

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 37, No. 21

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

May 2018

Always A Buckeye

*Ohio State Coaching
Great Earle Bruce
Remembered For
Passion On The
Field And Off*

**Earle Bruce
1931-2018**



By MARK REA
BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Earle Bruce often introduced himself as a football coach, and his Hall of Fame résumé suggests he was one of the best. But while the persona on display for much of his nine-year tenure as Ohio State head coach was mostly that of a one-dimensional Woody Hayes imitator, Bruce had many more layers and textures to a life that touched so many people in so many ways over the years.

Bruce, who died April 20 at his suburban Columbus home due to complications of Alzheimer's disease, was honored with a public memorial April 25 at St. John Arena and a private funeral service the following day. During each event, the impact the 87-year-old coach had on his family, friends and former assistant coaches and players was on full display.

Current Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, who was a graduate assistant at OSU under Bruce in 1986 and '87 and then a full-time assistant for three seasons during the 1990s on Bruce's staff at Colorado State, has often said his father and Bruce were the two most influential men in his life.

But Meyer has also recounted stories that underscore the kind of tough-love approach he received from Bruce, including the late September afternoon in 1990 when Meyer walked onto the practice field at Colorado State after the birth of his first child, Nicole.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," said Meyer, who was the Rams' wide receivers coach at the time. "We were working on a screen pass when one of the receivers blows a blocking assignment and Earle blows a gasket. I mean, he just undressed me."

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IN GREAT COMPANY – Former Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce was one of the few non-band members to dot the "i" during "Script Ohio" at Ohio Stadium.

JOSH WINSLOW

Bruce Was Honest, Intense, Classy At Once

I first met Earle Bruce almost 40 years ago. I was a scruffy, cocksure, 20-year-old sports-writer, and he was a 47-year-old grown-ass man who had been a football coach since before I was in diapers.

To say that our first encounter didn't go well for me would be akin to saying the Battle of the Little Bighorn didn't go well for Custer and the 7th Cavalry.

In those days, media members covering Ohio State football had almost unlimited access to players and coaches following games. As sports editor of a small newspaper in OSU quarterback Art Schlichter's hometown, I was used to having nearly unlimited *carte blanche* in terms of asking questions and receiving answers.

An emotionally-spent Bruce had just won his first game as successor to the legendary Woody Hayes, watching the Buckeyes systematically dismantle a pretty good Syracuse team by a 31-8 final score in the 1979 season opener. OSU enjoyed a lopsided 383-81 edge in rushing yardage – obviously something Woody would have liked – but Bruce had spent a large chunk of the summer claiming that he would bring a more updated and sophisticated offensive approach to Columbus.

So, naturally I asked why running the ball 69 times while throwing it on only 16 occasions could be interpreted as anything akin to a modern offensive attack.

That's when I got the look for the first time. Bruce had a way of simultaneously pursing his lips while raising his eyebrows to the point where you didn't know if he was angered by the question or simply pitying you for being so dumb.

Finally, after a few seconds that seemed like minutes, Bruce answered, "Well, I don't know. We threw the ball on the first play of the game. I think we threw it three or four times during that first series. Exactly how many times do you think we should have thrown it?"

Was there ever a time in your life when you wished you could have become invisible? That was one of those times for me. But it also taught me a valuable lesson that I have carried for the remainder of my journalistic career. If you're going to ask a question, make sure it's based upon facts and not opinion.

Bruce was the teacher, I was the pupil, and I never played a down for the man.

To be honest, I didn't think much of Bruce when he was head coach at Ohio State. I never thought he took as much advantage as he should have with such strong-armed quarterbacks as Schlichter, Mike Tomczak and Jim Karsatos at his disposal, preferring instead to rely upon traditional, ground-and-pound Big Ten football.

It was far from glamorous (much like the coach himself), yet it was a winning formula. When Bruce was fired, he enjoyed a .770 winning percentage against Big Ten competition that at the time ranked fifth all-time among conference coaches with at least five seasons in the league.

Class Personified

In the aftermath of the outpouring of love and admiration for Bruce following his April 20 death, it seems almost unbelievable that the Buckeye Nation that remembered the coach with such affection was the same one that was ready to pay for his one-way bus ticket out of Columbus after a string of 9-3 finishes during the 1980s.

Only through the prism of time do we begin to fully understand that Bruce's ouster the week of the Michigan game in 1987 came not wholly as a result of the product he put

on the field. Never one to suffer fools, the coach was no glad-hander or butt-kisser, and to his ultimate detriment he never understood how important those roles were to play in Columbus.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Still, how wounded Bruce must have been to have given his heart and soul to his alma mater only to see that university vindictively spit on him. I can only imagine the hurt he must have felt – not only at being dismissed from his dream job, but to have it come at the beginning of the most important week of the season.

It's difficult to put myself in that position, but it's not difficult to imagine I would not have handled the situation with such class.

Bruce somehow kept his emotions in check that week, showing them briefly only twice – when members of the Ohio State marching band showed up on the lawn at his house to play "Across the Field" and "Carmen Ohio," and when he triumphantly pumped his fist into the air while being carried off the field atop the shoulders of his players following the 23-20 victory against Michigan in his final game.

"I was kind of in awe that week as I watched how a man gets back up after he's been knocked down," said current Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, then a 23-year-old graduate assistant on Bruce's staff. "We were all kind of shell-shocked, but not Earle. He wouldn't let us get distracted. We had a job to do, and he was going to make sure we did it. That week, we all saw how a man – and I mean a *real* man – reacts when adversity knocks him to the ground."

In a kind of ironic way, the botched manner in which Bruce was fired by then-OSU president Dr. Edward Jennings helped turn public opinion in the coach's favor. Bruce suddenly became a martyr of sorts to many fans who had previously been apathetic toward him, and when the coach returned to Columbus several years later to become an OSU football analyst for WTVN Radio, the transformation became complete.

With his passion for anything and everything scarlet and gray firmly on display, Bruce became a beloved figure to an entirely new generation of Buckeye fans. He was approachable, seemingly indefatigable and eminently eager to discuss football in general and Ohio State football in particular for as long as anyone cared to listen.

My personal relationship with Bruce came full circle after Jim Tressel was hired in 2001 and welcomed Bruce and fellow former head coach John Cooper back to the program as honorary assistants.

Bruce became a regular at Tressel's weekly press luncheons, and it was always a privilege and honor to sit beside Bruce as he would regale media members with a litany of stories – some salty, some hilarious and every one of them more entertaining than the last.

One of the most enjoyable games I ever covered was the 2004 Fiesta Bowl. Ohio State survived a furious comeback from Kansas State to secure a 35-28 victory, but exceedingly more entertaining than the game itself was getting a chance to sit beside Bruce in the auxiliary press box on the roof at Sun Devil Stadium. I didn't need to watch that game. I

got a blow-by-blow description from the coach complete with priceless (and sometimes profanity-laced) analysis.

At the end of the game, I stood up, shook his hand and said, "Coach, that was the most enjoyable game I think I've ever had the pleasure to watch." A kind of mystified look came across his face as he replied with a somewhat bewildered, "OK."

Last year, as I interviewed him for what would be the last time, he seemed a little slower than usual. But I hadn't seen him for a while and I chalked it up to the fact that he was 86 years old. It wasn't until a few months later that it was revealed that he was in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease.

Anyone who has been touched by that disease knows how insidious it can be, but Bruce took the same approach to that fight as he did any other – with as much hard-nosed determination as he could muster. The fact that he attended an Ohio State spring practice session on his 87th birthday, just six weeks before his passing, probably tells you all you need to know about the man's grit.

Potent Quotables

I realize the foolhardiness of attempting in just a few words to convey the importance of a life such as the one fully lived by Earle Bruce, so I thought I would enlist the coach's help. Here are some of my favorite quotes from the series I wrote last year for BSB on his life and legacy.

- When asked about his no-nonsense personality: "I've never been one to blow smoke. I've never done that, and I don't think I could ever do that. But it's never been a problem. Not with me anyway."

- About working on Sundays as an OSU assistant: "It wasn't that Woody wasn't religious. It's just that Woody wanted everyone to work religiously. He was of the mind that there was simply too much to be done to take a day off – ever. Honestly, we never knew from year to year if we were going to get Christmas Day off."

- On dealing with adversity: "Every now and then, the lessons you learn on the football field come back. And when you get knocked down and hit real hard – if you stay down, that's sad. You can't always be taken aback by the fact you got hit. You can get hit, but you've got to do something about it. You can't fold up. When you try to teach that to your kids, how can you not do that when it happens to you?"

