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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 13, 2002

Offense Under Close Scrutiny During Spring

Coordinator Bollman Busy Assessing Key Personnel

By MIKE WACHSMAN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At about 4 p.m. on April 27, Ohio State fans will start giving their outlook on how they feel the Buckeyes will do this year.

That's about the time the annual Scarlet and Gray Game should end, and the precise moment that the OSU faithful will go into overload about their team.

Should the offense struggle, you can bet that will be the hot topic over the summer. But fans should not make judgments about the offense for the upcoming season based on what happens in the spring game. Last spring's final fling, for instance, served to whet the appetite with a ton of passes. Yet the Buckeyes were fairly conservative on offense once the season rolled around.

"We want the spring game to be a lot of fun," Ohio State offensive coordinator Jim Bollman said. "But it's not even close to how we'll look on the field this fall. Anyone who takes what we're going to do in the spring game and tries to apply it to our production in September is missing a lot."

Bollman pointed out that offensive linemen will be mixed together, the secondary will be a mosh of bodies, and the untested nature of the quarterback position will lead to mistakes.



STEVE HELWAGEN

A PIECE OF ADVICE — Ohio State offensive coordinator Jim Bollman (right) gives some instruction to offensive lineman Steve Winner.

In the grand scheme of things, daily practices are more important than the spring game because the coaches can evaluate players within their set units.

"You're only as good as your weakest link, and we want to try to minimize the number of weak links we have," Bollman said. "That's why this time of year is so crucial. We can teach and tell them what to do, but they need to go out and execute it."

Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel will be watching the offense with a keen eye, and he believes the spring is used for honing and improving in all aspects of the game.

"There are a lot of fundamental things," Tressel

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Stockman, Sullinger Find New Home With Buckeyes

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Few people go through life without an older, wiser person telling them to be careful not to burn their bridges.

Apparently Jim O'Brien took that piece of advice to heart when he decided to get into the coaching profession. As most people know by now, O'Brien is willing to leave the door open when dealing with prospective players, a trend that has paid off handsomely in recent years.

He arrived in Columbus five years ago, and soon after one of his players from Boston College decided to tag along. His name was Scoonie Penn. Less than two years later, O'Brien and Penn were hugging each other on the court, cutting down the nets in Knoxville, Tenn., and leading the Buckeyes to the Final Four.



Tony Stockman



J.J. Sullinger

Another player O'Brien once got a commitment from at BC, Sean Connolly, stayed in the East for a year at Providence then realized he wanted to join the fun at OSU. Connolly has helped

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Vandy's Foster Gets Nod For Women's Post

By MIKE WACHSMAN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Many people see the Ohio State women's basketball program as one that has underachieved the last few years.

Two NCAA berths, one WNIT title and no Big Ten championships since the Final Four run of 1993 have meant nine years of what could have been.

But Jim Foster sees it as a sleeping giant, a program that can reach the heights already scaled by Purdue and Notre Dame, two of the best in the Midwest.

That belief in OSU made Foster itchy enough to leave a cushy job at Vanderbilt — where he led the Commodores to a 30-7 record and No. 5 ranking this season — and take over a Buckeye team that was in serious need of a makeover.

Foster, who went 504-225 in 24 years of collegiate coaching at Vandy and St. Joseph's, was introduced April 7 as the seventh women's basketball coach in OSU history and immediately set his sights on reaching the top.

"When an opportunity knocks, you have to take a chance," Foster said. "I'm someone who has aspired to reach the highest level, and this university has the potential to win the last game of the season. There's only one team that wins the last game of the season and that's the national championship game. That's why I came here."

"In order to do that we have to start to win the Big Ten, we have to compete at the level necessary that we're playing well into March."

Foster received a five-year deal with terms believed to be around \$400,000 per season. That is roughly \$100,000 a year more than his predecessor, Beth Burns, made annually during her five-year stay. Her contract was not

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STEVE HELWAGEN

A JIM DANDY — New Ohio State women's basketball coach Jim Foster, late of Vanderbilt, speaks to reporters following his April 7 introduction.

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OPINION

For Added Weaponry, Look To The C's

We're going to play a modified game of name association this time, beginning with some observations from the first week of spring football. (We'll be back in two weeks with The Spring Answer Man.)

• **Drew Carter, Bam Childress and Angelo Chhattams** — These three C's have already raised some eyebrows in the first week of spring ball.

Granted, Michael Jenkins, Chris Vance and Chris Gamble figure to get the lion's share of the work at wide receiver this fall. But these three aren't settling for pine time.

Offensive coordinator Jim Bollman has made noise of using more three- and four-wide receiver sets, and these are the guys, it appears, who will be counted on to help fill those formations out.

Carter (leg) and Chhattams (knee) seem to be making strong recoveries from injury problems, while the enthusiastic Childress is proving to be a great weapon in the open field.

• **Ivan Douglas** — Douglas also has rebounded from a season lost due to blood clots in his lungs. He is working toward showing he is reliable enough to start at offensive tackle.

• **Ryan Hamby** — Ben Hartsock is penciled in as the starter at tight end, but Hamby, a redshirt freshman, could be a solid No. 2. In the first week, he was dazzling as a pass-catching threat.

• **Maurice Clarett** — It's rare that players live up to their advance billing, but Clarett seems to be the real deal. Again, we have just three days of returns and Clarett's surgically repaired thumb must stand up to the test of time.

But this guy is driven to succeed. I'm not sure if some of the upperclassmen know how to take Clarett, who allegedly has taken up residence in the weight room.

Mike Doss, seeing this kid's enormous potential, has taken him under his wing, which is good to hear.

The impact of Clarett's performance in the spring's first "Hoot and Holler" drill April 6 will not fade anytime soon (see Spring Diary, pages 19-20).

• **Simon Fraser** — A winter in the weight room has helped the rawboned Fraser develop as a solid contributor at defensive end. Due to a lack of depth, he is getting a ton of reps and making the most of it.

• **Cie Grant** — I know I was on Grant pretty hard last season for his showing as a cover corner. But I think the senior has found his niche as an outside linebacker. His sure-handed tackling and newfound ability to play in space should pay huge dividends this fall.

More Names Of Note

• **Jim Foster** — OSU's new women's basketball coach may be the most decorated coaching hire the school has ever made in any marquee sport.

Think about it: Who had accomplished anything close to what Foster has in their respective sports prior to coming to OSU? I know John Cooper's star was bright after he had won the Rose Bowl a year prior to coming to Columbus. And Jim Tressel has four national championships on his resume, although those were in Division I-AA.

But Foster led his teams to 16 of the last 18 NCAA Tournaments. His Vanderbilt squads played for five Final Four berths, making it once.

After attending his introductory press conference, I came away wholly impressed.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

with

Steve Helwag

I think Andy Geiger and Michelle Willis hit a home run with this hire. He is a proven commodity who can recruit and coach.

My over/under on the first Value City Arena sellout for women's basketball is two years.

• **Brit Kirwan** — I'm really sad to see OSU lose this president. Kirwan seemed to have great aspirations for Ohio State, but he encountered opposition everywhere he turned, from his own board of trustees to this state's inept legislature.

As Joe Hallett of The Columbus Dispatch argued, "It is hard to run a public university in a state with a government lacking vision and rationality."

It would have been hard for anybody to replace Gordon Gee, who had a dynamic personality and nearly eight years to build his power base.

As Tressel told me, Ohio State will attract great candidates for this position. But I'm afraid the people in this state are facing tough decisions on education if OSU is to take its rightful place among the nation's top public universities.

It should be noted as well that Kirwan's decision was certainly made easier by the chance to go home to Maryland.

• **Gary Williams** — Speaking of Maryland, how fitting was it that the Terrapins coach won the national championship against Indiana, a team he could not touch during his days here at Ohio State?

Hearty congratulations go out to this man, who many believe started the renaissance of OSU men's basketball in the late-1980s.

• **Tony Stockman and J.J. Sullinger** — Speaking of national championships, does anybody believe the recent transfers by these two fine basketball players will be the impetus for OSU to move closer to what would be the school's second NCAA crown?

At worst, these two proven commodities should keep OSU at or near the top of the Big Ten standings for the next several years.

• **Trent Jackson and Andrew Lee** — These two former OSU athletes made the papers recently for all the wrong reasons.

Jackson, a former OSU basketball player, was recently convicted of robbery for holding up a Bowling Green, Ohio, drive thru with a knife. He faces two years in

prison for his crime.

Lee, a one-time OSU football signee, is up for a life sentence, maybe more, after being charged in connection with the murder of a Columbus area store clerk.

It is sad that neither of these athletes took advantage of the immense opportunities they had after receiving athletic scholarships.

My sympathy and condolences go out to the victims and the families affected by their crimes.

• **Ed Martin** — We wrap up with a note on the never-ending saga surrounding the Michigan basketball program.

A few years ago, I was on an Ann Arbor radio station to preview an upcoming OSU-Michigan game. Martin's name had been in the news that day.

When the host asked me how things were in Columbus that day, I replied, "Hey, any day Ed Martin's name is in the news, it's a good day in Columbus, Ohio."

The host paused for a second, stammered something incoherent and moved on with the interview.

But lost in the coverage of the Martin pay-for-play scandal are several things. For starters, Ohio State was denied a bid in the 1992 Final Four after a loss to a Michigan team which had at least one professional player.

And over the years that followed OSU teams were repeatedly embarrassed by UM squads that had players who were illegally recruited with the lure of illicit cash.

I hear arguments from Michigan administrators that their once-proud program has suffered enough, and there may be validity to that. After all, should Tommy Amaker, whom I respect as a coach, be penalized for the sins of long-gone players and their coach?

But as long as this story has legs, the Wolverines could find it hard to put the pieces back together.

To that end, I want to commend to your attention a recent post on our BSB Internet site. The author, named moebias, satirized the Martin saga by casting the former Detroit auto worker in the role of Col. Nathan Jessup, made famous by Jack Nicholson in the 1992 epic "A Few Good Men."

You've probably seen Nicholson's cross examination by the defense attorney, played by Tom Cruise, many times.

But moebias' version is a must-read for any true Buckeye fan. I urge you to check it out on the OSU Basketball Forum on the BSB Internet site (ohiostate.rivals.com).

Simply go to that homepage and click on Message Boards in the left-hand navigation bar. Then click on OSU Basketball Forum. The moebias message is "push-pinned" at the top of the board.

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Geiger, Tressel React To Kirwan's Departure

OSU athletic director Andy Geiger professed "profound disappointment" following the recent announcement that OSU President William "Brit" Kirwan would be leaving the university to become chancellor of the state university system of Maryland.

Kirwan, 64, announced on March 25 that he would be returning to the state where he served as president of the University of Maryland for nine years before coming to OSU in July 1998.

"I'm of two minds," said Geiger, who also worked with Kirwan at Maryland. "I'm thrilled for Brit and Patty to be able to go back to the community where they're beloved and where their family is. That's the first mind."

"The second aspect is that I feel profound disappointment and sadness for Ohio State. He is a visionary. He is a firm but gentle leader who has moved Ohio State brilliantly in the last four years."

"I only hope we can capitalize on the work he's done and move on from here. He's been a wonderful mentor for me at two different universities," Geiger told BSB.

OSU football coach Jim Tressel, who was hired after interviewing with Geiger and Kirwan in January 2001, also shared his thoughts on the announcement.

"I was very impressed when I met Brit," Tressel said. "I had not met him before I interviewed here. I could just tell he has a real passion for kids and a real passion for Ohio State to be an outstanding place."

Tressel said he understood why Kirwan was making this move.

"We hate to lose Brit, but when you look at the circumstances, that was a no-brainer," he said. "Family is important and that (state) was almost like home to him. I understand and I wish him well."

"You will always feel good about the administration that was here when you got here. But the good news is Ohio State will attract great candidates."

The OSU board of trustees figures to take six months or more in naming Kirwan's successor.

Tressel Expects Doss In Leadership Role

As OSU embarked on its spring drills, Tressel noted the importance of having a leader like senior strong safety Mike Doss.

In a dramatic announcement in early January, Doss spurned a chance to leave OSU and enter the NFL draft. Instead, he returns for a third full season as a starter and a chance to become just the school's seventh three-time All-American.

"It was exciting for Mike to say he wanted to be with this group," Tressel said. "He enjoys being a part of Ohio State. Plus he knows he wants to work on some things and become even better than he already is."

"He is a playmaker, and you have to have playmakers on defense. As he approaches this four-month period leading up to the beginning of his senior season, the focus he is going to have will be extraordinary. He has a passion to be the best."

Doss has made noise that he would like to help OSU on offense and on special teams.

"He wants to help in special teams and see if he can beat out the guys returning punts and kickoffs," Tressel said. "He knows it's not going to be easy because Maurice Hall proved to everybody he's a darn good kick returner—and I really felt Chris Gamble was starting to emerge as the punt returner before he got dinged up. I think Chris Gamble and Chris Vance are going to be very competitive."

"Mike wants to compete against them and that's what we need to get to — guys wanting to beat guys out."

