program that was not only without its longtime head coach but was also without three-year



## YEAR IN REVIEW

starting quarterback Pryor, who left for the NFL, and three other suspended offensive stars to start the season.

Nevertheless, the new head coach said he was ready for the challenge.

"Everything happened pretty fast," Fickell said before the season. "The greatest thing I guess I could say is I had no time to sit and think. I had no time to feel sorry of any sort, to have a whole lot of emotion. The situation arose and obviously I had to stand up.

"I think that's what's been best for me – not to have the ability to sit down and think about the situation that's ahead but hit the ground running, do what I know how to do best, and that's compete and obviously learn along the way. It has been exciting and challenging, but I think that's what you get into this field for."

Fickell did his best to keep the Buckeyes focused on the on-field challenge, but the Buckeyes struggled down the stretch and finished with a 6-6 record. During a late-season losing streak, the rumor mill was churning with the suggestion that Meyer would soon be taking over.

As a result, Fickell's frustration finally boiled over after the season-ending loss at Michigan. Upon being asked if he had been kept in the loop about the coaching situation leading up to the game, he pounded the table in anger.

"I said it's about the Ohio State-Michigan game," Fickell said. "It's been about that since Saturday. This is going to be about that always. That's the way it is."

Meyer was named the new head coach less than 48 hours later, but Fickell was the subject of praise from Smith during Meyer's introductory press conference.

"There's no question – we all know it – that Luke and his staff took on an unbelievable challenge to lead this football program through this particular year at this particular time, and he was the right leader for that time to lead this football program," Smith said. "I think we all saw it on the field of play – different situations at different times – that he responded.

"I want to publicly thank Luke and the staff for taking on the challenge and leading these young men through this challenging season."

Despite losing the head coaching job, Fickell decided to remain at Ohio State. Meyer, Fickell and their wives met the night after the Michigan game for several hours, and the next morning the two men met for coffee at 7 a.m. Before the latter meeting, Meyer said he knew he wanted Fickell on staff.

"Shelley and I prayed about it, we talked about it, we took our time," Meyer said. "The next morning, we woke up and I looked at her again – she's a better judge of talent than I am – and there's no doubt I wanted him to be a part of this team."

Fickell was named defensive coordinator and linebackers coach on Meyer's staff.

## 9. Women's Basketball Team Wins Another Title

The Ohio State women's basketball team won its third consecutive Big Ten tournament championship but did so in a new way – as underdogs. The fifth-seeded Buckeyes beat four seed Iowa, top seed Michigan State and two seed Penn State at Conoco Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

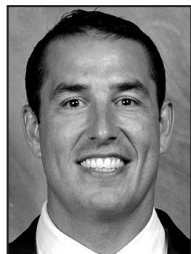
Ohio State was led by center Jantel Lavender as well as guards Samantha Prahalis and Tayler Hill. The trio was named to the all-tournament team, and Lavender was named the tourney's most outstanding player for the third straight season after averaging 23.7 points and 12.7 rebounds for the three games.

The Buckeyes started their run with a 71-61 victory against the Hawkeyes. Brittany Johnson sparked the win by scoring a game-high 23 points thanks in large part to 7-for-14 shooting from beyond the arc. Johnson made a pair of threes during a crucial final run in the waning minutes, the latter of which gave OSU a 66-61 lead with 1:16 to go and essentially iced the victory.

The next night, Ohio State advanced to the tournament final with a 72-57 win against the top-seeded Spartans. Lavender led the Buckeyes to their third victory against MSU during the season with a tournament-record 37 points to outduel the Spartans' talented duo of Kalisha Keane and Lykendra Johnson. Lavender made 15 of her 20 shots from the field and went 7 of 7 at the free-throw line.

In the final against Penn State, Lavender and Prahalis combined to score 46 points in the 84-70 title-clinching win. The pair each netted 23 points and Hill added 17 on 6-for-12 shooting, including 3 of 5 from beyond the arc.

The tournament championship was extra sweet for the Buckeyes, who at one point were 4-6 in Big Ten regular-season play and looked like they might miss the NCAA tournament.



Luke Fickell

"It's fun winning for my teammates and especially this year with where we came from and how people just kind of gave up on our team," Lavender said. "We just kind of all stuck together, and that's what makes us feel that much better."

Ohio State was a No. 4 seed in the Dayton Region of the NCAA tournament and opened play in Columbus at St. John Arena with an 80-69 victory against 13th-seeded Central Florida.

Prahalis led the attack with a 19-point, 10-assist effort.

Five seed Georgia Tech was next for OSU, and the Yellow Jackets and their press were unable to beat back the Buckeyes. Ohio State erased a one-point halftime deficit to score a 67-60 win at St. John Arena with Lavender scoring a game-high 21 points, including 17 after half-time.



