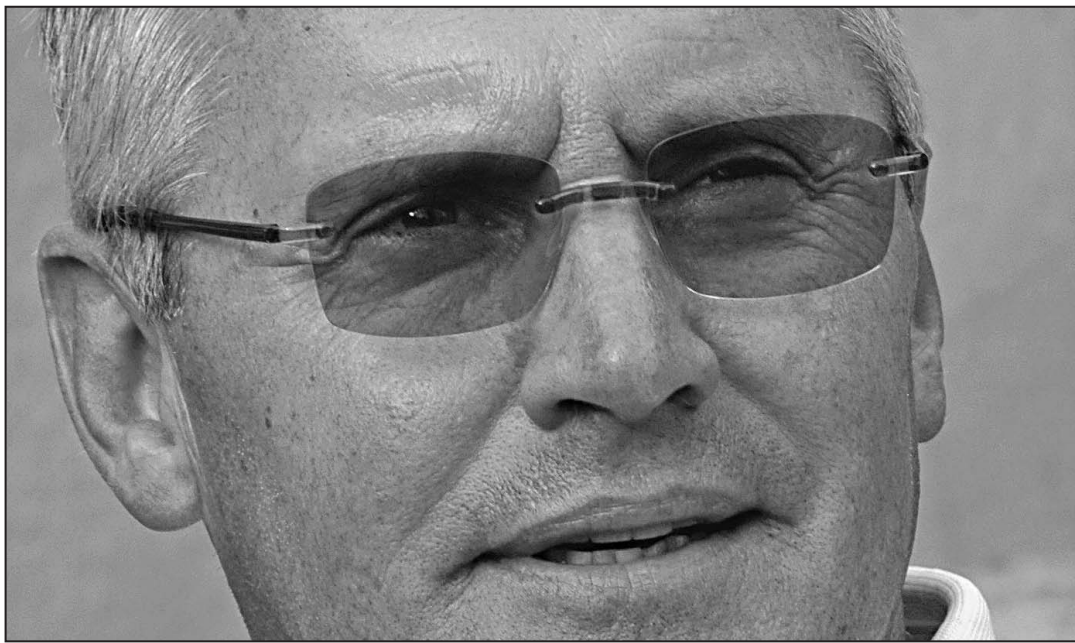


## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING



MARK REA

**MASTER TACTICIAN** – On the field, Jim Tressel has enjoyed success at Ohio State with four Big Ten championships and three trips to the national championship game. That success begins with recruiting high school talent, and Tressel seems to excel with tactics unique in college football.

# How Does He Do It?

## *Tressel's Recruiting Philosophy Has Paid Off For OSU*

By MARCUS HARTMAN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In his time as the head coach of the football team at Ohio State, Jim Tressel has proved there is more than one way to build a national power.

While the other teams to win the BCS national championship this decade have made a habit of piling top-10 recruiting classes on top of each other, Ohio State has pulled in its share of groups with less star power.

That has not translated to poorer production, however.

Tressel coached the Buckeyes to the national title in 2002 and has managed to steer his team to a finish among the nation's top five in four of the five seasons since.

According to Scout.com, Tressel signed the nation's third-ranked recruiting class in 2002, the No. 7 class in 2005 and the fourth-rated group of 2008. That last class obviously has not had anything to do with any on-field success yet, but nonetheless the total of three top-10 classes in the last seven years is fewer than those compiled by other notable national powers such as Oklahoma, Miami (Fla.) and Texas (four apiece), Florida, Georgia and LSU (five) and USC (six). Michigan has signed six top-10 classes in that span as well.

In addition, Ohio State signed the smallest class in Scout's top 25 three times since 2002.

How is it that Tressel has been able to mold smaller, lesser-rated recruiting classes into perennial contenders for the national championship?

Certainly, top-notch workout facilities and a successful strength and conditioning program have played their part, but it just might be that Tressel and his staff have figured out how to beat the system when it

comes to recruiting.

The key, according to coaches, recruits and their parents, is personalization.

### Offering Selectively

"They just don't throw out offers just to throw them out," Jay Minton, who in nearly 30 years as a high school coach both in Ohio and Florida has coached multiple future Buckeyes, told BSB. "They do their homework. They're going to recruit not only great players but also great character."

Minton, whose noteworthy Ohio State recruits include senior linebacker Marcus Freeman and 2003 All-America safety Will Allen from Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne along with former Buckeyes Greg and Steve Bellisari of Boca Raton, Fla., said the first question an Ohio State coach will ask him in regard to a prospect is generally not one regarding the youngster's 40-yard dash time or his max in the bench press but rather something akin to, "What kind of kid is he?"

"Some other schools are like that also, but (Ohio State) comes in and will ask, 'Well, what are his grades like? We know he's a good player. We wouldn't be here if he's not a good player,'" Minton said. "And that's what we tell our kids. If you've got aspirations to go there, you better make sure. Those are the first questions that a Jim Tressel staff member will ask you: What kind of character? What kind of grades does he get?"

"They just recruit that way. It's a unique way of doing it, and I think they can afford to do that because they are the Ohio State University. But I think it's appreciated out there in a day that some people go out there and drop offers (like candy). (Ohio State's coaches) do it right, they do it well. They really research it."

Bill Nees, who coached Piqua – a member of the Greater Western Ohio Conference

like Wayne – to the 2006 Division II Ohio state championship with future Buckeye tight-back Brandon Saine in a starring role, put it another way.

"There are some schools that recruit and they still maintain their pride about them," Nees said. "I think they maintain some very good dignity, and they can – they're Ohio State. And they're great people. They're not phony. What you see are genuine people. And I think all you've got to do is just show that to the kids and it just speaks for itself."

According to Ohio State offensive coordinator and line coach Jim Bollman, that approach did not come about by accident. That Bollman and his fellow assistants focus on the person more than the football player on the recruiting trail is a decree that comes from the top.

"I think when you're working for Coach Tressel that's a very, very important thing to him," Bollman said, "and you've got to believe that with all your heart if you're working for him. It doesn't matter where you work – if you're working for Youngstown State or if you're working here."

Luke Fickell, who played for former head coach John Cooper in the mid-1990s and now serves as linebackers coach and co-defensive coordinator under Tressel, agreed with Bollman.

"That comes from the top down," Fickell said. "That's our head coach. That's the way he wants to do it. We're a lot more specific, specialized, and that's probably why most of the time we're going to come up a little below the numbers."

This year on signing day Tressel highlighted an impressive set of numbers when he revealed his staff's rate of success in terms of serious recruiting targets for 2008.

Schools are allowed 56 official recruiting visits, but Ohio State used only 26 during this past recruiting season. Of those 26 players

who were on campus, 20 became Buckeyes. Tressel cited the quality of the product of Ohio State and the hard work of the coaching and support staff, but Fickell seemed to think there was more to it than that.

The assistant called scoring such a high rate of official visitors "pretty amazing" and added, "I talk to them about it. I say, 'Hey, we focus on the kids.' We might be in Georgia only recruiting four kids, but we early on figure the ones that we might have a chance with and I think that's one of the keys to recruiting. People might say Ohio State has got a chance with everybody, but that's not true. When you can focus in on the kids you think you've really got a chance at, then I think you do your best job."

### Other Characteristics

Tressel was matter-of-fact in explaining the reason for his philosophy.

"We concentrate on our recruits as people because that's what we believe," he said. "We want to know about a young man as a member of his family, as a teammate, and as a contributor to his school and community overall. We try to give them an honest impression of Ohio State and what it takes to succeed here. We want them to know that what they will experience here is much more than just football."

Count Solomon Thomas among those sold by the approach.

The day he signed his national letter of intent in 2007, Thomas made no secret of why he chose to be a Buckeye after starring at West Chester Lakota West in the suburbs of Cincinnati.

