

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 41, No. 19

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

April 2, 2022

National Champs!



BRILLIANT BREAKTHROUGH — Led by senior captain Liz Schepers (pictured with trophy) and a talented cast of transfers and veteran contributors, the Ohio State women's hockey program captured its first national title on March 20 with a 3-2 win over Minnesota Duluth that sixth-year head coach Nadine Muzerall described after the game as "brilliant."

PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

Muzerall Leads Women's Hockey To National Title

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For Ohio State women's hockey head coach Nadine Muzerall, the early evening of March 20, 2022, served as a culmination of more than five years of exhaustive work. Her Buckeyes had just closed out a 3-2 victory over Minnesota Duluth in the NCAA championship, deflecting a last-ditch shot to claim the program's first national title and Muzerall's first as a head coach in her sixth year at the helm in Columbus.

"That was a true national championship game. It was back and forth. I want to compliment (my team), they got on the board first which was unique among this post-season," Muzerall said, pausing to shoot a smirk at her players accompanying her on the podium. "And then credit to Duluth. They kept counterpunching and tying up the game, but we never quit.

"We looked brilliant today. Areas of the ice I thought we were a little weak on in previous weeks, we really tightened up — our neutral zone, our transition, our back pressure. We did a great job scoring on our

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Ohio State Hopes To Reap Rewards Of Youth Movement

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Spring is in full bloom, and Ohio State is celebrating the end of what proved to be an especially frigid winter — both in Columbus and within the halls of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center after the Buckeyes parted ways with four assistant coaches — by welcoming more than its fair share of familiar faces through those doors.

As the Buckeyes kick off Ryan Day's fourth year of spring practices (including the abbreviated 2020 spring) as Ohio State's head coach, a flurry of former players, coaches and program friends have made their way through.

National champion quarterback Cardale Jones teamed up with current incumbent C.J. Stroud to dole out passes on Ohio State's March 23 pro day to many of the Buckeye draft hopefuls, while

others showcased their ability to NFL personnel in attendance — including Tennessee Titans head coach Mike Vrabel, who still garners quite the reception in the building — on a 40-yard sideline track or under the bar on a bench press.

Jonathon Cooper (Denver Broncos), Jashon Cornell (Detroit Lions) and Jalyn Holmes (free agent, most recently of the New Orleans Saints) dropped in at the end of February to do some work with their old defensive line coach, Larry Johnson. Though it isn't affiliated with Ohio State, Jones, J.T. Barrett and their head coach, Urban Meyer, have made waves in Columbus by joining the board of "THE Foundation," an independent name, image and likeness collective (see Recruiting Outlook on page 20).

Ohio State is always happy to open its doors

to old friends, but as it began work on a critical spring practice session, the most important familiar faces to walk through those doors did so donning scarlet or white practice uniforms and silver helmets.

After a youth movement in 2021 — which yielded major ups and downs in an 11-2 campaign with a Rose Bowl victory but a loss to Michigan for the first time in a decade — Ohio State returns more than a dozen starters and another two dozen contributors, which has played a major role in establishing a sense of importance around these early practices.

"We do have a talented team and veteran players in certain spots, and I think all the stuff that we did last year with playing young players is going to

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**BSB'S 2022
SPRING
PREVIEW**



From The Message Board

With Ohio State football's spring practices under way, we asked readers on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff members, which player they are expecting to step up and make a significant impact in the 2022 season. Here are some of their responses:

"There is an enormous depth of quality players at all three levels on defense. The key this season will be finding players at those three levels who take a giant step forward and become standouts. They should dominate the Big Ten and a few of them should be All-American candidates.

"What will be disappointing will be if none of these players step up and stand out. They have great potential. They need to become elite talents. We've seen many of them exhibit average skill and ability. At Ohio State, they need to be NFL caliber. Someone needs to take charge

and be extraordinary.

"It seems like every season we have players that we expect to 'take that next step' and become dominant. Like Zeke Elliott, Chase Young, etc. Zach Harrison has had the burden put on him every year, only to fall short of expectations.

"Will we see a linebacker take that next step this season? The D-line is loaded with talent, but will 2-to 3 of those guys 'make headlines'?"

- Byron McNutt

"Great question. Zach Harrison, as always. He's not a player, but I

think Jim Knowles is on the spot too.

- Poster That Harley Built

"Agree, great question. Agree Zach Harrison, always. Taron Vincent is another? Without the roster in front of me, I am going to say several defensive backs whose names probably are 'on the spot.' Is Cameron Brown healthy enough to make a significant contribution? Evan Pryor might be another guy in a crowded room?

"For what it's worth, I don't think Knowles is on the spot or under much pressure unless the defense is no better than it was last season. Marginal defensive improvement will be sufficient for him."

- Terrier Buck

but he's fully healthy and should be able to show out. Given what we've heard/seen from him this spring, I'm inclined to think he balls out.

"Ballard, meanwhile, is only from the 2021 class but is continuing to fall down the depth chart. He's a former top-100 prospect who, if he doesn't leap, I could see getting passed by some of the new guys, not to mention Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka from his own class. It may seem weird to refer to an incoming sophomore as on the spot, but when he's being mentioned with Xavier Johnson and Sam Wiglusz instead of his 2021 classmates like he was recently, it's time for him to step up."

- Braden Moles, BSB

"I agree with Zach Harrison and the new starters on the offensive line, but a couple I hadn't seen is Kamryn Babb or Jayden Ballard. While they are just role players, I think this is their last chance to make an impact. I believe Babb's eligibility is gone after this season,

"Ohio State recruits high school athletes who you'd think would become professionally ready within a season or two, but that hasn't been the case recently. I think that speaks to development more than anything. Zach Harrison, Teradja Mitchell, Taron Vincent - those are five-star guys that haven't panned out as Buckeyes. Why is that a more common trend these days? Honestly, I could think of several players on the spot this year. It feels like many of these highly rated guys underperform year in and year out.

"Does anyone think C.J. Stroud is on the spot this season in his own unique way? He was All-Big Ten everything last season and a contender for the Heisman Trophy. He's drawing high praise from NFL scouts after throwing to Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson at Ohio State's pro day. How can he take another step forward to become a better quarterback this season?"

- Chase Brown, BSB

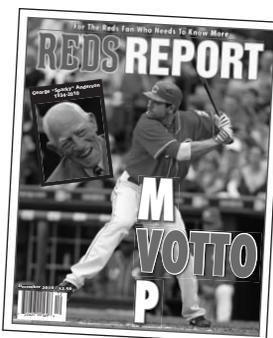
"With sweeping changes to the defensive coaching staff, maybe we will learn if the lack of development was a coaching issue or poor evaluation in recruiting."

- Mcarr

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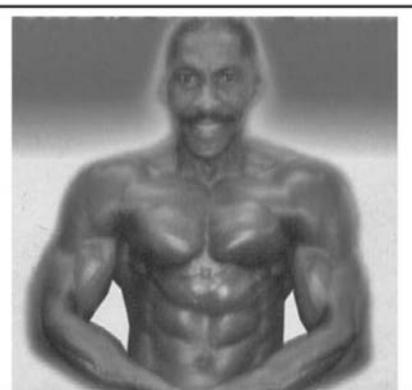
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No. 1	Sept. 11	No. 13	Dec. 18
No. 2	Sept. 18	No. 14	Jan. 15
No. 3	Sept. 25	No. 15	Jan. 29
No. 4	Oct. 2	No. 16	Feb. 12
No. 5	Oct. 9	No. 17	March 5
No. 6	Oct. 23	No. 18	March 19
No. 7	Oct. 30	No. 19	April 2
No. 8	Nov. 6	No. 20	April 16
No. 9	Nov. 13	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 20	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 27	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 4	No. 24	August

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Deuces Can Be Wild For OSU Football Team

No pressure (more than normal), but Ryan Day has a pretty tough act to follow in 2022 if he's going to match what his predecessors accomplished in seasons ending with the number "2."

Ten years ago, a refreshed Urban Meyer was coming off a one-year sabbatical and charged with making a course correction for a rudderless Ohio State football program still reeling from the so-called "Tattoogate" scandal. The supposedly kinder, gentler version of the then 47-year-old coach who had wrecked his health during a six-year stint at Florida that included two national championships began with laying waste to his new players' egos and assuring them there were two paths they could take – his way or the high-way.

The stories of first contact between Meyer and his new team are legendary. There was something called "dawn patrol," the punishment for tardiness that required a detailed cleaning of the team's weight room equipment, always before dawn and always in complete silence. "Attention training" required outside workouts in sub-freezing temperatures while wearing T-shirts and shorts. And there was the assessment of the Ohio State receiving corps as "an absolute clown show."

Somehow, whether by brute force, luck or skill – probably some combination of all three – the members of the 2012 team bonded with their new coaching staff to become one of only six teams in program history to record a perfect season.

A decade before that, the 2002 team produced the fifth unblemished season in a decidedly different way, keeping fans on the edge of their seats during a national championship run that culminated in a pulse-pounding, back-and-forth, double-overtime victory against a defending national title team from Miami (Fla.) that was working on a 34-game winning streak.

To say Jim Tressel is the coaching antithesis of Urban Meyer is understating the obvious, but that simply proves there are different ways of achieving success. While Meyer's always-attack-ing, balls-to-the-wall type of offense won two national championships at Florida (including one at Ohio State's expense), Tressel's brand of football that combined a smothering defense and attention to detail on special teams with a unique style of close-to-the-sweater-vest offense was good enough to win four national Division I-AA championships at Youngstown State.

When he got to Ohio State in 2001, Tressel faced a daunting rebuilding project of his own after the 13-year reign of John Cooper. Following a debut season that featured five losses – three of them by three or fewer points – everything suddenly clicked in 2002, and the Buckeyes won a record 14 games and their first consensus national championship in 34 years.

Not every season ending in a "2" produces perfection, of course, and the 2022 team faces a daunting schedule that opens with Notre Dame, contains a three-game stretch in October that includes Michigan State, defending Big Ten West champion Iowa and Penn State, and finishes with a trash-talking Michigan team that might want to be reminded that it hasn't won in Columbus since 2000.

But even if there is a bump in that road somewhere, the Buckeyes can take solace in what happened in 1942 when that team rebounded from a midseason loss to capture the program's first national championship under the guidance of the legendary Paul Brown.

Ten Years Ago

As long as we're on a bit of a history kick, let's wish a happy 10th birthday to the College Football Playoff. Yes, I realize this season's playoff will only be the ninth played under the preseason four-team format, but it was on June 26, 2012,

that university presidents and athletic directors unveiled a new system for determining college football's national champion.

On the off-chance you don't remember, the College Football Playoff (catchy name, right?) replaced the Bowl Championship Series, which was a micro-mini-tournament consisting of two teams. The new format expanded the much-maligned BCS model by only two teams and just one game.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Unfortunately, the new CFP became almost exactly like the BCS. You still don't have to win your conference to qualify, and big-name, well-heeled conferences continue to receive favorable treatment with a selection process that went from bad to worse.

The powers-that-be had a chance to eliminate the human element from the selection process, but instead proceeded to implement a process that relies 100 percent on the human element. No computerized rankings, no scientific polling – just a bunch of conference commissioners, athletic directors and former coaches and players coming self-equipped with whatever personal biases they might harbor.

My contention a decade ago remains the same today. The obvious way to have gone was to completely dismantle the BCS model and go to an eight-team playoff. Personally, I would prefer at least a 16-team format – the Football Championship Subdivision (Division I-AA) long ago expanded its playoff system to include 24 teams – but I could have lived with eight.

There are those who continue to argue that expanding the playoff to include more teams will "water down" the product and render the regular season almost meaningless. But as tiny St. Peter's taught us once again, Cinderella teams are part of what put the excitement in March Madness. Would the Peacocks have been something less than a legitimate champion had their clock not struck midnight in the Elite Eight against North Carolina?

It was also 10 years ago that several schools celebrated realignment and officially joined new conferences. TCU and West Virginia joined the Big 12, replacing Missouri and Texas A&M, which each jumped to the SEC. Temple took West Virginia's place in the Big East, TCU left the Mountain West to be replaced by Nevada, Fresno State and Hawaii, and Massachusetts filled the MAC slot vacated by Temple. The void created in the WAC by the exodus of Nevada, Fresno State and Hawaii was filled by Texas State and Texas-San Antonio.

Ten years hence, the Big East and the WAC no longer exist as football conferences while TCU, West Virginia, Missouri and Texas A&M have combined for exactly one conference championship in their new leagues. TCU won the Big 12 title in 2014 after which longtime head coach Gary Patterson threw a hissy fit because Ohio State leaped over his team in the final CFP rankings. Had the format included eight teams, Patterson and his Horned Frogs would have gotten a chance to prove ... well, you know where I'm going with that.

Madness Musings

I never thought it possible for the final two minutes of college basketball games to drag on any longer until the NCAA decided to bring video replay into the equation. Too many timeouts coupled with incessant trips to the foul line has

always conspired to make the last two minutes of any game stretch into eternity. Now, with seemingly every close out-of-bounds call subject to endless video scrutiny, stretch runs have all the start-and-stop excitement of big-city traffic at rush hour. Get the calls correct, by all means, but players shouldn't have to need to warm up again after officials spend countless minutes at the scorer's table.

- I realize it's every announcer's duty to keep viewers engaged no matter the performance they're witnessing on the court. But good shooting in college basketball has largely gone the way of the rotary telephone, and too many announcers continue to equate bad shooting with good defense. Late during Villanova's 50-44 win against Houston that sent the Wildcats to the Final Four for the third time in the last six tournaments, play-by-play man Brian Johnson called the game "a defensive struggle." It definitely was not that. The teams combined to shoot 6 for 41 from three-point range (that's 14.6 percent) with Houston the main culprit. The Cougars were an ice-cold 1 for 20 (5.0 percent).

- Chris Holtmann might want to think about getting his players to watch a few games played by counterpart Kevin McGuff's team. While the Ohio State men are prone to hot-and-cold stretches during which they sometimes appear uninterested, the women always seem engaged. No one gave them much of a chance to knock off LSU or Texas in the NCAA tournament, but they smothered the Tigers on their home court and had the more-experienced Longhorns on the ropes in the Sweet 16 before falling by a 66-63 final. Scrappy defense coupled with a solid offensive plan of attack can take teams – men's or women's – a long way.

Times Have Changed

While researching a new book I am writing about Ohio State football, I found something interesting that pertains to all of the millions of dollars suddenly floating around and available to college student-athletes through the new Name, Image and Likeness legislation.

During the spring of 1983, Ohio State quarterback Mike Tomczak appeared in a full-page ad for the Lazarus department store that ran in the June issue of Columbus Monthly magazine. Tomczak received no money for his modeling gig, and when the folks at Lazarus insisted he be compensated, the quarterback told the store to donate his fee (the grand total of \$40) to the Leukemia Society of America.

Neither Tomczak's name nor any mention of Ohio State appeared in the ad, which carried only the word "winners." Still, in accordance with an NCAA rule that forbade athletes from appearing in advertisements, whether they received money or not, Tomczak was ruled ineligible to play during the 1983 season.

The university later appealed the case to the NCAA Eligibility Committee, and the OSU quarterback, who claimed he had been unaware of the rule, was reinstated. He went on to lead the Buckeyes to a 9-3 season that year, including a 28-23 win against Pitt in the Fiesta Bowl.

Tomczak threw for 1,942 yards in 1983, a total that was then the second highest in a single season for an Ohio State quarterback, trailing only Art Schlichter, who threw for 2,551 yards in 1981. To further underscore how times have changed, C.J. Stroud threw for 3,193 yards against Big Ten competition last season on his way to 4,435 yards in 12 games.

In case you're interested, Stroud enters the 2022 season needing exactly 5,000 yards to pass J.T. Barrett, who holds the OSU career record with 9,434 yards.

By the way, that book I mentioned is scheduled to be published this fall. I'm sure you'll hear about it again between now and then.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Liddell Declares For NBA Draft

Ohio State forward E.J. Liddell's career in Columbus has come to a close. After three seasons with the Buckeyes, the Illinois native declared for the NBA draft on March 25 and will be signing with an agent, signaling the end of his career in scarlet and gray following a season that landed Liddell on the All-Big Ten first team and the AP All-America third team.

"I am going to start this off by thanking Buckeye Nation," Liddell wrote in a release shared on Twitter. "These past three years have given me some of the best moments of my life. Being able to have our fans back in the Schott made this year extra fun!

"Thanks to my family and friends for always being there through the highs and lows. I love you with all my heart. To my teammates, I appreciate you all – we have built a bond that will never be broken. The times we spent together will never be forgotten and I'm grateful to call you all my brothers.

"Choosing to play for Coach (Chris) Holt-

mann has been the best decision for me not only as a player but as a person. Thank you for believing in me, coach. To our trainers, managers and the rest of our coaching staff, I appreciate you all for allowing me to carry on the great traditions and culture of being a Buckeye. Most importantly, thank you God for everything. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

"I will cherish the time and commitment of Buckeye Nation. I hope the feeling is mutual! With that, I'd like to announce that I will be hiring an agent and entering the 2022 NBA Draft."

Liddell led the Buckeyes in scoring, rebounding and blocks this season out of the power forward slot, pitching in 19.4 points on 49.0 percent shooting (37.4 percent from three-point range), 7.9 rebounds and 2.6 blocks to earn a nod among the finalists for the Karl Malone Award, which goes to the nation's top power forward. The Buckeyes finished the season at 20-12 with a Round of 32 loss to Villanova on March 20, 71-61.

"I'm really excited for E.J. as he begins his NBA career," Holtmann said. "He has developed and grown significantly as a player every single year as a Buckeye, and that will continue to be the case as an NBA player. E.J. has represented our program at the highest level with his excellent play, leadership and of course, his trademark smile. E.J. will always be a Buckeye. We love you, my man."

After eschewing the draft a season ago to return to Columbus, Liddell has seen his draft stock skyrocket. Thanks to a more balanced, perimeter-centric game, he's largely considered a first-round prospect and was

2022 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2021 Record
Sept. 3	NOTRE DAME	TBA	TBA	11-2
Sept. 10	ARKANSAS STATE	TBA	TBA	2-10
Sept. 17	TOLEDO	TBA	TBA	7-6
Sept. 24	WISCONSIN	TBA	TBA	9-4
Oct. 1	RUTGERS	TBA	TBA	5-8
Oct. 8	at Michigan State	TBA	TBA	11-2
Oct. 22	IOWA	TBA	TBA	10-4
Oct. 29	at Penn State	TBA	TBA	7-6
Nov. 5	at Northwestern	TBA	TBA	3-9
Nov. 12	INDIANA	TBA	TBA	2-10
Nov. 19	at Maryland	TBA	TBA	7-6
Nov. 26	MICHIGAN	TBA	TBA	12-2

tabbed as the No. 18 pick in ESPN's most recent mock draft. He was recognized on Ohio State's senior day and has been considered a likely departure for months.

The question for OSU turns now to freshman point guard Malaki Branham, who was slotted in at No. 16 in that same mock draft and whose plans moving forward remain in the air. Super seniors forward Justice Sueing and Seth Towns and senior guard Justin Ahrens have decisions to make regarding their status next season as well. The latter was recognized on senior day, the former two were not.

Ohio State acknowledged seven players with that event: Ahrens, Liddell and super senior forward Kyle Young, as well as a quartet of transfers in Joey Brunk, Cedric Russell, Jimmy Sotos and Jamari Wheeler. The Buckeyes are set to welcome a five-man recruiting class into the fold and will shape their transfer portal strategy around those remaining decisions.

Miller Appears On Today Show

Former Ohio State offensive lineman Harry Miller, who announced his medical retirement from football on March 10 after an extended battle with mental health issues, made an appearance on The Today Show on March 21 to discuss his struggle.

"It just breaks my heart," Miller said. "When I was going through my therapy, I was seeing stories of Miss Americas and athletes all over the board (facing this). And I just kept thinking, 'If only somebody would just say something.' And I'm just really grateful that I was able to receive the care and love and affection that I did so that I could."

Among Miller's biggest supporters is head coach Ryan Day, who has outlined in the past his own struggles with his mental health and said on March 22 that Miller will have a place within Ohio State's program moving forward. In Miller's statement, he thanked Day for putting an infrastructure in place to support student-athletes who are experiencing these challenges.

"I think a lot of guys on our team have really supported him," Day said. "When you put yourself out there publicly, there's a concern of what people may say or think, and I think the support of Buckeye Nation, of the state of Ohio, of Ohio State and of this football team and really nationally has been pretty remarkable, and I think that means a lot to him."

Day said that what makes him proudest of Miller is the work he did leading up to his retirement announcement, noting that it was a long road for him to get where he is now.

"He certainly wasn't where he is right now a year ago. He did the work," Day said. "What we did is put structures in place to help him, help all of our players, just like if somebody tears their ACL or sprains their ACL and they need physical therapy. There are guys who need some work in the mental area. He did the work. We just put the structure together, and I'm proud that he's in a better place now."

Day Speaks On Team Concussions

Day said any decision-making on running back TreVeyon Henderson or any other player is out of his hands and determined by team doctors – answering a question sparked by a Henderson statement after Ohio State practice on March 10 that turned heads. The running back claimed that he played through injuries last season despite not missing any games. When asked which one impacted him the most, Henderson responded by saying that a concussion limited his performance ability. It forced him out of one game and affected him for several weeks.

Day's press conference on March 22 was his first session with reporters since Henderson discussed his concussion experience. He

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If you have wanted to show your support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program but are unable to participate at the Scarlet or Elite level, now is the time to sign up at the Brutus level for just \$50. Brutus level VIPs are recognized in BSB twice a year, and we will be running the complete list of Brutus VIPs during spring football season. VIP donors help Buckeye Sports Bulletin stay alive and vibrant.

"We want to thank the many BSB readers who have stepped up and shown their support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin through the VIP program," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "It is a true vote of confidence in what we are doing now, what we have done the previous 40 years and what we plan to do in the future."

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Scarlet VIPs: Anthony Ananthanarayanan, Rochester, Mich.; Greg Brooks, Gahanna, Ohio; Marty Brumbaugh, Troy, Ohio; Dennis Dahm, Sandusky, Ohio; Tom Goila, Cincinnati; Doug Harris, Lima, Ohio; Ed Helal, Ashland, Ohio; Phil Helal, Strongsville, Ohio; Joseph Huber, Walpole, Mass.; Alan Lord, Reynoldsburg, Ohio; Lawrence Romanoff, Powell, Ohio; Jim Shaw, Lake Forest, Calif.; William Torok, Girard, Ohio; J.D. Wientjes, Peoria, Ill.; Anonymous, Dallas; Anonymous, Norwalk.

BSB's Spring Football Coverage In Full Swing

Ohio State spring football is in full swing with the annual spring game rapidly approaching. The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is not scheduled to be mailed until April 12, but you don't have to miss any of the breaking football news. The BSB staff will be keeping track of all the developments at our BuckeyeSports.com website.

We will be covering all the latest recruiting news as well, along with any other news concerning Ohio State sports. Follow all the news of the day as it happens at BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

Along with the daily posts, we offer reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays. Also, staff members man the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day.

Please note that recent developments with the mail service have us concerned about delivery time for BSB. We remind you the complete print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin is posted at BuckeyeSports.com at the time the issue is mailed and is available to subscribers free of

charge, as is all the other content provided at the site.

If you are not already taking advantage of BuckeyeSports.com, BSB's 24/7 website, simply email your name, address and preferred email address to subscriptions@buckeyesports.com, and we will send back easy instructions on how to access the site. Don't forget, subscriptions@buckeyesports.com is our email address, not the website. We will send you directions on how to access the site.

If you are a current subscriber and have been unable to access all features on the site, please give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will help you gain access.

As mentioned, readers who have been experiencing postal delivery problems can read the complete edition of each issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin online at BuckeyeSports.com immediately upon completion. Your copy of the paper will still arrive in your mailbox at the usual time.

If you have any questions about BuckeyeSports.com or your mail service, feel free to call us at the above number.

said he relies on the medical staff to tell him whether players can practice or play.

"I just ask the trainers and ask the medical doctors if they're clear or where they're at in the protocol – and that's it," Day said. "Before every practice, we go through the medical record with their entire staff, and guys are either limited, out or full go. We just follow their lead on it and go from there."

Henderson continued at the time to say he cleared concussion protocol and was cleared to play by team doctors. He noted too that the side effects forced him to leave games because of headaches. However, when his symptoms improved to a tolerable level, he would return to the field and take more snaps.

After the interview session, Henderson felt compelled to use social media to clarify his remarks and claim that he didn't play through a concussion at any time during the 2021 season.

"I didn't play through a concussion at any time last year," Henderson wrote on Twitter. "I did sustain one during a game, left and did not return. I was cleared to play by our team doctors every time I played the rest of the season."

Henderson rushed for 1,248 yards and 15 touchdowns last season, adding 312 yards and four touchdowns on 27 receptions. Those 18 total touchdowns broke Maurice Claret's OSU freshman record.

Big Ten Out Before Elite Eight

The Big Ten sent nine teams to the men's NCAA Tournament, the most of any conference. Yet, just two weeks after Selection Sunday (March 13), it became the first conference to send nine teams and see them all eliminated before the Elite Eight.

Of the losses, not all came as major surprises, as many teams lived up roughly to

their seeding. No. 12 Indiana fell 82-53 to No. 5 Saint Mary's two days after playing in the First Four. No. 11 Rutgers fell in the First Four, while No. 11 Michigan, No. 7 Ohio State and No. 7 Michigan State all won at least one game before falling to a higher seed – the Wolverines claimed two.

However, the teams on top struggled. Big Ten tournament champion Iowa earned a No. 5 seed and bowed out in the first round, falling to No. 12 Richmond, 67-63. Two more top teams lost in the second round, with No. 4 Illinois losing to No. 5 Houston, 68-53, and No. 3 Wisconsin losing to No. 11 Iowa State, 54-49.

Michigan's loss came to Villanova in the Sweet 16, meaning the conference's Elite Eight hopes rested with No. 3 Purdue. In the first two rounds, the Boilermakers claimed comfortable wins over No. 14 Yale and No. 6 Texas. Still, they ran into an apparent juggernaut in the Sweet 16 in the 15-seeded Saint Peter's, which upset No. 2 Kentucky in the opening round and then defeated No. 7 Murray State.

The game was close throughout, but the Peacocks were able to take the lead in the final minute, and the Boilermakers' last-second three-pointer was off, securing the 67-64 win for Saint Peter's (the first 15 seed ever to make the Elite Eight) and eliminating the Big Ten from the tournament.

It's the second straight season that the Big Ten has seen a less than ideal performance. Last year, the conference again had nine teams (subbing in Maryland for Indiana), with Michigan, Illinois, Iowa and Ohio State all as No. 1 or 2 seeds. Only Michigan advanced to at least the Sweet 16. The Wolverines moved to the Elite Eight before falling to No. 11 UCLA.

This year's Elite Eight makeup included three ACC teams (No. 2 Duke, No. 8 North Carolina and No. 10 Miami) and one team

Podcast Back To Weekly Schedule

The BSB podcast, hosted by associate editors Wyatt Crosher and Patrick Mayhorn, with occasional guest spots from Chase Brown and Braden Moles, publishes every Friday morning, covering the stories of the week in Ohio State athletics.

The show is free for everyone. To find it, go to your favorite podcast app or website and type in "Buckeye Sports

Bulletin Podcast," and click the subscribe button. You can listen on Amazon Music, Apple Podcasts, Audible, Google Podcasts, iHeartRadio, Podbean, Spotify, Stitcher and anywhere else that podcasts are found. For those of you who are new to the podcast world, the show is also posted at 10 a.m. every Friday on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as on the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum.

weighed 360 pounds.

"I was supposed to be around 320, but COVID got the best of me," he said. "It was rough. I was always last in the drills."

Williams went on a nutrition plan that helped him lose over 40 pounds since the start of last season. Not only does he look thinner, but Williams also saw benefits to his speed and quickness from the lost weight. Recently, Ohio State timed Williams' 10-yard dash at 1.62 seconds.

"You always saw his athleticism, like tremendously athletic, one of the better athletes we have on our team," said Day. "From zero to 10 yards, he has one of our better times, and we have some really good athletes."

Williams believes he can keep that athleticism this season. He acknowledged how hard it was to lose the weight, but he's pleased with the transformation to become leaner. Day said he's been impressed with the changes, too.

"His body's very different," Day said. "He can go for an extended period of time. He flashed again (March 24) at practice."

Still, Ohio State likely won't need to use Williams for more than 60 snaps per game, so his conditioning isn't as significant a factor as it could be at other positions. Defensive line coach Larry Johnson rotates linemen at defensive tackle, including Jerron Cage, Mike Hall, Ty Hamilton, Jaden McKenzie and Taron Vincent.

Even with such depth at the position, Williams sees himself as a front-runner to play starting-level snaps next season.

"I was always quick," he said. "But now I think I'm starting to actually see my true potential. Last year, I was actually huge, so I couldn't show what I really could do. Now I'm at that (proper) weight."

Ohio State's defensive line wasn't as dominant as it expected to be in 2021. With new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles now in control of the scheme and most of its weapons returning, the Buckeyes believe it will live up to its promise this season.

Williams is one of the weapons who can make that happen.

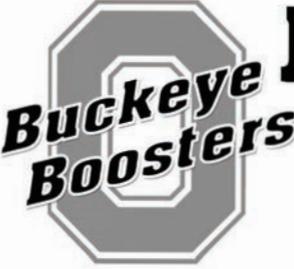
"I believe in myself, and we all believe in each other," Williams said.

Buckeyes Sign NFL Deals

The NFL began its new league year on March 15, and several former Buckeyes signed new contracts.

The highest-profile deal was former Ohio State safety Malik Hooker, who signed a two-year, \$8 million contract to stay with the Dallas Cowboys. Hooker

Continued On Page 6



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OHIO STATE INSIDER

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spent last season with Dallas, appearing in 15 games (three starts), intercepting one

pass and breaking up two passes. He also contributed 44 tackles.

Prior to his time in Dallas, Hooker spent four seasons in Indianapolis after the Colts selected him with the 15th overall pick in the 2017 NFL draft. During his time with the organization, he suffered two season-ending injuries that led to the Colts declining his fifth-year option. In those four seasons, he appeared in 35 games (34 starts), intercepting seven passes, collecting 11 pass break-ups and combining for 117 tackles.

At Ohio State, Hooker played in 13 games in 2015 after redshirting in 2014. He then started at safety in 2016, recording seven interceptions and 74 tackles

(5½ for loss), and was named first-team All-American and first-team All-Big Ten for his efforts.

Former Ohio State offensive lineman Jamarco Jones signed a two-year, \$5.75 million deal with the Tennessee Titans, joining former Ohio State defensive end and assistant coach Mike Vrabel's team. Vrabel won the 2021 NFL Coach of the Year award after bringing Tennessee to the playoffs last season.

Jones was drafted in the fifth round of the 2018 NFL draft by the Seattle Seahawks and appeared in 36 games (with seven starts) over the past three seasons.

Another former Buckeye to sign a deal was former long snapper Jake McQuaide,

who agreed to a new one-year contract with the Cowboys. McQuaide is entering his 12th season in the NFL and will play his second season in Dallas following 10 years with the St. Louis/Los Angeles Rams.

Another Title For Synchro Swim

The Ohio State synchronized swimming team won its 33rd program title on March 27 at the U.S. Collegiate National Championships in Columbus, sweeping each category to earn 102.0 overall points.

Holly Vargo-Brown won her eighth national championship as the Buckeyes' head coach. She also claimed her sixth U.S. Collegiate Coach of the Year award.

"I am so proud of the resilience of this family, because it really is a family," Vargo-Brown said. "The love and the care that these student-athletes feel for each other and for Ohio State is something that I have never felt before. This team has been very special all year. I think the couple years of roughness really pulled us together in a very exciting way."

Ohio State started the final day of competition with a trio win from Emily Armstrong, Cassie Neeley and Ruby Remati. Their routine earned a score of 83.7667 from the judges and cleared Stanford's performance by a third of a point.

Laila Huric and Nikki Dzurko brought their duo routine to the pool for the first time in two seasons after Dzurko spent last season with the United States national team. The pairing looked dominant in an 85.2000-point swim to claim first place. Armstrong and Remati were Ohio State's second duo performers and took second with 84.1667 points.

In the solo routine, Dzurko won her second career national title with a score of 85.3333. She also won the event as a freshman in 2019 – the last time Ohio State stood on top of the championship podium.

The Buckeyes brought out the brooms in the team category when the Scarlet Team won first place. Armstrong, Dzurko, Hannah Heffernan, Huric, Rachel Jager, Neeley and Remati brought in a score of 85.2667 to win the category.

Stanford's team performance earned second place, while Ohio State's Gray Team of Camryn Carrasco, Rose Homelle, Ava Lichter, Paula Luis, Olivia Malloy, Reverie Nedde, Olivia Schafer and Haley Watson rounded out the top three with a score of 82.6667.

The Buckeyes scored 102.0 team points during the three days of competition. Stanford finished second with 86.0 points and Incarnate Word took third with 72.0.

Armstrong also received hardware in the post-competition festivities, winning the Individual High Point Award for her three swims that earned gold or silver medals at the U.S. Collegiate Championships.

Overall, 13 teams swam in the event, including Ohio State, Stanford, Incarnate Word, Texas Woman's University, Florida, UCLA, Arizona, Wheaton College, Minnesota, Michigan, Boston University, Penn and Richmond.

Mikesell Returning For Fifth Season

The season ended just days ago for Ohio State women's basketball, but the Buckeyes have already received a massive boost for next year. Senior guard Taylor Mikesell announced March 28 that she will be re-



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turning for a fifth year (her second at Ohio State) granted by the NCAA due to COVID.

Mikesell transferred to Ohio State this past season after two seasons at Maryland and a season of Oregon, where she became known for her three-point shooting prowess.

Despite gaining eligibility for the 2021-22 season only days before the campaign was set to begin, Mikesell slotted right into the lineup for Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff and started all 32 games for the Buckeyes, who finished with a 25-7 record.

"She's got a lot of experience at a couple of different programs where they were at a high level," McGuff said earlier this season. "Every day, her work ethic and just knowing what it takes to be successful at this level has been really good for our young players."

Mikesell helped lead Ohio State to a share of the Big Ten regular-season title, as well as the school's 12th appearance in the Sweet 16 (and first since 2017). She averaged 18.6 points and 3.5 rebounds per game, shooting 48.2 percent from the field

and 47.5 percent from deep, which ranked second in the nation and first among shooters with at least 130 attempts.

She tied the Ohio State single-game record for most makes from deep without missing with five and also set career single-game highs in points (33 vs. Maryland, Jan. 20) and made threes (eight vs. Illinois, Jan. 6). Mikesell's strong shooting had the Buckeyes near the top of the country in three-point shooting at 37.6 percent.

With Mikesell back, McGuff suddenly finds himself with more potential starters than he knows what to do with. Ohio State returns Mikesell, junior forward Rebeka Mikulasikova and junior guard Jacy Sheldon, who started all 32 games, as well as redshirt sophomore guard Rikki Harris, who played in every game and started 19.

The Buckeyes will also return guard Madison Greene, who was expected to run point for Ohio State before suffering a season-ending injury just days before the 2021-22 campaign, with the rise of freshman guard Taylor Thierry adding some additional depth.

Poole Enters Transfer Portal

Ohio State sophomore guard Kateri Poole announced March 28 that she has entered her name into the transfer portal.

"First and foremost I would like to thank the fans and the coaching staff for the countless support and the opportunity to play against the best in the country," Poole said in a statement posted on Instagram. "I would also like to thank my teammates for all the memorable moments and everlasting relationships we hold. I want to thank God for keeping me on my feet and guiding me through it all. My friends and family, thank you for always believing in me and being there every step of the way. With that being said, I have decided to enter the transfer portal to seek a better opportunity."

