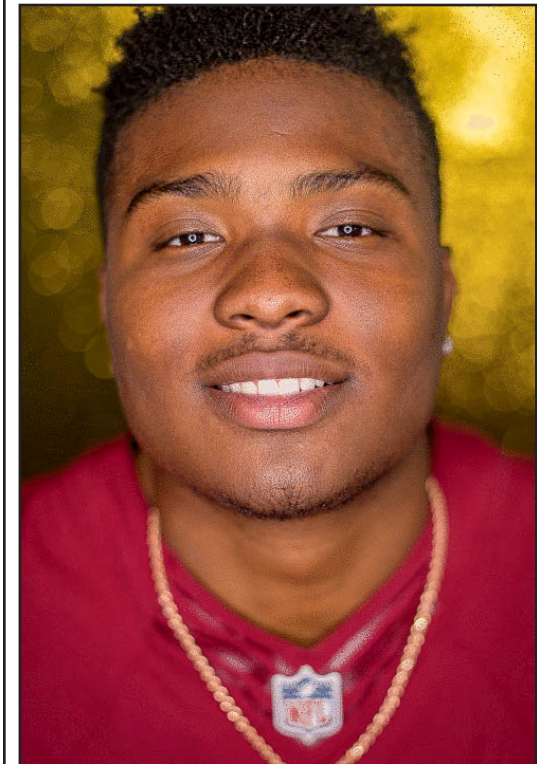


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## Road To Recovery Day, Miller, Potter Inspire Hope By Sharing Stories



### Former Ohio State Star Quarterback Dwayne Haskins Dead At 24

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Dwayne Haskins, who shattered school and conference records in his lone season as a starting quarterback at Ohio State, died on April 9 in South Florida after being struck by a dump truck on Interstate 595. He was 24 years old.

Florida Highway Patrol spokesperson Lt. Indiana Miranda shared in a statement that Haskins "was attempting to cross the westbound lanes of Interstate 595 (on foot) when there was oncoming traffic" and confirmed that he was pronounced dead at the scene. Rumors swirled in the immediate hours after news broke of his death that Haskins' car had broken down on the side of the road, but the FHP has released no further details on the incident and has launched an investigation.

Haskins, who signed a one-year contract with the Pittsburgh Steelers on March 16, had been in South Florida training with fellow Steelers players, including quarterback Mason Rudolph and wide receiver Chase Claypool, who indicated on Twitter that he was with Haskins in his final moments.

"I spent your final moments with you and I can't help but think about how selfless you were in those moments," Claypool said. "All you cared about was making sure that everyone around you was OK and I can't thank you enough for that. You are what I strive

FILE PHOTO

**EYES ON MENTAL HEALTH** — Ohio State head coach Ryan Day (right) has spoken at length about the importance of taking mental health seriously and saw the resources he helped to build put to the test last season as junior center Harry Miller and sophomore defensive end Noah Potter faced major struggles of their own.

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ryan Day's history with mental health goes back to his days in Manchester, N.H., where he grew up, learned the game of football and met his future wife, Christina, but also suffered an unimaginable tragedy.

As revealed by Day in 2019, he lost his father, Raymond, to suicide when he was only 9 years old.

The loss created what would become a lifelong battle for Day. He struggled to come to terms with his father's death and fought with a litany of emotions, ranging from sadness to resentment and even anger.

"I was angry. I thought he was a coward who gave up on our family," Day said in a keynote speech on March 29 in the Archie M. Griffin Grand Ballroom at the Ohio Union. "It wasn't until I grew older that I realized it was the impact of mental health."

Day's breakthrough of sorts, helping him begin in earnest his work toward acceptance, came on a recruiting visit as an assistant coach with Ohio State in 2018. Outlined in an ESPN "College GameDay" segment on Oct. 9, 2021, he visited a rural Ohio high school and found it completely without students.

"I was with one of the high school coaches, and I walked through the hallway and nobody was in school," Day said. "I asked the coach, 'What's going on?' He said, 'We had another suicide.' It was the seventh of the year, and it was in May. I remember calling back home to Christina and being like, 'Something is wrong. Why is this happening?'"

The incident spurred Day to action. In the following offseason, he and Christina established the Ryan and Christina Day Fund for Pediatric and Adolescent Mental Wellness at Nationwide Children's Hospital and made a donation of \$100,000. Along with the fund's launch, Day revealed that day the

Continued On Page 8

Continued On Page 10

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## From The Message Board

***With the 2022 Ohio State spring game approaching, we asked readers at BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff members, how much weight they put into the offseason scrimmage and which players they want to see perform well before the Buckeyes take a break for the summer:***

"To be honest, I do not change my schedule to watch the spring game. If I'm home and doing nothing, I'll watch it. If I have plans, I won't lose sleep over missing it. I don't think you can really learn anything about the team by watching this game because of how it is played, which is basically touch football."

– **Bstu9**

"I like the no tackling format. The absolute worst thing that can happen in a spring game is having a significant injury to an important player. I imagine the coaches can see as much in the spring game as in any other practice session, but it is probably more fun for the players and the fans than valuable for the coaching staff. It's neither useless nor valuable, actually. Just mostly for fun."

– **Terrier Buck**

"While there is no tackling in the spring game, you can still see if players can fly around the field. I am also interested in seeing Devin Brown at quarterback. I think he can beat out Kyle McCord next season after C.J. Stroud (presumably – almost assuredly) leaves for the NFL to become a first-round selection.

"I like Brown's confidence and swagger. He has exceptional arm talent, carried himself to a high standard in high school, and learned under Joe Germaine. I still think McCord would have the edge because of his in-game experience, but all bets are off with Ryan Day because he will select the best player for the job (see: his trust in Stroud through the first four weeks last season)."

– **Chase Brown, BSB**

"I'm excited about Devin Brown

and C.J. Hicks especially. That's always the best thing about the spring game is getting to watch the newbies. Unless an asteroid hits, but that's another story. I think the spring game has more weight some years than others. I'll give it more than the normal weight because I want to see the quarterback depth and new wide receivers. There's a lot of great new talent to peruse. Cayden Saunders would be another player I want to see. He seems to be making progress."

– **PeyoteBuck**

"I like watching the spring game. Heck, I even watched part of the Wolverines game. By this point, I am football starved and will watch almost anything. It's not really a game anymore, but it's fun to have a peek at some of the early enrollees and see who is emerging as a star-to-be. I'm not sure how much of the new defense we will see, but they will certainly have implemented some of it. It should be worth a peek."

– **Michael Bauer**

"The part I look forward to the most for the spring game is getting a first look at the incoming freshmen. Ohio State has no shortage of interesting first-year guys to watch at this year's spring game, including Devin Brown, Caleb Burton, Caden Curry, Kyion Grayes and C.J. Hicks.

"Brown is of particular note because Ohio State has been practicing for a few weeks now. It will be his first audition if he wants to compete with Kyle McCord for the starting job next season. I'm also interested in seeing how quickly Chip Trayanum and Tanner McCallister can mesh on defense."

– **Braden Moles, BSB**

## ***Dwayne Haskins 1997-2022 In Memoriam***



"Oh man, this is tragic. Dwayne was a monster player at Ohio State and one of the all-time best! He was especially close to his younger sister, and I feel for his parents and her. I always hoped he would find his footing in the NFL, and now this. Rest in peace, Dwayne."

– **Michael Bauer**

"Heartbreaking. The reaction to this loss has reflected just how beloved Dwayne was among those who knew him. He had so much life left to live."

– **Patrick Mayhorn, BSB**

"This is shocking. Wow. Another example to live life while you can because tomorrow never knows. So sorry to hear this. Rest in peace, Dwayne."

– **PeyoteBuck**

"His 2018 season is a thing of legend. I was in the stands for most of the season, and it was amazing

to watch him go off as he did."

– **Braden Moles, BSB**

"So young and so sad. Thanks for the great Buckeye memories, especially for your first Michigan game!"

– **Mcarr**

"I'm speechless."

– **TiffinBuckeye**

"Like Tiffin, I, too, am speechless!"

– **Terrier Buck**

"I never lost faith in Dwayne. I always figured the light bulb would go on at some point and he would reach the stardom in the NFL we all would have predicted after his stay in Columbus.

"Rest in peace, Dwayne Haskins. You were way too young to leave us."

– **Frank Moskowitz, BSB**



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No. 6	Oct. 23	No. 18	March 19
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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

The next issue (May cover date) will be mailed on April 26.

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# Portal Benefits Some, Others Not So Much

I'm sure you've heard of the old idiom, "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." It fits perfectly with the NCAA's so-called transfer portal that allows student-athletes to move from one program to the other without missing a year of competition. Ohio State recently has had more than its fair share of portal travelers, some who have flourished in their new surroundings and others whose experiences have been decidedly less successful.

Wide receiver Jameson Williams couldn't get on the field at Ohio State, catching only 15 passes for 266 yards and three touchdowns in two seasons with the Buckeyes. But after a transfer to Alabama, Williams became one of college football's top stars last season. He totaled 79 receptions for 1,572 yards and 15 touchdowns, returned 10 kickoffs for 352 yards and two scores, and led the nation with nine plays from scrimmage worth 50 or more yards.

Williams tore up a knee in the College Football Playoff national championship game, but NFL scouts apparently don't care. He's still projected as a first-round selection in this year's draft, which gets under way April 28 in Las Vegas.

Former OSU running back Brian Snead, whose freshman season in 2018 consisted of only two games before his dismissal from Ohio State following allegations of sexual assault, has carved out a niche for himself at Austin Peay. In two seasons with the Governors, he has rushed for 1,016 yards and nine touchdowns, and he is poised for even bigger numbers in 2022 as the heir apparent to the starting tailback position.

After his transfer to Boston College, wide receiver Jaelen Gill enjoyed a 2020 season during which he caught 29 passes for 435 yards and one touchdown. A foot injury sidelined him for three games last season, and his numbers dipped to 24 receptions for 269 yards and one score.

Foot injuries also hampered wide receiver Mookie Cooper, who made only nine appearances during his first season following a transfer to Missouri. He failed to catch a pass in six of the Tigers' final seven games in 2021, and finished with 17 catches for 194 yards and one touchdown. He also carried the ball nine times for 18 yards.

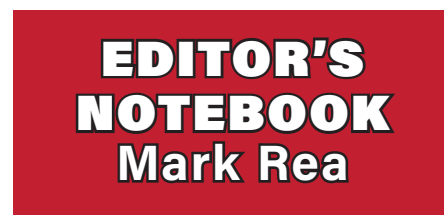
L'Christian "Blue" Smith, yet another highly decorated high school receiver who couldn't seem to dent the depth chart at OSU, spent his third season in 2021 at Cincinnati. But while the Bearcats were stomping their way to a semifinal berth in the College Football Playoff, Smith wasn't much of a contributor. He appeared in only six games and failed to record a reception for the second year in a row. Smith hasn't caught a pass since an 8-yard reception during a 48-3 win against Connecticut in 2019.

Five-star cornerback prospect Tyreke Johnson was supposed to make an immediate impact when he joined the Buckeyes in 2018 after a high school career in Florida that included six interception returns for touchdowns. But after redshirting as a freshman and seeing only eight games of action in 2019, Johnson bolted for Big Ten rival Nebraska, where he was again supposed to be the next big thing. But he wound up appearing in only two games, seeing just six total snaps, and failed to record a single statistic. The good news for Johnson is that he has two years of eligibility remaining.

Defensive end Alex Williams, who redshirted in 2018 and saw reserve action the following year at Ohio State, has encountered a rocky path during his transfer process. He sat out the 2020 season under the old transfer rules and then saw playing time early in

2021 at Vanderbilt, recording six tackles in eight games for the Commodores. But he didn't see action in any of the team's final four games, and he is back in the transfer portal looking for another new destination.

Offensive tackle Max Wray, who lettered with the Buckeyes in 2020, transferred to Colorado and started two of the first three games in 2021 for the Buffaloes at left tackle. But he played only four snaps during the



remainder of the season due to a neck injury severe enough that Wray has decided to retire from the game.

Jack Wohlabough, a center who spent the 2016 and 2017 seasons with the Buckeyes and earned Academic All-Big Ten honors in 2016, never saw any game action before transferring to Duke. He became a starter in 2018, earned All-ACC honorable mention the following year and then missed the entire 2020 season with a torn ACL. He returned last year and won all-conference honorable mention again. In 34 career games at Duke, Wohlabough made 29 starts.

Remember Wayne Davis? The highly-regarded safety prospect who was Virginia's high school player of the year in 2015 spent two seasons at Ohio State before transferring to James Madison, where he became a four-year starter. Last season, Davis totaled 53 tackles and one interception as the Dukes made it all the way to the Football Championship Subdivision semifinals. For his career at JMU, Davis had 196 tackles, including 16 for loss and 3½ sacks, and six interceptions.

And then there's quarterback Tate Martell, a product of the recruiting hype machine if there ever was one. Martell was with Ohio State long enough to establish a program and Big Ten single-game completion-percentage record in 2018 when he completed all 10 of his attempts during a 52-3 blowout of Rutgers.

But after Justin Fields entered the OSU program in 2019, Martell began playing the role of college football vagabond, first transferring to Miami (Fla.), where he washed out in 2020, and returning to his hometown last year to play for UNLV. He appeared in only two games for the Rebels in 2021, presumably dealing with some kind of medical issue. Martell would have started the 2022 season fourth on the UNLV depth chart at quarterback but announced in mid-January that he was retiring from the game to focus on what he called "business ventures."

Regarding former Ohio State quarterbacks of a more recent vintage, Jack Miller seemed to impress his new coaches and teammates at Florida this spring. He is in competition for the starting job with Anthony Richardson, who threw for 556 yards and seven touchdowns in eight games for the Gators last season.

And Quinn Ewers was locked in a battle with Hudson Card for the starting QB position at Texas. First-year head coach Steve Sarkisian said midway through spring camp that both quarterbacks were "doing some nice things, but we're still a work in progress."

## An Athlete Dying Young

Part of my job as a columnist is to take otherwise hard-to-explain situations and try to make some sense of them. But how do you

make sense of the senseless? What kind of context are we to invent for a young man – still filled with nearly unlimited potential – whose life was snuffed out less than a month before his 25th birthday?

There are others who have had a longer and deeper association with Ohio State football than Dwayne Haskins. His career in scarlet and gray lasted fewer than two dozen games, but he packed a generation worth of thrills into those games, especially the 14 he played during the 2018 season when he shredded the program's record book for quarterbackbacks.

Of all the new benchmarks Haskins set that season, the most impressive to me has always been that he threw for 400 or more yards in five different games. Over the 128-year history of the program to that time, Ohio State quarterbacks had combined for exactly one 400-yard passing performance.

It remains a mystery to me how Haskins finished a distant third in the 2018 Heisman Trophy balloting. Between them, winner Kyler Murray of Oklahoma and runner-up Tua Tagovailoa of Alabama collected 817 first-place votes. Haskins received only 46. Either the Heisman voters that year were blind or they had no conception of what Haskins was doing in Columbus or the value he brought to the Buckeyes.