"They have recruiting techniques that no one else has, and that's why I will be attending the Ohio State University," said the defensive end.

To what differences did Thomas refer?

"The pressure that they do not put on, football-wise," Thomas said. "When you go up there, they rarely talk about football. They talk about people and the relationships that you will build in the next five years, and the city. Very little will you hear about football and redshirting and when would you start and how many sacks are you going to get."

"(Football talk) was kind of there because I am going there to play football and get a degree, but no pressure is put on in that area."

Seated at a table in a Chicago hotel during Big Ten media kickoff festivities last July, Vernon Gholston had similar recollections of his recruitment as it had taken place four years earlier.

"I just noticed the genuineness of their approach," the native of Detroit, Mich., said.

Rather than engaging in what Gholston termed "recruiting talk" – such as coaches puffing themselves up with boasts about fans, stadiums, national titles, etc. – the Ohio State staff brought a message that "was more about me and what I can bring to the program, telling me specific things about the program."

Tressel's approach works on parents, too.

As the father of a five-star offensive line recruit from the high school football hotbed of Texas, Bret Shugarts dealt with high-profile coaches from across the country.

His son, J.B., attended camps at Florida, Michigan, Texas A&M and Ohio State and had scholarship offers from many of the nation's best programs, but it was Tressel and his approach that won out in the end.

"With Coach Tressel, you can tell that it's more than about football," the elder Shugarts said on National Signing Day this past February.

"He's just one of the most genuine coach-

## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

es that I've met in the whole process, and I've met some of the greatest coaches in the country through this process," Shugarts said. "They all have great, great points and so forth, but Coach Tressel is in a league by himself. He's the most genuine guy that you'll ever meet."

He cited as an example Tressel's appearance at the younger Shugarts' high school spring football game the previous year.

"A lot of head coaches will come down to the game, watch it for a little while and then leave," Shugarts said. "(Tressel) was there from before the game started until after it ended. A bunch of OSU fans turned out in their colors because they heard he was coming, and he talked to every one of them, shook every one of their hands, talked about people that he knew that they knew, signed autographs and took pictures. He's just a great guy."

Most impressive to Shugarts was the Block "O" of Life the coaching staff presents to potential Buckeyes to map out goals for every facet of life as a young man growing up.

"(Tressel) wants these guys to be successful in the future and down the road after they're out of Ohio State, so it is a lot more personal in that regard," Shugarts said.

Asked if other schools had a similar phenomenon to that Block "O" of Life, he said, "They may have it, but no one in the process ever pulled it out and handed it to me. From the time that J.B. first got a copy of it, which I guess was his junior year in high school, he had a copy of it hanging in his room. He has a copy of it hanging in our weight room. So it was something that really sank in and meant a lot."

After having been a part of the program for more than three years and seeing how it works from the inside, Gholston said in Chicago, "Knowing Coach Tressel and the things that he's about, the man that he is, the type of person he is, it really trickles down to the rest of the program. He talks about character and just doing little things right and being a good person. I think those are the type of things he goes out and looks for in people. When you bring those types of people in – a person with character – you know you're going to have a good person here and somebody who's going to work hard to bring success to the program."

Recruiting coordinator John Peterson said

the focus on off-the-field attributes is no accident.

"I can't speak of how other schools recruit, but we base our recruiting on people," Peterson said. "The bottom line is we believe the 'You win with people' philosophy, and that's the foundation of where our recruiting starts and it continues as you get to know kids and families."

"As kids come on campus for the first time with their families, they get that feeling also."

## Closing The Net Faster

It turns out that Ohio State can take a more personal approach to each kid because the coaches are asked to concentrate on fewer recruits at a time.

Each year, schools are allowed to bring in 25 scholarship freshmen, but Ohio State has reeled in that many only once in Tressel's seven full-term recruiting seasons (he finished a class largely started by predecessor Cooper in 2001). Four times, fewer than 20 Buckeyes have signed.

Why not bring in as many players as possible on a consistent basis? Ohio State, it seems, prefers to get only kids that fit its specific parameters.

Larry Cox, who coached Thomas at Lakota West as well as current Buckeye senior Steve Rehring, said Ohio State's diligence is obvious.

"They take their time getting to know these kids," he said. "They do a great job with it, too. I'm really impressed."

So impressed is Cox that he said he is not above telling a prospect that he might not fit the Ohio State mold or even letting the coaches know they might be better served to look elsewhere.

"Because of my experience with them, I won't just say, 'Hey, this kid can play for you,'" Cox said. "I know there are only certain kids who do that. And I'm honest enough with my kids and tell them that as well. I'm honest with my players as well, to say, 'Hey, I know what they're looking for and you might want to channel your efforts in another direction.'"

"There is a certain way that they do recruiting. There is no denying it. First off, are you an Ohio State person? It all has to do with what type of person you are first. Don't get me wrong: You've got to be a great athlete. But if you don't fit that personality

mold, it isn't going to happen.

"He does things differently. They just don't allow early offers like a lot of schools do. I'm going to wait. Is there a fit? Is he the kind of kid we're looking for? Then we'll go from there."

Peterson was not ready to go so far as to say Ohio State is more cautious than other schools when it comes to making offers, but the consensus among high school coaches seemed to indicate that is the case.

"I don't know if we do or don't," Peterson said. "I know that's just the way we believe in doing it, whether it's cautious or what have you. We try to be as thorough as we can. We want to make sure it's a good fit on both ends."

Fickell said the initial net the Buckeyes cast for recruits is probably the same size as the one used by the average school but that Ohio State is quicker to narrow its focus after determining which prospects it covets most and believes it has a legitimate shot to land.

"You might get to know a kid when you're only recruiting six kids down the wire or even through the season as opposed to recruiting 20 or 25," Fickell said. "We spend a lot of time early in the recruiting process trying to narrow down who we really want to go after and have a shot at."

## Under The Radar, Into The NFL

Perhaps the more careful approach also explains how Tressel and his staff seem to be so good at turning lowly regarded prospects into stars and even NFL draft picks.

Gholston is as good an example of that as any.

A three-star prospect at Detroit Cass Tech, Gholston arrived with little fanfare as part of the class of 2004. Last April he was the sixth player selected in the NFL draft, an honor that followed a junior season in which

Gholston set the single-season Ohio State record for quarterback sacks with 14.

But he was not the only starter for last season's outright Big Ten champions who came in under the radar of the recruiting gurus. Wide receiver Brian Robiskie was a two-star prospect as a senior at Chagrin Falls, Ohio, in 2005, but he led Ohio State in catches (55), receiving yards (935) and touchdown catches (11) last season as a junior. Fellow two-star prospect Chimdi Chekwa turned in a solid season as the team's fifth defensive back in 2007, while two other former three-star prospects joined Gholston as All-Americans in linebacker James Laurinaitis and cornerback Malcolm Jenkins.

"If you look at us all now, you would never know," Jenkins said. "You'd think we're all five-star athletes, but that's not the case. You never know how somebody is going to develop."

Jenkins and Laurinaitis likely could have joined Gholston as first-round draft picks this year but chose to return for one more year of school instead. Both are fixtures in the top 15 of various 2009 mock drafts, but Jenkins would not go so far as to call himself or his once-unheralded teammates diamonds in the rough.

"I would hope to think when I was in high school I was good enough, but I was somebody who didn't go to camps so my name wasn't really out there," Jenkins said. "I think Coach Tressel does a good job recruiting character guys. He recruits guys who work hard and who can improve. A lot of guys who are real big-time in high school, when they get to college they don't have the work ethic or the intangibles to make them a great player so I think he does a great job of finding who wants to work hard, who wants to be leaders and who can actually play."

