

1968 PROFILE: MIKE SENSIBAUGH

# Versatile Sensibaugh Played Key Role In '68

By MIKE WACHSMAN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The talk has been there before. This year's version of the Ohio State secondary, led by corners Antoine Winfield and Ahmed Plummer, has been hyped as the nation's best.

While there were no formal rankings from magazines, the 1968 group no doubt would have stacked up favorably to any.

Jack Tatum was the high-profile name, Tim Anderson played with the reckless abandon now shown by Damon Moore only at the corner position, and Ted Provost was the other corner, sturdy against the run.

Mike Sensibaugh was "the other safety," kind of in Tatum's shadow, but not really, blessed with the uncanny ability to be around the ball. He had five interceptions that sophomore year before going on to hold the Ohio State career record of 22.

Teams may not have passed as much, but that doesn't mean Sensibaugh and the Buckeyes weren't tested.

"The passing game is much more dominant now," Sensibaugh said, noting that he and the Buckeyes were challenged right out of the box that year by SMU's Chuck Hixson, who threw a then

NCAA record 69 passes. "I know in our day it didn't matter how good the passers were if they were flat on their back. We had such good guys up front."

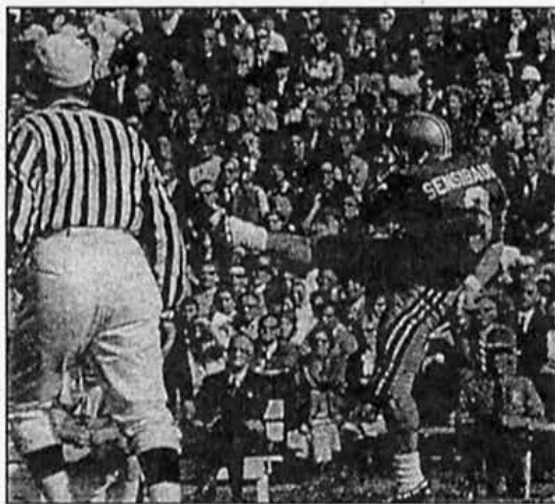
Sensibaugh deflected much of his praise to the team, something he did as a player.

"It was hard to go wrong with the guys we had," he said. "Tate was obviously outstanding, and Timmy and Ted weren't bad, either. It was a different game, sure, but we had a lot of things we were responsible for."

As the Buckeyes were chugging along on their magical date with destiny, Sensibaugh remembers one distinct thing — not being able to truly enjoy it.

"We weren't really aware of what we did, even after the season," Sensibaugh said. "We just kept going and kept winning. They didn't let us enjoy things or get a big head, really. All of a sudden it was over. It wasn't the next year even, but a couple of years before the national championship sort of set in."

Sensibaugh spent seven years in the NFL, playing for Kansas City from 1971-75 before moving to the St. Louis Cardinals in 1976. He finished his career after the 1978 season with 27 career picks, two of which he took back for touchdowns.



CHANCE BROCKWAY

**MAKES A LOT OF SENSE** — Former Ohio State safety Mike Sensibaugh was a multipurpose threat for the Buckeyes in 1968, the year of their last national title. In addition to being a ball-hawking defender, Sensibaugh handled OSU's punting chores.

Even after reaching the pinnacle of his sport, Sensibaugh still holds his days at Ohio State in high esteem.

"The pro game is great, but there was something about this place that you couldn't duplicate," Sensibaugh said. "That year, especially, but the whole time I was here it really felt like something special. With the way guys got traded and cut in the NFL, it was hard-

er to build up the friendships. Here you came in with guys and left with them. You could build up friendships. That was the best part."

Now working in the swimming pool business in the St. Louis area, Sensibaugh doesn't get to see Ohio State as much as he would like. But what he has seen reminds him of a certain team he had the honor to be associated with.

"They're kind of like us because they're just going out and taking care of business," Sensibaugh said. "Each week we

went out and played our opponent and did what we had to do to win. Whether it was defense one week or offense another, we had enough to get by everybody. Even when we were behind USC in the Rose Bowl (10-0), we didn't panic or anything. I see this team with a lot of the same qualities.

"It should be interesting to follow the rest of the year."



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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL PROFILE

# OSU's Little Big Man

## Corner Winfield Considered One Of Nation's Best

By RICH LEONARDO  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The best of the best.

To be arguably the best player on the undisputed best team in the country would seem to be an honor reserved for a high-profile performer such as a quarterback or middle linebacker.