Haskins' fame was fleeting, of course. After he was selected with the 15th overall pick of the 2019 NFL draft, he flamed out in Washington, ignominiously released after just two seasons due to inconsistent play and questions about his work ethic. (Funny how neither of those was a problem at Ohio State.) He signed last year with Pittsburgh as a reclamation project for the Steelers and was training in South Florida to audition this summer for the team's starting quarterback spot vacated by the retirement of Ben Roethlisberger.

Early in the morning of April 9, for reasons unknown, Haskins was attempting to cross an interstate highway on foot when he was struck and killed by a dump truck. He was only 24.

It is impossible to measure the impact one's life has on others. Quite possibly, Haskins will be eulogized and then pass into history as just another name in the OSU record book. But one never knows how many football-loving kids who grew up during that 2018 season looked to Dwayne Haskins as the very embodiment of Ohio State football.

More than that, he became a positive presence in their lives. It happened for me in 1968 with Rex Kern, and I unabashedly admit I have been a die-hard Ohio State football fan ever since. Like Kern for me, and such players as Chic Harley, Vic Janowicz and Hopalong Cassidy before him, and Archie Griffin, Eddie George and Troy Smith since, Haskins became a hero for those kids in 2018, a hero with whom they formed an emotional attachment so strong and lasting that it defies logic.

I doubt Haskins fully understood all that adoration and affection, but how many of those youngsters will grow up, have families of their own and lead otherwise sensible lives, yet look back upon the 2018 season with a certain nostalgia and say to their children and grandchildren, "I watched Dwayne Haskins play quarterback at Ohio State, and he was one of the best there ever was."

We should all enjoy such a legacy.

# OHIO STATE INSIDER

## Shaw, Cavazos Enter Portal

Ohio State junior safety Bryson Shaw and redshirt sophomore defensive back Lejond Cavazos have entered the transfer portal.

After playing sparingly in his first two seasons, Shaw appeared in all 13 games for Ohio State last season, including 12 starts after safety Josh Proctor's season-ending leg injury. He collected 59 tackles, three pass breakups and an interception at the position.

He recorded a career-high nine tackles in Ohio State's Rose Bowl win over Utah last season. However, his highlight moment might have been his interception in the Buckeyes' loss to Michigan, one of the few bright spots for Ohio State that afternoon.

He faced an uphill battle to regain a starting job. He was likely set to play backup at one of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' three safety positions – the adjuster, bandit or nickel.

The Eldersburg, Md., native is a former three-star prospect and was the No. 9 player in the state in 2019, according to 247Sports. That year, he arrived on campus, playing in three games as a true freshman while redshirting. Shaw appeared in five games during his second season.

Cavazos entered the transfer portal after two seasons with Ohio State. His role was largely up in the air for the Buckeyes this spring.

He logged 77 snaps in Ohio State's first five games last season – nearly starting against Minnesota in the season opener. However, he recorded only 35 in the last eight, with 24 against Michigan State once the game was firmly in hand.

He entered this spring as a contender for rotational snaps. Still, with Cameron Brown and Denzel Burke locked into starting roles and class of 2021 signees Jordan Hancock and Jakailin Johnson pushing to move past him on the depth chart, he'll try to find a more established spot elsewhere. He also

tried his hand at nickel, but Oklahoma State transfer Tanner McAlister and classmate Cameron Martinez looked to have the edge there.

For the Buckeyes, Cavazos' move likely solidifies Hancock and Johnson as the primary backups at the outside cornerback spots. At the same time, the battles for the three safety positions remain wide open before the end of spring camp.

Cavazos came to Ohio State in the class of 2020 as a four-star prospect out of Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy, ranking as the No. 352 player in the country. He didn't see the field in 2020 and redshirted, giving him four more seasons of eligibility if he were to utilize the extra year of eligibility granted as a response to COVID-19.

He was not in attendance for Ohio State's student appreciation day scrimmage on April 2, though head coach Ryan Day did not indicate in speaking to media on April 4 if that was transfer-related, as Cavazos' intentions had not yet been made public.

## McCord All In At OSU

Ohio State doesn't have to worry about second-year quarterback Kyle McCord going anywhere this offseason.

Despite sitting firmly behind redshirt sophomore C.J. Stroud, the incumbent starter and a Heisman finalist in 2021, the former five-star has no plans to leave Ohio State soon. McCord told reporters he hasn't thought about entering the transfer portal to find a starting job at another school.

"It's ridiculous," McCord said on April 6. "I mean, especially now with the transfer portal, I feel like if something isn't going the way a guy expected it to, fans and even the player might think I can just put my name in the portal and change a situation like that. But I think you just have to see the bigger picture."

For the 2021 signee, who already managed to fend off five-star classmate Quinn Ewers to establish himself as Stroud's top backup, Ohio State offers everything he wants in his career – even if that doesn't yet include starting snaps.

"I mean, what more could I want, being at a school like this, getting coached by the best coaches in the world? I didn't even think about (leaving) at all, to be honest. And I think you just have to see the bigger picture. I mean, yeah, do I want to play this year? Of course," he admitted. "But I think you've got to look at it from a long-term perspective."

Ewers wasn't the only domino to fall this



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NOT GOING ANYWHERE** – Ohio State sophomore quarterback Kyle McCord (6) told media that he has no plans to enter the transfer portal despite sitting behind C.J. Stroud on the depth chart. Ohio State has seen two quarterbacks transfer this offseason in Quinn Ewers (Texas) and Jack Miller (Florida).

offseason, ultimately reassuring McCord that his long-term future is best served by sticking with the Buckeyes. In December, Stroud's classmate, former four-star Jack Miller, announced that he had transferred to Florida, leaving McCord as the only backup quarterback with collegiate reps entering this season, offering him a distinct leg-up on early enrollee Devin Brown.

"When those two guys made their decisions to leave, I think it kind of cleared up everything," McCord said. "I think there's still a long way to go from now until next year, so I'm just focused on the present. But when you look at the long-term picture, I guess you could say it cleared itself up."

As it stands right now, a future competition with Brown is the defining long-term question for McCord. Stroud is almost certainly set to depart after the 2022 season, which would leave the starting job in 2023 to McCord, Brown or whomever the Buckeyes sign in the class of 2023, barring any surprising moves in or out of the portal.

And a year ahead of that potential competition, McCord feels better than ever. Af-

ter seeing a full game of reps against Akron a season ago and working all year under Day, McCord has seen a significant transformation in his play.

"It's night and day. It really is," McCord said. "I think when you go through a full offseason and then a full season and then another full offseason, you see things from a different perspective. Picking up on the little details now is the biggest thing. That's where I've grown the most. The game's slowing down, so I think the combination of all that is just a confidence booster when you step out there on the field. I feel like I'm at a totally different comfort level, seeing things quicker, anticipating."

He's not looking ahead to the following offseason, though. Always in the moment, McCord is focused entirely on improving every day – especially as he knows that he's just one play from being called on as the quarterback for Ohio State this season.

"I'm just worried about right now getting better every day," he said. "I'm not looking into the future like that. I think it's easy to get caught up thinking about that and thinking, 'If C.J.'s gone, I could be the guy.'"

"The biggest thing right now is just focusing on the present and getting better every day. That's how you get better. I'm not going to get better by looking at the future and dreaming about it. I'm going to get better at being in the present. Working."

## OSU Coaches Receive Raises

In an offseason with extensive coaching staff turnover, Day and the university's athletic department rewarded a few who continue to call Columbus home. Tony Alford, Corey Dennis and Brian Hartline all received raises in the winter.

Alford will make \$750,000 as Ohio State's running backs coach. Day promoted

## Haskins Tribute Planned For Spring Game

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day spoke to the media April 11 for the first time since Dwyane Haskins' passing and confirmed that the former Buckeye quarterback would be honored during Ohio State's spring game on April 16.

"We're certainly going to do something to recognize him, some sort of a tribute, which I think is very appropriate, especially with Buckeye Nation being together," Day said.

Haskins died the morning of April 9 at the age of 24 after being struck by a dump truck in South Florida, where he was training with his teammates from the Pittsburgh Steelers, as covered on the cover of this issue of BSB.

Day said the program is still trying to process the loss of Haskins, one of the most successful quarterbacks to ever step

on the field for Ohio State.

"We're still trying to process all of that," he said. "In today's day and age, things happen so fast. We're just trying to digest it all."

Beyond a tribute at the spring game, Day said there are plans in the works to honor Haskins this upcoming season and beyond.

"I have a list of things that I've written down – some probably too big, some maybe not big enough," he said. "We'll just keep talking about it this week. I don't think we'll decide this week."

The spring game is scheduled to begin at noon on April 16 at Ohio Stadium.

## 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

him to running game coordinator in January, resulting in the \$132,000 raise from last season to next. Alford has been with the program since 2015 and helped developed talents such as J.K. Dobbins, Ezekiel Elliot and Mike Weber.

Hartline will enter his fifth season as the Buckeyes' wide receivers coach with a \$350,000 raise from last season, moving him to \$950,000 in total. With the additional salary, Hartline becomes the program's second highest-paid offensive assistant behind offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, who will earn \$1.4 million this year. Alford will be the fourth-highest paid offensive assistant behind Wilson, Hartline and offensive line coach Justin Frye, who will make \$800,000 in 2022.

Ohio State quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis received a \$100,000 raise after he signed a new two-year contract in January. In his third year with the program, Dennis

will earn \$400,000 this season.

Wilson and defensive line coach Larry Johnson also signed contracts in the offseason. The former inked a two-year contract, while the latter signed a one-year deal. Both Wilson (\$1.4 million) and Johnson (\$1.133 million) will receive the same salaries from their 2021 contracts.

New defensive coordinator Jim Knowles leads all staffers in total salary, as he's set to make \$1.9 million this upcoming season.

Overall, Ohio State will pay its 10 full-time assistant coaches \$8.783 million in 2022 – an increase of \$1.132 million from last season, when the Buckeye staff earned \$7.651 million in total salary.

### Proctor Returns For Spring Ball

Ohio State senior safety Josh Proctor is still working his way back to the field after suffering a compound leg fracture in the

## 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.

Buckeyes' loss to Oregon last season. He was ruled out for the beginning of spring practice but has started returning to action, and he spoke to the media April 8 after his first week back on the field.

"I feel good," Proctor said. "I feel like I'm able to get out there and run around. I'm just getting my legs back under me. This is my first full week getting able to go again and be able to do team reps and everything. I'm just trying to get back out there. I know I have some time to go."

After building on his play in 2020, it appeared last season could be a banner year for the Owasso, Okla., native with the NFL draft in his sights. Proctor played in two games and started one at safety last season before a shoulder injury against Minnesota, and his eventual leg fracture a week later would send him to the sideline for the rest of the year.

"It was difficult because I had goals," Proctor said. "But I felt that it was maybe God's plan. It kind of sat me down, like maybe I wasn't ready."

Proctor said it took time for him to come

to terms with his injury and work his way back for another season.

With 100 percent health drawing near and the prospect of playing in a new-look defense, Proctor is expected to start at one of the three safety positions – likely as the "adjuster," playing in deep center.

Day is excited to see what the veteran defensive back can bring to the field after rehabilitating his leg in recent months.

"When Josh is at his best, he's rangy and can cover a lot of ground," Day said earlier this spring. "He's extremely physical and will absolutely get after you whether it's a receiver down the field, running or blitzing. In the Clemson game, the first one, he got after the tailback and was physical against him. He had that hit in the Wisconsin game to end it."

"He can come downhill and be physical. He also has really good ball skills, tracking it. When he's at his best, he's all over the place. He plays with discipline and can really affect the game in a lot of areas, can get away with some things that maybe others can't, and that's what we're looking for from him."

Even as Proctor begins to see the field, it will be a slow process as he continues his recovery, but there's little doubt that he'll be ready to go when Ohio State's season begins in a few months.

"First getting back out there, it's shaky," he said. "Everything is still kind of moving fast again. The heart is pumping a little bit. But it just takes some getting used to getting those reps and calming yourself down. I'm getting that confidence back day by day."

### Jones Dreaming Big In 2022

Before the 2021 season, Ohio State offensive lineman Dawand Jones wasn't a household name for most Buckeyes fans. Some knew of his athleticism and size, but Jones hadn't developed enough consistency to make them hopeful enough that he would soon make a significant impact.

When Thayer Munford moved to the interior offensive line and Nicholas Petit-Frere took over the quarterback's blind side, Jones became a front-runner to start at right tackle. The Indianapolis native stepped in and immediately made his mark. According to Pro Football Focus (PFF), Jones earned the eighth-best run-blocking grade (90.6) in the country last season.

Still, Jones has a lot left to prove if he wants to reach the next level in his senior season. With one more year of development, the 6-8, 360-pound lineman could be one of the nation's best right tackles. He also could be an intriguing NFL draft prospect if he declared after next year – something he considered after Ohio State's Rose Bowl

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## Now Is The Time To Become A Brutus Level VIP

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."

A VIP upgrade can easily pay for itself each year with special VIP discounts and perks.

VIP subscribers enjoy a 20 percent discount at Conrads College Gifts at Easton. VIP subscribers also enjoy a 5 percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel. And VIP subscribers receive a certificate good for \$10 off at Roosters restaurants, the "Fun, Casual Joint," as well as a card good for \$10 off your next food purchase at Rusty Bucket, where your neighborhood eats, drinks and laughs, or any Cameron Mitchell Restaurant, based on availability at the time of upgrade.

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To upgrade your existing subscription to VIP status, with all the benefits that come with that designation, go to buckeye-sports.com/vip-memberships to pay by credit card, or call us at (614) 486-2202 during regular business hours. If readers have questions on this program, they can call the same number.

The following are our Elite Wachsman, Elite and Scarlet VIP subscribers. Brutus level VIPs will have their names listed at a

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**Elite Wachsman Donor (in honor of late BSB assistant publisher Karen Wachsman):** Roosters Restaurants Foundation.

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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.

# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

win over Utah.

"At the end of the season, you normally get a draft grade. I had seen mine in the fourth or fifth round," Jones said on March 31. "I think after playing my season and just seeing my potential, I think coming back one more year could do me some good."

Jones said the draft grade didn't surprise him. After all, he started for one season on the offensive line, so he didn't expect much. Jones wanted to know how the NFL viewed him, approaching the situation with cautious optimism. He said he treated the situation like a college basketball player thinking about the NBA draft who doesn't hire an agent.

Day said there were discussions in the winter that Jones could depart for the draft. However, the late-round projection didn't provide enough confidence for Jones, who aspires to be a first-round pick before his collegiate career ends.

"There was a conversation in the building," Day said March 29. "I know there was a conversation outside the building. You identify where you think you could go in the draft and decide whether that makes sense for you and your future. He wanted to come back and be a first- or second-rounder. That's his goal. He's been challenged with a set of things that he needs to get done if he wants to get there."