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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

## Verbals Keep Coming – Jackson, Fragel Commit

Two seasons ago, Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel welcomed in a recruiting class that numbered 15 members. Last year, quarterback Terrelle Pryor became the 20th and final member of the class of 2008, but he took until mid-March to do so.

This year, as the calendar turned to June – the vaunted hundreds of kids trek to Columbus to show their wares to all kinds of coaches – the Buckeyes already boasted 15 verbal commitments, a fact tempered slightly by one player who decommitted from his verbal.

As a result, the summer camp season, a time in which players typically have the opportunity to land scholarship offers from Ohio State should they impress the coaching staff, likely will take on less importance this time around.

With time running out before the camp season begins, OSU was not standing pat and waiting to see how things pan out on campus. Here is a look at the two latest players to issue verbal commitments to the Buckeyes since BSB last went to press as well as a look at a handful of other prospects Ohio State is tracking.

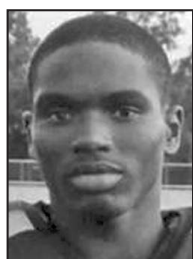
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perfect time to try out our free seven-day trial and see what you have been missing. Recruiting moves at a breakneck speed – don't wait until July to find out what happened in June.

### Speedy Get Speedier With Commit From Michigan WR

Plenty of high school recruits are touted as the next so-and-so as their raw abilities are compared to those displayed by some earlier high-level college players who went on to have standout careers.

The OSU coaching staff had reason to be excited, then, when James Jackson issued a verbal commitment to the program. For starters, the wide receiver out of Grand Ledge, Mich.,



James Jackson

is listed as a four-star prospect and the No. 20 wideout in the country by Scout.com.

As a junior, Jackson caught 31 passes for 430 yards and carried the ball 40 more times for 337 yards. Plus, he has been timed at 4.31 seconds in the 40-yard dash and can run the 100-meter dash in 10.56 seconds.

But when it comes down to it, the coaching staff sees qualities in the 5-11, 175-pound Jackson that remind them of a certain former Buckeye with game-changing abilities.

And those abilities are still growing.

### OSU Football Verbal Commitments

Football players in the class of 2009 who have issued verbal commitments to play college football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	High School
C.J. Barnett	CB	6-1	180	Clayton (Ohio) Northmont
Dorian Bell	WLB	6-0	227	Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway
Zach Boren	LB/FB	6-1	255	Pickerington (Ohio) Central
Chris Fields	WR	6-0	180	Painesville (Ohio) Harvey
Melvin Fellows	DE	6-5	245	Garfield Heights, Ohio
Reid Fragel	TE/OL	6-7	255	Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South
Darrell Givens	CB	6-1	178	Indian Head (Md.) Lackey
Jordan Hall	RB/CB	5-9	185	Jeannette, Pa.
Adam Homan	LB/RB	6-2	232	Coldwater, Ohio
James Jackson	WR/CB	5-11	175	Grand Ledge, Mich.
Storm Klein	RB/LB	6-3	220	Newark (Ohio) Licking Valley
Corey Linsley	OT	6-4	285	Youngstown (Ohio) Boardman
Jack Mewhort	OL/DL	6-6	285	Toledo (Ohio) St. John's
Johnny Simon	DT	6-3	250	Youngstown (Ohio) Cardinal Mooney
Jamie Wood	DB/WR	6-2	190	Pickerington (Ohio) Central
Jordan Whiting	LB	6-0	230	Louisville (Ky.) Trinity

"I've heard the comparisons that he reminds the staff a lot of Teddy Ginn when he first came," Grand Ledge head coach Matt Bird told BSB. "I would say James is still a raw talent. He's got great speed, he's a student of the game, and he's getting better and better."

Word surfaced in the evening of May 12 that the speedy wideout quietly had given his verbal pledge to the Buckeyes. Bird said they decided to just let the information get out on its own rather than hold a press conference because that is more in tune with what kind of person Jackson is.

"The thing about James that is special is that the athletic ability is phenomenal, the speed is phenomenal, but the type of kid that he is," he said. "He's just a tremendous young man. He's very humble, he's very appreciative of everything that he gets and I think that's what the appeal to Coach Tressel and the staff was. He fits that mold of everything that they stand for."

Bird said he expects Jackson to assume an even bigger role in the team's offense as a senior. The Comets utilize a pro-style offense that can see them spread the field with four wideouts or line up with two tight ends and two running backs, but they will be borrowing a few pages from Tressel this season.

"I've got a package that Coach Tressel ran at Ohio State, and we're going to be doing some of the stuff that they hope to be doing to get that to mesh up," Bird said.

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"Not only is it a benefit to us, but also it's going to be a benefit to him."

Bird said he expects Jackson to be utilized as a wide receiver, a running back and a quarterback at different times during his senior year in an effort to get the ball into his hands more frequently.

The coach was quick to point out that Jackson is far from a finished product. With his natural speed and abilities, he is able to beat most players his age without having to do everything fundamentally correct.

"When I say he's raw, I mean that he's still got to learn how to utilize his body and do some things such as route-running because he can get by at our level with his speed," Bird said. "There is a lot he's going to have to get from (receivers coach Darrell) Hazell. I know he's got a good fit there."

Jackson fell in love with the OSU program when he came to Columbus during the winter for a junior day experience. The plan was to take more time to make a final decision, but the unofficial visit left a strong impression on both player and coach. That trip, coupled with some advice Bird sought out, helped sell Jackson on leaving his home state and becoming a Buckeye.

"What it came down to, and it was the best advice that we could get, was that you've got to knock down all the facilities and deal with the people," Bird said. "You have to look past the color situation, so to speak. Yeah, it's Michigan and Ohio State – and that's huge and he's very much aware of the significance of that – but when he stepped foot on the campus he was very comfortable."

"The facilities are obviously amazing, but there is a different feel in Columbus. It's pretty special. We went down for a practice and really got some one-on-one time with the coaches, and James kept calling and kept a good relationship with them. Every time, it was the same, consistent message. We called around to some guys that I know in the college game and they said, 'Hey, this is what you're going to get from these guys. There's a reason why they've been to the national title game twice.'"

With his commitment, Jackson joined Painesville (Ohio) Harvey's Chris Fields as the wideouts in the class of 2009. Jackson also held offers from Iowa, UCLA, Michigan and Michigan State, among others.

#### OSU Nets Verbal From Tight End Out Of Michigan

Tressel's recruiting philosophy includes building a fence around the state of Ohio to keep the top in-state talent from leaving the state.

Perhaps new Michigan head coach Rich Rodriguez should take notes.

Two weeks and one day after Jackson offered up his verbal commitment to Tressel, Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South tight end Reid Fragel followed suit, defecting from his home state to become member No. 15 of OSU's class of 2009.

"I committed," Fragel told BuckeyeSports.com, a member of the Scout Network, on May 27. "I called them up. I talked to (tight ends coach John) Peterson and figured out what time it would be best to call Coach Tressel. I called him around 7:30 and we're all excited, Coach is excited and it is nice to be done with all this stuff."

A three-star prospect, Fragel is listed as the No. 23 tight end prospect in the country by Scout. Listed at 6-7, 255 pounds, Fragel figures to give the Buckeyes a big target who can stretch the field and create mismatches with his size. He has been timed at 4.88 seconds in the 40-yard dash and has played some offensive line while in high school.

Fragel's final decision came down to OSU and Michigan State, the school his father attended. He also held offers from Purdue, Cincinnati and Miami (Ohio).

He was offered a scholarship by the Buckeye coaching staff after he took in the team's spring game in late April.

"I fell in love with the place," he said. "I was blown away by it. It came down to where I would fit in best and where I was comfortable. I fit in better there and will help the team there, too, as a tight end."