Tressel admitted it would be a long shot to see No. 2 line up on offense. But he and the coaches plan to shuttle players between both sides of the ball to keep things interesting and to sharpen their athletic skills.

"Mike has got some interest in that," Tressel said. "Right now, that's not what he's focused the most on."

"During spring practice, we're going to have the corners running some routes and having the receivers cover some. We started doing that in the bowl practice. If someone emerges as the best guy who can do something, we need for the good of the team for that guy to do that."

"The guy who looks to me like one who can cover anybody is Chris Gamble. There could be moments down the line, maybe the Texas Tech game or some other time, where we turn to him and say, 'Chris, you've got their number one wideout. Go get him.'"

"The same would be true if a guy could make plays on offense getting the same chance."

Doss has a well-earned reputation as a character. But he channels that gift in a positive way, Tressel said.

"He's got that contagious enthusiasm," Tressel said. "He can get people going and make a play that makes a difference. I watched a young guy mature over the course of the year. That's what makes it even more exciting for me because of what he brings back off the field."

"He is real intent on making a difference in the right ways. He's very willing to be a leader off the field. I think that is a heck of a bonus on this."

Fox Spending The Spring Learning Cornerback Spot

With Doss and Donnie Nickey firmly entrenched at safety, the OSU staff opted to move sophomore Dustin Fox to cornerback.

The 6-0, 190-pound Fox actually spent bowl preparation at corner and started the Outback Bowl against South Carolina there.

Speaking after the team's initial spring practice April 3, Fox said he was enjoying the challenge of mastering the position.

"It was a good first day," Fox said. "It was



STEVE HELWAGEN

GLAD TO BE BACK — Many Ohio State fans wondered if they would see this sight again, but there was senior-to-be Mike Doss grinding it out during the first week of spring drills. This past winter, Doss decided not to enter the NFL draft a year early.

good to get the kinks out. I'm looking forward to having a big spring. I want to take this time to learn the position. I want to get some good film work in and hopefully become a better player."

"For now, it looks like I'll be at corner. I'm just going to do the best I can out there and try to be the best corner I can be."

Both cornerback jobs are open after Derek Ross left school a year early for the NFL and Cie Grant has moved back to his more natural linebacker position. It figures to be a baptism by fire for Fox and the other cornerback candidates this spring as they go up against a deep wide receiver corps.

"We've got some All-Big Ten caliber wide receivers," Fox said. "We're going against the best every day. If we can do a good job against them, we should feel good about when we get out on the field in games."

"The biggest thing I need to work on is my footwork. Man-to-man coverage, obviously, is a big factor at cornerback. We didn't do a lot of that at safety, so I'd say I really need to work on my coverage skills."

Spring Notes: Injuries, Position And No. Switches

There were a number of notables from the first week of spring practice:

Injuries — Several OSU players are out for the spring with injuries. They include defensive end Darrien Scott (right shoulder), offensive guard Adrien Clarke (right wrist) and fullback Jesse Kline (right shoulder).

Middle linebacker Matt Wilhelm was not practicing as he recovers from surgery on his right ankle. He has done some rehab work on the side.

"We hope to maybe get him back for the last week," Tressel said.

Offensive tackle Shane Olivea is still recovering from work on the broken ankle he suffered in the Michigan game. He has been able to do some running with Clarke on the side and could be cleared by the end of the spring.

"Olivea is still off because of his injury from the Michigan game," Tressel said. "The medical personnel have said we need to be careful with that because swelling could come easily."

"By the end of the spring, he should be back to full speed."

Wide receivers Drew Carter (leg), Angelo

Chattams (knee) and John Hollins (knee) all were participating, although Hollins could be held out of contact drills.

The only player who appeared to be injured during the first week was incoming freshman cornerback Michael Roberts, who injured his ankle April 6. His status was unknown.

Position Changes — Tressel commented on the move of Grant from cornerback to outside linebacker.

"Cie Grant is back at linebacker," he said. "That's kind of where his home is. He switched out to corner last year to help us."

Maurice Lee has moved from cornerback to wide receiver.

Tressel noted that linemen on both sides will be jockeyed throughout the spring to find the right combinations. Most notably, senior Kenny Peterson will rep at both end and tackle on defense.

"I think you'll see the offensive linemen and defensive linemen switch around quite a bit," Tressel said.

Number Changes — There were some notable number changes and assignments.

Carter has forsaken the No. 82, which has been unlucky for him in his injury-plagued career, and picked up No. 8, vacated by the departure of his friend and roommate Steve Bellisari.

Tailback Maurice Hall has switched from No. 20 to No. 28.

Roberts was assigned No. 39, while fellow incoming freshman Maurice Claret, a tailback, took No. 13, the same number he wore in high school.

But that assignment may not be permanent. Cornerback Harlen Jacobs, a junior, also wears No. 13. Both figure to play this year, meaning one may have to switch. Upperclassmen typically prevail in such situations.

Tressel Urged His Coaching Staff To Rest Before Spring

Tressel admitted recently his new life inside the Ohio State football fishbowl has taken some getting used to.

"This past year seemed like every national championship year we had at Youngstown State with tons of autographs and tons of calls," he said. "It's that way here every year. At Youngstown State, that was only when you won a national championship."

"The fishbowl is just part of the situation. For 26 years, I wasn't in a fishbowl. Now I'm in a fishbowl and I have to make sure I do a good job because it's real."

As Tressel has said many times, Ohio State is like Youngstown State — "just on a larger scale."

"There was a lot of this I didn't deal with in the first seven years at Youngstown," Tressel said. "It was a different planet and it was really under relative obscurity. It is different here."

"I would have thought that the Otterbein (Division III) national championship would be like a ticker tape parade and all they got was a little corner (of the sports page)."

"The last seven or eight years at Youngstown were similar to this. I was the athletic director as well, so there was no time. The expectations were to win every game. There was nowhere you could go without someone saying something."

Tressel took the OSU job in mid-January 2001. He quickly took a survey of the situation and knew the first year or so would be quite an adventure.

"We just knew the first 15 or 16 months where there was so much to do would be hard," he said. "I know our guys now. I don't have to look at the press guide to figure it out. There are a lot less things to do."

"Talking to a player, we all now have a

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reference point instead of saying, 'This is who I am.' Now we can both look at each other and say, 'I know who you say you are, but here's the way I see you.' I've spent the last four weeks talking to the coaches as well as our rising seniors and rising juniors.

"These are totally different meetings than we had a year ago."

Tressel has tried hard to familiarize himself with his players, even sitting down with many of the upperclassmen for extended meetings in his office. But with 80 or more players on the roster it is hard to gain a rapport with everybody.

"The one thing I wish we had more time for was to get to know them better," Tressel said. "I don't know that it would have changed a whole lot in our first season together. But it's impossible to have too much time in a relationship."

"We may have set an awfully large agenda. We just felt the first year was so important to set some direction. We wanted a lot of interaction with our players, with the campus, with the alumni and with the media. We wanted everyone to get to know us."

Tressel asked his coaches to take some time off during March, giving them perhaps their first extended break since he came on board. He hopes it pays dividends as the Buckeyes begin spring football.

"After recruiting ended and they had been here 13 months, I knew they needed to take some time off and get on a little bit more normal schedule," Tressel said.

"I was pleased with the approach the players took. They tried extremely hard to understand what we expected. They were

willing to talk about what they didn't understand. I'm not sure we're all the way there yet. But I do think we've progressed."

Fickell Beaming After First Practice At OSU

Former OSU defensive lineman Luke Fickell seemed at home in his new job as the special teams coordinator.

Tressel hired the 28-year-old Fickell, who worked the last two years as an assistant at Akron, in mid-March to replace Ken Conatser.

"It was exciting to be able to run back out there for practice again," Fickell said after the team's April 3 practice. "It has been a bit nerve-racking with the things I've had to do."

Fickell will coordinate the special teams and assist his former position coach, Jim Heacock, with the defensive line.

"This is something new for me, to be in charge of something," Fickell said. "I'm sure I will have help and have other people tell me what we need to work on."

"But a lot of it is trial and error. I think I'd like to talk to other people who have done this job and hear what they have to say."

OSU Names Graduate Assistants For 2002

Tressel announced April 4 that he had appointed Mark Staten and Serie Kanu as interns on this year's football team.

Staten will work primarily with the

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STEVE HELWAGEN

HIS FIRST DAY — Newly hired OSU assistant coach Luke Fickell (left) makes a point to defensive end Will Smith during the team's first spring practice session April 3 at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

Thumb Injury Not Enough To Slow Claret

Maurice Claret, the reigning Ohio Mr. Football award winner and USA Today national offensive player of the year, enrolled at OSU early this winter with an eye on participating this spring.

The former Warren (Ohio) Harding High School star had those hopes nearly dashed, though, after he underwent surgery in early February for torn ligaments in his thumb.

But the healing process was accelerated and, when the Buckeyes opened spring drills April 3, there was Claret.

"The good news is, at first we didn't think Maurice Claret was going to be able to practice much," said OSU coach Jim Tressel. "But it's coming along well and they said as long as he keeps it casted with the plastic-type thing and then taped up, then he can do whatever."

"It may affect his receiving a little bit, although we're not going to assume that it will. We're going to have to still throw it to him, but I think Maurice will get to do everything that he's capable of."

If anybody can overcome this type of setback, Claret could be the guy.

"Maurice is a great worker," Tressel said. "Maurice Claret's in the weight room constantly."

He already has made the transition from high school phenom to college student and athlete.

"I told him just the other day, 'You finished the hardest quarter that you're ever going to have in college,'" Tressel said. "It's tough that first quarter academically and socially, getting adjusted."

"In terms of football, he really runs with square shoulders, which is something that is so important. Jonathan Wells learned finally that if you do that you can do some



STEVE HELWAGEN

MAN TO BE? — He's just an incoming freshman, but running back Maurice Claret has set some high goals, including starting every game he plays for OSU.

pretty good things. So I think Maurice will be a good one."

After Claret's first practice with the Buckeyes, BSB's Gary Houstau had a chance to interview him. Here are some excerpts from that session.

BSB: Are you happy with your decision to enroll early?

Claret: "I'm more than happy. I'm glad I got it all out of the way now before our season came around. Then I'd have to deal with the season, football, classroom work and the whole adjustment. I'm happy I got all of this out of the way right now."

BSB: Take me through your decision process to come to school early.

Claret: "My junior year, I just said I wanted to come to college early so it was just something new for me to do. I just like to do, I guess, stupid and crazy stuff, and I just kind of stick with my decisions and I just stuck with it and I followed it through. I'm glad I made it now. After I look back on it, it's more positives than negatives out of the whole thing."

BSB: What exactly did you have done with the thumb?

Claret: "It was reconstructive surgery. I separated ligaments in my thumb and they just restructured them and put them back together."

BSB: Will the thumb hinder you in any way this spring?

Claret: "They'll probably have to cast it up for the spring game and it might affect me a little bit, but I figure if I could have a good spring game with it on, when I get it off it will only be better after that."

BSB: Are you full-go? Are you restricted in any way?

Claret: "It's kind of a day-to-day basis thing. I talk to Doug Cailand, the trainer. I always tell him, 'Don't tape it up and don't cast it up.' I don't want it taped up, but then I won't be able to practice. We just argue back and forth, but it's cool though."

BSB: Is this a war at running back this spring?

Claret: "I wouldn't call it a war but everybody is going to be competitive because everybody knows the position is open and everybody wants to play."

"I'm sure they know I came in wanting to play. So I can just tell everybody to strap up and let's get ready. It's only going to make

the whole running back corps better."

BSB: Have you been welcomed with open arms here by the other players?

Claret: (Laughing) "Put yourself in my shoes. Imagine somebody else challenging for your job. That's how the whole situation has been. Of course the people at your position aren't going to accept you with open arms. It's just like, 'Hello, I've got to talk to you because my coach says so,' but we really know what's up."

BSB: Has anybody taken you under their wing?

Claret: "Mike Doss, he's been helping me out a whole lot. He's basically guided me and helped me through, and gave me pointers and advice to follow."

"Every chance we talk, he just talks about something different. Or I'll ask him a question about what's going on and why does the coach say that or why does he do this or why do people act the way they act? Just different things like that and how I can have my head on straight coming in."

BSB: Do you welcome the competition at running back?

Claret: "Sure. Youngstown is full of competition, just the competition of growing up and living. So I've been doing this my whole life. Without struggle there is no appreciation. So you might have to struggle sometimes and you might have to go through some things that you really don't want to go through, but that's life."

BSB: Maurice, state the obvious. How much do you want to start on opening day?

Claret: "I want to start all 14 games and however many other games we play. I want to be the man every play, basically. It's no mystery. If everybody didn't feel that way I guess they're not believing in themselves. But I've told Coach Tressel and I'll tell any player on the team, 'I want to be the one, just like in high school, that you all can look on to make plays.'"

"I want to help carry this team and eventually, by the time I'm done here, I want to win a national championship. I've got high goals and I'm working on them every day."

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

Ignatius' Gonzalez Is First Verbal For 2003

Cleveland St. Ignatius wide receiver/defensive back Tony Gonzalez became OSU's first verbal commitment for 2003 when he contacted the coaching staff on April 5.