Jantel Lavender

Ohio State's season came to an end March 26 in a regional semifinal against top-seeded Tennessee at the University of Dayton Arena. The Lady Vols' taller, deeper lineup bested the Buckeyes, 85-75. Ohio State led 42-40 at halftime after shooting 66.7 percent (16 for 24) from the floor in the first half, but Tennessee cranked up the defense after the break.

UT tied the game just 1:12 into the second half, and the Lady Vols eventually built a six-point lead at 56-50 with 12:55 remaining. Ohio State drew within one twice, the latter time on a Lavender jumper with 9:49 left to make it 58-57, but Tennessee answered Lavender's basket with a 15-5 run that ended OSU's threat.

Lavender closed her career as the program's all-time leading scorer (2,818 points) and rebounder (1,422). Her rebounding total also established a new Big Ten career record, as did her 1,142 field goals.

"The numbers Jantel put up over her career speak for themselves," OSU head coach Jim Foster said. "She was the model of consistency year in and year out. She will continue to have a great career."

The Buckeyes finished the season with a 24-10 record.

## 10. Suspended Players Lead In Sugar Bowl Win

Before the off-the-field drama that pushed Pryor to the NFL, cost Tressel his job and ultimately forced the NCAA to punish Ohio State for its transgressions, 2011 started pretty well for the football Buckeyes thanks to a 31-26 victory against Arkansas in the Sugar Bowl.

One of the players in the middle of the subsequent scandal played the hero in the final seconds. Thomas, a reserve defensive end, nabbed a game-saving interception of a Ryan Mallett pass with 58 seconds left, heroics that gave Ohio State its first victory against an SEC foe in 10 bowl battles.

"(Defensive coordinator Jim) Heacock has always told me, it's what I do with those snaps," Thomas said on making the most of his limited playing time. "It's not about when or how many. It's what I do with them."

Thomas saved the day only 17 seconds after Arkansas put itself on the brink of a come-from-behind victory. The Razorbacks blocked a punt and had taken over at the OSU 18-yard line, but the threat ended two plays later when Thomas faked a rush, dropped back into coverage and picked off a pass intended for wide receiver Jarius Wright.

The play allowed Ohio State to escape with the win. The Buckeyes had built a 28-7 lead in the first half before Arkansas nearly clawed all the way back.

"Our kids kept fighting," Tressel said. "Arkansas is a special football team, but we knew that when we drew them. When you get in a bowl like the Sugar Bowl, you're going to get a great opponent, and we've had about five or six opponents in a row like this. It's just a knock-down, drag-out game and I'm awfully proud of our guys."

The Buckeyes nearly turned the knock-down contest into an early knockout by building their large first-half lead.

Ohio State started the scoring in front of the primarily Arkansas-backing crowd of 73,879 thanks to a heads-up play by Dane Sanzenbacher. On third-and-9 from the Razorbacks' 37, Pryor was flushed from the pocket and scrambled to the 3 before losing his grip on the football when he was tackled by Arkansas safety Tramain Thomas. The loose ball squirted toward the goal line and through the hands of two Razorbacks players before Sanzenbacher dived on it in the end zone for a touchdown early in the first quarter.

Arkansas answered on its next offensive possession, but the Buckeyes took command with three consecutive touchdowns. The first came late in the first quarter on a 9-yard touchdown run by Herron. Sanzenbacher added a 15-yard TD reception and Posey hauled in a 43-yard scoring strike from Pryor, both coming in the second quarter to give Ohio State a 28-7 lead.

Zach Hocker booted a 20-yard field goal on the final play of the first half to send Arkansas into the halftime break down 28-10, and the Razorbacks eventually pulled within five points on Hocker's 47-yard field goal with 8:55 left in the game.

Then both teams made critical mistakes in the final minutes to set up the fantastic finish. First, Herron fumbled as he vaulted over the pile on a fourth-and-1 play at the OSU 39 to give Arkansas the ball at the 38 with 5:56 remaining. The Razorbacks failed to take advantage, however, thanks in large part to a holding penalty and a dropped third-down pass by receiver Lance Ray.

Ohio State took over after the punt at its own 4 and advanced to the 38 before preparing to punt. Arkansas was out of timeouts with 1:15 left on the clock, but Colton Miles-Nash came straight up through the middle to block Ben Buchanan's punt. Despite having a clear path to the end zone, Julian Horton fell on the loose ball at the OSU 18.

Mallett then threw an incomplete on first down before Thomas picked him off on second down to seal the victory.

## Honorable Mentions

The following stories received votes from the BSB staff but did not rank among the top 10.

- The men's volleyball team, led by long-time coach Pete Hanson, won its first NCAA championship by rallying to defeat UC Santa Barbara in five sets. The Buckeyes earned the victory after dropping the first set 25-20. OSU won the next two sets, 25-20 and 25-19, before the Gauchos forced a fifth and deciding set with a 25-22 win in the fourth set.