The Buckeyes also have extended scholarship offers to Orchard Lake (Mich.) St. Mary's standout Dion Sims, a four-star prospect and the No. 5 tight end in the country, and Ra'shede Hageman, a three-star prospect and the No. 25 tight end in the nation from Minneapolis Washburn.

Fragel is the 14th verbal member of OSU's class of 2009 who is at least a three-star prospect. The overall talent that will be headed to Columbus next year helped to catch Fragel's eye.

"I am excited to know I'm playing with guys as committed to winning as I am," he said. "When you have a team of guys on the same page as you, you can compete for a national championship."

Although he likely still will receive interest from other schools trying to sway him from his commitment, Fragel said those schools would be wasting their collective breath.

"I'm done," he said. "I'm committed to Ohio State."

#### Penn State Plucks Maryland Cornerback From Buckeyes

With so many early verbal commitments in the fold, the OSU coaching staff now has to shift some attention toward maintaining those commitments in addition to securing some new ones.

The Buckeyes learned that doing so is not always an easy task when Darrell Givens opted to switch his verbal commitment to the Nittany Lions less than a month after giving his verbal pledge to Ohio State.

The four-star cornerback prospect from Indian Head (Md.) Lackey was in State College for a Nike camp when he made the decision. According to Lackey head coach Douglas Lamb, it came down to one primary reason – playing time.

"He did some research on the Internet and he came to a decision that he felt he could play a lot earlier at Penn State than he could at Ohio State," he told BSB. "The only thing he told me was that everything he was looking for in a school, both Ohio State and Penn State have. It was the playing time that separated (the two)."

With that, the switch was on. Following his appearance at the May 10 combine, Givens "found the first reporter he could find," Lamb said, and switched his commitment.

Givens first verbally committed to the Buckeyes while in attendance for the spring game April 19. At halftime, he

found Tressel and gave him his verbal.

Lamb said he did not sense any indecision on Givens' part when he returned home about his intentions to become a Buckeye.

"I don't know about indecision," he said. "A lot of times you've got to remember these are just 17-year-old kids, and in Darrell's situation he had more than 20 schools that had offered him full athletic scholarships from Miami, Fla., to Oklahoma."

The 6-1, 178-pound Givens plays slot receiver and tailback and also returns kicks and punts at Lackey but is projected as a cornerback in college. As a junior, he recorded 82 tackles, intercepted three passes and earned first-team all-county and all-state honors. He has been timed at 4.50 seconds in the 40-yard dash.

After Givens' commitment to OSU, Lamb said they took the prospect off the table and did not have him meet with any more college coaches. The decision to get in touch with the Nittany Lion coaching staff was Givens' own, and the Buckeye coaching staff has not been in contact since Givens switched his verbal commitment.

Although Givens appears to be set on his new decision, Lamb said nothing is certain until National Signing Day.

"I don't know," he said when asked if Givens would consider switching again. "I would hope not, because he was 110 percent firm when he verbed to Ohio State. I would hope he wouldn't, but with 17-year-old kids ..."

Less than one week after Givens switched his verbal commitment, a rarity under Tressel, the Buckeyes extended a scholarship offer to four-star cornerback prospect Corey Brown from Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway.

A 6-1, 185-pound prospect who preps at the same school as Dorian Bell, a verbal member of OSU's class of 2009, Brown lists the Buckeyes as one of his top seven schools along with Michigan, North Carolina, West Virginia, Pittsburgh, Maryland and Alabama.

Brown says he has been to Ohio State a couple of times and will likely take an unofficial visit to Columbus during the summer.

"I love it up there," he said May 28. "Everything's like new. Last week I talked

to (linebackers coach Luke) Fickell and he said that Coach Tressel is going to call me this week or next week and talk to my mother and see when we can get up there again."

When asked what he likes best about OSU, Brown pointed to the school's history.

"They are known for getting corners to the NFL," he said. "Their coaching staff is great, and you've got to love their prestige and stuff like that."

#### Buckeyes Now Lead For Florida Defensive Back

Although he now claims to hold more than 30 total scholarship offers, one school is rising above the rest when it comes to Vlad Emilien.

In an interview with BuckeyeSports.com, the three-star safety prospect from Plantation, Fla., said Ohio State can be considered his top school.

"I'm ready to say Ohio State is my leader," he said. "They are recruiting me as a safety, but they also said I could slide over and play some corner. Coach Tressel will be making his one call to me pretty soon. I was on a high at the Ohio State spring game, but now I can say it's even higher. They are the most honest of all the coaches that are recruiting me. I feel very comfortable talking with all of them."

"Ohio State is my leader and that's from my mouth. I don't have a top five, but they are at the top right now. I just want to see other schools and be totally sure of my decision."

Moving forward, Emilien said he plans to take a few unofficial visits during the summer to schools such as Florida, LSU, Michigan and possibly Wisconsin. He also plans to come back to OSU in late June or early July and bring Miami Palmetto running back Jaamal Berry along with him.

Aside from OSU, South Florida and Wisconsin appear to be high on Emilien's list as well. Asked to talk about which coaches he has bonded with, he mentioned OSU safeties coach Paul Haynes, USF assistant coach Larry Scott and Wisconsin defensive line coach Charles Partridge.

"I'm very close to Coach Haynes," he said. "We bonded during the spring game and we talk at least once a week. I can see

Continued On Page 16



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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

## Yet Another Glenville Standout Eyes Ohio State

Continued From Page 15

myself playing for Coach Haynes. He's very honest and he is someone I trust very much. He doesn't pressure me at all, but at the same time he lets me know how much they want me at Ohio State."

As for Berry, his mother, Eartha, said her son is favoring OSU. A five-star running back prospect, the 5-10½, 184-pound athlete has a certain Buckeye nemesis also near the top of his list.

"Right now he's kind of favoring Ohio State," Berry's mother said. "He had a great visit there earlier this spring. Florida is another school ranked with Ohio State. Those are the top two schools."

### Five-Star Glenville Prospect High On Ohio State

The recruiting process might be hectic for most highly ranked prospects, but Cleveland Glenville offensive tackle Marcus Hall is not viewing it that way.

Instead, the five-star player and the nation's No. 2 prospect at his position told BSB he views his situation as a blessing. Of course, it is easy to do so when holding offers from the likes of OSU, Michigan and Illinois while also receiving interest from USC and Penn State, among others.

As a Tarblooder, Hall is almost assumed to be a lean to the Buckeyes. Eight players hailing from Glenville will be on the OSU roster this fall, but it does not mean Hall is ready to end things right now and give his pledge to Tressel.

"It's good to have guys that you know that go to the same college, but I kind of want to go out and see what's out there," he told BSB. "I don't want to limit myself to just one school so early. I want to go on my official visits and see what other schools have to offer."

For the summer, Hall plans to take part in the annual Ted Ginn Sr. bus tour that will stop at numerous schools across the region, including OSU. Those will be the only unofficial visits he plans to take aside from a planned camp experience at Bowling Green.

Once the fall rolls around, Hall has a few official visits already on his mind. He likely will check out Ohio State, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Florida State and Michigan.

Hall is being recruited by safeties coach Taver Johnson and offensive line coach Jim Bollman, both of whom have been recruiting him for more than a year.

"I've developed a real good relationship with Coach Johnson," Hall said. "Coach Bollman being my position coach, when I've been down to the school I've been in on their O-line meetings and I really like the way he coaches. I've gotten a chance to watch film with him and he's a real good coach."

Whether that proves to be enough to secure an eventual commitment from Hall remains to be seen, but things appear to be looking pretty good for Ohio State so far.

"Ohio State is a real good school," he said. "I've visited them and it was great. The coaching staff is great from what I see and what I hear. I think it's only fair to say that they're No. 1 on my list right now because they're the only school I've gotten out and visited."