Poole is a former five-star prospect out of Bronx, N.Y., and was ranked as ESPN's 24th overall prospect in the 2020 class. She played sparingly in her freshman season before starting the final five games of the year, averaging 10.8 points, 3.4 re-

bounds and 4.8 assists in those contests.

Poole was set to begin this most recent season backing up Greene at point guard, but a season-ending injury to Greene just days before the season began thrust Poole back into the starting lineup.

After coming off the bench for Ohio State's season opener against Bucknell, she started the next 13 games for the Buckeyes, averaging over 20 minutes played, 7.2 points, 3.5 assists and 3.6 turnovers per game.

She then suffered an injury in a win over Northwestern on Jan. 9 and missed the next four games. She returned to action against Michigan on Jan. 27, but she did not start a game for the remainder of the season as Sheldon took over duties at point guard.

In just eight minutes of action against Michigan State on Feb. 27, Poole hit two three-pointers to help lift the Buckeyes over the Spartans and secure a share of the Big Ten regular-season championship. She finished the season averaging 16.1 minutes and 4.8 points per game.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1982

A horrendous performance in the final 11 minutes of the second half of Ohio State's NCAA East regional game against James Madison wiped out what had been a surprisingly successful season for coach Eldon Miller and his troops.

Ohio State managed to score only six points in the last 11:15 as it dropped a 55-48 decision to the unheralded JMU Dukes in the first round of the tournament. The Buckeyes led 42-34 with 11:15 to play after a Clark Kellogg corner jumper but were outscored 21-6 down the stretch - bolstered by a 14-0 run across seven minutes to give the Dukes a 48-42 edge - as they struggled to hit shots against the sagging James Madison defense.

"We quit moving offensively and defensively," said Miller. "And I think their movement picked up. They played better than we did with and without the ball."

35 Years Ago - 1987

Woody Hayes - who had drawn up the blueprints, laid the foundation and built Ohio State's gridiron success during his 28 years as the head football coach at Ohio State - passed away in his sleep March 12.

During the days immediately following Hayes' death, thousands of words were spoken about the man who forever changed Ohio State football.

"We at Ohio State were privileged to know him," said OSU president Edward Jennings, during a public memorial to Hayes at which almost 15,000 people filed into Ohio Stadium. "A warm and giving human being. Great charm. Rare generosity of character that radiated from within him. 'Tis a remarkable person we remember here today. All of us who knew Woody loved him dearly. He was an example of dedication and achievement to us all."

"Woody was, without a doubt, one of the greatest football coaches of all time."

Tributes to Hayes, who posted a 205-61-20 record at Ohio State, came from all over - and from all walks of life. Former tailback Archie Griffin described Hayes as a father figure and said that he "meant everything" to the two-time Heisman winner. Sitting head coach Earle Bruce, who played and coached under Hayes, praised him as a deeply caring man.

Even President Ronald Reagan released a statement calling Hayes "colorful and sometimes even controversial" and a man who "cared deeply about his players, his team and his school."

30 Years Ago - 1992

Scrutinizing a few plays that led to Ohio State's overtime loss to Michigan in the finals of the Southeast Regional would have been easy, but Randy Ayers didn't want to look back at one game. He wanted to look back at the 126 games that had come before that loss, the games that spanned the careers of five Buckeye seniors who appeared in OSU uniforms for the final time.

"It's going to be hard to say goodbye to this senior class," Ayers said immediately following the Buckeyes' 75-71 loss to the Wolverines in Lexington, Ky., March 29. "They've done a lot of good things for our program. They've worked hard for the last four years and done everything right both on and off the court."

The seniors to whom Ayers referred - Mark Baker, Jamaal Brown, Steve Hall, Chris Jent and Bill Robinson - had been recruited by his predecessor Gary Williams but had all but grown up with Ayers in returning Ohio State to national prominence during his first three seasons in town.

25 Years Ago - 1997

Although Ohio State athletic director Andy Geiger was acting as a committee of one in directing the search for the school's new men's and women's basketball coaches, fans could rest assured he was getting a little bit of help.

OSU president Gordon Gee confirmed that he, along with vice president for student affairs David Williams and associate athletic director Mieschelle Willis, were all involved in Geiger's covert operations to hire new coaches.

"We're in the process of hunting for two of the best basketball coaches in the country, and we will get them," Gee said. "We're keeping the process close to the vest. Is there a formal search committee? No. That's not the art of this craft."

20 Years Ago - 2002

To say that the month of March had been an exciting time for Luke Fickell would have been an understatement.

Nothing could probably top the joy the former OSU nose guard and his wife, Amy, felt March 2 when they welcomed their newborn son, Landon, into the world.

But Fickell likely was still on cloud nine two weeks later when OSU head coach Jim Tressel offered him a job as the school's new special teams coordinator.

Fickell, who had spent his previous two years as the defensive line coach at Akron, quickly accepted, and his appointment was announced March 16.

"Coach Tressel called and asked if I would be interested in interviewing for the job," Fickell told BSB. "I said, 'Yeah, just tell me the time I need to be there. It takes two hours to get down there (from Akron). Just give me an hour and 45 minutes' notice and I'll be there.'"

Fickell, 28, would be one of the youngest full-time assistant coaches in school history and was the youngest since Wayne Stanley, who was 25 when he came to OSU with Bruce from Iowa State in 1979.

15 Years Ago - 2007

In barely slipping past NCAA foes Xavier and Tennessee, Ohio State certainly added much of the insanity to March Madness, but with the more convincing and less life-threatening 92-76 win March 24 over Memphis, the Buckeyes turned heart palpitations into resounding drumbeats and punched their ticket to the Final Four.

Against Xavier, the top-seeded Buckeyes needed a furious comeback after trailing 55-44 with 7:21 to play. They stormed back to within two at 61-59 and had a look at a go-ahead three-pointer that went begging. Xavier's Justin Cage rattled in 1 of 2 free-throw tries on the next possession, setting up perhaps the most exciting moment of the entire tournament - a dead-eye, game-tying three by Ron Lewis with two seconds remaining in regulation that saved OSU's season. Behind 11 overtime points from point guard Mike Conley Jr., Ohio State survived and advanced, 78-71.

The Volunteers pushed Ohio State to the brink too, claiming a 49-29 lead late in the first half before the Buckeyes engineered the largest come-from-behind win of the tournament and one of the most improbable in program history, rattling off a 15-2 run to cut the deficit to seven points, knotting it at 64 with 9:34 to play and ultimately claiming the final edge with a Conley free throw, 85-84. At the buzzer, Greg Oden swatted aside a Ramar Smith try that would have won the game for the Vols had he converted.

Even the Tigers proved challenging, leading 60-57 with less than 10 minutes to play before an intentional foul by Tigers guard Chris Douglas-Roberts ignited a five-point possession, giving Ohio State a lead

it would not relinquish as it locked up a bid to take on East champion Georgetown on March 31 in the Georgia Dome, with defending champion Florida and UCLA set to battle on the other side of the bracket.

10 Years Ago - 2012

Ohio State head coach Thad Matta didn't want to take for granted the importance of the moment after his Buckeyes wrapped up a 77-70 victory over Syracuse to claim the East Regional title and advance to a Final Four matchup with an unknown opponent later revealed to be Kansas.

"I've been a head coach now for 12 years, and the one thing I've always tried to do was enjoy the special moments," Matta said. "We don't even know who we're playing yet (in the Final Four in New Orleans). I think taking the time to celebrate is something that the team deserves."

That celebration began earlier on the floor of TD Garden in Boston. The Buckeyes - bolstered by 19 points from forward Jared Sullinger, 18 from guard Lenzelle Smith Jr., 14 from winger Deshaun Thomas and 13 from guard William Buford - slowly but surely closed out the Orange in front of 19,026 fans, including a small pocket of scarlet and gray that stood out like a sore thumb in a heavily orange-clad arena.

Five Years Ago - 2017

New Ohio State co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Ryan Day inherited a rebuilding project in his first season in town but made clear that project would not involve picking a new starting quarterback for the Buckeyes - not in 2017, at least.

J.T. Barrett was declared the Buckeyes' No. 1 signal caller once again after opting to return for his fifth and final season in Columbus. Behind the Wichita Falls, Texas, native was a trio of highly-recruited players - sophomore Joe Burrow, redshirt freshman Dwayne Haskins and early enrollee Tate Martell - all competing for backup duties.

"J.T.'s past speaks for itself," Day said March 21 after his third practice as the Buckeyes' new assistant. "But everybody is here competing. Those guys are really fighting like heck every day and looking to put the best foot forward."

One Year Ago - 2021

The No. 2-seeded Ohio State men's basketball team fell 75-72 to No. 15-seeded Oral Roberts (17-10) in the first round of the NCAA Tournament at Mackey Arena in West Lafayette, Ind., on March 19.

"I want to first begin by giving Oral Roberts credit. They really played well, as we expected they would," said Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann. "Their two players, who obviously concerned us, were terrific."

Holtmann was referring to the nation's leading scorer, Max Abmas (24.2 points per game), who scored 29 points against the Buckeyes, and Kevin Obanor, who came in averaging 18.2 and tallied 30. The two sides couldn't come to a conclusion in 40 minutes, entering overtime knotted at 64. After a back-and-forth period, a pair of Obanor free throws gave Oral Roberts a 75-72 edge entering the final possession of the game.

On that final possession, junior Buckeye wing Justin Ahrens missed a contested three-pointer for the Buckeyes before senior forward Seth Towns corralled an offensive rebound, but junior guard Duane Washington Jr. came up just short on a deep three-pointer from straight-on to end the game.

"They made some big-time plays in the second half and overtime, and we didn't," Buckeye guard C.J. Walker said. "We didn't take advantage of turnovers and missed shots in transition, things that we usually take advantage of. It hurts."

Muzerall Hire Brought Program Back From Brink

Continued From Page 1

power play. I'm very proud. We're overjoyed, overcome with excitement. We felt that we had an entire state behind us, cheering for us. We created a Cinderella story, and we're going to enjoy every minute of it.

"This is something that's forever, that can never be taken from these young ladies. Of course they're enjoying this moment, but it's one of those things when you come back 15 years later with your kids – or without – as you get older and you can feel that pride that you left a legacy."

To arrive at this point – a coronation of sorts for one of the fastest-rising programs in women's hockey – is, as Muzerall declared, the result of what can be accurately described as a Cinderella story.

She even remembers the exact day it began – Aug. 20, 2016. Serving at the time as an assistant coach for Hockey Canada in a three-game series against the United States, Muzerall missed a call from Ohio State, but her initial response was lukewarm at best.

Her star in the hockey coaching community was rising despite breaking into the collegiate ranks just five years prior, and Ohio State – which was in the market for a third head coach in as many years – wanted her to take over its flailing program.

The Buckeyes had recently reassigned hiring responsibilities for women's hockey to then-senior associate athletic director (now with the Big Ten) Diana Sabau, who was without hockey contacts but found Muzerall through an Internet search and numerous calls, quickly identifying her as a top candidate.

For many, that kind of interest from the collegiate athletics powerhouse in Columbus would yield an immediate and resounding yes.

But Muzerall remembers being concerned about Ohio State's commitment to women's hockey and about a program without even a 20-win season to its name in its first 17 seasons, let alone a berth in the



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

A TEAM EFFORT – Ohio State used goals from senior forward Paetyn Levis and graduate forward Clair DeGeorge to claim a 2-1 lead early in the third period, but it was junior forward Kenzie Hauswirth (11), a transfer from Quinnipiac, who ultimately delivered the game-winning goal with 6:40 to play in a 3-2 national championship victory over Minnesota Duluth.

NCAA tournament or Frozen Four.

The Buckeyes had just fired head coach Jenny Potter after one season for myriad recruiting violations after an investigation into the program and did so only a month before the scheduled start of the 2016-17 season. A year prior, Ohio State dismissed four-year head coach Nate Handrahan amid allegations of a toxic program culture, rife with sexual harassment complaints around the coach and his staff.

On top of that, Muzerall was set to enter her sixth year as an assistant coach at

Minnesota – one of the nation's most dominant programs and her collegiate stomping grounds where she set numerous records – with four national titles already under her belt. She had dreams of a head coaching gig down the road, but Ohio State was near the bottom of the best conference in hockey, the Western Collegiate Hockey Association (WCHA), and had quite the hole to dig itself out of both with a severe talent deficit and a deeply damaged culture.

She told her husband, Ryan, who played football at Minnesota, about the call. He called her crazy.

"I was telling the ladies a story in the locker room," Muzerall said. "I was just coming off of Hockey Canada, I was there for 2½ weeks. It was late August, Aug. 20. Ohio State kept calling me. I had a missed call, and I thought, 'What do they want?'"

"I remember my husband, who was a Big Ten football player, said, 'Are you out of your mind? This is Ohio State. It doesn't get any bigger than this.' I told him, 'Well, their hockey team isn't very good,' and he said, 'Well, change that. You have the resources to do that, and the people supporting you.'"

At his insistence, Muzerall accepted the job under the condition that Ohio State provide her with the resources she needed to build a winner. She was allowed to hire the program's first full-time operations director and began her work in constructing a foundation and a culture. It was grueling, extensive work.

"There were a lot of tireless nights," Muzerall said. "My son was five months old, I had a two-year-old daughter – and thank God, my mom lived with us. But I was just so committed to wanting to win."

The Buckeyes went 14-18-5 in her open-

ing season – no major surprise given that they played their first game on Sept. 30, just 20 days after Muzerall was announced as the new head coach – but hit their established goals off the ice in repairing a weary locker room while infusing talent into the roster on the recruiting trail. The Buckeyes added forwards Emma Maltais, Liz Schepers and Tatum Skaggs, defender Lisa Bruno and netminder Lynsey Wallace – among others – to form what would quickly become the core of the team. Muzerall insisted on biweekly individual meetings with her players to better connect with a team that she described in a 2018 interview with *The New York Times* as broken.

"They looked sad, and they looked broken," Muzerall said. "I was like, this is ridiculous. If you're not having fun in college, when are you going to have fun? You have the rest of your life to be stressed out. You're supposed to enjoy college and enjoy your hockey. I'm going to come in and try to make you a better hockey player, but I also want to make you a better person."

That young core, especially those at forward, paid out immediate dividends in 2017-18. Behind 93 combined points from the freshman forward trio, Ohio State enjoyed a year of firsts.

With a 24-11-4 record, the Buckeyes notched their first 20-win season. They finished second in the WCHA – two spots higher than the previous program best – and claimed a win in postseason league play over Minnesota State before falling to the Gophers in the semifinals, which proved just enough to launch Ohio State into its first NCAA tournament berth. The Buckeyes blanked No. 4 Boston College in the quarterfinals and qualified for their first

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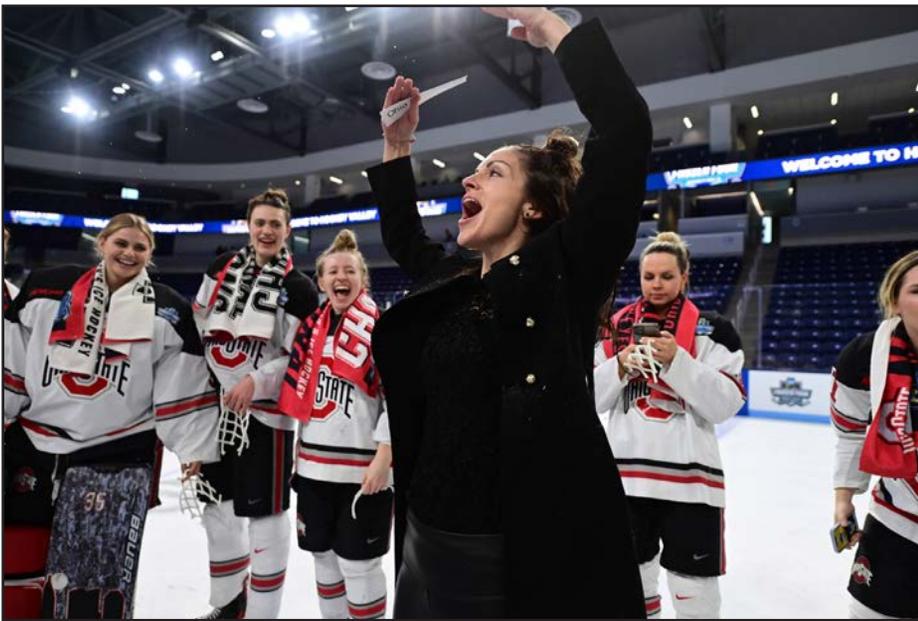


PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

JOB WELL DONE — Six seasons after accepting the head coaching position at Ohio State, Nadine Muzerall (center) saw her dreams realized as the Buckeyes claimed the national title. Muzerall won one as a player and four as an assistant, but this is her first as a head coach.

Frozen Four berth. Muzerall told *The New York Times* that when she took the job, she did so with expectations of reaching those heights by the final year of her original five-year contract. She needed just two.

"I had a five-year contract, and in those five years I wanted to make it to the Frozen Four," said Muzerall. "I didn't put a time capsule on what that would look like, but I would be lying if I didn't say it happened sooner than I would have thought.

"I know myself personally, how high the demands I have on myself are and how I want things to the fullest right away. People were telling me, 'You can't have it all in one year.'

"How about two?"

As the program grew, so too did Muzerall's confidence. Her Buckeyes rattled off their first WCHA tournament title in 2019-20 before COVID put an end to the season prematurely, and they returned again to the Frozen Four in 2020-21 before a semifinals loss to conference rival Wisconsin, which had toppled the Buckeyes for the WCHA tournament title less than two weeks prior.

Always the fierce competitor, Muzerall spoke of national title expectations entering the 2021-22 season both privately and publicly. Entering their NCAA tournament quarterfinals matchup with Quinnipiac after rolling over WCHA stalwarts Wisconsin and Minnesota for another tournament crown, she said that she felt her team was without a weakness and that it was time for them to make that title push.

"I don't think we have a flaw," Muzerall said. "If I were an opposing coach, I think it would be tough to find a weakness. We're a 200-foot hockey team, and I think this is the first time we have a true Patty Kazmaier Award contender in senior defender Sophie Jaques. (The award goes to the nation's top female college hockey player and was claimed ultimately by Minnesota's Taylor Heise). There are a lot of firsts, and if I were a gambling gal, I would say this is our year."

In an athletic department-wide meeting before the season, she kept her introduction short and sweet, sharing her name, her team, and a blunt declaration that her team was going to win a national title. The team

had some fun with that one on the chartered flight – which the team could only start taking after Muzerall pushed for it – back from its title win.

"We were laughing on the plane because at the beginning of the year, Muz got in front of the whole department of athletics and said, 'We're going to win a national championship this year,'" forward Clair DeGeorge said. "We can look back at that now and realize that we actually made it come true."

Within that title win and the season that preceded it, Muzerall saw every facet of her original core program plan bear fruit. The majority of her first recruiting class had departed with Schepers – donning the captain's patch – as the lone holdover, but the culture that they helped to establish was as strong as ever, starting at the top with Muzerall's work ethic and competitive streak.

"First and foremost, it's just how much she wants to win," Schepers said of Muzerall after the title game. "We know she outworks every coach in the league, every coach in the country. When you have a coach who works that hard for you, you want to put it back into the program. Muzzy and the leaders on the team my first couple of years here set the standard of what our culture was going to be, and it was, 'Get on board or get out of the way because we're running with this thing.'

"I credit those early teams so much with where we are today, the opportunities we've had and how we've grown. Her desire to win, that family atmosphere – it's a tough-love environment, but it gets the job done. It gets you results."

As Schepers spoke, the weight of the moment seemed to hit her in waves.

"I don't even know if I realize what's going on right now," she said through a laugh. "It's so special. This team has the fingerprints of so many leaders who came before me, so many people who were a part of this program that put in the dirty work and set the standard for our culture. It runs itself. You know the standard coming in when you put on that Ohio State jersey. I have so much pride. We wanted to carry the torch for those teams that struggled, that went through the grind years of getting Ohio

State where it is today. I'm just so thankful for this program. To have been a part of that journey makes this that much sweeter."

It was the 2018 recruiting class, a senior class of seven, that largely led this group, but a newfound interest in the transfer portal gave Ohio State an extra boost. The Buckeyes nabbed a trio of graduates in defender Emily Curlett, DeGeorge and forward Lexi Templeman from Robert Morris (Curlett and Templeman) and Bemidji State as well as junior netminder Raygan Kirk from Robert Morris and junior defenders Lauren Bernard, Teegan Grant and Hadley Hartmetz from Clarkson, Wisconsin and Boston College, respectively.

Kenzie Hauswirth, a junior forward from Quinnipiac, put on net the shot that ultimately lifted the Buckeyes for good against Minnesota Duluth with 6:40 to play.

"To be completely honest, I don't really remember it that much," Hauswirth said of the goal after the game. "All game, Coach kept saying to throw pucks on the net. I had a chance to, threw the puck on net and it worked out. I think it hit a stick and went in. It was amazing to get that goal for the team, and I'm just so grateful to be here."

The combination of established Buckeyes and new faces jelled, as the players see it, because of those structures Muzerall worked so hard to build.

"All the credit goes to our coach here, recruiting us and wanting us," Hauswirth said. "It felt really special to be able to come here. I think we've all really adapted to taking on whatever role we need to. At the end of the day, we're all just super excited to be a part

of this program because we knew what kind of culture she was building. We wanted to be a part of that.

"She believed in us all year, she pushed us all year, and we knew what we were fighting for and what we were going for, and she just brought this confidence to us that we needed in order to win today," Hauswirth said. "She's pretty intense, but in the best way possible and the best coach I've ever had in my life, and I'm sure everybody would say the same thing."

Though she had collected herself and returned to her usual calculated, to-the-point approach by the time she reached the postgame podium, Muzerall wasn't immune to the importance of the moment as that last shot careened back into Minnesota Duluth's end of the ice and the final buzzer rang out.

As her players spilled onto the ice to celebrate, Muzerall all but collapsed into her assistants, overcome by the realization of the dream that seemed so outrageous just 5½ years prior. She embraced Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith, university president Dr. Kristina M. Johnson and Sabau, who made the trip out to State College, Pa., to watch the coach she worked so hard to bring to Columbus lift a trophy.

"I couldn't have done this without you," Muzerall told Sabau in a postgame video captured by the Big Ten Network. "Thank you for giving me a chance."

Later, Muzerall would sum the process succinctly.

"We have come a long way in six years."

Buckeyes Among Leaders In Returning Production

Continued From Page 1

pay off this season," Day said at the onset of spring practice. "That's the idea, in that there were some growing pains along the way but a lot of young players on both sides of the ball got a lot of experience."

To be specific, Ohio State is returning six full-time starters on offense and another six players who offered major contributions off the bench. The defense, which turned to a large number of youngsters in hopes of finding a suitable lineup, returns eight starters and at least 10 serious contributors behind them, including almost every member of the linebacker and defensive back rooms.

In ESPN writer Bill Connelly's returning production rankings, which adjust for positional value and take into account all returning and departing statistical production, Ohio State ranks 24th nationally (with 76 percent of its production returning), 53rd on offense (70 percent) and 13th on defense (82 percent).

In seven years of Connelly's rankings, that's the second-highest overall ranking and percentage, trailing only the 2015 bunch, which was 14th nationally with 77 percent of its talent back. Just two Buck-

eye teams, 2015 (82 percent) and 2018 (72 percent) have returned more offensive production, and only one defense, 2019 (85 percent) brought back more.

Among playoff-contending programs, rosters like the one Ohio State expects to field this season are increasingly rare. Of the final 2021 AP poll top 10, just one team – the Buckeyes – ranks among Connelly's top 25 heading into 2022. National champion Georgia is 96th, runner-up Alabama is 65th and playoff finalists Cincinnati and Michigan are 92nd and 67th, respectively. The rest of the top 10 peaks at 42nd (Michigan State) and checks in at No. 87 on average. No. 19 BYU (second in Connelly's rankings) and No. 20 North Carolina (12th) are the only teams to crack that group in the AP's final top 25. In his eyes, that plants the Buckeyes firmly in the preseason national title favorite conversation, if not as the outright leader of it.

"Of last year's top seven teams, the six not named Ohio State currently rank an average of 82nd in returning production," Connelly writes. "That the Buckeyes return a vast majority of last year's talent might make them 2022's early national title favorites."

The expectations internally at Ohio State are similar, as always. The Buckeyes return, from last season's highest-scoring offense, a Heisman-contending quarterback and one of the nation's best receivers in Stroud and Jaxon Smith-Njigba. They have a record-setting tailback entering just his sophomore season in TreVeyon Henderson behind an offensive line with three returning starters and a fourth who filled in whenever needed during the past two seasons in guard Matthew Jones.

But as they work through these early practices, that offense seems less a focus and more an immutable feature to be preserved and eventually deployed rather than severely adjusted or developed. Day tabbed UCLA offensive coordinator Justin Frye to tinker with an offensive line that struggled at times with run blocking, but his concerns around the offense this offseason seem to start and stop with finding a new tight end as Jeremy Ruckert departs, identifying two receivers to pair with Smith-Njigba, and continued improvement in the established positions.

"Certainly, tight end is something that's a concern for us just because there's not a

lot of experience there," Day said. "(Senior fullback) Mitch (Rossi) is not practicing this spring. He'll be back in the preseason. That will be good to have a veteran presence there. I think he's going to have a big impact on our offense. Replacing (Ruckert) will be important because we have some young guys that just haven't played a ton. We're looking to see what (redshirt sophomore) Gee Scott Jr. can do. He's put a year in and some of the young guys are going to have to step up.

"With the running back position, TreVeyon played last year, (redshirt sophomore) Miyan (Williams) played last year and it will be good to see (redshirt freshman) Evan Pryor. He had a really good offseason, so we're looking forward to seeing him.

"At receiver, you're seeing some of these younger guys (like sophomores Emeka Egbuka and Marvin Harrison Jr.) get out there. In the Rose Bowl, we had some guys who stepped up, but we're still trying to figure out what the depth looks like there. All of these guys will play. And then, watching the quarterbacks play, it's just about improving, learning and getting more reps under their belt."

The primary focus for Day lies on the other side of the ball, and in the more intangible portion of team-building.

New Staff Inherits Experienced Defense

Day has all but completely replaced his defensive staff with Johnson as the only holdover, joined by defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Jim Knowles, cornerbacks coach Tim Walton and safeties coach Perry Eliano from Oklahoma State, the Jacksonville Jaguars and the Cincinnati Bearcats, respectively.

And for those new coaches, Day has offered free rein to rework the Buckeye defense schematically and an immense collec-

PLAYERS ON THE SPOT

Junior wide receiver Julian Fleming: There's still plenty of time for the former five-star, top-ranked receiver in the class of 2020 to break through, but this season presents the clearest path yet to a starting role in Columbus.

With Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson off to the NFL as projected first-round picks, there are open positions at the outside receiver spots for the first time in Fleming's career. When he arrived in 2020, Olave had locked down one spot, Wilson was cemented in the slot, and then-sophomore Jameson Williams was the de facto starter opposite Olave. Fleming (6-2, 207), as he dealt with a few nagging injuries, played in just seven games, snagging seven receptions for 74 yards.

Fleming is firmly on the spot heading into his junior campaign. He served as the first receiver off the bench behind Wilson and Olave but played in just eight games, hauling in 12 receptions for only 86 yards.

Finally free of a shoulder injury that he struggled to overcome during both of those first two seasons, Fleming is set as a favorite in the battle for those vacant receiver spots.

Junior left tackle Paris Johnson: Out of the frying pan and into the fire for the former five-star prospect out of Cincinnati Princeton. After spending his first season as a starter filling in at right guard, Johnson (6-6, 315) is slated to kick back out to his natural position at tackle, taking over for Nicholas Petit-Frere at left tackle – often considered one of the most important positions on the offense, especially with a right-handed quarterback who will need his blind side protected.

In the move, Johnson will have the chance to return to his natural position, but with it comes an increased responsibility. In 2021, Johnson was one of the new guys along with center Luke Wypler, trailing behind the veteran leadership of right tackle Dawand Jones, left guard Thayer Munford and Petit-Frere. The latter two are gone, meaning that those responsibilities now fall to the bookends on the line at tackle, Johnson and Jones.

Fifth-year senior left guard Matthew Jones: As the other new face on the offensive line, this season has been a long time coming for the fifth-year senior out of Brooklyn Erasmus Hall. Jones (6-4, 310) was a spot contributor in each of the last two seasons. He was able to provide a spark for the Buckeyes at

guard a season ago when they needed a quicker option than their four-tackle look could offer but was unable to break into the starting lineup.

With the pair of departures and a green group outside of the three returning starters and Jones, the time is now. Jones' spot at left guard seems all but cemented in the minds of his coaches through spring ball, which means that the veteran can focus his energy this offseason on developing chemistry with those around him and developing some leadership chops to take some pressure off of those tackles in tandem with Wypler.

Senior defensive end Zach Harrison: That Harrison (6-6, 272) is back at all is a bit of a surprise and serves as a major victory for the Buckeyes. A former five-star from Lewis Center (Ohio) Olentangy Orange, Harrison was expected to play out his junior season, star and then follow in the footsteps of Chase Young and the Bosa brothers in declaring for the NFL after three seasons in Columbus.

Harrison gave thought to an early departure but decided instead to return to Columbus and hone his skills for one more year after an up-and-down junior campaign that did not have him blossom into the superstar that many expected to see.

A deep defensive line group and a changing defensive scheme under new coordinator Jim Knowles will look to push Harrison to improve and prove himself as an elite pass-rushing prospect.

Junior linebacker Cade Stover: Just pinning down a position for Stover (6-4, 255) has been difficult in his first three seasons as a Buckeye. Entering year four, the Mansfield, Ohio, product is still listed as a tight end – where he's spent the past two seasons as a backup – but seems to be finding a more comfortable home at linebacker.

Whether he'll settle in there by the time the Buckeyes take the field against Notre Dame in September is still something of an open question, but he's made clear that his heart lies with the defensive side of the ball, and Day has made equally clear that the former four-star will be a factor in Ohio State's plans somewhere.

– Patrick Mayhorn

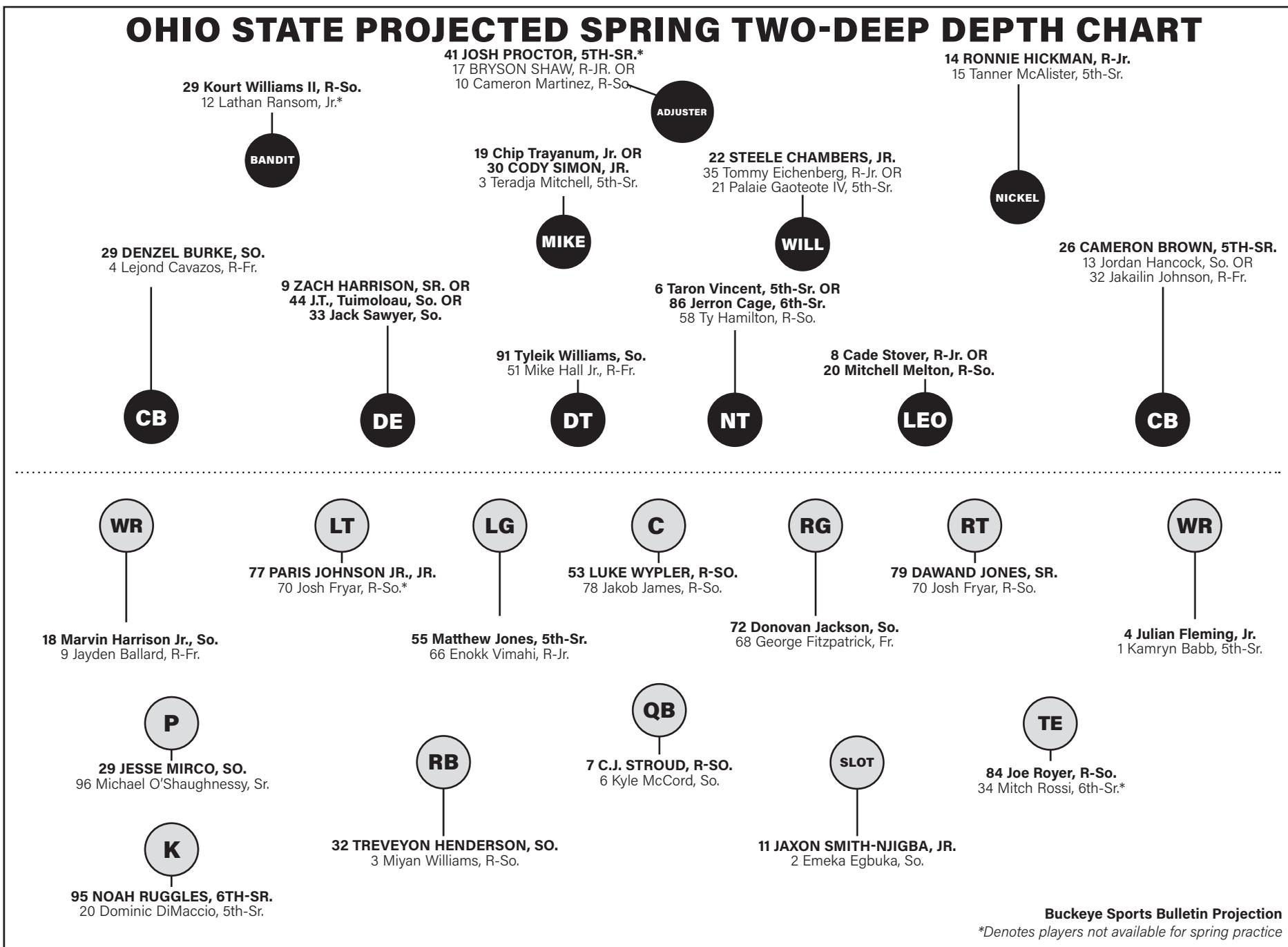
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OHIO STATE PROJECTED SPRING TWO-DEEP DEPTH CHART



Buckeye Sports Bulletin Projection
*Denotes players not available for spring practice

JIM KNOWLES' JARGON

Adjuster: Safety in the deep center of the defense, named the adjuster because he "adjusts" the defensive alignment.

Bandit: The "Bandit" is simply the boundary safety. He'll line up to the short side – also known as the boundary – of the field. Its responsibilities are similar to that of the nickel, albeit with less man coverage.

Nickel: Identified as a "cover safety" at Ohio State last season, a nickel is a player who can, depending on offensive personnel:

- Cover slot receivers, tight ends and halfback one-on-one.
- Drop into a traditional, deeper safety spot.
- Move into the box and help against the run.

CB: Standard cornerback rules apply. Knowles traditionally likes his top cornerback playing opposite the boundary, to the "field."

Mike/Will: Interior linebackers. Per Knowles, there's "not much difference" between the two.

"They need to be able to play in the box and in space on the edge. Blitz, and cover. We're really looking for complete versatility out of those positions," Knowles said.

DE: Traditional defensive end.

DT: The bigger of the two tackles, usually more focused on taking up multiple blockers against the run.

NT: A smaller, quicker tackle with a lower center of gravity who can pressure the quarterback and win matchups against centers and guards with leverage.

LEO: Knowles' speciality position. Ohio State has yet to install the "Leo," which can be moved all over the defensive front, and is instead working currently with a more traditional rush end.

tion of now-experienced young talent after involving 27 different players in at least 100 snaps last season – 20 of whom return this season as defensive backs Sevyn Banks, Ryan Watts, Marcus Williamson and Craig Young, defensive tackles Haskell Garrett and Antwan Jackson, and defensive end Tyreke Smith are the only major departures. Knowles sees it as a chance for a fresh start.