- Ohio State (26-6) then clinched the title, the first for the program after losing in its other two NCAA final appearances, with a 15-9 win in the final set. The championship allowed the Buckeyes' five fifth-year seniors to go out on top.

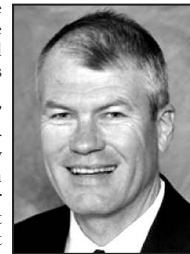
"I'm so happy that it could end the way it ended for them in that they absolutely got a chance to realize their dreams and their goals," Hanson said. "It's not very often that happens, to put something down on paper and then to have it play out like that. That's a pretty phenomenal thing."

- The Ohio State men's hockey, men's basketball and women's basketball teams opened the 2011-12 season red hot. The hockey team ended the calendar year ranked No. 4 nationally and atop the Central Collegiate Hockey Association standings with an overall record of 14-4-1 and 10-3-1-1 in the conference. Matta's men were 13-2 (1-1 Big Ten) heading into 2012 and ranked No. 2 in the nation. And the women's basketball team had the best mark of them all, unbeaten at 14-0 (1-0 Big Ten), and were No. 9 nationally.

- Tressel's final recruiting class ranked third according to Scout.com. Ohio State added 23 signees, including 15 who were rated four-star prospects or better. The three five-star signees were Miller, Richmond (Va.) Hermitage linebacker Curtis Grant and Steve Miller, a defensive lineman from Canton (Ohio) McKinley.

- Ohio State honored legendary Olympic athlete and former Buckeye Jesse Owens with a new statue in front of the stadium that bears his name. The unveiling ceremony was attended by members of Owens' family and fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, on April 21.

- The university lost several beloved members during 2011, including former football players Bob Shaw and Ron Springs, football coach Joe Daniels and basketball player Brent Darby. The Ohio State family also mourned the passing of Jean Bruce, wife of former football coach Earle Bruce.

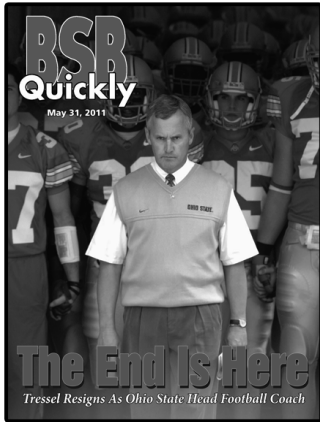


Pete Hanson



Terrelle Pryor

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## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

# Sullinger Takes Share Of Blame For Struggles

Jared Sullinger won't go so far as to describe himself as a sore loser, but Ohio State's sophomore big man will admit he doesn't like coming up short in anything – let alone basketball.

"I haven't lost much in my life," Sullinger told BSB. "Whenever I do, especially in basketball, I take it very seriously. I don't think there is ever a situation where losing is acceptable, especially for a team this good."

Of course, Paul's offensive explosion was a large part of it, but the obviously irritated Craft didn't beat around the bush when admitting the Buckeyes don't always play hard.

"You never know what team is going to show up," Craft said. "Some games we play hard and some games we don't. And every time we don't the other team makes us pay for it.

"(Opponents) exploit our weaknesses, especially when we don't want to play hard and play together. One of the big things we need to do is find a way to play together. It's a blessing and a privilege to come out and play basketball, and if we're taking it for granted and just expecting things to happen, it's going to be a long season."

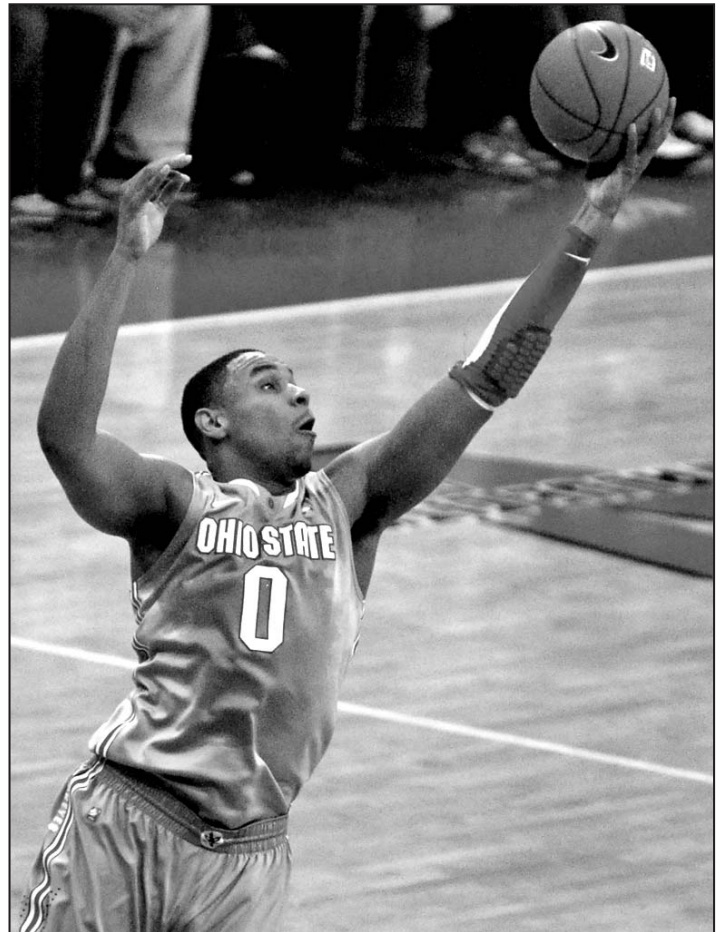
Taken at face value, Craft's remarks were general statements about the team. Sullinger, the unquestionable leader for the Big Ten-favorite Buckeyes, took them a different way.