"I don't think there's any question he has the ability and the talent to be one of the better tackles in the country. Now whether he is or not, there are certain things that he's

## BSB's Spring Football Coverage Schedule

The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin (May cover date) is scheduled to be mailed on April 26, with our comprehensive coverage of the spring game and spring football practice. The spring game is slated to be played on April 16, so there will be plenty of coverage at our BuckeyeSports.com website between then and the print issue. The May issue of BSB will be our last biweekly issue of the winter/spring schedule. The next issue after that will be mailed on June 7.

In addition to spring football coverage, we will be covering all the latest recruiting news at BuckeyeSports.com as well, along with any other news concerning Ohio State sports. Follow all the news of the day as it happens. BuckeyeSports.com is 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.

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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.

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going to have to get accomplished here in the offseason and then during next season to get to that point. Consistency is going to be one of them. But he's done some good things, and I think he knows what those things are that he wants to get done."

Although Jones excelled in the running game, his pass-blocking grade at PFF (78.8) ranked 40th of all qualified right tackles. With those numbers in mind, it's clear that Jones needs to improve his pass protection if he wants to see his name climb draft boards.

"I need to be consistent, making sure I can pass block," he acknowledged. "The NFL is all pass game, so if you can't pass block – or run block, that comes naturally to me just with how big I am – you're not going to last long. I just have to become consistent there and consistent in practice."

Jones claims he's clicked thus far with Frye, who came to Ohio State from UCLA in the offseason and has challenged Jones and other linemen to think more critically about

their pass and run blocking technique.

"I bought in a lot, and I listen to him. He's like a mentor almost," Jones said about Frye. "Every time I need something, he's right there. He's like my right-hand man right now, I'd say. I didn't even know that (he was from Indiana) until he told us on the first day. You can get that connection with our new coach."

As the coordinator of the offense, Wilson fielded a question about whether he had considered moving Jones to left tackle after Petit-Frere announced he would forgo his final collegiate season and enter the NFL draft.

"It's not like everybody has to play left tackle," Wilson said with a slight chuckle.

According to Day and Wilson, Paris Johnson Jr., who started at right guard last season, is the left tackle in spring practices. Wilson said the former No. 1 overall tackle prospect would stay there unless otherwise noted.

Wilson also indicated that both Johnson

and Jones must shore up their pass blocking this offseason, understanding that Ohio State anticipates facing talented pass rushers throughout the regular season and into a College Football Playoff run.

"As big as (Jones) is and as talented as he is, and same with Paris with the talent, their ability to handle one-on-one matchups, grown men on grown men, one-on-one, and be dominant is a huge challenge," Wilson said. "And the great players can do that."

### Former CB Jenkins Retiring

In a March 30 appearance on "The Pivot Podcast," former Ohio State standout cornerback Malcolm Jenkins announced he would retire from football after 13 seasons in the NFL. Jenkins said he feels that he's accomplished everything he hoped to in football.

"It's been a long, long journey, but it's the right time for me to do that transition," Jenkins said. "I've played the game at the highest level for 13 seasons, and I've accomplished Super Bowls, Pro Bowls, all that there is to do in this game. And when I came in, I always wanted to make an impact on the game on and off the field, and I just feel like, at this point, I've accomplished that."

Jenkins also cited the physical and mental toll football takes on its players. He desires to move on to the next stage of his life – which includes involvement with his production company, Listen Up Media, and a continued focus on speaking out about social issues, as he did for much of his career.

"You grind and put everything into this game in order to play at a certain level," Jenkins said. "You sacrifice your body, your time, your mental, and you perform at a certain level. And I'm (thinking that) if I can do this at this level, among the greatest in the world at what I'm doing, I'm excited to put that energy into something else."

Jenkins finishes his career having played 199 games at the professional level since his selection in the first round of the 2009 NFL draft by the New Orleans Saints, with 191 starts. He spent the first five seasons of his career with the Saints, starting in six games and playing in 14 for the 2009 Super Bowl team, earning a second-team All-Pro



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nod in 2010 and serving as a stalwart member of the secondary until his departure to Philadelphia in free agency for the 2014 season.

He started every game for the Eagles at free safety during the next six seasons, earning Pro Bowl bids in 2015, 2017 and 2018 and helping to lead the Eagles to the 2017 Super Bowl. He ended his tenure in Philadelphia after the 2019 season after racking up 96 starts, 515 tackles and 11 interceptions, returning to New Orleans for the final two seasons of his career. He started 95 games in seven combined seasons with the Saints, recording 529 tackles and 10 interceptions.

In 2019, Saints head coach Sean Payton called Jenkins "one of his guys" and claimed that losing Jenkins in free agency to the Eagles was one of the biggest mistakes of his career.

"I said this, and I just said it recently, probably one of the bigger mistakes we've made," Payton said in January 2019. "You got to be able to look at them and say, 'How did that happen?' But letting him out of the

building certainly wasn't a smart decision.

"He was probably one of the most important parts of our Super Bowl run, and it was his rookie season. I told him after the game (between the Eagles and Saints in November of 2019) I love him, and I know that the feeling is mutual. I just have a ton of respect for him as a player and as a person. He's a fantastic player and just as good of a person."

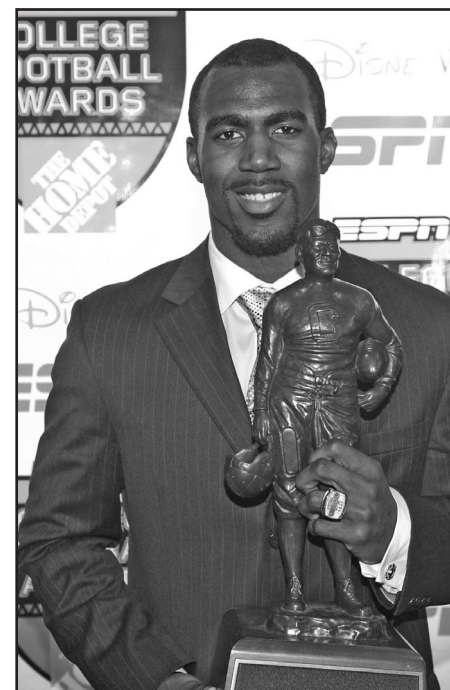
The president and founder of The Malcolm Jenkins Foundation, which "is committed to youth development initiatives and programs, which emphasize education, character development, leadership, life skills, health and recreation" per its masthead, Jenkins made as significant an impact off the field as he did on it during his career.

He was an involved member of the NFL Players Association. He spoke out frequently against racial inequality, participating in 2016 and 2017 protests and spearheading the NFL's "Let's Listen Together" initiative, which focused "on supporting programs and initiatives that reduce barriers to op-

portunity, with a priority on supporting improvements in education and economic development, community and police relations, and the criminal justice system" in 2018.

In Columbus, Jenkins played a major role during all four seasons, contributing as a nickel in his 2005 freshman campaign before starting at cornerback his next three seasons. He was named a first-team All-Big Ten pick in 2006-08, a second-team All-American in 2007 and a consensus first-team All-American in 2008 while also claiming the Jim Thorpe Award. The Saints took him with the 14th pick in the first round following his senior season.

His retirement makes Pittsburgh Steelers defensive lineman Cameron Hayward and Dallas Cowboys long snapper Jake McQuaide – both members of the 2011 draft – the longest-tenured Buckeyes in the NFL. Two of Jenkins' 2009 draft classmates at Ohio State, Hartline and Marcus Freeman, will square off as coaches in the 2022 season opener between Ohio State and Notre Dame.



Malcolm Jenkins

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 40 Years Ago - 1982

Dr. Sol Maggied, a three-time letter winner as a guard on Ohio State football teams from 1935-37, passed away.

In the 45 years since his graduation from OSU, Maggied had been associated with athletic teams at both his college alma mater and West Jefferson (Ohio) High School in the community where he set up his family practice in his home shortly after finishing college.

"Doc," as he was known to all, was a permanent fixture at sectional, district, regional and state high school basketball tournaments, serving as the volunteer medical coordinator to the Ohio High School Athletic Association.

He was a Big Ten honorable mention as a senior at Ohio State, served as the president of the Varsity "O" Club and worked as a team physician at Ohio State for 38 years, rarely missing an Ohio State home football game.

### 35 Years Ago - 1987

Ohio State had to push some snow off the field before it could begin spring practice after a six-inch snowstorm struck Columbus in the days prior to the opening of spring practice.

But the snow on the ground was the least of the worries for OSU head coach Earle Bruce. He had many questions that needed answering.

Among them: Would Tom Tupa prove a capable replacement for the departed Jim Karsatos? Who would replace the six starters who used up their eligibility in 1986? Would Larry Kotterman be available for his senior season?

Bruce, as he began his ninth season at the Buckeye helm, had his game plan charted as the Buckeyes set sail in an attempt to improve on a 10-3 season which included a share of the Big Ten championship and a Cotton Bowl victory over Texas A&M.

"There definitely are priorities," said Bruce. "The first thing you do in spring practice is try to replace the good football players that you lost through graduation.

"Obviously, when you look at the offense, we've got to replace Bob Maggs and Ed Taggart and Jim Karsatos. Not exactly in that order, but those are the three positions that are daggone important. The tight end position – receiving and running the routes. The center and quarterback are what start everything in offensive football. So we're going to have to work hard to replace those fine football players."

### 30 Years Ago - 1992

Ohio State's football squad hit the practice field for the first time April 2, and though there were only three practices prior to BSB going to press, there were some quick impressions made by various players.

Among the names on many players' minds were early reporting freshman running backs Eddie George and Travis McGuire. George especially caught the attention of many, as his size and ability to cut back and find small holes bordered on the amazing.

Not to be outdone by the rookies, some veterans were making marks, including junior running back Raymont Harris, who many players said was primed for a big season, and offensive tackle Alan Kline.

Harris appeared to be in tremendous shape as he prepared to battle junior Jeff Cothran for the starting fullback job. Meanwhile, Kline, already an all-conference performer and potential All-American, had one of the early highlights of the spring during a run-blocking drill.

Kline, who was up against 300-pound redshirt freshman defensive lineman Dan Wilkinson, was to create an opening big enough for freshman running back Matt Calhoun to score. The clash was set up by head coach John Cooper, who liked to put two top players head-to-head to "get the team riled up" according to Kline.

Kline, surrounded by his teammates with two pads placed 4 yards apart on either side of the combatants, got leverage on Wilkinson and held him up sufficiently for Calhoun to dart into the end zone. After it was over, the offense let out a huge cheer.

### 25 Years Ago - 1997

When Andy Geiger fired Randy Ayers as Ohio State's men's basketball coach on March 10, Jim O'Brien was probably somewhere in Boston bask-

ing in the glow of a Big East tournament championship.

O'Brien, despite some misgivings about Boston College's admissions department, was perfectly content to remain at his alma mater and was preparing for his team's NCAA Tournament appearance.

Meanwhile, Geiger went about the task of finding Ayers' replacement – as well as one for women's coach Nancy Darsch, whom he also fired March 10.

As the weeks went by, Geiger offered the OSU men's post to two coaches, Clemson's Rick Barnes and Georgia's Tubby Smith, but both turned down the job. At the same time, O'Brien's BC team was ousted from the NCAA's second round, and his battle with the school's hierarchy was coming to a head.

Although O'Brien probably had not been a serious candidate when Ohio State opened its search, he and Illinois State's Kevin Stallings were the only ones left when Geiger ended it. The BC coach accepted the job after meeting with Geiger and visiting Columbus March 31.

Meanwhile, on April 4, Geiger made official the hiring of Beth Burns, who was fresh off her fourth NCAA tournament bid in five seasons with San Diego State, a program she built in eight seasons at the helm, taking over in 1989 when the team had only four scholarship players. Burns had been Ohio State's second choice behind former player Amy Tucker, then an assistant under former Ohio State head coach Tara VanDerveer.

### 20 Years Ago - 2002

Many saw the Ohio State women's basketball program as one that had underachieved in recent seasons, making two NCAA berths, winning an NIT title and claiming no Big Ten titles since a Final Four run in 1993.

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

That belief made Foster itchy enough to leave a good job at Vanderbilt – where he led the Commodores to a 30-7 record and No. 5 ranking in 2001-02 – and take over a Buckeye team in serious need of a makeover.

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

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

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

### 15 Years Ago - 2007

To be sure, there was hurt to spare April 2 in the Ohio State locker room at the Georgia Dome after the men's basketball team fell 84-75 to Florida in the national championship game.

However, just a few feet outside of that locker room, the team's exhausted head coach managed to put the whole experience in perspective.

"If somebody had the audacity to call this season unsuccessful, I don't think they know a whole lot about sports," a gravely voiced Thad Matta told a huddle of reporters. "We had one starter returning, and we just played a team that had five returning starters and their top two reserves back. We had four returning players on this year's team, and you could say, 'Well, you added great players,' and we did. But I don't think anybody can understand how hard it is and how proud I am of these guys.

"They came together, they played unselfishly, they made it happen. My job was to get them to the arena on time. Those guys, the family they formed, the bond that they formed, you don't see that every day. That is a special group of guys in there."

### 10 Years Ago - 2012

Jared Sullinger was a projected NBA draft lottery pick before he ever stepped foot on campus at Ohio State, but he looked Matta in the eye before his freshman season and told the coach he'd be a Buckeye for more

than a year.

That's why it hadn't been a surprise to Matta when Sullinger turned his back on the draft in 2011 to return to Ohio State for his sophomore season.

This time, though, the OSU head coach was prepared for the alternative.

"I've known since Jared got here this was probably going to be the end of the road," said Matta, who sat proudly next to the sophomore April 4 as the big man declared for the NBA draft. "Not only did he make us a better program and a better team, the list of accomplishments over the two-year span he's been here is unlike anything I've ever seen before."

Sullinger's two-year career at Ohio State made for the latest chapter in the advancement of Matta's program. Having averaged 17.3 points and 9.7 rebounds per game during his career, Sullinger helped lead the Buckeyes to consecutive Big Ten regular-season championships and most recently to the Final Four, ending with a 64-62 loss to Kansas.

### Five Years Ago - 2017

When Ohio State cornerbacks Gareon Conley and Marshon Lattimore announced they were both declaring for the 2017 NFL draft, many believed the Buckeyes would have to find two new starters at the position.

With rising junior Denzel Ward still in the fold, OSU cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs saw things differently.

"You guys keep saying he wasn't a starter last year," Coombs said of Ward on March 30. "I know he didn't walk out onto the field for the first snap of the game, but he played the same number of snaps as Marshon and Gareon. I would prefer it if you guys refer to him as the third starter at corner because that's what he was. We had a three-man rotation. There was never a series where he didn't play."

Coombs added that he viewed Ward as a starter because the 5-11, 191-pounder was just as effective as his former cohorts.

"What I would tell you is that from a production standpoint, the production was identical for those three kids," Coombs said of the play of Conley, Lattimore and Ward in 2016. "To somehow say we were less when one went on the field would be an incredible injustice. Go back and check the numbers – what we did was we kept guys fresh. (Ward's) as good as the other two. I played three guys of equal talent and ability."

### One Year Ago - 2021

Spring practice continued to move forward, but head coach Ryan Day was still not ready to produce any answers on who was leading the race to become the Ohio State starting quarterback.

