

California Weather In Gordon's Future

By Craig James

Ohio State rover Sonny Gordon has never been to California. Ask him what he anticipates when the Buckeyes travel to Pasadena late next month for a New Year's date with Southern Cal in the Rose Bowl and he'll reply, "Hot weather."

But he smiles when he says that. Everybody on the team was smiling a lot after the Buckeyes' 21-6 win over Michigan last Saturday. The victory wrapped up the Big Ten crown for OSU, with the Rose Bowl berth as a reward.

"It's more than a lifelong dream," he said. "I thought it was over two games ago and we'd never

see the Rose. But it's come true now, and right now the Rose is everything. We're there."

What Gordon knows about the "Granddaddy of them all" has been learned from stories he's heard.

"I talked to (former Buckeye) Todd Bell, who's also from Middletown (Gordon's home)," he said. "He told me he had been to a lot of bowls and, to him, the Rose Bowl was the best thing he had ever been to. It's the best bowl there is. He said there's nothing to compare with the Rose."

Gordon played a critical part in the crucial battle with Michigan that decided OSU's fate.



Rover Sonny Gordon (7) helps put a lick on Michigan running back Gerald White. Also in on the hit, from left, are Terry White and Dave Morrill. Gordon helped pace the defense with a key interception in the second quarter.

The Wolverines, trailing the Buckeyes 7-0 at the time, had spent the last five minutes of the first quarter pushing the ball across the field. Early in the second period, Michigan had driven down as far as the Ohio five-yard line before tailback Jamie Morris was hit for a loss of three yards by linebacker Larry Kolic and tackle Dave Morrill.

On the next play, Wolverine quarterback Chris Zurburg faked a handoff, but was flushed out of the pocket over to the right sideline by linebacker Eric Kumerow. Zurburg found tight end Eric Kattus in a corner of the end zone and let the ball go, only to see Gordon step in front of Kattus and intercept it.

"I just really cut in front of the man," said Gordon. "We were in man coverage, so I latched onto the tight end since he was scrambling. (Zurburg) just threw it right at me and so I caught it. He threw it right in my stomach."

"I thought I was out (of bounds) for a minute. I was trying to keep my foot in because I knew we were right next to the sideline."

Gordon then learned from an official that he had indeed picked off the ball in bounds.

"I was excited, because I thought they were going to try to score," he said. "We wanted to try and hold them to a field goal. When I got the interception, it pumped me up and the team."

It pumped the OSU defense up even more since that UM drive was the closest the Wolves would get to the end zone all afternoon. On three other possessions, Michigan had to settle for field goal attempts and made two of them. Gordon revealed that the defense's goal was to try to limit the Wolverines to nine points.

"We accomplished that," he said proudly.

The defense had been meeting its goals a lot lately. This was the third straight game in which the Buckeyes had held opponents to under eight points.

"We just buckled down, I guess," said Gordon. "We started playing like we should. I think it just came from within. We all started playing harder. We just weren't giving it our all (earlier in the season). I started playing harder, personally."

"We started playing more disciplined, I guess, and reading our keys. It's always preventing somebody from making the deep play. It's just that sometimes we break down."

Emotion may have been a key ingredient in preventing any major breakdowns against Michigan.

"We've got some excited young guys," said Gordon. "They're really enthused, like (cornerbacks) William White and Greg Rogan. Of course, (safety) Terry (White) is always pumped."

"We were looking forward to this game a lot. That's what we came here for, really, playing for the Big Ten championship in the last game of the season against Michigan."

That was another goal that had been realized, due in part to a more intense than usual week of practice leading up to the game. But the effort had paid off.

"We worked long and hard during the dog days," Gordon remarked. "They were probably the hardest dog days I've ever been in. We had come too far to give up this easy, so we went out and tried to do it."

"And we did it. We gave it our all."

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Gordon Answers Call From Secondary Spot

By Craig James

It seems like every time Sonny Gordon turns around, someone is trying to hang a new nickname on him.

Take last year, for instance. A reporter with one of the Columbus newspapers decided to conduct a readers' poll in an effort to come up with a new title for Gordon's rover position in Ohio State's defensive secondary.

The name finally selected was "The Nutcracker," one which never caught on, but one that still makes Gordon cringe when he hears it.

"People can call a rover whatever they want to call him," he said. "I go out and do my best and hit hard, but *nutcracker*? I don't know. I just don't like that name."

"They can call me what they want to call me and I'll respond to it," he added.

Responding to the call of duty has been the junior's forte since he first came to OSU in 1983 from Middletown (Ohio) High School, a valuable source of talent for the Buckeyes in recent years.

As a cornerback backing up Shaun Gayle and Garcia Lane, Gordon spent his freshman year seeing some action in nine games and earning a letter. It was more than he expected.

"I came up here thinking I might be red-shirted," he remembered. "It turned out with me traveling and lettering. But I think a year's experience would have helped me out more, when I look back on it."

"I learned a lot from talking to (Lane and Gayle), but I didn't really get that many repetitions. I learned a lot from playing against guys like Cedric Anderson and Thad Jemison. I learned it was a lot different from playing in high school. People were faster, stronger."

"But Garcia taught me some things, as far as cat coverage and man-to-man coverage and how you should know your opponent."

Gordon got some hands-on experience on all of those subjects during his sophomore year in '84 after he emerged as a starter in OSU's opening game. Now a rover, he was a member of the youngest secondary that Buckeye fans had seen in quite a while.

"They had lost Garcia and all



Sonny Gordon

those starters," he said. "They were trying to find out where everyone could play. They were trying to make a secondary, because everybody was gone. They were placing us where they thought we'd play better at. It turned out I liked playing roverback."