- On his radio career: "I may not breathe into the microphone the right way and I may not talk just right. I may not be the most professional broadcaster you've ever heard. But I give it to you straight from the heart. I'm no phony. I'll tell you the way it is because that's the way I've always been."

- On following in the footsteps of a legend: "I never at all regretted being the guy who succeeded Coach Hayes. At the time, I felt I was the guy who could follow Coach Hayes and be successful, and if I hadn't felt that way, I wouldn't have done it. I was never going to be the guy who said, 'I want to be the guy who follows the guy who follows Woody.' A person with that attitude is a loser."

Earle Bruce was many things to many people – coach, friend, mentor, father, grandfather, storyteller – but one thing he was not was a loser. Earle Bruce was every bit a winner, and he was a winner by any definition of that word.

Aside from my father, Earle Bruce just might have been the most honorable man I've ever known.

As with his immediate family as well as all of Buckeye Nation, I'm going to miss him.



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Charter Member

Bruce Served As A Mentor To Many At OSU

Continued From Page 1

"All these years later, I can remember the night of the play we were working on and the defensive scheme we were working against. What was the lesson? No matter what else is going on, focus on the task at hand. Focus on what you're doing."

William White, who played four years at OSU for Bruce before embarking upon an 11-year NFL career that included an appearance in Super Bowl XXXIII as a starting strong safety for the Atlanta Falcons, had a similar brush with Bruce's wrath.

As a freshman out of Lima (Ohio) Senior, White earned a starting job at cornerback in 1984 and chalked up his first career tackles during a 22-14 victory against Oregon State in the season opener. Three weeks later, during his first road game in scarlet and gray, White snared the first of his 16 career interceptions at OSU, a second-quarter pick that set up a touchdown during an eventual 35-22 victory at Minnesota.

As the freshman danced his way toward the sideline, he was expecting a high-five or at least a congratulatory pat on the butt. What he got instead was rather unexpected.

"I'm a freshman, I'm all happy (and Earle comes up and grabs me by the helmet and is yanking me and yelling at me," White told The Lima News. "I just got an interception, and he's talking about a tackle I missed two plays ago. I was like, 'Really?' But when you look back at it, it was to make you better. That was the passion he had. It was always that way.

"My first two years, I thought he hated

me, as much as he yelled. I'm starting as a freshman, and I'm thinking, 'You ought to be embracing me and trying to help me out.' But every time he talked to me, he was yelling about something. But it was to make me better and get better. When I was able to settle in and become a decent player, we actually became friends."

Not every recollection about Bruce contains tough love. Former quarterback Greg Frey remembered how the coach managed to sweet-talk Frey's mother – a devout Catholic who wanted her son to play football at Boston College – into allowing him to attend Ohio State.

"In January 1986, Ohio State was very late in the game to recruit me," Frey said. "(Quarterbacks coach Jim) Tressel had left the Ohio State staff in November or December to become head coach at Youngstown State, and the trail to recruit me went quiet.

"I remember telling my dad that I would at least like to know if they had an interest in me before it was too late. So, we reached out to a few alumni in Cincinnati and found out Ohio State was indeed still interested in me."

Bruce re-established contact with the quarterback prospect and his family and quickly scheduled an in-home visit.

"Coach quickly realized it was not me or my dad that he had to win over – it was my mom," Frey said. "And he knew he had his hands full.

"Growing up Catholic, I went to St. James Elementary School and St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati, and my mom wanted to keep that theme going for my future college education. Boston College was at the top of the list and

they wanted me. This was right after Doug Flutie won the Heisman, BC was a hot program, and Mary Ann Frey had her mind made up that BC was where I needed to be."

Taking a page from the legendary Hayes, who always placed as much or more emphasis on recruiting a player's parents than the player himself, Bruce placed a call to the Frey household, hoping Greg's mother would answer the phone.

"He always said he knew he would never totally win her over," Frey said, "but he at least wanted to connect with her, give her some peace of mind that I would be more than OK at Ohio State and that he really wanted to coach me."

After a 30-minute conversation, Bruce said he knew he was going to get his quarterback.

"Earle must have told me that story a dozen times over the years, and his face always lit up with a beaming grin of pride," Frey said. "He would say, 'Oh, boy, I got her to talk to me for 30 minutes! I got her! Do you hear me? I got her!'

"A few weeks later, I signed with Ohio State, and although my mom didn't speak to me for three days, things worked out just fine and she came to love Earle and Jean Bruce and her new Buckeye family."

Passion From An Early Age

Ask anyone who spent any amount of time around Bruce to describe the coach and most likely the word "passion" would be uttered in the first few words of the reply.

"Earle was real," White said. "He was a guy who always spoke the truth, and he had a deep passion for players, the organization, the team."

Apparently, the deep seeds of that kind of passion were planted at an early age.

Bruce was born March 8, 1931, the first of four sons to Earle D. Bruce Sr. and his wife, Mildred. Bruce's father was a no-nonsense man of strong will and an even stronger constitution having toiled in the steel mills along the tristate area where the borders of Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia converge.

Young Earle inherited his father's grit and determination as well as a passion for sports. As one of the only left-handed players on his baseball team, Bruce quickly picked up the nickname "Lefty" as an homage to Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher Lefty Grove, who was a native of Lonaconing, Md., just 15 miles west of Bruce's blue-collar hometown of Cumberland.

Despite being only 5-9 and 155 pounds, Bruce was a high school star in track as well as football. He set the city scoring record in 1948 as a junior with 23 touchdowns and 138 points in 10 games, leading his team to a 9-0-1 season and earning all-state honors at fullback.

Several major programs were interested, but Bruce chose to attend Ohio State, beginning a self-professed love affair that lasted nearly seven decades.

"I was a Buckeye from day one," the coach told BSB last year. "When I got there, and I saw that band come out of the field for the first time, I jumped up and shouted, 'I'm a Buckeye! I'm a Buckeye!' It was just something I'd never seen before, and I still remember I got chills when that band came out on the field."

Bruce never played a single varsity down for the Buckeyes, suffering a career-ending knee injury about a month before the 1951 season opener against SMU. But Hayes offered him a chance to remain with the team – as well as keep his scholarship – as a student assistant on the Ohio State coaching staff. It was the

beginning of a career that lasted more than 40 years and went from the high school ranks to the professional level with the Arena Football League.

Bruce's first full-time coaching job came at Mansfield (Ohio) High School in 1953. He spent three seasons there, the first two under Bill Peterson, who went on to become head coach at Florida State for 11 seasons before spending a season and a half at the helm of the NFL's Houston Oilers. His third season came on the staff of Bob McNea, who would later become an assistant for Ara Parseghian at Northwestern. Years later, Bruce hired McNea as his recruiting coordinator at Ohio State where his duties included helping design the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

"I don't think Mansfield ever enjoyed a more successful three-year period than the Peterson-McNea era," Bruce said. "It was a privilege to be an assistant coach for those guys."

In addition to cutting his coaching teeth there, Mansfield was also where Bruce met a striking young lady named Jean French.

"She was a senior when I was a first-year teacher and I remember she used to bring me the attendance sheets," he said. "When she graduated, we began to date, and we were married the next August."

Earle and Jean Bruce were married for 56 years until Jean's death in 2011. The marriage produced four daughters – Lynn, Michele, Aimee and Noel.

Bruce got his first head coaching job in 1956 at Salem, Ohio, beginning a four-year stint that turned a previously moribund program into a winner. The Quakers posted a 24-4 record during the coach's final three seasons, earning him an undying love and respect from the small town of about 12,000 that, according to Tressel, continues to this day.

"Coach Bruce is still a legend in Salem," said Tressel, now the president of Youngstown State University, located about 25 miles northeast of Salem. "He hasn't coached there for more than 50 years, and people talk about him like he was coaching there yesterday."

Bruce's coaching career continued upward when he left Salem for Sandusky in 1960 and was promptly named Ohio High School Coach of the Year after nearly leading the Blue Streaks to a state championship. From there, he took over the legendary program at Massillon High School, where he posted back-to-back undefeated seasons as well as state titles in 1964 and '65.

With his second straight 10-0 record, Bruce joined Paul Brown and Chuck Mather as the only coaches in Massillon's long and storied history with back-to-back undefeated seasons. Brown did it in 1935 and '36 and had three in a row between 1938-40, and Mather posted back-to-back undefeated campaigns in 1952 and '53.