The big hurdle, according to Day, was the amount of inexperience in the room and how much time was spent on developing the likes of Kyle McCord, Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud.

"They're still doing some things for the first time, and we're still on first and second down," Day said on March 29. "We start installing third down on March 31, and then we can start getting into move-its and situational things. They all throw the ball well. The ball comes out of their hands well. They still need to work on consistency in those areas and the different things fundamentally and technique-wise throwing it that makes them more consistent.

"They certainly all throw it well enough. Now, decision-making, timing, consistency, vision, anticipation – those are all the things that come into play. And then in the end, who takes care of the ball. The guys who turn the ball over aren't going to last very long as a quarterback at Ohio State.

"Those are the things we'll have to figure out. When you just watch them go out there and throw the ball on air, they all look the part and they all throw it really well. But now who's going to run the offense and be a leader? Because in the end, that's what a quarterback's No. 1 job is – being a leader."

# Mental Health Infrastructure A Focus For Day

Continued From Page 1

circumstances of his father's death and the impact it had on him at such a young age.

"Growing up, I didn't quite understand what all went down," he said. "As I got older, I started to realize that it was a sickness and that there are people out there that need help. There's a stigma attached to it that I don't think is right. It's a stigma that, even as a young person, I bought into."

The changes were quickly evident within the football program and the school as a whole.

Ohio State hired four full-time mental health professionals, including Dr. Candice Williams and Charron Sumler as counselors, as well

as Dr. Chelsi Day (no relation to Ryan) and Dr. Jamey Houle, Ohio State's lead sports psychologist, to cover all 36 varsity sports.

Day took things even further, taking time out of a fall camp practice to announce the new additions to the staff.

"I knew it was important the day that he stopped practice during (fall camp) to introduce us," Williams said on "College GameDay." "You have a coach that's bringing awareness to it to break that stigma, but then he's also putting things into action."

Day put a foundation in place for the program to support mental health, giving the players options and outlets that he didn't have.

"There's a stigma attached to mental health," Day said. "We must break it down and be able to say, 'That's OK.'"

Not even he could have guessed how close to home these mental health struggles would soon hit.



Jamey Houle

## Miller Opens Up About Struggles

Before Ohio State's 2021 season, junior center Harry Miller and Day had a conversation that the head coach later described as the kind that "keeps you up at night."

It was no standard football conversation. There was no talk of technique, depth-chart positioning, or of anything as inconsequential as a game. Instead, Miller went to Day's office and informed him of his intentions to take his own life.

"He immediately had me in touch with Dr. Candice and Dr. (Joshua) Norman (a psychiatrist specializing in sports psychiatry at the Wexner Medical Center) and I received the support I needed," Miller said in a statement on March 10 announcing his medical retirement from football.

"After a few weeks, I tried my luck at football once again, with scars on my wrists and throat. Maybe the scars were hard to see with my wrists taped up. Maybe it was hard to see the scars through the bright colors of the television. Maybe the scars were hard to hear through all the talk shows and interviews. They are hard to see, and they are easy to hide, but they sure do hurt. There was a dead man on the television set, but nobody knew it."

Miller started in 2020 on the offensive line but appeared in only one game in 2021 before being ruled out for the season in November. Rumors swirled concerning his absence, ranging from an injury to a potential transfer on the horizon.

Few knew the battle Miller was fighting.

"At the time, I would rather be dead than a coward," his statement continued. "I'd rather be nothing at all than have to explain everything that was wrong. I was planning on being reduced to my initials on a sticker on a back of a helmet. I had seen people seek help before. I had seen the age-old adage of how our generation was softening by the second, but I can tell you my skin was tough. It had to be. But it was not tougher



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**NOT ALONE —** Former Ohio State center Harry Miller (76) was put into contact immediately with the athletic department's team of mental health professionals when he told head coach Ryan Day before the 2021 season that he was experiencing suicidal thoughts.

than the sharp metal of my box cutter.

"And I saw how easy it was for people to dismiss others by talking about how they were just a dumb college kid who didn't know anything. But luckily, I am a student in the College of Engineering. I have a 4.0 (GPA) and whatever accolades you might require, so maybe if somebody's hurt can be taken seriously for once, it can be mine. And maybe I can vouch for all the other people who hurt but are not taken seriously because, for some reason, pain must have

prerequisites.

"A person like me, who supposedly has the entire world in front of them, can be fully prepared to give up the world entirely. This is not an issue reserved for the far and away. It is in our homes. It is in our conversations. It is in the people we love."

Miller added that he was grateful for the infrastructure that Day had put in place to support him and his teammates and hopes that other athletic programs throughout the country are proactive in taking care of mental health.

"If not for him and the staff, my words would not be a reflection," Miller said. "They would be evidence in a post-mortem."

Asked on March 22 about what Miller's experience may have conjured up in Day regarding his previous experiences with mental health struggles, Day explained that he had no interest in making the story about himself. Instead, he focused on the strength required for Miller to tell his story and on the vulnerability of opening up like he did.

"The fact that he's a football player, someone who's 6-5, 320 pounds, valedictorian of his high school, (people) think that everything is really easy and it's not that way," he said. "To see him (share his story) has been great."

"I'm proud he was able to step out, ask for help and then be willing to do the work. That's the hard part. You have to have the courage to say something and ask for help, but then you have to go do the work, wake up every day, and he's done that. This is a work in progress for him."

Though Day — along with most following Miller's saga — viewed his announcement as courageous, Miller pushed back on that line of thinking during an appearance on "The

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Today Show" on March 21.

"I had no intention of this happening the way it did, and people call me brave," he said. "But to me, this felt like not dying, and I felt like being honest. Maybe bravery is just being honest when it would be easier not to be. If that's bravery, so be it."

Miller did not outline timeline details behind the start of his struggles in his numerous statements, but he's made clear that they were exacerbated once he arrived on a college campus to play football. Student-athletes face increasingly harsh criticism, especially in the age of social media – given the freedom for fans to connect with players via a tweet or direct message on one of several platforms that most find themselves on.

"You play a game. It's a hard game," Miller said. "Perhaps you made a lot of mistakes, and people send you a message saying, 'Transfer, you suck.' Some people that I know on the team get death threats.

"I'm trying to text my mom, that's the first thing I see. Then, you can't worry about it too much because you've got an exam the next day. And you have that for weeks and then months and by the end of the semester you're like, 'What is happening right now?'"

Miller is not the only Ohio State athlete to go public with these sorts of incidents. Men's basketball forward E.J. Liddell spoke at length about messages he received from so-called fans after Ohio State's loss to Oral Roberts in last year's NCAA Tournament, bringing to light messages where his life was threatened.

Day is able to sympathize with Liddell, Miller and others, having played college football himself at the University of New Hampshire and later taking on one of the most public jobs in the country as Ohio State's head coach.

"Anything in terms of a death threat or anything like that that comes onto our plate we would handle very seriously, but we do see a lot of the exposure that our players get, that I get. That's, unfortunately, part of this job, but it doesn't make it easy," he said. "It's one thing for someone in their 40s to be able to compartmentalize things like that, but it's a lot harder for the younger generation, which has really found their identity through social media and through their phones, to go on there and see some of these things.

"It's one thing to tell them, 'Hey, it's only 10 people.' I say it all the time, when you look at a stadium of 107,000 people, if you have 10 bad comments it's a tiny part of that stadium and everyone else is great. But all you see are those 10 people and those comments. They stick with you."

The next steps for Miller are about moving forward, with the support of his loved ones, teammates, coaches and Ohio State's mental

health infrastructure. His playing days are over, but he is expected to remain on scholarship and stay involved with the program.

"We're still trying to figure out what Harry will do around the program," Day said. "The fact that he retired from football is one thing, but he still wants to be part of the program and find a way to make an impact. We said that we don't need to make that decision right now, we're going to give it a little time and figure out how that will work. He's certainly someone who has a lot to give."

Throughout this ordeal, Miller said he has been immensely grateful for the support he has received and the message he has been able to share.

"I would just say hope is just pretending to believe in something until one day you don't have to pretend anymore," he said on "The Today Show." "And right now, we have all the logic, all the rationale in the world to give up on it.

"And I just ask, pretend for a little bit. And then one day, you won't have to pretend anymore, and you'll be happy."

### Potter Details Going To 'Dark Place'

Miller is not the only Buckeye to share his struggles with mental health of late.

Defensive end Noah Potter, inspired by his former teammate, spoke on March 24 detailing his battle while recovering from several injuries, including a detached retina that nearly blinded him.

Potter was set to return to the field this past season after recovering from a foot injury, but shortly before Ohio State's game against Rutgers in early October, he began experiencing a loss of peripheral vision in his right eye. He was quickly diagnosed with a detached retina – an injury that can often be caused by a hard tackle in football – and was told he had to get into surgery, otherwise he could lose sight within 30 minutes.

"I don't recommend getting eye surgery," he said. "It was probably the worst experience in my life. It was terrible. I could feel the stitches in my eye."

While the surgery itself was obviously not pleasant, the recovery is what most took a toll on Potter. A gas bubble was inserted into his eye to allow fluid to leave the cavity, meaning he was only able to stand up for five minutes per hour for four straight days. All the while, there was no guarantee that the surgery would be successful.

"When you're laying by yourself with an eye thing, you can watch shows and stuff but with only one eye. You're just there with your thoughts," he said. "I got into a dark place with it."

Fortunately for Potter, his scar tissue had receded enough during his recovery that he would not need a second surgery, and he's

since been able to make a full recovery.

"I could be blind, not playing football right now, just sitting on the sidelines," he said. "And being able to run again, to be able to see, it's just a blessing that I'm here right now, compared to where I was last year."

During those challenging times, Potter had the support of his teammates – specifically Miller – and head coach. Potter is close friends with Miller, and while he was forced to bed rest, he saw Day's story on "College GameDay" outlining his struggles with mental health.

"With my eye surgery, I couldn't go anywhere. I couldn't go on the field. I was stuck at home," Potter said. "And one Saturday when we were playing, there was a 'College GameDay' segment on (Day), and he was talking about his dad's (death), having someone who has gone through mental health things, and him being an advocate for (mental healthcare). I think it put everyone on the team in a good spot.

"And I'm really close with Harry, so even in the past years, I've known what he's been going through. We've been sharing some of the same struggles. Seeing him in a great place right now is really encouraging."

Much like Miller, Potter was appreciative of steps taken within the program to address mental health and hopes to see those changes reverberate throughout the college landscape.

"You get told growing up, 'You're a man. You've got to keep it in.' I would always just lock it down and keep it really close to my chest, not tell anyone," he said. "Just kind of

push through it, because that's always what I've learned. Just push through it and it will get better. Having that support system, being able to open up to someone has really helped me out. I'm a big advocate for mental health. That's why I was so proud of Harry, seeing what he went through.

"It's just really great to see that we have a culture here that allows for that (growth)."

Potter's story is one of many that has been revealed since Miller's retirement announcement. Empowered by Miller's words – who was in turn was encouraged by Day to work through his struggles – athletes around the nation have shared similar experiences, helping to further break the stigma that Day, Miller and others have worked hard to get past.

"The thing that makes me the proudest is the work that Harry did to get to this point," Day said. "He certainly wasn't where he is right now a year ago. He did the work. 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."

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Noah Potter



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# Former Teammates, Coaches Mourn Haskins

Continued From Page 1

to be.”

Rudolph tweeted simply that he is “devastated.” Players, coaches and media around the sport and those beyond the field who had known Haskins shared their shock and sorrow at the tragic loss, many telling stories of Haskins’ kindness and gentle spirit, from Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes to Steelers edge rusher T.J. Watt, who met Haskins when he signed with the Steelers in January of 2021.

“The world lost a great person today,” Watt wrote. “When Dwayne first walked into the locker room, I could tell he was an upbeat guy. He was always making people smile, never taking life for granted. His impact on me will last forever.”

Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin, who had spoken glowingly of Haskins as a player and a person throughout his time in Pittsburgh, released a statement through the team.

“I am devastated and at a loss for words with the unfortunate passing of Dwayne Haskins,” Tomlin said. “He quickly became part of our Steelers family upon his arrival in Pittsburgh and was one of our hardest workers, both on the field and in our community. Dwayne was a great teammate, but even more so a tremendous friend to so many. I am truly heartbroken.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Kalabrya, and his entire family during this difficult time.”

In a statement, Christian G. Sullivan, the head of school at Bullis School – Haskins’ high school alma mater – shared his condolences to Haskins’ family, father Dwayne Sr., mother Tamara, sister Tamia and wife of just over a year Kalabrya.

“The community, former Head of School Dr. Gerald Boarman and I send our sincerest condolences to his wife, Kalabrya; his parents, Dwayne Sr. and Tamara; and his sister, Tamia, class of 2019. We are so deeply sorry for their loss.

“Dwayne was known as a standout athlete at Bullis, Ohio State, and in the NFL, and here at Bullis we also knew him as an honorable, smart, and family-oriented young man who graduated from college in three years. His loss will be felt deeply by so many people.”

Perhaps nowhere in the sport was Haskins’ impact both on and off the field more apparent than at Ohio State. To don the scarlet and gray was Haskins’ dream as a kid growing up in Maryland, as made clear in the now-famous video of a young, star-struck Haskins visiting an Ohio State camp during the Jim Tressel era and proudly declaring to his dad that he’d be going to college in Columbus. Roughly a decade later, Haskins rescinded his commitment to the home-state Terapins because of interest from Ohio State, flipping to and ultimately signing with the Buckeyes in the class of 2016.

After redshirting during the 2016 season, Haskins spent much of 2017 in a battle with fellow young quarterback Joe Burrow, who tweeted on April 9 that it was “tough to find the words” about Haskins’ passing. The Maryland native took over as Ohio State’s top backup when Burrow suffered a season-ending hand injury and was thrust into the spot-

light when fourth-year starter J.T. Barrett sustained a leg injury in the second half of Ohio State’s regular-season-ending matchup with Michigan.

Haskins entered the game with just over six minutes to play in the third quarter, his team trailing by six points, and engineered a 78-yard touchdown drive that spanned more than five minutes to give the Buckeyes the edge while delivering a pair of critical plays in the process.

Facing third-and-13 from the Ohio State 47-yard line, Haskins took the snap, surveyed the field and delivered a strike to wide receiver Austin Mack across the middle, splitting the Michigan cornerback and safety masterfully for a 27-yard gain.

Two plays later, Haskins escaped from a pressured pocket and scampered down the sidelines for 22 yards, falling just a yard short of the end zone and ultimately setting up a J.K. Dobbins touchdown that gave Ohio State a lead it would not surrender. The then-red-shirt freshman completed six of his seven passes for 94 yards and ran for another 24 in what would prove his first of many electric moments behind center in scarlet and gray.

After prevailing in the ensuing quarterback battle a season later and taking over for Barrett as Ohio State’s leading man, Haskins broke new ground, shattering just about every passing record he could get his hands on while leading one of the most effective offenses in school history.

Completing 70.0 percent of his 533 attempts (both Ohio State records) on the season, Haskins threw for 4,831 yards and 50 touchdowns to just eight interceptions.