"A fresh start is great. It's what I do," Knowles said in March. "I don't think you could ask for a better situation. You're not walking into a program that's struggled, you're walking into Ohio State – Rose Bowl winner, 12-2, national championship quality. For me to be able to come in on a clean slate, and this is what I do with this defense that I've established, it's great. The support is all there, everything is right there."

For Day, who seemed to grow increasingly frustrated with his struggling defense

a season ago, that's the idea. The Buckeyes aren't starting over in the talent or experience department. Rather, they're giving new direction to a group they feel has the potential to be far greater than it showed the last two seasons.

"It's a fresh start, new ideas and new perspectives, which is a good thing," Day said. "It's healthy in an organization, especially when you have guys who have been here for five, seven years, there have been a lot of guys who have been here for a long time. The continuity is great, that's a big part of our success here, but having fresh ideas and new perspectives is really good and refreshing."

"At the end of the day I was really just looking for a head coach of the defense (with the search for a new DC), and certainly (Knowles') background and all the people who have worked for and with him have said

such great things. You watch the film of how his team plays, and they play hard, they have a system, they have answers and they've done a great job developing. When this thing is running well, there's a head coach of the defense, recruiting, special teams and then I'm heavily involved with the offense. If those things aren't happening and I'm being taken away from the offense, then the way this structure is built isn't being optimized."

The defensive line sees as much attrition as any other unit on the team with the trio departing, but both Day and Knowles see that as a motivating factor for this season's group.

Five seniors return in defensive ends Tyler Friday, Zach Harrison and Javontae Jean-Baptiste and defensive tackles Jerron Cage and Taron Vincent, and the youngsters rising up around them have inspired just as much – if not more – optimism. The sopho-

more class touts three of the nation's most impressive young linemen in Jack Sawyer, J.T. Tuimoloau and Tyleik Williams, with classmate Michael Hall Jr., redshirt sophomore Ty Hamilton, Jaden McKenzie and Mitchell Melton all drawing spring praise as well.

"It's important to have those veterans. Zach, Taron, Tyler Friday, Jerron Cage," Day said. "These are guys who have been around the program for a few years now. This is very important for them to play like veterans for us and to give us that presence. They've played a lot of football. They played in the national championship game. It's exciting to have some guys over there who have been in the program for a couple of years. Then we have that sophomore group and they'll be right there. The strength of our defense should be up front."

Continued On Page 12

Continuity Especially Strong In Secondary

Continued From Page 11

When speaking to media March 24, the most outspoken members of that group, Sawyer and Williams, were adamant that the defensive line group was ready for a bounce-back season after struggling to make its presence felt the last two years. Sawyer said he expects a big change, while Williams, when asked about the ceiling for a line of him and Hall on the inside with Sawyer and Tuimoloau on the outside, flashed a grin before answering.

"The potential is limitless," he said. "We can do whatever we want. We just have to lock into our scheme, and when we do, we can do great things."

The rest of the defense offers a bit less in the way of veteran presence but is similarly packed to the brim with young players champing at the bit to establish themselves in Knowles' new-look defense.

His scheme calls typically for just two linebackers, and redshirt junior Steele Chambers figures to factor into one of the spots, but there's no major difference between the two spots and Knowles said that everyone has a fresh slate under his direction. That means a clear shot to the field for anyone, from the older players such as super seniors Palaie Gaoteote IV and Teradja Mitchell or redshirt juniors Tommy Eichenberg, junior Cody Simon or converted tight end Cade Stover to newer faces, such as junior Arizona State transfer Chip Trayanum, redshirt freshman Reid Carrico and newcomers C.J. Hicks and Gabe Powers.

"There's not much difference between our two linebacker positions," Knowles said. "They need to be able to play in the box and in space on the edge. Blitz, and cover. We're really looking for complete versatility out of those positions. If I find a guy who's more of an internal (offensive) tackle-to-tackle player, I can adjust things to make sure he's in that position. But right



"Up front, because we haven't created a float (Leo) player yet, we're using a rush end, a tackle, a nose and an end. R, T, N, E. Mike and Will at linebackers. Our boundary safety is called the bandit. Our middle safety is called an adjuster. Our nickel is called a nickel. That's different than it was at Oklahoma State. Sometimes when you move, you think, 'I could really say this better.' Instead of calling the free safety the bandit like we did at Oklahoma State, the bandit here is the boundary safety. It makes sense with the 'B.' And the middle safety, we call him the adjuster because he is the guy that has to really adjust the formation. There are things to do when you take a new job to make things better and easier to understand for the players." — Jim Knowles

now, I want to put the guys in as many different positions as possible to see what they're good at so I can build things around what we have here."

In the secondary, Ohio State returns four starters for the first time since 2008, when Kurt Coleman, Malcolm Jenkins, Anderson Russell and Donald Washington kept fully intact the previous season's No. 1

pass defense nationally. This group doesn't have quite the pedigree that one did, given its standing at No. 96 in that same category, but Ohio State is excited about its potential.

In the cornerback spots, sophomore Denzel Burke looks to build on a Freshman All-American season opposite redshirt senior Cameron Brown, with a trio of

battle-tested safeties vying for time behind them in Ronnie Hickman, Josh Proctor and Bryson Shaw. Ohio State will need to find a way to work those three, along with Oklahoma State transfer Tanner McAlister, highly touted redshirt sophomore Kourt Williams, classmates Cameron Martinez and Lathan Ransom and young cornerbacks Lejond Cavazos, Jordan Hancock and Jakailin Johnson into the rotation, but Day sees plenty of room in what Knowles has described as a safety driven defense.

"The good news is that there are three safeties out there a lot of the time, so there's another spot on the field," Day said. "A few years ago, it was three linebackers and two safeties. They're just competing. Jim, Perry and Tim are still trying to figure out exactly how guys fit because each one of those three safeties has a different skill set and is asked to do different jobs."

"And we still have a few guys out with Lathan, Josh and Jantzen Dunn but those who are out there have a lot of reps under their belts. Tanner, Cam Martinez, Bryson, Ronnie, Kourt, they got work last year. We were not anywhere near this at this point last year with the amount of experience that we have. We still have a long way to go, but at least these guys have played in games."

In Need Of New Leadership

The Buckeyes have their sights set firmly on improving a defense that surrendered more than 30 points five times last season, but Day has made clear on sever-

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SPRING PREVIEW: ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown/Previous School
1	Kamryn Babb	WR	6-0	205	G-Sr.	St. Louis, Mo./Christian Brothers College
2	Kourt Williams II	SAF	6-1	220	So.	Harbor City, Calif./St. John Bosco
2	Emeka Egbuka	WR	6-1	205	So.	Steilacoom, Wash./Steilacoom
3	Miyan Williams	RB	5-8	225	So.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Winton Woods
3	Teradja Mitchell	LB	6-2	239	G-Sr.	Virginia Beach, Va./Bishop Sullivan
4	Julian Fleming	WR	6-2	207	Jr.	Catawissa, Pa./Southern Columbia
4	Lejond Cavazos	CB	6-0	192	So.	San Antonio, Texas/IMG Academy
6	Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	220	So.	Mt. Laurel, N.J./St. Joseph's Prep
6	Taron Vincent	DT	6-2	305	Sr.	Baltimore, Md./IMG Academy
7	C.J. Stroud	QB	6-3	218	So.	Rancho Cucamonga, Calif./Rancho Cucamonga
8	Javontae Jean-Baptiste	DE	6-5	255	Sr.	Spring Valley, N.Y./Bergen Catholic
8	Cade Stover	TE	6-4	255	Jr.	Mansfield, Ohio/Lexington
9	Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	195	R-Fr.	Massillon, Ohio/Massillon Washington
9	Zach Harrison	DE	6-6	272	Sr.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy Orange
10	Cameron Martinez	SAF	5-10	190	So.	Muskegon, Mich./Muskegon
10	Xavier Johnson	WR	6-2	215	Sr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Summit Country Day
11	Jaxon Smith-Njigba	WR	6-0	198	Jr.	Rockwall, Texas/Rockwall
11	C.J. Hicks	LB	6-3	220	Fr.	Dayton, Ohio/Archbishop Alter
12	Caleb Burton	WR	5-11	169	Fr.	Austin, Texas/Lake Travis
12	Lathan Ransom	SAF	6-1	205	Jr.	Tucson, Ariz./Salpointe Catholic
13	Jordan Hancock	CB	6-1	188	So.	Suwanee, Ga./North Gwinnett
14	Ronnie Hickman	SAF	6-1	205	Jr.	South Orange, N.J./DePaul Catholic
15	Devin Brown	QB	6-3	205	Fr.	Draper, Utah/Corner Canyon
15	Tanner McCalister	SAF	5-11	192	G-Sr.	Rockwall/Texas Rockwall-Heath/Okla. State
17	Kylon Grayes	WR	6-0	175	Fr.	Chandler, Ariz./Chandler
17	Bryson Shaw	SAF	6-0	195	Jr.	Eldersburg, Md./Bullis School
18	Marvin Harrison Jr.	WR	6-3	205	So.	Philadelphia, Pa./St. Joseph's Prep
18	Jyaire Brown	CB	5-11	180	Fr.	New Orleans, La./Lakota West
19	Chip Trayanum	LB	5-11	227	Jr.	Akron, Ohio/Archbishop Hoban/Ariz. State
20	Mitchell Melton	LB	6-3	245	So.	Silver Spring, Md./Good Counsel
20	Dominic DiMaccio	K	5-8	190	Sr.	Powell, Ohio/DeSales
21	Evan Pryor	RB	5-10	198	R-Fr.	Cornelius, N.C./William Amos Hough
21	Palaie Gaoteote IV	LB	6-2	248	Sr.	Las Vegas/Bishop Gorman/USC
22	Steele Chambers	LB	6-1	232	Jr.	Roswell, Ga./Blessed Trinity Catholic
23	Marcus Hooker	SAF	5-11	200	Sr.	New Castle, Pa./New Castle
24	Ryan Turner	CB	6-0	180	Fr.	Hollywood, Fla./Chaminade-Madonna Prep
24	Jantzen Dunn	SAF	6-1	182	R-Fr.	Bowling Green, Ky./South Warren
24	Marcus Crowley	RB	6-1	216	Jr.	Jacksonville, Fla./Trinity Christian Academy
25	Jaylen Johnson	SAF	6-1	210	R-Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/La Salle
26	Cayden Saunders	RB	5-10	190	So.	Northville, Mich./Northville
26	Cameron Brown	CB	6-0	190	Sr.	St. Louis, Mo./Christian Brothers College
28	Reid Carrico	LB	6-2	230	R-Fr.	Ironton, Ohio/Ironton
29	Denzel Burke	CB	6-1	190	So.	Scottsdale, Ariz./Saguaro
29	Jesse Mirco	P	6-4	220	So.	Fremantle, Australia
30	Cody Simon	LB	6-2	233	Jr.	Jersey City, N.J./St. Peter's Prep
30	Corban Cleveland	WR	5-11	180	So.	Rockwall, Texas/Rockwall Heath
32	TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-10	215	So.	Hopewell, Va./Hopewell
32	Jakailin Johnson	CB	6-0	179	R-Fr.	St. Louis, Mo./De Smet
33	Jack Sawyer	DE	6-4	260	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington North
34	Andre Turrentine	SAF	5-11	195	R-Fr.	Nashville, Tenn./Ensworth
34	Mitch Rossi	TE	6-1	245	G-Sr.	Franklin, Tenn./Franklin
35	Tommy Eichenberg	LB	6-2	235	Jr.	Cleveland, Ohio/St. Ignatius
36	Gabe Powers	LB	6-3	214	Fr.	Marysville, Ohio/Marysville
37	Kye Stokes	SAF	6-2	185	Fr.	Seffner, Fla./Armwood
37	Garrison Smith	K	5-8	195	So.	Norwalk, Ohio/Norwalk
38	Cameron Kittle	DB	6-0	182	So.	Glouster, Ohio/Trimble
38	Jayden Fielding	K	5-11	167	Fr.	League City, Texas/IMG Academy
39	Andrew Moore	DB	5-11	185	So.	Cleveland/Cleveland Heights
41	Josh Proctor	SAF	6-2	205	Sr.	Owasso, Okla./Owasso
42	Lloyd McFarquhar	CB	5-10	180	Sr.	Cleveland, Ohio/Brush
42	Bradley Robinson	LS	6-1	230	G-Sr.	Troy, Mich./Athens
43	Ryan Batsch	LB	6-2	228	Sr.	Loveland, Ohio/Loveland
44	J.T. Tuimoloau	DE	6-4	272	So.	Edgewood, Wash./Eastside Catholic
46	Elias Myers	LB	6-2	240	Sr.	Sunbury, Ohio/Big Walnut/IMG Academy/Pitt.
46	Cade Kacherski	LB	6-2	225	G-Sr.	Dublin, Ohio/Jerome
48	Max Lomonico	LS	6-3	225	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
49	Patrick Gurd	TE	6-4	245	Jr.	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
50	Jackson Kuwatch	LB	6-4	235	So.	Cincinnati/Lakota West
51	Michael Hall Jr.	DT	6-2	292	R-Fr.	Streetsboro, Ohio/Streetsboro
53	Luke Wypler	OL	6-3	300	So.	Montvale, N.J./St. Joseph Regional
54	Toby Wilson	OL	6-2	290	So.	Lewis Center, Ohio/Olentangy
54	Tyler Friday	DE	6-3	264	Sr.	Ramsey, N.J./Don Bosco Prep
55	Matthew Jones	OL	6-4	310	G-Sr.	Brooklyn, N.Y./Erasmus Hall
56	Zach Cicero	DL	6-2	265	So.	Niles, Ohio/Niles McKinley
57	Jalen Pace	LB	6-0	225	So.	St. Louis/Mary Institute & Country Day School
58	Ty Hamilton	DT	6-3	290	So.	Pickerington, Ohio/Pickerington Central
60	Ryan Smith	OL	6-1	285	Sr.	Valley City, Ohio/Buckeye
61	Jack Forsman	OL	6-6	300	So.	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
62	Bryce Prater	DL	6-0	280	Fr.	West Lafayette, Ohio/Ridgewood
63	Zach Prater	DL	6-0	285	Fr.	West Lafayette, Ohio/Ridgewood
64	Quinton Burke	OL	6-4	310	Jr.	Lancaster, Ohio/Lancaster
65	Zen Michalski	OL	6-7	305	R-Fr.	Floyds Knobs, Ind./Floyd Central
66	Enokk Vimahi	OL	6-4	310	Jr.	Kahuku, Hawaii/Kahuku
68	George Fitzpatrick	OL	6-6	285	Fr.	Englewood, Col./Cherry Creek
69	Trey Leroux	OL	6-7	315	So.	Norwalk, Ohio/Norwalk
70	Josh Fryar	OL	6-6	315	So.	Beech Grove, Ind./Beech Grove
71	Ben Christman	OL	6-6	310	R-Fr.	Akron, Ohio/Revere
72	Donovan Jackson	OL	6-4	300	So.	Bellaire, Texas/Episcopal
73	Grant Toutant	OL	6-6	320	So.	Warren, Mich./De La Salle
76	Harry Miller	OL	6-4	315	Jr.	Buford, Ga./Buford
77	Paris Johnson Jr.	OL	6-6	315	Jr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Princeton
78	Jakob James	OL	6-4	295	So.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Elder
79	Dawand Jones	OL	6-8	360	Sr.	Indianapolis, Ind./Ben Davis
81	Sam Hart	TE	6-5	245	R-Fr.	Aurora, Colo./Cherokee Trail
82	Sam Wiglusz	WR	5-11	189	G-Sr.	Brecksville, Ohio/Brecksville-Broadview Heights
83	Joop Mitchell	WR	6-2	180	So.	Wyoming, Ohio/Wyoming
84	Joe Royer	TE	6-5	245	So.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Elder
85	Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	245	Fr.	Acworth, Ga./Allatoona
86	Jerron Cage	DT	6-2	310	G-Sr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Winton Woods
87	Reis Stocksdale	WR	5-9	188	So.	Morrow, Ohio/Little Miami
88	Gee Scott Jr.	TE	6-3	225	Jr.	Seattle, Wash./Eastside Catholic
89	Zak Herbstreit	TE	6-2	235	So.	Nashville, Tenn./Montgomery Bell Academy
90	Jaden McKenzie	DT	6-2	290	Jr.	Wake Forest, N.C./Wake Forest H.S.
91	Tyleik Williams	DT	6-3	315	So.	Manassas, Va./Unity Reed
92	Caden Curry	DE	6-3	250	Fr.	Greenwood, Ind./Center Grove
93	Jacolbe Cowan	DL	6-4	272	So.	Charlotte, N.C./Providence Day School
94	Mason Arnold	LS	6-0	233	So.	Tampa, Fla./Carrollwood Day
95	Noah Ruggles	K	6-2	190	G-Sr.	Odessa, Fla.
96	Michael O'Shaughnessy	P	6-3	205	Sr.	New Albany, Ohio/New Albany
97	Noah Potter	DL	6-6	275	Jr.	Mentor, Ohio/Mentor
98	Jake Seibert	K	6-1	205	So.	Cincinnati, Ohio/La Salle

Coaching Staff – Ryan Day, head coach; Larry Johnson, associate head coach/defensive line; Jim Knowles, defensive coordinator/linebackers; Tony Alford, assistant head coach for offense/running backs, run game coordinator; Justin Frye, associate head coach for offense, offensive line; Brian Hartline, wide receivers, passing game coordinator; Kevin Wilson, offensive coordinator/tight ends; Tim Walton, secondary coach, cornerbacks coach; Perry Eliano, safeties coach; Corey Dennis, quarterbacks coach; Parker Fleming, special teams coordinator; Keenan Bailey, offensive quality control coach; Matt Guerrieri, senior advisor and analyst.

al occasions that Ohio State is just as focused this offseason on pairing these new ideas in the coaching room with stronger leadership in the locker room. He said flatly on March 22 that Ohio State wasn't tough enough in its regular-season finale against the Wolverines and that team toughness starts with leadership and accountability among the players that he didn't see truly emerge until the second half of the Rose Bowl win over Utah.

"Part of it was how young we were," Day said. "We were really green, and guys were just trying to get lined up and play well. When you have a team who has the experience that we have coming back, you can put more focus on leadership, and that's what happened in the second half of the Rose Bowl. The leadership stepped up at halftime. We didn't have (toughness in the Michigan) game. That's the truth. We really wanted to focus on that over the last seven weeks."

In the quest for leadership, Ohio State underwent nearly two months of searching through winter workouts. They called for volunteers who wanted to step up into

leadership roles.

"We decided that leadership was the number one thing we needed to get done in this offseason," Day said. "We explained to everyone what leadership is and asked for players who want to be the leaders of this team. They volunteered, and we voted 24 players from that onto a leadership committee. During the offseason program, we designed 12 squads, with two leaders assigned to each.

"Through that seven-week period, we really forged a lot of leadership throughout the team. There were a lot of ways that (director of strength and conditioning) Mickey Marotti and our strength and conditioning staff did that. If somebody was late, there was community service on the weekend for the whole group – there was a lot of accountability and a lot of feedback.

"I think this is probably the best we've done for an offseason of forging leadership. Not all of those 24 were great leaders. Some of them were and some of them weren't, but there was a lot more leadership based on what we did the last seven weeks than we've had in a while, and that

was encouraging."

He didn't name names, but Ohio State returns three team captains from last season in wide receiver Kamryn Babb, who has earned effusive praise from his coaches early in spring ball as he's returned to the practice field a healthy man for the first time in several years, Harrison and Mitchell.

Stover was selected for a most-improved award during that session. Others, such as Stroud, Smith-Njigba, offensive tackle

Dawand Jones, many of the defensive line's more experienced players, Chambers and McCalister have been increasingly vocal through spring camp. For a team that will be spending the next five months growing up, the standard has been reset.

"We know what to expect," Harrison said. "We know when we're hitting on all cylinders, and we know when we're not. And it's not a secret because we all know, so we can be open about it and call each other out."

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OSU's Coaches Are Teaching By Connecting

By **BRADEN MOLES**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

At its most basic level, college football is about building relationships. This begins with an athletic director forming a connection with a head coach, who then fills out his staff with like-minded coaches he has been able to connect with. Once a staff is in place, the relationship building extends into recruiting, where coaches go across the country to form bonds with student-athletes and set a foundation for the future once they've arrived on campus.

This process is starting over for Ohio State this season, with several new staffers on both sides of the ball getting ingrained into the program. Spring practice is off and running with the new hires organizing drills and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles running things on defense, but head coach Ryan Day said it can take time for them to get worked in.

"Relationship building is a big part of working these new coaches in, and it's going to take a little bit of time in that area but it won't take very long," Day said. "People understand what this is all about.

We're not making drastic changes, and I think we got some guys in here who know how to develop at a high level, so it's creating a lot of excitement. The feedback I've gotten from recruits is that they understand the staff we have now on defense and they're excited to get here in March and April and watch spring practice."

Although Knowles is new to Ohio State's staff, he's no spring chicken; this upcoming season will be his 35th season coaching at the Division I level and his 20th at a Power Five school. He is joined by some fellow veterans on the coaching roster, including offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson (entering his 38th year of college coaching) and defensive line coach Larry Johnson (going into his 27th year).

Coaches are known to stick to their ways throughout their careers, but when it comes to teaching, Knowles and Wilson spoke extensively during spring practice about how their views have progressed in how they look to impart knowledge to student-athletes.

"I would have said 15 years ago the ability to keep it simple to understand," Wilson said. "You know, I always felt in my world I wasn't that good of a player, so I knew some things I had to do to give me a chance. Marshall Faulk – a few years ago when a guy ran some 4.2 something at the NFL combine – said, 'Well, the best way to slow a guy down is to make him think.' I think a great coach can give coaching points but allow his players to, in time, understand it to where they're not thinking.



Ryan Day

"My players should tell you that if they're thinking, they don't know. They (need to) know what they're doing. They know it's this route at this depth or it's this block or it's this call. If they're thinking about it, they don't know."

Wilson's point has been proven in recent seasons, especially on defense where it often appeared Ohio State was too often caught thinking. But with several more stops and a head-coaching stint at Indiana under Wilson's belt, some nuance has been added to his teaching style.

"I would tell you now, you better have the ability to connect," he said. "I explained the other day – we called a pass play that's called naked, when the quarterback is by himself. Why do we call this naked? I was just trying to help them understand why it's called this, because I think we're in a generation where kids want to know why we're doing things or why we're doing a drill. One of the abilities (you need) now to be a great teacher is the ability to connect with kids and invest time with them."

Knowles echoed Wilson's sentiment and said that one of the expectations that Day



SONNY BROCKWAY

OLD DOGS, NEW TRICKS – Ohio State's veteran coaches, including offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson (above), are continuing to evolve their teaching strategies to better suit a new generation of athletes. This will be Wilson's 38th year of college football coaching, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' 35th year and defensive line coach Larry Johnson's 27th year.

has is that Knowles will create a system that is accountable for both himself and the players he is teaching.

"I have to have answers," Knowles said. "The players have to understand why I'm teaching what I'm teaching. You need to be able to wrap the whole thing. Here's what we do, here's why we do it, here's why you should buy into it – because we can give the historical facts and figures – and this is what it can do for you and for our team. Let's take a look at the fundamentals, how we teach, and I've worked hard on that.

"How we teach this generation, all of the different creative ways to do it – we have to have a system, a plan. We have to be accountable, and when things go wrong, which they will every now and then, we have to have answers. That's what Ryan wants."

Knowles has introduced some innovative teaching tactics, like incorporating quiz shows to help keep everyone engaged in a lesson. While he admits that it might be corny, he said the players have been drawn to the familiar format.

"We also hold them accountable to their teammates," he continued. "At any time while I'm teaching – and everything is interactive, we have things where when I say something, they say something. I want to keep them engaged. Anytime during my presentation, which we try to keep as 20-minute, high-energy meetings, their picture can pop up and they have to stand up and within 2.5 seconds they have to answer a question because otherwise, the play is over. We keep them on their toes, locked in and engaged."

While the lessons have mostly stayed the same – after 35 years in the business, you generally settle into what you like – the student-athletes continue to change, with most looking for meaning beyond just directions.

"I've improved a lot as a teacher," Knowles said. "Teach, motivate, demand. In the past, maybe I jumped to demand too soon. Now it has to be teach, tell them what you want to do, give them a reason why they should do it – we always try to illustrate why this works – and then if they don't get it, go back and teach again. When you finally get to be demanding, if you've done the right procedures, they're ready for it. I'm much more thorough with the teaching part now. I'm taking responses from the players, keeping the meetings lively and interactive, giving them things they can look at on their phone because that's where they live and approaching teaching as an adjustment to the players and their lives.

"If the student hasn't learned, the teacher hasn't taught. Going through a career, when you're young, you'll get upset when a guy doesn't understand something. Now I look at it like, 'Hey, that's my responsibility. He has not learned it well enough because I have not taught it well enough.' You're always looking at yourself and at your approach to being a better teacher.

"This generation wants reason, and there's nothing wrong with that. Nothing. That's good. That forces us to grow as teachers and show them the reasoning, give them meaning for why they're doing something."

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Henderson Seeking Well-Rounded Approach

By **CHASE BROWN**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Before last season, TreVeyon Henderson hadn't played a football game in almost two years. The sophomore running back lost his senior season of high school football when his home state of Virginia moved the traditionally-fall sport to the spring of 2021 after Henderson had already enrolled early at Ohio State.

It wasn't noticeable in the Buckeyes' season-opening game at Minnesota, where Henderson rushed twice for 15 yards and caught one pass for 70 yards and a touchdown. Or when he broke Archie Griffin's freshman single-game rushing record with a 270-yard, three-score performance against Tulsa in Week 3.

However, as the season continued, Henderson's body wore down. In the Big Ten, he wasn't in a league of his own anymore. The defensive linemen, linebackers and defensive backs were bigger, faster and stronger than his competition at Hopewell High School.

"Throughout the season, you feel your body start to shut down a little bit," Henderson said. "I think I did a pretty good job of taking care of my body and getting into the training room before and after practice. Each week, I was grinding in the training room and making sure I was straight before the game. I was nicked up a bit going into some of the games, but I was able to play through them."

Henderson had to embrace the grunt work in his first season. He showed plenty of the big-play ability that had exploded off his high school tape – proven with his 17 plays of 20-plus yards from the line of scrimmage – but he realized that a collegiate running back also needs to grind out the hard-fought short-yardage carries.

"I had to learn to love those," Henderson said. "Especially after the beginning of the season, after the Tulsa (and Akron games), when everything was open. After those games, you had to go fight for what's yours."

Henderson averaged 11.3 carries and 108.0 yards with six touchdowns in the first four weeks against Minnesota, Oregon, Tulsa and Akron. Despite an increase to 15.1 carries per game in the conference schedule, he averaged only 91.6 yards with nine score over the next eight regular-season games.

While he would have liked to produce more for his team, Henderson said his debut season in an Ohio State uniform was a success. He became the fourth freshman running back in school history to surpass 1,000 rushing yards in a season, broke Maurice Claret's freshman touchdown record and finished as a semifinalist for the Walter Camp Player of the Year and Doak Walker Award.

Henderson hopes to keep building on his breakout year and wants to carry that momentum deep into the 2022 season, where he will be the primary ball carrier in the Buckeye backfield with Miyan Williams and Evan Pryor providing change-of-pace duties.

"I think, overall, I had a great season," Henderson said. "I'm very hard on myself,

and I always think I can do more. I'm way more confident than I was coming in last year. I know the offense and the speed of the game from practicing against some of the best players in the country all year. I'm way more confident."

Henderson will enter the year with high expectations and will require more stellar production to avoid a "sophomore slump." J.K. Dobbins, Ohio State's most recent breakout freshman tailback, ran into the problem during the 2018 season after becoming a freshman phenom the year before.

Dobbins averaged 7.2 yards per carry as a freshman and 6.7 as a junior. However, the La Grange, Texas, native averaged only 4.6 yards a carry as a sophomore, struggling largely with picking up extra yards through contact.

According to Pro Football Focus (PFF), Dobbins' yards after contact as a freshman (4.25) and junior (4.01) were nearly identical, but he managed only 2.68 yards in that category during his sophomore season. Dobbins also spent much of the 2018 season splitting carries with Mike Weber, causing him to overcompensate with his somewhat-limited opportunities.

"I didn't have the year I needed to have. I put that on myself and I'll get back to that this upcoming year," Dobbins said before the 2019 season. "It's not the offensive line's fault. It's not anyone else's fault except for mine. I didn't take advantage of my opportunities like I did my freshman year, and the results were what they were."

PFF also indicated that Dobbins created 20 breakaways – designed runs for more than 15 yards – as a freshman and 31 as a junior. Those runs accounted for nearly 47 percent of his yards in those two seasons. As a sophomore, he created only seven breakaways, accounting for 15.4 percent of his yards.

Dobbins, like Henderson, broke off big runs at times – although he didn't possess the same explosiveness and speed. Still, Henderson is wary of the all-too-common sophomore slump trend that plagued the former Buckeye running back.

Ohio State offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson said he took responsibility in the offseason to speak with Henderson about how to avoid that drop-off. Wilson developed a theory around how to encourage growth and success among running backs while spending the 1990s as an offensive line coach and coordinator at Miami (Ohio).

Then-head coach Randy Walker, who had been a fullback for the Mid-American Conference program, explained to Wilson that you don't find dollar bills on the ground, but you might occasionally find a nickel. Eventually, you'll have a dollar if you pick up enough nickels.

Wilson used another analogy to describe the running back position, describing its flow like baseball. Head coach Ryan Day used a similar approach when calling Henderson a "home-run hitter" throughout last season.

"It's like baseball," Wilson explained. "There are a lot of singles. If you're looking for home runs, you're going to strike out a lot. I think as a young player, you start look-



SONNY BROCKWAY

BACK FOR MORE – Ohio State sophomore halfback TreVeyon Henderson (32) is embracing tough yardage as he hopes to balance his game. The tailback told media that, despite a record-breaking freshman campaign, he felt he hit a wall down the stretch in 2021 and that he wants to improve on the little things heading into this season.

ing to make big plays as a runner. If you just trust the read, trust your talent and run, big plays will happen."

If Henderson follows his coach's advice, he might be headed for another record-breaking season in scarlet and gray. Williams and Pryor will push for carries, but Henderson is the unquestioned front-runner to take handoffs from quarterback C.J. Stroud, unlike a season ago.

To be one of Ohio State's all-time greats at the position – something he revealed as one of his goals before he leaves Columbus – he will need to build on his opening year. Henderson said he's confident that can happen and that he will be remembered as one of the best Buckeyes to play the position when it's all over.

"Dreaming big is always a part of my process," Henderson said. "I have some big expectations for myself. I'm always trying to prove myself wrong (and do more than I thought I could)."

NIL's Impact Runs Deep

Henderson's on-field accomplishments bring him accolades and critical acclaim, but his grin shone brightest at a March 16 media availability when he said his mother no longer needs to work two jobs because of his off-field NIL deals.

Thanks to individual sponsorship deals with a car dealership in Columbus, a cryptocurrency exchange company and a fast-food restaurant, Henderson can now provide financially for his mother, who works as an

accountant while managing other miscellaneous occupations.

"I watched my mom struggle (as I was) growing up, having trouble taking care of us and providing for us," Henderson said. "She worked so hard, and she always did whatever she could to make sure we were straight. With NIL, I can take care of her forever. Hopefully, it can be forever. She's straight now, and she doesn't have to worry about anything."

Henderson didn't offer specifics for how much money NIL has provided for him over the last nine months but indicated that he's bringing in more than standard pocket change.

"Being here at The Ohio State University and being a running back here, there's been lots of money," Henderson said. "I've always sent that money home. Whatever my mama needs or my grandma needs, I send it right to them."

Henderson's generosity also extends beyond the immediate family. Though he was reluctant to share further information because he feared he was being boastful, he revealed that he takes time to provide for anyone who needs a helping hand.

"I love giving back," he said. "I always give back – it's not just to my mom and grandma. If I'm walking out on the street and I see somebody, I always give back to them and get them something to eat. That's something I don't talk about because that comes from the heart."

Stroud and Smith-Njigba Are Record Setters

By **CRAIG MERZ**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's pro day on March 23 was a chance for quarterback C.J. Stroud to reunite with former teammates Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson before the receivers head to the NFL for big paydays.

Stroud built chemistry with the pair in his one season as a starter, and it was evident the vibes were still there as the third-year sophomore threw ball after ball to Olave and Wilson in front of a throng of NFL coaches and scouts.

"That was just like old times," Wilson said. "It's truly special to watch."

Ohio State fans were worried prior to the Jan. 1 Rose Bowl against Utah that the decisions by Olave and Wilson to opt out of the game to save themselves for the NFL draft would be spell trouble.

Those concerns proved unfounded as Stroud went to his new No.1 receiver, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, repeatedly. The final tally in the 48-45 win was Stroud throwing for 573 yards and six touchdowns – both Rose Bowl records. The yardage was a school record while the half dozen scores tied the program mark.

"I think when you dive into C.J., you realize he's highly motivated," coach Ryan Day said. "The way he came out and played in that Rose Bowl, you can see that he comes out with the mind-set to get something and improve every day. It's the way he's wired. I think that's what gives him an opportunity to be great."

"Is he great yet? No, he's not. But he's on his way there. And I think it's that approach of, 'I have to prove myself every single day.' That's the way he was brought up and the way things have happened in his life. I expect it to be that way throughout the spring and into the preseason and then into next year because there's still a lot to prove. I think that's the way he's wired, and he's very competitive in that area."

Meanwhile, Smith-Njigba set a program and FBS bowl record with 347 receiving yards to go along with three TDs among his school-record 15 catches in the Rose Bowl. In the process he set Ohio State season records for receptions (95) and receiving yards (1,606).

"We built that connection probably all the way back," Stroud said after the game. "We came in as freshmen together, came in early. Scout team last year, we really built it. This doesn't surprise me at all. When I heard the numbers, I didn't really notice because he does this all the time."

Barring unforeseen circumstances, Stroud could be throwing to his junior partner during the 2023 pro day. Until then, expectations are high for the duo to lead the Buckeyes to the College Football Playoff after a disappointing 11-2 record in 2021. Yes, the benchmarks are high in Columbus.

"This is a conversation for down the road with (Smith-Njigba and Stroud), but it's really about the process on a daily basis, about them and the standard they set," Day said. "It has to be more important than ever. There will be games where we feel a certain way coming out, but then when we

play against a team that's a little bit more competitive, or we get into conference play, (any complacency) will pop up. This is going to be a constant battle of who can bring it week in and week out. And these guys understand that. They're highly motivated, and now they're taking the steps as leaders."

Day is looking beyond their impressive stats.

"They certainly played well and were high-impact guys and now they're working as leaders, and that's a whole different deal," he said.

As Stroud to Smith-Njigba continues to evolve they are on a path to put their names atop numerous team marks in addition to those already established.

Still, Stroud will have more weapons than just Smith-Njigba with Marvin Harrison Jr., Julian Fleming and Emeka Egbuka among those awaiting their opportunities.

"We've typically played five or six receivers," Day said. "When you think back on when Terry (McLaurin) was here with Paris Campbell, Austin Mack, K.J. Hill, Johnnie Dixon – we've typically rolled a lot of guys. We'd like to do that. What you do is you try to find one, then you try to find two, three and then four. As many guys who deserve to get on the field and get reps are going to get reps, and we typically like to roll those guys if we can, but they have to get out there and earn that work. We have some really intelligent guys out there."