Following the 1965 season, Bruce and his 82-12-3 record in 10 seasons at the high school level began to attract college coaching offers. Miami (Ohio) head coach Bo Schembechler made an offer that might have been acceptable had the post not come with an \$11,000 annual salary, some \$2,000 less than Bruce was making at Massillon.

About the same time, Hayes was looking for a replacement for defensive backfield coach Max Ulrick, who had left the OSU staff after four seasons.

"Woody told me he couldn't afford me," Bruce said with a chuckle. "My negotiating didn't go well from that point on. He offered me the same \$11,000 that Bo had offered me. But

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COVER STORY

I wanted the job, so I left everything, paid my own moving expenses and came to Columbus for \$11,000.

"I took a pay cut to leave high school and come coach college ball. And you know what? I'd do it again."

To OSU And Back Again

Bruce spent six seasons as an assistant coach on Hayes' staff, a stretch during which the Buckeyes won an undisputed national championship in 1968 and the National Football Foundation's version of the national title in 1970.

After the 1971 season, Bruce secured his first head coaching position at the college level, beginning with a 10-2 campaign at the University of Tampa. That led to a six-year stint at Iowa State, a job that served as a springboard for returning to Ohio State to succeed Hayes.

On the evening before Bruce was formally introduced as Hayes' successor, the new coach was treated to dinner at the residence of then-university president Harold Enarson. During the evening, OSU athletic director Hugh Hindman interrupted the proceedings to say that Bruce had a phone call.

"It was Woody," Bruce said. "I was struck by how upbeat he sounded. He said he was happy that I'd been chosen and he would be there for me whenever I needed support. To this day, I have no idea who called Woody to tell him I was at the president's house. I just know it was a gracious gesture and gave me a great feeling about coming to Ohio State."

Bruce made an immediate mark on the Ohio State program, leading the Buckeyes to the 1979 Big Ten championship and a berth in the 1980 Rose Bowl, earning national coach of the year honors from the American Football Coaches Association. He spent nine seasons as head coach of the Buckeyes, leading the team to an 81-26-1 record and four Big Ten titles before being fired the week before the Michigan game in 1987.

Stints at Northern Iowa and Colorado State followed before Bruce finished his college coaching career with a 154-90-2 record. He later spent five seasons in the Arena Football League with several different teams before finally giving up coaching for good in 2004.

The list of those who played and/or coached for Bruce during his illustrious career reads like a who's who of football. Mike Tomczak, Cris Carter, Keith Byars, Chris Spielman and Jim Lachey are considered some of the finest players in Ohio State history at their respective positions, while Bruce's coaching tree includes Meyer, Tressel, Alabama head coach Nick Saban and Michigan State head coach Mark Dantonio as well as Seattle Seahawks head coach Pete Carroll. In fact, 11 of the last 16 college football national championships have been won by teams with a former Bruce assistant at the helm.

In addition to his coaching career, Bruce spent more than 20 years as an Ohio State football analyst for WTVN Radio in Columbus, something that introduced the coach's passion and affection for his alma mater to a whole new generation of fans.

In 2000, Bruce was inducted into the Iowa State Athletics Hall of Fame and followed that honor in 2003 with induction into the College Football Hall of Fame. A year later, he was inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame.

His final public appearance at Ohio Stadium came Oct. 1, 2016, when he was honored by the Ohio State marching band as one of only a handful of non-band members to dot the "I" in Script Ohio. During halftime of an eventual 58-0 win against Rutgers, the coach again donned a dark-colored suit, walked out on the Ohio Stadium turf one

more time, and doffed his trademark fedora to a crowd that responded with a thunderous standing ovation.

The coach received a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease last August but still made an appearance at his annual Beat Michigan Tailgate Party in November, looking determined to meet his newest adversary with every bit of the grit and determination he leveled against any opponent.

He celebrated his 87th birthday March 8 with a visit to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center to watch a spring practice session then returned to his home in Dublin, Ohio, where he passed away early in the morning of April 20.

Current OSU running backs coach Tony Alford, who played for Bruce at Colorado State, echoed many others when he said, with the exception of his father, no other person had more influence on his life than Bruce.

"He changed the culture of Colorado State football in just two years," Alford said. "He took a bunch of underachievers and forced us to believe in ourselves and each other. He had this way about him that you not only heard

what he said, but you also listened to what he said. I think that's important."

Alford crossed paths with Bruce several times after both left Colorado State, including in 2015 when the Akron native had been contacted by Meyer and offered the running backs position at Ohio State. After six years at Notre Dame, Alford didn't know if he wanted to make a change – that is, until his phone rang on a Friday afternoon.

"It was Coach Bruce," Alford said with a smile. "He asked if I had been offered the job, and when I said that I had, he asked, 'Well?' I told him I hadn't made a decision, and that's when he said, 'Stop thinking, son. You know what to do. It's time to come home. I'll see you on Monday.' And then he hung up."

"I looked at my wife and said, 'Call the realtor.' That's how big an influence Coach Bruce was in my life."

Longtime Ohio State football historian Jack Park said the coach's passing marks the end of an era that many consider the program's golden age.

"In a lot of ways, Coach Bruce represented one of the last links to Woody Hayes," Park

told BSB. "Down through the years, there have been many players and coaches who have been important to the Ohio State football program, but in my opinion, Coach Hayes is one of, if not the most important."

"But when Coach Hayes was fired after the 1978 season, Ohio State football was at a crossroads. Replacing an icon the likes of Woody Hayes, who had been the head coach for 28 years, was going to be difficult enough. But when you add the circumstances under which Coach Hayes was to be replaced ... well, I think the university needed a unique man to fill that void, and in my opinion, Coach Bruce was the perfect choice."

Perhaps former OSU All-America lineman Jim Lachey, who played for Bruce and later coached with him in the arena league, put it best when he said, "No matter what happened along the way, Coach Bruce always represented Ohio State with so much humility and so much dignity. He was just a class act."

"If Coach Bruce has a legacy, that's it. He was a class act all the way."



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EARLE BRUCE: 1931-2018

Bruce's Passion Carried Over To All Aspects Of Life

By RYAN McGLADE
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Cloud cover above the Ohio State campus on April 25 cast a gloomy backdrop as people gathered at St. John Arena that morning to celebrate the life of former OSU football head coach Earle Bruce, who died April 20 after an extended battle with Alzheimer's.

Upon entering the venerable hall, however, videos of Bruce being played on the scoreboard depicting his unyielding passion for Ohio State football offered a moment of joy for those in attendance.

Longtime Columbus WBNS 10-TV sports director Dom Tiberi emceed the ceremony, which lasted about an hour. Former Ohio State cornerback William White, who was a 1987 team captain and All-Big Ten Conference selection for Bruce, delivered the invocation.

From there, former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, current Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford, sports director of Columbus radio stations 610 WTVN and 105.7 The Zone Matt McCoy, current OSU wide receivers coach Zach Smith, who is Bruce's grandson, and current Buckeye head coach Urban Meyer each took a few minutes to share their memories of Bruce.

Tressel opened his speech by pointing out that Bruce had love affairs throughout his life, starting with OSU when he was a player and student assistant for Woody Hayes in the early 1950s, to his wife, Jean, and his family, to his career as a high school football head coach, to his time as a college football head coach at Tampa, Iowa State, Ohio State, Northern Iowa and Colorado State, circling back to his affinity for the Buckeyes once he retired from coaching.

"With Coach Bruce, love affairs never end, that's just the way it is," Tressel said.

Tressel was the head coach at Ohio State from 2001-10. He was an assistant on Bruce's staff at OSU from 1983-85. But in Tressel's mind, he said he was always an assistant for Bruce, who had a resounding presence around the Ohio State campus once he retired from coaching in 1995.



TIM MOODY

REMEMBERING A MENTOR – Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, who coached under Earle Bruce at Ohio State and Colorado State, was the final speaker at a memorial held for Bruce at St. John Arena on April 25.

"Somebody asked me earlier in the week, 'How many years did you coach for Coach Bruce?' " Tressel said. "I said, 'Thirteen.' They said, 'You were an assistant coach for 13 years for Coach Bruce?' I said, 'No, I was an assistant coach for three years, but I was the head coach here for 10 years. But he was in the building, so really, I was an assistant

coach for Earle for 10 more years.' That's just the reality of the situation."

Alford, who was a running back at Colorado State from 1987-90, played for Bruce as a junior and senior in college. It just so happened that Meyer was an assistant on Bruce's staff at Colorado State in 1990, Alford's senior year.

Roughly 25 years later, Meyer interviewed Alford and eventually offered him the running backs coach position at Ohio State prior to the 2015 season. Alford said Bruce called him and told him to take the offer.