"Actually, he was kind of singling out me," the sophomore said. "There were times in the Illinois game where I kind of took a break on the defensive end and it cost us. Honestly, I was one of those people that played hard when they wanted to, and hon-

## COURT REPORT Ari Wasserman

So it wasn't anything out of the ordinary when Sullinger sported a rather somber face while speaking with a faint voice during a meeting with the media shortly after Ohio State's 79-74 loss Jan. 10 at Illinois.

It was Aaron Craft's comments after the loss – delivered to the media from a similar disappointed demeanor – that suggested more went into the Buckeyes' defeat than Illinois guard Brandon Paul's 43-point scoring barrage.



KEVIN DYE

**LOOKING INWARD** – Ohio State sophomore Jared Sullinger (0) blamed himself for the Buckeyes' Jan. 10 loss at Illinois after admitting to taking a break at times on the defensive end of the floor.



OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

2011-12 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

17-3 Overall (5-2 Big Ten)  
Statistics through games of Jan. 21

Player	G	GS	Min.	Avg.	FG	FGA	Pct.	3P	3PA	Pct.	FT	FTA	Pct.	Off.	Def.	Total	Avg.	PF	FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.	Avg.
Jared Sullinger	18	17	502	27.9	112	189	.593	8	17	.471	76	102	.745	43	120	163	9.1	48	0	17	30	14	28	308	17.1
William Buford	20	20	641	32.0	115	264	.436	31	82	.378	43	50	.860	19	70	89	4.5	29	0	68	41	3	17	304	15.2
Deshawn Thomas	20	20	560	28.0	119	215	.553	22	63	.349	40	55	.727	41	43	84	4.2	34	0	19	27	1	9	300	15.0
Aaron Craft	20	20	590	29.5	55	118	.466	8	27	.296	42	61	.689	12	52	64	3.2	43	1	102	41	1	50	160	8.0
Lenzelle Smith Jr.	20	20	450	22.5	43	83	.518	17	35	.486	20	41	.488	27	64	91	4.6	40	0	43	22	2	25	123	6.2
Evan Ravenel	20	3	245	12.3	36	64	.563	0	0	.000	26	40	.650	20	30	50	2.5	41	1	6	16	6	9	98	4.9
J.D. Weatherspoon	17	0	127	7.5	26	41	.634	0	2	.000	13	22	.591	16	8	24	1.4	6	0	2	6	4	5	65	3.8
Jordan Sibert	19	0	253	13.3	21	73	.288	13	48	.271	10	16	.625	5	25	30	1.6	19	0	18	11	1	11	65	3.4
Sam Thompson	20	0	215	10.8	23	45	.511	1	8	.125	8	15	.533	6	15	21	1.1	15	0	18	8	7	4	55	2.8
Amir Williams	18	0	145	8.1	16	29	.552	0	0	.000	6	17	.353	21	25	46	2.6	17	0	5	15	4	0	38	2.1
LaQuinton Ross	5	0	21	4.2	2	8	.250	2	7	.286	4	4	1.000	0	2	2	0.4	2	0	2	0	0	0	10	2.0
Shannon Scott	19	0	217	11.4	15	45	.333	1	14	.071	2	4	.500	3	20	23	1.2	26	0	41	22	2	10	33	1.7
Trey McDonald	10	0	34	3.4	0	5	.000	0	0	.000	0	0	.000	2	3	5	0.5	2	0	1	4	0	0	0	0.0
TEAM																22	2.4								
Ohio State	20		4000	583-1179	.494	103-303	.340	290-427	.679	237-501	738-36.9	322-2	335	235	56	172	1559-77.9								
Opponents	20		4000	403-1013	.398	109-346	.315	205-297	.690	153-436	589-29.5	374-9	179	370	52	99	1120-56.0								

estly I have to stop that. That Illinois loss, I kind of blame myself."

Though Craft's blunt answers to pointed postgame questions weren't designed to publicly point fingers at the All-America big man, it was yet another wake-up call for Sullinger to help guide Ohio State through a rough patch.

Sullinger admitted later the loss to the Fighting Illini hurt more than usual even before Craft made his comments. Realizing he was responsible for a good portion of the blame is what kept him up at night, and he hasn't been the same since.