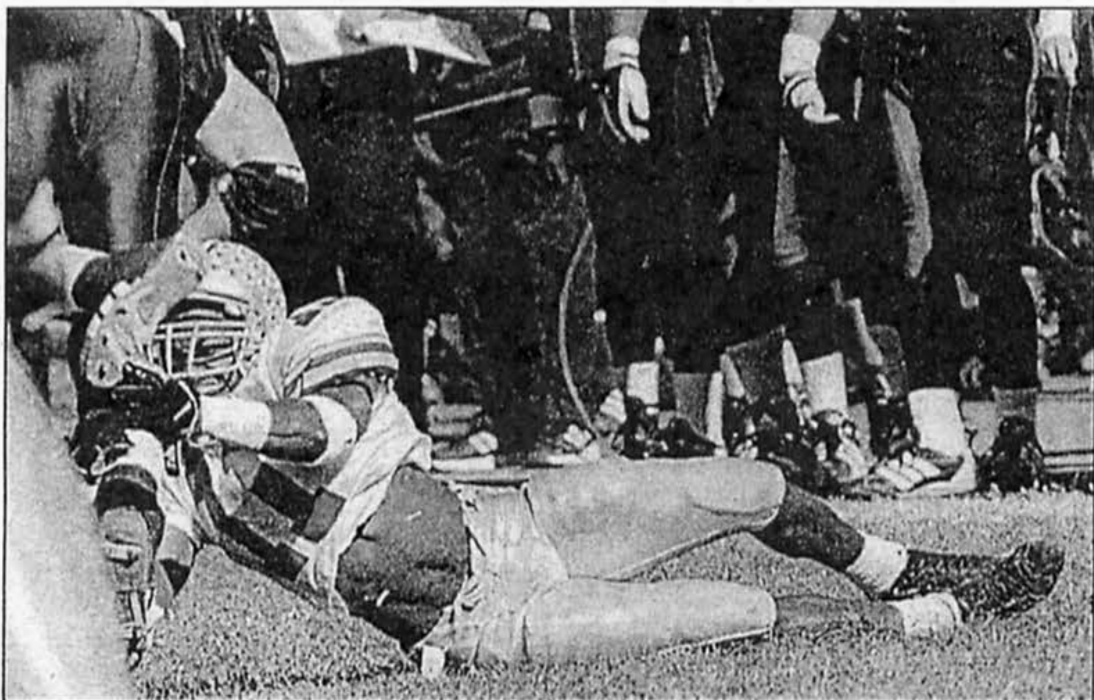
The top-ranked Ohio State Buckeyes, who indeed boast both a great quarterback in Joe Germaine and last season's top collegiate linebacker in Andy Katzenmoyer, also have the good fortune of having 5-9, 180-pound senior cornerback Antoine Winfield on their side.

Last season Winfield turned in a stellar performance as he led the Buckeyes in tackles with 100, including the fifth-highest solo tackle total in school history with 82. He also had eight tackles-for-loss, three sacks, two interceptions and a team-leading 12 passes broken up.

Following last season's heroics, Winfield won first-team All-American honors, consensus All-Big Ten honors, and was voted OSU's most valuable player, which says a lot about the Buckeye cornerback considering the multitude of star players on the team.

"In all my years of coaching, I have never had a cornerback play his position any better than Antoine in 1997," OSU head coach John Cooper said.

"I'm going to really be disappointed if he doesn't win the Thorpe Award, based on the way he's played and what I've



JEFF BROWN

**THE TENACIOUS WINFIELD** — OSU senior cornerback Antoine Winfield seems intent on bringing down a Northwestern ball carrier. It's this kind of tenacious effort that helped Winfield earn All-American and team MVP honors a year ago.

seen of some of the other guys around the country. That's very little, but I don't know of any other defensive back who is playing as well as he is playing.

"You can talk to Don Nehlen, Glen Mason, coach after coach after coach marvels about how this guy plays."

Through seven games this season, Winfield, a Buckeye co-captain, is third

on the team in tackles with 41, including four for loss, one sack and a team-high 10 passes broken up.

"I feel I've played pretty well this season despite having given up a few more receptions lately than I'd like," Winfield said. "Quarterbacks seem to be feeling a bit more comfortable throwing in my direction, which is fine because

I'm always up for whatever challenge comes my way."

According to Winfield, the fact that opposing teams are testing the waters on his side of the field says more about his teammates than it does about him.

"Ahmed (Plummer) has really stepped up his game in addition to Gary (Berry) and Damon (Moore) also doing out-



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**OHIO STATE FOOTBALL PROFILE**

standing jobs, so teams have to throw somewhere," Winfield said. "With our defense I guess it's just a matter of picking your poison. Really, in our defensive scheme, our goal is of course to try and stop every pass from being completed. But if they're going to complete a pass, we want their passes to be short and in front of us. If we can prevent big plays from being made against us, then obviously we're doing our jobs."