"I watch Kamryn Babb work out there, and he's learned a bunch of different positions," Day added. "It's the same thing with Emeka and Julian. They've learned a bunch of different positions. It's good that there's some versatility there. We have some decent depth out there too with guys like Xavier Johnson, Sam Wiglusz and Jayden Ballard."

But make no mistake, the top priority for defenses will be containing Smith-Njigba, who said he is up to the task.

"My No. 1 goal is to win the national championship, and for me to do that, I'm going to have to step up even more," he said. "So that's my challenge to me is how can I step up even more, be a leader to these young guys and see if we can make a run at the natty this year, for sure."

To get Smith-Njigba the needed touches, he will spend more time this season as an outside receiver than being in his normal slot position.

"We're going to have to move Jaxon around," Day said. "There will be some one-on-one opportunities, but there's no question there are going to be times when guys are going to try to double-team Jaxon. We will have to be creative in that area, but they can't do it every play and they have to give up some other things to do it. We'll try to figure out ways to (take advantage of) that."

Records For The Breaking

The pursuit of excellence for Stroud and Smith-Njigba begins with the opener vs. Notre Dame on Sept. 3. With that in mind, here are some records they are pursuing:

If Smith-Njigba can get over the century mark in receiving yards vs. the Fighting Irish, he will have his sixth straight 100-yard plus game to break a tie with Cris Carter (Oct. 18-Nov. 15, 1986).



SONNY BROCKWAY

EYES ON THE CROWN – Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud (7) could shatter several program records in 2022, as could wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba. Stroud is 5,000 yards short of the career passing record, while Smith-Njigba would need 97 receptions and 1,243 yards to claim career receiving marks.

As for the career mark, leader David Boston had 14 100-yard games from 1996-98. Olave (2018-21) is second with 11 while Smith-Njigba is tied for seventh with seven.

All of his came last season, the second most in a season to Boston's nine in 1998.

Smith-Njigba would need a season even greater than his 95 catches last season to become the OSU career record holder. He is 23rd with 105 and would need 97 to surpass the 201 of K.J. Hill (2016-19). Runner-up Boston (191) is within reach, though.

"I'm not where I want to be," Smith-Njigba. "I feel like my ceiling is way higher. I feel like I can get way better in all aspects of the game."

"My mind-set is I want to get better at everything I did last season. Just tweak it, level up just one or two notches."

Another record that could fall to Smith-Njigba is the 2,898 career receiving yards mark for Michael Jenkins (2000-03). Smith-Njigba currently is 22nd, but with 1,655 yards he is just 1,243 away from matching Jenkins.

While Stroud's 4,435 passing yards is second all-time in a season to the 4,831 of Dwayne Haskins in 2018, he is unlikely to catch the career yardage mark of J.T. Barrett, who in four seasons (2014-17) threw for 9,434 yards. No Buckeye has ever thrown for 5,000 yards in a season, and Stroud would need exactly that to topple

Barrett. All of Stroud's yardage, by the way, came last season since he did not throw a pass in two games as a freshman.

Nor is it likely Stroud can become the touchdown passes leader. His 44 trails Barrett by 60. Justin Fields (2019-20) is second, but only 19 ahead with 63. The school season mark is 50 by Haskins in his lone season as a starter.

Stroud has twice tied the school record of six TD passes in a game and set the mark for consecutive completions with 17 against Michigan State.

Now that Stroud has a full season at the helm, offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson sees a big 2022 for his quarterback, who set the school season mark for completion percentage (71.9; 317 of 441).

"He is extremely gifted and talented, but he's equally smart and equally aware on the field," Wilson said. "His ability to see and put it all together is uniquely high, so I think we can just put a little bit more on his plate. (Day) has a phenomenal amount of confidence in his ability to trust him to get protections right and get the ball out to the right guys and not force it."

"A veteran player like him has got one year under his belt – 13 games. Our veterans are second-year starters. It's exciting about how good C.J. could be. Here's a guy that started (well), but you'd like to think there's a lot more in that ceiling."

Stroud Steals The Show At Ohio State's Pro Day

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The main attraction at Ohio State's March 23 pro day for many of the NFL scouts, coaches and front-office staffers in attendance won't be draft-eligible for another season.

Working in tandem with former Buckeye quarterback Cardale Jones to provide passes for Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson and other Buckeyes who are headed to the professional ranks this year, incumbent quarterback C.J. Stroud seemed to draw just as many eyes as his former teammates with a litany of dazzling deep balls. During the session, ESPN draft analyst Matt Miller tweeted a quick quote from an evaluator he spoke to on the sidelines about the player who most drew his attention. His answer?

"The QB! He's amazing."

For Stroud, the attention wasn't exactly unexpected. The 2022 class of quarterbacks is considered weaker than usual, and though a few members of it – namely Liberty's Malik Willis, Pitt's Kenny Pickett and Matt Corral of Ole Miss – are expected to contend for first-round spots this season, many of the league's most quarterback-hungry teams appear to be looking at this season as a sideshow to the main attraction a season from now.

There's another season to be played for that group, but in March of 2022, it's a two-man main event at quarterback



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

ANOTHER GO — DT Haskell Garrett didn't run the 40-yard-dash at Ohio State's pro day, but he did take a shot at the rest of the drills, just a month removed from participating in many of the same drills at the NFL combine.

in 2023 – Stroud, and Alabama's Bryce Young. Just two years ago, the two were signing on with their prospective schools and were the No. 3 and No. 1 quarterbacks

respectively on the 247Sports recruiting rankings composite. Now, with most likely a year left to play, they're already jockeying for positioning.

But for Stroud, the chance to throw with his old teammates was no high-pressure situation. In fact, he told gathered reporters that he could hardly sleep the

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Name	HT	WT	Arm (In.)	Hand (In.)	Wing (In.)	40-Yd. (Sec.)	10-Yd. (Sec.)	20-Yd. (Sec.)	Vert. (In.)	Broad (Ft.)	Bench (Reps 225)	3-Cone Drill (Sec.)	20-Yd. Shuttle (Sec.)
CHRIS BOOKER (WR)	5'11"	184	30 3/4"	8 7/8"	72 3/8"	4.52/4.53	1.60/1.63	2.63/2.64	36"	9'9"	DNP	7.01	4.13
HASKELL GARRETT (DT)	6'2"	300	31 7/8"	9 7/8"	79"	DNP	DNP	DNP	30.5"	9'	24	7.75	4.80
ANTWUAN JACKSON (DT)	6'2 1/8"	298	31 7/8"	9 1/4"	77 1/4"	5.15	1.75	2.91	28"	7'10"	22	7.94	4.90
DEMARIO MCCALL (WR/CB)	5'9 3/8"	179	30 3/8"	9 3/8"	73"	4.53	1.57	2.60	34.5"	10'	13	7.09	4.13
THAYER MUNFORD (OL)	6'5 3/4"	329	35 1/2"	10 1/8"	84 1/2"	5.33	1.90	3.08	DNP	9'	22	7.74	4.77
CHRIS OLAVE (WR)	6'0 1/2"	185	N/A	N/A	N/A	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP
NICHOLAS PETIT-FRERE (OT)	6'5 1/4"	316	34"	10 3/4"	82 3/8"	DNP	DNP	DNP	30.5"	DNP	24	7.85	4.85
JEREMY RUCKERT (TE)	6'5 1/8"	251	N/A	N/A	N/A	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	22	DNP	DNP
TYREKE SMITH (DE)	6'3 3/8"	255	33 3/4"	10"	80 7/8"	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	9'9"	DNP	7.06	4.24
MASTER TEAGUE (RB)	5'11 1/4"	221	31 7/8"	9 1/2"	76 7/8"	4.44-4.49	1.54	2.59	36"	10'11"	27	6.95	4.29
GARRETT WILSON (WR)	5'11 7/8"	184	N/A	N/A	N/A	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP

night prior out of excitement.

"I can do nothing but just thank (my teammates) for just letting me do this with them," Stroud said. "I was excited. I damn near didn't sleep last night. When you build a connection with them, I wouldn't say it's like second nature ... but it definitely is second nature. People said I did a decent job. I want a couple of the throws back, but I feel like we had a decent day."

After he concluded his time on the field, Stroud drew quite the crowd from the NFL personnel in attendance. He spoke at length with representatives from several teams – including Tennessee Titans head coach Mike Vrabel, who has plenty of familiarity with the Woody Hayes Athletic Center where the Buckeyes performed as a former OSU player and coach. Not that Stroud was ever lacking for confidence, but the reception confirmed for the California native his ability to perform at the kind of level that will almost certainly see him hear his name called early come next year's draft.

"It just shows me that I'm able to do this," Stroud said. "I have the God-given talent. I think I was a little nervous at first, but after you let that first ball go, you're back to doing what you did since you were a kid. I think that will just catapult me to

next year and make me feel a lot more comfortable and better."

Teague Leads The Way

Among the Buckeyes who are eligible for this upcoming draft, none benefited more than redshirt junior running back Master Teague III. A surprise entry in the draft after toting the ball just 67 times for 355 yards in 2021, Teague turned heads with the best 40-yard-dash, broad jump, bench press and three-cone time, while measuring in at 5-11 and 221 pounds.

Looking as much like a superhero as he did a football player in build, Teague blazed a 4.44-second 40-yard-dash, leapt 10-feet, 11-inches in the broad jump and benched 225 pounds 27 times – none of which came as a surprise to the Tennessee native.

"I already know what I could do," Teague said. "I already knew I could do that, so it's not surprising. I just do it. I was doing (broad jumping) in high school. It's kind of just what I'm used to. I know I can do it. I was trying to get 11 actually, but I got 10-11. That's still good."

Ohio State's pro day presented Teague's first – and likely best – shot at catching the NFL's attention. He wasn't invited to last month's NFL combine, but his performance in Columbus would have placed him among the best-testing running backs at that event.

His 40-time is good enough for 11th,

while his broad jump would lead the pack and his bench press would tie him atop the group with Michigan's Hassan Haskins. Granted, many running backs didn't participate in the ancillary drills at the combine (no one did the three-cone, very few bench pressed), but Teague's showing turned heads in Columbus and

he hopes that's enough to overcome what he referred to as a disappointing final season.

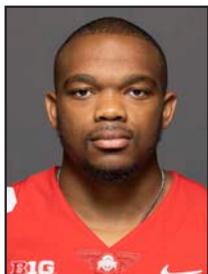
"Of course last year didn't go the way that I imagined," Teague said. "Either way, I just wanted to show my character, be available whenever I could and contribute any way that I could. It's been a journey for sure. I feel like my sophomore year was probably the best year that I showed and I had. With COVID this next year, it was all right, but I wasn't fulfilled with that. Part of it was my performance but also the limited amount of games that we had."

The stars of the show, Olave and Wilson, didn't perform outside of the pitch-and-catch session with Stroud, but many others in attendance looked to either improve on combine showings or make a first impression.

Among the former group, defensive tackle Haskell Garrett added 6 1/2 inches to his vertical leap up to 30 1/2 inches while adding a broad jump (9-0), bench press (24), three-cone (7.75) and 20-yard shuttle (4.80); offensive tackle Thayer Munford ran the whole gantlet, improving his 40-time by 0.06 seconds and his broad jump by four inches (see chart for new scores) while adding a 22 on the bench; offensive tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere added six inches to his vertical leap and pitched in 24 on the bench. Tight end Jeremy Ruckert and defensive end Tyreke Smith were light participants, but the latter spent plenty of time talking with teams in attendance.

"There are so many, I feel like I've heard from every team," Smith said. "When you come out of these interviews, you feel like you ace it with all of them. So it's really hard to gauge anything or where you're at with the teams. I just go into them and be myself, be personable and be funny. It's just another day at the end of the day."

Wideout Chris Booker, defensive tackle Antwan Jackson and defensive back Demario McCall all took their opportunity to make an impression. Booker was the only one of the three who didn't participate in every event, skipping out only on the bench press.



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Meyer, Barrett Join OSU NIL Collective Board

The executive board is shaping up for THE Foundation, an unaffiliated, booster-led Ohio State NIL collective that aims to connect student-athletes with businesses to facilitate deals for their name, image and likeness, including with charities. Columbus businessman Brian Schottenstein and former Ohio State quarterback Cardale Jones had already been announced as co-founders, but in recent weeks, the collective has added major firepower with former Buckeye quarterback J.T. Barrett and former OSU head coach Urban Meyer joining the nonprofit's board.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

"We proudly welcome (Meyer) to our board," THE Foundation said in a tweet. "Urban has (three national championships) on his resume, including the '14 title (with OSU. He's recognized as one of the best recruiters in college football history. Urban looks forward to seeing future success for OSU and local charities."

It's unknown yet what Meyer's role will be in this collective or how the collective will function given the infancy of the nonprofit. The general model of other collectives around the country that have come before it includes fund-raising and operating a database of businesses and student-athletes interested in making an NIL deal. It's assumed, if that is the case, that Meyer's func-

tion will be in the fund-raising sector.

The collective, which was expected to launch on March 31, is one of dozens that have appeared in recent months as the college athletics landscape deals with the fallout of NIL. With a lack of oversight – or even rules – for these collectives, many are brazenly operating in the public space, openly courting recruits with the promises of NIL deals once they arrive on campus.

The one concern for collectives is the fear of inducement, which was outlined in detail in the March 5 issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. In short, if a recruit is convinced to come to a university due to the promise of a specific deal, it could be considered a recruiting inducement. However, those charges can be difficult to prove given the previously mentioned lack of oversight between a student-athlete and third parties.

With other schools – including Texas and Texas A&M, which reportedly have been among the nation's leaders in the collective space – getting on solid ground, it was only a matter of time before an Ohio State-centric collective took off. Buckeye Scoop recruiting analyst Bill Greene told BSB that Meyer's inclusion could be a big deal for Ohio State's future in NIL.

"I think it can be huge," he said. "I didn't know what to think of it at first, but then when I saw Urban was involved, my antenna went way up. If he is going to be involved, and I mean not just throwing his name on that, but if he is going to be physically involved, if he's going to be a fund-raiser, I think Ohio State will compete with anyone in that area.

"You can send J.T. Barrett or Cardale

OSU Football 2023 Commitments						
Players in the class of 2023 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.						
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School	
Cedrick Hawkins	SAF	6-0	165	★★★★	Titusville (Fla.) Cocoa	
Ty Lockwood	TE	6-5	225	★★★★	Thompson's Stn. (Tenn.) Independence	
Luke Montgomery	OT	6-5	270	★★★★	Findlay, Ohio	
Joshua Padilla	OG	6-4	265	★★★★	Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne	
Will Smith Jr.	DL	6-3	260	★★★	Dublin (Ohio) Coffman	

Jones out to try to fund-raise, but that's not the same as Urban Meyer. Urban Meyer can walk in any business in Ohio or outside of Ohio, even, and he's going to leave that office with a check, so I think it's huge. When I saw Urban got involved, that piqued my interest."

Meyer is joining the collective as scrutiny continues to build regarding his short-lived tenure as head coach of the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars. A recent report from The Athletic outlined the challenges in Meyer's lone season, including one source saying it was "the most toxic environment I've ever been a part of."

Greene noted that Meyer's recent challenges may spur him to go above and beyond in his new responsibilities with THE Foundation.

"That guy succeeds at everything," Greene said. "He's coming off failure right now. You're seeing articles almost weekly about how inept his performance was, so I don't think he's going to come into this collective and want to see Ohio State be embarrassed in terms of NIL. I think this guy, if he's going to lend his name to it, I think he's going to come in at 150 miles an hour. I couldn't think of a better point man or

fund-raiser to head this NIL operation than Urban Meyer. If he's in it and his heart is in it, Ohio State will compete with anyone in this area."

Iamaleava Commitment Resets QB Board

Long Beach (Calif.) Poly five-star quarterback Nicholaus Iamaleava (6-5, 195), one of the nation's top quarterback prospects and one of Ohio State's targets in 2023, is off the board after committing to Tennessee on March 21.

"They had everything I was looking for," Iamaleava told 247Sports. "I met some incredible people, not just with the football program but everyone we met was so welcoming to us and made me feel like home."

Iamaleava's commitment to Tennessee comes days after a report from The Athletic detailing a five-star recruit in 2023 signing an NIL deal that could pay more than \$8 million by end of the recruit's junior year of college. While Iamaleava was not named in the article, it has been widely reported that Spyre Sports Group, an NIL collective for Tennessee, has been raising millions for upcoming recruiting classes.

Within days of The Athletic's report,

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago - 1987

Vincent Clark was not the ordinary "player to be named later" in what was a unique football package deal. According to the talented Cincinnati Academy of Physical Education (CAPE) senior, he would like to be named quite often when he revved up his gridiron career at Ohio State University.

"We can't wait to show all the people in Columbus that we can play football down here in Cincinnati," said Clark via telephone from his Cincinnati home. "We want to show them that we can take it up to Columbus and play there, too."

The other half of the "we" Clark was referring to was high school All-American Carlos Snow, the standout CAPE running back who helped lead his team to a pair of state championships the last two seasons.

According to Clark, a 6-2, 180-pound defensive back, he and Snow were a high school recruit package deal. Clark said the two of them made a pact long ago that they would attend the same college or would continue looking until one came along that would accept the deal.

30 Years Ago - 1992

Signee Luke Fickell of Columbus DeSales won his third state wrestling championship by pinning Ray Edmonds of Akron Hoban 54 seconds into the heavyweight final in Division II.

One day earlier, Edmonds, a Michigan football signee, told reporters Fickell was "good, but he can be beat and it's about time."

25 Years Ago - 1997

The Ken-Yon Rambo Watch continued.

Rambo, the prep All-America wide receiver prospect from Long Beach (Calif.) Poly, remained committed to Ohio State, and he had signed a letter of intent for OSU. But he had not faxed, mailed or overnighted the letter back to Columbus to make it official.

"My father is just having me wait for a minute," Rambo told BSB on March 23 regarding the delay. "We're supposed to be sending it in sometime this week. I'm still going to Ohio State."

Rambo's father, Cedric, said he just wanted to make sure Ohio State was committed to supervising his son before sending him 2,000 miles away from home to play football.

"Anytime you send your son that far away from home, you are going to be concerned," Cedric said. "He's fairly mature, but when he's that far

away and there's no mom or dad or auntie or uncle to watch over him, you want to make sure he's doing what he needs to do academically."

20 Years Ago - 2002

Cleveland St. Ignatius wide receiver/defensive back Tony Gonzalez (6-1, 190) was a standout two-way player for St. Ignatius' Division I state championship team. He attended OSU's Junior Day in February and was impressed.

"It was a lot of fun," Gonzalez told BSB. "They did some unique things. Compared to Michigan and Northwestern, they were a lot more personal at Ohio State. They seemed like they were interested in you. Your recruiting coach and your position coach spend a lot of time with you.

"The day before, (defensive backs coach Mel) Tucker had emailed me. He asked me to come down early and visit with (head coach Jim) Tressel.

"The stadium was a lot nicer than I thought it would be. I was always under the impression that The Big House was the place, but I thought it was kind of ugly in person. At Ohio Stadium, they got rid of those bleachers. Those were pretty nasty. It really looks brand-new."

15 Years Ago - 2007

The 2008 Ohio State recruiting class picked up its third commitment from a village not well-known for producing Buckeyes.

Jefferson, Ohio, boasted a population of fewer than 2,000 people, but it was a visitor passing through who decided to become the third member of OSU's recruiting class.

On a Sunday evening drive down Interstate 71 from Columbus to his hometown of Cincinnati, LaSalle wide receiver DeVier Posey asked his mother to make a stop at the outlet stores that dot the east side of the freeway.

He had an important phone call to place and a purchase to make. "On my way home, we stopped at the Jeffersonville Outlet," he told BSB. "I was like, 'Mom, I need to get an Ohio State hat because I'm a Buckeye.' We stopped and I called Tressel and told him what happened and why we stopped, and he started laughing and was like, 'Wow, I'm happy.'"

10 Years Ago - 2012

Vandalia (Ohio) Butler offensive tackle Taylor Decker (6-8, 315) maintained a strong relationship with Notre Dame offensive line coach Ed Warinner and recruiting coordinator Tim Hinton and had initially

maintained his commitment to the Fighting Irish.

Then Urban Meyer hired Warinner and Hinton to his new Ohio State staff and things changed. Decker opted to take another look at being a Buckeye.

"I just wanted to make sure I was going to do it the right way, make the right decision," he said. "I wanted to get all the information necessary because switching schools is a big change. I wanted to make sure I was making the right choice just based on facts."

With his family in tow, Decker took a visit to campus in Columbus. They liked what they saw and soon a new decision had to be made.

Shortly thereafter, he announced his intention to sign with his home state's flagship university instead of Notre Dame.

Five Years Ago - 2017

The nation's top defensive end and second-ranked overall prospect, Micah Parsons (6-3, 236), was a Penn State commit out of Harrisburg, Pa., but he had recently named his new puppy Brutus – which happened to be the same name as Ohio State's famous mascot.

According to the player, however, there was nothing in the name. "I looked up dog names (online)," Parsons said. "The Twitter reaction went crazy. I didn't expect everyone to go crazy over a dog."

Parsons had, in fact, visited Ohio State on multiple occasions even after committing to the Nittany Lions, and the Buckeyes were thought to be very involved in his ongoing recruitment.

One Year Ago - 2021

Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy five-star offensive tackle Zach Rice trimmed his list of scholarship offers down to Alabama, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Virginia on March 21. He also announced those schools would receive an official visit before he made his college decision.

The 6-6, 282-pound Rice – who was considered the top-rated offensive tackle and No. 21 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – had landed an offer from the Buckeyes the previous April. He had never been to campus but chatted regularly with head coach Ryan Day, offensive line coach Greg Studrawa and offensive graduate assistant Kennedy Cook.

Offensive tackle continued to be Ohio State's top priority for the recruiting cycle, with the staff hoping to land three or four more players at the position in addition to West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Tegra Tshabola.

ASK AN ANALYST

With Bill Greene of Buckeye Scoop

One of Ohio State's spring visitors was Windsor (Conn.) The Loomis Chaffee School four-star offensive tackle Olaus Alinen (6-6, 315), who made his first visit to the school from March 8-10. Where do the Buckeyes stand with the Finnish football phenom?

"I definitely think they're in it. Justin Frye's developing that relationship with him, and I think Ohio State has got as good a shot as anybody in this one. I would have him as someone to watch for the offensive line in this class. Alabama is in it, as are a few others, but I think Ohio State's right there (at the top) for him."

Another spring visitor was Many, La., four-star line-backer Tackett Curtis (6-2, 218), who has developed a strong relationship with defensive coordinator Jim Knowles since he joined the staff. Do you think Knowles will bring Curtis into the fold, and how do you assess his ability as a recruiter with a couple of months under his belt?

"The last time I did a class preview for 2023, I had Tackett in the class. He visited a while ago, and I think he came up with his dad (Moses, the principal of Many High School) and his uncle (Jess, who is the head coach at Many High School). He spent a couple of days at Ohio State, and I think that was locked up. I

think Ohio State is getting that kid.

"He's a heck of a player, a seek-and-destroy guy. His film is unbelievable, but he's also got the measurables you're looking for. I think he's going to be in this class, and I think he's a kid that might be able to play early. His film is really good, and I think the coaching he is getting is really good as well, so he's someone I'm pretty high on.

"For Knowles, Justin Frye, Perry Eliano and Tim Walton, they have to really be given one full year. Knowles looks like, 'Oh, my gosh, he's going to get Tackett Curtis out of Louisiana.' Well, Tackett Curtis could commit and then decommit in six weeks and then we're going to say, 'Man, that Knowles, he blew that one.' You have to give these guys one full year, let them form relationships, let them establish that comfort level. The first Wednesday in February (signing day, 2023) is probably the right time to assess how these guys did their first year.

"Your first year is tough. Those guys were just hired weeks ago, and they're competing now against other college coaches that have been forming relationships with these kids since they were sophomores, so they're playing catch-up right now. I like everything I've seen out of the new staffers right now, but the proof will be in the pudding with who they sign."

Ohio State has one tight end in 2023 with Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star Ty Lockwood (6-5, 225) committed since August, and it's been widely reported that the Buckeyes will look to take two in this class after failing to do so in the last few classes. Who might they be looking at, and is it difficult for Ohio State to recruit this position given the lack of emphasis on offense?

"It sure seems like they've (had difficulties) since they got (Jeremy) Ruckert, and he was supposed to be a guy getting 50-60 catches per year. That didn't really work out that way even though he had flashes. For the most part it's been Nick Vannett and those types at Ohio State. I think it is a little more difficult when that offense - I mean, it features those wideouts (so much).

"They're in on about five or six other guys for a second tight end (such as Folsom, Calif., four-star Walker Lyons (6-4, 230), St. Louis DeSmet four-star Mac Markway (6-4, 250) and five-star Samuel M'Pemba (6-4, 230) of Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy).

"An interesting guy (for down the road) is Chillicothe, Ohio, tight end Tayvion Galloway (6-6, 215), the Ohio kid. He's someone (for 2024) that they're interested in, and he's probably going to have to come to camp in June and really show out there. I think he's got a chance. I think they like him."

several crystal ball predictions came in on 247Sports for Iamaleava to commit to Tennessee. Additionally, he is the only recent five-star commitment on either 247Sports or Rivals, with no other five-star prospects having committed this calendar year.

Ohio State had been interested in Iamaleava, hosting him last summer, but he did not return this past season and the Buckeyes were left off his most recent top five just days before his commitment to Tennessee.

"I thought Nico probably was going to be their guy until he committed to Tennessee," Greene said. "I thought he was probably the leader in the clubhouse at one point."

With Iamaleava in for the Vols, the quarterback board is mostly reset for Ohio State. Head coach Ryan Day and quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis have issued offers to seven quarterbacks in the class, with three - Denton (Texas) Guyer four-star Jackson Arnold (6-1, 195), Iamaleava and Los Alamitos, Calif., five-star Malachi Nelson (6-3, 180) - already committed to other schools.

The other quarterbacks offered include Detroit Martin Luther King five-star Dante Moore (6-2, 195); Snellville (Ga.) Brookwood four-star Dylan Lonergan (6-2, 215); Zachary, La., four-star Eli Holstein (6-3, 226), who recently decommitted from Texas A&M; and Birmingham (Ala.) Briarwood Christian four-star Christopher Vizzina (6-4, 207).

Moore has seemingly homed in on his two home-state schools, Michigan and Michigan State, and also has Notre Dame among his top options. It's unknown what interest Holstein may have in the Buckeyes. This leaves Lonergan or Vizzina as likely targets for Ohio State, though recent classes have shown quarterback targets can appear late in a recruiting cycle.

"I think that's going to crystallize once you get here into the spring evaluation phase where they can get out on the road, Corey Dennis can get out and watch these guys throw," Greene said. "I'm not sure who they would take right now, who could call up and commit. I think things have fallen off with the Michigan kid, Dante Moore, so I think it's going to be interesting to see where Corey Dennis goes when he's allowed to get out on the road."

He has yet to receive an Ohio State offer, but Pittsburg, Calif., five-star Jaden Rashada (6-4, 185) cuts the profile of a Day quarterback too. He's a lanky passer with experience against top competition, a strong touch-down-to-interceptions ratio (27/5 in 2021) and experience in a second sport (baseball). California, Miami (Fla.) and Ole Miss are considered top contenders in his recruitment, but he has not set a decision date and could be hoping for a senior-year bump.

OSU In Top Five For Top WR

Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star wide receiver Carnell Tate (6-2, 185) has long been connected to Ohio State, and he made things official on March 15, listing the Buckeyes among his top five schools along with Alabama, Georgia, Notre Dame and Tennessee.

Tate is rated the No. 21 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 3 receiver in the class, according to the 247Sports composite rankings.

He's one of the top targets for Ohio State at receiver, along with Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star Brandon Inniss (6-0, 190), a former Oklahoma commit whom the Buckeyes have recruited hard since he went back on his verbal to the Sooners.

Tate was offered by Ohio State last April and made two unofficial visits this past season. He was expected to visit on April 1 along with members of his 7-on-7 team, South Florida Express, which includes Inniss, Jacksonville (Fla.) Bartram Trail four-star cornerback Sharif Denson (5-11, 170) and four-star safety Daemon Fagan (6-2, 180), a teammate of Tate's at American Heritage.

"The development there is great with Coach (Brian) Hartline, one of the best wide receiver coaches in college football and Coach Day getting their wide receivers the ball," Tate told 247Sports. "The proof is right there with Jaxon (Smith-Njigba), (Garrett Wilson) and Chris Olave, and you've got (Marvin Harrison Jr.) coming up next. The proof is there and the path is there for me to follow."

Both of Tate's crystal ball predictions have him going to the Buckeyes, but Notre Dame is expected to be the other major player as his recruitment comes down to the wire.

Other receiver targets in the class include DeSoto, Texas, four-star Johntay Cook II (6-0, 170); Folsom, Calif., four-star Rico Flores (6-1, 190); Del Valle, Texas, four-star Braylon James (6-2, 175); Gilbert (Ariz.)

Williams Field four-star Kyler Kasper (6-5, 195); Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch four-star Bryson Rodgers (6-2, 170); and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Stranahan four-star Hykeem Williams (6-3, 195).

Blue Jackets Help Recruit OT Alinen

Windsor (Conn.) Loomis Chaffee School

Continued On Page 22

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Day Watches Star Signee Win Hoops Title

Continued From Page 21

four-star offensive tackle Olaus Alinen (6-6, 315) visited Ohio State from March 8-10 and found some unexpected camaraderie while in Columbus.

Alinen, who is from Finland, spent time on Ohio State's campus and at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center but also headed south of campus to visit with the Columbus Blue Jackets, who have several Finns in the organization, including general manager Jarmo Kekäläinen, goaltender Joonas Korpisalo and forward Patrik Laine.

"I was able to go there and meet some of the players and all that," Alinen told The Athletic. "It was a really nice experience to get to meet the guys and see how they like Columbus. (Talking to them) was really helpful. It's good to talk to some people who have been there from your country and have experienced this before."

Laine said he would enjoy the presence of Alinen, who is the No. 127 overall prospect and No. 14 offensive tackle in 2023 and one of Ohio State's top targets on the offensive line.

"That's a big, big boy," Laine said. "Hopefully he comes (to school) here so we can get a little more Finnish presence in this town."

Alinen's father, Klaus, is from Finland where he played football in the Vaahteraliga, a seven-team Finnish league, after a

preseason stint with the NFL's Atlanta Falcons. He is also friends with Kekäläinen.

As for Alinen's Ohio State portion of the visit, he said it was the whole package and that he enjoyed it a lot.

"I was able to watch practice, watch a walk-through and watch film with the coaches," he told Eleven Warriors. "I met all the important academic and strength and conditioning people. I saw Coach Day and met some players and spent time with them also. I was able to do almost everything you need to do on a visit."

Styles, Pickerington Central Win State Title

Five-star safety Sonny Styles, an Ohio State signee in 2022, helped lead Pickerington (Ohio) Central to the school's second Division I state basketball championship over Centerville, 55-48, on March 20.

Styles, a junior forward for the Tigers, averaged 9.0 points per game and 7.5 rebounds this season, earning first-team all-league and third-team all-district honors. He missed nearly a month from late January to February due to an ankle injury, but Pickerington Central still finished its championship season with a 25-2 record.

In attendance for Styles' championship game at UD Arena was Day, who took in the Sunday evening matchup between two of the top teams in the state.

"I watched Sonny's whole game," Day



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

WINNING WITH STYLE — Pickerington (Ohio) Central five-star safety Sonny Styles (above), an Ohio State signee, helped lead his high school basketball team to a state title on March 20 with Ryan Day in attendance.

said. "What a great game, great atmosphere. I thought it was just fun, really enjoyed watching it. I wish it wasn't at 8:30 on a Sunday, but it's all right. It was great to see."

The win snapped a 45-game winning streak for Centerville, which won last year's state championship and hadn't lost since dropping a game to Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary last January.

"Centerville had a great team and played well, but what a great game for Pick Central, the way that they played," Day said. "I thought (Sonny) was tremendous. When he decides he wants to go, what a great athlete — and really skilled in basketball. A lot of the time you see a football player out there and they're just bouncing into people, they're the goons out there knocking people around, and that's not Sonny. He's

very skilled and had some huge baskets in the fourth quarter, some great passes. The thing you notice about him is that he doesn't get rattled. He has great composure, and it was a great win."

Day has been an avid supporter of recruiting multi-sport athletes and said he looks forward to seeing those skills transferred to the football field once Styles, who reclassified to 2022, arrives on campus.

"When he decides to go, the explosion and the power he has just jumping on the basketball court — it takes like two dribbles and he's at the basket," Day said. "He's been blessed with a lot of athletic ability."

"Sonny has done a great job for us in helping with recruiting. He's built great relationships with this class and in the class he was in before he reclassified. I'm excited he's a Buckeye."

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Buckeyes Fading With DL LeBlanc

Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola four-star defensive lineman Derrick LeBlanc (6-4, 270) is one of the top defensive linemen in 2023, but it appears Ohio State is losing steam in his recruitment.

His most recent top seven in December included the Buckeyes among his top schools, and he made several visits last summer to Ohio State, but momentum is swinging toward Florida to land the top-100 prospect.

"Florida is in the lead for me," LeBlanc told 247Sports. "(I) love them the most."

He's made several unofficial visits in the past few months to Florida, and a crystal ball prediction from 247Sports' Steve Wiltfong came in on March 16 signaling LeBlanc to Florida. He's set to announce his school of choice on July 23.

Ohio State already has one defensive line commitment in the class with Dublin (Ohio) Coffman three-star Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 260). Other targets include Phenix City (Ala.) Central four-star Tomarrion Parker (6-4, 255), Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola four-star John Walker (6-3, 210) and Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star AJ Hoffer (6-5, 245).

Top-100 TE Markway Commits To LSU

Ohio State lost out on one of the nation's top tight ends in 2023, as on March 24 St. Louis DeSmet four-star Mac Markway (6-4, 250) committed to play for LSU.

Markway is the No. 100 overall prospect and No. 7 tight end in his class and held offers from over 30 schools. He was previously committed to Florida but decommitted this past December.

Ohio State had been involved with Markway, offering him last March, and was among his most recent top seven along with Alabama, Florida, Iowa, LSU, Missouri and Notre Dame before his first commitment to the Gators.

A visit to LSU in March left a strong impression on Markway, as several crystal ball predictions came in following his visit for him to commit to LSU.

"I just love what they're building there with (head coach Brian) Kelly and (offensive coordinator Mike) Denbrock coming together again," he told 247Sports after his visit. "They both love the tight end position from Cincinnati and Notre Dame, and they're telling me how they're going to use them and feature them and they're going to be the focal point of the offense for sure."

With Markway committed elsewhere, Ohio State stays at one tight end in the class of 2023 in Thompson's Station (Tenn.) Independence four-star Ty Lockwood (6-5, 223),

who has been committed since last August.

Ohio State is looking to take two tight ends in this class, which leaves Folsom, Calif., four-star tight end Walker Lyons (6-4, 230) as the next priority target for the Buckeyes. Ohio State has offers issued to just 10 tight ends in 2023, with six (including Lockwood) already committed to a school.

Recruits Updating Top Schools

As the calendar shifts to April, time is dwindling for recruits to make contact with schools and make a decision, and the easiest way to save some time is by trimming down an offer list. Since BSB last went to press, several Ohio State targets have released their lists of top schools – ranging from top fives all the way to a top 13 – and the Buckeyes have a better idea of where they stand with these prospects.

First up is Fort Worth (Texas) North Crowley three-star linebacker S'Maje Burrell (6-1, 215), a top-500 prospect and the No. 41 linebacker in the class. He released a top 11 on March 13 featuring Baylor, Florida State, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Ole Miss, Tennessee, Texas, Texas Tech, USC and Utah.