"I was going to try to come in that fall camp and give Kevin Richardson a run and try to push him. I didn't feel like I was playing up to my capabilities, but when I got the chance to start, I did. It thrilled me."

The switch in positions necessitated an increased training effort on Gordon's part.

"Since they moved me to roverback, I wanted to get a little heavier," he said. "I was only 170 and I felt that was kind of light to be playing and trying to hit some back like Keith Byars or somebody that big. If I could gain the weight and play at that weight and not be slowed down, I thought it would be an advantage to me."

The work paid off. Thirteen pounds heavier, he started in 11 of Ohio State's 12 games last season, totaling 64 tackles, four interceptions and five touchdown saves. He now weighs in at 190.

Talking about the secondary last season, "I think we did pretty good, that being the first year for a lot of us as starters," he said. "I was a sophomore and there were three freshmen. I didn't think we'd do that well, but I think they really rose to the occasion."

"We used to make a lot of mistakes. Most of the time, though, it didn't hurt us very much."

Now Gordon feels the secondary is improving steadily game by game in '85, although they are far from perfect. The selection of a new nickname, one that Gordon found favor with this time, has helped in uniting the defensive backs.

"We're starting to play more together than we did last year," he said, "because we know what everybody else is doing. Last year, it was more of just doing what we had to do as individuals."

"Now we've come together more

as a team. We adopted a new name, 'The M.O.B. (Men of Brutality),' to bring us a little closer together. We also have to go out and live up to that name."

Gordon also sees his own game getting better as time goes on.

"I feel I haven't made the steady improvement that I would like, but I feel I'm improving little by little," he said. "I'm ready to go uphill."

"I've been playing, but it doesn't seem like I've been relaxed. I think a little too much on the field and that's what I'm trying to get out of. Once I get that part out, I think I'll start improving like I want to."

"My goal is to go out and give the best effort I can. That's really why God put you here. If you're playing for the glory of God, you go out and give your best effort. My goal is to try to make every play I can make that comes my way and try not to make mistakes. That's probably why I'm thinking too much on the field, because I'll be trying not to make mistakes instead of just

going out to play."

But when he does make a play, don't expect Gordon to start breaking into some kind of cheerleading routine. He's not of the rah-rah variety, which is one of the reasons behind another nickname of his — "The Quiet One."

"I'm not really the type to go out and scream and holler and all that," he said. "You can say what you want to say, but if you don't go out and get the job done, all that talk is wasted."

"That's the way I was brought up, I guess. I've always been kind of low key and not too outspoken."

But Gordon admits he does get a little excited at times, such as when he made his first interception of the year in the Buckeyes' game against Washington State.

"I have my moments," he agreed. "But as far as jumping around and all that, it's never been me and I don't think it ever will be. That's just the way I am."

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Sept. 20	COLORADO	
Sept. 27	UTAH	
Oct. 4	ILLINOIS	
Oct. 11	At Indiana	
Oct. 18	At Purdue	
Oct. 25	MINNESOTA	
Nov. 1	At Iowa	
Nov. 8	NORTHWESTERN	
Nov. 15	At Wisconsin	
Nov. 22	MICHIGAN	

Karsatos Hopes To Earn Rose Bowl Trip

Home Cooking Could Be QB's Reward

By Jim Wharton

Jim Karsatos, who has been around Ohio State University for what seems like eternity, is ready to go home.

Now hold on a minute. Don't be misled into thinking that the Buckeye quarterback, who set numerous school passing records last year, is ready to pack it in and leave. Instead, Karsatos simply has this idea that he'd like to go home for the holidays, eat some of his mother Valerie's home cooking and mix in an appearance in the Rose Bowl.

"I want to go home, that's my goal," said Karsatos, who has not seen too much of his native Fullerton, Calif., since arriving on the Buckeye campus. "I certainly won't mind working as long as I'm there."

Karsatos has been to the Rose Bowl before, serving as a sophomore caddy for Mike Tomczak and not seeing any action as the Buckeyes dropped a 20-17 decision to USC in the 1985 game. The 6-3, 224-pound fifth-year senior, elected a co-captain by his teammates, sees the 1986 OSU squad as having the ingredients necessary to get him home to California in late December.

"I think this is a different team than we've had the last few years," said Karsatos, who actually has been a Buckeye at heart for six years — returning home prior to enrolling in school in 1981 after suffering a knee injury. "I really like the unity we have

Jim Karsatos

- 177 completions in 289 attempts for 2,311 yards and a school single-season record 19 TDs in 1985.

- 2,350 total yards and 21 TDs in 1985.

- 19 TD passes in 1985 established school single-season mark, breaking record of 17 set by Art Schlichter in 1981.

- 1985 passing yardage was second-best single-season total in OSU history, topped only by the 2,551 of Schlichter in 1981.

- 1985 total yardage figure also second-best single-season total in Buckeye history, bettered only by the 2,509 of Schlichter in 1981.

- Enters 1986 season third on the OSU all-time passing chart with 2,967 yards.

- Third on all-time TD pass list (23) behind Mike Tomczak (32) and Schlichter (50).

- Eighth on all-time total offense list with 3,011 yards.



right now and we haven't even started camp."

Karsatos, interviewed during OSU photo day between posing with babies, was asked to explain what he sees as different about this 1986 edition of Buckeyes compared to others.

"We don't have individuals that want to stand away from the team," said Karsatos, a communications

major who spent the summer working as a "runfor guy" for a local television station. "Guys that didn't necessarily try to stand away, but somehow they separated. This year, already and overall throughout the team, we like to do things together and we all like to spend time together. It's just a lot different. It's not the same as it has been."

Sounds like a good indication of things ahead.

"As a team," said Karsatos, who started all 12 games and guided the Buckeyes to a 9-3 record last year, "we've got to improve our record. We've got to play more as a team."