Gonzalez (6-1, 190, 4.36) is a standout two-way player for St. Ignatius' Division I state championship team.

"I wanted to get it out of the way early," Gonzalez told BSB. "I sat down with my parents and we evaluated everything. We looked at all the possibilities, including the football program, the education, how close it was to home, how well we liked the coaches and the situation of playing time."

"When we factored all of those things in, it was clear that Ohio State was the best place for me."

RECRUITING OUTLOOK with Steve Helwagen

Gonzalez also had firm offers from the likes of Iowa, Maryland, Louisville, Boston College, Oklahoma State and Miami (Ohio).

"I e-mailed them on (April 5) to let them know," Gonzalez said. "Then I called (defensive backs coach Mel) Tucker after practice that day. He got (head coach Jim) Tressel on the telephone and I talked to him as well."

"They seemed pretty excited."

Gonzalez's father played at Michigan and his brother, Joe, will be a senior defensive back at Indiana this fall. Plus he had a cousin, Dave Becker, who was a walk-on linebacker at OSU.

"It's just a great football tradition," Gonzalez said of his new school. "They have a huge stadium and you get all the exposure you could ever want."

"Every Saturday, you come out there and play in front of a hundred thousand people in the Horseshoe and millions on TV."

Gonzalez played in 13 of St. Ignatius' 15 games this past year, missing two due to injury. On offense, he caught 42 passes for 1,112 yards (24.1 average) and 10 touchdowns. Defensively, he had 56 tackles and six interceptions for the 11-4 state champions.

He came up big in St. Ignatius' two state tournament games. He caught five passes for 152 yards and a touchdown in the 49-20 semifinal win over Massillon Washington. Then he had seven catches for 144 yards in St. Ignatius' 37-6 championship game rout of Cincinnati St. Xavier.

Gonzalez could line up at receiver, cornerback or safety for the Buckeyes.

"I'll go and do whatever is best for the team," he said. "It seems like I will probably start out on defense. I like to think I could play on either side of the ball if I had the chance."

Gonzalez fits the mold of a Tressel recruit: He holds a 3.39 GPA and has

already scored an 1150 on the SAT.

Cincinnati Princeton Senior Could Be Late 2002 Addition

Ohio State brought in a 25-man class on signing day in February. But with early enrollees Maurice Clarett and Michael Roberts already in school, the Buckeyes can count them against last year's class.

That would allow the school to potentially sign an extra player or two if a scholarship is available this summer.

OSU seems to have dialed in on Cincinnati Princeton wide receiver/defensive back Darren Barnett, who is working furiously to improve his academic standing before graduating in June.

Barnett (5-11, 180, 4.45) visited OSU with close friend and signee E.J. Underwood of Hamilton on April 6. He said the coaches told him they would likely sign him if he qualifies.

"Right now, the coaches are telling me they need more time," Barnett said. "They want to see how my grades pan out. Obviously, it would be a big edge if I can qualify."

"They said they want to come down and watch me run track and then wait it out until the end of the school year. They said I would be a great candidate for the one scholarship they have left."

Illinois also has said it would offer Barnett if he qualifies. LSU has also been involved. If he fails to qualify, he could go to Bowling Green as a Prop 48.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

"It's real exciting for me," Barnett said. "I've waited my entire life for an opportunity to play big-time college football. Ohio State is right up the road from Cincinnati, plus they put a lot of guys in the pros. I just need to do my part to try and get there."

Barnett said he currently has a 2.30 GPA to go with an 18 on the ACT. With that score, he would need a 2.375 GPA or higher to qualify.

"I think the coaches see how I've improved academically," he said. "They see I have that urgency. I started off real bad, but my grades are coming up. This is my last hope and I want to play. I know I have to buckle down and do this."

Barnett has been a three-year starter at Princeton. As a senior, he had 91 catches with 16 going for touchdowns. He also had two punt returns for scores and two of his six interceptions went back for TDs. His team reached the second round of the Division I playoffs before finishing at 8-4.

"Ohio State said they are in need of DBs," Barnett said. "They believe I might be able to come in and compete right away. I want to help out any way I can. I've been playing defense my whole life."

Barnett's friendship with Underwood helped the OSU staff recognize him.

"E.J. and his dad have been putting the word in for me," Barnett said. "They've been helping me by telling people I'm a good player and a good person off the field. I'm a guy they can spend their last scholarship on."

"I met E.J. in the eighth grade when we were playing basketball against each other. We played together after that in the spring and summer. Since then, we've just clicked. We talk all the time and we go to acceleration training together."

"E.J. knows us being together up there could be a good thing for Ohio State."

OSU Signees, Prospects Attend Spring Practice

Underwood and Barnett were among a collection of OSU signees and prospects who made it to at least one of the team's first three spring practice sessions.

Signees attending the early sessions included Justin Zwick, Bobby Carpenter, R.J. Coleman, Doug Datish, Tim Schafer and Rob Sims. North Carolina offensive lineman Derek Morris and his father used Morris' spring break to also make the trip up to Columbus.

"Some people go to Florida and Cancun for spring break," Tressel said. "Other guys go to the frigid spring practice here. It's fun for them. They enjoy coming out and peeking in the huddle and trying to find out what's going on."

Zwick, for instance, was keeping a close eye on junior quarterbacks Craig Krenzel and Scott McMullen.

"I just wanted to come down and be around practice," Zwick told The Associated Press. "I've been excited for it to start. I'm looking forward to summer coming and just trying to be around it as much as I can."

"My time will come. I've just got to sit and wait for it."

Perhaps the top junior to watch OSU in the first week was massive West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West defensive tackle Brandon Maupin (6-5, 270, 4.9), rated among Ohio's top 20 junior prospects.

Avon Lake, Ohio, defensive back Brian Jones (6-1, 180, 4.4) also attended an OSU spring practice.

"I like Ohio State, Notre Dame, Virginia, Wisconsin and Penn State," Jones told Bill Kurelic of The Ohio

Football Recruiting News and the BSB Internet site (ohio.state.rivals.com). "Every school in the Big Ten except Penn State has offered me a scholarship."

"I really liked it a lot (at OSU). I like Coach Tucker a lot."

Jones, playing alongside OSU signee Mike D'Andrea, had 32 tackles and four interceptions on defense and rushed for 1,100 yards on offense. He also has a 3.75 GPA.

Miscellaneous Notes

• Rumors continue to persist that St. Henry, Ohio, junior quarterback Todd Boeckman (6-5, 215, 4.75) has verbally committed to Ohio State.

"No, I haven't committed to anyone," Boeckman told Kurelic.

OSU, Pittsburgh, Maryland, Iowa and Miami (Ohio) all have offered Boeckman, who threw for over 1,700 yards and 14 touchdowns last year.

"I'm going to Maryland for a day or two of their spring practice and I'm going to visit Ohio State for a spring practice, too," Boeckman said. "I'd say Ohio State is still my favorite."



Todd Boeckman

Michigan, Notre Dame, Tennessee, Kentucky and Syracuse also have expressed interest in Boeckman.

• G&W Recruiting Report recently issued a list of 100 prep stars to watch for next year. The list includes 10 Ohio prospects.

They include Boeckman, Warren Harding defensive back Prescott Burgess, Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary defensive lineman Sian Cotton, Massillon Washington defensive end Shawn Crable, Cleveland Glenville defensive lineman Michael Hearn, Cleveland Glenville defensive back Dareus Hiley, Youngstown Ursuline tight end Louis Irizarry, Massillon Washington wide receiver Devin Jordan, Cincinnati St. Xavier

defensive lineman Nick Larkin and Strongsville offensive lineman Dan Pribula.

• Ohio's Future Stars has completed its 2002 spring issue. It includes rankings of the state's top 200 seniors-to-be, the top 100 juniors and top 30 sophomores. Plus

it looks at the national top 100 as well.

We will examine some of these rankings in an upcoming edition.

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OHIO STATE RECRUITING PROFILE

Ursuline Tight End Thankful To Be Playing

By GARY HOUSTEAU
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Although his junior year wasn't as good statistically in terms of his catching the football as his sophomore campaign on the Division IV state championship team, Louis Irizarry of Youngstown (Ohio) Ursuline High School was truly grateful just for the opportunity to be back on the gridiron.

Irizarry, a tight end considered among Ohio's very best junior prospects, suffered a slight stroke on March 31, 2001.

The 6-5, 235-pound Irizarry said he was in the Irish locker room after school that day clowning around with his teammates just as he normally does, when all of a sudden he began to slur his speech and he eventually fell to the ground.

"I couldn't talk, the words wouldn't come out," Irizarry said. "My right side went partially paralyzed. The right side of my face was paralyzed, so the stroke actually happened on the left part of the brain."

"I remembered everything that I went through that day. The next thing I know I was laid down on the stretcher and they were rolling me to the ambulance. It was silly."

Irizarry remained in the hospital for about a week before he was eventually released. A neurologist in Cleveland said it might have been caused by a small blood vessel that ruptured in his brain at some point while he was working out with heavy weights.

"I was lifting hard at the time," Irizarry said. "But (the doctor) said that it would have had to have happened maybe a week or so before the stroke actually happened for the clot to form. So really to this day we don't really know what exactly happened."

As a precautionary measure after the incident, however, Irizarry was given blood thinners until about the end of June to help make sure that he wouldn't clot up again.

"Sometime in June we started our passing and skill workouts and I was there," Irizarry said. "I didn't really miss anything except for the lifting part because I had to take it easy for a while, just to be safe, so I wouldn't rupture another vessel or whatever it was."

Almost a year later now, any fear of suffering through another similar injury has completely subsided for Irizarry. He's back lifting heavy weights and doing as much as he can physically and conditioning-wise in the off-season.

Irizarry never missed a game due to the stroke but he was nagged a bit during his junior season with a shoulder injury that also is completely healthy now.

The whole incident, however, has left



Louis Irizarry

an indelible impression on him.

"When I was laying on the ground when this happened I remember thinking, 'Am I going to ever play again?'" Irizarry said. "That right there makes me want to be a better player when I am out on the field."

"After that, even to the last sprint, I sprinted my hardest, and almost every night up until the season I would catch about 200 balls with my father."

After helping Ursuline post a 14-1 season and win the Division IV state title in 2000, Irizarry and his teammates had to endure a rough 2001 campaign.

They were 7-3 on the field but were forced to forfeit four games for using an ineligible player. The forfeits dropped the Irish out of the playoff race. Then, at season's end, coach James Vivo announced he was leaving to become the new coach at Westerville (Ohio) North.

But Irizarry has hope that he can complete his career with a big senior year in 2002.

"With last season being so devastating for the team, I'm just trying to hit the weights hard since I missed so much of that last year," he said. "I want my hands to be 100 percent so I'm out there again catching every night."

According to many of the recruiting gurus around the state, Irizarry is ranked as one of the best players in Ohio heading into his senior campaign.

"All this attention now just makes me think a little bit harder about where I should go to college, but it really doesn't change my game plan in perspective of playing the game, because I still want to be the best," Irizarry said. "I want to come out number one in any category that I can, and I'm going to try as hard as I possibly

The Irizarry File

NAME — Louis Irizarry Jr.

HIGH SCHOOL — Youngstown Ursuline

POSITION — Tight end

HEIGHT, WEIGHT — 6-5, 235 pounds

40-YARD DASH TIME — 4.65 seconds

BENCH PRESS — 300 pounds

GRADE-POINT AVERAGE — 3.9

COLLEGE ENTRANCE TESTS — Will take college entrance exams this spring.

VITAL STATISTICS — Irizarry is considered one of Ohio's top five junior prospects. In 2-1/2 seasons as a varsity starter, Irizarry has caught 92 passes for 1,770 yards (19.2 average per catch) and 16 touchdowns. Those totals include his breakout sophomore year, when he caught 46 passes for 962 yards and eight touchdowns for Ursuline's 14-1 Division IV state champions. He suffered a minor stroke last March but recovered and showed no ill effects this past season. As a junior, he hauled in 31 passes. Ursuline figures to again contend for state honors in 2002 with Irizarry and the tailback tandem of Delbert Ferguson and Terrence Graves leading the way.

COACH'S COMMENT — "Louis is a hard worker. He's never satisfied. He's an over-achiever, he's very intelligent and basically the sky is the limit for him. Since I've been coaching here at Ursuline, he's probably one of the best overall kids that I've ever seen as far as having the hands, strength and blocking ability. He already has all the skills he needs to take it to the next level and he's still going to get a lot better." — Ursuline assistant coach Rollen Smith

HOBBIES — Creates musical tunes on an electronic drum kit.

SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN — Ohio State, Penn State and Notre Dame. In addition to Ohio State and Penn State, he also has been offered scholarships by Wake Forest, Michigan State, West Virginia, Maryland and Boston College.

can."

He's arguably already the number one pass-catching tight end in the state. As a freshman who started from the fourth game of the season on, Irizarry grabbed 15 passes for 250 yards and one touchdown. In his stellar 15-game season as a sophomore he nabbed 46 balls for 962 yards with eight scores. During his junior campaign, in a more ground-oriented offense and a 10-game schedule, Irizarry was limited to 31 catches for 558 yards and seven touchdowns.