Though Burrell is only a three-star prospect according to 247Sports composite rankings, he is listed as a four-star and top-100 prospect by On3 Sports, so it's safe to assume that his stock will continue to rise through the summer and into his senior season.

Burrell was offered by Ohio State in December and is scheduled to visit from April 1-3. He told Lettermen Row that his conversations with Ohio State – which are happening three or four times a week – have been good.

"The message has been that I'm a player that can come play in their program," Burrell said. "That I can make a difference. I think my mind-set and athletic abilities is why I'm a main priority. When you cut on the film you can see the passion and love for the game that I have."

Another list Ohio State found itself on was the top eight of Indianapolis Roncalli three-star offensive tackle Trevor Lauck (6-6, 285), who announced his top schools on March 11. The Buckeyes were on the list along with Cincinnati, Indiana, Iowa, Louisville, Michigan, Michigan State and Purdue.

He's been to Michigan State twice in recent months and appears to be leaning there. Ohio State offered Lauck in December, and he told 247Sports that he plans to visit the Buckeyes sometime this spring.

"(With) me being a Midwest kid, it's Ohio State, they're always at the top of the Big Ten and I could see myself in a conference like the Big Ten," Lauck said. "Their coaches, Coach Day, and their new offensive line

coach, Justin Frye, I like a lot."

Even a top 13 for Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy five-star offensive tackle Francis Mauigoa (6-6, 325) helps narrow things down from his offer list that stands near 40 schools.

The usual suspects are on Mauigoa's list, including Alabama, Georgia, Ohio State and Oklahoma, while other schools such as Florida, Hawaii, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oregon, Penn State, South Carolina and Texas are also mentioned.

Mauigoa is the No. 8 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 2 offensive tackle behind Des Moines (Iowa) Southeast Polk five-star Kady Proctor (6-7, 330), whom the Buckeyes are not in the running for.

The one negative update came with the new list of Orlando (Fla.) Dr. Phillips four-star offensive tackle Payton Kirkland (6-6, 345), who left the Buckeyes out of his top five on March 18. Alabama, Florida, Miami (Fla.), Michigan State and Oklahoma made the cut.

According to 247Sports, Kirkland plans to officially visit each of his top schools before making his decision.

With Ohio State still in the running for Lauck and Mauigoa and out on Kirkland, the Buckeyes are left with a clear big board on the offensive line that includes Alinen, Braintree (Mass.) Thayer Academy five-star Samson Okunlola (6-6, 295), Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep four-star Chase Biontis (6-5, 290) and Mount Pleasant (S.C.) Oceanside Collegiate Academy four-star Monroe Freeling (6-7, 283).

Ohio State already has Findlay, Ohio, four-star Luke Montgomery (6-5, 270) and Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Joshua Padilla (6-4, 265) committed on the offensive line for 2023 and is eyeing a four- or five-man class.

OSU Announces Dates For Summer Camps

Ohio State has announced its summer camp schedule, with six one-day camps, a youth camp and multiple 7-on-7 competitions set for action.

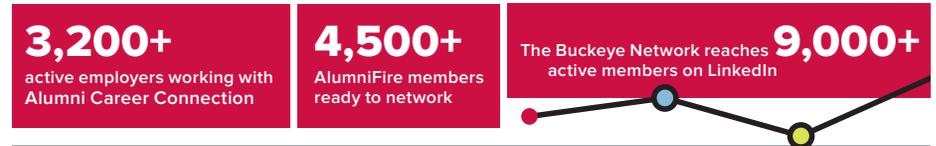
The one-day camps will begin on June 1, with further camps on June 6-7, 14-15 and 21. The morning session of each is listed as the "Big Man" session from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. for offensive and defensive linemen, while skill players will take the field in the afternoon from 1:45-4:15 p.m. These camps are for those entering ninth grade and up. A 7-on-7 competition will take place on June 16 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. for that same age range.

A youth camp for fifth- through eighth-graders will be held June 8-9 from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and a middle school 7-on-7 competition (seventh- and eighth-graders only) will be held on June 22 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. All events are scheduled to take place at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers daily.

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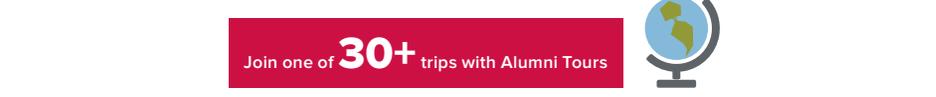
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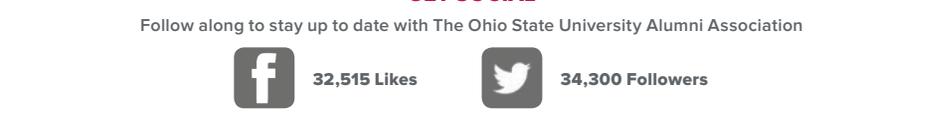
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Decisions Loom As Buckeyes Enter Offseason

It's officially decision time in Columbus. Ohio State saw its season come to a close on March 20 with a 71-61 loss to Villanova in the second round of the NCAA Tournament and enters now into the period of the offseason that will determine its roster – and potentially its outlook – for the upcoming season.

COURT REPORT Patrick Mayhorn

Among some of head coach Chris Holtmann's Buckeyes, the decisions have already been made, either through the expiration of their eligibility or through a desire to forgo any extra eligibility and move on. In the former group is center Joey Brunk; guards Cedric Russell, Jimmy Sotos and Jamari Wheeler; and forward Kyle Young. Brunk, Russell and Wheeler spent just one season with the Buckeyes as graduate transfers, while Sotos did a two-year stint after transferring from Bucknell.

Young, who suffered an injury in the final minutes of the Villanova game, played five seasons with the Buckeyes and used his COVID season of eligibility to return for 2021-22.

"I've loved every minute I got to play in a Buckeye uniform, and I am so grateful I had the opportunity to compete for this university," Young shared on Twitter after the game. "I'm going to miss this with all of my heart but want to say thank you for all the love and support over the years."

Senior wing Justin Ahrens and junior forward E.J. Liddell slot into the second group, meaning that a return would be technically possible, but both players have signaled that they plan to depart after this season. Ahrens has a COVID year if he wants it after an up-and-down senior campaign, while Liddell announced on March 25 that he would be declaring for the draft and signing with an agent, which does mark the end of his career (as covered on page 4).

A March 21 ESPN mock draft slotted him in as the 18th pick to the Chicago Bulls and was pretty open throughout the season that this would be his final season in Columbus. Ahrens has yet to publicly declare his intentions.

"I don't think reality has really kicked in yet that I wouldn't be able to – this certain group of guys, a lot of guys these last games, older guys, seniors. It's tough, man. I'm really hurting inside," Liddell said after the loss to Villanova. "I wish I could have done more to help get it done. This group of guys was really determined. We fought through a lot of adversity and injuries this year. I gave my all this year. I wish I could have done a little bit more, though."

"Right now I'm just reflecting on enjoy-

ing the moments I have with these guys, not even thinking about that, really haven't thought about that process yet. But this one stings. I'm not going to say I have thought about it because I really haven't. This moment right here, I didn't want it to happen, ever."

Entering tournament play, ESPN's Mike Schmitz praised the Illinois native's development this season and compared him to players like Draymond Green – a four-time All-Star for the Golden State Warriors – and Grant Williams, who has found a contributing role with the Boston Celtics this season and was a first-round pick in 2019.

"One of the most improved players in college, Liddell has turned himself into a first-round pick by modernizing his game on both ends of the floor as a powerful 4/5," Schmitz wrote. "He has trimmed down, evolved as a perimeter shooter, expanded his playmaking off the dribble, become an asset in switch situations and developed into a true defensive anchor for the Buckeyes thanks to his stellar timing and non-stop motor."

"Scouts still have questions about Liddell's long-term upside as he stands no taller than 6-7 with average positional length, a flat jumper that might take time to adjust to the NBA line and a somewhat power-reliant game. Former college players ranging from Draymond Green to Grant Williams come to mind when watching him."

The real decisions that Ohio State will wait on with bated breath – potentially through the June 1 underclassman draft declaration date and the June 13 deadline for upperclassmen – are those of freshman guard Malaki Branham, redshirt senior wing Justice Sueing and super senior forward Seth Towns.

The latter two are widely expected to return to the Buckeyes for their sixth and seventh seasons, respectively. Sueing missed all but two games this season and would have the chance to star on next year's group and resurrect his pro prospects, while Towns has dealt with injuries for several years, missed the entire past season and has yet to piece together a full year with the Buckeyes since transferring before of the 2020-21 season.

Branham's plans are the most in question. Holtmann told media after the loss to Villanova that he expects the star freshman to go through the draft process as Liddell did last season as a sophomore, which includes the combine from May 16-22 and, if he so chooses, the G League Elite Camp that hosted Liddell and Duane Washington Jr. – ultimately springboarding the latter to a combine invite – last season. The NBA has yet to announce dates or participants for that event.

"I've not had specific conversations with (Malaki's) family," Holtmann said. "I will when we get back, I'm certain. I'm assuming he'll do everything in terms of going through the process. It's certainly out there. It's certainly a possibility. I'll advise him as they ask for. We'll have conversations with his family, and I'll support whatever decision they think is best."

Branham has seen his stock skyrocket in the back end of the season, culminating



SONNY BROCKWAY

UP IN THE AIR — Ohio State freshman guard Malaki Branham (22), the Big Ten Freshman of the Year, has yet to put his name into the draft pool. He's been projected as a mid-first-round pick and is expected to test the waters.

with the No. 16 spot in that previously mentioned ESPN mock draft, which would send him to the Houston Rockets to team up with former Buckeye forward Jae'Sean Tate. ESPN's Jonathan Givony mentioned Branham as a potential lottery selection because of the upside he showed as a freshman.

"Branham looked like the best player on the floor against Villanova, despite only being a freshman," Givony wrote. "Ohio State has gradually shifted most of their offense to run through him as the season has progressed, and he did a great job of making shots to keep the game close before the Buckeyes eventually bowed out. Branham's size, frame, length, scoring instincts and shot-making prowess off the dribble and with his feet set make his game look seamlessly translatable for what the NBA is looking for at his position."

"He got to his spots in the mid-range and rose up beautifully with his high release point and showed he can do a little more than that too by facilitating for others and showing competitiveness defensively one-on-one. While he has some things to work with as a ball-handler and off-ball defender, the fact that he's 18 years old, has made such impressive strides as the season moved on and plays with a unique combination of aggressiveness and poise could put him in lottery conversations."

Schmitz projected him as a secondary ball-handler a la Cleveland's Caris LeVert before the tournament and projected another potential leap if scouts came away impressed with his tournament run.

"Scouts will be evaluating Branham's ballhandling and passing to discern whether they think he can play more of an on-ball role in the future, as that would greatly boost his value given that he's most impactful defending 1s and 2s," Schmitz wrote. "But in terms of his age, positional length (6-foot-11

wingspan), shooting and productivity, Branham checks a lot of the boxes teams look for in a young guard prospect. A deep NCAA Tournament run could earn him looks in the late lottery, similar to what we saw from (Alabama guard and 2021 lottery pick) Joshua Primo last year."

Branham scored 14 points against Loyola Chicago's Lucas Williamson – considered an elite defender – on 5-of-7 shooting with five rebounds, four steals and two assists, while he led the charge against the Wildcats with 23 points on 10-of-19 shooting, including six in a row as the Buckeyes surged in the second half.

Regardless of Branham's decision, Ohio State will have work to do in filling out its roster. The realistic best-case scenario – one that sees Branham, Sueing and Towns return – would give the Buckeyes a 13-man returning roster, with seniors Sueing, Towns and former walk-on forward Harrison Hookfin; juniors Eugene Brown III, Meechie Johnson Jr. and Zed Key; sophomore Branham; redshirt freshman Kalen Etzler; and true freshmen Roddy Gayle, Bowen Hardman, Felix Okpara, Brice Sensabaugh and Bruce Thornton.

That's a full roster according to NCAA rules, but to go without at least one transfer would be essentially unheard of in the modern game, and it's unclear if the trio of seniors – all of whom would be using their COVID year to return – would count against the scholarship limit. COVID seniors did not count against rosters this past season. Holtmann said he expects to hit the portal in the coming weeks.

"That's obviously going to be important for us," Holtmann said of the portal. "We'll have to sit back and evaluate and talk to Justice and Seth and make those decisions and see. We have guys on our roster we'll have to sit down and have conversations with. All

that will happen and we'll make those decisions when we move forward.

"I believe in what we're doing, and I'm more than confident (we'll break through). We feel good about what we're doing. We've obviously got to do some roster construction here, given some of what we're losing, but we will deal with that when we get back."

That process has already begun, with the Buckeyes reaching out to several targets.

Buckeyes In Contact With Pair Of Transfers

Ohio State has expressed interest in a pair of players in the transfer portal. The Buckeyes were among those calling for Princeton's Jaelin Llewellyn and Lafayette's Neal Quinn, according to reports from Stockrisers' Jake Weingarten and Pittsburgh Sports Now's George Michalowski.

In Llewellyn, Ohio State would be getting a scoring threat in the backcourt, similar to Russell or, on the upper end, Washington. He averaged 15.7 points per game on 44.7 percent shooting (38.6 percent from three-point range) in 2021, with 2.5 assists and 4.1 rebounds on top of that. With 1.8 turnovers per contest, though, Llewellyn's best fit would be as more of an off-ball scorer, not as a primary ball-handler – which Ohio State will need with Wheeler departing unless Johnson is in for a big leap.

The Buckeyes are joined in this recruitment by Alabama, Arkansas, Butler, Cal, Cincinnati, DePaul, Georgetown, Iowa State, Memphis, Miami, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Ole Miss, Santa Clara, Seton Hall, Stanford, St. John's, SMU, UNLV, Vanderbilt and West Virginia. His -2.3 defensive box plus-minus (DBPM) would be the worst among all Ohio State contributors this season, but his 2.4 offensive box plus-minus (OBPM) would slot him in slightly ahead of Russell. Princeton was 23-7 this past season but fell to Yale in the Ivy League finals, losing out on the league's NCAA bid.

Quinn offers a potential big man for the Buckeyes, who will be without Brunk, Liddell and Young and will need to find extra players to complement Key, with Etzler and Okpara as the only big men projected for next season's roster. The 7-0, 280-pound center played nearly 30 minutes per game for the 10-20 Leopards this season averaging 14.7 points, 7.4 rebounds and 1.4 blocks per contest while staying under 2.0 personal fouls per game.

His advanced stat profile is a mixed bag. His 3.9 OBPM would slot him as one of Ohio State's most effective offensive players from the jump, behind only Liddell (8.1), Young (4.7) and Branham (4.5), but his 0.4 DBPM leaves much to be desired, especially if he were to enter the big-man-heavy Big Ten. His 19.5 defensive rebounding percentage would also be among the team's best, but his stat profile projects roughly to a more offensively effective version of Key, or Brunk with a higher usage rate.

He recently visited Rutgers and has interest from Butler, Georgia Tech, Illinois, Loyola Chicago, NC State, Richmond and Seton Hall. He named the Scarlet Knights, Loyola Chicago and Richmond as the teams that have most grabbed his interest,

2021-22 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

20-12 Overall (12-8 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 20

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds		PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
									O-D	T-Avg.						
E.J. Liddell	32-32	1061-33.2	203-414	.490	46-123	.374	169-221	.765	72-182	254-7.9	80-2	80	77	83	18	621-19.4
Malaki Branham	32-31	948-29.6	160-321	.498	37-89	.416	80-96	.833	25-89	114-3.6	56-1	64	54	9	23	437-13.7
Kyle Young	27-4	613-22.7	77-154	.500	15-51	.294	52-66	.788	36-99	135-5.0	50-1	33	29	15	13	221-8.2
Zed Key	29-23	573-19.8	95-169	.562	0-0	.000	36-62	.581	58-105	163-5.6	69-0	15	33	24	6	226-7.8
Jamari Wheeler	31-31	913-29.5	76-166	.458	38-98	.388	31-36	.861	17-81	98-3.2	75-1	91	51	2	39	221-7.1
Justice Sueing	2-0	30-15.5	5-13	.385	0-4	.000	2-2	1.000	1-6	7-3.5	3-0	0	2	0	1	12-6.0
Justin Ahrens	32-19	647-20.1	46-133	.346	45-127	.354	18-24	.750	5-70	75-2.3	42-1	26	22	1	9	155-4.8
Meechie Johnson Jr.	26-5	461-17.7	37-120	.308	27-84	.321	14-19	.737	8-32	40-1.5	40-0	31	35	3	17	115-4.4
Cedric Russell	30-0	386-12.9	46-105	.438	29-67	.433	6-9	.667	0-19	19-0.6	22-0	13	15	0	4	127-4.2
Eugene Brown III	26-10	442-17.0	34-77	.442	8-35	.229	14-23	.609	19-44	63-2.4	42-0	14	14	7	5	90-3.5
Joey Brunk	28-5	214-7.6	29-46	.630	0-0	.000	10-13	.769	6-39	45-1.6	28-0	6	10	6	6	68-2.4
Jimmy Sotos	19-0	147-7.7	10-19	.526	6-10	.600	8-10	.800	1-12	13-0.7	17-0	25	6	2	2	34-1.8
Harrison Hookfin	7-0	14-2.0	1-3	.333	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	2-0	2-0.3	1-0	2	0	0	1	2-0.3
Team									38-41	79				10		
Total	32	6450	819-1740	.471	251-688	.365	440-581	.757	288-819	1107-34.6	525-6	400	358	152	144	2329-72.8
Opponents	32	6450	772-1860	.415	226-669	.338	396-542	.731	329-694	1023-32.0	551-11	369	325	80	198	2166-67.7

saying that he wants a school with a "focus on big man development, strength and conditioning, (a) style of play I can work well in and a place where I'm going to play significant minutes," according to an interview with 247Sports.

The Buckeyes had also contacted North Dakota State wing Sam Griesel, but he committed to Nebraska on March 20.

No Skinn In The Game

Almost as quickly as he came, Ohio State basketball assistant Tony Skinn is gone. The advanced scouting director on Holtmann's staff this past season, Skinn is expected to accept a similar position on Kevin Willard's inaugural staff at Maryland.

This gives Ohio State a second vacancy on its staff, as offensive coordinator Ryan Pedon departed for the head coaching job at Illinois State shortly after the Buckeyes closed out their season. Jake Diebler is the last man standing, and as he prepares to slot into offensive coordinator duties, Ohio State will need a new defensive expert and a coach to take over for scouting and development.

OSU Men's Basketball Signees

Players in the class of 2022 who have signed to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the 247Sports composite rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Roddy Gayle	SG	6-4	195	★★★★	Youngstown (N.Y.) Lewiston Porter
Bowen Hardman	SG	6-3	160	★★★	Cincinnati Princeton
Felix Okpara	C	6-11	210	★★★★	Branson (Mo.) Link Academy
Brice Sensabaugh	F	6-6	240	★★★★	Orlando (Fla.) Lake Highland Prep
Bruce Thornton	PG	6-2	205	★★★★	Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton

Skinn's early departure comes as no major surprise. Hired to replace Terry Johnson, who left Ohio State for an assistant position at Purdue, Skinn joined the staff in the 2021 offseason after three seasons working under Willard at Seton Hall. He's a Maryland native, played his college basketball at George Mason in Virginia and has made his name as a recruiting specialist on the East Coast – which Holtmann mentioned specifically when he hired Skinn.

"He has developed a reputation in his coaching career as being a tremendous worker, he's detailed-oriented, builds excellent relationships with players and is an outstanding recruiter," Holtmann said last

summer. "He has strong ties in the D.C. metro area and has worked with some highly successful high school, AAU and college programs."

Names have yet to surface regarding potential replacements for the two gaps on Ohio State's staff, but Holtmann said after Pedon was announced as Illinois State's next head coach that he had already fielded numerous calls from interested candidates.

"That's what I'm doing right now is I'm getting a ton of calls," he said in early March. "There's a ton of interest for Ryan's position. I've given it some thought, but it will be something that we'll look at after the season."

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Athens
740-566-1009

Ohio State's Season Ends In Round Of 32

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

The Ohio State men's basketball team's season ended on March 20, with the Buckeyes falling to second-seeded Villanova, 71-61, in the second round of the NCAA Tournament in Pittsburgh.

The Buckeyes battled back from a second-half deficit that grew as large as 15 points but never led against the Wildcats as they were unable to repeat their dominant defensive performance of the first round, which had Ohio State smother 10th-seeded Loyola Chicago to advance to the round of 32 for the third time in head coach Chris Holtmann's tenure.

Buckeyes Stifle Ramblers For Win

Ohio State knew coming into its NCAA Tournament-opening matchup with Loyola Chicago that it would need to get creative to score against a stingy defense and it would need significant defensive versatility to deal with a ball screen-centric Rambler offense. It picked up a major boost in both respects when center Zed Key and super senior forward Kyle Young were cleared for play prior to the March 18 matchup and took full advantage, holding Loyola to a 26.8 percent shooting performance from the field (15 of 56) while grinding out enough offense to survive and advance, 54-41.

"I think it really comes down to ownership with them," Holtmann said of his team after the game. "And obviously as coaches we're constantly seeking ways we can do a better job at putting our guys in position defensively. But I think ultimately the effort piece comes down to ownership on their part. And they were as bought in and as owned as they've been all year for sure on that end. It was the best defensive performance we've really had in a couple years."

The first half offered a mixed bag for the Buckeyes. That vaunted Rambler defense lived up to its reputation, holding Ohio State to just 23 points while forcing eight turnovers, but it was the maligned Ohio State defensive unit that ruled the half.

A trio of triples – two from guard Braden Norris – kept Loyola within striking distance, but the Ramblers converted just seven shots on 30 tries, a paltry 23.3 percent, in the first frame and suffered seven turnovers of their own, stumbling to a 23-18 halftime deficit. It was that defensive outburst – along with 10 points from freshman Malaki Branham – that allowed the Buckeyes, despite taking 10 fewer shots than their foes and missing on all nine of their three-point tries, to hold that slight edge.

"Our defensive effort has been really good," Holtmann said as his team entered the break after a half he described as a rock fight. "Offensively, we have to move the ball a little bit better – it's hard against their defense. We have to attack close-outs a little bit better. We settled a few too many times and we have to play faster in transition, but again, I give them credit, their defense is good."

The Buckeyes led by as many as nine points in the first half, when Branham connected on a pair of free throws at the 2:12

mark, but those were the Buckeyes' final points of the period.

After the break, the opening four minutes of play had a combined seven fouls and seven turnovers, but they also had Ohio State adhering closely to Holtmann's half-time words of wisdom.

After losing the ball on their first two offensive possessions, the Buckeyes rattled off three straight buckets to claim their largest advantage of the afternoon, 29-18, after a Young hook shot at 17:29 that forced Loyola Chicago head coach Drew Valentine into a quick timeout. The Ramblers would break into the scoring department in short order with another Norris triple and a Chris Knight dunk, but Young and E.J. Liddell chipped in buckets of their own to give the Buckeyes a 33-23 lead into the under-16 timeout (which came with 14:17 left).

Meechie Johnson Jr. extended Ohio State's lead to 13 points with the first OSU three-pointer of the game with 13:39 to play, but it took another 4:01 for the Buckeyes to put the ball in the hoop from the field again with a Liddell jumper. He pitched in one free throw during the dry spell as well, but the drought did very little damage to the OSU lead.

Loyola rattled in two three-pointers but could muster no more, pulling within just eight points at 37-29 with 10:48 to play. A Ryan Schwiager three-pointer cut the deficit back to eight after a Liddell basket and one more free throw, 40-32, but every Rambler push was met with an OSU reaction that moved the Buckeyes back ahead by double digits. In the case of the Schwiager make, it was a Jamari Wheeler layup, which pushed the OSU lead back to 42-32 with 7:53 remaining.

Even when Branham went to the bench after picking up his fourth foul with just under seven minutes on the clock, Ohio State found a way to stave off any surges. It snared four points at the line, held the Ramblers to just one field goal, and immediately matched its largest lead of the evening, 48-34, when Branham returned with just over four minutes left and converted on a layup.

A Norris triple brought the Ramblers again within nine, 48-39 with 2:25 to play, but they would never draw closer. Branham and Cedric Russell notched a pair of free throws to push the Buckeyes back into a 13-point lead, and Young teamed up with Eugene Brown III for the exclamation point, with a Young block on one end into an uncontested Brown dunk on the other, pushing Ohio State ahead by 15. A pair of Loyola free throws closed out the game.

Liddell led the Buckeyes with 16 points and also pulled down a game-high 10 rebounds, while Branham added 14 in his NCAA Tournament debut, connecting on 5 of 7 shots. Norris, with 14 points, was the only Rambler in double digits. The Buckeyes connected on just 1 of 15 attempts from beyond the arc in the game (6.7 percent).

This was Ohio State's first tournament win with fewer than 60 points since 1961, when it beat Louisville, 56-55.

"A credit to our players," Holtmann said. "They were locked in on the game plan at a high level. We knew we were in for a rock



SONNY BROCKWAY

TOO LITTLE TOO LATE — Chris Holtmann's (center) Buckeyes rallied from down 15 points in the second half of their March 20 matchup with Villanova but never drew closer than two points in an eventual 10-point defeat.

fight, and that's very much what it was. Our guys deserve great credit. They really competed on both ends and were able to break away just when we needed to. Players win games, and those guys did a great job with that."

Comeback Bid Blunted By VU

After Ohio State's opening-round victory over Loyola, Liddell spoke at length about the importance of a strong start for these Buckeyes, about setting the rules for the game and needing to take that mentality into the next round.

"I'm not surprised. I feel like when we start out, the first four minutes, that determines the game. We set the rules," Liddell said. "And I felt like we came out here and did a great job on the defensive end, great communication. And we played with an edge tonight. Played like the underdogs. We have to keep playing like that because people have been counting us out big time. We've got to have that same mind-set next game."

A few hours later, the Buckeyes would learn that they'd be squaring off with the second-seeded Villanova Wildcats. Liddell was right – those early minutes would determine the game, but unlike against the Ramblers, Ohio State was the team having the rules set for it. Villanova jumped out to a 17-7 lead with 12:24 to go in the first half behind 10 consecutive points from star guard Collin Gillespie, and the Wildcats went on to withstand a furious Buckeye comeback to claim a 71-61 win that ended Ohio State's season.

Those early minutes certainly weren't pretty for the Buckeyes. Villanova (28-7) knocked down eight of its first 12 shots of the game while Ohio State started 2-of-11 shooting. When Ohio State locked in on Gillespie (he scored only two more points the rest of the half), Caleb Daniels, Eric Dixon and Jer-

maine Samuels tallied easy baskets, combining for eight straight Wildcat points, and Villanova maintained a 25-17 lead with 6:57 before the break. A Branham three-pointer later cut the lead to five, 27-22, but the Wildcats outscored Ohio State 12-6 in the final 5:31 with Ohio State's only points coming on long-range shots from Branham and Liddell, and the score was 39-28 at the half.

Ohio State, which shot only 38.5 percent (10 of 26) from the field in the half compared to Villanova's 52.0 (13 of 25), was buoyed by 12 points from Liddell and eight from Branham, but just five combined from Brown, Wheeler and Young, the three other starters for the afternoon, and only three Johnson points off the bench.

Dixon opened the second half with a hook shot and a three-pointer sandwiching a Liddell free throw, to give the Wildcats their largest lead of the game at 44-29, the deficit of which held into the first media break of the half at 48-33.

With its season teetering on the edge, Ohio State mustered a response to pull back within single digits. Branham pulled the Buckeyes out of the break with a mid-range pull-up jumper and added two more points with a jumper on the next possession, enabled by a Young offensive board. Then Young knocked down a basket of his own to give OSU six straight, cutting the deficit down to 48-39 and forcing a timeout by Villanova coach Jay Wright.

The Buckeye push wasn't finished, despite a Justin Moore three-pointer that pushed the Wildcats back ahead by 12 shortly after that timeout. That bucket gave Villanova 55 points with 11:59 to play, but the Wildcats would not hit 60 for the game until the 7:33 mark.

In the interim, Ohio State – led by Branham and by effort plays from Key and Young – pitched in 10 points of its own, cutting the

OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Ohio State 54, Loyola Chicago 41

March 18, 2022
PPG Paints Arena • Pittsburgh, Pa.

	1	2	F			
Loyola Chicago (25-8)	18	23	41			
Ohio State (20-11)	23	31	54			

Loyola Chicago	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Knight	19	3-6	0-0	1-2	0	2	6
Uguak	32	1-6	0-0	0-0	1	1	2
Williamson	34	1-10	1-6	1-4	6	2	4
Norris	33	5-13	0-0	2-1	2	2	14
Hall	19	1-4	0-0	0-2	0	4	3
Schwieger	22	3-6	0-0	2-4	0	3	8
Welch	8	0-1	0-2	1-0	0	2	0
Kennedy	24	1-8	2-2	1-4	3	3	4
Hutson	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Clemons	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Thomas	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Alcock	1	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Totals	200	15-56	3-10	11-20	12	19	41

Percentages: FG: 26.8%. FT: 30.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-28 (Norris 4-11, Schwieger 2-4, Hall 1-3, Williamson 1-5, Kennedy 0-2, Uguak 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 2. **Turnovers:** 14 (Schwieger 4, Williamson 3, Knight 2, Uguak 2, Hall, Norris, Team). **Steals:** 9 (Williamson 3, Clemons, Kennedy, Knight, Norris, Uguak, Welch).

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Young	35	4-10	1-2	0-7	1	4	9
Liddell	35	4-9	8-10	1-9	1	1	16
Brown III	21	2-5	0-0	0-1	1	2	4
Branham	28	5-7	4-4	1-4	2	4	14
Wheeler	30	1-4	2-3	1-3	1	2	4
Johnson Jr.	15	1-3	0-0	1-0	0	1	3
Key	12	1-1	0-0	1-6	0	2	2
Ahrens	13	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Russell	10	0-0	2-2	0-0	0	0	2
Sotos	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Hookfin	1	0-1	0-0	1-0	0	0	0
Brunk	1	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Totals	200	18-43	17-21	8-33	6	16	54

Percentages: FG: 41.9%. FT: 81.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 1-15 (Johnson Jr. 1-3, Branham 0-1, Ahrens 0-2, Liddell 0-2, Wheeler 0-2, Young 0-2, Brown III 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 3. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Liddell 3, Brown III, Young). **Turnovers:** 17 (Key 4, Branham 3, Liddell 3, Wheeler 2, Young 2, Brown III, Johnson Jr., Russell). **Steals:** 7 (Branham 4, Ahrens, Wheeler, Young). **Officials:** Green, O'Connell, Petty. Attendance: N/A.

deficit down to four points with a Branham jumper (his sixth straight make) at the 7:51 mark, 57-53. A Villanova triple by Moore briefly blunted the Buckeye run, but a Liddell turnaround and a Wheeler three-pointer turned aside the Wildcat answer, bringing Ohio State within as few as two points for the first time since 9-7 with only 5:37 gone in the game.

"We have been searching for that third and fourth guy, it's been Kyle a lot, other guys at times, but it's been Kyle when we have been at full strength, sometimes Zed (Key)," Holtmann said. "I thought he gave us a good lift on the glass. He missed a couple of baskets, but I thought he gave us great lift on the glass. We have been kind of searching for that, and we have missed that third, fourth and sometimes fifth option."

In the flurry of the run, though, Ohio State sustained another major blow. In a fight for positioning down low, Young bumped his head into the shoulder of a Villanova player with 8:55 to play. Fresh out of concussion protocol, Young was taken to the locker room and could not return. Without its effort leader, Ohio State (20-12) seemed to run out of gas.

The Wildcats held the ball for nearly 70 seconds after Wheeler cut the lead to two, recovering the ball after a Liddell block, snagging an offensive rebound from a Gillespie three-point miss and eventually getting two points for Samuels while going more than a minute without allowing the Buckeyes an

Villanova 71, Ohio State 61

March 20, 2022
PPG Paints Arena • Pittsburgh, Pa.

	1	2	F			
Ohio State (20-12)	28	33	61			
Villanova (28-7)	39	32	71			

Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Young	28	3-9	0-0	3-3	0	0	6
Liddell	35	6-13	3-5	1-5	3	4	17
Brown III	25	2-4	1-2	0-1	0	4	5
Branham	39	10-19	0-0	0-2	4	2	23
Wheeler	32	1-4	0-0	1-4	3	2	3
Johnson Jr.	16	1-2	0-0	1-1	1	3	3
Ahrens	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Key	17	1-5	2-4	7-4	0	3	4
Russell	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	24-57	6-11	15-20	11	18	61

Percentages: FG: 42.1%. FT: 54.5%. **Three-point field goals:** 7-22 (Branham 3-8, Liddell 2-4, Johnson Jr. 1-2, Wheeler 1-3, Brown III 0-1, Young 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Liddell 2, Young). **Turnovers:** 12 (Branham 4, Liddell 3, Key 2, Young 2, Brown III). **Steals:** 4 (Liddell 3, Wheeler).

Villanova	Total	FG	FT	Reb.	A	PF	Pts.
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D			
Slater	22	0-2	0-0	0-0	1	4	0
Samuels	37	7-9	2-3	2-6	0	0	17
Dixon	32	5-9	1-2	5-3	1	3	13
Gillespie	38	5-14	8-8	0-1	4	1	20
Moore	29	3-9	0-0	0-1	2	2	8
Daniels	34	3-9	4-5	2-6	1	4	11
Arcidiacono	3	0-0	2-2	0-0	0	0	2
Antoine	5	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	23-52	17-20	9	14	71	

Percentages: FG: 44.2%. FT: 85.0%. **Three-point field goals:** 8-23 (Dixon 2-2, Moore 2-6, Gillespie 2-9, Samuels 1-2, Daniels 1-4). **Team rebounds:** 5. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Dixon). **Turnovers:** 9 (Dixon 2, Moore 2, Samuels 2, Slater 2, Gillespie). **Steals:** 7 (Samuels 2, Slater 2, Arcidiacono, Dixon, Gillespie). **Officials:** Simons, Daily, Chiazza. Attendance: 18,506.

offensive possession.

Key clinked in a free throw to bring the Buckeyes back within a triple, but a Gillespie jumper and a Dixon three-pointer to make it 67-59 with 1:38 to play surrounded Ohio State's coffin with nails, and despite a Branham runner with 59 seconds to play to cut the lead back to six, Villanova's free-throw shooting hammered them in and closed Ohio State's season.

Samuels knocked in a pair right off of the Branham make, the Buckeye freshman came up short on a midrange try a possession later, Liddell met the same fate after a missed VU free throw, and Gillespie all but ended the game with his 19th and 20th points.

"Listen, it's hard to win in this tournament," Holtmann said. "We've had four opportunities. I've been here five years, and we have had four opportunities. We performed pretty well in this tournament in three of them. We just haven't been able to push through to that second (weekend)."