His yardage total bested Curtis Painter’s mark at Purdue – previously the best in the Big Ten – of 3,895 by nearly 1,000 yards and crushed Joe Germaine’s 3,330 yards, the high-water mark in Columbus. He broke the touchdown record of 39 held by another Purdue quarterback, Drew Brees, by 11 and Barrett’s OSU record by 15.

Haskins twice broke Art Schlichter’s single-game yardage record of 458 yards – which had stood for 37 years before Haskins’ arrival – in gaining 470 yards against Purdue and 499 against Northwestern in the Big Ten title game. He provided, in total, five of the six 400-yard passing games in school history by the time his season came to an end. When it came to touchdowns, he tossed six on two separate occasions, equaling the school mark set by Barrett.

The latter occasion was perhaps Haskins’ crowning moment as a Buckeye. Less than a month removed from a loss to Purdue that had knocked Ohio State from the ranks of the unbeaten and ultimately out of the College Football Playoff race, the Buckeyes entered a Nov. 24 matchup against Michigan hoping instead to play spoiler. The Wolverines touted one of the nation’s best defenses and a No. 4 ranking, and they looked to complete what they’d declared a “revenge tour” for the season prior with a rivalry win and a berth in the sport’s highest competition.

Instead, it was Haskins who exacted revenge, dazzling those in Ohio Stadium with a 20-of-31 passing, 396-yard, six-score aerial assault. Operating as the conductor of Ohio State’s passing attack, Haskins shredded the Michigan secondary on the way to a 62-39

victory that stands among the most impressive and surprising in the rivalry’s immense history.

Head coach Urban Meyer, who watched from the sidelines as the quarterback he had helped to recruit demolished the vaunted Wolverine defense, shared his feelings of heartbreak online shortly after Haskins’ death.

“Heartbroken to hear of the loss of Dwayne Haskins Jr.,” Meyer shared. “My thoughts and prayers go out to his incredible family. One of the greatest QB’s in Ohio State history, but an even better son, teammate, and friend. God Bless!”

So too did nearly all of the teammates who worked so closely with Haskins to create that season. Wide receiver Parris Campbell, one of Haskins’ closest friends at Ohio State, shared several pictures of the two with the message “I love you forever. Miss you Simba.”

Terry McLaurin, who lined up with Haskins both at Ohio State and in two seasons professionally with Washington, released a complete message on his Twitter account about the impact Haskins had on his life.

“Devastated is the only word I can come up with right now,” McLaurin wrote. “Dwayne always had a smile on his face and had a personality that was one-of-one. We talked the night we both were drafted about how hopeful we were for our futures and how excited we were to be able to play and compete together again. I thank God for the memories we shared and the conversations we had. I’ll miss those so much.

“He was a man trying to become the best version of himself, just like we all are. He was excited to compete for his dream and I know as well as those closest to him that his best years on and off the field were ahead of him. He was more than a phenomenal football player, who could spin it like I have never seen to this day. He was a guy who wanted to see the ones around him win and have success. He was a man of God and spoke about his faith quite often.

“A beloved son, brother, husband, friend and teammate. I’m heartbroken and pray he knew how much he was loved ... how much I loved him. I would’ve given anything to see him win. His legacy on this Earth will forever be felt because of the way he lived life and the way he impacted everyone he came in contact with. Until we meet again brother. Save a spot for me in that big end zone in the sky where we will celebrate again one day.”

Safety Jordan Fuller, who roomed with Haskins at Ohio State, shared that the two had planned on a reunion and that he too is heartbroken over the loss.

“(Dwayne was) one of my college roommates,” Fuller posted. “We played in the same eighth grade all-star game. We talked about a reunion trip during one of these off-seasons. It felt like we had time.”

Haskins’ legacy and importance within Ohio State football is impossible to overstate. In shattering record after record – and flashing that brilliant toothy grin as he did – he ushered in a new era of Buckeye football. Passing plays had so often been a point of great anxiety at Ohio State, down to Woody Hayes’ declaration that two-thirds of the results for a downfield pass would be bad. But



FILE PHOTO

**GONE TOO SOON – Hundreds of Dwayne Haskins’ (above) friends, teammates and coaches shared memories of their time with him in the days after his death, many noting his immense compassion for others.**

with Haskins, anxiety shifted to confidence just as the Buckeyes shifted into the tenure of head coach Ryan Day. By the end of the 2018 season, there wasn’t a single doubter in the seats of Ohio Stadium when Haskins dropped to launch a pass.

When his successor, Justin Fields, explained his decision to transfer to Ohio State, he cited the success that Haskins had under Day’s watchful eye, riding one season to the No. 15 pick in the 2019 NFL draft. Two seasons later, having led the Buckeyes to two College Football Playoff berths, Fields too heard his name called in the opening round of the NFL draft. When incumbent starter C.J. Stroud earned a nod to the Heisman ceremony for his production as a passer in 2021, he too cited Haskins as the originator of Ohio State’s newest tradition of golden-armed quarterbacks.

“You’ve seen Dwayne, you’ve seen him do what he’s doing when he was here. You’ve seen Justin, what he did when he was here. And then I got to witness it (with Fields) last year. You definitely want to picture yourself in those shoes,” Stroud said in December.

Day, with whom Haskins worked most closely at Ohio State and remained in close contact with since his departure from Columbus for the professional ranks, summed up succinctly the feelings of a community, both within and without football, devastated at the tragic loss of a person with so much living left to do.

“The loss of Dwayne is beyond tragic and extremely difficult to process,” Day said. “For those who knew him closely, he was much more than a great football player. He had a giant heart, old soul and an infectious smile. The Ohio State community and our entire football program are heartbroken.”

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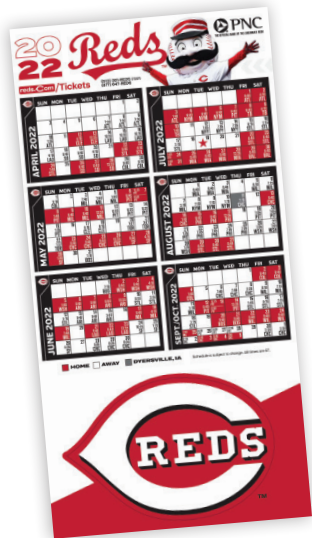
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# First-Year DCs Set High Standard For Knowles

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Given the last several years of uncertainty on the defensive side of the ball for Ohio State, expectations are high for new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and what he might bring to the table.

The Buckeyes are coming off a season in which they allowed 22.8 points and 372.9 yards per game, which ranked 38th and 59th in the country, respectively. It's been a two-year stretch – and three out of four years going back to 2018 – that the defense has not been up to snuff for what is expected at Ohio State, but with Knowles' pedigree and the success he found at Oklahoma State with his 4-2-5 scheme, which is being installed during spring practice, the thought is that he may bring about the return of the Silver Bullets.

With Knowles set for his first season as defensive coordinator, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is looking back at how Ohio State's defensive coordinators have performed in their first seasons, dating back to our publication's start in 1981. First up is former defensive coordinator Bob Tucker, who took over on defense following the 1981 season.

## Bob Tucker

Tucker, who previously coached outside linebackers under Earle Bruce from 1979-81, took on inside linebacker duty for the 1982 season following the firing of the bulk of Ohio State's defensive staff. He was the lone survivor, while defensive coordinator Dennis Fryzel, defensive backfield coach Nick Saban and middle guard/tackles coach Steve Szabo were all let go following Ohio State's 31-28 win over Navy in the 1981 Liberty Bowl.

Though a formal defensive coordinator was not listed on Ohio State's media guide for the 1982 season, it was clear that Tucker was the leader of the defense as the only returning coach on that side of the ball. He took over a defense that had allowed just 21.1 points per game in the preceding season and returned eight starters, and Dom Capers (defensive backfield), Randy Hart (middle guard/tackles) and Fred Pagac (outside linebackers) were also added to the defensive coaching staff.

The result was an improved defense as the Buckeyes gave up only 17.3 points per game. Ohio State finished the season 9-3, dropping consecutive games against Stanford, Florida State and Wisconsin – all unranked – despite giving up just 21.0 points on average in those contests, including a 6-0 shutout loss to the Badgers.

Tucker stayed on as defensive coordinator for one more season before leaving to become the head coach at his alma mater, College of Wooster, where he coached for 10 seasons, eventually returning to Ohio State in an administrative role until 2008.

## Gary Blackney

Following Tucker's departure, Gary Blackney was promoted to defensive coordinator for the 1985 season after just one year



SONNY BROCKWAY

**TOUGH TASK — Jim Knowles will be tested in his first outing as defensive coordinator at Ohio State when the Buckeyes take on Notre Dame to open the 2022 campaign on Sept. 3. With a strong season, he'd become the seventh OSU DC since 1982 to improve on his predecessor's final mark for points per game allowed in his first season at the helm.**

on staff as the defensive backs coach. He inherited a strong defense from Tucker that featured linebackers Eric Kumerow and Chris Spielman, as well as all four starters in the secondary – cornerbacks Greg Rogan and William White, rover Sonny Gordon and safety Terry White.

William White led the secondary with six interceptions, while the team combined for 21 interceptions and held opponents to 17.7 points per game, just one more point per game than Tucker's final defense at Ohio State.

It was another 9-3 season for Bruce. The Buckeyes fell to Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan before downing No. 9 BYU in the Citrus Bowl, allowing just a touchdown in the 10-7 victory.

Blackney's defense showed further improvement in the next two seasons, allowing just 13.8 points per game in 1986 and 16.5 points per game in 1987, but he ended up a casualty of sorts of Bruce's firing following the 1987 season. It was reported in BSB on Jan. 16, 1988, that Blackney would remain on staff following Bruce's firing and John Cooper's subsequent hiring but that his role would be reduced.

He ended up coaching inside linebackers for the next two seasons and left to become the head coach at Bowling Green from 1991-2000. Blackney quit following the 2000 season, leading to the Falcons hiring an upstart wide receivers coach at Notre Dame – Urban Meyer.

## Bill Young

Bill Young would serve as Cooper's defensive coordinator after assisting Cooper for eight seasons during stops at Tulsa (1980-84) and Arizona State (1985-87).

"I went to the little OSU – Oklahoma State University," joked the former defensive lineman, who was an outstanding senior for the Cowboys in 1967. "I'm really excited to be here. It's one of the schools you always dream of having the opportunity to coach at."

"I went through college at a time when Ohio State football was doing – and they still are – really super in football. And Woody Hayes was one of the guys you look at as a figure of what you want to be as a football coach."

"We're going to be aggressive, and we're going to run to the football," said Young on his defensive philosophy. "We're going to be fundamentally sound and do things that are necessary to win the game. Whatever it takes – that's John's philosophy. He's a real believer in being a teacher and teaching all aspects of the game."

While Young had high hopes, the defense – and the team as a whole – suffered a significant setback in his first season, going from 16.5 points per game in 1987 to 25.7 in 1988, which ranked 68th in the country. Cooper said before the season that he felt the team was thin on defense, and that was reflected with just five returning starters on defense.

"We don't have a great deal of depth or experience in some areas," Cooper admitted. "We will have to make up for that with team tackling, hustle and effort. Our defense is going to have to make things happen."

Unfortunately for Ohio State, that was not the case, as the Buckeyes gave up at least 30 points in six games en route to a 4-6-1 finish, its fewest wins in a season since a 3-5-1 record in 1959.

Though Young had a challenging first season as defensive coordinator, he was

able to whip things into shape over the next seven seasons, of which the high point was allowing just 13.2 points per game in 1992, fourth-best in the country.

Following the 1995 season, Young accepted the defensive coordinator job at Oklahoma under head coach John Blake.

## Fred Pagac

Once Young was off to Oklahoma, the door opened for Pagac, who had been on the staff in various roles dating back to 1978. He began as a graduate assistant before working his way up to linebackers coach in 1982, where he remained until his promotion to defensive coordinator before the 1996 season.

As chronicled in the April 27, 1996, issue of BSB by Jeff Rapp, Pagac was known for his "incessant bark."

"The fiery first-year defensive coordinator likes to use his lungs to amplify his point and sometimes raises more than the decibel level," Rapp wrote. "Poor decisions are annoying but can be rectified, Pagac asserts, and usually don't warrant a kind of hut-ho response."

"A lack of effort or apparent desire, however, is so mind-boggling to Pagac that his eyes often widen greatly and an occasional spittle of chewing dip shoots from his feared mouth when addressing the problem."

"Pagac even tends to point the bill of his coaching cap to the back, further illustrating the unmatched intensity in his face, just in case the offending player isn't already skittish in his presence."

The intensity paid off, as not only did Pagac continue Young's strong run of defenses at Ohio State, but he improved on it, going from 16.9 points per game in 1995 to 10.9

in 1996, second best behind North Carolina (10.0 ppg). He had 10 returning starters to work with, including linebacker Greg Bellisari, cornerback Shawn Springs and defensive end Mike Vrabel.

Pagac's defense pitched three shutouts that season, including a 72-0 thrashing of Pitt and big wins over Minnesota (45-0) and Illinois (48-0). The team's lone loss came at home to No. 21 Michigan, when the Buckeyes fell despite only giving up 13 points. The season was capped off with a 20-17 win over No. 2 Arizona State in the Rose Bowl.

After three more seasons as defensive coordinator, Pagac experienced a rare transition compared to his peers on this list – he received an internal promotion, acquiring the title of assistant head coach under Cooper.

"His duties won't change a whole lot," Cooper said. "If I'm not here, obviously he would be the guy to run the daily operations of the program. Fred's done a great job and been very loyal to this program and been very loyal to me. I just felt like it was a natural (move) to promote him to assistant head coach."

### Jon Tenuta

With Pagac relinquishing his defensive coordinator duties, the job fell in 2000 to Jon Tenuta, who had coached the secondary for the previous four seasons.

"It's a great honor to be here at Ohio State, period," said Tenuta, who had seven years of experience as a coordinator between his previous stops at Marshall, Kansas State and SMU. "I look at this as a great honor for me personally, and I am pleased.

"I'm sure Fred and I will continue to argue everything out with the defense. It will be just like we've done things for four years now."

The defense showed great strides with Tenuta running the show, going from 23.9 points per game in 1999 to 18.5 in 2000, which ranked 14th in the country. The Buckeyes allowed just 319.4 yards per game (24th) and had 19 interceptions, led by defensive back David Mitchell with five picks.

Despite the defensive improvement, Ohio State went just 8-4 on the season, leading to Cooper's ouster. Tenuta opted not to stick around, accepting a dual defensive coordinator/defensive backs coaching role at North Carolina and establishing himself as a one-and-done defensive coordinator with the Buckeyes.

While Tenuta could have set himself up well at Ohio State given his first outing as defensive coordinator and potentially lobbied for a spot on Jim Tressel's staff, his departure set the stage for one of college football's better minds to join the Buckeyes.