That team, based on things which transpired last season, may look a little unusual to long-time Buckeye followers. The reason lies in the pass. Karsatos is likely to be firing away an un-OSU like number of times this fall. With a tremendous receiver in Cris Carter, Karsatos could wind up with a quarterback's equivalent of tennis elbow.

"The ball is going to stay in the air," said Karsatos, who set a school record with 19 TD tosses a year ago while completing 177 of 289 passes for 2,311 yards. "That's going to make for an exciting season. Personally, though, I want to improve on last year. I've worked on some things this summer that I didn't do last year and I think they'll help me a lot."

It might be hard to improve on his personal statistics. The 61.2 percent completion record also was a school record for one season. His effort in a 35-17 win over Northwestern undoubtedly was his brightest moment. Against the Wildcats, in a driving rainstorm in Dyche Stadium, Karsatos completed

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Gordon Has Added Incentives For Last Year In OSU Uniform

By Jim Wharton

Sonny Gordon returned for his senior year of football at Ohio State with a couple of additional incentives to go out with a bang.

The first one came when Gordon, about to begin his third year as a starter at rover back in the defensive secondary, was elected a co-captain — along with quarterback Jim Karsatos — by his Buckeye teammates. That happened in the spring.

"It was a very high honor," said Gordon, a mechanical engineering major out of Middletown (Ohio) High School. "It really touched me to know that they had that much respect for me because I really didn't think I would become captain. I would have liked to have been, but just to know that they have that much respect in me and thought of me as a leader, more by example because I'm really not a vocal type of guy."

"It's an honor and a privilege." The second added incentive came this summer when Gordon changed directions in his walk down life's path.

"I picked a different focal point this year," said Gordon, who had 68 tackles, intercepted three passes, batted down three others and blocked one punt last season. "I'm trying to focus more on the Lord this year. I accepted Jesus Christ and I went to this camp during the summer and that really turned it around for me. We worked the whole week and a half on just using our athletic abilities to glorify the Lord and it helped me out a lot."

"That's what I'm really going to base my year on this year."

Gordon, safety Terry White and



Sonny Gordon

cornerbacks William White and Greg Rogan — known around campus as the "Men Of Brutality" — will be starting their third year together as the OSU secondary.

"The past three years we've grown to become like brothers," said Gordon of himself and his partners, who combined for 14 of Ohio State's 21

interceptions last year. "On and off the field we hang together, which helps us on the playing field. If you're playing for your brother, then you're going to do everything you can to make sure he doesn't look bad. That's the thing with our defense becoming close like brothers. We're becoming more of a unit than we've ever been."

The unity and ability of OSU's secondary has been much-maligned in the past few years.

"We know that there has been criticism of Ohio State's defensive backs in the past and they have criticized us in the past," said Gordon, the lone senior in that secondary quartet. "We go out and try to play every game hard and try to build a reputation like Ohio State used to have. We still have another year together and the other three have two more years together. Hopefully, by the time we leave, the reputation will be back."

The fact that Gordon, who carries 192 pounds on his 6-0 frame, is 12 — more likely 13 — games from leaving OSU is yet another incentive.

"I expect to have a good season because it's my last year," said Gordon, who has 132 tackles and seven interceptions since becoming a starter at the beginning of his sophomore year. "I don't have another chance, so I have to go all out and give it my best effort. It gives me more incentive than I've ever had because I know that I want to go out on a good note. I don't have any time to stand around waiting for tomorrow. I've got to go out every day thinking this is my last swing, my

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Maggs Ready To Go After Back Surgery

By Jim Wharton

Bob Maggs is alive and kicking as a member of the Ohio State football team. How well Maggs remains a question mark.

Maggs, a 6-5, 287-pound senior out of Youngstown (Ohio) Cardinal Mooney High School, started all 12 games the Buckeyes played in 1985, earning first-team All-Big Ten and honorable mention All-American honors. But he played the Michigan and Brigham Young games with a ruptured disc in his back.

Surgery to remove part of the disc was performed earlier this year and Maggs was relegated to the role of a spectator during spring practice. Jeff Uhlenhake, a starter at left guard in 11 of the 12 Buckeye skirmishes last year, spent time in the spring working at center because of the uncertainty of Maggs' condition.

Maggs, though, says he is ready. "It feels pretty good," said Maggs, one day before the Buckeyes began practice for their opening game, an Aug. 27 battle against Alabama in the Chase Kickoff Classic. "I haven't hit on it since the bowl game, so I'm a little leery of that. But other than that there's no problem. I think it's going to be OK. I've done some things on it and I'm not really too worried about it."

There must be some concern for that first contact.

"Hitting is second nature because I've been doing it so long," said Maggs, who played in eight games as a second-year freshman tackle in 1983 and then played in 12 games — starting the last three at center — as a sophomore. "I'm going to hit and not worry about the back. If I go in soft then I might get hurt, so I'll have to go in full go."

OSU coach Earle Bruce knows how

Maggs might feel when the pads go on.

"I'm sure he'll think about it the first few times," said Bruce. "But he played in three games in a lot of pain last year. They fixed what was wrong and I think he'll come out of it OK. He's hitting the sled pretty good right now. He's taking a shot."

Maggs, one of eight fifth-year seniors on the OSU squad, just wants a shot at making the 1986 season his best.

"I'm really looking forward to it," he said. "This is my fifth year and I think I'll do really well. We've got a lot of guys back, everybody's looking good and everybody's got a good attitude right now. We've got everybody healthy, finally, which is something we didn't have in the spring."

With the Buckeyes being so depleted by injuries in spring practice, Maggs saw what everybody else saw.