"I took the Illinois loss really bad," Sullinger told BSB after his team bounced back five days later to blow out seventh-ranked Indiana by an 80-63 final at home. "It stood out because it was our second (conference road loss) and we had that game. We were up 11 and we gave it away."

A year ago, the Buckeyes lost only three games all season - including its loss to Kentucky in the NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16 - so the struggles the team was facing were incredibly unfamiliar for Sullinger.

After allowing a few hours to let the Illinois loss sink in - and maybe with a little help from Craft - Sullinger found what he needed to do. The answer, he said, starts and ends with himself and his responsibility to the team to be a leader. Now taking a break from social media, namely Twitter after receiving a multitude of negative comments from fans, Sullinger said he is determined to stay focused only on the things that matter.

"I wasn't trying to single anyone out," Craft told BSB. "That's just the type of player Jared is, and any time he hears something that pertains to him, he's going to take it to heart. That is a team thing - myself included - and we just had to have a better understanding of what it takes to be successful in the Big Ten."

"I have been around Jared for about four years now and I understand how he runs. He is one of those guys that you don't have to say much to. He's a high IQ player and sometimes all it takes is a loss or a word here or there and he gets going."

In the two games since the Buckeyes suffered the loss at Illinois, they have looked like an entirely different team with back-to-back blowout wins - the 17-point romp over Indiana and a 79-45 rout of Nebraska, one of the most lopsided losses in the history of the Cornhuskers' program.

Craft said he has seen a new dedication from Sullinger in practice, setting the tone for better basketball when the games come around.

"I think he's been different since that point," the sophomore point guard said. "You

just see him more focused, but I think as a team we're all more focused in just understanding that practice is very important to our success."

"We can't just look forward to playing games and no team is good enough to do that. We have to find a way to get better every day and I think Jared is doing a great job of setting an example for all of us to look at."

Head coach Thad Matta has frequent discussions with Sullinger about maintaining his leadership role, which can often be a tough balance given his easy-going personality.

"I think (talking to Sullinger about leadership) is something that probably transpires daily - just through talking and coaching and the film work that we do," Matta said. "We've been on him to do what he needs to do to play his best basketball. I think he's playing well, but we just want him to be a little more ... I don't know if it is vocal, but I think a lot of guys look to him."

Sullinger has promised to be re-energized after paying the ultimate price in the form of a loss, and that has shown up in practice. He understands, whether it's verbally or by his actions, the Buckeyes will continue to look to him during crunch time.

"I have seen angry Jared in practice sometimes," sophomore forward Deshaun Thomas said. "It motivates me. I'm always out there laughing and having fun, but seeing our best player out there taking it seriously just motivates me to go hard. We all feed off him. We look to him out there."

**Buford Snaps Slump**

Being the only senior on Ohio State's roster hasn't added any pressure for William Buford. What it has done, however, is magnify what has been an inconsistent final season with the Buckeyes.

And the guard acknowledges this season has been a bumpy ride so far.

"I get sidetracked sometimes on not keeping my mind in the game the whole 40 minutes," Buford said. "I just need to quit thinking too much and just go out there and play and try to help my teammates out. I've been having careless plays on offense and probably taking some plays off on the defensive end. But that's something that can be fixed and I'll fix it."

Taking plays off was already addressed by Craft as a team problem, but Buford's admitted lack of focus and a lower shooting percentage from beyond the arc have been tangible proof the senior guard hasn't had the year he hoped for.

Before Ohio State's win over Nebraska, Buford was shooting only 36.4 percent from three-point range, a tremendous difference

from the 44.2 percent clip he produced in his junior season.

But Buford has been known as a streaky shooter during his time at Ohio State and his overall shooting percentage (43.6 through 20 games) is similar to what he shot a year ago.

Questionable decision-making, which has led to a team-high 21 turnovers in conference play, is the real area of concern. That decision-making process was most highlighted in the senior's decision to take a contested NBA-range three-pointer in the waning seconds of the Buckeyes' loss at Indiana on New Year's Eve despite his team facing only a two-point deficit.

"I don't think he's trying to do too much because he's passing up opportunities offensively at times," Matta said. "I don't want to say that he's maybe overthinking what he's doing out there because I don't think that's the case completely."

But Buford showed some signs of coming to life in Ohio State's win at Nebraska. He posted a team-high 15 points and more importantly didn't have a turnover in 27 minutes on the floor. That was quite a turnaround against the Cornhuskers since he had a career-high six turnovers during the Buckeyes' first meeting with Nebraska on Jan. 3.

Buford is only 368 points shy of Dennis Hopson's school scoring record of 2,096 career points, which puts him in range to break that mark before the season comes to a close. That, combined with anxiousness for how NBA scouts have evaluated him, could have had an impact on his numbers.