### Nittany Lions Making Some Big Gains

Stealing Givens from the Buckeyes was not the only big news to come out

### A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

#### 15 Years Ago – 1993

When the Buckeyes signed Griffin, Ga., quarterback Tommy Willis, they did so with the hopes he could turn into a productive college wide receiver.

Listed at 6-2, 195 pounds, with 4.35 speed in the 40-yard dash, Willis told BSB he would have liked to be a receiver in high school but Griffin head coach Lloyd Bohannon used him at quarterback because of his overall skills.

"We were forced to play him a little bit everywhere," Bohannon said. "But I think he will become accustomed to playing only receiver at Ohio State and he'll be a great one."

"Any way I can help the team is fine with me," Willis said.

#### 10 Years Ago – 1998

With the verbal commitment of St. Henry, Ohio, offensive lineman Matt Zahn, Ohio State's class of 1999 reached 10 members.

At 6-7, 350 pounds, Zahn appeared to be the prototypical road-grading run-blocker, but

he said that was not his best skill.

"People tell me all the time I have good feet and balance," he said. "I'm probably better at pass blocking. We've mainly been a passing team. I know you've got to be good at both, but my best is probably pass blocking."

"I feel it's good to have the size, but I'm sure there are other things about my game that they like. I'm sure they wouldn't just recruit someone because they're big."

#### Five Years Ago – 2003

Ohio State picked up two more in-state verbal commitments in the month of May, bringing the total to date to six.

First, Carrollton tight end/linebacker Chad Hoobler pulled the trigger, picking Ohio State over Penn State, West Virginia and Boston College. Next came the good news from Columbus Beechcroft defensive back Sirjo Welch, who chose his hometown school over the likes of Michigan, Michigan State, Iowa, Wisconsin and Boston College.

They joined Hubbard defensive back

Shaun Lane, Xenia offensive lineman Ben Person, Akron Buchtel running back Tony Pittman and Austintown Fitch wide receiver Miles Williams.

#### One Year Ago – 2007

The Buckeyes finished May with nine verbal commitments when on the final day of the month Washington (Pa.) Trinity linebacker Andrew Sweat announced he would join the fold.

"I made the decision because I felt Ohio State has the best people all around," he told BSB. "Everyone had great facilities, but I thought Ohio State had the best facilities. It was close to home, the tradition of Ohio State, the players and the coaches are great people."

He also wasted no time in making known he wanted to help with the effort of building the recruiting class further, saying he would soon get on the phone with fellow OSU verbal Michael Brewster of Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater to see whom he could help get to agree to join the group.

of Happy Valley since BSB last went to print.

After entering the month of May with just three verbal commitments, head coach Joe Paterno and his staff landed eight more during an 18-day stretch.

One day before Givens issued his verbal commitment, he was preceded by three-star safety prospect Stephen Obeng-Agyapong from Cheektowaga (N.Y.) John F. Kennedy.

Next up were three-star cornerback Derrick Thomas from Greenbelt (Md.) Eleanor Roosevelt on May 12 and unrated offensive guard Frank Figueroa from Alexandria (Va.) Edison, but the biggest commitment to date came May 15, the same date Figueroa issued his verbal commitment.

Eric Shrive, a five-star offensive tackle prospect from Scranton (Pa.) West Scranton, surprised many when he abruptly ended his recruitment and pledged his services to the Nittany Lions.

"I have talked to head coach Joe Paterno a few times over the past couple of weeks, and he answered all of the questions and concerns I had about the program," Shrive told Scout. "I was worried about the stability of the coaching staff and he made me feel comfortable about it. I also wanted to know that I'd have an opportunity to play early and I was told I'd be given that opportunity. In the end, I was just most comfortable with Penn State."

A 6-7, 300-pound athlete, Shrive was viewed as a heavy lean to either Notre Dame or Illinois.

"I've always loved Notre Dame and enjoyed my visit there, but I just didn't feel like it was a good fit for me," Shrive said. "I loved the staff and players at Illinois, but again, I didn't feel like that was a good fit either."

Shrive said he is not entertaining interest from any other schools and that he is looking forward to helping the Nittany Lions finish with a recruiting class that ranks in the top 20 nationally.

Scout ranks him the No. 3 offensive tackle in the country. He was being recruited by OSU and visited the Columbus campus over the April 12 weekend.

The final three commitments to round out the month of May for PSU were Thomas' prep teammate in cornerback

Stephon Morris, wide receiver Brandon Felder from Oxon Hill, Md., and defensive end Sean Stanley from Gaithersburg, Md. Morris and Felder are unranked, while Stanley is a four-star prospect.

### Michigan Lands Talented Two-Way Prospect

Rodriguez's month might not have been as busy as Paterno's, but the U-M head coach still welcomed in one new verbal commitment from a highly regarded prospect.

Four-star wide receiver Bryce McNeal of Minneapolis Breck High School issued a verbal commitment to join the Wolverines on May 17, giving Rodriguez eight members in his class of 2009.

A 6-2, 180-pound athlete who has been timed at 4.45 seconds in the 40-yard dash, McNeal also could project to a cornerback in college. Scout ranks him the No. 16 wide receiver prospect in the country.

"I narrowed it down to two schools, Michigan and Clemson, and went through the statistics," he told Scout. "Michigan turned out to be the best place for me."

McNeal caught 31 passes for 720 yards and nine touchdowns as a junior.

He has also joined forces with the last player to commit before him – Wichita Falls (Texas) Rider quarterback/wide receiver Shavodrick Beaver – to help recruit other highly ranked players to come to Ann Arbor.

### News & Notes

• Shortly before Givens withdrew his verbal commitment from OSU, the Buckeye coaching staff extended a scholarship offer to Middletown, Ohio, safety D.J. Hunter.

A three-star prospect, Hunter stands 6-0, 186 pounds, and is being viewed as a cornerback by the Buckeyes. The only school to offer him as a safety is Michigan State. A lifelong Miami Hurricanes fan, Hunter said he was humbled by the OSU offer but not ready to make a quick decision.

"Everybody around here is always saying, 'You should be a Buckeye,'" he told BuckeyeSports.com. "It is a very good school there, but I am going to look at all

of my options, whether that is in the ACC or SEC. I like all of them."

Hunter also holds offers from Illinois, Wisconsin, Maryland and Indiana, among others.

• Kraig Appleton, a four-star wide receiver prospect from East St. Louis, Ill., is now listing the Buckeyes among his top schools. A 6-2½, 190-pound prospect with 4.4-second speed in the 40-yard dash, Appleton has LSU, OSU and Illinois in his top three, with Wisconsin and Michigan rounding out his top five.

"They are a very competitive team overall," he said of OSU. "I want to go somewhere I can win. I love to win. What motivates me to go there is Terrelle Pryor."

• Four-star linebacker prospect Petey Smith from Seffner (Fla.) Armwood has narrowed his list to five schools, and the Buckeyes did not make the cut. The 6-0½, 248-pound Smith is now favoring Auburn, Alabama, North Carolina, Louisville and Illinois. Smith does hold an offer from OSU.

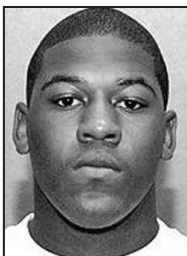
• The Buckeyes will land an official visit from five-star wide receiver Shaquell Evans this fall, but the prospect from Inglewood, Calif., might be viewed as a long shot to wind up donning scarlet and gray in college.

The 6-2, 192-pound prospect listed four schools in USC, UCLA, Notre Dame and Michigan that fit the criteria he is looking for in a college. However, he does not plan to take official visits to check out the Trojans or the Bruins because of their proximity to his hometown, so Evans will visit Michigan, Notre Dame, OSU, LSU and Tennessee in the fall.