"I'm a big target but sometimes the quarterback can't really get the ball there, and I can adjust easily and I can go get the ball," Irizarry said. "But I want to get faster because I know that speed helps you, especially when you have size. And in college, that's one of the main factors that distinguishes you from other players. So I'm working on my footwork and speed right now."

"And I'm catching at least 200 balls every night with the quarterback, to get on the same page with him. And I'm getting stronger, too. I want to be a better blocker and that comes with size and working hard on the weights."

Ursuline graduates their big-play wide receiver in Jimmy Riley, who is off to Louisville. But they return the much heralded one-two punch of Terrence Graves and Delbert Ferguson in the backfield, along with strong-armed Darryl Clark, who will return for his second season under center.

"We know that I'm the big target on the team in the air this year and guys are going to be out for me and us as a passing team, so we have to get it done," said Irizarry, who admitted they'll miss Vivo's leadership on offense.

"We'll put some wide receivers out there, but I'm pretty sure that I'll be one of the more active receivers on the team," he said. "I don't want to drop one ball this year and I want to learn more ways to get open over the middle and keep that going because when you get open you get the ball. But they'll still need me to block because the tight end is important in our blocking scheme."

Off the field, Irizarry continues to get letters from schools around the country on

a daily basis. Many of the letters invite him to spring practices and impending Junior Days. He's already made stops at Ohio State, Penn State and Michigan and missed out on one with Notre Dame due to inclement weather.

"It makes you want to work a lot harder," said the athletic Irizarry, who averaged 41 yards a kick as the school's punter last season. "It just puts the standards so high, it's like wow! What can I do for this school? You just want to make them see something in you that you don't necessarily see in yourself."

Irizarry's recruiting odyssey began for him as a starting freshman for the Irish when he received his first college letter, and it just happened to be from Ohio State.

"I was kind of excited about it then and I probably still don't know the real potential that I have," he said. "But ever since then I dreamed of going to college to play football and that's what I'm trying to do right now."

Of course, Buckeye fans would like to see the recruiting journey end for Irizarry at the same place it began.

"I have a ton of interest in Ohio State," he said. "They're the home away from home. They're close, (Jim) Tressel's there, there is promising things at the tight end position with Darnell Sanders, who just went on to the NFL."

"There are great things happening there, and it's close to home and the fans are all here. They're at the top of the list."

Irizarry, who said he greatly admires Kansas City's Tony Gonzalez and has a photo of University of Miami's Jeremy Shockey as a screen saver on his computer, attended an OSU game at Ohio Stadium last year and came away from that experience ready to suit up in the scarlet and gray.

"I went to see them play Purdue last year and I told my dad, 'I want to sign right now,'" he said. "It has to be the best home game atmosphere in America. I think as soon as I get to spend a weekend up there and check out the campus life, you may see my name on the dotted line."

"I'm going there for spring practice the first week of April and I don't want to give out too much, but they're at the top of the list."

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COVER STORY: OFFENSE UNDER SCRUTINY

Receivers' Experience Should Help Quarterbacks

Continued From Page 1

said. "You don't have to worry about the game plan. You're teaching in the spring. It's an exciting time of year and we have to grow significantly. For instance, when we didn't do well in the red zone, we didn't win. Getting better at things like that will make us a better football team."

Putting Fun in Fundamentals

Much of the onus will be on quarterbacks Craig Krenzel and Scott McMullen — at least until prized recruit Justin Zwick arrives for fall camp.

Both of the veterans were given their chances late in the season, and while Krenzel was something of a hero in OSU's win over Michigan, he was occupying a seat on the bench for much of the Buckeyes' Outback Bowl loss to South Carolina Jan. 1.

McMullen got the start against Illinois after captain Steve Bellisari was suspended following a DUI arrest, and though he showed flashes he did nothing to entrench himself in the position.

"In the spring the coaches are looking to see what we can do and what we can take to the fall," McMullen said. "We have to go out and make plays and do what the coaches are looking for."

The work that each quarterback gets

will be important when determining a leader.

"With two guys getting the bulk of the snaps we'll have a better indication of (what they can do by) putting them in a lot more situations," Tressel said. "That should help them grow."

One of the more heated battles is going on in the backfield. Sophomores Lydell Ross and Maurice Hall are fighting against redshirt freshman JaJa Riley and true freshman Maurice Clarett.

"All of this is easy to say, but the overall picture at Ohio State has always involved running the football," Bollman said. "We have a lot of guys back there. We need some to step up and show they can do the work."

Bollman believes that the Buckeyes will be able to stretch the field but won't make it a primary option in the passing game.

Too many times last year OSU opted for the home run ball instead of throwing the shorter, safer pass.

With experience pervading much of the receiving corps, OSU should be able to figure out some method of moving the ball.

"We would love to be able to attack the entire field," Bollman said. "But you can't do that right away. You have to establish some things first, and if you don't develop along the offensive line, anything you want to do won't be done."

We feel we're going to be good on offense, and we think we can be consistent throwing the football.

"Seldom does consistency involve throwing long passes. We'll do that some but not a ton. Short passes to the receivers, where we allow them to utilize their abilities and get some timing with the quarterbacks, will probably be what we lean on."

While the spring should be at the very least interesting for the Ohio State offense with guys fighting for jobs, Bollman doesn't want to lose sight of the big picture.

"We want to make ourselves a better football team, and to do that you have to win," Bollman said. "If you win you have fun, and we want to have a lot of fun this fall. You lay that groundwork in the spring."

New Faces, New Roles

With each new season comes change, and this year is no different. OSU lost some valuable experience on offense, including Bellisari, tailback Jonathan Wells and center LeCharles Bentley.

It's up to the understudies to know their roles and show the coaches they have what it takes to succeed.

"That's the way it's been every year since I've been here," tight end Ben Hartsack said. "Every year someone graduates and then somebody steps up. We need some guys to do that this spring."

"There are always question marks with young players. But I know Coach Bollman will get them prepared."

Bollman said the goal for the spring is to find the best 11 players and put them on the field.

"Our base is always going to be broad enough to employ our best personnel," Bollman said. "We have the most experience in our receiver groups, so we have to take steps toward utilizing

those guys and getting them the ball. We have to do enough to develop our young running backs and need to find some consistency with our quarterbacks. If it's a young guy who isn't here yet, then he'll play. If someone we have right now steps up, he'll play."

"Every year someone graduates and then somebody steps up. We need some guys to do that this year."

— Jim Bollman

With all the youth up front, the Buckeyes have looked alternately robust and ragged this spring.

There will be growing pains for the newcomers along the line, but as is the case everywhere else, the best men for the job will be the ones on the field.

"We're going to get the best five linemen we have out there," center Alex Stepanovich said. "If that means moving Bryce Bishop to tackle or making some other change, then so be it."

"We just want to get the five toughest, most intense guys on the field."

The measuring stick for Bollman and the offensive coaching staff will be how things progress from day one to day 15.

"We did a pretty good job of continuing to improve throughout the season, and that's what we'd like to continue this spring," Bollman said. "We want to be able to go from point A to point B without missing a beat. We always want to end up a lot better than we start off."

"The key thing here is utilizing the people who are available to you. I think that's the key to football — any place, any year."

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OHIO STATE SPRING FOOTBALL: THE QUARTERBACKS

For Right Now, Derby Is A Two-Horse Race

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Nobody has called it a match race yet, but OSU's spring practice is being marked by a two-man quarterback derby.

For those trying to handicap the field closely, they note that a much ballyhooed yearling will be added to the mix beginning in August.

Of course, juniors Craig Krenzel and Scott McMullen are going through their paces this spring with incoming freshman Justin Zwick due in the fall.

Whether Zwick will be able to push for playing time this season remains to be seen. But the upperclassmen are spending the spring making their case to win the job, vacated by outgoing starter Steve Bellisari.

"It's a real plus for Craig and Scott because they'll get the bulk of the snaps with the ones and twos," OSU coach Jim Tressel said. "It's also fun for (walk-on) Jim Otis Jr. because he's the third guy instead of the fifth guy last year."

"With just two guys getting the bulk of the snaps, we'll get a better indication. I think that will be a plus for them. Someone could emerge significantly over the other."

"They will get more reps with the first group. I like to think that maturity will be a part of what you will see from them."

The questions have already begun for Tressel: Can somebody lock down the job this spring? Does Zwick have a legitimate chance to start the opener against Texas Tech? Will the No. 2 man this spring fall behind Zwick on the fall depth chart?

The coach, who works directly with the quarterbacks, remains noncommittal on his plans.

"I don't know if it's fair to say if a person ends up second in the spring, he will be third in the fall," he said.

"All three of them will be battling against each other. But they really need to focus on themselves getting better and leave the discussions of who's No. 1, who's No. 2 and who's No. 3 to other people."

Krenzel and McMullen served as Bellisari's understudies the last two seasons. They seem to be enjoying the chance to show their skills this spring.

"Steve was the quarterback here for three years," McMullen said. "We wanted to push him and make him better. With him gone, our time is now."

Those two and Otis seem to rotate on every third snap during most drills, giving them each plenty of work.

"Scott and I are the only two (scholarship players) getting reps," Krenzel said. "We will do some good things and some bad things. You just try to learn from the bad things and hope the good things make you look better."

Krenzel Takes Nothing For Granted

Bellisari's late-season suspension following his drunken driving arrest opened the door for Krenzel and McMullen to show what they could do.

McMullen got the first chance by starting the Illinois game, but he was pulled in favor of Krenzel. Krenzel's play led Tressel to start him the following week against Michigan and in the Outback Bowl against South Carolina.

Now, with Bellisari out of the way,

Krenzel (6-4, 215) was penciled in as the starter to open spring drills.

But the Sterling Heights, Mich., native knows that pre-spring designation is worth about as much as the paper it is printed upon.

"Right now, that means nothing," Krenzel said. "So many different things could happen between now and Aug. 24. That's why you have to take a day-to-day approach and go out every day and try to get better."

Krenzel ended up completing 23 of 43 passes (53.7 percent) for 286 yards with one touchdown and three interceptions last season. He was, of course, at the helm as OSU downed Michigan 26-20.

"That experience was very important," Krenzel said. "Practice reps benefit you, but nothing replaces game experience. Nothing can substitute for that."

Although he got the hook in the Outback Bowl in favor of Bellisari, Krenzel still believes he showed what he is capable of.

"I have enough confidence in myself to know I can play at this level," he said. "I feel if I go out and play like I know I can play, I feel I'll play this season."

"I've always been one who likes to prove people wrong. I'm excited about the challenge. It's always a challenge when you play at a place like this. That's because you're always playing against good people in practice and there are good teams that you face in the Big Ten."

"Playing at this kind of football program, with the talent we have on this team, you better go hard every day and get better or you lose your spot."

Set to begin his fourth year as an OSU athlete, Krenzel believes his time has come.

"I knew as a freshman I would have to wait my turn," he said. "I've always had confidence in myself I could go out and get the job done. I was just waiting for an opportunity. The biggest thing was patience."

"Last year, in different circumstances, I got a chance to play. I did a few good things and I did a few bad things. The most important thing was just learning from the bad things."

"At this level of college ball, all you can really expect to ask for is one shot and just try and make the best of it you can. There are a lot of great athletes who come through here that don't get that opportunity because they were behind a great player who was just a step better."

Krenzel considers the battle to earn the starting job a friendly competition.

"Scott and I are great friends and the same with Steve," he said. "Steve was starting and all three of us competed. I lived with Steve and all three of us would hang out and do things."

"When you get to this level, you have to have the maturity that the competition stays on the field. Off the field, everybody is



Photos by STEVE HELWAGEN

TWO GUNSLINGERS — Getting most of the attention behind center this spring are juniors-to-be Craig Krenzel (16) and Scott McMullen (15).

friends with everybody."

McMullen Not Backing Down

McMullen (6-3, 215) is taking one piece of Tressel's advice to heart — he is not worried about where he stands, only with getting better this spring.

"One thing Coach Tressel said is we can't worry about (the competition)," McMullen said. "I just need to worry about myself and improving myself. If I can do that, I feel I will put myself in a good position."

McMullen is known for his athletic ability and quick release. He wants to add the words "consistent performer" to his dossier this spring.

"The biggest thing is confidence, being consistent, making plays and not making mistakes," he said. "I think that's what they're looking for."

The Granville, Ohio, native appeared in five games last year, completing 6 of 21 passes (28.6 percent) for 85 yards with one touchdown and one interception.

In meeting with the media at the beginning of spring practice, McMullen said he had few regrets on how his 2001 season ended.

"Now that I look back on it, it was a good learning experience," he said. "It was good to get out there and get that experience. It made me work harder this winter. I know I need to be more consistent."

"I was excited to start against Illinois. It was a great feeling to get those initial jitters out of the way."

The New Sensation

Unless Krenzel or McMullen locks the quarterback job down with a big spring, speculation will simmer all summer long on whether Zwick can crack the lineup as a true freshman.