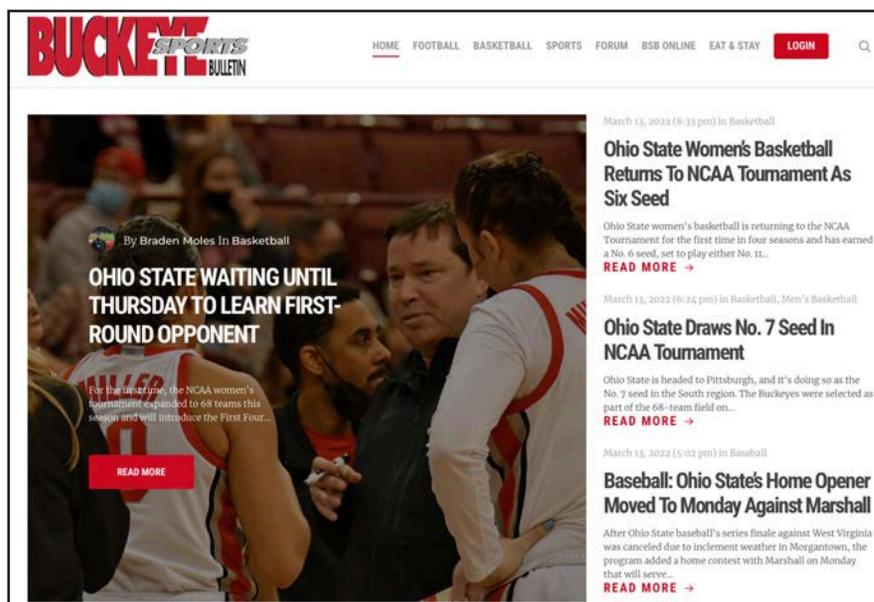
Branham led the Buckeyes with 23 points and will now enter into a critical decision cycle regarding his future in Columbus with the NBA expected to come knocking. Liddell, who was playing what would turn out to be his final game with Ohio State, finished with 17 points, while Key added 11 rebounds to help the Buckeyes to a win in the rebound category, 35-31. Young finished with six points and six rebounds before being forced to leave the game.

Gillespie's 20 led Villanova, with 17 from Samuels, 13 from Dixon and 11 from Daniels.

The Buckeyes cooled Villanova to 37.0 percent shooting (10 of 27) in the second half.

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Sheldon Earns AP All-American Recognition

Ohio State junior guard Jacy Sheldon was honored as an Associated Press All-American honorable mention on March 16.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

Sheldon led the Buckeyes in scoring this season with 19.7 points per game on 50.4 percent shooting from the field. She also averaged 3.7 rebounds and 4.2 assists across 32 games this season as Ohio State finished with a 25-7 record, falling to Texas in the Sweet 16, the school's first appearance in that round since 2017.

Though Sheldon was always going to be among Ohio State's leading scorers this season, she took on additional responsibilities throughout the year, including starting at point guard after junior guard Madison Greene's preseason injury and sophomore guard Kateri Poole's injury in January that left her out for close to three weeks.

A point guard in high school, Sheldon excelled in the role as she dished out at least four assists in Ohio State's final six games of the season. She had a career-high 10 assists (to go with 24 points) in a 95-89 win over Maryland on Jan. 20 and matched that number with a 13-point, 10-assist performance in a win against Michigan State to close the regular season. Those were the second and third double-doubles in her collegiate career.

In addition to her AP honors, Sheldon was named to the All-Big Ten first team and All-Big Ten defensive team, and she also earned a spot on the All-Big Ten Tournament team after averaging 21.5 points in two games.

Sheldon is the first Buckeye to earn AP honors since Kelsey Mitchell was honored in the 2017-18 season. This season, she also surpassed 1,000 points in scarlet and gray and recorded double figures in 27 of 29 games.

Other Buckeyes to receive AP All-American

honors include Katie Smith (1996, second team), Jessica Davenport (2005, first team; 2006-07, second team), Jantel Lavender (2009, second team; 2010-11, first team) and Samantha Prahalis (2012, second team).

Bell, Juhasz Excelling At New Schools

A pair of transfers from Ohio State – forward Kierstan Bell at Florida Gulf Coast and forward Dorka Juhasz at UConn – have found success with their new schools, as both went dancing in the NCAA tournament.

Bell, who missed part of the season due to a torn meniscus, and the Eagles fought to a 29-2 record this year before falling to Maryland in the second round of the NCAA tournament.

Along the way, Bell led the team with 23.5 points per game on 46.7 percent shooting in the 21 games in which she saw action. She scored at least 20 points in 15 games this season and eclipsed the 30-point barrier five times. She's only a junior but declared her intentions to enter the WNBA draft earlier this season and is expected to be one of the first picks off the board.

While Bell was expected to be the star for the Eagles, Juhasz stepped into a star-heavy UConn lineup that included Paige Bueckers and Christyn Williams. Yet she still found her role, averaging 20.4 minutes per game with a little under half of her appearances coming as a starter for the Huskies. She was averaging 7.5 points and 5.8 rebounds per game while shooting 45.7 percent from the field.

The highlight of the season was a 16-point, 16-rebound performance in a win over UCLA on Dec. 11, and she added another double-double later in this season with 14 points and 10 rebounds against Providence on Feb. 27.

UConn, a two-seed entering the tournament after finishing the regular season and Big East tournament with a 25-5 record, defeated Mercer, UCF and Indiana in the NCAA tournament and was set to take on No. 1 NC State in the Elite Eight on March 28.

Powell Named To WBCA's 30 Under 30

Ohio State women's basketball assistant coach Jalen Powell was named one of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association's "Thirty Under 30" honorees for the 2021-22 season on March 14.

Powell is in her first season at Ohio State, joining head coach Kevin McGuff's staff during the past offseason. Prior to her stop in Columbus, she was an assistant coach at Florida A&M for one season and was also a graduate assistant at Arkansas, where she received her master's degree.

Beyond her contributions in coaching, she has also been important in developing the team's culture and tradition off the court, as she was one of the creators of Ohio State's dub chain – which has gone viral – being awarded to the team's most valuable player following a win.

The Under 30 program recognizes up-and-coming women's basketball coaches at all levels of the game aged 30 or under. Powell is the first recipient from Ohio State since the honors was introduced in 2016. According to Ohio State, "each honoree has exemplified their involvement in community service, mentorship and impact on others, professional manner and attitude and professional association involvement."

Powell was one of two additions to Ohio State's coaching staff this past offseason, along with assistant coach Wesley Brooks. The pair have helped to lead the Buckeyes to their first NCAA tournament berth in four seasons and the school's first regular-season Big Ten title since the 2017-18 season.

Lavender Signs With Seattle Storm

Lavender, a former WNBA All-Star forward, signed with the Seattle Storm on March 21 after parting ways with the Indiana Fever this offseason. She spent the last two seasons with the Fever, playing alongside Kelsey Mitchell as the team struggled to a 12-42 mark over the past two years.

"Jantel's toughness, veteran leadership, and championship level experience complement our roster tremendously,"



SONNY BROCKWAY

HONORED – Junior point guard Jacy Sheldon (4) earned an AP honorable mention nod after averaging 19.7 points, 4.2 assists and 3.7 rebounds per game.

Storm head coach Noelle Quinn said in a statement. "She is a premier forward in our league with offensive and defensive versatility, and I am excited to have her join the Storm this season."

Lavender was drafted by the Los Angeles Sparks in 2011 and spent eight seasons there before being traded to the Chicago Sky. She played just one partial season in the Windy City before suffering a foot injury that forced her to miss the remainder of that year and the 2020 season.

She was then traded to the Fever along with a second-round pick for a third-round pick and former Ohio State teammate Stephanie Mavunga (now with the Washington Mystics), and Lavender signed a multiyear deal with the Fever in February 2021. This past season, she averaged 6.4 points per game and pulled down nearly four rebounds per contest in 27 appearances (with 14 starts).

"I'm super excited to compete with this team," Lavender said. "Seattle has won and knows what it takes to win. I feel their experience matches what I want out of basketball at this point in my career. I can't wait to get to Seattle to start prepping for what I know will be a great season."

The WNBA's season begins on May 6, with the Storm set to take on the Minnesota Lynx.

2021-22 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

25-7 Overall (14-4 Big Ten) Statistics through games of March 26

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds			A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.	
									O-D	T-Avg.	PF-FO						
Jacy Sheldon	32	32	1086-33.9	225-446	.504	41-112	.366	140-162	.864	32-87	119-3.7	68-0	134	100	10	62	631-19.7
Taylor Mikesell	32	32	1103-34.5	218-452	.482	114-240	.475	46-51	.902	12-101	113-3.5	39-0	63	50	9	30	596-18.6
Rebeka Mikulasikova	32	32	642-20.1	123-268	.459	21-73	.288	34-43	.791	32-127	159-5.0	64-1	28	54	6	13	301-9.4
Rikki Harris	32	19	806-25.2	78-199	.392	33-99	.333	39-70	.557	42-94	136-4.3	68-1	81	31	17	52	228-7.1
Tanaya Beacham	31	0	584-18.9	97-185	.524	2-11	.182	31-47	.660	52-91	143-4.6	92-2	23	44	11	26	227-7.3
Braxtin Miller	31	31	938-30.3	63-188	.335	26-79	.329	52-74	.703	30-91	121-3.9	66-1	91	52	15	42	204-6.6
Kateri Poole	25	13	402-16.1	39-100	.390	15-44	.341	28-52	.538	9-56	65-2.6	48-1	60	57	2	23	121-4.8
Gabby Hutcherson	18	0	183-10.2	23-59	.390	9-30	.300	5-8	.625	5-36	41-2.3	10-0	6	9	12	4	60-3.3
Heyvonne Bristow	11	1	97-8.8	11-30	.367	1-3	.333	12-16	.750	11-15	26-2.4	9-0	4	12	6	3	35-3.2
Taylor Thierry	30	0	456-15.2	33-61	.541	1-5	.200	20-31	.645	46-57	103-3.4	58-1	26	16	28	29	87-2.9
Anyssa Jones	8	0	39-4.9	2-8	.250	0-0	.000	1-2	.500	1-4	5-0.6	3-0	2	0	0	0	5-0.6
Kaitlyn Costner	11	0	59-5.4	3-11	.273	0-4	.000	0-0	.000	1-10	11-1.0	6-0	5	4	0	2	6-0.5
Team										41-78	119		7				
Total	32	6400	915-2007	.456	263-700	.376	408-556	.734	314-847	1161-36.3	531-7	523	436	116	286	2501-78.2	
Opponents	32	6400	774-1922	.403	171-553	.309	379-521	.727	363-839	1202-37.6	534-11	414	587	88	178	2098-65.6	

OSU Falls Short Of Elite Eight With Loss To UT

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State women's basketball team made a surprising run to the NCAA Sweet 16 that culminated in a loss to the two-seeded Texas Longhorns on March 25.

To get to the Sweet 16, the six-seeded Buckeyes defeated No. 11 Missouri State in the first round and upset No. 3 LSU in the round of 32 to earn the school's first appearance in the Sweet 16 since 2017. While the Buckeyes had chances against Texas, they were unable to overcome a 10-point fourth-quarter deficit to move on to the Elite Eight for the first time since 1993.

Ohio State finished the season 25-7, picking up the school's 16th Big Ten regular-season championship, 26th NCAA tournament berth and 12th appearance in the Sweet 16. Graduate forward Tanaya Beacham and senior guard Braxtin Miller's eligibility is exhausted following this season.

"It was a really fun season," junior guard Jacy Sheldon said. "Every single person on this team contributed to what we were able to do. Despite everything we've been through, we've proved we're one of the best teams in the country and we will be back here, and we're excited. We've got to be excited for the offseason now, but it was a great season for us."

OSU Survives Scare From Lady Bears

No. 6 Ohio State (24-6) overcame a challenge from No. 11 Missouri State's (25-8)

Ohio State 63, Missouri State 56							
March 19, 2022							
Maravich Assembly Center • Baton Rouge, La.							
	1	2	3	4	F		
Missouri State (25-8)	14	12	17	13	56		
Ohio State (24-6)	5	26	13	19	63		
Missouri State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Jackson	26	5-12	1-2	2-6	1	4	11
Ezeh	24	2-4	0-0	2-0	0	2	4
Calip	32	5-13	5-6	2-3	3	2	15
Wilson	26	2-6	2-2	3-2	1	2	6
Bhinhar	39	0-6	0-0	2-2	3	3	0
Nwachukwu	30	3-5	3-5	5-12	1	5	9
White	19	2-14	1-2	1-2	1	2	6
Rocca	4	2-3	0-0	1-1	0	0	5
Totals	200	21-63	12-17	22-29	10	20	56
Percentages: FG: 33.3%. FT: 70.6%. Three-point field goals: 2-4 (Rocca 1-1, White 1-1, Bhinhar 0-2). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 6 (Jackson 4, Bhinhar, Nwachukwu). Turnovers: 22 (Calip 4, Wilson 4, Bhinhar 3, Ezeh 3, White 3, Nwachukwu 2, Jackson, Rocca, Team). Steals: 5 (Calip 3, Jackson, Nwachukwu).							
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.				
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Mikulasikova	18	2-7	1-2	1-2	1	3	6
Harris	16	1-4	1-2	1-1	0	3	4
Sheldon	40	7-12	10-12	2-4	5	2	25
Miller	33	0-9	1-2	2-1	1	3	1
Mikesell	40	5-13	2-2	0-3	3	2	14
Thierry	26	1-2	3-4	2-3	0	2	5
Beacham	22	3-9	2-4	2-3	1	3	8
Poole	5	0-0	0-2	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	19-56	20-30	11-22	11	18	63
Percentages: FG: 33.9%. FT: 66.7%. Three-point field goals: 5-20 (Mikesell 2-4, Harris 1-4, Mikulasikova 1-3, Miller 0-5). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 7 (Mikesell 2, Miller 2, Beacham, Mikulasikova, Sheldon). Turnovers: 10 (Sheldon 3, Miller 2, Thierry 2, Mikesell, Mikulasikova, Poole). Steals: 13 (Sheldon 5, Miller 4, Thierry 2, Beacham, Mikesell).							
Officials: Grinter, Murray, Berger. Attendance: N/A.							

stiffing defense to win 63-56 in the opening round of the NCAA tournament on March 19, the school's first tournament win since 2018, in a game played at the Maravich Assembly Center in Baton Rouge, La.

It was a challenging first frame for Ohio State, as the Buckeyes were just 1 of 13 from the field. Missouri State was not significantly better – just 5 of 18 – but took advantage of six offensive rebounds to lead 14-5 at the end of the first. It was the lowest-scoring quarter of the season for Ohio State's high-powered offense.

"I think it was more excitement," said Sheldon. "They had a game under their belt (in the First Four), and we hadn't played in a while. I think we were excited to get out there, and it showed a little bit. Maybe the nerves showed. But I think once we got out there, we started playing as a team."

The early run came for the Bears despite their two leading scorers – guard Brice Calip and forward Abigayle Jackson, who were also named to the Missouri Valley Conference All-Defensive Team – spending time on the bench due to foul trouble. In their First Four win over Florida State, Missouri State finished with 23 team fouls, and the team averaged over 18 per game this season.

A free throw from Miller just 15 seconds into the second quarter finally broke a scoring drought that lasted over four minutes, but after a layup from senior guard Taylor Mikesell on the next possession, the Buckeyes were again held scoreless, this time for 3:40, and the Bears increased their lead to 20-8.

Sheldon, who had been held without a three-point basket since Ohio State's loss to Maryland on Feb. 17, connected on her first triple in over a month to get the Buckeyes back on the board, and Ohio State followed it up with three-pointers on its next two possessions – one each by sophomore guard Rikki Harris and Mikesell – to cut the deficit to five points, 22-17.

"It's always good to see the ball go in, but I think me and T-Mike, no matter whether it's going in or not, we're going to keep shooting," Sheldon said. "It was something we needed at that time, but we're always going to keep shooting."

The barrage from deep seemed to kick-start the Buckeyes. Ohio State closed the second frame on a 14-4 run to lead 31-26 at the half. While it was Missouri State's defense that dominated in the opening quarter, the Buckeyes took over in the second, forcing six turnovers in the final three minutes of the half that resulted in 10 points during that run.

"I think that was a huge momentum shift for us," Mikesell said. "In the huddle we were talking about starting the offense with our defense, and I think we did that at the end of the second quarter (and) got a nice little run going into halftime."

Despite the momentum built up to close the first half, Ohio State again struggled on the offensive end to open the third quarter, missing its first seven shots, and the Bears took a 36-35 lead with 4:45 remaining. Junior forward Rebeka Mikulasikova eventually scored the Buckeyes' first basket of the half with 3:11 remaining in the quarter to regain the lead for Ohio State, 37-36.

Three lead changes later, the Bears were looking to take a 43-41 advantage into the



SONNY BROCKWAY

RESILIENT SQUAD — Kevin McGuff's (center) Ohio State overcame a fourth-quarter deficit against Missouri State and knocked off the higher-seeded LSU Tigers to make the Sweet 16 before falling to No. 2 Texas, 66-63 on March 25, ending the team's season.

fourth quarter, but after a miss by Mikesell and an offensive rebound by Sheldon, the Buckeyes found Mikulasikova on the perimeter and she knocked down her first triple in over a month to give Ohio State a 44-43 lead at the buzzer.

Missouri State responded with the first two baskets to start the fourth quarter, and Ohio State continued its early-quarter struggles, missing its first six shots from the field while the Bears took a 50-46 lead with 7:09 remaining in the game.

Beacham hit Ohio State's first basket of the quarter and later hit a free throw to make it a one-point game, and Sheldon then connected on a layup in transition to give the Buckeyes a 51-50 lead with 3:54 remaining. The Bears retook the lead on a trip to the free-throw line, but Mikesell responded with perhaps Ohio State's biggest shot of the game, knocking down a triple to lead 54-52 with 3:10 left in the contest.

Missouri State had a chance to tie or take the lead down 56-54 with just over a minute remaining, but after a pass sailed out of bounds, Sheldon was fouled on the other end and knocked down a pair of free throws to give the Buckeyes a 58-54 lead.

The Bears responded to make it 58-56, but after a pair of timeouts by Ohio State, head coach Kevin McGuff got the look he wanted, resulting in an easy drive to the basket for Sheldon to push the lead to four with 29 seconds remaining. With time winding down, Missouri State was forced to foul and the Buckeyes closed things out with three free throws.

"I'm proud of our effort and our ability to stay together and execute down the stretch," McGuff said. "Missouri State has a great team. They played extremely hard today like they normally do. Their defense was very good, and they made us earn everything we got. But I think it speaks to just our leadership of our captains and our upperclassmen for them to keep us in the right frame of mind when we got off to a bad start and then to keep us together down the stretch where we had to make a lot of plays on both ends of the

floor to win the game."

Sheldon led the Buckeyes in points (25), rebounds (six), assists (five) and steals (five). Mikesell chipped in 14. Calip led the Bears with 15 points, with Jackson also in double figures at 11. Ifunanya Nwachukwu pulled down 17 rebounds and helped Missouri State to a 51-33 advantage on the boards.

Neither team was effective from the floor. Ohio State shot 33.9 percent (19 of 56), while the Bears hit on 33.3 percent of their shots (21 of 63).

Bucks Upset LSU For Sweet 16 Berth

Ohio State played 14 contests away from Value City Arena this season, but perhaps none – not Michigan's Crisler Center, Iowa's Carver-Hawkeye Arena or the Big Ten tournament in Indiana's back yard – offered quite the environment and challenge of the Maravich Assembly Center, host to over 8,000 fans clad in LSU's signature purple and gold attire for a matchup on March 21 in the NCAA tournament's round of 32.

The hostility of the Tiger faithful – not to mention the challenges presented by LSU's size and pedigree on the court – set the stage for LSU to advance, with the Tigers playing on their home court after earning a top-four seed in the tournament. The upstart Buckeyes, who have experienced ample adversity over the past few seasons, did not take the challenge lying down, using a signature performance from Sheldon, three-point shooting from Mikesell and a surprising effort on the boards to take down No. 3 LSU, 79-64, earning the school's first trip to the Sweet 16 since 2017.

"It's awesome," Sheldon said. "I'm super proud of our whole team. We stayed together. That's a tough environment to play in, so we stayed together. We relied on each other, and I'm just super proud and it's awesome. But we're not done yet. We've got a tough opponent coming up so we've got to start focusing on them."

Continued On Page 30

Buckeyes Win In Hostile LSU Environment

Continued From Page 29

Ohio State spoke at length following the win over Missouri State about using defense to help generate offense, and the Buckeyes did exactly that to start things off against LSU, forcing seven turnovers in the first quarter that resulted in 10 points.

Beyond forcing turnovers, Ohio State forced several missed shots, and the Tigers were just 3 of 15 from the field and experienced separate scoring droughts of over four minutes. Sheldon accrued three steals in the first frame and had six points as the Buckeyes led 15-8, closing the quarter on an 11-0 run.

Ohio State knew heading into this contest that defending the triple was not one of LSU's strengths this season, and the Buckeyes took advantage in the second frame by hitting 5 of 9 from beyond the arc, led by Mikulasikova's two makes from deep on both her attempts.

Her triples, sandwiched around a layup

and a Mikesell three-pointer, helped pushed Ohio State's lead to 26-20, and a three-pointer from Harris then pushed things to 29-20, tied for the Buckeyes' largest lead in the first half.

The Tigers' two leading scorers this season, fifth-year senior guards Jailin Cherry and Khayla Pointer, scored on back-to-back possessions to make it 31-26 with 2:26 remaining, but after a triple from Miller to make it 34-26, both teams were held scoreless for the remainder of the half and Ohio State took the lead into the break. The Buckeyes were led in the first half by Mikulasikova's eight points and spread the ball out well, with seven Buckeyes scoring a basket in the first 20 minutes. Sheldon passed out five assists before the break.

Harris and Sheldon got a pair of early baskets to start the third, forcing LSU head coach Kim Mulkey to call a timeout less than two minutes into the second half with her Tigers facing a 38-26 deficit. This did

Ohio State 79, LSU 64										
March 21, 2022 Maravich Assembly Center • Baton Rouge, La.										
	1	2	3	4	F					
Ohio State (25-6)	15	19	23	22	79					
LSU (26-6)	8	18	11	27	64					
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Mikulasikova	20	5-9	0-0	0-2	1	0	12			
Harris	25	2-5	2-2	2-5	1	4	7			
Sheldon	40	9-17	3-3	0-3	8	3	23			
Miller	29	1-4	3-4	1-8	3	4	6			
Mikesell	40	7-15	0-1	0-5	2	3	18			
Thierry	15	1-2	4-4	0-4	1	5	6			
Beacham	20	3-6	0-0	3-2	0	2	6			
Poole	11	0-0	1-2	0-4	0	1	1			
Totals	200	28-58	13-16	9-34	16	22	79			
Percentages: FG: 48.3%. FT: 81.3%. Three-point field goals: 10-22 (Mikesell 4-7, Mikulasikova 2-3, Sheldon 2-5, Harris 1-4, Miller 1-2, Beacham 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 4 (Thierry 2, Mikesell, Miller). Turnovers: 20 (Sheldon 6, Beacham 3, Harris 3, Mikesell 3, Mikulasikova 2, Miller, Thierry, Team). Steals: 5 (Sheldon 3, Mikesell 2).										
LSU	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Newby	34	2-2	1-2	5-5	0	2	5			
Aifuwa	22	1-7	0-1	1-5	1	1	2			
Cherry	40	6-14	0-0	0-3	2	1	12			
Pointer	40	12-30	7-13	2-0	4	3	32			
Payne	26	2-8	4-4	1-2	0	4	8			
Morris	14	1-5	0-0	0-1	0	0	3			
Gusters	9	0-0	0-0	1-1	1	0	0			
Trasi	14	1-2	0-2	2-1	0	3	2			
Ward	<1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Shematsi	<1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Petty	<1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	200	25-68	12-22	14-22	8	14	64			
Percentages: FG: 36.8%. FT: 54.5%. Three-point field goals: 2-8 (Morris 1-2, Pointer 1-4, Payne 0-1, Trasi 0-1). Team rebounds: 6. Blocked shots: 5 (Gusters 2, Aifuwa, Cherry, Pointer). Turnovers: 11 (Aifuwa 3, Morris 3, Pointer 2, Cherry, Newby, Team). Steals: 13 (Cherry 4, Newby 4, Pointer 2, Aifuwa, Morris, Payne). Officials: Grinter, Gulbeyan, Murray. Attendance: 8,135.										

Texas 66, Ohio State 63										
March 25, 2022 Veterans Memorial Arena • Spokane, Wash.										
	1	2	3	4	F					
Ohio State (25-7)	20	10	15	18	63					
Texas (29-6)	16	16	18	16	66					
Ohio State	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Mikulasikova	16	1-4	1-1	2-1	1	3	3			
Harris	26	1-6	2-2	0-1	2	2	4			
Sheldon	38	7-16	2-2	1-5	4	3	17			
Miller	32	6-10	0-0	1-3	0	2	12			
Mikesell	40	7-12	2-2	1-2	1	1	19			
Thierry	23	0-4	0-0	3-0	1	2	0			
Beacham	24	4-9	0-0	4-6	1	2	8			
Poole	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2	0			
Totals	200	26-61	7-7	13-19	10	17	63			
Percentages: FG: 44.26%. FT: 100.0%. Three-point field goals: 4-12 (Mikesell 3-4, Sheldon 1-2, Beacham 0-2, Harris 0-3, Mikulasikova 0-1). Team rebounds: 2. Blocked shots: 5 (Miller 2, Beacham, Mikesell, Thierry). Turnovers: 17 (Sheldon 6, Miller 5, Mikulasikova 3, Beacham, Mikesell, Poole). Steals: 11 (Beacham 4, Sheldon 4, Harris 3).										
LSU	Total	FT	Reb.							
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Ebo	31	3-5	3-4	3-5	0	2	9			
Gaston	20	3-5	2-2	2-3	1	0	8			
Harmon	22	2-4	2-2	0-2	3	4	6			
Holle	18	1-4	0-0	0-0	0	1	2			
Allen-Taylor	38	7-11	3-3	1-0	3	0	17			
Moore	24	3-10	2-4	2-2	0	2	8			
Matharu	21	4-8	0-0	1-2	2	1	10			
Warren	23	3-7	0-0	1-2	0	2	6			
Lattimore	4	0-1	0-0	0-2	0	0	0			
Totals	200	26-55	12-15	12-20	9	12	66			
Percentages: FG: 47.3%. FT: 80.0%. Three-point field goals: 2-4 (Matharu 2-2, Holle 0-1, Warren 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 4 (Moore 2, Gaston, Matharu). Turnovers: 17 (Allen-Taylor 3, Harmon 3, Matharu 3, Moore 3, Ebo 2, Warren 2, Gaston). Steals: 12 (Matharu 4, Moore 2, Allen-Taylor, Ebo, Harmon). Officials: Gonzalez, Inouye, Green. Attendance: N/A.										

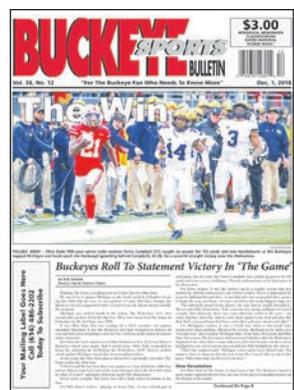
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not solve any woes, however. LSU suffered a shot-clock violation out of the timeout and watched Mikesell score on the other end to make it 40-26.

Ohio State later pushed the lead to 19 points, 49-30, after a pair of baskets from Mikesell and points from Mikulasikova and Miller, but the Tigers threatened to get back into the game by forcing four Ohio State turnovers in the span of 1:12. The Tigers were unable to capitalize, however, scoring only three points in that time. The Buckeyes pushed on, forcing an LSU turnover and scoring eight straight to move the lead to 57-33 with 1:34 remaining before finishing the quarter up 57-37.

The Tigers, no strangers to comebacks after erasing a 10-point deficit against Jackson State in the first round, started building momentum in the fourth and getting the home crowd back into the contest, chipping away at Ohio State's lead until the Buckeyes led by 14, 64-50, following a basket from Pointer with 5:39 left in the game.

"Our biggest goal was trying to withstand their runs," Mikesell said. "We knew they were going to have runs, and we have been in environments like this before. I think I can speak for both of us (Mikesell and Sheldon), it's probably the loudest one we've been in all year. Just being competitors, I think that this

is exciting. This is the best time of year. And I think that every single one of my teammates from the bench to the court did a great job staying composed even when they were going on runs."

As she's done in Ohio State's time of need so often this season, Mikesell connected on a triple on the next possession, pushing the lead back to 17 with 5:26 remaining. Ohio State saw its lead shrink to as few as 11 points on an Awa Trasi layup with 2:39 remaining,



Braxtin Miller

but the Buckeyes – whether it was a block from freshman guard Taylor Thierry or forcing a miss by the Tigers with stingy defense – made the plays they needed to down the stretch to secure the lopsided win.

The Buckeyes finished the game 10 of 22 from deep (45.5 percent), while the Tigers were only 2 of 8 (25.0 percent) and finished just 12 of 22 (54.5 percent) from the free-throw line.

Sheldon led the Buckeyes with 23 points, going 9 of 17 from the field. Mikesell (18) and Mikulasikova (12) were also in double figures. Miller had a team-high nine rebounds, helping lead Ohio State to a 43-36 advantage on the glass, while Sheldon dished out eight assists. Pointer led the Tigers with 32 points on 12-of-30 shooting.

"I told them about five times yesterday, told them at shoot-around today, told them before the game – if we were going to win the game we were going to have to fight like hell on every possession when the shot went up

to get the ball back. And we did," McGuff said. "We didn't get it back every single time, but we fought on every possession. They're big, they're physical, they're aggressive. They're one of the best rebounding teams in the country. And that was where we were going to put ourselves in a position to win, and we did. We fought and I'm proud of that area."

OSU Comes Up Short Against Texas

Ohio State's surprise tournament run came to an end on March 25 in Spokane, Wash., as the sixth-seeded Buckeyes fell short of the Elite Eight in a 66-63 loss to No. 2 Texas.

The Buckeyes had several opportunities to tie or take the lead late, but their final two shot attempts of the game were both blocked by the Longhorns.

Texas imposed its will in the game's early stages, getting some pressure on the defensive end and scoring the Longhorns' first three baskets in the paint. Texas traditionally has not shot often from deep this season, and that remained true as it shot just two three-pointers in the first half, finishing the game just 2 of 4 from deep.

The Longhorns also took an early advantage in rebounds to lead 12-7 with 5:20 left in the first, but Ohio State's press began ramping up, pushing the Buckeyes to a 13-4 run to close out the first frame with a 20-16 lead. During the run, Texas was held scoreless for over four minutes.

The run was due in part to the absence

of Texas starting point guard Rori Harmon, who picked up two early fouls and was forced to exit the game with 2:26 remaining in the first. The freshman did not return to the game until the second half.

"She is a fantastic player and has such an incredible future at Texas, and when she went out, I thought that hurt them a little bit, quite frankly," McGuff said. "She sets the tone for them defensively, playing 94 feet, and certainly bothered us with that. I thought we handled it well early, but then we got worn down and sloppy and had some turnovers that hurt, but her going out of the game was certainly a significant part of us being able to make a run on them at that point."

Holding a lead and seeing Harmon on the bench, McGuff saw an opportunity to rest his starting point guard in Sheldon. However, after not even two minutes of the quarter, Sheldon was forced back to the floor after sophomore guard Kateri Poole picked up two fouls and the Longhorns scored five quick points.

Texas guard Joanne Allen-Taylor hit a jumper to give the Longhorns a 25-24 lead with 6:51 remaining in the second, and it set the stage for a poor run of basketball by both teams to close out the quarter. In total, the teams combined for 11 turnovers from there to the break and were just 5 of 20 from the field, and Texas took a 32-30 lead into the locker room.

Though Harmon was on the bench for 12:26 of the first half, the Buckeyes were outscored 20-17 with her off the court – certainly not the result McGuff was looking for with

one of the best Longhorns out of action.

After two turnovers and three fouls in the first four minutes of the third quarter by the Buckeyes, Texas worked its way to a 41-36 lead, forcing McGuff to call a timeout with 5:40 remaining. Out of the timeout, Mikulasikova was forced out of the game with her third foul, and the Longhorns knocked down their first triple of the game to take a 44-36 lead, their largest of the game to that point.

Following a basket from Miller and a steal on Texas' ensuing possession by Beacham, Harmon picked up her third foul after going up for a ball with Harris.

Ohio State then cut the deficit to just one point, 44-43 on a triple by Mikesell, but the Longhorns took a 50-45 lead into the final frame after the Buckeyes missed on six of their final seven shots of the quarter.

Mikesell knocked down a triple – her second of the night – to make it a four-point game, 54-50 with 8:30 to play, but the Longhorns converted Ohio State turnovers into points on their next two possessions to take a 58-50 lead with 6:42 remaining.

Following Harmon's fourth foul that sent her back to the bench, Ohio State finally broke through with under five minutes remaining, forcing a scoreless possession by the Longhorns despite two offensive rebounds, and Sheldon then scored on the other end and was fouled for another point to make it 60-53. After another turnover by Texas, Sheldon hit her first triple of the game to make it 60-56 with 4:35 remaining.

"That was a big momentum shift for us,"

Sheldon said. "We were playing as hard as we could that whole game. We got a few plays that went our way. At that point we were just telling each other, 'We've still got a chance to win it,' and we fought it to the end."

Mikesell later connected on her third triple of the game to cut the lead to one point, 62-61, but Harmon responded with a jumper on the next possession. McGuff called a timeout with just over a minute remaining, and out of the timeout, the Buckeyes found a Beacham jumper at the other end to trail 64-63 and forced a miss by Texas.

Ohio State had the ball down one with under 30 seconds remaining but was held scoreless on the possession and was forced to foul the Longhorns. Harmon hit both free throws following a hard foul from Miller. On the Buckeyes' final possession, Beacham's shot at the buzzer was blocked following some confusion on the offensive end by Ohio State, securing the 66-63 win for Texas.

"We needed a three," McGuff said. "We had action on the back side, but they did a great job of defending it. We weren't able to turn the corner to try to skip it across the baseline."

Mikesell led the Buckeyes with 19 points on 7-of-12 shooting and was 3 of 4 from deep. Sheldon added 17 points, and Miller scored 12. Beacham had eight points and 10 rebounds. Allen-Taylor led Texas with 17 points.

As a team, Ohio State was just 4 of 12 from three-point range.

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McGowens Headlines Big Ten Declarations

There's plenty of time for men's basketball standouts to make the call, but the Big Ten has already seen many of its stars enter their names into the draft after the conference saw its season come to a close with Purdue's loss to 15th-seeded Saint Peter's in the Sweet 16 on March 25.

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

Ohio State's E.J. Liddell may be the biggest name of the bunch, declaring and signing with an agent to end his time in Columbus, but several other major players have made similar declarations.

Nebraska freshman guard Bryce McGowens announced the same move on March 21, tossing his name into the draft and signing on with an agent. A third-team All-Big Ten pick, McGowens averaged 16.8 points and 5.2 rebounds per game this past season and was named the league's Newcomer of the Year by The Associated Press (Ohio State's Malaki Branham beat him out for the league's official Freshman of the Year award).



Bryce McGowens

"Since he arrived on campus last summer, Bryce has been diligent in putting in extra work, whether it is in the gym or in the weight room, and you could see it in his continued improvement over the course of the season," Nebraska coach Fred Hoiberg said in a statement. "Bryce has put a lot of thought into this decision, and we will do everything we can to support him as he prepares for the NBA draft and the start of his professional career."

Michigan senior point guard DeVante' Jones announced that he'd be declaring on March 26 after the Wolverines fell to Villanova in the Sweet 16. A transfer from Coastal Carolina, he played just one season in Ann Arbor, averaging 10.3 points, 4.6 assists and 4.5 rebounds per game this year.

"Michigan... Thank you, this wasn't the easiest year for me but with the support of the fans, my teammates, the coaching staff, and the hardworking managers, it made my experience here worthwhile," Jones tweeted.

Michigan State wing Gabe Brown and Spartan center Marcus Bingham Jr. elected to go pro instead of returning to East Lansing, according to reports from ESPN's Jonathan Givony and WZZM 13's Mike Lacett, respectively.

Brown, a 6-8, 215-pound forward, led the Spartans with 11.6 points per game during the 2021-22 campaign, shooting 42.8 percent from the floor, 38.2 percent from beyond the arc and 89.4 percent from the charity stripe.