After Alford accepted the job, he said Bruce took him out to dinner to celebrate.



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EARLE BRUCE: 1931-2018

When they arrived at the restaurant, Alford said everyone inside stopped what they were doing to meet Bruce and take pictures with the former Buckeye coach, gestures that struck a chord with Alford.

"I'm 46 years old and I had never looked (Bruce) in his eyes and told him how much he meant to me," Alford said. "So, I promptly told him how much I admired him, how much I trusted him, how much faith I had in him, and I thanked him for being the influence that he was on my life. I looked him in the eye and I told him I loved him.

"What I would ask all of you to do – I took too long – if there is anybody in your lives who has influenced you, has helped you, has guided you, let them know. Thank them, thank them as often as you can."

McCoy then took the stage and shed light on Bruce's time in the media. McCoy worked 23 years alongside Bruce at 610 WTVN doing pre- and postgame shows for Ohio State football, as well as other responsibilities.

McCoy recalled one particular instance when he and Bruce were in the studio together watching Ohio State play Notre Dame in the 2016 Fiesta Bowl. The Buckeyes received the kickoff to begin the second half leading 28-14, largely due to Ezekiel Elliott, who finished the game with 149 yards rushing and four touchdowns, three of which came in the first half.

Ohio State's drive at the start of the second half featured nine plays – five rushes and four passes. Despite the play-calling slightly favoring the ground game, McCoy said Bruce was not pleased.

"Whenever (Ohio State) would throw, even completed passes, Earle would say,

'Run the ball. They can't tackle Zeke,' " McCoy said. "As fate would have it, this particular drive ended with an interception, and Earle lost it. He stood up, shouted at the TV, 'What are you doing?!"

"Before I knew it, Earle had his phone out and was scrolling down his contact list. He looked at me and said, 'I'm calling Urban.' I told him, 'Coach, two things: One, I'm pretty sure he doesn't have his phone with him right now and two, even if he does, he's a little busy and I'm pretty sure he's not going to answer.' Earle looked at me and said, 'He'll answer if it's from me.' "

McCoy's speech dovetailed into Smith's. The oldest of Bruce's 12 grandchildren, Smith said Bruce grandfathered like he coached.

"He loved his players, he loved his coaches who coached for him just like he loved his daughters (Lynn, Michele, Aimee and Noel) and loved his grandchildren," Smith said. "It was the same to him, believe me, I can tell you. Being a teenage grandson of his and not renewing your license plates, he reacted about how I would imagine he reacted when, Tony, you fumbled (at Colorado State). It was the same man – passionate with energy."

After Smith shared a few memories about his grandfather, the memorial then shifted to what was termed, "The Fourth Quarter," signaling the last portion of the proceedings. To open the final act, the marching band played "Hang on Sloopy," the song that is played at the beginning of fourth quarters of Ohio State football games.

After "Hang On Sloopy," Meyer opened his speech by saying, "Heaven just got a little more intense."

Meyer was a graduate assistant for Bruce

at Ohio State in 1987, Bruce's last season as the Buckeyes' head coach. As previously alluded to, Meyer also was the wide receivers coach at Colorado State while Bruce was there.

Meyer eventually became a head coach, and his last stop before Ohio State was at Florida. He led the Gators to a match-up against Arkansas in the 2006 SEC Championship Game, what Meyer called the first big game of his career as a college football head coach.

Reflecting on that contest against the Razorbacks, Meyer remembered sending his players to their hotel rooms after they finished their pregame meal to get ready to go to the stadium. What Meyer didn't know was that Bruce was in the room where the team ate.

"As the players leave, I sit down, I feel a nudge, I look over and say, 'Oh, hey, Coach,'" Meyer said, referring to Bruce. "He said, 'How are you doing?' I said, 'I'm not doing very good, not very good at all.'"

"By then, the servers are picking up the dishes, probably 25 around us picking up the dishes. And here's this older coach basically verbally assaulting and attacking a coach. He stands up and starts pounding me with the famous finger. He pounds me in my chest and starts screaming at me in front of these young ladies to the point where they went and got security. They didn't know who this guy was.

"He says, 'You've gotten your team to this point because you've let them play and you let the MF'er go.' Now he's at the top of his lungs. He starts pounding on my chest, 'Let the MF'er go.' He just kept screaming at me. So like any coach who worked for Earle Bruce, I grabbed my

pen, I write on my game-plan sheet right at the bottom, 'Let the MF'er go,' in big, bold letters."

Meyer then transitioned the anecdote to the game. Florida took a 17-7 lead into halftime. While in the locker room, Meyer said the team found out that USC had just lost to UCLA. That result meant the Gators would be in the national championship game if they beat Arkansas.

"The team feels it, and I did not do a great job of calming the team down," Meyer said. "Sure enough, we went out and we played like we were playing for the national championship. Turnover, touchdown Arkansas. Turnover, touchdown Arkansas. Next thing you know it's 21-17 and we're losing."

Following Arkansas' go-ahead score, Florida managed to return the ensuing kickoff only to its own 8-yard line. The Gators were unable to move the ball on three plays and faced a fourth-and-10.

"What do I do?" Meyer said. "Like any coach, I grab my folder, I stare at the game plan, and what do I see? 'Let the MF'er go.' So I called a fake punt on fourth-and-10 from my own 8-yard line. Obviously, I'm telling you this story because I'm not sure I would have survived down in Florida if that would have not happened. We got a first down and the game changed. I can speak on many here today that Coach Bruce has influenced many former players and coaches with decisions such as that."

Florida went on to beat Arkansas, 38-28, and shellac Tressel's Buckeyes in the national title game, 41-14.

The service observing Bruce's life concluded in fitting fashion, with the playing of Ohio State's alma mater, "Carmen Ohio."

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EARLE BRUCE: 1931-2018

Remembering Earle Bruce

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer: "Buckeye Nation lost one of its own. Thoughts and prayers to the Bruce family. My mentor and friend, thank you for all you did for the Ohio State University, and all those players and coaches whose lives you made a difference in."

Former Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel (2001-10): "He was just so loyal to his family and coaches, his players, Ohio State, the game of football and his colleagues in the media when he became a part of that family. You just knew he was there for you. You would get a phone call from him when you needed it. He just had a sense of when someone that he loved needed a shout-out. There are memories for all of us. We all have different memories, different times, different impacts, but you always knew he was there for you."

Ohio State wide receivers coach Zach Smith, Bruce's grandson: "RIP to one of the finest men I've ever met. The impact he had on those he loved, cared about, coached and mentored has left a legacy that will pay forward for generations. No greater example than the impact he's had on me. He will be missed, but his presence here lives on."

Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford, former Colorado State running back (1987-90) under Bruce: "He was much more than a coach. He was a father figure, mentor and, most importantly, a leader of young men. He will be missed."

Michigan State head coach Mark

Dantonio, former Ohio State graduate assistant under Bruce (1983-84) and defensive coordinator under Tressel (2001-03): "RIP to one of college football's finest coaches and mentors. Will never forget his wisdom, humor and grit."

Texas head coach Tom Herman, former Ohio State offensive coordinator (2012-14): "My heart goes out to the Bruce family. It was a joy and a privilege to be around Coach Bruce and his wisdom for three years. He will be missed."

Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh, who played quarterback for the Wolverines while Bruce was coaching Ohio State: "The U of M football program and Harbaugh family send our prayers and condolences to the Earle Bruce family on the passing of a football icon. Simply said, Coach Bruce was a respected husband, father, friend and football coach."

Former Ohio State assistant Glen Mason (1978-85): "Earle was very demanding. You better pack your lunch when you go to work every day. It was always a constant push to get better. But you knew his heart was always in the right place. You knew it was about having the well-beings of the players and coaches, first and foremost, in mind. The way he went about it with his work ethic, his integrity and his passion for the game of football and his love for Ohio State was second to none."

Former Ohio State defensive lineman Matt Finkes (1991-94): "One of the best to ever

roam the sidelines. Great coach and better man. Will miss you and your stories, Coach."

Former Ohio State fullback Vaughn Broadnax (1980-83): "My freshman year was real tough for me. Both my parents were hospitalized throughout the season and that year, and then my father passed away that Thursday before my spring game. I kept a lot of it in throughout the year. It affected my grades, it affected my practice but I actually played in the spring game. It was that following Monday that we had my father's funeral, and Earle Bruce showed up with the captains - Doug Donley, Art Schlichter and those guys. That meant the world to me. Some of the things he did trying to be that surrogate father will always, always stand out in my mind."