But Krenzel confirmed that he is not looking over his shoulder.

"I can speak for myself, no," he said. "I can't speak for Scott."

Krenzel hearkened back to his freshman year of 1999 when asked if a newcomer could make this type of leap.

"It's hard," he said. "I came down early in the summer of my freshman year and did the seven-on-seven workouts. I'm not saying it can't be done, but there is a lot to learn with the terminology and the speed of the game. That's the hardest thing to get used to."

And, as Krenzel said, designations in April, May, June and July will carry very little weight.

"Everyone is equal now," he said. "Everyone will be equal in the fall. The only edge Scott and I have is we will have been here three years. I'm taking the mentality everybody is equal and you have to go out every day and prove you're the man."

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COVER STORY: STOCKMAN, SULLINGER COME ABOARD

OSU Waiting On Word From JUCO Jenkins

Continued From Page 1

the Buckeyes to 44 wins the last two seasons including the recent Big Ten co-championship and league tournament title. He enters next season as a senior and top returnee.

Connolly was nearly followed by big man Michael Bradley, who committed to O'Brien at BC, signed with Kentucky after O'Brien left and looked at transferring to OSU when things didn't work out in Lexington. Bradley, however, chose Villanova over OSU and went on to lead the NCAA in field-goal percentage.

This past season, OSU began the campaign with two players who once had planned to be elsewhere: Tim Martin and JaQuan Hart. Martin transferred from Kent as a walk-on and earned valuable minutes from O'Brien the past two seasons. Hart came to Ohio State after Michigan refused to admit him as a partial qualifier. However, Hart soon left OSU, citing his lack of interest in going to class.

Would that rare bump make O'Brien apprehensive about accepting players from other schools? Not on your life.

That's because J.J. Sullinger and Tony Stockman, two talented players whom the staff liked all along, recently made it known they wanted to return to their home state and play for the Buckeyes. O'Brien accepted them with open arms.

A freshman at Arkansas, the 6-5 Sullinger began daydreaming about joining OSU almost as soon as Razorbacks coach Nolan Richardson was bought out of his contract. His homecoming was delayed, however, when Arkansas stalled on releasing him from his scholarship.

Stockman, an effective 6-1 guard in

Ohio State Men's Basketball Projected Roster

Position (Spots)	Seniors	Juniors	Sophomores	Freshmen	Commitments
Guards (2)	Brent Darby* (6-1) Sean Connolly (6-5) Ryan Heflin# (5-10) Shaun Smith# (5-10)	Tony Stockman* (6-1)	Brandon Fuss-Cheatham (6-1) J.J. Sullinger* (6-5)	Ricardo Billings (6-4)	
Forwards (2)		Zach Williams* (6-7)	Terence Dials (6-9)	Matt Sylvester* (6-7) Charles Bass (6-9)	Ivan Harris (6-7)
Center (1)		Velimir Radinovic* (7-0)	Matt Marinichick (6-10)		

Scholarship Status — As things stand, OSU will have 12 players on scholarship next season. That could become 13 if JUCO forward Shun Jenkins verbalizes. If Jenkins comes on board, OSU would have only one scholarship to give to current high school juniors (in addition to current verbal Ivan Harris).

*-Returning starter.

#-Walk-on player.

*-As transfers, Stockman and Sullinger will be eligible at these class levels in 2003-04.

&-Sylvester redshirted this past season.

his two years at Clemson, had less trouble. He held up his hand to be excused and after only mild interference from Clemson coach Larry Shyatt accepted a scholarship offer from O'Brien. Sullinger eventually did the same and was merely awaiting word on the status of his transcript at press time.

Both Stockman and Sullinger, according to NCAA rules, have to sit out next season and will be eligible to play for OSU in 2003-04. Sullinger will enter that campaign with three years of eligibility remaining, while Stockman will have two.

"I really think it will be hard to sit out but at least I'll be close to home," said Stockman, whose mother lives in Medina and father lives about three blocks from the edge of the Ohio State campus. "At least I'll be doing it with someone else. I bet J.J. and I become really good friends from this."

Stockman and Sullinger, in effect, join a recruiting class that included a pair of fall signees — 6-4 guard Ricardo Billings of Detroit and 6-9 forward Charles Bass of Crete, Ill.

Sullinger's eventual go-ahead to join

the program left O'Brien closely involved with two prospects and only one scholarship available for next year. Shun Jenkins, a 6-6 power forward at Itawamba Community College, and Marcus Morrison, a 6-5 swingman from Lakewood High School in St. Petersburg, Fla., were scheduled to visit OSU the weekend of April 5-7. But O'Brien canceled Morrison's visit.

The staff had been working with Jenkins for months in hopes of adding much-needed rebounding help along the front line. They became more involved with Morrison in the late winter after his stock began to elevate.

The following is an outlook for all four players. (Note: the OSU coaches are not allowed to comment on prep prospects, JUCO players or transfers until they are signed to play at a school.)

Stockman: Hello, Mr. Basketball

There was speculation that O'Brien would bank a few scholarships for talent-heavy classes in Ohio and the Midwest in the next two years, but the chance to take a proven commodity such as Stockman was a no-brainer.

Stockman was the Tigers' second-leading scorer last season at 12.2 points per game, a figure that led all ACC sophomores. Despite missing two games because of a knee injury, he managed to lead the team in scoring nine times last season, including 30-point efforts against North Carolina and Wake Forest and 22- and 19-point outings against eventual national champion Maryland.

His high school resume is impressive as well as he was an Ohio co-Mr. Basketball winner at Medina High School, sharing the honor with Chet Mason of Cleveland South. Stockman averaged 25.4 points per game in his senior season.

Ohio Roundball Prep rated Stockman the state's third-best player, regardless of class, during his senior season of 1999-2000. He ranked behind only Dayton Christian's Romain Sato, who picked Xavier over Ohio State, and Warrensville Heights' Julius Johnson, who was leaning toward Ohio State until the Buckeyes backed off when he failed to meet freshman eligibility. Johnson ended up at Miami (Ohio).

Stockman would have looked more seriously at OSU a couple of years ago except the Buckeyes were not interested in recruiting a point guard right after Brent Darby.

"They wanted me to come there and

redshirt, and of course at the time I wanted to play," Stockman told BSB. "I understand it more now because I see the opportunity is better for me at Ohio State."

"I knew I wanted to go back close to home and Ohio State was my first choice. As soon as I got my release I contacted them before they got another guard. I'm really excited about coming there."

The feeling would appear to be mutual in Columbus. Stockman was a double-figure scorer both seasons at Clemson. As a sophomore he led the Tigers with 80 threes in 220 attempts (36.4 percent) although his free-throw percentage dipped from above 80 to below 70. He ranked second on the team to backcourt mate Edward Scott in minutes per game (28.3), assists (64) and steals (40).

"My thing is I want to play a little at the point but also at the two," he said. "It's funny how I got this reputation as a shooter because I feel I can do other things. I know Brandon (Fuss-Cheatham) is there and is a pure point guard — I played against him in AAU so I know his game — but I think it will work out great."

Stockman was listed at 6-1 and 165 pounds in a preseason guide but he said he is 6-2 and was close to 185 during the season. He's 175 now. His strength is fine but he is still trying shake off after-effects of arthroscopic surgery. He tore the meniscus in one of his knees during the second game of the season and played with limited mobility the rest of the season.

"I couldn't cut on it well, but I'll be good to go," he said.

Stockman said he has sent in his transcript and is prepared to take summer courses if necessary. He'll likely attend OSU summer quarter anyway and will play in the Worthington Summer League.

Sullinger: Local Boy Comes Home

Sullinger's migration back to Columbus seemed more like a jailbreak. He opted for Arkansas mostly because of his father's close friendship with Richardson then was among the more outspoken players on the team when Richardson was forced out.

Sullinger was appointed as one of 14 members of the school's search committee for a new coach but ended up pulling out of the group. Still, he lay low and waited to see if the university might actually hire interim coach Mike Anderson.

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COVER STORY: STOCKMAN, SULLINGER COME ABOARD

When the school instead scooped up Kent State's red-hot Stan Heath, Sullinger began to look into ways to get out of Fayetteville. Anderson, by the way, recently accepted the head coaching position at Alabama-Birmingham.

"Nolan Richardson compensated for me being 800 miles from my family," Sullinger told BSB. "I felt very comfortable with Coach Richardson, but he's not here now. There's no reason to keep a guy here who doesn't want to be here when there is probably somebody else out there who is just as talented as me, maybe more talented, who wants to be here."

Sullinger kept hoping that point would appeal to Heath and force some action. It did, but not until after Sullinger made his feelings known in a sit-down meeting with Heath April 4.

"It went as expected," Sullinger said. "I told him I just don't feel comfortable here anymore and I asked for my release. He signed it and my wish was granted. It was kind of like a closure meeting."

"I have nothing but respect for Coach Heath," he added. "He recruited me in high school when he was at Michigan State. I probably know him better than anyone connected with this program."

"I just didn't think it was in his best interests to try to get me to stay."

Sullinger finally was free after a trying month. His frustration mounted since the Ohio State coaches were not allowed to contact him until they received his release. Sullinger's father, Satch, a longtime coach at Oberlin College and now the boys coach at Columbus Northland, even wrote scathing letters to the university administration and a Fayetteville newspaper to try to help J.J. obtain his release.

Meanwhile, O'Brien, according to one source, made overtures to Arkansas athletic director Frank Broyles with no result.

But the end result was happy for Sullinger.

"I've always loved Ohio State," he said. "I was hoping to go there in the first place but it didn't work out because they didn't have any scholarships for me, and I understand that."

"But I wanted them to know I'm very interested in becoming a Buckeye. I want to wear 'Ohio State' across my chest."

Sullinger should fit in immediately. He is an athletic lefty who, at 6-5, can play several positions. He's also a solid defender who isn't afraid to do the dirty work. At Thomas Worthington he was The Associated Press co-player of the year in Division I along with Matt Sylvester of Cincinnati Moeller. The 6-7 Sylvester redshirted for the Buckeyes this season because of a back injury. Sullinger also is the reigning Mr. Basketball of Franklin County award winner. That honor is presented annu-

Welcome Aboard

Here are the college career statistics for incoming transfers Tony Stockman of Clemson and J.J. Sullinger of Arkansas.

Tony Stockman's Career Statistics At Clemson (2 Years)

Year	G-GS	Min-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct	3P-3PA	Pct	FT-FTA	Pct	Reb-Avg.	AT	TO	BS	ST	Pts-Avg.
2000-01	31-6	33-26.8	126-337	.374	75-196	.383	46-65	.836	60-1.9	79	67	3	44	37.3-12.0
2001-02	28-27	79-28.3	114-325	.351	80-220	.364	35-51	.686	69-2.5	64	64	1	40	34.3-12.2
Career	59-33	162-27.5	240-662	.363	155-416	.373	81-106	.764	129-2.2	143	131	4	84	716-12.1

J.J. Sullinger's Career Statistics At Arkansas (1 Year)

Year	G-GS	Min-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct	3P-3PA	Pct	FT-FTA	Pct	Reb-Avg.	AT	TO	BS	ST	Pts-Avg.
2001-02	29-12	61-21.2	94-224	.420	13-64	.203	72-100	.720	88-3.0	56	38	7	27	27.3-9.4

ally by BSB and American Awards.

Sullinger would be an obvious commodity to an OSU team that relies on its guards and could use one of size who can defend and offer all-around attributes. He averaged 9.4 points, 3.0 rebounds, 1.9 assists and 21.2 minutes per game as a freshman.

He is taking 16 credit hours this semester and took 20 the semester prior. He needs to have 36 credit hours on the quarter system to become a sophomore at Ohio State.

"I'll take classes at Columbus State or wherever for whatever needs to be made up," he said. "That's no problem. I'm just glad to be coming home."

"I never stopped being a Buckeye. I cheered them on in the Big Ten tournament, I cheered them on all season, and I cheered them on in the NCAA Tournament. I was sad when they lost to Missouri. The only time I would ever cheer against Ohio State is if I was in the other uniform."

Jenkins: JUCO Who Can Mix It Up

How serious is O'Brien about dipping into the JUCO well to get an enforcer? He blew off his radio show during the season to trek down to Mississippi to get a look at Jenkins, a powerfully built 6-6, 230-pounder at Itawamba Community College in Fulton.

He also did not attend the state playoffs — even with Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary's LeBron James, Columbus Brookhaven's Andrew Lavender and Cincinnati Roger Bacon's Monty St. Clair in the house — in order to watch Jenkins in the NJCAA playoffs in Hutchinson, Kan.

O'Brien was at the Sports Arena for the March 21 quarterfinals. Jenkins had 11 points and five rebounds in the first half but was hurt at the onset of the second half and left the game, which Itawamba lost 84-72 to Schoolcraft.

O'Brien's keen interest could pay off as Jenkins made his only official visit so far to Ohio State April 5-7.

That visit reportedly went well but

Jenkins returned to Mississippi without accepting OSU's scholarship offer. He'll decide if he wants to make other visits or not before signing in the late period, which begins April 10.