"In the spring we might not have looked our sharpest," said Maggs, a student in the College of Arts and Sciences. "But once we get into these double sessions, we'll be looking really good. It's almost like a whole different team. So I think we'll be really good. After summer, everybody's a little rusty. Once we get back into it and get going, things should shape up real quick."

A quick start to the season is almost mandatory since the Buckeyes face Alabama and Washington in their first two games.

"We can't start slow like we've done in the past," said Maggs, touted by some as an All-American candidate this fall. "I think we can start fast because we've got two teams that if we start slow we're going to be in a world of trouble. We know we've got to go early. We know if we don't do it, we'll



Bob Maggs

look bad and that will maybe hang on a lot of people's minds for the rest of the season.

"So I think everybody is aware of the fact that we've got to come out fast."

Maggs will be coming out for the final time. As a senior, he realizes younger members of the squad will look to him for leadership.

"I think a lot of guys look to me because I've been around here for so long," said Maggs, who had perhaps the best block of his career when he wiped out two defenders allowing John Wooldridge to score a touchdown against Colorado last fall. "I've paid my dues. I've paid my dues around here for a long time. But it's not just me, we're going to need a lot of leadership out of all the seniors and all the starters to get everybody going this year."

There are goals for Maggs, who is 25 pounds heavier this fall than he was when he first reported to the Bucks.

"I'd like to be in among the top linemen in the country," said Maggs. "I just want to be the best that I can be. If I can be real great, I want to be that. But I want to make sure the team reaches its goals. That's first in my mind."

Gordon

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last time at bat."

Gordon, one-sixth of the "Middle-town Connection" on the Buckeye roster, was impressed with what he saw of the squad prior to the start of practice for the Aug. 27 Chase Kickoff Classic contest against Alabama in East Rutherford, N.J.

"The attitude on the team is probably the best since I've been here, as far as in the weight room and in the workout habits over the summer," said Gordon, whose 673 career playing minutes are tops among returning players. "I think we'll have a good season, just judging by the attitude of the team right now."

And any predictions?

"I don't really like to make predictions," said Gordon. "I just kind of let things take place."

Gordon, who has started 23 of 24 games the past two years, has let things fall for themselves since coming to Ohio State.

"My past three years have been an experience," he said. "My first year starting, I really wasn't expecting to start. I expected to play, but they had Kevin Richardson and I was playing behind him. But things happened and I ended up starting."

"My first year was a learning year for me. I learned a lot of things," continued Gordon, an all-state selection in high school who spends his spare time reading and listening to music. "Last year it was a little better than my sophomore year, but I've still got a ways to go."

"From those two years I have learned that I must react better. If you're not thinking, you react slow. I do a lot of thinking out there."

"You're never too old to learn and I think this year, game by game, I'll still be learning. I expect to build on what I learn."

Karsatos Still Looks To Improve

Continued From Page 3

16 of 20 passes for 275 yards and three touchdowns. But Karsatos, who spent a lot of time in the weight room this summer, wants more. He still is not satisfied with his game.

"I'm looking for other things to work on," noted Karsatos, who turned 23 on May 26. "I just want to be ready for any situation that comes up. I'm going to have fun. I'm going to enjoy it. I mean I love it here and I've had six great years. I'm just going to have fun and hopefully we'll bring a winning season back and that will just put the cherry on the ice cream."

That bowl of ice cream might have melted long ago for somebody with less determination and patience than Karsatos possesses. Buckeye coach Earle Bruce often says Karsatos has been around OSU almost as long as he has.

Karsatos came out of Sunny Hills

High School having passed for 4,426 yards and 40 touchdowns. He was the Orange County Player of the Year his senior season.

But an injury suffered in an all-star game in the summer of 1981 failed to come around and Karsatos was sent home prior to the football season. He re-enrolled, but was redshirted for the 1982 season.

After serving as an understudy to Tomczak for two years, a period in which he started three games, Karsatos earned the starting nod last year and responded with impressive credentials, ending the campaign ranked fourth nationally in passing efficiency.

"The whole thing has been just one experience after another," said Karsatos, reflecting on his OSU career to this point. "I've grown from them and I think I've become a better person. I didn't like some of the things then, but I've seen that they've helped me grow now and I really appreciate that."

Pre-Season Depth Chart

(As of August 1)

OFFENSE

SE	2 CRIS CARTER	Jr. **	26 Nate Harris	Jr. *	18 Gary Cift	So.
LT	79 Joe Staysniak	Fr.	74 Tim Moxley	Fr.	78 Mike Durham	So.
LG	68 JEFF UHLENHAKE	So. *	70 Steve France	Fr.	64 Mike Kurl	Fr.
C	71 BOB MAGGS	Sr. ***	53 Rich Morris	Jr.	60 Dan Himeise	Fr.
RG	51 Greg Zackeroff	So. *	66 Karl Coles	Fr.		
RT	72 LARRY KOTTERMAN	Jr. *	69 Jay Shaffer	Jr.		
TE	80 ED TAGGART	Sr. ***	81 John Hutchison	Sr. **	83 Frank Hoak	So.
					85 James Palmer	Fr.
QB	16 JIM KARSATOS	Sr. ***	19 Tom Tupa	Jr. **	13 Scott Powell	So.
					9 Tom Bolyard	Fr.
TB	42 Vince Workman	So. *	25 JOHN WOOLDRIDGE	Sr. ***	43 Barry Walker	Sr.
					28 Roman Bates	Sr.
FL	6 Jamie Holland	Sr.	4 Dino Dawson	Jr. *	5 Everett Ross	So.
FB	44 GEORGE COOPER	Jr. **	11 Bill Matlock	So.	33 Steve Gresock	Jr.
					38 Chris Boddie	Fr.