• Although OSU remains high on the list for four-star cornerback prospect Brandon McGee, the 6-0, 180-pound prospect from Plantation, Fla., does not plan to make a final decision anytime soon.

McGee recently has earned offers from USC, Wake Forest and North Carolina, adding to a list that includes Florida, Notre Dame, OSU and Michigan, among others. He plans to take a full slate of official visits this fall, and Ohio State is on that list.

"I had a great visit to Ohio State," he told BuckeyeSports.com. "I need to see some other schools to compare to them. I've kind of calmed down after a few weeks have gone by, but I still consider Ohio State one of my top schools I'm interested in."



Marcus Hall

SCOUT.COM

## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

# Buckeyes Survive APR Scholarship Hit – For Now

Despite falling below the acceptable Academic Progress Rate score for the second consecutive year, the Ohio State men's basketball team is not facing sanctions after the May release of the most recent APR numbers.

Next year, though, all bets are off.

Two weeks after BSB learned that the men's basketball team's APR score was expected to fall short of the goal of 925 (out of 1,000), scores for each team were released May 6 and the cagers finished with a four-year composite score of 909. A score of 925 roughly translates to a 60-percent graduation rate.

Teams falling short of 925 are subject to NCAA penalties, but the men's basketball program escaped facing sanctions from the NCAA that could have included the loss of a scholarship because of an academic improvement plan the university submitted, said Ohio State athletics faculty representative John Bruno.

There are signs of improvement. After having a score of 909 during the 2005-06 school year alone, the men's basketball APR score was a passing 932 for the 2006-07 academic year. When last year's numbers were released, the Buckeyes had compiled a four-year score of 902, which was raised seven points by the 2006-07 performance.

However, the four-year mark of 909 is still below the NCAA minimum, and Ohio State found itself eligible to be sanctioned because of two factors – the team's APR score was below 925 and it also failed to retain a player who was ineligible when he left the university.

The latter situation, known in APR jargon as an "0 for 2," automatically triggers a review of the school's situation. Although Bruno was

not allowed to identify the player in question by name, it has been learned that it was Greg Oden who left classes after the withdrawal date.

To counter the potential loss of scholarship, the university submitted an academic plan that was conditionally approved by the NCAA.

"Yes, we have some challenges in basketball, but we have a great plan in place," Bruno said. "We think we're moving in the right direction with respect to that sport."

The plan submitted to the NCAA calls for more support to be made available to the men's basketball players. The university has hired another learning specialist to work with the team, and the athletes also will have one that travels with the team and organizes study tables and such.

There will be an enhanced focus on tutoring and mentoring via individualized learning plans for each student-athlete as well.

In addition, the basketball team requires all of its players to live in the residence halls and no longer allows them to play in summer leagues in order to help them better focus on their coursework. Each player is tracked on a day-by-day basis, and the coaches have weekly meetings with the support staff.

However, the plan does not have a specific timeline for completion, and specific benchmark goals have not been made available to the public. Bruno said OSU head coach Thad Matta is fully on board with the added responsibilities that will be taken on by his staff.

In all, 120 schools submitted waiver requests in regard to facing sanctions in all sports, and 66 were approved.

OSU's struggles to meet the benchmark in men's basketball are not exclusive ones. NCAA president Miles Brand told reporters that the problem is widespread within the sport and that a committee is looking into the situation. He expects serious recommendations to be made when the report is finalized this fall.

The scores for the OSU men's basketball team have been hurt for a number of reasons. Players such as Brayden Bell and Sylvester Mayes have transferred out of the program, while others such as Greg Oden have dropped out of classes to enter the NBA.

Players leaving early like Oden and Kosta Koufos do not necessarily hurt Ohio State's score. Once spring quarter begins in late March, student-athletes have three weeks in which to withdraw. After that deadline, doing so will make them ineligible. Once that deadline passes, the player must finish the quarter.

There is also the option of taking part-time classes, though a petition must be filed in order to do so and stay within the good graces of the APR measures. Bruno stated that was the track followed the year previous by at least one of the other Buckeyes who left after their freshman year, Mike Conley Jr. and Daquan Cook.

"In general, students who are academically

eligible and who leave to go to the NBA do not create an 0-for-2 situation," said Walter Harrison, the chair of the NCAA Committee on Academic Performance. "Fifty of the 90 players in men's basketball who tried out for the pros ... did earn the retention point (for remaining academically eligible)."

OSU operates on a quarter academic system that makes it difficult for players considering heading to the professional levels to attend tryout camps and continue their coursework. That factor is not considered in the APR and likely will not be, according to Brand.

"I'm not sure that it's correct to say that the quarter schools are at a disadvantage in this regard," he said.

However, Bruno said the current system makes it nearly impossible for schools on the quarter system to allow their players the ability to test the professional waters while maintaining their eligibility. Many of the pre-draft tryout camps take place after most semester athletes have finished their terms in May but before Ohio State lets out in early June.

"There is no doubt that the quarter system discriminates against athletes," Bruno said.

The university is considering switching to the semester system, according to Bruno.

He said that having students graduate early from high school and enroll in spring classes prior to their freshman seasons would not help the situation either. However, there is dialogue between the Big Ten and its member schools discussing an amendment to that rule.

What the future will hold for the OSU men's basketball program – and programs within the sport around the country as well – remains to be seen. Next season, the Buckeyes will be dealing with the loss of freshman

## COURT REPORT with Adam Jardy

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## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

## Mullens, Dunning Win Awards

One year after being edged out for the Mr. Basketball of Franklin County award, B.J. Mullens has received his due. The 7-0 senior center from Canal Winchester is a unanimous selection for the honor co-sponsored annually by Buckeye Sports Bulletin and American Awards of Grove City, Ohio.

"He's going to be a top-five pick in the (NBA) draft next year," Chris Johnson, Ohio editor of the publication Hoop Scoop and one of the panelists for the award, said of the future Buckeye. "He's got a rare mix of size, athleticism and skills and has all the ingredients to be a potential superstar."

"He is an outstanding big man, outstanding around the basket, soft touch, good shooter," chimed in Larry Larson, another panelist and the longtime high school sports expert at WTVN-AM 610 in Columbus. "He has made himself into an outstanding player."

Meanwhile, Miss Basketball of Franklin County for 2008 is Ayana Dunning of Columbus Eastmoor Academy. Dunning will be an LSU Tiger next season.

"Ayana was the dominant big girl in central Ohio for each of her four years in high school," Steve Blackledge of The Columbus Dispatch said. "Provided she stays injury-free and fit, she should excel in college, even for an upper-tier program such as LSU."

USA Today selected Mullens for its All-USA first team and The Associated Press picked him the Division II co-player of the year in Ohio after he averaged 26.2 points, 14.5 rebounds and 2.7 blocked shots per game while shooting 70 percent from the field. He shared the AP honor with future Ohio State teammate William Buford of Toledo Libbey.

Scout.com ranks Mullens the No. 2 center in the country and the No. 6 prospect overall for his class.

Mullens earned the honor ahead of Chris Johnson, a senior small forward from Columbus Brookhaven who finished third in

the voting one season ago and will play for the University of Dayton next season. Others in consideration included Devon Moore, a senior shooting guard from Columbus Northland who will attend James Madison, and his younger teammate, sophomore power forward Jared Sullinger.

After issuing a verbal commitment to Ohio State as a freshman, Mullens enjoyed a stellar prep career that has taken him all the way to being selected for the 2008 McDonald's All-American Game.

Last season, Eastmoor point guard Ronnie Steward edged Mullens for the award.

Dunning, a 6-4 center, was a first-team All-Ohio selection last season and led the Warriors to the regional semifinals while averaging 18.2 points per game. She shared statewide AP Division II player of the year honors with Cierra Bravard of Sandusky Perkins.