Jenkins, who was not available for comment, also was offered lots of minutes by LaSalle. That appears to be the Buckeyes' chief competitor, although another source told BSB that Wisconsin is pushing hard as well. A report out of a Hartford, Conn., paper April 8 also made mention of UConn making a push for Jenkins, which could muddle the picture.

Itawamba head coach Marty Cooper told RivalsHoops.com last month that Ohio State, Tennessee, Wyoming, Wisconsin and Tennessee Tech were among the leading candidates.

A native of Albany, Ga., Jenkins averaged right around 14 points and 10 rebounds for the Indians as a sophomore. He's on course to get his two-year degree in the spring and, unlike many players who find themselves at the JUCO level, was described as having a good work ethic.

"He's a great kid who is a solid student with excellent work habits," Cooper said. "He comes to play every day. He's very athletic and explosive and runs the floor real well."

JUCO expert Jerry Mullen said Jenkins is "about the best guy available at that level right now."

OSU also was showing interest in O.J. Sumter of Palm Beach (Fla.) C.C., similarly built at 6-6, 230. At last check, the Buckeyes had not yet offered Sumter but they could if things fall

through with Jenkins.

Palm Beach head coach Steve Bernath said coaches from Pittsburgh, Rutgers, St. John's and West Virginia also have shown interest in Sumter.

Morrison: No Room At The Inn

Morrison was set to come to OSU the same time as Jenkins but got a disappointing phone call from O'Brien April 3.

"Coach O'Brien said they had a transfer coming in who was originally from Ohio, a hometown kid who wanted to come home," Morrison told BSB. "I was bummed out, but you've got to move on."

"(O'Brien) was real apologetic about it. He told me he hated how it turned out."

O'Brien wished Morrison luck and even put a good word in for West Virginia and new head coach Dan Dakich. Morrison was considering OSU, Tulane and Auburn, but he said he'll probably decide between WVU and South Carolina after the turn of events.

Morrison, a late bloomer who led Lakewood to the Class 4A state title, was leaning toward OSU just days before the call from O'Brien.

"I have good feelings about them," he told BSB. "Everybody I've talked to has said nothing but good things about them."

An academic qualifier, Morrison came into prominence at the City of Palms tournament in Fort Myers as Lakewood beat several quality teams and Morrison won the slam dunk contest.

It also didn't hurt that he led Lakewood to a 33-2 mark and the state title. Lakewood beat Belle Glade Central, which included OSU football signee Antonio Holmes, 59-52 to claim the championship.

"I think that's what really helped me, that we kept winning games," he said.

Hoop Scoop touts Morrison in its national top 100 for seniors.

"Explosive quickness, great body control, excellent three-point range and good handling and passing skills," the service said.



Shun Jenkins

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COVER STORY: FOSTER GETS NOD

Foster Gave UConn Coach Auriemma His Start

Continued From Page 1

renewed after Ohio State finished 14-15 this past season.

Foster's credentials are the stuff legends are made of, and if he weren't in the state of Tennessee — where another legend patrols the sideline at another SEC school — he would be as well-known as anyone in the coaching profession to the general public.

In his 24 seasons, Foster has guided teams to the NCAA championships 16 times. Vanderbilt went to the Final Four in 1993 — the same year Ohio State finished as national runner-up — and reached the Elite Eight on four other occasions. The Commodores went dancing 10 times in 11 years under Foster's tutelage, advancing as far as the Sweet 16 eight times.

While it wasn't easy to leave Nashville, the Pennsylvania native admitted the time just felt right for a change of scenery.

"I had a comfort zone where I was," Foster said. "There are places in the back of your mind that seem special, and situations that are special. This is a place where they care about their traditions. As I was walking down the hallway to come in here I looked at all the names in the various sports that I recognized, and it was a lot. It was impressive."

"This is a great league and this is a school that can win this league. If you're at the top of this league you'll have a chance to play in March. Everything we do is geared toward playing in March. That's when it's fun, when your adrenaline is going. That's why players are in the gym in July taking those 500 shots — to play in March, to cut down the nets."

OSU athletic director Andy Geiger, who reportedly had his eye on Foster from the outset, couldn't have been happier about the hire.

"As I've watched Vanderbilt over the past few years I've marveled at how well the players improve from the beginning of the season to the end," Geiger said. "He's a master coach."

The personal side is even more impressive than the athletic side in Geiger's eyes.

"He has numerous credentials as far as won-lost record, but his personal qualities, his love of the game and his devotion to teaching are better than everything else," Geiger said. "He has deep caring for his players and brings a family atmosphere."

Every player Foster recruited to St. Joe's and Vanderbilt has earned a degree, and he was largely responsible for giving UConn's Geno Auriemma and Notre Dame's Muffet McGraw their starts as assistants at St. Joe's.

Hit The Ground Running

Though Foster admitted he didn't know a lot about the players at Ohio State, he was eager to learn.

Stating that nothing great is achieved without hard work, Foster pledged that the Buckeyes will be competitive, will hustle and will contend for a Big Ten title.

"I want to win next year," Foster said. "I want to be in the NCAA Tournament. I found out one thing three years ago when we didn't get in — that I was miserable. I didn't look at the selection show or read the paper. It was a bad, bad time for me. I know what I like to do in March — I like to be working when everyone else is at home."

Foster's staff at Vanderbilt most likely will be coming to Columbus, with one notable exception. Director of operations Erin O'Brien, daughter of OSU men's coach Jim O'Brien, gave Foster notice that her final day would be May 3. She is getting married this summer and will be moving to

Columbus with her fiancé. That means current director of operations Nikki Keyton, a former OSU player, will stay in that role.

As the first male women's basketball coach at Ohio State, and the only one currently in the Big Ten, Foster is making history of sorts. While there could be some backlash from proponents of keeping women in charge of women's teams, Foster isn't hearing any of that.

"I'm the only male who has been president of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association," Foster said. "So I've been in a room as a male with females my whole life. Whether the locker room, whether it's administratively, it's the world I live in."

Foster also coached a gold medal team in the 1990 world championships and assisted on a bronze medal Olympic team in 1992. A two-time national coach of the year (1985 and 1993), Foster led Vanderbilt to 20 or more wins in 10 of his 11 seasons.

Current Ohio State players appeared pleased with the selection of Foster.

"We knew Mr. Geiger would make the right choice," guard Caitly Matter said. "It was sort of a situation of us being in limbo. There wasn't a lot of structure. We've been lifting as a team. I think we're all glad the decision's been made."

"He seems to care about you as a person, not just a player," center LaToya Turner said. "That's important to us. He wants to win, and that's something I've wanted as a player."

(BSB will have more reaction on Foster's hiring in an upcoming edition.)

Strange How Things Work

Though Geiger allegedly had Foster on the brain from the outset, most reports centered on Tennessee assistant Mickie DeMoss as the front-runner for the job.

DeMoss, in fact, interviewed in Columbus on April 2 and was feeling good about her chances. She had received support from Vols coach Pat Summitt, who felt DeMoss would do a superb job with the Buckeyes.

But when Ohio State tabbed Foster, Summitt said, "I'm disappointed for Mickie. I firmly believe she was the very best choice for Ohio State because of her proven recruiting experience. Their loss is Tennessee's gain."

Also in the mix was Virginia Tech coach Bonnie Henrickson, but she had to cancel two scheduled interviews in Columbus after one of her players contracted meningitis.

Informal conversations also were held with Iowa State's Bill Fennelly, Colorado State's Tom Collen, George Washington's Joe McKeown and Minnesota's Brenda Oldfield, who went on to take the job at Maryland.

Foster had no inkling when the process started that he would be standing before an assembled media throng at the Schottenstein Center.

"Two weeks ago I was sitting in Ames, Iowa, preparing for a regional final," Foster said. "I was very happy and satisfied with my lot in life. I have two children attending the university I was coaching at, one a sophomore and one a junior. If you had told me two weeks from that day that I'd be standing where I am today I wouldn't have believed you."

There is one drawback to taking over at Ohio State, though.

"I'm now paying full room and board at Vanderbilt — twice," Foster said. "I just told my sons that they're on an accelerated program as of now."

Pull Was Strong

Once Foster was in town, OSU did what it could to snag him.

The Foster File

Name: Jim Foster

Age: 53

College: Temple, 1980.

Coaching Career: St. Joseph's, head coach, 1978-91; Vanderbilt, head coach, 1991-2002.

Coaching Notes: At Vanderbilt, led Commodores to the 1993 Final Four and to three Southeastern Conference tournament championships (1993, '95, '02). Ten of his 11 Vandy squads finished in the Top 25. Made a total of 16 appearances in the NCAA tournament (six with St. Joseph's, 10 with Vanderbilt). At both stops, every player that Foster recruited who completed her career at the schools graduated. Won 500th career game this past season at Vanderbilt. Head coach for 1997 World University Games, and 1991 and 1993 Junior National games teams. Assistant coach on 1992 Olympic team that won the bronze medal in Barcelona, Spain.



Jim Foster

JIM FOSTER'S COACHING RECORD

Year	School	Record	Tournament Result
1978-79	St. Joseph's	16-9	AIWA qualifier
1979-80	St. Joseph's	11-15	
1980-81	St. Joseph's	14-11	
1981-82	St. Joseph's	16-12	
1982-83	St. Joseph's	15-13	
1983-84	St. Joseph's	17-10	
1984-85	St. Joseph's	25-5	NCAA Qualifier
1985-86	St. Joseph's	22-7	NCAA Qualifier
1986-87	St. Joseph's	23-9	NCAA Qualifier
1987-88	St. Joseph's	24-8	NCAA Qualifier
1988-89	St. Joseph's	23-8	NCAA Qualifier
1989-90	St. Joseph's	24-7	NCAA Qualifier
1990-91	St. Joseph's	18-12	

St. Joseph's (13 Years) 248-126 .663

1991-92	Vanderbilt	22-9	Elite Eight
1992-93	Vanderbilt	30-3	Final Four
1993-94	Vanderbilt	25-8	Sweet 16
1994-95	Vanderbilt	28-7	Sweet 16
1995-96	Vanderbilt	23-8	Elite Eight
1996-97	Vanderbilt	20-11	Sweet 16
1997-98	Vanderbilt	20-9	NCAA Qualifier
1998-99	Vanderbilt	13-14	
1999-00	Vanderbilt	21-13	NCAA Qualifier
2000-01	Vanderbilt	24-10	Elite Eight
2001-02	Vanderbilt	30-7	Elite Eight

Vanderbilt (11 Years) 256-99 .721

Overall Record (24 Years) 504-225 .691

He toured the facilities, strolled the campus and met the administration, and he came away pretty happy. Foster also sought counsel from a close friend who just happened to be in the area.

"I was invited to come and visit the campus and I was impressed with what I saw," Foster said. "I have a lot of good and close friends in basketball, and Jim O'Brien is a good friend of mine. I've known him for a long time and I had lunch with him and had a real comfort zone when it came to asking questions."

"That started to make the decision a little easier. Leaving your players is always the hardest part of things, but everything I saw made me want to be here."

According to Foster, leaving Vanderbilt wasn't easy and the Commodores have a great chance to win next year's national title. They return national player of the year candidate Chantelle Anderson and gritty point guard Ashley McIlhenny, so for Foster to shun the security of a top program to come to Columbus says quite a bit about OSU's potential.

"It's a major university in a major conference that sits in a state with great players," Foster said. "It's about different challenges and opportunities in life and I was ready for another opportunity and another challenge."

Though Vanderbilt didn't recruit a ton in Tennessee, it often went head to head with

the Volunteers for top players. As the pre-eminent college in the state, OSU has some built-in advantages in Foster's eyes.

"I think it's an ideal situation to be at a state university in a state that is full of players," he said. "People go to bed at night and dream of being Buckeyes. I haven't been at a place like that. We've been pretty successful recruiting at Vanderbilt. I'm sure there are some very good players in the state right now that want to be Buckeyes and we want to get them — at least get the ones that will help us win."

Foster's first order of business is getting to know his team and what he has athletically for next season.

But he also has one last bit of business to tend to in New York in May, something he hopes to one day be the center of.

"On May 1 I'm going to New York City for the second year in a row," Foster said. "The New York Athletic Club gives what it calls the Winged Foot Award. The person who wins the national championship is presented this award. The coach who wins is given the opportunity to invite people from their past to speak about their experiences with that individual. Last year, I had that honor and was chosen by Muffet to speak about her start. This year, I'll be talking about Geno."

"My goal here at Ohio State is to invite Muffet and Geno to that event in the future."

OHIO STATE INSIDER



Continued From Page 5

offense, while Kanu will assist on the defense.

"These are two fine young men who someday will be excellent coaches," Tressel said. "This should be a tremendous learning experience for them. We are certainly pleased to have them working with our staff."

Staten played college football at Miami (Ohio), where he was a four-year starter at defensive tackle between 1988-92. He earned All-MAC recognition his senior year. He spent two years in the NFL (Cincinnati and New England) and a year in the World Football League before beginning his coaching career.

Staten worked as a high school coach in California in 1999 before returning to Miami in 2000. He worked that year as a student coach and last season as a graduate assistant. He graduated cum laude from Miami in May 2001.