Former Ohio State quarterback Mike Tomczak (1981-84): "Sad to share the passing of Earle Bruce. One of my favorites! I'll miss our talks, Earle."

Former Ohio State wide receiver Dee Miller (1995-98): "Rest in heaven, Coach Bruce, it was an absolute honor to work with you for two years at 610 (WTVN). Those times were some of my most memorable Buckeye memories. Don't think you knew how much that meant to a young kid from the south side of Springfield, Ohio."

Former Ohio State linebacker Joshua Perry (2012-15): "Rest in heaven, Coach Earle Bruce!"

Northern Iowa head coach Mark Farley: "Our thoughts and prayers for the family of Earle Bruce. Once a Panther always a Panther."



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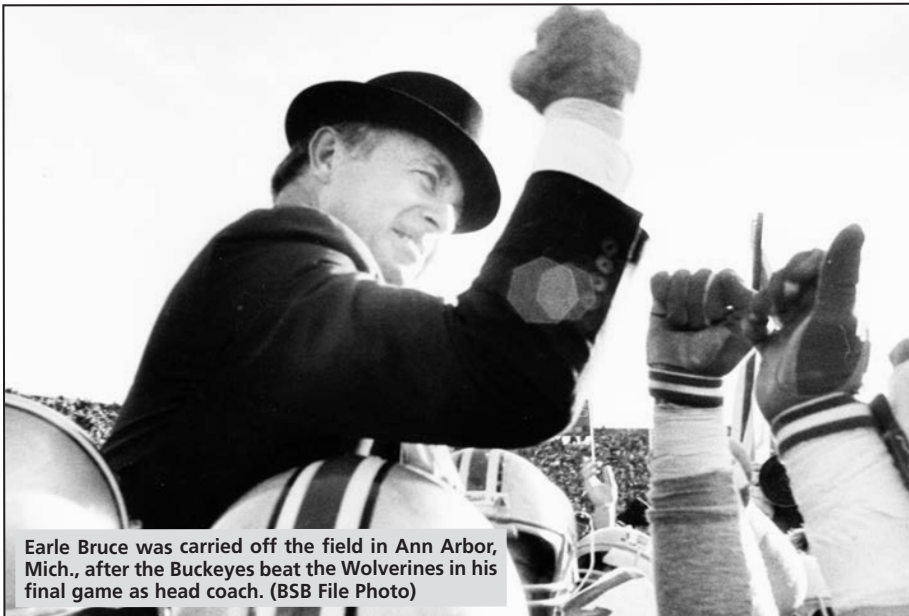
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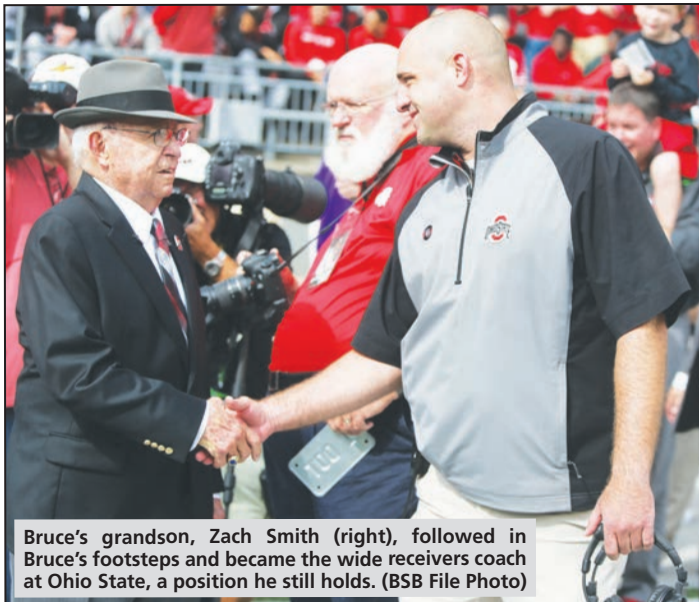
Earle Bruce was carried off the field in Ann Arbor, Mich., after the Buckeyes beat the Wolverines in his final game as head coach. (BSB File Photo)



Bruce was a constant presence at OSU after his coaching career concluded. (BSB File Photo)



Bruce coached the Buckeyes to 81 victories during his Hall of Fame career in Columbus. (BSB File Photo)



Bruce's grandson, Zach Smith (right), followed in Bruce's footsteps and became the wide receivers coach at Ohio State, a position he still holds. (BSB File Photo)



Bruce concluded his Ohio State career with a 5-4 record in The Game. (BSB File Photo)

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Spring Practice Sheds Light On OSU's Lineup

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Entering spring practice, Ohio State had 11 starters back from its 2017 squad, with the same number of spots left to fill. Injuries played a role in a few position battles staying open this spring, while there were some that neared an end as well. Overall, the Buckeyes got a good look at where the roster stands heading into summer workouts.

With spring camp over, the coaches won't see the players in pads until the fall, but they'll be going in with an idea of how things should shake out. What follows is a position-by-position breakdown of where things stand for the Buckeyes after spring practice, starting with the offense.

Offensive Line

As is the case with any football team, offensive line will be key for the Buckeyes in 2018. Along with finding a quarterback, replacing Billy Price at center might have been at the top of head coach Urban Meyer's to-do list.

To that point, mission accomplished – sort of.

After the spring game, Meyer named Brady Taylor, a fifth-year senior, the starting center heading into the summer. A couple of days later, position coach Greg Studrawa stressed that there will still be plenty of competition in the fall.

"That battle is continuous," Studrawa said. "Both those guys are playing well."

The other man in the competition is redshirt freshman Josh Myers, who came on strong toward the end of camp to make sure he will still have a shot in the fall. For the time being, though, it's Taylor's position to lose.

In addition to losing Price, the Buckeyes also have to replace left tackle Jamarco Jones, who was a two-year starter. Ohio State knows its two starting tackles – senior Isaiah Prince and sophomore Thayer Munford – but which side of the line they end up on is still in the air, although Munford is more likely to play on the left with Prince retaining his spot on the right.

At guard, junior Michael Jordan will slot back into the left side of the line once he returns from an offseason shoulder injury, while fifth-year senior Demetrius Knox and junior Branden Bowen, who each started for parts of 2017 (Bowen broke his leg against Maryland), will fight to be the right guard. Junior tackle Joshua Alabi, fifth-year senior guard Malcolm Pridgeon and freshman tackle Max Gray could all factor into the two-deep as well.

Quarterback

The quarterback battle has been written about ad nauseam this spring, and quite simply nothing has changed since BSB last went to press, meaning this update will be brief.

If nothing else, the spring game showed that Ohio State is down to two real options to replace J.T. Barrett – it will either be junior Joe Burrow or sophomore Dwayne Haskins, with special packages built into the offense for redshirt freshman Tate Martell.

That said, there's still a good chance a resolution will come sooner than later – after the coaches break down and analyze all the available data – allowing the loser of the battle to consider his options going forward.

"We said we weren't going to focus on



JOSH WINSLOW

INTO THE LINEUP – Fifth-year senior center Brady Taylor was named the starter for Ohio State after spring practice, but he'll have to hold off redshirt freshman Josh Myers in the fall.

anything other than getting better," said offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Ryan Day. "At the end, we were going to take all the film, all the grades, pile it on and go from there."

Running Back

Perhaps more so than any other position on the team, Ohio State is set at running back. The two-headed monster of sophomore J.K. Dobbins and junior Mike Weber hardly played in the spring game, but they hardly needed to. Both are already 1,000-yard rushers, and both will be expected to carry heavy loads in 2018.

Instead, the focus this spring was on staying healthy and developing depth, and both goals were accomplished – although the depth took a hit when junior Antonio Williams announced his plans to transfer to North Carolina.

At the end of spring, the Buckeyes had freshman Master Teague third on the depth chart after he ran for 73 yards and a touchdown on 14 carries in the spring game, and

the depth will only be boosted this summer with the addition of another four-star prospect in Brian Speed.

Tight End

Ohio State entered the spring with a big question mark at tight end, and the Buckeyes were able to erase that – to some extent – with the emergence of sophomore Luke Farrell, who made an early cameo in the spring game with one catch for 15 yards. After the game, Meyer named Farrell the starter but, like Taylor at center, he'll have to continue competing going forward.

Behind Farrell is junior Rashod Berry, who was limited at the end of camp and missed the spring game by way of injury. Farrell had already passed Berry, though, and the junior will have to hold off sophomore Jake Hausmann and freshman Jeremy Ruckert in the summer and fall as well.