### Mark Dantonio

Along with offensive coordinator Jim Bollman, Tressel's biggest splash on his inaugural staff was Mark Dantonio, who had served as a graduate assistant at Ohio State from 1983-84 and coached under Tressel at Youngstown State from 1986-90. Tressel pulled Dantonio away from Michigan State, where he had been the Spartans' defensive backs coach for six seasons, to become Ohio State's defensive coordinator.

In the Feb. 3, 2001, issue of BSB, Rapp wrote, "Dantonio will take over a defense that had been under the supervision of both

Name	First Season	Net Change In PPG
Bob Tucker	1982	-3.8
Gary Blackney	1985	+1.0
Bill Young	1988	+9.2
Fred Pagac	1996	-6.0
Jon Tenuta	2000	-5.4
Mark Dantonio	2001	+1.8
Mark Snyder	2004	-2.1
Jim Heacock	2005	-3.0
Luke Fickell	2012	+1.8
Greg Schiano	2017	+3.5
Jeff Hafley, Greg Mattison	2019	-11.8
Kerry Coombs	2020	+12.1

assistant head coach Fred Pagac and defensive coordinator Jon Tenuta. Their tenure, which dated to the 1996 season, produced units that were nationally ranked in several categories and were anchored by future pros such as Andy Katzenmoyer, Shawn Springs, Antoine Winfield, Damon Moore and Na'il Diggs."

Dantonio didn't shy away from the recent history.

"They've been excellent here," Dantonio said. "In the past couple years, they've really stopped the run, and in '98 they were tremendous. They've got good players here – or we've got good players here – and the coaches here, Coach Pagac and his staff, have done a great job. The cupboards definitely are not bare here."

Dantonio inherited a defense returning six starters while losing cornerbacks Nate Clements and Mitchell, but Dantonio expected to play an attacking style once again.

"We played a lot of press coverage with the corners up. We've had a lot of good corners (at MSU)," Dantonio said. "Our safeties have usually been two of our leading tacklers every year. (Free safety) Richard Newsome led the conference in tackles per game last year."

Later, in the Sept. 8, 2001, issue of BSB, Steve Helwagen wrote that Dantonio was opting to stick with what had worked at Ohio State: a base 4-3 defense.

"Where I've been, we've pressured people, and I know Ohio State has pressured people," Dantonio said. "I think in this day and age we have to be able to affect the quarterback.

"Depending on how well we are able to affect the quarterback with our front, people will dictate how much we have to do in addition to that.

"We want to be sound and not give up the big play and make them earn everything they get. At the same time, we want to make the big play and come up with turnovers."

Dantonio's first-year defense gave up more points per game than Tenuta's – 20.3 in 2001 compared to 18.5 in 2000 – but still intercepted 21 passes and held opposing offenses to 20 or fewer points in eight games. The offense struggled, meanwhile, leading to a 7-5 record for the Buckeyes in Tressel's first season. Even in Ohio State's losses, Dantonio's defense gave up only 25.4 points per game while the offense mustered just 20.0.

The foundation Dantonio established in

his first season as defensive coordinator set the stage for Ohio State's title run in 2002, in which his defense allowed just 13.1 points per game, leading the Buckeyes to a perfect 14-0 record.

Dantonio left after the 2003 season to take the head coaching position at Cincinnati, where he remained for three seasons before taking the lead job at Michigan State. He coached the Spartans for 13 seasons, retiring following the 2019 campaign.

### Mark Snyder

Dantonio's departure led to linebackers coach Mark Snyder receiving a promotion to defensive coordinator in 2004. Snyder had spent the previous three years on staff.

"We will continue to be an attacking type of defense that runs to the ball and puts pressure on whatever type of offense we are playing," he said. "We will emphasize speed, sure tackling and playing with emotion."

Snyder, in his only season as defensive coordinator, stuck to the status quo set by Dantonio and his predecessors and turned in a top-20 defense for Ohio State. The Buckeyes gave up just 18.2 points per game, led by linebackers Bobby Carpenter and A.J. Hawk and standout cornerback Ashton Youboty.

Snyder likely would have continued in his role given his success but elected to return to his alma mater, Marshall, to become the school's head football coach after the season concluded.

### Jim Heacock

Defensive line coach Jim Heacock then took over Snyder's role, having served nine years on the staff across Cooper and Tressel's tenures. He had no shortage of returning starters to utilize, including linebackers Carpenter, Mike D'Andrea, Hawk and Anthony Schlegel; defensive linemen Quinn Pitcock and Marcus Green; and defensive backs Tyler Everett, Nate Salley, Donte Whitner and Youboty.

"First-year defensive coordinator Jim Heacock has a deep, talented, experienced and physical collection of athletes in his lineup," read the team's 2005 media guide. "And forget the age-old notion that Big Ten teams lack speed. These guys can run."

The defense capitalized on the returning production, finishing among the nation's best in most categories, including points per game (15.3, fifth), yards per game (247.6, fifth) and rushing defense (73.4 yards per

game, first). Hawk led the team with 121 tackles. Ohio State finished 10-2 that season, dropping games to No. 2 Texas and No. 16 Penn State by a total of 10 points.

Heacock continued a strong run of defenses over the next several years, never ranking worse than sixth in points per game allowed until the 2011 season, in which Ohio State's defense allowed 21.0 points per game, finishing the season 6-7 under head coach Luke Fickell. Following the conclusion of the 2011 season, Heacock was not retained by Meyer and retired from coaching.

### Luke Fickell

Fickell remained on staff once Meyer was on board, returning to the defensive coordinator position which he had co-coordinated with Heacock since 2005. Meyer also hired former North Carolina defensive coordinator Everett Withers to co-coordinate with Fickell.

Coming off a challenging season, Ohio State had plenty to be hopeful for going into 2012. The Buckeyes returned several starters on defense, including defensive linemen John Simon and Johnathan Hankins, linebackers Ryan Shazier and Etienne Sabino, and defensive backs Bradley Roby and C.J. Barnett.

Fickell and Withers' defense held opponents to 22.8 points and 359.6 yards per game, which ranked 31st and 34th, respectively. Though not up to the normal expectations at Ohio State, it was enough to help lead the Buckeyes to a 12-0 record.

Fickell worked with Withers from 2012-14 and later was given co-coordinator titles with Chris Ash from 2014-16 and Greg Schiano from 2016-17. After giving up around 22 points per game in his first three seasons as defensive coordinator under Meyer, Fickell pulled everything together following Ohio State's national championship in 2014 and led the Buckeyes to a top-three defense over the next two seasons.

His run as defensive coordinator at Ohio State led to him getting a shot as head coach with Cincinnati. Fickell led the Bearcats to their first appearance (and first appearance for a Group of Five school) in the College Football Playoff in 2021.

### Greg Schiano

Schiano had spent the 2016 season co-coordinating along with Fickell, and Fickell's departure to Cincinnati left Schiano as the obvious candidate to maintain control of the defense. He was named the team's sole defensive coordinator heading into the 2017 season.

In the August 2017 issue of BSB, Schiano expressed confidence in his group despite a number of key departures, including several first-round NFL draft picks in cornerbacks Marshon Lattimore and Gareon Conley and safety Malik Hooker.

"We have a chance to be exceptional," Schiano said. "What's given them a chance is they've worked incredibly hard to get to this point. But I've told them all that just gives us a chance, and I don't just mean work with (strength and conditioning coach Mickey Martotti). They've worked hard in the classroom, learning the defense, learning the subtleties of it, and now we have to go out there and execute it over and over again."

Continued On Page 14

# Buckeye DCs Have Varied First-Year Success

Continued From Page 13

The result was the defense that took a slight step back but by no means performed poorly. The Buckeyes still ranked 15th in points per game (19.0) and were ninth in total defense at 300.9 yards per game.

After just one season with Schiano as the lone defensive coordinator, it was decided that Alex Grinch would be brought in from Washington State to co-coordinate along with Schiano, allowing him to operate with a broader set of responsibilities over the defense.

"With the addition of our 10th coach, it allows me to (have more oversight of the defense)," Schiano said. "I can kind of fill in where they need a little help. If you take it that one of the linebackers does a different job than the other two, I can help there. I can help whatever position is needed."

None of the staffing changes helped to improve the defense, which fell to 51st in points per game (25.5) and 72nd in total defense (403.4 yards per game). The Buckeyes gave up 30 points in five games, including in a loss to Purdue, 49-20, and nail-biters over Nebraska (36-31) and Maryland (52-51).

The poor defensive performance led to Schiano's firing and Grinch taking the defensive coordinator job at Oklahoma. Meyer, the head coach who had hired both, would step down following the season's conclusion.

## Jeff Hafley, Greg Mattison

Grinch and Schiano were out, meaning that Ryan Day began his first season as head coach with a clean slate. He opted to poach Greg Mattison from Michigan and hired Jeff Hafley from the San Francisco 49ers, where he and Day had worked in years prior, and gave them co-defensive coordinator titles. Hafley's work with secondaries was renowned, and Mattison looked to bring an edge to the defense.

"His expertise in the back end, he's as good a secondary coach as I've ever seen, and I know the players would say that," Mattison said, while cornerback Jeff Okudah said Hafley's knowledge and enthusiasm were contagious.

"Things the offense does and things that would pass through last year, guys are stepping up and identifying like splits or formations and everyone's player condition is just flying through the roof so we're playing faster," Okudah said.

In the April 20, 2019, issue of BSB, Mattison explained that he was hired at least partially for his experience running aggressive units.

"He definitely wanted us to be able to play the kind of defense that he's seen me be associated with," Mattison said of why Day hired him. "It's pretty evident with Larry (Johnson) that it always started up front. You want to be a very physical team against the run and you want to be a pressure team,

whether it's pressure with a four-man rush or it's pressure with blitzing, or whatever. But you want to not let quarterbacks sit back there and feel pretty good about themselves."

The defense showed immediate improvement under Hafley and Mattison's tutelage, allowing over 11 fewer points per game (13.7 in 2019, 25.5 in 2018) and establishing a defense full of superstars for Ohio State.

Defensive end Chase Young went off for 16½ sacks despite missing two games, while the Buckeyes' secondary shone with defensive backs Damon Arnette, Jordan Fuller, Okudah and Shaun Wade allowing only 156.0 passing yards per game, the best mark in the country.

The defense (as well as a not-too-shabby offense with Day and quarterback Justin Fields) helped lead the Buckeyes to the College Football Playoffs, where they fell to Clemson in the semifinals. Hafley's audition as defensive coordinator was strong enough that he immediately received interest from schools to become a head coach, and he left after one season to take the reins at Boston College, where he is headed into his third season.

## Kerry Coombs

Hafley departed from Ohio State in December 2019, but the defensive coordinator position – whether Mattison would become the sole coordinator or if someone else would be given the co-title – remained in limbo until former staffer Kerry Coombs' return was announced on Jan. 20, 2020.

Coombs had served as cornerbacks coach at Ohio State from 2012-17 before heading to the pros and joining Vrabel at Tennessee. In the Feb. 1, 2020, issue of BSB, Day said Coombs was the one coach they had hoped to bring back.

"He is an excellent coach, and he has had two outstanding seasons in the NFL on Mike Vrabel's staff with the Tennessee Titans," he said.

Coombs – and Mattison, at least for one season – faced an uphill battle trying to keep the defense playing at the level it did in 2019.

"We've got a lot of work to do, but the kids have been playing extremely hard," Coombs said. "They are working and learning. It is a work in progress. I believe they're going to get there."

With the loss of several starters, including Arnette, Fuller, Okudah and Young, as well as the pandemic throwing the season in limbo until a start was eventually set for

late October – not to mention Coombs' lack of coordinating experience – things never came together for Ohio State's defense in 2020.

The Buckeyes cratered to 122nd in passing defense as one of just six teams to give up more than 300 passing yards per game. They were 59th in yards per game (401.6) and gave up 25.8 points per game, an increase of over 12 points per game from 2019. While Ohio State gave up only 97.6 rushing yards per game, sixth in the country, it didn't matter – teams loved throwing against the Buckeyes to the tune of 39.5 attempts per game, tied for the most among 127 teams that season.

Despite the defense, Ohio State still made a run to the College Football Playoffs, defeating Clemson before falling to Alabama in the national championship game. Perhaps due to the circumstances of the season and the challenges faced by Coombs, or simply because the Buckeyes still made a run to the title game, Coombs was given an additional year as defensive coordinator this past season.

It didn't last long, as he was demoted following Ohio State's week-two loss to Oregon, and he was not retained following the season, setting the stage for Day to hire Knowles.

Although there are perhaps too many unique instances above to pull any lessons for Knowles, the one common factor for a successful first-year defensive coordinator is returning starters, of whom the Buckeyes have plenty.

Defensive backs Cameron Brown, Denzel Burke, Ronnie Hickman and Josh Proctor; defensive end Zach Harrison; tackles Jerron Cage and Taron Vincent; and linebackers Steele Chambers, Tommy Eichenberg and Cody Simon all started at one point or another last season, giving Knowles plenty of talent to work with as he takes on a new challenge at Ohio State.

"When anyone thinks of the best in college football, they think of Ohio State," Knowles said. "That goes for people in the coaching profession too. You want to be the best, you want to be at the best, you want to compete against the best, you want to be at a place that's 100 percent supported by the university, the community and the alumni – a place with a rich tradition. When you put all of those things together, it's Ohio State. For someone who has worked his way up in the profession, it's really the culmination of a professional dream to get to Ohio State and to be with the best in the business."