DEFENSE

OLB	14 ERIC KUMEROW	Jr. **	32 Tom Anderzack	So.	99 Mike McCray	So.
					39 Reggie Graves	Jr.
LT	90 FRED RIDDER	Jr. **	94 Henry Brown	Jr. **	96 Srecko Zizakovic	Fr.
					93 Ty Jones	Jr.
NG	87 Mike Sullivan	So. *	54 Pat Thomas	Fr.	62 Charles Keenan	Fr.
RT	95 DARRYL LEE	Sr. ***	55 Ray Holliman	Sr. **	84 Jim Davidson	So.
OLB	10 Derek Isaman	So. *	88 Alex Higdon	Jr. **	63 Dedrick Howard	Fr.
LB	36 CHRIS SPIELMAN	Jr. **	30 Mike Kee	Sr. **	35 Joe Jenkins	Jr.
LB	57 John Sullivan	So. *	8 Scott Leach	Sr. **	58 Ed Soltis	So.
					91 Brian Benio	Fr.
ROV	7 SONNY GORDON	Sr. ***	3 Sean Bell	So. *		
CB	37 WILLIAM WHITE	Jr. **	47 Ray Jackson	Jr. **		
CB	29 GREG ROGAN	Jr. **	20 Dwight Smith	So.		
S	12 TERRY WHITE	Jr. **	27 David Brown	Fr.		

SPECIALISTS

P	19 TOM TUPA	Jr. **	9 Tom Bolyard	Fr.	32 Mike Morton	Jr.
EP	23 Jeff Compton	So.	32 Mike Morton	Jr.		
C	52 TOM MOORE	So. *	71 Bob Maggs	Sr. ***		

CAPS — 1985 Starter
* letter

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Gordon Stars In Leading Role As Bucks Perform 'Striptease'

By Dave Waitkus

For the first time in his football career, Ohio State's Sonny Gordon is concentrating more than ever on stripping.

Now before anyone goes running to the *National Enquirer*, let's make it clear that the Buckeye senior has not made a career change to exotic dancing. It's just that Sonny and his teammates in the Ohio State defensive secondary are intent upon stripping the ball from opposing players.

"We're practicing a lot of strip drills in practice this year, and I don't ever remember doing that much on it before," said Gordon, who roams the secondary as Ohio State's starting roverback. "The coaches have put that in this year, and we're working a lot on knocking the ball loose."

"It's more realistic that way," he continued. "Rather than just going through the motions, the guy actually runs at you and you hit him and try to knock the ball loose and recover the fumble. It's a lot better than the other guy just standing there, and you hit

him and try to knock the ball away."

Gordon, who is also the Bucks' defensive captain for 1986, quickly added, however, that he and his teammates are definitely not giving up the fundamentals of good tackling in favor of 'gimmick' tackling.

"We treat every (opposing) player as an equal. Each person can hurt you," he explained. "We don't have any scouting reports or anything on a guy who might be more likely to fumble. If you start thinking about that, they will hurt you. We have to play everyone the same."

The results thus far this season have been no less than eye-catching for the Buckeyes. After eight games, Buckeye defenders have forced 24 enemy fumbles, including 15 which have been recovered by Ohio State. Cornerback Greg Rogan is the OSU leader in fumbles caused with four, while Gordon paces the team with three defensive fumble recoveries.

"Our defense is doing a good job in the turnover ratio," said Gordon, who had only one fumble recovery all last

season. "That's a lot of turnovers."

"You're always trying to go for the ball," he continued, "but we're not sitting back and waiting for the key situation or the important drive to go for the ball. We're trying to turn the ball over more to our offense."

In addition to 'stripping,' Gordon and his pals have also been quite prolific this season in intercepting enemy passes. Of the 16 thefts recorded by the defense this season, nearly a third of those (five) belong to Gordon. That tally has placed him at the top of the team chart and among the leaders in the Big Ten in that department.

As a defensive leader, Gordon has also learned to share in the successes and failures of the other Buckeye defensive backs, many of whom he has played with since he came to OSU. For example, when freshman David Brown returned an interception 100 yards for a touchdown in the Bucks' 39-11 victory over Purdue, Gordon said he felt a wave of joy rolling over the entire secondary.

"It's a spark for us," he said. "It's a job well done and well executed. We were all happy for David, and it made us feel a sense of accomplishment as much as it made him feel a sense of accomplishment. We're all back there working together, and we try to pick each other up when one of us does something wrong. It goes the same for when we do something big like that."

When it comes to his own personal successes, though, Gordon remains modest.

"I don't pay much attention to stats," said Gordon, who became a Buckeye starter his sophomore season and started all 12 games at roverback for Ohio State last year. "My only goal is to use my athletic ability the way God intended me to. If the stats come, that's great."

Although he and his teammates are enjoying defensive success this year, Gordon admitted that the learning process has been long and hard since he graduated from Middletown High School and joined the Buckeyes.

"In high school, it's really easy to read the offenses," he claimed. "It's much more difficult in college, and there are so many more plays to learn. It's like going to class. There are a lot more hours involved, and it seems like you're always learning new plays."

"Other than that," he added, "I guess the biggest thing for me has been that the offensive lines are bigger and faster than they are in high school. In high school, linemen are usually big or fast. If they're real big, they're usually real slow. Here, they are both big and fast."

"My job is to go to the strength of the formation and support against the run. Other than that, I play just like a free safety. It's a tough job when you have to go up against such big and quick



Sonny Gordon

people." Meanwhile, back in the secondary where the Buckeyes are short and swift, Gordon and company are working to 'stay on the same page' in order to short-circuit the opposition.

"There's more communication this year than there has been in, say, the past two years for the simple fact that there's different people back there now," he explained. "We try to stay on the same page."