Kanu (pronounced canoe) is a 2001 graduate of Michigan State. He was a four-year letterman at safety for MSU, where he played for OSU defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio. He was a team captain and MVP in 1998. He played professionally with the NFL's Detroit Lions and the Canadian Football League's Hamilton Tigercats. He has been a student assistant at MSU the last two years.

Staten and Kanu replace last year's

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TERRY GILLIAM

FEATURED BUCKEYES — Former OSU basketball stars Clark Kellogg (left) and Jerry Lucas were honored at the Fellowship of Christian Athletes' Ohio Sports Legends dinner April 5 in Columbus.

graduate assistants, Brandon Blaney and Jim Bridge. Blaney got a job as the tight ends coach at Kansas, while Bridge was named the offensive line coach at Eastern Michigan.

Former OSU Athletes In Trouble With Law

A pair of former OSU athletes were in the news due to their alleged criminal activity in recent weeks.

One-time OSU football signee Andrew Lee faces aggravated murder charges in Columbus in connection with the death of a west side store clerk. Meanwhile, former OSU basketball player Trent Jackson was looking at two years in prison following his conviction on a robbery charge.

Lee, 20, was arrested by Columbus police at his parents' home March 29. He was charged with aggravated murder in the March 25 death of Shauna Sandercock, a clerk at Game-Arama, 3101 W. Broad St. in Columbus.

Police believe robbery was the motive. The coroner's report said Sandercock died of a blunt trauma.

The city's Crime Stoppers program, which offers cash rewards for tips that lead to the arrest and indictment of felony suspects, was instrumental in Lee's arrest.

Lee, a Columbus Brookhaven graduate, has had a turbulent life since signing with OSU as part of the 2000 recruiting class. In his first quarter on campus, OSU police investigated claims that Lee assaulted a food delivery driver outside his dormitory.

Lee, a wide receiver, left OSU and attempted to transfer to Cincinnati but never made the squad there. At the time of his arrest, Lee was free on bond for felony arrests for receiving stolen property and forgery cases filed in 2000.

Meanwhile, Jackson, 23, was sentenced to two years in prison for his role in a robbery at a Bowling Green, Ohio, drive-thru.

Jackson, who transferred to Bowling Green after basketball coach Jim O'Brien kicked him off the squad in 1997, apologized for his crime but had no explanation for why he donned an Afro-style wig and a bandana on his face when he held up a BG Drive Thru worker at knife-point.

"Sir, I really don't know," Jackson said. Jackson robbed the carryout July 22, 2001, and was quickly apprehended by police, who spotted him on his bicycle with an overstuffed book bag.

Jackson tried to dump the contents of

the bag, but police found the wig, the knife and a brown paper bag with \$2,149 in cash.

In exchange for a guilty plea, Wood County prosecutors agreed to recommend a minimum sentence and drop charges of receiving stolen property and possession of criminal tools.

"Everything I've worked for has been changed," Jackson told the court. "There are no words to describe how sorry I am."

Jackson was charged with disorderly conduct and resisting arrest following an altercation near the OSU campus in August 1997. He was later acquitted of those charges, but O'Brien cited that arrest and other factors in dismissing Jackson from the program that fall.

Miscellaneous Notes

The BSB Internet site (ohiostate.rivals.com) is part of the Rivals network. That network recently added NFL draft analyst Chris Landry to its list of contributors.

Landry recently provided draft projections for Big Ten players eligible for the league's April 20-21 draft.

Landry only had three Big Ten players listed among his first-round picks: Wisconsin defensive tackle Wendell Bryant, Northwestern outside linebacker Napoleon Harris and Michigan State running back T.J. Duckett.

He listed five OSU players on his draft board, including center LeCharles Bentley and cornerback Derek Ross in the second round. (See pages 6-7 for a profile on Ross)

Then, he had tailback Jonathan Wells as a third-round pick, outside linebacker Courtland Bullard as a fifth-round pick and defensive tackle Mike Collins as a seventh-round selection.

That would leave such notables as quarterback Steve Bellisari, fullback Jamar Martin, linebacker Joe Cooper and tight end Darnell Sanders, who left school a year early, as potential free agents.

College Football News.com has updated its preseason top 50 rankings, bumping Ohio State up to No. 10 as of April 4.

"There's not one specific area the Buckeyes appear to be better than anyone else in the Big Ten, but the overall package looks fantastic," CFN.com wrote.

Texas got the nod for No. 1, followed by Miami (Fla.), Oklahoma, Florida State, Tennessee, Florida, Washington, Colorado and Georgia.

Others of note in the top 50 are Illinois

OSU Athletes Get Academic Recognition

The Big Ten Conference named 31 Ohio State student-athletes to its winter academic all-conference teams. The top Ohio State team was women's gymnastics, which had nine recipients. Women's swimming had seven and wrestling had five.

The complete list follows.

Men's Basketball

Sean Connolly, Jr., family resource management (3.00).

Women's Basketball

Emily Haynam, So., communications (3.33); Lauren Shenk, Sr., molecular genetics (3.88).

Men's Gymnastics

Raj Bhavsar, Jr., biology (3.34); Ben Falkner, Sr., journalism (3.72); Dick Huntwork, Jr., sport & leisure studies (3.14); Ryan Schwartzkopf, Jr., art (3.45).

Women's Gymnastics

Amanda Allen, Sr., social work (3.54); Stephanie Buerkel, Sr., pharmaceutical science (3.23); Mary Beth Doerr, Sr., occupational therapy (3.65); Sheri Greig, Jr., exercise science (3.28); Bethany Groskopf, So., nursing (3.41); Julie Levi, So., communications (3.52); Sarah Spring, Jr., psychology (3.91); Jill Tucker, Sr., pharmaceutical science (3.26); Rickie Wirtzberger, Jr., business finance (3.05).

Men's Swimming

Nick Cheney, Sr., biology (3.01); Sean Veit, So., engineering (3.33); Daniel Vitina, Jr., information systems (3.47).

Women's Swimming

Kimberly Bojko, So., human development (3.41); Nicole Hamilton, Jr., psychology (3.68); Stacy Lowry, Jr., human development (3.69); Amanda Messmer, Sr., occupational therapy (3.33); Kristin Sander, Sr., human development (3.27); Katie Severson, So., chemical engineering (3.78); Amanda Treleven, So., communications.

Wrestling

Richie Borden, Sr., humanities/English (3.74); Ryan Hieber, So., business/finance (3.13); Blake Kaplan, Jr., business/finance (3.13); Casey Kapustka, Sr., mechanical engineering (3.22); Jeff Ratliff, So., political science (3.32).

(17th), Purdue (20th), Michigan (21st), Michigan State (31st), Wisconsin (33rd), Washington State (34th), Penn State (38th) and Iowa (40th).

Former OSU basketball stars Clark Kellogg and Jerry Lucas were recognized at the Fellowship of Christian Athletes' Ohio Sports Legends dinner April 5 in Columbus.

Kellogg received the Ohio Legend Award, while Lucas was the keynote speaker.

Golfing legend and former Buckeye Jack Nicklaus chose to miss The Masters for just the second time since 1959 due to lingering back problems.

The six-time Masters champion hopes he will be able to compete in his own tournament, The Memorial, in late May.

Courtney Coleman was the final recipient of the *Plank's Lady Buck of the Month* after scoring 20 points and grabbing nine rebounds in OSU's 70-55 loss to Penn State in the Big Ten Tournament March 1. Coleman, a junior, hit 8-of-13 shots from the floor.

Sophomore forward Daymen Bencharski was named the *Varsity Club Ice of Month* for March. Bencharski, a native of Beaverlodge, Alberta, had a team-high three goals in OSU's five games during the month. That included the game winner in overtime of the team's March 8 CCHA playoff win at Western Michigan.

OPINION

No Doubt About It: Geiger Hired Right Person

It's not every day that you meet a basketball coach — women's or men's — who served two tours in Vietnam, began coaching at age 13 and whose father was a whiskey salesman.

But that's what Jim Foster has experienced. So it's no wonder that his experience has often made life experience for the players he's coached much more enjoyable and meaningful.

Foster loves the game of basketball and, as the only male president of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association, knows a little something about it, too.

"It's a great game, it's an intellectual game," Foster said. "It's a game where you go from offense to defense very quickly and don't stop to talk about it like they do in football. You have to know where you are."

And where Foster is is almost as surprising as how he got there.

The supposed leader for the job almost from the beginning was Tennessee associate head coach Mickie DeMoss. But Andy Geiger had a plan, something bold, something different, something that was going to shake the very foundation of Ohio State and the Big Ten.

The Buckeyes have never had a male women's basketball coach, and Foster becomes the only current male leader in the Big Ten.

"It's not a big thing to me because I believe women can coach a men's team," said Foster, who led 10 of his 11 Vanderbilt teams to 20 wins or more. "I think we will see the day when that happens."

Foster has earned respect through victories, both at Vandy and St. Joseph's, but now he's on a different stage — one that has eaten up and spit out many without so much as a second thought.

Whether Ohio State fans will cut Foster some slack and allow him to coach the program without being a distraction remains to be seen. There are many who believe a woman should have been hired and they look at Geiger with disdain.

They can stay home.

Foster, who counts the Palestra as his

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

favorite basketball building in the world and UConn coach Geno Auriemma as a close friend (and former assistant), is a breath of fresh air for a program that seemed to be getting stale.

No Big Ten titles, few postseason appearances and general discontent added up to a malaise under Beth Burns, and it was time for a makeover.

Foster may not do it overnight, but based on his track record there's little doubt that he'll get it done. The national coach of the year in 1985 and 1993 — the year in which Vanderbilt made its lone trip to the Final Four, in a year when Ohio State finished as runner-up — Foster has seen it all and done even more.

"The reason I did that is that it was my scholarship," Foster said of his time in the armed forces. "In order to go to college I needed someone to pay for it. The government at that time had something good, the GI bill, and if I was going to go to college I had to figure out how to get there. The army bankrolled me."

"At the end of the three years I spent doing what I did, it was an education that was superior to the one my friends were getting. I learned a lot of things about life that I could apply in college."

And he's eager to pass those lessons on to the Buckeyes.

Ivan To Be Part Of The Action

It's not a stretch to say the happiest guy in football camp this spring is offensive tackle Ivan Douglas.

His career was given up for dead last year after it was discovered he had a rare form of clotting in his lungs. Douglas was never truly concerned as he's ever the optimist, but there were a few tense moments as doctors battled to get the problem under control.

"They said it could have been a lot worse if I wasn't an athlete," he said. "Because I was strong it helped me. They said people have died from this kind of thing. They never told me a reason why it happened, but if everything works out it won't happen again. I didn't know it was that serious, really. I thought it was something they'd take care of and I'd be back out there in a couple of days."

It was a textbook example of "you don't know what you've got until it's gone" for Douglas, who had a spring in his step this spring and looked intent on holding down one of the tackle positions.

"I didn't have the opportunity to be out there with the rest of the guys last spring so I'm probably a little more anxious to hit the field," Douglas said. "When you have something taken away from you that you love and that you're used to doing, you get hungry for it really fast."

Douglas was hospitalized for 10 days and then began on the long road to recovery thanks to a much needed assist.

"My teammates were great through the whole thing," Douglas said. "They brought me everything — stuff I needed and stuff I didn't need. They came to my room and brought me so much food and candy and DVDs. I like burritos, too, and they brought

me those. Everyone on the team helped me through it."

Now Douglas hopes to reciprocate.

Leftovers

A funny thing happened to Jim O'Brien on the way to securing another "mediocre" recruiting class — top-notch players started beating down OSU's door.

Former Ohio prep stars Tony Stockman, who went to Clemson, and J.J. Sullinger, who chose Arkansas, both admitted that they wanted to be Buckeyes after the recently completed hoops season. Even the presence of new head coach Stan Heath, who recruited Sullinger while an assistant at Michigan State, apparently wasn't enough to keep Sullinger a happy Hog.

Maybe those who have said O'Brien can't land the big fish — never mind that incoming freshman Ricardo Billings is pretty much a consensus top-75 player — will finally, finally pipe down.

This year's national championship basketball game was difficult to watch, for two reasons — one, the play was very sloppy. Part of that was likely a byproduct of nickel-and-dime fouls being called by the officials, who had a horrible tournament. It also doesn't help that the TV timeouts are lengthened for the tournament, making the breaks seem interminable.

The second reason was the combatants — Indiana is a member of the Big Ten but is OSU's basketball Michigan as far as venom and disdain go, and Maryland has Gary Williams. It was kind of a no-win situation.

In the end the best hope was for a good game, but those moments were few and far between. If not for Maryland's Juan Dixon,

the game would have been totally abominable.

While college sports as a whole can be very entertaining, there are a few things that really need to be examined closely.

For one, how can a sport — in this case track and synchronized swimming — have a national champion who isn't an All-American? Both sports choose to not recognize the foreign influence, so they truly have an all American team. And they wonder why there's so little respect there. Buckeyes Carolina and Isabela Moraes, from Brazil, won their fourth straight national duet title yet weren't on the list of All-Americans. And almost every year in track there's a foreign runner who wins but doesn't get mentioned.