But Buford told reporters after Ohio State's second win over Nebraska that he didn't find himself thinking too much. If that's the beginning of a trend, Matta knows his basketball team will be in a better spot moving forward.

"I want William to play with the confidence and the abilities that he has," the OSU coach said. "When he's doing those things, that's when he's playing his best basketball - kind of losing himself in the moment, just dancing with the music and just playing."

**Parker Adds To List**

Lithonia (Ga.) Miller Grove big man Tony Parker originally hoped he would have picked a college by the end of December. That didn't happen, of course, and the 6-8, 255-pound center is going in the opposite direction.

The five-star prospect, Scout.com's No. 19 overall prospect in the 2012 class, recently added Connecticut to schools he's considering, making a decision between Ohio State, UCLA, Duke, Kentucky, Memphis and the Huskies that much more difficult.

"Coach (Jim) Calhoun (of UConn) called me recently and that's probably one of my dad's favorite schools," Parker said. "I guess they are going to come in (to the process) a little bit. I have to talk to my dad and my mom and see where to go from here."

Ohio State has been steadily recruiting Parker since the beginning of the process, and that has helped the Buckeyes, who have yet to secure a commitment in the 2012 class, stay toward the top of his list. Parker admitted he has taken note of what OSU has done with its basketball program and sees a lot of potential there.

"Ohio State is a great program," he said. "They talk a lot about football, but their basketball team has been playing really well recently. They do a lot with their bigs and that really works into my favor because I am a big. I talk to Jared Sullinger and I see how he moves and I see how they find ways to get him the ball. They recruit great around their bigs, too, and that means a lot."

Parker not only has a solid relationship with the OSU coaching staff, he has developed a friendship with Sullinger as well as junior transfer Evan Ravenel. The three often communicate via Twitter.

"I have a deep relationship with the coaching staff," Parker said of Ohio State. "They know my game, they know what I like to do and what I don't like to do. They tell me what I need to do more, how to get open. Jared Sullinger helps me a lot and Evan Ravenel helps me a lot. I have a great relationship with the program."

Parker has one more official visit and he recently decided to use it before making his final decision. Though Parker hasn't decided which school will receive the visit, it is between Connecticut, Kentucky and Kansas.

"I am getting closer," he said of his decision. "It is starting to get hectic, but it is pretty cool and I don't let anything affect me too much. I'll probably pick around the springtime. I don't really feel pressure. You kind of get used to it. Colleges coaches need company, so they're going to call you and it is pretty cool talking to them."

**Hoops Notes**

- As mentioned, Sullinger has taken a break from his Twitter account to focus more on basketball. However, the sophomore told BSB that a recent wave of negative comments made partaking in social media less desirable. "I am not on Twitter," he said. "I actually deleted the app from my phone. I am just focusing on basketball. People talking about praying that I'd blow out my knees and pray that something happens to my mom, my dad, my brothers. Before I say something wrong, I just stay away from it."

- Ohio State assistant Chris Jent took in a game featuring 2015 Indianapolis Cathedral shooting guard Jalen Coleman on Jan. 17. Despite being only a freshman, the 6-4, 185-pound Coleman has already garnered scholarship offers from Indiana, Purdue, Butler and Notre Dame.

- Ohio State assistant Dave Dickerson was in attendance at the Flyin' To The Hoop Basketball Invitational the weekend of Jan. 14 in Trent Arena in Kettering, Ohio, to watch small forward Tony Farmer of Garfield Heights, Ohio. Farmer, a four-star prospect for 2013, doesn't have an offer from Ohio State, but the staff has told him it is keeping close tabs. Farmer has offers from Dayton, Xavier and West Virginia. "They've just been telling me that I need to pick it up some," Farmer said, "but that they really like my game and that they will be watching me."

# Paterno Also Played Part In Ohio State History

Joe Paterno's legacy is undisputed and recounted elsewhere in this issue of BSB, as it has been recounted in virtually every news outlet – large and small – during the days following the coach's Jan. 22 death. Whether that legacy has been tarnished by the recent scandal at Penn State is, as far as I'm concerned, a discussion for another day.

The thing that strikes me most in the wake of the legendary coach's passing is how omnipresent he has been for most of our sports-watching lives. Growing up back east, where Penn State was a presence even before Paterno led the school to football prominence, I can vaguely recall Rip Engle being head coach of the Nittany Lions.

But for a huge segment of the nation's population, there had never been another coach in State College until Paterno's recent demise. To put it in perspective, President Obama was 5 years old when JoePa took over at Penn State in 1966.

Joe Paterno not only made history as the winningest coach in Division I college football history, he was part of history. It is amazing how his career intertwined with the rest of college football.

Take Ohio State, for instance. Paterno pops up again and again.

In 1968, the Buckeyes won the national title behind their Super Sophomores, and the team that finished second in the polls that year was Paterno's Penn State. The Lions finished 11-0 after a 15-14 win over Kansas in the Orange Bowl. Interestingly, future Ohio State head coach John Cooper was defensive coordinator on Pepper Rodgers' staff for the Jayhawks that season.