Scout rates Dunning a five-star prospect, the No. 3 overall player in the nation and the top center. Like Mullens, she took part in the McDonald's All-American Game in Milwaukee in April.

Other contenders for the Miss Basketball award were seniors Tyasha Moss of Columbus Africentric and Amber Stokes of Gahanna Lincoln.

Moss and Dunning were runners-up last year to Crystal Murdaugh of Dublin Scioto.

Stokes is an Ohio State signee and the daughter of former Buckeye basketball captain Ron Stokes.

Past winners of the Mr. Basketball award include Lawrence Funderburke (Wehrle), Gary Trent (Hamilton Township), Samaki Walker (Whitehall), Andrew Lavender (Brookhaven) and Jamelle Cornley (Brookhaven). Among notable past Miss Basketball recipients are Tomeka Brown (Marion-Franklin), Jessica Davenport (Independence) and Brittany Hunter (Brookhaven).

— Marcus Hartman and Adam Jardy

their sons could go through the process without hurting the program.

"We met with the families last year and asked them to please honor this," Matta said. "And everybody was in agreement."

## Where Will Koufos Go?

The future for Koufos remains cloudy at best. After opting out of playing his sophomore season and deciding to head for the professional level, the 7-0 Koufos continues to face an uncertain future.

With more and more mock drafts popping up, Koufos finds himself on the outside looking in when it comes to being a lottery pick.

NBA.com compiled a comprehensive mock draft based on all other mock drafts conducted

by other websites, and Koufos did not factor very highly into it. Of the 10 mock drafts consulted, Koufos was listed on just one. ProBasketballNews.com pegs him as going 11th overall, which would see him suiting up for the Indiana Pacers. However, that mock draft was conducted April 28 — a full 22 days before the NBA draft lottery took place.

That does not mean Koufos appears to be in danger of not being drafted, though. ESPN's Chad Ford lists Koufos as being a candidate to go to the Cleveland Cavaliers with the No. 19 pick in the draft, calling him "a young Zydrunas Ilgauskas." Draft Express slots Koufos as going to the Phoenix Suns with the No. 15 pick, while ProBasketballNews.com has him going No. 16 overall to Philadelphia.

"The man who essentially replaced Greg Oden as the focal point at Ohio State didn't get the attention his predecessor enjoyed but did put up solid numbers that would've been even better if he had someone the caliber of Mike Conley getting him the ball," ProBasketballNews.com said. "Despite the Buckeyes' lack of success, the enormous Koufos impressed enough scouts to make this leap with the knowledge that he could potentially emerge as a lottery pick."

Plain Dealer columnist Bill Livingston penned a column dated May 23 that casts doubt on Koufos' ability to withstand the physical beating that comes with playing in the paint in the NBA.

"For the NBA, Koufos needs to improve

his physical strength," he wrote. "A guy his size is expected to have a low-post presence. The league is also not a game for gentlemen. There are a lot of sinister, tough people who will plant rookies in the paint while referees figure the contact is part of paying their dues. It takes a strong will, a strong sense of self, to handle it."

"Koufos is not a power player in the paint. He was called the most skilled big man among freshman players, which is a nice thing to be but would not at this point keep him from being bullied in the paint by most big men in the NBA and even some of the more robust wings."

Since his decision to leave college, Koufos has been working out along with other draft prospects in Las Vegas in Joe

Abunassar's Impact Basketball training camp. The six-week program is part of Koufos' efforts to move up the draft charts.

According to multiple reports, Koufos has hired an agent, fully ending any chances of him returning to school. Koufos has signed with Mark Termini's Cleveland-based sports management agency, MTA Inc. The agency's director of worldwide basketball, Andy Bountogianis, will help Koufos with his overseas options.

Bypassing the NBA altogether and heading to Europe remains a possibility, Koufos told the Plain Dealer paper.

"It's an outside possibility," he said of playing in Greece or for the Greek Olympic team. "I'm not trying to think too far ahead. My main focus and main goals are to work hard and play in the NBA."

The player tasked with replacing Koufos next season on the hardwood of Value City Arena is projected to be making a similar leap following his freshman season. ESPN.com writer Joel Francisco lists incoming freshman B.J. Mullens from Canal Winchester, Ohio, as another player likely to be a one-and-done athlete.

"A versatile 7-footer out of Canal Winchester, Ohio, Mullens is the most promising big man to come out of high school since Greg Oden," Francisco wrote. "He has a mas-

Continued On Page 20

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## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

## Iowa State Forward Is On Ohio State's Radar

Continued From Page 19

sive frame and soft hands and runs well. Still, he doesn't dominate as much as he should on a consistent basis."

Mike DeCourcy from the Sporting News addressed the topic of schools that have a lot of one-and-done players and the ensuing impact those early departures have on their respective programs, and not surprisingly OSU factored into the discussion. Specifically, DeCourcy wrote of Koufos' attempt at replacing Oden in the paint for the Buckeyes.

"Ohio State center Kosta Koufos was

nowhere near the level of prospect that Greg Oden was, but Koufos stood out because of his extraordinary ball-handling and shooting skills for a 7-footer," he wrote. "As a freshman, he operated with a sense of entitlement, his demeanor suggesting he naturally would follow the same path as Oden. When Koufos' distaste for contact led to a substandard freshman season, he nonetheless took off for the draft and signed with an agent. Ohio State won the NIT, but that result was not what anyone planned."

**OSU Pursuing Another Forward**

Although two recent additions have put the

OSU class of 2008 among the upper echelon in the country, a report in the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Gazette indicates the Buckeyes might not be done recruiting for that class.

According to the paper, OSU is one of about a dozen schools that have asked about the services of Wesley Johnson, a forward who has suited up for Iowa State for the past two seasons but has asked to be released from his scholarship.

A member of Johnson's family called ISU head coach Greg McDermott on May 15 to inform him that Johnson was seeking to transfer out of the program. McDermott flew to Johnson's hometown of Corsicana, Texas,

to try to talk him out of the decision, but the forward's mind was already made up.

As a freshman in 2006-07, Johnson was named to the Big 12 All-Freshman team after averaging 12.3 points per game. He upped his scoring average to 12.4 points per game as a sophomore, leading the Cyclones in shots attempted from the floor while battling an injury to his left foot that caused him to miss five games and eventually resulted in Johnson undergoing surgery for a stress fracture April 30.

"He certainly was a great fit for our program during his healthy freshman season, and there's no doubt the injury this year affected him a great deal physically," McDermott said in a release. "During our visit in Texas, I outlined all of Wesley's options and the challenges of a mid-career transfer. A transfer is a lot more complicated than just switching schools. I want Wesley to fully understand how a transfer can impact his development for a professional career."

The university had not yet released Johnson and is unsure how the situation will proceed. He was no longer listed on the team's roster on its website.

In addition to OSU, West Virginia, Cincinnati, Wyoming, Montana, Sam Houston State and SMU all have contacted the school about Johnson's services.

With or without an inclusion of Johnson, Matta's class of 2008 has received some pretty high marks from ESPN.com. In a revised list of the top incoming classes for next season, the Buckeyes check in at No. 3, just behind top-ranked UCLA and Florida. Although OSU already had held down a high spot in most national rankings thanks to the likes of incoming freshmen Walter Offutt, William Buford, Anthony "Noopy" Crater and Mullens, the recent additions of JUCO players Jeremie Simmons and Nicola Kecman have helped push that ranking even higher.

"The Buckeyes have one of the most versatile classes in the country," ESPN's Antonio Williams wrote. "When he plays with intensity, B.J. Mullens gives Ohio State a superior inside presence, which will come in handy given Kosta Koufos' early departure for the NBA. The Buckeyes added two JUCO players since the early signing period, bringing power forward Nicola Kecman and point guard Jeremie Simmons on board. Both players will bring maturity to a very young team and mesh perfectly with ESPN 100 prospects Will Buford, Walter Offutt and Anthony Crater."