Winfield has done his job so well that when opposing teams do complete passes in his area, it has prompted some rabid OSU fans to ponder what's wrong with the Buckeye All-American.

"The receivers I face every week are talented and on scholarship just like I am, so why wouldn't they be expected to perform at just as high a level as I'm supposed to?" Winfield said. "You just can't please everybody all of the time, and if someone wants to downgrade me for giving up a few completions, then so be it."

"I'm just going out every week and giving it all I've got."

Since Fred Pagac took over the reins as defensive coordinator, the Buckeyes have played an ultra-aggressive, attacking style of defense that, while successful, oftentimes leaves the cornerbacks alone, one on one against some of the fastest, most talented receivers in the country.

"Guys are going to get beat, I mean that's just the nature of the position," OSU defensive backs coach Jon Tenuta said. "Sometimes the media like to portray Antoine as a player who will never get beat, but that's not realistic. What matters is not his getting beat, but rather the fact that he gets back up with the confidence to go after it again the very next play."

"If we can stop the completion, then that's great, but we stress no yardage after the catch and no big plays. If Antoine gives up a big touchdown or a long completion, I can guarantee you that it will be awhile before that happens again because that's the kind of player he is," he added.

Winfield has been an exceptional player since he first arrived at Ohio State back in 1995. As a true freshman, Winfield played in all 13 games, including one start against Purdue where he totaled 11 tackles. He finished his first season eighth on the team in tackles with 56. In 1996 he played behind All-American Shawn Springs but still managed to play in all 12 games, totaling 47 tackles and one interception.

As impressive as Winfield's 1997

**"I'm going to really be disappointed if he doesn't win the Thorpe Award, based on the way he's played and what I've seen of some of the other guys around the country."**

**• John Cooper,  
OSU head football coach**



stats are, it's equally impressive to note that during the season he shut down some of the Big Ten's top receivers and played a major role in holding Michigan's wide receivers to no catches.

"Antoine is simply a great kid as he's very coachable, he understands the game, he does all the little things necessary to be the best, and he has a great work ethic, which is obvious by the amount of time he spends studying film," Tenuta said. "Even with all those good attributes, the really great thing about him is that when the lights come up and he goes out on the field, his performances speak for themselves. Antoine Winfield is just an outstanding football player."

Winfield's outstanding performances on the field may have just gained national attention last season, but according to him, he's just the same unassuming player he was when he arrived from Akron's Garfield High School four years ago.

"I'm still the same cornerback I was back when Ty (Howard) and Shawn were here, and I could have been making the same type of plays then that I do now, only now I have the opportunity to do so," Winfield said. "I've always worked hard, and I've always been willing to do whatever is necessary to help the team win. The only difference between then and now is that now is my time to shine."

Winfield's star was already shining back when he was named the Ohio Division I defensive player of the year as a senior at Garfield. Winfield also played tailback for Garfield and averaged 7.1 yards per carry.

"Antoine's always been a competitor," Tenuta said. "If any opposing offenses look at him and see just an undersized player, then I guarantee you by the end of that game Antoine will have left deep impressions on both the chests of the receivers and the minds of the offensive

coordinators."

Despite Winfield's somewhat diminutive stature, it's doubtful that many opposing teams will be willing to test him very often as he, along with the rest of the Buckeye defense, make up the nation's No. 1-ranked defense against the pass. Through seven games, the Buckeyes have given up just four touchdown passes while intercepting 11 balls and allowing opponents a completion rate of just 47.8 percent.

"Our defense may be the difference in what sets us apart from all the other teams in the country," Winfield said. "Although we're really a well-balanced squad we, the defense, are capable of picking up the offense if they're not hitting on all cylinders, likewise the offense is more than capable of outscoring opponents if we're not doing the job stopping everybody."

"We just need to stay focused for the remainder of this season, regardless of our opponents' records. We need to just motivate ourselves to strive to play the

perfect game, which we haven't come close to doing as of yet," he added.

If Winfield has any control over it, the perfect game he and his teammates seek will come about during the last game of the season, where in the past the Buckeyes have found everything but perfection.

"We've been 7-0 before and we've had really good teams here before, but come the end of the season it seems like we've lost that winning attitude," Winfield said.

"This year we've had a different, more confident attitude all year long as we're not just wanting to play well in our last game, but rather going into that game with the same mind-set as we've had all this year, and that is to win the game."

"Honestly, this season will be totally unsuccessful if we don't end up in the Fiesta Bowl. When you go into our locker room, you see a big picture of Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe. When we look at that picture, it reminds us that our only goal this year is to be in that stadium on Jan. 4," he added.

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