In 1978, Woody Hayes made the bold and controversial move of starting ballyhooed freshman quarterback Art Schlichter over veteran quarterback Rod Gerald in the season opener. Paterno's Lions were the Buckeyes' opponents that day and they forced Schlichter into throwing five interceptions – a single-game school record that still stands – and forced nine turnovers total during a convincing 19-0 victory.

In 1980, the two traditional powers met in the Fiesta Bowl in a game that one Columbus scribe dubbed "The Losers Bowl," since neither the Buckeyes nor the Lions played up to expectations that year and the Fiesta Bowl – played on Dec. 26 – had yet to evolve into the major bowl it is today.

The trip was the first of what would become many to Tempe for the Buckeyes, and they lost to Paterno's men by a 31-19 final score. That dropped Ohio State's record to 9-3, the first in a string of such campaigns that would earn head coach Earle Bruce the nickname of "Ol' 9-3 Earle."

By 1993, the Nittany Lions had joined the Big Ten and the anticipation for the first conference contest between the two traditional powers – set for Oct. 30 in Ohio Stadium – was huge.

"The game with the Nittany Lions has the added spice of the legendary Joe Paterno," I wrote in this space the week before the game. That was 19 years ago and I was already referring to Paterno as legendary.

The Buckeyes pounded Penn State, 24-6, that afternoon behind running back Raymont Harris in a snowy Horseshoe with Ohio State fans storming the muddy field after the game. Harris gained 151 yards on 32 carries in a big win that gave OSU an 8-0 record and the inside track to the Rose Bowl. But the win was made even bigger by what BSB managing editor Mark Rea at the time described as

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

"the aura that swirls around coaching legend Joe Paterno."

Paterno and the Penn State got their revenge a year later when the top-rated Nittany Lions pounded Ohio State in Happy Valley with a 63-14 verdict, the most points the Buckeyes had given up since 1902. It was a game that added to the controversy of whether Cooper should remain as head coach at Ohio State, something he would wind up doing through 2000.

By 2001, Jim Tressel, who had unsuccessfully applied for a graduate assistant job on Paterno's staff in 1974, was the new head coach of the Buckeyes and as the headline of the Nov. 3, 2001, issue of BSB boldly stated, visiting Ohio State found itself on the "Wrong Side Of History" following a 29-27 loss to Penn State. The victory was the 324th of Paterno's career, moving him past Paul "Bear" Bryant's 323 at the top of the all-time Division I-A wins list.

In 2008, a full 30 years after Paterno's Lions welcomed Schlichter into college football, his Penn State team gave Terrelle Pryor – the first freshman since Schlichter to start at quarterback for Ohio State – a dose of big-time college football reality. With the home-standing Buckeyes holding a 6-3 fourth-quarter lead and driving, Pryor eschewed a quarterback sneak on a third-and-1 and tried to bounce a play outside and go for a big gainer.

Unfortunately, he was stripped of the football, the Lions recovered and they went on to secure a 13-6 victory, one of only a handful of defeats during Pryor's time as OSU's starter.

Pryor, who had considered playing for Paterno before committing to the Buckeyes, was on the winning side of what turned out to be the legendary coach's final game against Ohio State in 2010. The Buckeyes went into the half trailing by a 14-3 margin, but after an impassioned speech from an angry Tressel, Ohio State scored 35 unanswered points in the second half to earn a 38-14 victory.

By the time Penn State arrived in Columbus for its 2011 game with the Buckeyes, Paterno had been ousted as head coach of the Nittany Lions. He finished his career with a 9-14 record against the Buckeyes.

I'm sure other schools have their own highlights through their years playing against Paterno and Penn State. When you are head coach for 46 years, it is hard not to cross paths with many teams, players and coaches and become part of college football history.

And love him or hate him, Joe Paterno was a significant part of college football history.

### Sniping About Strength

Anyone who followed football during the Tressel era at Ohio State knows that his teams prided themselves on conditioning. His early-morning winter conditioning workouts were legendary and were used not only to build the team's strength, but also its camaraderie.

When Tressel was forced out last May and many wrote the Buckeyes off, the team put its nose even more firmly to the grindstone, some of the players saying they never worked harder than in the time leading up to the ill-fated 2011 season.

"If someone trained harder than us this summer, I'd like to meet them because I don't

think that would be possible," senior center and frequent team spokesman Mike Brewster said before the season started.

Despite all that work, new head coach Urban Meyer apparently wasn't that impressed with what he saw when his Buckeyes convened for his version of winter workouts.

"It's average right now," Meyer said of his team's conditioning. "I don't want to jump over the top, but three days into it, you walk around saying, 'That was decent.' The first day, you kind of had a sick feeling to your stomach like, 'What was that I just watched?' So it's getting better."