Only two other Big Ten teams featured in the top 25. They were Michigan State and Minnesota, which checked in at Nos. 16 and 25, respectively.

**Scheduling Update**

In the last issue, BSB cited the Memphis Commercial Appeal as stating that the Buckeyes would begin a home-and-home series with Memphis beginning next season, but the validity of that report appears to be in doubt.

The Columbus Dispatch cited two sources close to the OSU coaching staff who denied that such a game was in the works, while the Plain Dealer said Matta declined to comment on the potential series.

The Plain Dealer reported that the Buckeyes will host Butler, Jacksonville and Sanford next season. In addition, OSU is looking to host a four-team, round-robin tournament to begin the 2008-09 season similar to the Black Coaches Association Classic in which the Buckeyes participated two seasons ago.

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## MEET THE BUCKEYES NIGHT

# Buckeye Greats Highlight Annual Toledo Event

It was a different format, but the results were pretty much the same as nearly 1,000 Ohio State fans from northwest Ohio gathered for the 11th Meet the Buckeyes Night, held May 9 at the Stranahan Masonic Complex in Toledo.

In the past, former Buckeye greats have been honored at the event, held every other year since 1988, with most of the top Ohio State coaches and athletic administrators making the trip from Columbus to speak and mingle with Buckeye fans from Toledo and surrounding areas.

This year's head table, however, was instead made up of a number of Buckeye personalities, with scant athletic department representation.

It seemed to make little difference to the scarlet and gray faithful on hand, though, as they enjoyed the company of fellow Buckeyes, got fired up with the speakers, the OSU band and cheerleaders as always, and raised \$40,000 for the Ohio State athletic department. That brought the total raised since 1988 to nearly \$500,000.

The featured speaker was former head coach Earle Bruce, now a popular radio analyst for WTVN-Radio in Columbus.

Meet the Buckeyes night organizer Phil Harrison noted that with Bruce's presence, the event had come full circle.

It seems Bruce and several boosters from the Toledo area wanted to organize a golf outing in the area to raise money for Ohio State football. The golf outing failed, but the idea of having a spaghetti dinner to raise money and bring Buckeye fans together was hatched. Unfortunately, Bruce was fired as head coach before the idea – which would become Meet the Buckeyes Night – became reality in the spring of 1988.

Now Bruce was back in Toledo as the event headliner.

The first speaker of the night, assistant football coach Dick Tressel, seemed to acknowledge the change in format. He told the crowd how honored he was to be one of the speakers.

"But when push comes to shove, I'm smart enough to realize the reason I am here is because Jim Tressel wasn't available," said Tressel with a smile, alluding to his younger brother.

Dick Tressel gave some background into how football was a way of life for his family. Most Buckeye fans know that Jim and Dick's father, Lee, was a highly successful coach for many years at Baldwin-Wallace, the school both Tressel brothers attended. Dick Tressel noted that their mother, Eloise, was also a knowledgeable football fan.

While Tressel was coaching at Hamline University in Minnesota, two of his own sons played for him. When one of the sons dropped a pass in a game, Tressel told the Toledo crowd that he called his son over to the sideline.

"Quit that," he said of the dropped pass. "You're embarrassing your mother."

"You're just lucky *your* mother isn't here," the son snapped back.

Tressel also praised the academic progress the OSU football team has been making, noting the presence at the head table of former quarterback Craig Krenzel, who was well-known for his outstanding work in the classroom.

"With Craig at a 3.98, the team was at around 2.3," Tressel said of the squad's GPA in the early years of the Tressel era. "We're near 3.0 now."

Next up was former assistant coach and recruiting coordinator Bill Conley, now a



SUSAN ZEIER

**EVENT HEADLINER – Former Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce was the featured speaker during Meet The Buckeyes Night, a charitable event held every other year in Toledo. Bruce joined such other luminaries as assistant football coach Dick Tressel, former recruiting coordinator Bill Conley and women's basketball star Katie Smith at the event, which raised \$40,000 for the university's athletic department.**

radio personality in Columbus for WTVN and an analyst for ESPN.com.

While Conley gained his most fame at Ohio State as an assistant to Bruce, John Cooper and Tressel, he also played for Woody Hayes while in school. Conley noted that he arrived in Columbus as a linebacker but was moved to the offensive line, where his position coach was none other than Bruce.

"That just proves that even the greatest coach in the world can't do the impossible," a particularly animated Conley said, referring to his modest playing career.

"Oh, yes, I did," Bruce interrupted loudly. "He played, by golly."

Krenzel, the quarterback of Ohio State's 2002 national championship team, was the next speaker.

He recalled looking out from his campus hotel room on the morning of the Ohio State-Michigan game in 2002, the game that would propel the Buckeyes into the championship game against Miami (Fla.), along with his roommate, tight end Ben Hartssock. Buckeye fans were already gathering below them in anticipation of the annual showdown with the archrival Wolverines.

"I wonder what all those people are thinking," Hartssock asked.

"They're probably confident we're going to win," Krenzel replied.

"Do you think they'd be so confident if they knew what a bunch of idiots we were?" the tight end wondered.

At first Krenzel said nothing.

"Then I got to thinking, maybe he was right," the quarterback recalled. "We were just a bunch of idiots. A bunch of young guys lucky enough to play football for Ohio State."

Those "idiots" would go on to beat Michigan and defeat the Hurricanes in double overtime to win the school's first national championship since 1968.

Katie Smith, one of the most successful athletes in Ohio State history, followed Krenzel. Smith helped lead the OSU women's basketball team to a national runner-up finish as a freshman in 1993 and finished her college career as the Big Ten's all-time leading scorer. She currently plays for the WNBA's Detroit Shock and is the leading career scorer in women's professional history. Smith also has extensive international

Indianapolis. He was also an assistant when the Buckeyes played Miami for the college football national championship in 2002.

"People ask me all the time about the difference between the Super Bowl and the national championship game," Spencer said. "The difference is we *won* the national championship game."

Finally, it was Bruce's turn. He talked about coming to Ohio State as a player, having fallen in love with the school and eventually having the chance to coach under Hayes. He would ultimately succeed Hayes, and Bruce praised the many great assistant coaches he had while he was head man in Columbus, including Glen Mason, Nick Saban and Pete Carroll, who have gone on to great success of their own. Surprisingly, he did not mention Jim Tressel, who served under Bruce from 1983-85.

But later, Bruce would address that omission.

"You may have noticed that I didn't mention Jim Tressel when I mentioned my other assistants," Bruce said. "That was on purpose. Coach Tressel has been very good to me and John Cooper. He's a smart guy. This way, we don't criticize him."

"Jim wanted to coach at a smaller school like his father and be there for a long time. But then he got to Ohio State and once you are bitten by the Ohio State bug, you see all the possibilities."

"By the time he is done, Jim Tressel will be the greatest coach in Ohio State history."

At the close of the program, which was emceed by noted Ohio State football historian Jack Park, Harrison presented a check for the event's proceeds to OSU associate athletic director Denny Hoobler.

"Everybody loved the new format," Harrison said. "We had a nice mix of the senior guys, a hall-of-famer (in Bruce), younger athletes including people still playing like Katie Smith, and assistant coaches. People just loved it."

Honorees at previous Meet the Buckeyes Nights have included Griffin, Clark Kellogg, Jim Lachey, Mike Tomczak, Tom Skladany, Keith Byars, Chris Spielman, Jim Karsatos, Howard "Hopalong" Cassidy, John Hicks, Tom Cousineau, Mike Vrabel and Bill Hosket.

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