"Luke has separated himself as our best performer," said offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson. "Rashod

had a minor injury that's not going to hold him back, but it limited him the last week of practice. He's a little bit more athletic. Jake Hausmann came along, and then with Ruckert, I think we're going to need all four."

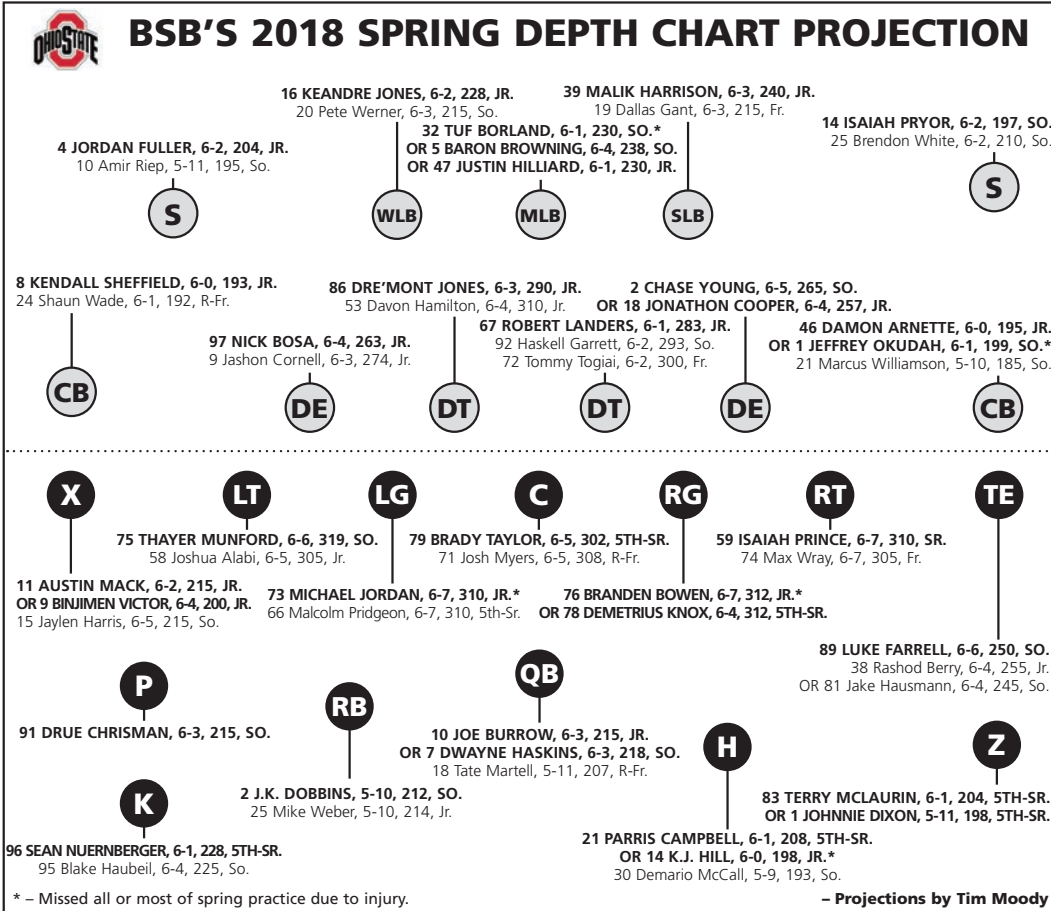
Wide Receiver

Similar to running back, the Buckeyes lost very little at wide receiver and have a ton of experience coming back. Ohio State employed a six-man rotation last year, and all six players will be back in 2018.

On the outside, fifth-year seniors Terry McLaurin and Johnnie Dixon and juniors Austin Mack and Binjimen Victor are known commodities while H-backs Parris Campbell and K.J. Hill were the team's top two receivers last year.

If anything, the main changes at wide receiver will come by way of additions to the rotation rather than subtractions. On the outside, sophomore Jaylen Harris acquitted himself well, showcasing his talents in the spring game with three catches for 39 yards and a score. Sophomore H-back Demario

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL



McCall was the star that day with 11 receptions for 165 yards and two touchdowns.

Harris and McCall should both be factors, in addition to the other six, in an improved passing attack for the Buckeyes in 2018.

Cornerback

Ohio State has employed a three-man cornerback rotation in recent seasons, leading to astounding success overall. That's the plan again in 2018 with two of the three - juniors Damon Arnette and Kendall Sheffield - back and a new cornerbacks coach, Taver Johnson, in the fold.

"Those guys have done a very good job with that first group," Johnson said after spring camp in regard to Arnette and Sheffield, who also ran track for the Buckeyes this spring. "We talked about it earlier with their game experience and things like that in the spring that both of those guys have had, they have done a tremendous job and they have gotten better in the 15 practices that we have had."

After the spring game, Meyer noted that sophomore Jeffrey Okudah, who missed all of spring camp after undergoing offseason shoulder surgery, will be the third man in the rotation.

After the top trio, young players such as sophomore Marcus Williamson, redshirt freshman Shaun Wade and early enrollees Sevyn Banks and Tyreke Johnson give Ohio State an astounding amount of depth and talent at cornerback.

In the spring game, Williamson was all over the field, finishing with a tackle and a pass breakup, while Banks made two stops of his own. Johnson had two tackles, one for a loss, and Wade had the game's

only interception with an impressive diving effort.

"Competition within the room is always good, and that is what we have," Taver Johnson said.

Defensive Line

Ohio State had an unusual situation at defensive line this spring.

The Buckeyes lost starters in Tyquan Lewis, Sam Hubbard, Jalyn Holmes and Tracy Sprinkle, but it seems like they have as much depth as ever regardless of those departures. At defensive end, Nick Bosa - the 2017 Big Ten Defensive Lineman of the Year - is back, and he'll be joined in the rotation by sophomore Chase Young and junior Jonathon Cooper, both of whom are expected to have breakout seasons in 2018. Junior Jashon Cornell also made the switch from defensive tackle to provide Ohio State with another talented edge rusher.

On the inside, starter Dre'Mont Jones opted to return, and he'll be playing with a talented and deep group that includes players such as juniors Robert Landers and Davon Hamilton, sophomores Haskell Garrett and Antwan Jackson and early enrollee Tommy Togatj, who was the only one of Ohio State's freshmen to lose his black helmet stripe this spring.

Top to bottom, the depth is there and the talent is there. The only thing lacking might be experience. But with Bosa and Jones leading the way, defensive line coach Larry Johnson will expect big things from his group once again.

The line was hit with some injury concerns this spring, though, as Garrett suffered a concussion and sophomore Malik Barrow is still recovering from a torn ACL from last season.

Linebacker

In 2017, linebacker was a weak point for Ohio State, and with two starters off to the NFL, it was a concern heading into spring practice. Fifteen practices later, though, and Meyer was raving about the linebackers, with a handful of young players stepping up to develop depth.

Early in the spring, the position group took a hit when starting middle linebacker Tuf Borland suffered an Achilles injury that is expected to keep him out until September. With Borland out, junior Justin Hilliard and sophomore Baron Browning stepped up, with Browning turning heads in the spring game with four tackles.



Nick Bosa

Those two, along with Borland, are all likely to find their way onto the field in some capacity next year. Borland's health could also impact Browning's position, as he could slide into a starting role on the outside once Borland is healthy.

In those outside spots this spring were mainly junior Keandre Jones and sophomore Pete Werner at Will with junior Malik Harrison and freshman Dallas Gant working at Sam. All four took a step forward in spring practice, and Gant was one of the surprises of the spring, culminating with a spring game performance that included five tackles and a forced fumble.

Along with Borland being out for most of spring camp, fifth-year senior Dante Booker missed the entire practice slate after undergoing two offseason shoulder surgeries. His health will be a big question mark going forward, but Booker has starting experience and would provide valuable depth once he's back on the field.

Going into the summer, the fights for all three spots are fairly open, with Jones, Browning and Harrison having a slight edge.

Safety

Ohio State knows one thing for sure - junior Jordan Fuller will be the starting boundary safety. The field safety spot, though, is still a concern, with sophomores Amir Riep, Isaiah Pryor, Brendon White and Jansen Wint all in the mix.

"There are guys putting in the work," co-defensive coordinator and safeties coach Alex Grinch said. "There are good days and there are some bad days and there are great reps and reps as a coach you wish you had back. I think as much as anything, you just leave spring football without circling one single name. So we'll go into fall camp as a great competition."