An Ypsilanti, Mich., native, Brown earned third-team All-Big Ten honors from

the conference's coaches for his performance in the 2021-22 season.

Bingham boasted career-high marks for the 2021-22 Spartans, averaging 9.3 points per game, 6.3 boards, 2.2 blocks, and 0.9 steals in 18.7 minutes per game, as well as shooting 54.7 percent on field goals, 41.5 percent on three-pointers, and 74.7 percent on free throws.

A Grand Rapids, Mich., native, Bingham ended his Spartan career with a 16-point, 10-rebound outing against Duke, where he made 5 of 12 shot attempts and knocked down all four of his three-point tries. The big man extended his range beyond the arc this season, connecting on 17 of his 41 attempts.

A 7-0, 230-pound center, Bingham will leave East Lansing as the program's all-time leader in blocked shots with 168.

Rutgers has seen two declarations as well, from senior guard Ron Harper Jr. and freshman forward Jaden Jones.

Harper, a second-team All-Big Ten pick in 2021-22, leaves as one of the most decorated Scarlet Knights of all time. He averaged 15.8 points and 5.9 rebounds per game this season and led the team to consecutive NCAA Tournament berths for the first time since 1976.

"The last few years at Rutgers were unbelievable," Harper said. "Nobody would imagine we'd be where we are today when I arrived. When I came on an unofficial recruiting visit, Coach (Steve) Pikiell said he wants to turn Rutgers back into a winning culture and get back to the NCAA Tournament. Now, if you don't make the tournament, it's a failure. This has been a great journey with my teammates, coaching staff and our fans."

Jones had very little impact in Piscataway, N.J. He joined the team as a midyear enrollee in 2021 and played in four games, he but wasn't able to pitch in much more during his first full season in town this year. He played in just 17 games – none after Feb. 5 – and averaged 3.6 points per game. He has yet to sign with an agent and could ultimately return.

"The Rutgers men's basketball program is excited for Jaden to explore the opportunity of declaring for the NBA draft," Pikiell said in a statement. "Jaden has been an outstanding teammate, a thrill to coach and we want the best for him and his future. Our program will support Jaden and his family throughout the entire process."

The draft is set for June 23. Underclassmen have until June 1 to remove their names and return to school; upperclassmen have until June 13.

Green Named Illinois WBB HC

Illinois hired Dayton head coach Shauna Green as the next leader of its women's basketball program, pending University of Illinois board of trustees approval.

Green led the Flyers to five Atlantic 10 regular-season championships during her six-year tenure at the helm in Dayton, qualifying for postseason play each year including four NCAA tournament appearances.

Dayton won the Atlantic 10 championship and an NCAA tournament game

during the 2021-22 season, which ended with a 26-6 mark for Green's squad. The Flyers went 14-1 in league play and defeated DePaul, 88-57, in a First Four game before being eliminated by Georgia to end their NCAA tourney trip.

"As we expected, our head-coaching position attracted tremendous interest from imminently qualified candidates across the country – a testament to the reputation of the University of Illinois, the upward trajectory of Fighting Illini Athletics, and the hard work of our basketball student-athletes," Illinois athletic director Josh Whitman said. "Even amongst such a talented candidate pool, Shauna Green quickly emerged as a dynamic, proven leader with a demonstrated record of success at one of the nation's most visible, accomplished mid-major programs."

"In visiting with Shauna, I was struck by her inner drive, her innate competitiveness, and her commitment to the student-athletes under her charge," Whitman continued. "She and I connected quickly around an ambitious vision for the future of Illinois women's basketball, which she and her staff plan to spread around the state and across the country."

The three-time Atlantic 10 Coach of the Year comes to the Big Ten after posting a 127-50 (.718) record at Dayton and 156-75 (.675) overall record, which includes two seasons at Loras College. Before becoming a head coach, Green served as an assistant coach for the Flyers, in addition to assistant-coaching stints at Northwestern and Providence.

"I am beyond excited to join the Illini family," Green said. "For me, it's always about the people, fit and vision. As soon as I met Josh, I believed in his leadership and desire to build a winning program."

Men's Basketball Portal Watch

The transfer portal has yet to truly kick into gear on the men's basketball side of things as postseason play continues, but the Big Ten has already seen its share of action.

Illinois landed Baylor forward Dain Dainja, a former four-star, back in January. The rising redshirt sophomore played in three games and nine total minutes for the Bears.

Indiana saw a trio of portal entries from March 23-25, started by sophomore guard Khristian Lander, continued by senior center Michael Durr and finished by senior guard Rob Phinisee.

Lander enrolled early at Indiana last season, reclassifying to do so. He averaged 2.1 points per game in 26 games as a freshman and 2.9 points per game in 13 appearances this season. Durr appeared in 30 games but averaged just 7.0 minutes a game in those showings, registering 1.5 points and 1.0 rebounds on average. He came to Indiana this season as a transfer from South Florida and has one season of eligibility remaining.

Phinisee is the only potential Hoosier transfer to make a serious impact in town. He played in 111 games with 69 starts in four seasons, averaging 6.5 points, 2.8 assists and 2.6 rebounds on his career. His role dwindled this season, as he averaged a

career-low 18.3 minutes per game without a start in 25 appearances, and he scored just 4.5 points per game (also a career low).



Rob Phinisee

Maryland has seen two departures. Freshman forward James Graham III, a four-star prospect who left high school early to play this season, entered the portal in early December and has yet to find a landing spot. Sophomore guard Marcus Dockery entered the portal March 16 and quickly signed on with Howard. He played in eight games this season, averaging 1.8 points per game.

Sophomore Michigan guard Zeb Jackson ended his career as a Wolverine and entered the portal Jan. 31 and has yet to find a destination. He played in just four games this season, averaging 2.0 points. He was a four-star, top-100 recruit in the class of 2020.

Hoiberg confirmed March 24 that three Huskers had entered the portal in freshman center Eduardo Andre, freshman guard Keon Edwards and senior forward Trevor Lakes. A 2020 signee, Andre maintained freshman eligibility with the COVID year in 2020-21 and suited up in 50 games with the Cornhuskers as a backup big, averaging 3.1 points and 3.2 rebounds. Edwards appeared in 19 games with five starts this season, averaging 0.5 points and 0.7 rebounds per game. Lakes averaged 1.5 points and 0.9 rebounds per game in 22 appearances during two seasons with Nebraska.

It hasn't been all bad for the Cornhuskers, though. North Dakota State junior forward Sam Griesel announced that he'll be transferring to Nebraska, bringing with him 14.3 points and 6.6 rebounds per game.

Penn State senior guard Sam Sessoms announced March 16 that he would play his final season of college basketball elsewhere. He averaged 11.6 points per game this season, starting in 10 games and appearing in 31 with 27.6 minutes per game.

Women's Basketball Portal Watch

As it works with a new coaching staff, Illinois has seen five players announce their intentions to depart. Junior forward Solape Amusan, junior guard De'Myla Brown, sophomore forward Aaliyah Nye, junior guard Jada Peebles and sophomore forward Erika Porter are all in the portal, but Green expressed plans to meet with every member of the team individually and could sway some of those planning to exit.

"First off, it's about the players. That's my first priority is our players here in building and starting those relationships," Green said. "We can't do anything until they start getting a feel for me and I start getting a feel for them and we start the long process of starting a relationship. Then, we'll get on the court and get to work and assess where we're at, what do we need to address recruiting-wise this year and going into the next couple of recruiting classes. All of it is a process."

BIG TEN NOTES

Formerly of Iowa Western Community College, Amusan played in 19 games for the Illini this past season and averaged just 1.4 points and 0.9 rebounds a game.

Brown started in 12 games for Illinois this season but finished third in points per game with 8.1 despite shooting just 28.8 percent from the field. Her 30 steals led the team. A native of North Little Rock, Ark., Brown started her career at Western Kentucky, spent a season at Chipola College and transferred to Illinois before this past season.

Nye was Illinois' top player this season. She led the team in scoring with 12.8 points per game, shooting 41.7 percent from the field and 36.9 percent from three-point range (No. 2 on the team) on 187 attempts. She came to Illinois by way of East Lansing (Mich.) High School.

Peebles led the Illini in three-point shooting percentage at 37.3 percent on 83 attempts, averaging 7.0 points per game with 22 starts and 27 appearances. A Raleigh, N.C. native, Peebles was Illinois' leading scorer as a sophomore but saw her playing time dwindle slightly with the arrival of Brown and Duke graduate transfer Sara Anastasieska.

Porter fluctuated between the starting lineup and a bench role throughout the season, registering 12 starts in 23 games but averaging just 13.1 minutes per game. She was one of Illinois' most reliable interior scorers, shooting 52.2 percent from the field, but she averaged just 4.2 points and 2.3 rebounds per game. Like her teammates, she has yet to find a new home in the portal.

Also in the portal, Indiana has lost a player and landed another. Freshman Keyarah Berry was announced as a departure in January and declared in February her intention to transfer to Kennesaw State.

The new player for the Hoosiers is Alyssa Geary, a 6-4 guard from Providence who will be using her COVID year to play one more season. A product of Elmhurst, Ill., Geary was the only Friar to start all 30 games this past season, averaging 9.5 points, 4.2 rebounds, 2.0 assists and 1.1 blocked shots per game. She racked up 66 career starts with Providence, finishing her time there with 854 career points.

Iowa's Tomi Taiwo and Logan Cook will finish their college careers elsewhere, with both heaving one year of eligibility remaining.

Both former Hawkeyes will be super seniors due to the extra year of eligibility granted because of the pandemic. Iowa played with just 13 scholarship players this past season, two fewer than the maximum; however, with Hannah Stuelke, Jada Gyamfi and Taylor McCabe arriving as incoming freshmen – plus Monika Czinano returning for her “super senior” season – there was not enough room for both Taiwo and Cook to return.

Taiwo and Cook were both part of the Hawkeyes' 2018 recruiting class. After two seasons of limited action, Taiwo averaged 3.7 points last season in 14.4 minutes per game and 4.6 points in 17.4 minutes per game in 2021-22. She had five double-digit scoring games this past year, including a 13-point outing in Iowa's NCAA tournament win over Illinois State.

Cook's most productive year for Iowa came during the 2020-21 campaign, when she averaged 8.1 minutes and 2.0 points

per game while appearing in 22 contests. The former Iowa City West standout spent much of this past year battling injuries.

Maryland nabbed a potential contributor out of the portal on Jan. 20 when Florida guard Lavender Briggs, who suffered a season-ending leg injury this past season, announced her intention to head to Maryland after three seasons with the Gators.

Michigan State received a significant commitment in former Michigan Miss Basketball winner Gabby Elliott, a Clemson standout, via the transfer portal. Elliott will be reunited with former Detroit Edison Public Academy teammate DeeDee Hagemann, who was an All-Big Ten freshman performer in 2021-22.

Elliott enjoyed a solid first season on the Tigers, averaging 13.6 points per game and adding 18 double-digit scoring performances to earn All-ACC freshman team accolades in 2020-21. She averaged 9.4 points while starting 10 of 12 games for Clemson this season before entering the transfer portal in January.

It wasn't all good news for the Spartans, though. Junior guard Alyza Winston announced on Dec. 30, 2021, that she would be transferring to Mississippi State.

Minnesota has faced as many losses as almost anyone, with four players announcing their intentions to depart. Sophomore guard Erin Hedman, junior point guard Jasmine Powell, junior center Klarke Sconiers and junior forward Kadi Sissoko are all on their way out after a 15-18 season under third-year head coach Lindsay Whalen.

Hedman announced her decision on March 5 after two seasons with the Golden Gophers. A former four-star recruit from New Berlin, Wisc., she played in just eight games this season and will be on the hunt for a fresh start elsewhere.

Powell has been gone since late January, when she left the team and entered the portal on the heels of a four-game losing streak. She announced on March 3 that she will be transferring to Tennessee.

Sconiers and Sissoko are both recent entries. The former served as a reserve this season, playing 7.3 minutes per game in 11 appearances as freshman Rose Micheaux claimed a starting spot ahead of her. She averaged 1.0 points and 1.5 rebounds per contest.

Sissoko, meanwhile, will be looking for a third program after announcing her decision to transfer on March 22. She arrived in Minneapolis by way of Syracuse ahead of the 2019-20 season and made her debut a year later, averaging 12.6 points per game in 2020-21. In 33 games and 27 starts this season, the Paris, France, native led the Gophers in rebounds with 5.7 per game while pitching in 10.8 points a contest.

Nebraska has faced attrition too, with Ruby Porter, Mi'Cole Cayton, and Bella Cravens all leaving the program.

Porter announced her plan to return home to Australia, while Cayton and Cravens are looking to continue their collegiate basketball careers elsewhere. A sophomore guard, Porter appeared in 29 games in 2021-22, including two starts, and scored 58 points.

Cayton, a guard from California, will need to get an NCAA waiver to play because it would be her seventh season in a college program. The former Husker has battled numerous knee injuries but said in a social

media post she is 100 percent healthy and wants to play college basketball and earn a doctorate degree.

Unlike Porter and Cayton, Cravens had established a role in the Nebraska rotation. She started 32 games for the Huskers until a practice injury led to the emergence of Alexis Markowski. She averaged 5.8 points and 5.3 rebounds during the 2021-22 campaign after transferring in from Eastern Washington.

Penn State is shedding three guards to the transfer portal too, with junior Shay Hagans, sophomore Tova Sabel and sophomore Nyam Thornton all announcing their intentions to depart.

Hagans, the Nittany Lions' No. 4-leading scorer, started in 15 of the team's 29 games during the 2021-22 campaign. Sabel, a 5-10 spark plug off the Penn State bench, will transfer with three years of eligibility remaining. Thornton, a product of Columbus Africentric High School, played in just nine games this season, contributing 2.2 points and 1.2 rebounds a game in those matchups.

Purdue is expected to lose two players as well, with senior forward Nyagoo Gony and senior guard Brooke Moore both in the portal.

A Lincoln, Neb., native, Gony will be a graduate transfer with her new program. She played in just under 41 minutes this past season through 12 games and never reached the highs she set as a freshman, playing in 31 games and averaging 9.0 points per contest.

Moore, who transferred to Purdue from

Auburn before the 2020-21 season, will be a graduate transfer as well. She averaged 10.3 points per game in 32 appearances, working almost exclusively as a leader of the team's second unit, starting just once and averaging 19.8 minutes per game.

Rutgers has two players on the way out in sophomore guards Joiya Maddox and Liz Martino. Maddox played in 17 games after returning from an injury that ended her 2020-21 season before it began, averaging 2.6 points and 1.1 rebounds per game. Martino played in 15 games and scored 2.2 points per game.

Like Indiana, Wisconsin is trading a player for a player in the portal. The Badgers added graduate guard Avery LaBarbera on March 22 from Holy Cross but lost junior forward Tara Stauffacher a day later.

LaBarbera is a major get for the Badgers. She averaged 16.8 points per game, 9.8 rebounds, 4.1 assists and 1.8 steals with Holy Cross in 2021-22 and was named the Patriot League Player of the Year, adding to a superlative career. She was a Patriot League second-team pick 2019-20 and 2020-21, an all-defensive team pick in 2020-21 and the league's rookie of the year in 2018-19.

“I am elated to have Avery join our Badger family,” said head coach Marisa Moseley. “I had the pleasure of coaching against Avery for three years during my time at Boston University. She is a consummate competitor and a phenomenal leader.”

Stauffacher, meanwhile, played in 28 games this season, averaging 12.8 minutes and 2.0 points per game.

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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2021 FOOTBALL (11-2, 8-1)

Sept. 2 at Minnesota, W 45-31; **11** OREGON, L 35-28; **18** TULSA, W 41-20; **25** AKRON, W 59-7.

Oct. 2 at Rutgers, W 52-13; **9** MARYLAND, W 66-17; **23** at Indiana, W 54-7; **30** PENN STATE, W 33-24.

Nov. 6 at Nebraska, W 26-17; **13** PURDUE, W 59-31; **20** MICHIGAN STATE, W 56-7; **27** at Michigan, L 42-27.

Jan. 1 vs. Utah in Rose Bowl, W 48-45.

2022 FOOTBALL

Sept. 3 NOTRE DAME; **10** ARKANSAS STATE; **17** TOLEDO; **24** WISCONSIN.

Oct. 1 RUTGERS; **8** at Michigan State; **22** IOWA; **29** at Penn State.

Nov. 5 at Northwestern; **12** INDIANA; **19** at Maryland; **26** MICHIGAN.

2023 FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 at Indiana; **9** SAN JOSE STATE; **16** WESTERN KENTUCKY; **23** at Notre Dame.

Oct. 7 MARYLAND; **14** at Purdue; **21** PENN STATE; **28** at Wisconsin.

Nov. 4 at Rutgers; **11** MICHIGAN STATE; **18** MINNESOTA; **25** at Michigan.

MEN'S BASKETBALL (20-12, 12-8)

Nov. 1 INDIANAPOLIS (EXH.), W 82-46; **9** AKRON, W 67-66; **12** NIAGARA, W 84-74; **15** BOWLING GREEN, W 89-58; **18** at Xavier, L 71-65; **22** at Seton Hall, W 79-76; **24** at Florida, L 71-68; **30** DUKE, W 71-66.

Dec. 5 at Penn State, W 76-64; **8** TOWSON, W 85-74; **11** WISCONSIN, W 73-55; **18** at Kentucky, Canceled; **21** TENNESSEE MARTIN, Canceled; **28** NEW ORLEANS, Canceled.

Jan. 2 at Nebraska, W 87-79 (OT); **6** at Indiana, L 67-51; **9** NORTHWESTERN, W 95-87; **13** at Wisconsin, L 78-68; **16** PENN STATE, W 61-56; **18** IUPUI, W 83-37; **22** NEBRASKA, Postponed; **27** at Minnesota, W 75-64; **30** at Purdue, L 78-81

Feb. 3 IOWA, Postponed; **6** MARYLAND, W 82-67; **9** at Rutgers, L 64-66; **12** at Michigan, 68-57; **15** MINNESOTA, W 70-45; **19** IOWA, L 62-75; **21** INDIANA, W 80-69; **24** at Illinois, W 86-83; **24** at Maryland, L 75-60.

March 1 NEBRASKA; **3** MICHIGAN STATE; **6** MICHIGAN; **9-13** Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis, Penn State, L 68-71; **18** NCAA Tournament at Pittsburgh, Pa., vs. Loyola-

Chicago, W 54-41 **20** NCAA Tournament at Pittsburgh, Pa., vs. Villanova, L 61-71

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL (25-7, 14-4)

Nov. 3 SLIPPERY ROCK (EXH.), W 96-48; **10** BUCKNELL, W 71-48; **14** NORFOLK STATE, W 86-48; **17** BOWLING GREEN, W 94-63; **23** BELLARMINE, W 110-58; **27** CINCINNATI, W 86-50.

Dec. 1 at Syracuse, L 97-91; **5** at Purdue, W 70-53; **7** MOUNT ST. MARY'S, W 94-50; **12** INDIANA L 86-66; **15** ALABAMA STATE, W 97-51; **19** at UCLA, Canceled; **21** at San Diego State, W 66-54; **31** at Michigan, L 90-71.

Jan. 3 PENN STATE, Postponed; **6** ILLINOIS, W 90-69; **9** at Northwestern, W 74-61; **12** MICHIGAN STATE, W 89-83; **15** at Minnesota, W 83-75; **20** MARYLAND, W 95-89; **23** at Rutgers W 80-71; **27** MICHIGAN, L 58-77 **31** at Iowa, W 92-88

Feb. 7 RUTGERS, W 61-57; **10** NEBRASKA, W 80-70; **14** at Illinois, W 86-67; **17** at Maryland, L 72-77; **20** WISCONSIN, W 59-42; **24** PENN STATE, W 78-55; **27** at Michigan State, W 61-55.

March 2-6 Big Ten Tournament at Indianapolis, Michigan State, W 74-58; Indiana, L 62-70 **19** NCAA Tournament at Baton Rouge, La., vs. Missouri State, W 63-56;

21 NCAA Tournament at Baton Rouge, La., vs. LSU, W 79-64; **25** NCAA Tournament at Baton Rouge, La., vs. Texas, L 66-63

MEN'S GYMNASTICS

Jan. 15 Windy City Invite, Chicago, Ill.; 2nd/7th (387.7.500); **22** New York Alliance, W 399.150-280.300.

Feb. 5 at (6) Illinois, L 400.750-394.500; **12** (4) Michigan, W 403.600-398.100 **19** (10) Army, W 393.950-374.850 **19** (12) William & Mary, W 393.950-364.550

March 5 at Penn State, W 397.200-393.900; **12** at Oklahoma, L 408.400-399.050; **20** NEBRASKA, W 407.350-406.650;

April 1-2 Big Ten Championships at State College, PA; **15** NCAA Qualifier at Norman, Okla.; **16** NCAA Championships at Norman, Okla.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS

Jan. 7 at Arkansas, L 195.450-195.025; **15** Denver, L 196.600-195.750; **22** Penn State, W 196.450-196.425; **30** Rutgers, W 196.025-195.750.

Feb. 7 NEBRASKA, W 196.675-196.350; **12**

at Minnesota, L 197.575-195.775; **18** Big Five Meet at Toledo, Ohio, 2nd/5; **26** MICHIGAN ST., W 197.075-196.850

March 4 All-Ohio Meet, 1st/3; **6** at Kent State, W 197.525-196.550; Eastern Michigan at Kent State, W 197.525-194.575 **11** CAL/PITT, 1st/3; **19** Big Ten Championships at Ohio State, 5th/10.

April 4 NCAA Regional First Round; **5** NCAA Regional Second Round; **6** NCAA Regional Final; **19** NCAA Semifinals at Fort Worth, Texas; **20** NCAA Championships at Fort Worth, Texas.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY (22-13-2, 13-9-2)

Oct. 8 at Bentley, L 2-1; **9** at Bentley, W 7-1; **15** UCONN, W 4-3 (OT); **16** UCONN, W 3-0; **29-30** MICHIGAN STATE, L 2-1, W 5-1.

Nov. 5 PENN STATE, W 5-2; **6** PENN STATE, W 4-1; **12** at Minnesota, W 4-3; **13** at Minnesota, L 2-0; **26** Mercyhurst, L 5-4; **27** MERCYHURST, W 3-2.

Dec. 3 at Notre Dame, W 4-2; **4** at Notre Dame, L 5-1; **10** MICHIGAN, L 5-2; **11** MICHIGAN, W 6-1; **16** BOWLING GREEN, W 4-3 (OT); **17** at Bowling Green, W 3-2; **31** LIU, W 6-0

Jan. 1, LIU, W 7-2. **8** at Wisconsin, W 5-3; **9** at Wisconsin, T 2-2 OT (SW); **14** NOTRE DAME, L 3-2 (OT); **15** NOTRE DAME, W 4-1; **21** at Michigan State, W 4-1; **22** at Michigan State, W 3-2; **28-29** at Penn State, T 2-2, W 6-0

Feb. 4-5 WISCONSIN, W 4-3 OT, W 6-2; **11-12** MINNESOTA, L 2-3; L 1-5; **18-19** at Michigan, L 3-5; L 0-3;

March 4-6 Big Ten Quarterfinals, Penn State, W 4-3, L 2-3, L 1-2.

WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY (32-6-0, 21-6-0)

Sept. 24 ST. THOMAS, W 6-0; **25** ST. THOMAS, W 4-1

Oct. 1 at Minnesota, W 4-2; **2** at Minnesota, W 4-1 **15** BEMIDJI STATE, W 7-0, **16** BEMIDJI STATE, W 3-1; **23** at Wisconsin, L 3-1; **24** at Wisconsin, L 2-1 (OT); **29** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 5-2; **30** ST. CLOUD STATE, W 10-1.

Nov. 5 at St. Thomas, W 8-1, **6** at St. Thomas, W 6-2; **19** MINNESOTA STATE, W 6-3; **20** MINNESOTA STATE, W 9-0; **26** DC Tournament at Washington, D.C., vs. St. Lawrence, W 5-2; **27** DC Tournament at Washington, D.C., vs. Penn State, W 4-2.

Dec. 3 at Minnesota Duluth, L 5-2; **4** at

Minnesota Duluth, W 6-2.

Jan. 7 LINDENWOOD, W 8-2; **8** LINDENWOOD, W 10-0; **14-15** at St. Cloud State, canceled; **21** MINNESOTA DULUTH, L 1-0.; **22** MINNESOTA DULUTH, W 3-1; **28** MINNESOTA, W 2-1; **29** MINNESOTA, L 5-3

Feb. 4-5 at Minnesota State, W 5-0, W 7-1; **Feb 8** at St. Cloud State, W 6-2 **11-12** at Bemidji State, L 3-2; W 8-1; **18** WISCONSIN, W 5-1, W; **19** WISCONSIN, 2-1; **25-27** WCHA Quarterfinals, St. Cloud State, W 6-0; W, 3-0 **MARCH 5-6** WCHA Championships., Wisconsin, W 2-1; Minnesota, W 3-2 OT **12** NCAA Quarterfinals, Quinnipiac, W 4-3 2OT **18** Frozen Four Semifinals at State College, Pa., vs. Yale, W 2-1 **20** National Championship Game, vs. Minnesota Duluth, W 3-2

SWIMMING & DIVING

Oct. 30 Indiana, Men: L 230-123; Women: L 209-142; Virginia Tech, Men: W 207-146; Women: W 225-128; vs. Penn State Men: W 250-100.50; 30 Indiana Women: W 225-163

Nov. 11 Akron, Women: W 228-91 **Nov. 12** DENISON, Men: W 184-104; Women: W 183.5-104.5; **18-20** OHIO STATE INVITATIONAL, Men: 2nd/10; Women: 1st/10.

Jan. 21-22 Shamrock Invitational at Notre Dame, Ind., Men: 1st/2; Women: 3rd/3. **28** MICHIGAN, Men: 189-111; Women: 152.5-147.5 **29** Cleveland State, Men: W 159-78

Feb. 11-13 WINTER INVITATIONAL; **16-19** Women's Big Ten Championships at Madison, Wisc.; 1st/8. **23-26** Men's Big Ten Championships at West Lafayette, Ind., 2nd/8.

March 6 LAST CHANCE MEET (men and women); **7-9** Zone Championships at Ann Arbor, Mich.; **10-12** CSCAA National Invitational at Cleveland, Men: 2nd/30; Women: 1st/43; NCAA Zone Diving at West Lafayette, Ind.; **16-19** Women's NCAA Championships at Austin, Texas, 9th/37; **23-26** Men's NCAA Championships at Atlanta, Georgia, 9th/34.

MEN'S TENNIS (14-1)

Jan. 19 TOLEDO, W 7-0; **19** XAVIER, W 6-1, W 4-0; **22** Illinois, W 4-0; **29** Arizona State, W 4-0 **30** (17) North Carolina W 4-0.

Feb. 4 (1) TENNESSEE, W 4-0; **6** (6) Virginia, W 4-0; **11** (10) KENTUCKY, W 4-0; **13** (6) WAKE FOREST, W 7-0; **18** ITA National Indoor Team Championships at Chicago; Washington, W 4-1; **19** (6) Wake Forest, W 4-0; **20** (4) TCU, L 3-4; **25** UCF, W 4-0; **27** Notre Dame, W 4-0.

March 12 at Texas, W 4-3.; **15** at Texas A&M, W 4-3; **18** at Michigan, L 0-4; **25** ILLINOIS, W 4-0; **27** NORTHWESTERN, W 4-0.

April 1 at Indiana, 3 p.m.; **3** at Purdue, Noon; **9** at Penn State, 12 p.m.; **15** MICHIGAN, 6 p.m.; **17** MICHIGAN STATE, 12 p.m.; **22** Wisconsin, 4 p.m.; **24** Nebraska, 1 p.m.

29 Big Ten Tournament at Madison, Wisc.

May 6 NCAA First & Second Round; **14** NCAA Regional; **19** NCAA Championships at TBA.

WOMEN'S TENNIS (8-3)

Jan. 21 Duke, L 3-4; **23** NC State, 3-4; **29** ITA Kickoff vs. OKLAHOMA STATE, W 4-1; **30** ITA Kickoff vs. TENNESSEE, W 4-0.

Feb. 11 North Carolina, L 1-4; **12** Florida, W 4-3; **13** Auburn, W 4-3; **18** Kentucky, W 5-2 **27** PEPPERDINE, W 5-2.

March 4 Penn State, W 7-0; **13** XAVIER, W 6-1; **18** Iowa, W 6-1; **20** at Nebraska, W 4-3; **27** Arizona State, Canceled.

April 1 MICHIGAN, 4 p.m.; **3** MICHIGAN STATE, Noon; **8** NORTHWESTERN, 4 p.m.; **10** at Purdue, Noon; **15** at Minnesota, 4:30 p.m.; **17** at Wisconsin, Noon. **22** MARYLAND, 6 p.m.; **24** RUTGERS, 12 p.m.; **27** Big Ten Tournament at Iowa, TBA.

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Ernst's Red-Hot Start Driving Buckeyes

Ohio State senior infielder Marcus Ernst struggled to find a consistent role in his first year with the Buckeyes. Although he received more playing time than some of his freshman counterparts, Ernst found it challenging to bounce in and out of the lineup.

Baseball is no different than any other sport. An athlete needs to be comfortable and find a rhythm to achieve success. Ernst strived for those qualities during his first three years on campus, hoping to become a dependable player with his bat and glove. However, he couldn't quite reach the level he needed to impact his team consistently.

FROM THE STRETCH Chase Brown

"When I came in my first year, I would have good and bad streaks," Ernst told BSB. "There were a lot of ups and downs, and it was a lot of the same thing last year where I had inconsistent performances."

Before the 2022 season, Ernst worked hard to improve his swing and fielding ability, making himself a more versatile weapon within the Ohio State lineup. In doing so he found his identity, becoming the everyday player he always knew he could be.

Through the Buckeyes' first 20 games, Ernst led the team with a .438 batting average and .537 on-base percentage. He was tied with shortstop Zach Dezenzo for the team lead in runs scored with 17, and his 41 total bases were second only to Dezenzo's 43.

"The biggest thing for me is feeling confident in my swing and being the same ball-player every time I take the field," Ernst said. "I think the biggest thing that brought me to this point is my confidence. I had a really good fall season. I worked on some tweaks in my swing that have led to success, and I still feel confident in my swing. My teammates and coaches have also trusted me, which feels great. I want to keep building."

"It's been great to keep working every day and find a balance. I can figure out what is and isn't working pretty easily. I can build off the things that are going well, and I can fix those things that are going poorly. That's been huge for me."

Ernst pointed to his new slot in the batting order as an avenue to his success. In Ohio State's nonconference games, the Dublin, Ohio, native hit leadoff – a position he hadn't experienced much in his nearly two decades of baseball experience.

"It was pretty new to me coming into this year, and I had never hit leadoff before," Ernst said. "I did a little bit of summer ball last year, but I never did in college, high school or growing up. It's new to me. Still, I like the responsibility of a leadoff hitter. Your job is to get on base. I have a lot of big hitters behind me in the lineup with (Zach) Dezenzo, (Trey) Lipsey and (Colton) Bauer. We've got names behind me that can do big things with their bat. I set the table for them and allow them to do their thing. My goal every at-bat is to find a way to get on base."



Marcus Ernst

Ohio State coach Greg Beals said he chose Ernst to bat first because he saw growing confidence in his ability. The 12th-year head coach wanted to make the leadoff hitter someone who could establish Ohio State's offensive strength from the opening pitch and thought Ernst would be a great candidate for the role.

"What I saw in Marcus was his evolution throughout the summer, fall and winter," Beals said on March 24. "He told me that he was ready to go, and knowing the kind of competitor he is, we want him at the top of the order. You want on-base percentage, and every coach is crazy about on-base percentage, but you also want someone who will establish that Ohio State is here – this is how we will do things, and we're going to give you tough at-bats. Marcus does that for us."

"He's an outstanding athlete, an excellent competitor. He's hitting around .450 with an on-base percentage near .600. When you have that in your leadoff spot, with the talent we have, he's more than just a table-setter."

Ernst said his offensive success has come from focusing on the fastball. In the first at-bat of a game, he explained that a pitcher looks to hit the strike zone as much as possible. While some might challenge him with breaking balls, most pitches he sees are four-seam or two-seam heaters.

"I filter out the breaking stuff early in games," Ernst said. "I'm always looking for the fastball because I can take that pitch anywhere. Pitchers like to throw that early in games, so I can expect it to be there. They want to hit the zone early, so I can count on getting good pitches. I've recently had some success against sliders, curveballs, change-ups – all that junk."

Ernst said he has a good feel for middle-out pitches. He believes that part of the zone allows him to extend the bat's full range of motion to keep the barrel over the plate longer, which leads to more solid contact, resulting in more back-side line drives.

Beyond providing energy for Ohio State's offense, Ernst has looked to impact his teammates off the field through the season's first weeks. While not much of a vocal leader, Ernst said he tries to lead the locker room with a steadfast approach that encourages an uplifting culture.

"We talk a lot about winning energy," Ernst said. "I can provide that on the field with my bat and glove, but I can also show

that I trust the person next to me. If you trust the guy next to you, good things can happen. That helped me a lot while I was looking for ways to contribute. The team rallied around me. If we can do that, wins and losses might come, but we will still be successful."

"There's more than one way to make an impact. I have the hot bat right now, but I might not have it soon. We need to pick each other up. If we play throughout the season with winning energy and confidence in each other, we will have a successful season. I'm proud of this ballclub, and I think I will be down the road."

Nischwitz Tosses First Pitch

Former Ohio State pitcher and longtime Wright State head coach Ron Nischwitz threw the ceremonial first pitch before the Buckeyes hosted the Raiders on March 22.

The 84-year-old Nischwitz was a two-year letter winner in 1957 and 1958 and earned first-team All-Big Ten and second-team All-America honors in his second season after finishing 9-1 with a 1.71 ERA and 82 strikeouts in 81 1/3 innings pitched. Later, the lefthander signed with the Detroit Tigers and made his major-league debut in 1961. The Dayton native pitched for three professional seasons with the Tigers and the Cleveland Indians.

After retiring, Nischwitz became the head coach at Wright State, where he amassed

866 wins in 30 years. He led the Raiders to the NCAA Division II Regionals eight times and finished runner-up at the 1987 NCAA DII World Series.

When the program moved to Division I, Nischwitz continued his successful run as the program's skipper. He led Wright State to its first regional appearance in 1994 and beat North Carolina State 14-12 in the opening round. In 2007, the university retired his No. 42 jersey and the American Baseball Coaches Association inducted him into their Hall of Fame.

"Nischwitz and I go way back," Beals said. "He recruited me in high school, so that's how long he's been at it. I have nothing but respect for him. I've known him since I was a big leaguer, and he was a coach at Wright State. It wasn't until I came here that I realized he was a Buckeye and what his career was like here at Ohio State."

Beals said he took Nischwitz and his family through Bill Davis Stadium before the game. He made sure to take the group into the Ohio State locker room and the Bill Wells Suite, where Nischwitz's name appears on the wall as a former All-American.

"We had a great time talking," Beals said. "He put on the scarlet and gray jersey, but he still had his Raider hat on top, too, so he supported both teams when he threw out the first pitch. It was great to have him back here. He had a storied career as both a player and a coach."



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Down To The Wire But Out For Men's Icers

In the end, the difference between the Ohio State men's hockey team making the NCAA tournament or finishing an otherwise stellar season on a down note was one goal. Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, they were on the wrong side of that equation.

On March 19 at 10:23 p.m., an overtime

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

goal 660 miles to the east in Lake Placid, N.Y., sealed their fate: The Buckeyes would not make the NCAA tournament.