Gordon, who lettered as a reserve cornerback during his freshman season, was joined in the starting lineup by Rogan, William White and Terry White to form what became known as the 'Men Of Brutality' (MOB) for the 1984 season.

The communicating really began then and continued through the 1985 season and into this year.

"The (1984) season and last year, most of us were basically on the same page," said Gordon. "There was communication, but not a lot. This year (due to injuries and changes in personnel), we're communicating a lot more. We're using hand signals, and we try to communicate so that we don't get lost out there."

Since portions of 'The MOB' have come of age, Gordon said a secondary that was once labeled as suspect has matured.

"I think we're becoming wiser to our opponents," he said. "As you mature, you tend to become more aware of what's going on on the field. So, we are becoming 'smarter' on the field."

Gordon, who ranks second on the Buckeye squad in tackles with 59 as the Iowa game approaches, has also matured academically and has worked out a switch from mechanical to metallurgical engineering. If his game plan in the classroom continues on schedule, he will graduate next year at the end of a five-year plan.

"I would tell any young player that he should get ready to get his head into the books, both in the classroom and on the field," said Gordon. "You spend a lot more time on football than you ever do in high school. It's like a job, really. There's so much to learn that you've got to keep after it."

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BUCKEYE FLASHBACK: SONNY GORDON

Gordon Recalls Thrill Of Being OSU Captain

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Sonny Gordon likes to tell you he doesn't just sell cars, rather he "assists people in their transportation needs."

Or at least that's the party line at Bob Caldwell Dodge Country in Columbus, where the inspired Gordon serves as sales manager for the used car division.

As a Buckeye in the mid-1980s, Gordon denied those very same transportation opportunities, making sure the opposition couldn't drive down the gridiron.

Behind his amiable persona and studious approach beats the heart of an unforgiving competitor. Gordon, who started a majority of his Ohio State career at rover, progressed to where he was All-Big Ten his senior year of 1986, thanks in part to a team-best seven interceptions.

But the thrill of football, he found, didn't last forever. It didn't even last five years, in fact, after leaving OSU. A mechanical engineering major and devoted student, Gordon still wasn't quite prepared for his football afterlife. That's when his career found him.

"I kind of stumbled upon it," Gordon said while seated in his north side Columbus office.

Gordon was working at a BP Procare in town when former Buckeye teammate Jay Shaffer offered him a salesman job with a guaranteed salary.

"I went in there and made a lot of money and sort of got drawn into it," he said.

It should surprise no one who knows him that Gordon has quickly worked his way up in his five-plus years at Bob Caldwell (former Buckeye Pete Johnson, incidentally, worked for the same company until recently). After all, Gordon fulfilled his promise for the Buckeyes and should be best remembered as a big-game player.

None was much bigger than the 1985 game with Iowa, which came into Ohio Stadium undefeated and ranked No. 1 in the nation. By rattling Heisman Trophy candidate Chuck Long and converting several big plays, the Buckeyes pulled off the upset, 22-13.

"Me and (safety) Terry White didn't start that game — we went in on the second play — and we had something to prove to the coaches," he said. "I don't know what it was, but all of the guys who felt that way going into the game did something to help turn that game around. Terry White had a big hit early, John Woolridge had a big run and I had a blocked punt."

Gordon's denial — the only one of the season — rolled out of the end zone for a safety and gave OSU an early 5-0 lead, setting the stage for a day where the breaks would go OSU's way. Yet Gordon still laments that two points could have been six and the only touchdown of his career.

"I did have a shot to scoop it up," he recalled. "I could have fallen on it, but I popped up all happy like 'I actually got this ball.'"

But when looking back on his memorable career, Gordon doesn't focus on specifics, just the fact he got to play for the Buckeyes.

"From most games I don't have one particular play that sticks out in my

mind, just certain games," he said.

Take the 1984 Illinois game, for example. Like the '85 Iowa tilt, the battle with Illinois a year earlier is now in the "classic" file. Just a sophomore in his first year as a starter, Gordon came through against the Illini as well with a key pick-off. He was also part of a unit that dominated Texas A&M in the 1987 Cotton Bowl with four defensive interceptions.

That rousing win erased some of the hurt of his last regular-season game, a 26-24 loss to Michigan that became numbing reality as Matt Frantz's game-winning field goal try missed by a whisker. Gordon had hoped to return to the Rose Bowl (the Buckeyes went after the 1984 season) as a senior alongside fellow secondary members Greg Rogan, Terry White and William White, all juniors in 1986.

"I think we were one of the worst secondaries our first year together, but we ended up being one of the best in the country," said Gordon, a team captain as a senior along with quarterback Jim Karsatos. "Fortunately, people tend to remember the latter instead of the early years when we were taking our lumps."

Gordon got all he wanted as a Buckeye, having to slow down the passing games of players such as Long, Jack Trudeau, Jim Everett and Jim Harbaugh. Playing in Columbus also afforded him the opportunity to nurture his friendship with receiver Cris Carter, a childhood chum who played with Gordon at Middletown (Ohio) High School.

"All of us thought Cris was going to be a pro basketball player because he was that good," Gordon recalled of Carter, now an All-Pro wideout for the Minnesota Vikings. "When he opted for football I was like 'Wow, why'd he do that?' It kind of shocked me."

"But he always had that air of confidence and he knew he could make it in football if he wanted to. He always had great hands. In high school, he was making the same catches — one hand, one finger. And he's very deceptive. He's faster than he looks."