With the battle seemingly wide open, Pryor and Wint stood out in the spring game with four and 11 tackles, respectively leading the Scarlet and Gray squads. Riep had five stops and a pass breakup while White assisted on one tackle for the Scarlet squad.

Early in practice, it seemed that Pryor had the edge to start, and he would be the betting favorite going into fall camp, but all four will have a chance to prove themselves before the season begins on Sept. 1.

Special Teams

Special teams shouldn't be too much of a headache for Meyer in 2018. Sophomore Drue Chrisman is back at punter after a stellar debut season while fifth-year senior Sean Nuernberger is one of the most experienced kickers in the nation. Long snapper Liam McCullough, a junior, has seemingly never put a foot wrong as a Buckeye, and sophomore Blake Haubeil is expected to handle kickoffs once again.

In the return game, the Buckeyes have struggled in recent seasons, but McCall is set to take over on both punts and kickoffs, providing a dynamic threat that has been lacking in the past.

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OSU's Summer Arrivals Could Make Early Impact

By **TIM MOODY**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

On the first Wednesday in February, Ohio State received national letters of intent from the last few prospects in a 26-man 2018 recruiting class. By that time, nine of the signees were already on campus as early enrollees – see page 18 for an update on them – with another 17 blue-chip prospects set to arrive in Columbus in June.

As is the case every season, there will be some prospects who don't see the field while taking a redshirt year. Others will find their way into the lineup in late-game blowouts with nothing on the line, and others will carve out an important role on special teams or in situational packages on offense or defense.

Then there are those who will truly have a shot to make a big impact – maybe even start – as first-year players for head coach Urban Meyer. With spring practice in the books, BSB takes a look ahead at three summer arrivals who could be impact players right away in positions of need for the Buckeyes.

Teradja Mitchell

Position: Linebacker
Height, Weight: 6-2, 232
High School: Virginia Beach (Va.) Bishop Sullivan Catholic

On paper, it might not seem like Mitchell has much of a shot at early playing time. He'll be a middle linebacker for Ohio State, and that position is already occupied by such players as sophomores Tuf Borland and Baron Browning, as well as junior Justin Hilliard.

Here's the thing – Borland is out until at least September with an Achilles injury while Browning could easily slide back to an outside spot if another player emerges in the middle. Hilliard is fully healthy

and is ready to contribute, but Ohio State has shown a willingness to rotate at middle linebacker in the past – think 2014 when freshman Raekwon McMillan rotated throughout the year with senior captain Curtis Grant. The Buckeyes won the national title that season.

So, not only is there a potential need for another body at middle linebacker, but Mitchell is simply that good as a player.

Throughout the spring, Ohio State linebackers coach Billy Davis has touted Mitchell – along with fellow June arrival K'Vaughan Pope and early enrollee Dallas Gant – as highly-talented prospects. Mitchell, though, stands out above the rest and has the best chance to play as a middle linebacker – the Buckeyes have even more depth and talent at the outside spots.

"They (Mitchell and Pope) were up here for the spring game, and I had a great time with them," Davis said after spring practice wrapped up. "They're so excited and they're

working hard to be ready. What happens when you have Dallas Gant who's their same age already here, they're champing at the bit at their high school and saying I've got to keep up with Dallas and everything he's getting done. I'm really excited about these young guys that are coming in. I hope and expect them to contribute."

Because prospects such as Mitchell have signed, the rules regarding contact change as well. Instead of being a recruit, Davis is now a coach, even if Mitchell hasn't arrived in the Buckeye State just yet.

In order for them to keep up with early enrollees like Gant, the coaches give prospects like Mitchell an offseason plan with goals to hit so that when they do arrive, they're ready to dive in.

"We always have a plan on their weights

and their conditioning and what their bodies are shaping into," Davis said. "We talk to them about the scheme and where we see them. They're in contact with our players who are currently here, so some of them are helping them. It's a good mix. We have a great plan here. We always have a real solid plan in place so kids are ready to go and not behind in any way."

Josh Proctor

Position: Safety
Height, Weight: 6-2, 190
High School: Owasso, Okla.

For much of his recruitment, Proctor expected to arrive in Columbus with Greg Schiano as his position coach. Now Schiano is simply the defensive coordinator, giving him more flexibility to move around and work with the entire lineup, rather than focusing on safeties.

Replacing Schiano as safeties coach is co-defensive coordinator Alex Grinch, who is in his first year with the Buckeyes after leaving Washington State. Grinch will be Proctor's position coach when he arrives, along with fellow safety signee Marcus Hooker, this summer.

While nothing is set in stone just yet as far as a role goes for Proctor – or Hooker, for that matter – Grinch is hoping for big things.

"You never know until you get them here," Grinch said. "We saw them perform at a high level as high school players, but high school's high school and the Big Ten's the Big Ten. So you don't know."

"But from all the years of doing it, you're hopeful that the things you saw that initially attracted you to offer them a scholarship, you feel when you're around those two guys, you think there's a possibility."

Perhaps more than any other reason, Proctor has a chance to make an immediate impact because there's an immediate need at his position. Jordan Fuller is the Buckeyes' starting boundary safety, but the field safety spot is still wide open after the staff failed to pinpoint a starter this spring.

That means when Proctor arrives in June, he'll have a chance to immediately impress with his work ethic in summer workouts. After that, he'll have fall training camp to prove himself on the field, and the coaches will give him a legitimate chance to win the starting job.

Jeremy Ruckert

Position: Tight End
Height, Weight: 6-5, 238
High School: Lindenhurst, N.Y.

After the spring game, Meyer announced that sophomore Luke Farrell had won the starting tight end spot in camp – but he simultaneously noted that nothing is set in

stone going forward. Part of the reason the coaching staff doesn't want to firmly give Farrell that starting spot for the season is because competition often brings out the best, but another reason is that Ruckert hasn't landed in Columbus just yet.

He's the top tight end recruit Meyer has signed at Ohio State, and he's arguably the best pass-catcher the Buckeyes have signed in that time period overall. When he arrives in offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson's position room, Ruckert will immediately challenge for a role – maybe even a starting role – by showcasing his ability as a receiver.

The thing is, Ruckert's skill as a receiver is far ahead of his ability as a blocker, and a tight end in Ohio State's offense has to be a complete player. His ability to pick up that aspect of the game will determine his role for 2018.

"It will be interesting because he's very talented, but very much so in a skill setting as a big receiver and great in the passing game," Wilson said of Ruckert.

Wilson also noted that he's being careful with Ruckert, though, to make sure he doesn't overdo it trying to get his body ready for the rigors of a Big Ten slate.

"He has a body that I don't want him to try to work so hard on getting strong because he's kind of a long guy, that I don't want to have a high school young kid with a bad back," Wilson said. "So I want him to get stronger, but I want him to be smart."

"It's a developmental position, so for him to really play significantly, how strong is he in the blocking game? And how does he hold up, because he's going to have to block defensive ends. We'll get phenomenal opportunity in practice with who he matches up against to see where he stands."

Regardless of where he ends up as a blocker as a freshman, Ruckert's skill will get him on the field. Even if he doesn't start, it wouldn't be out of the question to see Ruckert with the best receiving numbers out of the tight ends as a freshman this fall.



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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Early Enrollees Make Strides In Spring Practice

By RYAN McGLADE
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Keeping in line with essentially every recruiting class Urban Meyer has constructed since becoming Ohio State's head coach after the 2011 season, the Buckeyes signed one of the best hauls yet again in 2018.

The Scarlet and Gray landed the No. 2 class in the nation, behind only Georgia, according to the 247Sports composite rankings. Of the 21 recruits Ohio State signed, nine of them arrived on campus in time to participate in spring practice, getting a head start on their development.

With eight of those nine players being able to begin their college careers a semester sooner – defensive tackle Antwan Jackson is a JUCO transfer – Meyer said he saw this group make the most of that privilege.

"I see guys that are all going to be swinging for an opportunity, and they're talented enough to play," Meyer said of the early enrollees March 26.

Now that the early enrollees have a full slate of 15 spring practices under their belts, BSB decided to take a look back at how the nine early enrollees have fared. What follows is a player-by-player breakdown of the 2018 recruits already on campus, listed in alphabetical order.

Matthew Baldwin, QB

Baldwin, a four-star quarterback from Austin (Texas) Lake Travis and Ohio State's lone signal caller in the 2018 class, never got a chance to show off his skills in spring practice. That is because he had surgery to repair a torn ACL he suffered as a high school senior in the state playoffs last fall.