But it gets even better.

To make itself more television friendly, volleyball has gone to rally scoring. In other words, instead of having your traditional side out, every serve results in a point.

The best, however, is from the world of softball.

It's not enough that there's a mercy rule — where games are called when a team gets up by 10 or more runs — but now there's something called the "international tiebreaker." Why it's international I don't know, but I do know this — it's stupid.

The coaches have to agree, but once they do, the process is simple and allegedly painless. A runner goes from the dugout to second base and action resumes from there. This is repeated in the home half of the inning as well and continues until someone wins.

It's no wonder that these sports thirst for attention — they have rules that border on the ridiculous.

From The Pages Of BSB

TEN YEARS AGO — 1992

After a school record-tying 53 wins over their last two years at Ohio State, five senior basketball players bowed out with a 75-71 loss to Michigan in the finals of the NCAA Southeast Regional.

Further, junior Jimmy Jackson was debating whether to make himself eligible for the NBA draft.

With Chris Jent, Jamaal Brown, Mark Baker, role players Bill Robinson and Steve Hall, and possibly Jackson all gone, where did that leave head coach Randy Ayers?

"We're trying to get to the Final Four," he said. "That's our goal and that's our challenge in the years coming up. We pretty much start over next year. We lose a great class, guys that just gave a good, solid effort."

"Plus your seniors know how to react. They know about wearing coats and ties on the road, turning the headphones down on the bus, being on time and handling responsibility. That's what you miss."

In the Buckeyes' final game, Fab Fivers Chris Webber (23), Juwan Howard (10), Jalen Rose (20) and Jimmy King (15) all reached double figures in scoring for the Wolverines.

FIVE YEARS AGO — 1997

After being spurned by Clemson's Rick Barnes and Georgia's Tubby Smith, OSU athletic director Andy Geiger finally found his man to take over the men's basketball program and that man was Boston College coach Jim O'Brien.

The 47-year-old O'Brien was publicly introduced to Ohio State April 3 as the school's 12th men's coach. He took over for Ayers, who was fired March 10.

O'Brien had been facing a tough road at BC when the school put roadblocks in front of him, denying admissions to two highly rated recruits. To his credit, he took the high road,

refusing to lambaste his former employer.

"I think the move will be healthy for Boston College and I think it's the best thing for me," O'Brien said. "In any long-term relationship, it's hard to pinpoint one or two things. You just get a sense that it's time for a change."

The following day Geiger introduced Beth Burns as the new women's basketball coach. Formerly the coach at San Diego State, the 39-year-old Burns was tapped to take over for the fired Nancy Darsch.

"One of the exciting things about this is how good the Big Ten conference is," Burns said. "If you can win the Big Ten, you can right there say you have the potential to be national champions. That's how good this league is."

ONE YEAR AGO — 2001

With spring practice under way, much of the attention was on quarterbacks Steve Bellisari, Craig Krenzler, Scott McMullen and Rick McFadden as they tried to get a leg up for the fall.

The position was a point of concern for new coach Jim Tressel and the Buckeyes, as incumbent Bellisari was coming off two seasons in which he posted a 47.6 completion percentage and 23 interceptions.

But Tressel and Co. were confident that Bellisari, a senior-to-be, would get things straightened out.

"The first question I asked Steve was, 'Can you take us to the national championship?'"

"He looked me right in the eye and said, 'I can.' He didn't say it like, 'Yeah, I think so.' He said it with conviction. He's a competitive guy."

The OSU men's gymnastics team delivered a national championship to the university.

Coach Miles Avery's Buckeyes, competing at St. John Arena, edged Oklahoma for the NCAA title, 218.125-217.775, April 6.



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THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Foster Brings With Him A Satchel Of Credentials

Ohio State has been through several high-profile coaching searches in the past few years, what with the football and men's basketball jobs both coming open in the past five years and the women's basketball job being vacant twice.

After seeing numerous "name" coaches flirt with Ohio State in other searches before the Buckeyes were forced to "settle" for a Jim O'Brien or a Jim Tressel, the Buckeyes seem to have finally landed a big-time coach for one of their high-profile jobs with the hiring of Jim Foster from Vanderbilt.

The search for the OSU women's coach this time around was actually quite different than it was five years ago following the firing of Nancy Darach. While AD Andy Geiger and staff searched far and wide to replace Randy Ayers and John Cooper, the search for a new women's basketball coach in 1997 seemed to center solely on Amy Tucker, a former Buckeye star and assistant coach at perennial power Stanford.

Obviously stung by the Ohio State women's lack of success since the magical run to the Final Four in 1993 and no doubt noting declining attendance, the Buckeye brass went wide in scope this time, ruling virtually no one out in the search. I must admit that I thought the chance of a coach like Foster leaving a premier program to come to Columbus seemed unlikely.

Yet here he is, and his credentials are very impressive.

His Vandy teams made it to the NCAA Tournament in 10 of his 11 years, advancing to the Sweet 16 three times, the Elite Eight another four times and the Final Four in 1993. In an SEC dominated by Tennessee, the Commodores also won three league tournament championships.

While those marks will stack up with those of almost anyone in the country, an Ohio State administration that no doubt bristles at a lackluster academic reputation had to take note of one other entry on Foster's resume. Entering the 2001-02 season, every athlete Foster had recruited in 23 years at Vanderbilt and St. Joseph's had earned a degree — a really amazing feat.

Foster's players have brought home plenty of academic hardware in the past few years. His players earned four NCAA Postgraduate Scholarships in the last seven years. In 1992, Vanderbilt set a conference record with nine players on the SEC honor roll, and the following season the entire starting lineup from the 1993 Final Four team earned the same recognition.

That combination of a Final Four (ironically, that was the same year the Buckeyes made it to the big show) and strong academics had to be extremely attractive to Geiger and his people.

About the only thing daring about the selection of such an accomplished coach is the fact that Foster is a man. Ohio State's highest-profile women's position has always been held by a female, starting with Phyllis Bailey, who went on to a noted career as an OSU athletic administrator, and running through Mary Combs, Debbie Wilson, Tara VanDerveer, Darach and Beth Burns.

But I would hope that all Buckeye fans would want the best person for the

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

job, regardless of race, gender or the like. And, again, it's hard to find fault with Foster's credentials. Perhaps he will be put under a more powerful microscope by some fans than a female coach might have been, but if the Buckeyes win and graduate, everyone should be happy.

On Williams And Cole

I have to give Maryland coach Gary Williams his due. I have dished out my share of criticism toward the former Ohio State mentor in this space through the years. Most of it stems from the fact he left Ohio State in mid-project back in 1989.

I got a little tired of hearing how Williams would have done better than Ayers if he had stayed at Ohio State and how Ayers won his two Big Ten titles only because he had Williams' players.

Well, Williams didn't stay, so we'll never know how he would have done or if he would have done as well as Ayers. It's easy to win games and championships if all you have to do is assume you are going to win them. Unfortunately, you have to win them on the court.

Because he left, rather than seeing Williams lead the Buckeyes to victories on the court, I was left to remember his team's total collapse following the neck injury to Jay Burson in 1989 and his inability to defeat archrival Indiana, something even the much-maligned Eldon Miller was able to do by his third season in Columbus.

There also were some problems between Williams and BSB that I did not feel were warranted. When it comes to people's actions toward our paper and my staff, I can have a very long memory.

Williams continued to have problems winning the "big game" for many years at Maryland.

But Williams' first win over Indiana, in this year's national championship game, gave him college basketball's biggest prize. The win comes on the heels of a Final Four appearance last season. So I think you have to recognize Williams for his accomplishments.

I don't have to like him, but I give him his due.

A sidelight to Maryland's championship this season was the farewell to the longtime home of the Terrapins, Cole Field House. This closing received much national attention, with the national media noting the historical significance of the building.

With all due respect to Cole Field House, I believe that St. John Arena was every bit as significant as Cole Field House. You often hear about media capitals, and the fact that Cole is in suburban Washington, D.C., one of the world's media centers, and St. John Arena is in sleepy Columbus may have something to do with the respective media coverage.

Much of the hubbub about Cole Field House centers around two events. In 1966, the national championship basketball game was played there and Texas Western (now UTEP), featuring five black starters, defeated Kentucky for the national crown. The game is said to be a

milestone in college basketball as it opened the gates for black players at schools — including Kentucky — that had traditionally suited up all — or predominantly — white teams.

This would not have been a big deal in St. John Arena, where Ohio State had won a national championship in 1960 with two black starters — Mel Nowell and Joe Roberts.

The other big game at Cole was actually a high school game. DeMatha, from suburban Washington, defeated New York Power Memorial, led by the then Lew Alcindor, handing the future Kareem Abdul-Jabbar his only prep loss, a historic game in prep basketball history.

But St. John Arena has a game to match that one.

In 1958, Columbus North defeated Jerry Lucas and Middletown in the state semifinals at St. John Arena to snap a 76-game winning streak. Middletown, the two-time defending state champion, featured three other college-bound players besides Lucas — Tom Sizer (Cincinnati), Ben Roberts (Kentucky) and Larry Emrick (Purdue).

Middletown did not go down without a fight. After the teams were tied at 30 at the half, Middletown started to pull away, as expected. But North settled down and trailed by just five after three.

Then the unexpected happened. North pulled out to a seven-point lead with less than three minutes left in the game. Middletown was not finished, however. The Middies chipped away and took a one-point lead on a pair of free throws by Sizer with under 10 seconds to play. North's Eddie Clark quickly came back with a shot over the 6-8 Lucas with five seconds left to give North the 63-62 victory, though Middletown got off a good shot at the buzzer that went off the rim.

"There is no question in my mind that was the greatest upset and the greatest game in high school basketball history in the state of Ohio," said Larry Larson of Columbus' WTVN radio, who has the well-earned moniker of Mr. High School Sports. "I would put it up against any high school game anywhere."

Lucas was every bit the high school and college player that Alcindor/Jabbar was. Yet one played in New York City, the other in Middletown, Ohio. Who do you think got more hype? And so Cole gets the credit.

Larson points out that there were several other great high school games at St. John Arena, including the championship game following North's upset, an almost anticlimactic game after the upset of Middletown.

Cleveland East Tech hit a 40-foot shot at the buzzer to send the game into overtime and North coach Frank Truitt, who would go on to be an assistant to Fred Taylor at Ohio State, elected to play for one shot in overtime, which North missed. Then, as were the rules of the day, the game went to sudden death, with East Tech winning the state crown.

Larson also pointed out the championship game in 1979 in which Clark

Kellogg scored 51 points for Cleveland St. Joseph's in a loss to Granville Waiters and Columbus East and Jimmy Jackson's magical championship performance against St. Joseph's in 1989.

Larson also called the 1992 girls championship game at St. John Arena between Pickerington and Katie Smith's Logan team a "breakthrough" game. The game drew a record girls crowd of 12,385.

"Katie Smith was legendary," Larson said, "and Logan's following was huge. So was Pickerington's."

Pickerington won the game, 53-46. "I really think that game elevated the game of girls basketball in the eyes of the fan," Larson said. "It gave girls basketball the respect it deserved."

And all this is just some of the great prep basketball played in St. John Arena.

The building also was the site of the greatest college game I ever witnessed, Ohio State's 97-95 double-overtime victory over Indiana in 1991. Cole couldn't have hosted too many games like that.

And St. John Arena was the home of one of basketball's greatest dynasties, the Lucas, John Havlicek-led Buckeyes who made it to the nation's championship game three years in a row from 1960-62. There was another Final Four team to call St. John home base in 1968. Cole Field House was not home to a Final Four team until these past two seasons.

There were all sorts of interesting games, but for extra intrigue, how about the time Indiana's George McGinnis went into the stands after OSU football star Stan White in 1971. And for good measure, Alcindor himself played in St. John Arena in 1968, leading UCLA to an 84-73 victory.

And what about the women?

Cheryl Miller and Cynthia Cooper led powerful USC into St. John in 1986 and Ohio State, behind Tracy Hall, almost pulled off the upset, falling 83-81 before 10,184. There were all those great games between the Lady Buckeyes and Iowa, often played before capacity crowds, that helped put women's basketball on the map.

In 1993, Ohio State downed fifth-ranked Virginia, 91-84, before a national television audience, behind 35 points from a freshman Smith. The win, in front of 9,177 in St. John, helped start the Buckeyes on their way to the national championship game.

I'm hard-pressed to believe that there was that much more action and excitement in Cole Field House than there was in St. John Arena. But because all those thrills took place in our little cow town, they'll just have to remain our little secret.

Spring Football Updates

With spring football practice sessions being open this year, the BSB staff will be able to follow all the action up close and personal. While this and the next two issues of BSB will feature in-depth coverage of spring football action, the best way to get daily reports is on our web site (ohiostate.rivals.com).

You can follow the battles at quarterback and tailback as they unfold. And don't forget your chance to chat with BSB editor Steve Helweg each Friday at 1 p.m. or the frequent recruiting updates from noted expert Bill Kurelic.