Meyer's longtime strength and conditioning guru, Mickey Marotti, who was in charge of Florida's strength training from 2005 through this past season, seemed to feel the condition of the Buckeyes was typical for a team after a long season.

"I think they're probably like the rest of the schools that played a bowl game on Jan. 1 that have a lot of young players back," Marotti said. "I think January is a time where you start and develop your team. No matter what year I go through this, in January, to me, they're all the same. They need rehauled – everybody – whether I was in Florida in '08 or here in 2012. We're going to start from scratch and we're going to go on."

While Meyer considers Marotti, who was a graduate assistant at Ohio State from 1987-88, an indispensable part of his staff, current Gators head coach Will Muschamp seemed to indirectly take some shots at Marotti following his departure.

"Mickey did a great job at the University of Florida," Muschamp said. "I appreciate his efforts, but we need to get stronger. We need to get physically and more mentally tough and it starts in the weight room. That's a critical hire for me."

Muschamp quickly hired Jeff Dillman to replace Marotti. Dillman was the strength and conditioning coach at his alma mater Appalachian State when it won Division I-AA national championships in 2006 and '07. He was also on Nick Saban's staff with Muschamp at LSU when the Tigers won the national championship in 2003.

While lauding Dillman upon his hiring, Muschamp got another subtle dig in at the past regime.

"(Jeff) will be the catalyst for kick-starting our offseason program with the No. 1 goal of making our football program a tougher program," Muschamp said. "We will be a blue-collar program built with toughness and Jeff is the man to lead that charge."

It sounds like a bit of sour grapes because Meyer raided Muschamp's staff. But it is also my experience that new staffs – not just in football, but in business – tend to be critical of the regimes they replace.

### Who's The Best?

When the question comes up regarding the best coach in college football, Meyer is certainly among the top few names in the discussion. But his year away from the game may have given Saban a leg up over his former SEC counterpart.

Saban led Alabama to a national championship win over LSU on Jan. 9, giving him three national titles to Meyer's two.

A look at their overall records makes for an interesting comparison between Saban and Meyer.

Both had their first success in the MAC. Saban was 9-2 in one season at Toledo, while Meyer was 8-3 and 9-3 in his two seasons at Bowling Green. Saban took a bigger step up from the MAC than Meyer, going to Michigan State while Meyer moved on to Utah.

Meyer was an immediate hit with the Utes, posting records of 10-2 and 12-0, while Saban turned in mediocre results his first four seasons in East Lansing, posting a combined 25-22-1 record with three bowl losses. However, he led the Spartans to a 9-2 regular season in his fifth year, and parlayed that 1999 season into the LSU job, which he left for before MSU's bowl game. You could make the case that former Ohio State assistant Mark Dantonio has had more success at Michigan State than Saban did.

While Saban led LSU to the 2003 national championship during his five years in Baton Rouge, he also had seasons of 8-4 and 8-5, posting a record of 48-16 with a 3-2 mark in bowls before bolting to the NFL's Miami Dolphins.

While Meyer had 9-4 and 8-5 seasons during his six years at Florida, he also had three 13-1 campaigns while winning a pair of national championships and winning five of six bowl games. He left Gainesville with a 65-15 overall record, good for a winning percentage of .813, compared to Saban's .750 percentage at LSU. Current Tigers head coach Les Miles has a better mark at LSU than Saban, winning 80.6 percent of his games since taking over for Saban in 2005.

It is at Alabama that Saban has really made his mark.

After going 7-6 in 2007, his first season, Saban has led the Tide to a 48-6 mark and two national championships during the past four seasons, good for an .889 winning percentage.

Interestingly, Meyer and Saban have equal .750 career winning percentages in the ultra-competitive SEC. Meyer was 36-12 in his six seasons at Florida, while Saban is 60-20 in 10 seasons combined at LSU and Alabama. For comparison, Miles has a 41-15 SEC mark at LSU, good for a .732 percentage.

With Meyer back on the sidelines in 2012, the battle for the title of best college coach in the nation will continue.

### Overly Optimistic

I was admittedly overly optimistic heading into the 2011 Ohio State football season. I thought that even with all the suspensions (I didn't predict the additional suspensions), and even without Terrelle Pryor (I didn't predict that Joe Bauserman would struggle as much as he did), the Buckeyes would contend for another Big Ten championship.

The thing I really failed to envision was the OSU defense being as porous as it proved to be.

I guess I wasn't alone in thinking the Buckeyes would do well despite all the chaos leading into the season. I just found our preseason online survey asking readers how many games they thought the Buckeyes would win.

Of those responding, 11.7 percent believed Ohio State would go 12-0 while 23.0 percent predicted an 11-1 finish. Those predicting a 10-2 mark were at 39.3 percent and 18.8 percent predicted a record of 9-3.

Only 7.2 percent of the readers in the poll saw a record worse than 9-3.