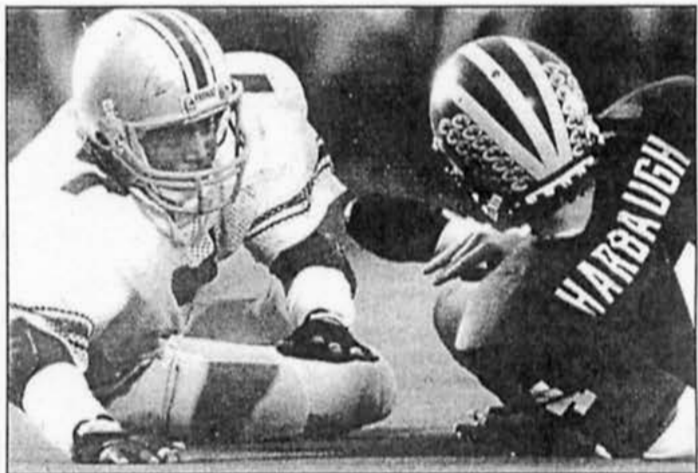
With Gordon gone, Carter also played defensive back as a Middletown senior and led his league in interceptions as well as receptions. When Carter was ready to be courted as a big-time recruit, Gordon and Middletown coach Bill Conley, now an OSU assistant, helped open his eyes to Ohio State.

"I probably helped close the sale a little," Gordon said.

So how would Carter fare today lining up against a more current Buckeye star like Shawn Springs? We'll get to see that battle in the NFL someday. But the debate as to which of the last two OSU Rose Bowl teams is better could rage into the night.

"You'd have to say the teams they've had at Ohio State the past couple years have had a lot better athletes, especially when you look at guys in the pros," Gordon said. "We had guys like Cris Carter, Jim Lachey, John Frank, Keith Byars, Kirk Lowdermilk, but they've had guys who were first picks, not just first-rounders."

"Still, we had an excellent team. I mean, we had a pro line, a lot of guys on our offense went to the pros, and we had a good defense with guys like (Chris) Spielman, Pepper (Johnson) and (Eric) Kumerow. I think it'd be a tossup."



FILE PHOTO

REMEMBERING SONNY DAYS — Former defensive back Sonny Gordon played in plenty of memorable big games during his OSU career, tangling with the likes of Michigan quarterback Jim Harbaugh. Gordon is now a car salesman in Columbus.

Another interesting fictitious match-up would be on the sideline, even though the accomplishments of former coach Earle Bruce seem to get overlooked these days.

"Earle was a player's coach," Gordon said. "He sincerely cared about his players beyond football. He knew your mother, he knew your name, he knew where you were from."

"That may not mean a lot to a lot of players nowadays because their only focus is getting to the NFL. But it meant a lot to me and my mom knowing I was coming to a place where I wasn't looked at just as a piece of meat, an athlete who could help generate revenue, then 'Thank you, bye.'"

Bruce repeatedly stressed the importance of an education and Gordon took it to heart. He hasn't ruled out obtaining the few credits needed for his engineering degree even though he always figured he'd gravitate toward sales.

As Gordon was winding up his days at OSU, football was still staring him in the face as he was chosen in the sixth round of the 1987 draft by the Cincinnati Bengals, a team he followed growing up.

Then the sport decided to hand him a dose of humility. Gordon became the Bengals' last cut on the last day of fall camp.

"I remember them coming up to my room right at midnight," he said.

He was picked up by Tampa Bay and appeared in seven games for the Buccaneers in 1987, but he never played again in the NFL.

"When you start at the major college level and become All-Big Ten and lead the entire league in interceptions, you start to think if given the right opportunity that you could contribute in the NFL," he said. "I just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time because the two teams I was with were not in dire need of someone at my position."

Gordon, who was listed 6-0 and 192 pounds going into his senior season, extended his professional career in the Canadian Football League, where safeties tend to have corner-like cover

skills. He went to Hamilton to play for the Tiger Cats for two years, then moved on to Saskatchewan.

"That was so different up there," he said with a laugh. "I wasn't familiar with any of the rules and was blown away at first. Everybody moves around before the ball is snapped and it's such a wide-open game."

"Doug Flutie loved it when he got there because he would run around and no one could catch him and he'd throw for like 500 yards a game. Then you've got guys like the Rocket (Raghib Ismail) getting a running start with his 4.2 speed. It's like a nightmare."

"In the NFL, you're more physical as a safety, but up there it's almost like you're in a nickel defense where you need four corners to cover these guys."

When it was time to embark on the real world, Gordon drew on his many experiences, most of all his time at Ohio State.

"I think the discipline is what really has carried over," he said. "Being an athlete and being in sales, you've got to learn to overcome adversity. Sales is a lot like professional athletics to me because you're only as good as your last month, and in the pros you're only as good as your last game."

"You can't really dwell on what you did last month because last month's business is not going to pay this month's bills. You have to set goals and then break them down into smaller goals, and as an athlete you do the same type of thing to motivate yourself."

And that is the secret to Sonny Gordon, who still attacks his day on "Buckeye time," a pet phrase of Bruce, which taught the value of arriving early and leaving late.

"I'm still on it," said Gordon, whose workday sometimes will stretch from 7:45 a.m. to 9 p.m. "I don't know any other way."

Sonny and his wife, Angelique, a college friend, have two children. His son of a previous marriage, Denman Jr. (known as "D.J."), will turn 6 on Oct. 16 and daughter Kandace turned 5 on Sept. 19.

MICHIGAN MEMORIES: SONNY GORDON

'I Still Have 1984,' Says Gordon

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There's no other way to put it: Sonny Gordon wakes up every day in enemy territory.

"I live in Chesterfield, Mich., which I guess is about 25 miles northeast of Detroit," said Gordon, a standout roverback for Ohio State in the 1980s. "Michigan football is a real big thing up here. It's definitely all about Michigan and Michigan State, but mostly the Wolverines."