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# 2022 SCHEDULE

APRIL							JULY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2						1 @IOW 7:08	2 @IOW 7:08
3	4	5 @LHV 7:05	6 @LHV 7:05	7 @LHV 7:05	8 @LHV 7:05	9 @LHV 6:35	3 @IOW 6:08	4 NAS 6:05	5	6 NAS 7:05	7 NAS 7:05	8 NAS 7:05	9 NAS 7:05
10 @LHV 1:35	11	12 SYR 6:15	13 SYR 6:15	14 SYR 6:15	15 SYR 6:15	16 SYR 4:05	10 NAS 4:05	11	12 IND 7:05	13 IND 7:05	14 IND 12:05	15 IND 7:05	16 IND 7:05
17 SYR 1:05	18	19 @IND 6:35	20 @IND 1: 5	21 @IND 12:05	22 @IND 7:05	23 @IND 6:35	17 IND 4:05	18	19	20	21	22 @TOL 7:05	23 @TOL 7:05
24 @IND 1:35	25	26 @LOU 6:15	27 @LOU 6:35	28 @LOU 6:15	29 @LOU 6:15	30 @LOU 4:05	24 @TOL 4:05	25	26 @LOU 7:05	27 @LOU 7:05	28 @LOU 7:05	29 @LOU 7:05	30 @LOU 7:05
							31 @LOU 1:05						
MAY							AUGUST						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 @LOU 1:05	2	3 @OMA 11:05AM	4 @OMA 6:35	5 @OMA 6:35	6 @OMA 6:35	7 @OMA 6:35		1	2 @ROC 7:05	3 @ROC 7:05	4 @ROC 12:05	5 @ROC 7:05	6 @ROC 7:05
8 @OMA 2:05	9	10 @STP 7:05	11 @STP 7:05	12 @STP 12:05	13 @STP 7:05	14 @STP 7:05	7 @ROC 4:05	8	9 @STP 7:07	10 @STP 1:07	11 @STP 7:07	12 @STP 7:07	13 @STP 7:07
15 @STP 1:05	16	17 @IOW 6:38	18 @IOW 12:08	19 @IOW 12:08	20 @IOW 7:08	21 @IOW 6:08	14 @STP 2:07	15	16 @TOL 7:05	17 @TOL 7:05	18 @TOL 7:05	19 @TOL 7:05	20 @TOL 7:05
22 @IOW 1:08	23	24 @BUF 7:05	25 @BUF 7:05	26 @BUF 7:05	27 @BUF 7:05	28 @BUF 7:05	21 @TOL 4:05	22	23 @BUF 7:05	24 @BUF 7:05	25 @BUF 1:05	26 @BUF 7:05	27 @BUF 6:05
29 @BUF 1:05	30 @TOL 6:05	31					28 @BUF 1:05	29	30 @IOW 6:15	31 @IOW 6:15			
JUNE							SEPTEMBER						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1 @TOL 7:05	2 @TOL 7:05	3 @TOL 7:05	4 @TOL 7:05					1 @IOW 6:15	2 @IOW 7:05	3 @IOW 7:05
5 @TOL 1:05	6	7 @IND 7:05	8 @IND 1:35	9 @IND 7:05	10 @IND 7:05	11 @IND 7:05	4 @IOW 1:05	5	6 @LOU 6:35	7 @LOU 6:35	8 @LOU 6:35	9 @LOU 7:05	10 @LOU 7:05
12 @IND 1:35	13	14 @STP 7:05	15 @STP 7:05	16 @STP 12:05	17 @STP 7:05	18 @STP 7:05	11 @LOU 1:05	12	13 @OMA 6:15	14 @OMA 6:35	15 @OMA 6:15	16 @OMA 7:05	17 @OMA 7:05
19 @STP 1:05	20	21 @OMA 12:05	22 @OMA 7:05	23 @OMA 7:05	24 @OMA 7:05	25 @OMA 7:05	18 @OMA 1:05	19	20 @TOL 6:35	21 @TOL 12:05	22 @TOL 6:35	23 @TOL 7:05	24 @TOL 5:05
26 @OMA 2:05	27	28 @IOW 6:38	29 @IOW 12:08	30 @IOW 6:38			25 @TOL 1:05	26 @IND 6:15	27 @IND 6:15	28 @IND 6:15	29	30	

## PROMOTIONAL SCHEDULE

- TUE - TANSKY TUESDAY DIME-A-DOG NIGHTS**  
- 4/12, 4/26, 5/10, 5/24, 6/14, 7/12, 8/2, 8/16, 8/30 & 9/13
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- \$5 Beers (small)  
- \$5 Wine
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# Knowles Takes Unique Approach To Tackling

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Jim Knowles is no stranger to straying from mainstream thought when it comes to coaching football. Ohio State's new defensive coordinator, plucked away from Oklahoma State after constructing a top-10 unit in Stillwater, has built a career around challenging conventional thought and creating advantages with unique ideas.

Faced with a talent deficit as the defensive coordinator at Duke in the early 2010s, Knowles constructed a dynamic 4-2-5 defense with multiple hybrid positions to provide better answers for spread offenses while forcing opposing coordinators to contend with skill sets and schematic looks they wouldn't see anywhere else.

Having constructed a consistent top-25 group in Durham, Knowles jumped to Oklahoma State in 2018 and worked to flesh out a similarly versatile system, leaning even more into those hybrid positions and eventually creating one of the nation's most disruptive and havoc-heavy defenses by eschewing traditional thought on positional archetypes and roles. The Cowboys worked linemen into coverage to confuse blockers and create clear shots to the passer for linebackers while shaping the secondary around defensive backs who had the ability to make tackles they aren't typically supposed to make.

In speaking to media at the opening of his first spring practice as a Buckeye, Knowles turned heads again, bucking the conventional wisdom when asked about his plans for balancing tackling practice – which of course entails bringing players to the ground, sometimes at full speed – with keeping his group healthy.

His gathered audience jolted to attention when he answered with a swift departure from football orthodoxy.

"You don't have to practice bringing guys to the ground," Knowles said, before stiffening his stance further. "You can't. We're

trying to save bodies. The number of blows that a guy takes is really important to us."

Make no mistake, Ohio State is still practicing its tackling – perhaps more than any other defensive fundamental – as it works to rebuild a defense that has faced constant struggles with bringing ball carriers to the ground in three of the last four seasons. But the work done under Knowles' guidance and according to his master plan is truly fundamental, centered not around the pop of pads but around establishing repeatable habits for smart tackling without putting at risk the players, college football's most limited resource.

Tim Walton's cornerbacks work to stick to the side of a ball carrier in motion, hoping to knock loose the football with a well-placed jab as the first stage of their "thud pace" tackle, meaning that contact is made (preferably at or close to the near hip of the ball carrier) but the ball carrier is never taken to the ground.

Safeties work with their new director, Perry Eliano, on pursuit angles, darting to the midsection of a standing tackling dummy, chopping their feet before exploding through contact with arms wrapped tightly around the dummy and their heads behind the contact, not in front of it.

Knowles' group, a batch of linebackers he hopes can reclaim the "Silver Bullets" moniker that Ohio State has struggled to embody recently, takes an even closer look at head placement. A team staffer rolls out a thick foam ring, which looks to be just under 4 feet tall (to encourage good leverage and proper tackling height), angled to simulate a ball carrier running to the outside opposite a linebacker set in his traditional position. The linebackers have to track the angle and bring the donut down with a wrap-up tackle, leading with their shoulder and shooting their lead arm into the center of the ring while keeping their heads out of the tackle and behind the ring, rolling to the ground through the contact.

The Buckeyes aren't practicing full-con-

tact tackles on human bodies, but the technique behind Knowles' approach to tackling doesn't need human bodies to be taught. His core tenets – group positioning, proper angles, hip tracking, driving feet and rolling through contact – apply all the same to Ohio State's extensive collection of coaching gadgets. In fact, Ohio State's cerebral new coordinator needed just the nearest object to explain his philosophy to a gaggle of reporters in March.

"The bottom line is that you don't have to practice bringing guys to the ground – it's all about positioning," Knowles said. "Tackling is technique and timing. What I'm looking for out there is what I call 'owning your hip.' You can do this all year long, you don't need pads on, you just need to own your hip."

Seated at a table behind a microphone on a short stand, Knowles rose to provide an example.

"If this microphone is the runner, I have to have one guy at its side – in a good position – and he has to tag (coaching slang for hit) the hip. And then I need another guy in front of him, with his near leg up (the near leg is on the same side of the body as the leading shoulder, and to have it up just means to have it in front of the other), and he's got to tag the hip. You can do that all over the field, you don't ever really have to tackle somebody in practice. It matters if you're in the right position. I teach them that it's OK to miss tackles if you're in the right position."

Comfortable as Knowles is in defining his ideal tackle, the new approach to bringing down ball carriers in Columbus does still merit a deeper look both at the technique Ohio State fans can expect to see this season and at what makes that technique successful.

## What Makes For An Ideal Tackle?

The approach Knowles brings to Columbus has many names, but the most common moniker is "rugby style" or "hawk." The

former comes – as one might guess – from rugby, where defenders have no helmets and have learned to tackle with leverage and physics, leading with their shoulders and rolling through tackles to avoid sustaining head injuries.

The latter is simply the football adaptation of that approach, named for the Seattle Seahawks, who started deploying rugby style tackling under the direction of head coach Pete Carroll and helped to popularize the approach in the American game.

"We are a shoulder-leverage tackling team," Carroll says in a now widely shared teaching tape. "We've found that we can practice and drill our tackling without pads or a helmet. We can train and develop our safe tackling system in shorts and T-shirts, and it's a system that we believe can work on all levels, during all phases of the year – in season, offseason, and spring football."

"How we teach this system of tackling was inspired by those who play rugby around the world. Rugby players have taken the head out of the game and truly exemplified shoulder tackling."

The names can be used interchangeably, but for the sake of clarity, Knowles' teaching can be described in the shorthand as rugby style.

"I'm into rugby-style tackling, for sure," Knowles said. "The standard approach, again, if this (microphone) is the ball carrier, what we all taught going back to Woody Hayes is that you put your head across the bow when you're making a tackle. We don't use the head anymore, so you don't teach that. Now you teach near leg, near shoulder, profile tackling because you're keeping your head out of it. If you're keeping your head out of it, that's naturally – as the runner gets away from you – going to turn into a rolling tackle. Everything we do is really based on those principles, keeping your head out of the tackle. It all turns into rugby tackling, it really does."

"We are not harping on those major contact collisions in practice," he continued, with a clap to illustrate, "even when we get pads on. We're not. Football is a physical game, it's going to happen, but we're teaching angles and keeping your head out of it and that leads into the rugby approach."

As Knowles details, the major difference between much of tackling consensus and rugby style is in head placement. Defenders were taught for decades to lead with the head across the ball carrier's body (or across the bow, as Knowles says) on profile tackles (coming from the side), using the head to halt the runner while connecting with the back shoulder and wrapping up through that contact, creating the largest possible collision. For straight-on tackles, defenders were instructed to use the top of the helmet as a spear prior to targeting rules, which shifted into heads-up, face-mask-into-sternum tackling after targeting rules came into play.

This is not how Ohio State wants to tackle. Knowles wants his group leading with a shoulder into the ball carrier's hip, with their head behind the runner's body on profile tackles and to the side in straight-on encounters.

Hitting at the hip gives the defender a

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leverage advantage and an easily identified, repeatable target. The defender's shoulder is always used to lead, as is the corresponding leg – near leg up, in Knowles' terminology. Because the brunt of the tackle's force is going into one side of a player's body (without the head and neck there to absorb the force), the other side will naturally wrap around the back end of the ball carrier and convert into a roll, drawing the impact in and redirecting it into pulling the offensive player down.

Working in tandem with that, Knowles preaches positioning and group tackling. He always wants one player making contact at the hip from the side, with another nearby to clean up if that first tackler misses – allowing his defenders to play fast and loose, without worries that a missed tackle will surrender a huge chunk of yardage. That's the Knowles system, in both its micro (hip targeting, near leg and shoulder leading) and macro (multiple tacklers in good position because they focus on taking the correct angles) scale. It can all be taught individually and built into a complete approach without ever needing to tackle to the ground in practice.

“(With this approach,) when you're looking at it as a fan or a guy who reports on it and you see a guy fly by and miss but he's on the right angle, you're not going to pay much attention to it because there's going to be another guy right there,” Knowles said. “You're not going to miss badly because there's going to be another guy in a position to make a tackle. The ones that stand out are when a guy loses leverage, the ball cuts back, there's nobody else there on the defense and it looks bad. It's all about timing, technique and angles.

“We're on them all the time about tagging hips and being in a position with the near leg up – and you have to mentally tackle, even when you aren't in. The adjustment starts in your mind and then goes into your body. When you do that repeatedly (it becomes ingrained). If you look at the teams I've had in the past, we were great tacklers, but we never tackled in practice. We worked and harped all the time on positioning on the field and body positioning. It's an 11-man game. If they're going to miss, (I want them to do it) aggressively and on the proper side of the runner.”

For Knowles, teaching this style of tackling isn't just about developing good habits and confident players in an easy-to-understand system – it's personal. In 2008, Knowles lost longtime friend and former Cornell teammate Tom McHale at just 45 years old to what was recorded as an accidental drug overdose. McHale's wife, Lisa – with whom Knowles is still close – donated his brain to Boston University's School of Medicine, which identified chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE.

“I really made a change a few years back when one of my best friends at Cornell, a guy named Tom McHale, became one of the first to donate his brain to concussion research,” Knowles divulged as he explained his plans for Ohio State's tackling. “It made me change everything that I do – I think the whole sport has changed.”

As Knowles learned more about the damage that established football techniques could wreak on a brain, he dedicated himself to changing how he taught.

He sought out and learned the teach-



FILE PHOTO

**FROM THE ASHES — Jim Knowles isn't the first Ohio State defensive coordinator to install rugby style tackling, as both Jeff Hafley and Chris Ash (above) preached the virtues of wrap-up, shoulder-leverage tackling styles for the sake of both safety and effectiveness during their time in Columbus. Ash has been one of its foremost supporters since 2014.**

ing points of rugby tackling, in hopes of both making the game safer for his players and of preserving the sport he loves, even if it meant breaking from the norm. For Knowles, this isn't just a difference of opinion, it's an imperative shift.

“You really have to look at how you're doing things,” Knowles said in 2015. “It's still a great game, right? But we need to preserve it, even if you have to do some drastic things. In order to protect this game, tackling like this is a necessity.”

### Rugby Tackling Not New At OSU

Although Knowles may be a trailblazer in his approach to practice, he's not the first Ohio State head coach to lead the Buckeyes into rugby style tackling. Defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley used a slightly modified system during his one season at Ohio State back in 2019 after learning it under then-defensive coordinator Robert Selah (who worked with Carroll in Seattle from 2011-13) when he worked for the 49ers, citing similar reasons to the ones Knowles shares.

“We're still teaching the components of the rugby-style tackling,” Hafley said in March of 2019. “The whole key to tackling is trying to keep the head out for the safety of the game. There are other things that we've all learned and we've come together to talk about, but the main thing is to keep the head out of it for safety reasons.”

Chris Ash, who worked as Ohio State's co-defensive coordinator in 2014 and 2015 next to Luke Fickell, was an even larger proponent. He had long adhered to the tackling fundamentals he was taught as a player in the 1990s, but he called a full-staff meeting ahead of his first season with the Buckeyes after watching Carroll's video upwards of 20 times in his estimation and ultimately con-

vinced the brain trust in Columbus to adopt Carroll's technique.

“The Pete Carroll video really got a lot of people to go back and evaluate what they're doing, but not a lot of people necessarily bought into it because it's different,” Ash said in 2015. “If you get out of your comfort zone, people are willing to do that. We did, and it paid off. If you're a coach that's been doing the same thing for 30 years and felt like you've had success doing it, you might think, ‘Why am I going to change what I'm doing?’ I look at it differently. There's always a way to do stuff better. You've got to at least evaluate it.

“I start watching our film, and I'll be damned. Everything he's talking about is showing up on film and we're not even coaching it. We got together as a defensive staff. I said, ‘We've got to watch this. We've got to talk about this. Something's not right here. We're all smart coaches and have been coaching for a long time, but what you're coaching, what I'm coaching, it's not happening on film. We've got to talk about this.’ We had some serious conversations for a few weeks.

“I think it's hard for coaches to stand up and say, ‘We were wrong. We were teaching it wrong.’ And in 2014 we decided we were wrong and there are better ways to do it. Tackling is not the only fundamental in football that people continue to learn and do better, whether it's blow delivery, stances, steps – whatever. There are always ways to improve and do it better. I think what a lot of coaches need to do is have the guts to admit they are wrong and find ways to do things. Not everybody is willing to do that.”