"He's not going to play (this spring)," Meyer said of Baldwin after Ohio State's first spring practice on March 6. "He has an ACL, had surgery. He's doing a good job, gained a bunch of weight back. He's here. He was out there today. But they're very, very cautious with him."

Although no injury is ideal, the timing of Baldwin's isn't too detrimental. With Joe Burrow, Dwayne Haskins and Tate Martell currently ahead of him on the depth chart, Baldwin likely would have been a candidate to redshirt his first year on campus regardless.



SONNY BROCKWAY

Sevyn Banks, CB

As is the case for many early enrollees in

HORSESHOE DEBUT – Freshman running back Master Teague (33) carried the ball 14 times for 73 yards and a touchdown in the spring game.



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their first spring on a college campus, Banks had some ups and downs, said first-year cornerbacks coach Taver Johnson.

"Very talented young man," Johnson said of Banks. "It's just learning every single day how to go and when to go and things like that. He's willing, without a doubt, and he's excited to be here. Now it's just a matter of maturing. This is a tough place. It's a tough position. You have to be mature, and that's a daily process."

Banks saw a decent amount of playing time in the spring game. Despite having some tough moments, he was the victim of very good throws when passes were completed against him. The Florida native had four total tackles.

Ohio State signed six defensive backs to its 2017 class and already has a three-man rotation in place at corner for the 2018 season in Damon Arnette, Jeffrey Okudah and Kendall Sheffield. With that in mind, it may be difficult for Banks to crack the two-deep as a freshman this year.

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Ohio State's 2018 Early Enrollees

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Previous School
12	Matthew Baldwin	QB	6-3	200	Austin (Texas) Lake Travis
12	Sevyn Banks	CB	6-1	190	Orlando (Fla.) Jones
13	Tyreke Johnson	CB	6-1	190	Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian
19	Dallas Gant	LB	6-3	215	Toledo St. John's Jesuit
33	Master Teague	RB	5-11	215	Murfreesboro (Tenn.) Blackman
51	Antwuan Jackson*	DT	6-2	310	Brenham (Texas) Blinn College
54	Matthew Jones	OL	6-4	305	Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall
72	Tommy Togiai	DT	6-2	300	Pocatello (Idaho) Highland
74	Max Wray	OL	6-7	305	Franklin, Tenn.

* - Jackson is a JUCO transfer who is a sophomore in terms of eligibility.

Dallas Gant, LB

While Banks must continue to work on his maturity, OSU linebackers coach Bill Davis said Gant has mastered that aspect of his game.

"I think Dallas is such a mature young man," Davis said. "He really is mature. He's very businesslike and he did everything. He went about it right. Now, he made the freshman mistakes that you're going to make. Technically he should still be in high school. But he's such a mature young man and it means so much to him. He had a lot of growth, and he'll benefit from that down the road. We'll benefit from that down the road."

A product of Toledo St. John's Jesuit, Gant finished the spring game second on the Gray squad with five tackles and also forced a fumble. He is a member of a crowded linebackers room that features Dante Booker, who missed the spring with shoulder injuries, Baron Browning, Tuf Borland, who is out until sometime in September with an Achilles injury, Malik Harrison, Justin Hilliard, Keandre Jones and others.

Though the amount of playing time Gant will see at linebacker this fall is uncertain, Meyer said Gant will earn reps on special teams.

"He's probably going to play (this season)," Meyer said. "He's shown enough. I'm going to go to him ready to compete on special teams because he's one of those very mature players to come right in. He's not where he needs to be, but he doesn't have to be. He just needs to give us everything he's got, and he's been doing that. He's a very smart player too."

Antwuan Jackson, DT

Jackson arrived at Ohio State with a leg up on his fellow early enrollees. Jackson initially went to Auburn as a member of the 2016 recruiting class before transferring to Blinn College in Brenham, Texas, and eventually landing at Ohio State.

Foot surgery limited Jackson in spring practice as well as in the spring game, though. He played about 23 snaps in the scrimmage, defensive line coach Larry Johnson said.

"We tried to push him a little bit and get him going, knowing that he is not quite ready," Johnson said. "By the time we get into fall, he will be ready to roll."

Given that he has already been in the college ranks for two years, Jackson should be able to provide some support to the interior of Ohio State's defensive line once healthy.

Tyreke Johnson, CB

Johnson, a five-star recruit, was highly coveted coming out of Trinity Christian Academy in Jacksonville, Fla. As a prospect, he was known for his hands and coverage ability.

Being a cornerback in Ohio State's defense is a completely different animal, though. Taver Johnson said Tyreke Johnson, as well as Banks, struggled at times this spring with playing the aggressive man coverage OSU primarily employs.

"I thought they did a good job," Taver Johnson said of the two corners' progress this spring. "They were sponges. They just tried to take it all in. They went into survival mode a few times, just because it is so hard with what we do, but they are really, really eager to be really, really great. They understand those expectations and everything that we have to get done in our room. To have them here early was a big, big plus."

Considering the aforementioned depth at corner, it may be difficult for Johnson to earn playing time at that position in 2018. Similar to Gant, though, he could be a candidate to play on special teams in his first year as a Buckeye.

Matthew Jones, OL

Jones' spring was about as quiet as his recruitment. A product of Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall, which also produced former Ohio State H-back Curtis Samuel and current OSU safety Jahsen Wint, Jones gathered offers from such powerhouses as Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, Michigan, Ohio State and Penn State. The Buckeyes were always the top pick, though. After all, he first visited Columbus all the way back in eighth grade.

A center in high school, Jones appeared to be buried on the depth chart at that position for Ohio State at the outset of spring camp. He entered a competition that already featured Brady Taylor, who was named the starter heading into summer, Matt Burrell and Josh Myers. Burrell, however, announced April 18 that he was transferring out of Ohio State. Prior to Burrell announcing his departure, Haskins said everyone playing center made gains in the spring, including Jones.

"Brady Taylor was my center last year with the twos, and he's done a great job with everyone else behind him - Josh Myers and Matt (Burrell) and Matt Jones," Haskins said March 22. "They're all doing a great job. It's hard playing center because you're like the quarterback of the offensive line. You have to be able to call IDs and you have to be able to change protections and it's hard for them as well, but they've been great."

Master Teague, RB

Although Teague wasn't a highly-rated player early in his recruitment, he showed during spring ball why he ended up being slotted as the No. 228 overall prospect and the No. 11 running back in the 247Sports composite's final rankings for the 2018 cycle.

At 5-11 and 215 pounds, Teague already appears to have the physical traits to be a successful tailback at the collegiate level. As the only running back on the Scarlet roster for the spring game, Teague rushed 14 times for 73 yards and a touchdown.

With J.K. Dobbins and Mike Weber at the top of OSU's running backs depth chart and Antonio Williams announcing his transfer to North Carolina on April 23, Teague will be battling for the No. 3 spot with fellow 2018 running back signee Brian Snead, who will join the team in June.

Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford, however, said there are still many things Teague can improve.

"He did some good things," Alford said of Teague. "He's just got to learn how to finish plays and the terminology we use - 4 to 6, A to B - and strain to finish every single snap. I know he's been here a semester, but in all reality, he's played football for two weeks - 15 days with actual bullets flying. He's going to be OK. He's going to be fine. He had a good spring. I'm happy with where he is at. We've got to still keep going."

Tommy Togiai, DT

Togiai committed to Ohio State shortly before the early signing period of Dec. 20-22, causing Meyer and Larry Johnson to dance around hysterically in a video that went viral on social media.

Togiai's performance in the spring can serve as the explanation of why Meyer and Johnson celebrated so fervently. The defensive tackle from Idaho was the first member of Ohio State's 2018 recruiting class to have his black helmet stripe removed, indicating he is a full-fledged member of the team.

Togiai wrapped up perhaps the most

impressive spring of any early enrollee by recording two tackles in the spring game.

Despite knowing what kind of talent Togiai is, Larry Johnson said he was still impressed to see what the young defensive lineman showed in the spring.

"I saw his videotape and saw him practice and saw what he could do, and then he walked in here and he was everything you hoped to get out of the Cracker Jack box," Johnson said. "That prize you want to get? You have to make sure it's really cool, and it was really cool to see what he is all about. You saw emotion, you saw excitement, and I am tickled to death with where he is at."

Max Wray, OT

Not much was said about Wray during spring practice, but the offensive tackle acquitted himself well. Wray earned time as the backup right tackle with the second-team offense in the spring game.

The competition could get fiercer this summer, though, when Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep five-star signee Nicholas Petit-Frere enrolls and looks to make his presence felt.

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