That was not official, though, until some 22 hours later during the NCAA selection show on ESPNU. Ironically, it aired on that network immediately after the OSU women defeated Minnesota Duluth for their first national title.

Ohio State men's hockey coach Steve Rohlik watched the women's historic victory. While elated for their success, he had to endure the numerous promos for the selection show that served as a painful dose of reality for his team.

"What the women did was incredible for the program but also for hockey here in Columbus," Rohlik told BSB. "It was awesome to see.

"But it was certainly gut-wrenching for us. I feel bad for my guys. I feel bad for the staff. So much hard work was put into it to put ourselves in that position to make it, which no one gave us a chance to do at the start of the season.

"You've got to learn from it. You've got to make yourself better. You've got to pull up your bootstraps and move forward, and certainly that's what our plan is."

Even with four straight losses for the men at the end of the regular season to drop the Buckeyes (22-13-2) from a surprising first

place in the Big Ten to fourth and being upset in the best-of-three conference quarterfinals by Penn State – losing the third game 2-1 on March 6 – there was still hope that OSU would earn one of the 10 at-large bids to join the 16-team field.

All the team and staff could do the weekend of March 11-13 was watch the scenarios play out in the six conferences quarterfinals and/or semifinals and pray that results were favorable for the Buckeyes.

They were. OSU remained 15th in the PairWise rankings that mimic the statistical formula used to determine the 16 spots. With the Atlantic Hockey tournament winner slotted for 15th or 16th, the Buckeyes were the bubble team.

Overload

On that March 19 championship Saturday, everything for Ohio State depended on the outcomes in the finals for the Central Collegiate Hockey Association, Eastern College Athletic Conference and Hockey East. All three conferences had a team higher ranked than the Buckeyes against a team below them in the PairWise.

Just one upset would extinguish Ohio State's season because the lower seed would get the automatic qualifier while the higher seed would get an at-large spot earmarked for the Buckeyes.

And so it went on an evening of drama and controversy.

Midway through all three games, the underdogs were either ahead or tied and the outcome looked gloomy for the Buckeyes.

Then the outlook changed. In Hockey East, Massachusetts (11th in the PairWise entering the weekend) defeated No. 19 Connecticut 3-2 in overtime. One down, two to go for the Buckeyes.

The next domino to fall was as crazy as it could get in the CCHA. Upstart Bemidji State (No. 29) took top-rated Minnesota State to overtime. With the Buckeyes' season in the balance again, Minnesota State won in OT.

Or did they?

As the Mavericks were celebrating, several Bemidji State players who did not dress for the game approached their coach and said there were social media videos showing the goal should not have counted (CCHA officials had reviewed the play and the call on the ice as a good call stood).

Bemidji State coach Tom Serratore approached Minnesota State coach Mike Hastings, a longtime friend, and explained the dilemma. By then CCHA commissioner Don Lucia got involved.

Lucia viewed a different camera angle than previously seen, and it clearly showed the puck did not cross the goal line. After 15 minutes, despite the building being empty and both teams in the locker rooms preparing to exit as well, he called for the game to resume.

Lucia gave the teams 20 minutes to return to the ice and get ready.

It took only 2:09 of the restarted overtime for Minnesota State to get the winner with no controversy, but imagine if Bemidji State had scored to deny the Buckeyes a spot.

As it turned out, Lucia broke an NCAA rule, according to College Hockey News, that states, "Officials' duties continue until players have left the ice at the conclusion of the game."

Lucia said, "Getting the correct call outweighed anything else under the circumstance. Right or wrong. Some people will say it was wrong. I can live with that."

Ohio State was still alive, and all eyes turned to Lake Placid, site of the U.S. hockey "Miracle on Ice" in the 1980 Winter Olympics.

It appeared the Buckeyes might get a miracle of their own with a positive result in the ECAC title game. Quinnipiac (No. 7) trailed Harvard (No. 23) 2-1 entering the third period but outshot the Crimson 18-1. Yet, it could muster only a power-play goal with 6:14 left in regulation to send the game to overtime.

Harvard's Matthew Coronato scored at 9:18 of the extra session to end the game and the Buckeyes' season as well.

The Crimson earned the automatic qualifier while Quinnipiac received the final at-large berth that Ohio State coveted.

"I thought right to the end we were going to be in there," Rohlik said. "I just had that feeling because I really felt we deserved to be there. We had a great year. I know in my heart we're one of those teams that should be in the tournament.

"The hard part is it's out of your control. Then all of a sudden, all three games go to overtime," he continued. "The Minnesota State game was an absolute debacle. UMass gets tied late and then they go to overtime and win, and Harvard's getting outshot badly in the third period, but they hang in there and end up winning.

"It was tough, let's be honest. To see Harvard win there, I felt terrible for our guys first and foremost."

It won't make the Buckeyes feel any better, but they finished 15th in the PairWise compared to 23rd for Harvard.

Best Of The Best

Freshman Jakub Dobeš was named the Big Ten Goaltender of the Year and co-Freshman of the Year. He was also named first-team All-Big Ten along with freshman forward

Georgii Merkulov.

Defenseman Mason Lohrei was an honorable-mention All-Big Ten selection, and he joined Dobeš and Merkulov to make up half of the Big Ten All-Freshman Team.

Dobeš is the first Buckeye to be named the conference's top freshman. He shared the honor with Michigan defenseman Luke Hughes. Three Buckeyes earned rookie of the year honors when they were in the CCHA: Paul Pooley (1981), Brian Loney (1992) and R.J. Umberger (2001).

Also, Dobeš is the second OSU Big Ten goalie of the year, joining 2019 winner Tommy Nappier. Mike Betz (2003) and Brady Hjelle (2013) received the CCHA Goaltender of the Year award.

Dobeš was 21-12-2, with a 2.26 goals-against average and .934 save percentage. Merkulov had a Big Ten-best 20 goals and led the Buckeyes with 34 points. He was first in the NCAA with seven game-winning goals.

Lohrei led the Buckeyes with 25 assists and was second in points (29). He missed the final six games of the season with an injury, and the Buckeyes lost five of them.

Wise Guys

Seventeen members of the hockey team were named Academic All-Big Ten for winter sports. Seniors Gustaf Westlund (economics) and Quinn Preston (sport industry) are three-time selections.

"For a sport like ours, that has the longest season of any sport, I've got to give my guys all the credit and the support system here," Rohlik said.

"We have 25 guys that are going to (Ohio State's) athletic scholarship banquet out of 28 on team. That's having a 3.0 or better GPA. To me, that's incredible and makes it so gratifying as a coach. That's why you come to Ohio State, to get a degree and hopefully a (pro) contract."

Ice Chips

Speaking of which, defenseman Grant Gabriele, who played five seasons for the Buckeyes, signed with the Providence Bruins of the American Hockey League. He agreed to a one-year contract for the 2022-23 season on March 25 and will be on an amateur tryout agreement for the remainder of this season.

The Brighton, Mich., native had 50 points (13 goals, 37 assists) in 124 career games. This season he had 20 points (five, 15) and was a plus-12. ... Assistant coach Steve Miller will once again be an assistant for the U.S. team that will compete in the World Junior Championship Aug. 8-19 in Edmonton, Alberta. He was on the staff when the event was originally scheduled for Dec. 26 to Jan. 5 but was cut short due to COVID-19.

Save A Lot

Dobeš is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month. The Buckeyes played only three games in March in losing the quarterfinal series to Penn State, but Dobeš stopped 125 of 133 shots (94.0 percent), including 49 of 52 in game 1 for a 4-3 victory. He made 43 saves in the 3-2 loss in the second game and 33 in the third-game 2-1 loss.

He also won the award for October.

VARSITY CLUB ICER OF THE MONTH For March



Jakub Dobeš
Freshman Goaltender
Ostrava, Czech Republic

Bucks Finish 13th At NCAA Championships

The Ohio State wrestling team ended its season on March 19 with four All-Americans and a 13th-place finish at the 2022 NCAA championships in Little Caesars Arena in Detroit.

ON THE MAT Chase Brown

The Buckeyes accumulated 44.0 team points in the event. Sammy Sasso earned the most points when he took fifth at 149 pounds, while 184-pound Kaleb Romero and 197-pound Gavin Hoffman added to the score with sixth-place finishes. Carson Kharchla won his final match of the year to claim seventh at 165 pounds.

While Sasso led the team in points at the national tournament, few can contend with Hoffman for toughness. The No. 21-seeded wrestler was the story of the NCAA championships after he upset multiple opponents on his way to the semifinals.

Hoffman started his first career national tournament with two sudden-victory matches. He defeated No. 12 Tanner Sloan of South Dakota State in a thrilling 6-4 win that brought him a bout with Pittsburgh's Nino Bonaccorsi, the No. 5 seed at 197 pounds. Hoffman and Bonaccorsi battled back and forth for three periods but neither wrestler could pull ahead. In overtime, Hoffman caught his opponent napping and earned a crucial takedown to win 6-4.

In the quarterfinals, Hoffman squared off with No. 13 Jake Woodley of Oklahoma and earned another close victory. Woodley controlled most of the match and looked sharp with his takedown attempts. Still, Hoffman remained firm on his feet and warded off several shots, using them as opportunities to gain himself points. The Buckeye wrestler outlasted Woodley to win a 5-3 decision.

Hoffman's magical run stopped when he met No. 1 seed Max Dean of Penn State – the eventual champion at 197. The Penn State workhorse secured a two-point takedown in the first and kept Hoffman on the bottom for the entire period. Dean extended his lead with an escape in the second and added a takedown to make it 5-0.

In the third, Hoffman put two on the board with a takedown, which Dean countered to win a 9-3 decision. Hoffman's loss sent him to the consolation bracket for a matchup with No. 7 Rocky Elam of Missouri, where he dropped a 3-2 decision.

Hoffman returned to the mat a final time against No. 10 Yonger Bastida of Iowa State. Bastida put Hoffman on his back, and the Buckeye suffered a fall in the first period. He closed the weekend with three upsets, an All-American honor and a sixth-place finish at his first-career NCAA Championships.

Sasso returned to the NCAA champion-

ships after finishing runner-up to North Carolina's Austin O'Conner last season. This year, he claimed the No. 4 seed and started the tournament with three consecutive wins over No. 29 John Arceri of Buffalo, No. 13 Beau Bartlett of Penn State and No. 5 Kyle Parco of Arizona State.

The Nazareth, Pa., native met Cornell's No. 1 Yianni Diakomihalis, who held the nation's longest active winning streak with 73-straight victories, in the semifinal match. Diakomihalis provided a significant challenge for Sasso, who hadn't yet faced him in his career.

Sasso went to his offense early, taking shots at Diakomihalis' legs and attempting to bring him to the mat. However, his efforts fell short as the Cornell wrestler used Sasso's vulnerable positioning to gain points. Diakomihalis wore him down, eventually taking control of the match and beating Sasso in a 6-3 decision.

Sasso met Wisconsin's Austin Gomez, who stripped him of his Big Ten champion title by defeating him in the conference tournament finals, in the consolation bracket. Gomez took an early lead and never relinquished his grip on the bout. With his back against the wall, Sasso scratched back into the match, but he couldn't find enough offense and allowed Gomez to take a 6-5 decision.

Sasso's final match came against No. 6 Jonathan Millner of Appalachian State. With a reversal and an escape, he jumped in front, but he allowed Millner to take a 4-3 lead in the third period. Sasso responded with a late takedown, which secured his 5-4 win and a fifth-place finish.

Kharchla, the No. 7 seed at 165 pounds, lost his chance to win a national championship when he dropped a hard-fought 2-0 decision to No. 2 Keegan O'Toole of Missouri in the quarterfinals. In the first two periods, he and O'Toole battled as both wrestlers traded shots and resisted takedown attempts to keep the match scoreless for almost five minutes.

O'Toole earned the match's first point when he escaped Kharchla's hold with 1:10 remaining in the second. In the third period, Kharchla started on the bottom and hoped to break free for an escape point. However, the Missouri wrestler held firm and added a riding-time point to win, 2-0.

Kharchla worked through the wrestlebacks to battle No. 9 Peyton Hall of West Virginia in the seventh-place match. The first-year NCAA qualifier fell behind in the second period, allowing Hall to earn an escape point. However, Kharchla pushed into the lead after a powerful takedown, and he entered the third with a 2-1 advantage. He secured over a minute of riding time in the final two minutes to win the bout and take seventh place.

Romero wrestled a familiar opponent in No. 2 Aaron Brooks of Penn State in the 184-pound quarterfinals. However, the Ohio State redshirt senior fell behind early and lost a 13-2 major decision to his Big Ten rival.

Brooks – the defending NCAA champion – struck first with a two-point takedown but allowed Romero to escape. He took Romero to a takedown clinic and held a 10-2 lead

OSU NCAA Results

125: No. 12 Malik Heinselman
133: Did Not Qualify
141: No. 17 Dylan D'Emilio
149: No. 4 Sammy Sasso, 5th
157: Did Not Qualify
165: No. 7 Carson Kharchla, 7th
174: No. 7 Ethan Smith
184: No. 7 Kaleb Romero, 6th
197: No. 21 Gavin Hoffman, 6th
285: No. 13 Tate Orndorff

with two minutes left. Romero kept Brooks from earning a technical fall. Still, the Penn State wrestler added three more points in the third to claim the 11-point win.

After wins in the consolation bracket, Romero found himself in a bout for fifth place against No. 3 Trent Hidlay of North Carolina State. He trailed Hidlay 2-1 through the first and allowed the Wolfpack wrestler to extend his lead with an escape to start the second. Romero opened the third period on the bottom and used an escape point to cut his deficit in half.

With a little over a minute remaining, Romero used a knee pick to bring Hidlay to the mat, but the referees did not award him two points. Ohio State assistant coach Logan Stieber tossed the challenge brick, which sent the officials to the monitor. After further review, the call on the mat stood, and Romero lost a hard-fought 3-2 decision to take sixth place.

Four other Buckeyes competed at the NCAA championships, including Malik Heinselman (125), Dylan D'Emilio (141), Ethan Smith (174) and Tate Orndorff (HWT). They all won at least one match at the event, with Smith and Orndorff winning three bouts each.

Penn State won the NCAA championships with 131.5 team points, while Michigan (95.0), Iowa (74.0), Arizona State (66.5) and Nebraska (59.5) rounded out the top five spots.

The Medical Forfeit Problem

The 2022 Big Ten Wrestling Championships experienced many medical forfeits in non-title matches, resulting in unchallenged finishes for third-place, fifth-place and seventh-place bouts at the conference tournament.

Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan said he noticed the trend in recent years, but he hadn't known the forfeitures to be an expected outcome until this season.

"It's an interesting phenomenon," Ryan said. "It's not a good thing. There were more of them this year than ever. Some of this will be rectified when we put more emphasis on this as an organization and as a sport at the end of the year. Some rules allow student-athletes to forfeit, and it won't hurt them. The forfeits don't count as a loss."

Ryan claimed that Sasso would have

claimed the No. 2 seed at the NCAA championships had he medically forfeited his title match with Gomez. Because he competed and lost, Sasso fell to the No. 4 seed, making his road at the national tournament more difficult.

"We have to put in rules that prevent things like that from happening," Ryan said. "Some of those wrestlers are legitimately hurt because it's the Big Ten and people get beat up. That's what makes it challenging. For us, we were chasing a fourth-place finish, so everyone wrestled. We benefited from the forfeits, and they helped us."

Heinselman, D'Emilio and Smith won their final Big Ten tournament matches because of medical forfeits. Heinselman and D'Emilio took fifth after Purdue's Devin Schroder and Rutgers' Sebastian Rivera withdrew, while Smith claimed third when Troy Fisher of Northwestern forfeited.

"Even though we benefited, I believe that over time those types of decisions – forfeiting those matches where your guys are healthy – will erode your culture over time," Ryan said. "We didn't have any forfeits, and there will be times when we do, but it is not because someone is protecting a seed (for nationals). I'm not here to say any coach was doing that because I don't know. But I do know that the rules allow for more of it now than it has in the past, and that's why you're seeing more of it."

Cody Goodwin, an Iowa wrestling beat reporter for the Des Moines Register, said the NCAA needs to change current medical forfeit rules immediately before the sport loses its integrity at the collegiate level.

"I think one solution is to make the medical forfeits count as actual wins and losses on a wrestler's record," Goodwin said. "I'm not sure how entirely fair that is, but that seems like an easy solution. That would force the guys that aren't truly hurt to wrestle or accept the consequences."

Goodwin offered another idea that could alter how a coaching staff and wrestler view medical forfeits, suggesting that the NCAA consider them only in tournament selection, seeding and bracket placement.

"Maybe they don't count as actual wins and losses," Goodwin said, "but when the NCAA Wrestling Selection Committee looks at seeding the brackets for the national tournament, they see that Wrestler A has a better record than Wrestler B but medically forfeited a match against the latter and gets penalized for that."

His final recommendations were that the NCAA uses a point system for wins and losses that quantify a wrestler's entire body of work throughout a season rather than using conference tournaments as qualifiers. He also considered the possibility of competitors needing an official doctor's note to prove they cannot perform because of an injury or ailment.

Whatever the solution, Ryan said the governing body should hurry toward a conclusion that adds consequence to medical forfeits. He acknowledged that there are gray areas involved because of actual injury risks but believes the sport would benefit from re-evaluating the unclear and undefined rule.



Gavin Hoffman



Kaleb Romero

Neutrality Should Not Be Only For Switzerland

It's fascinating to me to see how media is treated by fans – whether on a national or local level.

Aside from announcers who are just bad, many of the men and women who do broadcasts or write-ups are thought to be one step above Vladimir Putin. They are told they don't know anything, that they don't understand the sport they're covering, or, in the case of local beat people, they don't cheer-lead enough.

THE FACTS MAN
Mike Wachsman

That last part is what intrigues the most because it's the one that fans understand the least.

There are outlets for fans who want to have things about their teams presented in mostly rosy terms – you're reading one right now. There isn't a whole lot of negativity in these pages, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. It's still fresh in my memory the fallout caused by a column written by our esteemed publisher that was hyper-critical of Ohio State football after a particularly lopsided road loss. Assistants and players were wary for weeks whenever someone from our outlet would come around, and John Cooper even once said something to the effect of "if you have Buckeye in your name then you need to be for us."

I sort of get why coaches would be defensive about something like that. It's their livelihood, and if someone who didn't play or coach is taking shots at them from the outside, the natural reaction is to have a bunker mentality. Sometimes it galvanizes a team.

But I'm not talking about coaches here. I am more interested in fans and their reactions to certain announcers and writers.

It's amazing to me that there is a segment of Ohio State fans who go out of their way to badmouth Kirk Herbstreit. He has ascended to the highest platform in college football as a vital member of the "College GameDay" crew and will be adding Thursday Night NFL games to his responsibility list this fall. He works extremely hard, loves the game, researches and studies – and yet a small yet vocal pocket of OSU fans are mad that he "isn't OSU enough" and for that they throw slings and arrows.

Really?

He's a national figure, people. He talks about all of college football, not just the

Buckeyes. Same with Joey Galloway and any other former Ohio State players involved in studio shows or game broadcasts. OSU fans hear things that aren't there, that Herbstreit is "too pro-Penn State" when a receiver makes a great catch or a linebacker makes a huge sack. That he gives Michigan too much (any?) credit for its success. Years back, people believed Brent Musburger was anti-Ohio State when he wasn't.

I see it all the time on social media, a fan base believing announcers are going out of their way to tout the opponent on a given night – not realizing that praise can be handed out both ways.

National types who tout Alabama and OSU and Clemson and Georgia are told they don't know anything because they are simply skills for "the big brands" – yet those programs are the best on a yearly basis and merit coverage.

If anyone was paying attention last year, there were plenty of people touting Cincinnati's march to the College Football Playoff. It was a great story, one that killed the narrative that "the little guy" would never make it.

It seems that a lot of fans of a team want broadcasters – especially at the local level – to be homers.

What they fail to realize is doing that kills your credibility. It's unfortunately too prevalent in broadcast media, with one local Columbus outlet doing all it can to show that it is truly the place for fans to be after a football game. The anchor/host has worn an Ohio State hat at times on air, yet there hasn't been much uproar about it. Because that's how many fans think broadcasters and journalists should act.

It's the job of a beat writer to research, analyze and conclude based on information that's present at the time, and if that information says that Ohio State could lose, the writer should say that. A local scribe picking against Old State U in a specific game is not heresy; it's good journalism. If they go too far the other way and look to blow up minor things that are not issues, that's a different story. There have been a handful of those over the years, but they are the exception. And doing an investigation into a program is not traitorous, it's a responsibility. If a coach gets fired because of something, it's not because the media brought them down, it's because they did something to get fired.

Fans want their local media to be homers. So what makes a homer?

Why is it that if a national pundit picks Ohio State as preseason number one it's all right, but if I or an OSU beat person does it, they are "homers?" If we're operating with

the same set of information, wouldn't it be somewhat expected to arrive at the same conclusion?

Full disclosure – it is quite likely that Ohio State will be number one in the preseason poll I put together for 2022. I'm not doing it for adoration from Buckeye Nation, but because I love the offense and believe that the defense will be good enough in year one under Jim Knowles to make up the deficit last year's stop unit caused. When I do a preseason ranking it's a forecast of how the year might end, not a ranking of how strong teams are now. And given the schedule and returning players and a Big Ten that likely won't be as strong as it was last season, it's not a stretch to see the Buckeyes going unbeaten in 2022.

So, if that's the case, what's the difference whether The Athletic or Phil Steele or Lindy's says it, or I say it?

Heat Rising On Holtmann?

Listening to the debate about Chris Holtmann and the men's basketball program has been – how to put this – interesting. And also maddening, and maybe a little bit amusing.

Holtmann has taken the Buckeyes to five straight 20-win seasons and four top-five Big Ten finishes in the last four seasons. He's been able to slowly rebuild the program back up from the last couple of seasons of the Thad Matta era (which I contend may be the longest sustained success the program has known, but that's a debate for another day) and kept the Buckeyes relevant and mostly competitive in a pretty tough league. He's been an excellent ambassador for the program, which means something, and seems to have the respect and trust of his players.

But there are a few things to be concerned about – first and foremost what appears to be some stagnancy within the program. After opening his OSU career with a 25-win campaign, Holtmann has eked out the 20 wins of the last four years by winning a game or two in the Big Ten and/or NCAA Tournament. His recruiting has been OK, nothing special, and his offense appears to be an extension of what Matta liked to do – rely heavily on players to beat their guys off the dribble instead of executing a ton of screens or playing an inside-outside game. It's "dribble up high and drive" or "get in to E.J. (Liddell) and see if he can back his guy down." It isn't terribly imaginative, and it makes the Buckeyes pretty easy to defend.

The fact that college basketball puts all its eggs in the postseason basket is a big

reason Ohio State fans have been doing considerable grouching about Holtmann.

Whereas college football has a wonderful regular season and a very elite postseason – which is hard to get to and hard to win in – college hoops players toil in relative anonymity until the middle of March. Four months of playing with people paying scant attention, then increasing focus when the Madness begins. That Holtmann hasn't taken Ohio State out of the first weekend is a big reason for the dissatisfaction. And it's not necessarily wrong.

If you want to be a big-time program, you need to advance in the postseason. It doesn't help when a loss happens to a 15 seed (as it did last year against Oral Roberts) or when that adds to your overall coaching résumé, which shows seven trips to the NCAA Tournament but only one time to the Sweet 16. The sport says that teams who win in the postseason have the best programs, so if Holtmann wants to reduce the heat, he needs to get his team to be more than spectators beyond week one.

There are a few things defenders can lean on – a touted recruiting class coming in for next year, which should make for Holtmann's best roster yet. And if Malaki Branham sticks around for another season, it gets even better. A healthy Justice Sueing – folks don't understand how big his absence was for the Buckeyes – would help. He would have been a reliable third scoring option and made the team more difficult to defend with his length and athleticism. Him being out left it to Liddell and Branham to carry the team most nights, and opponents knew that.

Holtmann is signed through the 2025 campaign, so there may not yet be any danger of him losing his job. But should there be? That decision is up to the folks in charge, but it's not difficult to be able to see things both ways. Remember folks, this is basketball, not football. Hoops is a passenger; football is a driver. It's great to be thought of highly in basketball, but it's not realistic to want football-level production out of the hoops program here. Competing for Big Ten titles in most seasons and making the NCAA Tournament should be enough – maybe sprinkle in a Sweet 16 berth every now and again. But if folks are going to use the same bar as is used for football, then there will never be satisfaction.

If next year is more of the same – stagnant offense, losing to inferior teams, early postseason exit – then maybe the talk of moving on from Holtmann can start. But I am willing to wait and see what next year brings before deciding to banish the guy.

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Star Duos Were Bright Spots For Basketball Teams

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I have to preface this discussion with the admission that I am not as intensely familiar with the Ohio State basketball program as I am with the football program. I have only so much Buckeye bandwidth, and much of it is used up with my interest in the football team. I suspect that many of our readers are similar to me. If we were fans of Kentucky, for instance, we would be happy that the Wildcat football team had a 10-win season and bowl win this year, but we would be way more focused on the basketball team losing to St. Peter's in the first round of the NCAAs.

I, like many of you, I suspect, enjoy any success the basketball team achieves, but if the team fails it doesn't eat at me like the football loss to Michigan last November or the humiliating loss to Alabama in the national championship in the previous January.

However, as the exciting Rose Bowl win over Utah got farther and farther in the rear-view mirror, I became more and more focused on the basketball Buckeyes, a scenario typical of my annual experience. Here are some random thoughts on the closing stretch of the hardwood season.

First, I have become much more impressed with E.J. Liddell. At first, I kind of looked at him as the best player on the current team – like a Kaleb Wesson or a Duane Washington Jr., among recent players and teams. I think he is in a higher echelon of all-time Buckeyes than I was originally giving him credit. Not a Jerry Lucas or Jim Jackson, but certainly a player worth remembering. How well he does in his pro career will probably define his final place among the stars in the Buckeye galaxy.

One thing I've really learned to appreciate about the 6-7 Liddell is that he was called on to be Ohio State's main force inside much of the time and led the team in rebounds (7.9) and blocks (8.3) but was able to step back and hit the three when necessary, connecting on a solid 37.4 percent from beyond the arc (46 of 123), trailing only Cedric Russell (43.3), Malaki Branham (41.6) and Jamari Wheeler (38.8) among players with at least 25 attempts. He was also second on the team in assists (80) to Wheeler (91) and third on the team in steals (18). Not to mention that, of course, he led the team in scoring (19.4), this all while being a primary focus of opposing defenses.

That's versatile.

Liddell and Branham virtually carried the team down the stretch, which seemed part of the struggle for the Buckeyes, if you think there was indeed a struggle. The team was never able to find a consistent third scoring option.

I figure the Buckeyes splitting their games in the first weekend of March Madness was right about where this edition of the Buckeyes was in the big picture – somewhere between the 16th- and 32nd-best team in the country. Probably closer to the 16th when you consider the Buckeyes were eliminated by Villanova, a No. 2 seed and I believe underrated on the national basketball scene. People seem to forget that the Wildcats have been national champions in two of the past five seasons the tournament was contested and with a shot at making it three in the past six.

Still, despite trailing by as many as 15 in the second half, Ohio State was able to pull within two of the Wildcats before finally running out of gas against a really good basketball team. In that 25-12 run to cut the lead to 60-58 with 5:39 to play, Branham had 11 points and Liddell added four.

One of the things I think we learned in the tourney win over Loyola and the hard-fought

game with Villanova was that the Buckeyes were a better team when they had Kyle Young and Zed Key available. In the final four games before the Big Dance, Young played a total of eight minutes, all against Nebraska, and Key seven, all against Michigan, and the Buckeyes lost both those games, as well as their Big Ten tourney opener against Penn State when neither played. In fact, without a completely unexpected effort by Joey Brunk against Michigan State, the Buckeyes might have lost all four of those games.

If the Buckeyes had the inside pair and won one or two of those games, they probably would have gotten a better seed and perhaps would not have had to face such a strong opponent in the round of 32.

Might Ohio State have completed its furious comeback against the Wildcats if Young, its hustle player, hadn't been knocked out of the game after another blow to the head in mid-run?

Of course, you could also wonder how Ohio State might have done if Justice Sueing, a starter last season and 10.7-point scorer, and Seth Towns, another veteran inside presence, had been available this season (Sueing actually played two games to start the campaign). But injuries are part of sports, and the good teams have the depth to overcome it. The Buckeyes overcame their injury problems to the tune of a 20-12 season and a solid sixth place in the always tough Big Ten conference as well as a stunning non-league upset of Final Four participant Duke.

Still, many Buckeye fans seem unhappy, and I think Chris Holtmann and the program are legitimately at a crossroads. There has been no word yet on whether Sueing and Towns will be back. Liddell has already announced for the NBA, and there is a good chance Branham will follow. Young, Brunk, Wheeler, Justin Ahrens, Cedric Russell and Jimmy Sotos are also gone, leaving a depleted roster for next season.

A highly touted freshman class is waiting in the wings, but Holtmann needs to scour the transfer portal while also being shorthanded on his staff as he tries to replace departed assistants Ryan Pedon and Tony Skinn. I've seen more optimal situations.

In his five years at Ohio State, Holtmann has won at least 20 games every season, including the COVID shortened 2020-21 campaign. He was named Big Ten Coach of the Year in 2017-18 and has taken the Buckeyes to the NCAA Tournament each year it was held, winning his first game three of those four times. As for the loss to Oral Roberts last year, I think I will choose to focus on the win over Duke this year rather than that unfortunate chapter of his tenure.

I don't think anyone would argue against the fact that the 2022-23 season will be an important one for Holtmann and his Buckeyes.

Two Is Enough

While the men's basketball team struggled with only two primary scoring options, the women's team seemed to do just fine with the tandem of Jacy Sheldon and Taylor Mikesell. Sheldon averaged 19.7 points and Mikesell 18.6 in leading Ohio State to its first Big Ten regular-season championship since 2017-18. The No. 6 seeded Buckeyes were – along with

the national champion women's ice hockey team – the darlings of Columbus with their recent run to the Sweet 16.

Their celebrity status was fueled by their upset victory over No. 3 LSU on the Tigers' home floor. Despite the hostile environment, Ohio State administered what can only be described as a good old-fashioned butt-whopping. The 79-64 final doesn't do justice to how dominant the Buckeyes were on that night.

Ohio State led by just eight at the intermission but came out with guns-a-blazing in the second half, pulling out to a 24-point lead in the third quarter, shooting 60.0 percent from the field in the frame with Sheldon scoring eight and Mikesell seven. Give LSU, coached by Hall of Famer and three-time national champion Kim Mulkey, credit. The Tigers did not throw in the towel in front of their home fans and fought until the end, but they could not get closer than 11 in the final quarter. Ohio State shot 62.5 percent from the field in the second half.

Sheldon finished with 23 points and eight assists, and Mikesell scored 18 points.

The Buckeye run ended four days later in Spokane, Wash., with a hard-fought 66-63 loss to No. 2 Texas, but it was nice to have the women's team in the spotlight for a couple of days.

Quotable Coaches

Ever since John Cooper was fired after the 2000 football season and took his candor and colorful, frequently homespun quotes with him, it has been pretty dull as far as listening to Ohio State football coaches.

Jim Tressel would talk but sounded like a politician with his lengthy non-answers when meeting with the media. I always found that ironic, because away from the microphones, Tressel is a really witty guy.

Dealing with the press always seemed like a nuisance for Urban Meyer. You could tell he would rather be out recruiting than talking to those whose job it was to cover the Buckeyes. Both Tressel and Meyer pretty much put a muzzle on their assistant coaches as well, leaving us old-timers longing for the days when Cooper would let you just pick up the phone and call his assistant coaches.

I wouldn't in any way shape or form call Ryan Day colorful, but he is much more open, much more candid with the press. After his two predecessors, it is refreshing. How he handles access to his assistant coaches remains to be seen.

But one thing is certain. His new defensive coordinator, Jim Knowles, is at no loss for words. The Cornell graduate has only been on the Ohio State job for a couple of months, but his ideas are unique, interesting and quite quotable. Let me say that Larry Johnson is one of my favorite assistant coaches of all time, but I don't know that I have ever quoted him in this space. Knowles, on the other hand, has already been quoted here, and I am quoting him again as he talks about his teaching technique in a story found on page 14 of this issue.

"I want to keep them engaged," Knowles says of working with his players. "Anytime during my presentation, which we try to keep as 20-minute, high-energy meetings, their picture can pop up and they have to stand up and within 2.5 seconds they have to answer a question because otherwise, the play is over. We keep them on their toes,

locked in and engaged."

This is not to say that his presentation is the same now as it was when he started coaching 35 years ago. Times and players have changed, and he has evolved with those times and players.

"I've improved a lot as a teacher," Knowles said. "Teach, motivate, demand. In the past, maybe I jumped to demand too soon. Now it has to be, teach, tell them what you want to do, give them a reason why they should do it – we always try to illustrate why this works – and then if they don't get it, go back and teach again. When you finally get to be demanding, if you've done the right procedures, they're ready for it. I'm much more thorough with the teaching part now. I'm taking responses from the players, keeping the meetings lively and interactive, giving them things they can look at on their phone because that's where they live and approaching teaching as an adjustment to the players and their lives.

"If the student hasn't learned, the teacher hasn't taught. Going through a career, when you're young, you'll get upset when a guy doesn't understand something. Now, I look at it like, 'Hey, that's my responsibility. He has not learned it well enough because I have not taught it well enough.' You're always looking at yourself and at your approach to being a better teacher.

"This generation wants reason and there's nothing wrong with that. Nothing. That's good. That forces us to grow as teachers and show them the reasoning, give them meaning for why they're doing something."

Doesn't sound like Cooper or Tressel, though I think Tressel probably shares some of Knowles' philosophies. And it certainly doesn't sound like Meyer.

In a few months we'll know how his techniques in the meeting room and in practice translate to game day.

On The Recruiting Trail

As any college football fan knows, there is more on an assistant coach's plate than just teaching and strategizing. There is that little matter of recruiting. Urban Meyer may not have been a great orator, but he was a great recruiter. So, too, were Cooper and Tressel. But frequently, it is the assistants who do the bulk of the legwork. So where does Knowles stand there? In the Ask An Analyst feature on page 21 of this issue, recruiting expert Bill Greene, a favorite with BSB readers, says it's way too early to tell how Knowles and the other new members of Day's staff will do on the recruiting trail.

"For Knowles, Justin Frye, Perry Eliano and Tim Walton, they have to really be given one full year," Greene explains. "Knowles looks like, 'Oh, my gosh, he's going to get (four-star linebacker) Tackett Curtis out of Louisiana.' Well, Tackett Curtis could commit and then decommit in six weeks and then we're going to say, 'Man, that Knowles, he blew that one.' You have to give these guys one full year, let them form relationships, let them establish that comfort level. The first Wednesday in February (signing day, 2023) is probably the right time to assess how these guys did their first year.

"Your first year is tough. Those guys were just hired weeks ago, and they're competing now against other college coaches that have been forming relationships with these kids since they were sophomores, so they're playing catch-up right now. I like everything I've seen out of the new staffers right now, but the proof will be in the pudding with who they sign."

FOR ATHLETES

HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that causes your brain to rapidly move inside your skull.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

Headache, nausea, vomiting, balance problems, dizziness, double or blurred vision, sensitivity to light or noise, feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy, just not "feeling right" or "feeling down," memory problems, confusion, and trouble sleeping.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?

REPORT IT. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

GET CHECKED OUT. If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL. A concussion can make it harder to do everyday activities, such as concentrating at school. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH AND PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain and can even be fatal.

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON



<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>

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