Gordon's relocation is ironic. He sold cars after his playing days but eventually took on a position with Worthington Industries just outside of Columbus. As an employee in the steel division, he now sells to stampers, companies that use the steel to make car parts for assembly lines, and is in charge of northern Detroit and Ontario.

That prompted the migration to the state up north nearly four years ago and coincided with the beginning of the Jim Tressel era at OSU, which means Gordon had bragging rights his first two years in the area.

"Overall, my customers and the people I know up here tease me, but they also like me," he said. "But they don't like it when we win, of course."

"It's kind of a weird situation. I know people that claim that they hate Ohio State but also admitted they rooted for us to win the (2002) national championship. They always point out to me that we wouldn't have won it without the kid from Utica, which is nearby here."

Gordon referred to former quarterback Craig Krenzel, who now plies his trade in the NFL. Of course, players from Michigan on the Ohio State roster and from Ohio playing for Michigan is nothing new. It just adds to what is one of the greatest rivalries in sports.

Gordon got to soak in the specter of that storied game from 1983-86 during his time as an active, big-play defensive back. To him, the rivalry was more of an otherworldly experience. He remembers the outcomes, but when it comes to specific moments he sometimes becomes a little fuzzy.

What he does know more than anything is the actual contests lived up to the hype he heard about while growing up in Middletown, Ohio, and playing high school ball for former Buckeye assistant coach Bill Conley.

"I think even after playing four times in that game that the tradition and the buildup still stand out more than anything," he said. "All the sayings are true, and it really makes no difference what the records are going in. It always seems like the underdog rises up in that game."

Gordon also learned why coaches and players always talk about every play mattering in The Game. He endured a 1-3 record in the series and all three defeats can be whittled down to an indelibly painful moment.

"If you look at it, we really were one play away from victory in all of those defeats," he said. "It does bug me, especially when someone brings it up."

"But I still have 1984. That's the one I hold onto."

Although the Buckeyes had lost a couple of nail-biters in the '84 Big Ten season heading into the date with Michigan, OSU was home, Keith Byars was in con-



OH SO CLOSE — Former OSU roverback Sonny Gordon (7) introduces himself to Michigan quarterback Jim Harbaugh during the memorable 1985 version of The Game, but his near-sack turned painful for OSU as Harbaugh somehow completed a backbreaking 77-yard touchdown.

tention for the Heisman Trophy, young players had impacted both sides of the ball and the Buckeyes had a shot at an outright league title.

To do it, they needed to take care of a Michigan team that entered with a 6-4 record and rumors that its longtime head coach, Bo Schembechler, was under fire.

Just to make sure everyone had the game in proper perspective, coach Earle Bruce asked Woody Hayes to address the team at Senior Tackle and had other reminders.

"There was Michigan stuff everywhere," Gordon recalled. "There were Michigan logos all over the locker room, Michigan colors all over the place. That was the only week we ever did that kind of thing."

OSU played classic bend-but-don't-break defense, especially in the second quarter when Michigan had driven all the way to the Buckeye 5-yard line.

After Larry Kolic slammed Jamie Morris for a 3-yard loss on first down, quarterback Chris Zurburg tried to fire a pass into the corner of the end zone to tight end Eric Kattus.

It looked like a good idea at the time until Gordon stepped in front of the play with perfect timing and recorded an interception just before stepping out of bounds.

For Gordon, the play was thrilling in that it stifled Michigan and also helped vindicate a young and often questioned secondary that also included freshmen Terry White, Greg Rogan and William White.

"A lot of people didn't have confidence in us because we were so young," said Gordon, who was the old man of the group at 19. "We felt we had to prove something to the world."

Ohio State logged two fourth-quarter touchdowns to salt away a 21-6 victory that clinched the Rose Bowl and set off a wild on-field celebration.

"That was as sweet as it gets right there," Gordon said. "There was so much on the line and so much at stake, and we did what we had to do."

Gordon aided an impressive defensive effort with nine total tackles to go along with his timely pick. In evidence of OSU's swarming effort, six other players had nine or more tackles — Kolic with 12,

Byron Lee with 10, and Anthony Giuliani, Dave Morrill, Pepper Johnson and Chris Spielman with nine apiece.

The next two years, the defense took heat for hard-to-swallow losses to UM, but once again Gordon made his share of plays. The only one he'd still like to have back came late in the 1985 game in Ann Arbor as he whacked Michigan quarterback Jim Harbaugh a fraction of a second

Gordon Vs. Michigan

Won 1, Lost 3

1983 — Michigan 24, Ohio State 21

1984 — Ohio State 21, Michigan 6

1985 — Michigan 27, Ohio State 17

1986 — Michigan 26, Ohio State 24

too late.

"I came on a blitz and I thought I had a sack," said Gordon, who logged nine tackles in the game including one for loss. "I looked up and saw the guy (wideout John Kolesar) running for a touchdown. It was one of those Hail Mary passes and he just threw it up."

A speedy freshman from Westlake, Ohio, Kolesar got past William White and hauled in the heave at the OSU 45. He raced home from there for a devastating 77-yard touchdown that came moments after OSU had cut the UM lead to 20-17.

To this day, the play gnaws at Gordon.

"It was that close. I mean, I thought I got there," he said. "I think I'll always question myself on that. Did I take a stutter step? Did I hesitate? I watched the film over and over."

After his OSU career ended, Gordon was drafted by the Cincinnati Bengals, was released, played one year for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and latched on for three more in the Canadian Football League. Nothing came close to the intensity of The Game, though.

"You psych yourself up for that game to the point where you literally hate them," he said. "After the game, you're able to put it in perspective."

Gordon has a wife of 10 years, Angie, and two children: son Denman Jr. (D.J.), 13, and daughter Kandace, 12.



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