For Ash, the switch was life-changing. Ohio State took to the new style almost immediately and saw defensive improvement across the board, all the way to the 2014

national title. On top of that, Ash saw injury rates drop and felt that his teaching wasn't just more effective, it was creating a much safer game for his players.

“It eliminated some injuries,” said Ash. “But it also was a lot more effective. And I can tell you honestly right now, as a coach, I could go show you our film and what we teach, what we coach, what we drill and guess what? It shows up on film. Not once, not twice, not by luck but by design. Our players have bought into it, and that alone, in my opinion, led to us having a lot of success, especially late in the season.

“I'm so glad I watched the video when I did, that we went through as a staff and did a self-evaluation when we did, because I feel, after 18 years of coaching, I teach something that actually shows up on tape and is safer for the players.”

Just as it was under Ash and Hafley, Ohio State's goal under Knowles' guidance is defensive improvement. But the path to that improvement starts with the development of safe, repeatable fundamentals – all established in the details of rugby style tackling and taught without sacrificing the bodies of the Buckeyes.

“The thing I've noticed with Jim is that it's not a competition every day of who can win the drill. It's about teaching because he has his eyes on that first game in September,” head coach Ryan Day said in March. “There will be a time when we want to go against each other, move the ball and compete, but I think that's the veteran coach in him. He understands the big picture. There's a method to the way he's installing, the way he's teaching.

“We had a practice before we left for spring break where he ran the same defense for the entire practice. It's unbelievable teaching to me. It's not about winning the drill, it's about getting better as a defense, learning and developing at a high level. I thought that was really impressive. I'm impressed with the way the guys have been playing, their energy and attention to detail!”



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# OSU Conducting Fierce Battle For Skill Snaps

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

As it continues working through the 2022 offseason and into the end of spring practice, Ohio State certainly is not lacking for skill-position talent on the offensive side of the ball. One look at the roster or a second at recent recruiting rankings makes that abundantly clear.

The Buckeyes have, in the latter's terms, four former five-star prospects, nine former four-stars (almost all of whom checked in within the top 150 of their respective class rankings) and four three-stars in the running back, tight end and wide receiver rooms, per the 247Sports composite rankings. Even if some of those highly touted recruits haven't yet panned out, they came to Ohio State with major pedigrees and are parts now of one of the nation's most explosive offenses.

That can be a blessing and a curse for head coach Ryan Day, the director of said offense. With such talent comes the burden to deploy it, and as the Buckeyes have worked through a critical spring camp in Columbus, the fourth-year head coach is still working to determine just how many of those players he can realistically work into an offense.

"We have to figure out how many guys deserve to be on the field," Day said March 29. "We have a lot of experience coming back, but we have a lot of young guys coming on. As we continue to build that we can figure out how to get these guys on the field to best attack the defense. Evan Pryor, Gee Scott Jr., those are weapons, and we have other guys who are built like that. That's exciting. The more of those guys we can have in the stable the better, and we do have some talented guys.

"It isn't so much like a role – some of it is – as it is just putting guys in a position to be successful based on their skill set – not asking someone to do something they can't. Now, the more they can do, the more they can play.

"It's the same on defense. If someone is a really good pass specialist but they can't stop the run, they're only coming in on third down. If you're really good against the run but not as much against the pass, you're probably playing on first and second down. A really good cover guy who struggles against the run, you're probably in a nickel situation playing against the pass.

"It's the same on offense. If you're a wide receiver who can block in the running game, it gives us a lot of flexibility. A tight end who can block a seven-tech (a defensive end lined up on the tight end's inside shoulder) but then go out and run a route against a safety or a linebacker gives us a lot of flexibility. The more guys who can do many things, the better. Evan Pryor, for example, can run a route on the outside and line up as a running back in the backfield. That gives us something. The more someone can do, the more of a weapon they are for us."

Day mentioned redshirt freshman tailback Pryor and junior tight end Scott by name, but the Buckeyes have several players in similar positions as spring practice progresses. Ohio State gave 12 skill position players at least 100 offensive snaps a season ago and returns eight of those play-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**CHANGE OF PACE — Redshirt freshman halfback Evan Pryor (21) caught Ohio State's attention with his speed as a recruit, but he's turned heads this spring as a well-rounded back and figures to move into a three-man rotation.**

ers for this season, with running back Master Teague, tight end Jeremy Ruckert and wideouts Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson departing.

Those four took up a ton of snaps – combining for 2,136 offensive reps – meaning there are plenty of snaps to go around, but Day has signaled that he doesn't expect any major changes to his offensive scheme. That's good news for the eight players returning, who should be able to step into either equal or larger roles this season, but it does present an interesting challenge for the Buckeyes.

Assuming that a 12-man rotation is near the upper limit of what Day wants with his skill talent – the Buckeyes had 12 skill players above 100 reps in 2020 (when projecting an eight-game sample size over 13 games), 12 in 2019 and 2018 and 13 in 2017, averaging out to 12.2 per season – there are just a few openings for new skill players to emerge. Determining who may find themselves among that group first requires an audit of the eight players returning within each position and an evaluation of Day's typical balance of contributing players within each one.

## Running Backs

100-plus snap returners: 2

Day's average rotation since 2017: 2.6

Ohio State feels secure in a pair of options at halfback through spring practice and seems to have a favorite for the third halfback to pull in at least 100 snaps – which Day has had three times in Columbus since his arrival as offensive coordinator in 2017.

The Buckeyes leaned on J.K. Dobbins (576 snaps), Mike Weber (320) and Antonio Williams (132) in 2017; Trey Sermon (463 snaps when projected across 13 games),

Teague (453) and Marcus Crowley (299) in 2020 – these numbers are obviously inexact, given the need to project the shortened season out for more representative counting stats – and TreVeyon Henderson (508), Miyan Williams (211) and Teague (140) in 2021. Dobbins and Weber stood alone in 2018, as did Dobbins and Teague in 2019, but Day's preference seems to be a three-man rotation.

With Henderson and Williams returning, two of those spots can be safely filled, barring any injuries. Day has set the expectations very high for the former as he enters his sophomore season after one of the most productive freshman running back seasons the school has ever seen, and the latter opened 2021 as the starter and stuck firmly in as the No. 2 back in the second half of the season, playing double-digit snaps in six of the last seven games of the season.

"(TreVeyon's) potential is to be as good as anyone in the country," Day said March 29. "He has a year under his belt, a little more confidence, has certain things he wants to get done in his spring and has a good look in his eye. He's a very serious young man who, when there are guys around and he sees that it's going a certain way, he'll encourage them, and when he sees it going the other way, he'll speak up. He's got a good voice, sets a great standard for everybody in the building. I think his potential is as big as anyone's in the country.

"Judging a running back in the spring is a little bit of a challenge because there's no tackling, but in terms of protection, pad level and vision, he's off to a good start."

Pryor looks like the leader for the third spot in April, especially with Crowley out for the spring while he continues to recover

from a second season-ending injury in three years. Offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson also singled Pryor out as someone impressing in his second spring camp.

"Miyan's always done things pretty consistently," Wilson said in early March. "I think Evan Pryor is coming on, and there's going to be some good competition there. I think we always need more than one (running back). With the volume of (plays we run), we need to be two- pushing three-deep at running back to get through the season and get through key games. And that's not just to milk out a game against someone bad, but also in critical games where suddenly you need a second or third guy who can play championship football."

Pryor, a former four-star signee out of Cornelius, N.C., carried the ball 21 times for 98 yards and a touchdown last season, playing a season-high 27 snaps in an 11-carry, 48-yard outing against Indiana on Oct. 23. He certainly doesn't lack confidence either, all but anointing himself the third back while speaking to media on March 10.

"We know we have three really good backs, so whoever touches the ball is going to eat," Pryor said. "But with all three of us wanting to touch the ball, we will. We're all good. We all believe in each other, us three. We all believe in each other to go make the play, (no matter) whose number is called."

## Tight Ends

100-plus snap returners: 2

Day's average rotation since 2017: 3.2

The competition at running back might be pretty cut and dried, but the battle at tight end is anything but. The Buckeyes return a pair of rotational players here too in Cade Stover (223 snaps in 2021) and Mitch Rossi (143), but Ruckert took more skill-position reps (714) than any other Buckeye last season, and both returners have faced unique circumstances this spring.

For Stover, his place at tight end wasn't confirmed until about halfway through spring camp, after he opened the session at linebacker. That was his position coming out of high school and seemed to be his future home after he lined up on that side of the ball for Ohio State's Rose Bowl win against Utah with several contributors unavailable, recording six tackles and earning praise from his coaches for stepping up on the fly.

But with an otherwise inexperienced group of tight ends and with a logjam at linebacker, Stover is back on the offensive side of the ball (for more on that, be sure to check page 22 for BSB's Stover feature story) and projects now as not just a contributor at tight end, but as the likely favorite to take over for Ruckert as the starter.

"I feel good right now," Stover said March 31. "When I first came over to tight end, I had growing pains. You look over on the other side of the ball, and it's more comfortable, so it's hard not to look back over there. But I would say that I am where I should be – unless something drastic happens – for now. I think I'm staying here."

Rossi hasn't faced quite the position-



SONNY BROCKWAY

**HIS OWN MAN — Marvin Harrison Jr. has NFL pedigree from his Hall of Fame father, but he's blazing his own path at Ohio State and has earned praise for his work ethic and maturity during his second spring camp as a Buckeye.**

al turmoil of his counterpart, but he has missed spring practice with an undisclosed injury.

That's opened up plenty of reps for a young, green core of tight ends featuring Scott, redshirt sophomore Joe Royer, red-shirt freshman Sam Hart and true freshman early enrollee Bennett Christian.

Like at tailback, Day has a pretty defined tight end rotation history. The Buckeyes deployed four in 2019 with Luke Farrell (461), Ruckert (405), Rashod Berry (239) and Jake Hausmann (237) but have been comfortable with three in Day's other four seasons. For the four behind Stover and Rossi, that likely means a competitive battle to fill out one spot — one that could be decided not by singular elite traits, but by an overall balance that Day has preached the importance of on multiple occasions.

"The more that a player can check off, the more he can play, and the more he can stay on the field, the more we can do with them," Day said. "When you make the transition over there like Cade and Mitch did, like Joe did as more of a receiver out of high school and like Gee is doing as a receiver, it's a developmental position. It takes a little time to learn how to do those jobs. You have to change your body and understand all three phases of the game — protection, run game and routes."

Short of mentioning Scott as a weapon, Day hasn't tipped his hand for the favorite to fill out the tight end rotation.

Scott is one of two former four-stars at the position along with Stover, but neither earned that ranking as a tight end. Royer is the oldest of the "true" tight ends on the roster and has been talked about as someone expected to step into a larger role, but as the Buckeyes close out spring ball, they seem to be doing so without a definitive answer at tight end — be it in the race for the starting job or anywhere else in the rotation.

## Wide Receivers

100-plus snap returners: 4  
Day's average rotation since 2017: 6.4

Day's wide-receiver rotation has tightened up from the early days of his Ohio State tenure. After using seven wideouts consistently in both 2017 and 2018, the Buckeyes have narrowed their rotation to six — three defined starters, three reliable backups behind them — in each of the last three seasons, as Day has established his offensive system and as wide receivers coach Brian Hartline has fleshed out a receivers room now made up almost entirely of players he recruited, save for 2018 signee Kamryn Babb.

With Olave and Wilson to replace on the outside and only one of those defined starters — Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who lined up in the slot and expects to play the majority of his snaps there again this season — returning, Hartline faces a pair of challenges in filling out what now appears to be a set six-man rotation.

First, he has to replace the projected first-round picks on the outside. Secondly, he needs a pair of youngsters to step into larger roles, filling in for backups last season who are expected to take over starting roles this year. No position on the offense — or on the entire roster — has a more impressive talent pool to pull replacements from, though.

Hartline has built a room with three former five-stars and five former four-stars, with two more joining the fold this summer when Kojo Antwi and Kaleb Brown enroll.

Four of the six spots can be considered established, though the battle for the top two spots next to Smith-Njigba will wage through fall camp.

Smith-Njigba, one of the three five-stars, was second among receivers in snaps last season (645) behind Olave (687) and will lead the pack this season barring injury.

Rising sophomore Marvin Harrison Jr., a former four-star, claimed the fourth-most reps with 255. He burst onto the scene down the stretch with 28 snaps against Indiana, 36 against Nebraska, 40 against Michigan State and a season-high 63 against Utah in the Rose Bowl, filling a starting role in Pasadena with the departing pair both sitting out to avoid injury.

That it was Harrison who earned the second-most receiver snaps in that game behind Smith-Njigba — hauling in six receptions, 71 yards and three touchdowns — speaks as loudly about his standing entering this season as Day's compliments about his ability, both purely as a player and as someone raised in the shadow of a Hall of Fame receiver — his father, Marvin Harrison Sr.

"Marv is his own person, but he certainly had a great example with a Hall of Fame dad and what he did," Day said. "That's not easy to do, to follow in someone's footsteps like that. It's easy for us to look at it and to say, 'Well his dad played in the NFL and became a Hall of Famer (so it's easy for him).' There's a lot that comes with that, a lot of expectations — especially when you share a name with that dad. I think Marvin has done a great job of blazing his own way, but the expectations have always been there for him and his work ethic, approach, attitude and who he is as a person, (it shows that) his parents raised a really great young man.

"He's going to do his own thing and he's

certainly blessed with a lot of talent, but his skill and discipline are off the charts too, and that's hard to find. Some guys are just blessed with great talent, but they have a harder time finding that skill and discipline. He has both. He's created great skill and discipline. He's had a really good offseason, and I'm proud of him."

The No. 5 spot for reps went to another former five-star in junior Julian Fleming, who drew 176 snaps but did so with 145 coming in three games (Michigan State, Nebraska, Utah). It seems that the battle for the last starting spot will come down to him and the third five-star on the board, sophomore Emeka Egbuka, who claimed 122 snaps last season to round out the top six.

That leaves two more spots in the rotation for the remaining six scholarship receivers to battle for. Like at running back, Ohio State hasn't been subtle about the favorites in those battles, which align smoothly, at this time, with seniority lines.

Sophomore Jayden Ballard was next up on the board for snaps last season with 34 and has been a popular name among his teammates this spring.

"When you look at the receiver room, the biggest growth from last year to this year is definitely Jayden Ballard," Harrison said March 10. "We all know he has the speed and he can run probably the fastest on the team right now, but the route-running ability is what he's improved on since last year."

Babb has been the other popular Hartline pupil through spring practice after earning captaincy last season, though he's had a career marred by injuries and can't fully

escape concerns of another one until he's on the field come September.

"Right now, he's full go," Day said at the start of spring camp. "I can talk for hours about Kamryn Babb and what he's done in being a captain and with everything he's been through. We're Kam Babb fans around here. Everybody loves Kam Babb, and he had a really good practice today. We'll just keep pushing forward, and if he can stay healthy, he's going to have an impact on this offense for sure."

If his health doesn't hold, one of the four freshman — Antwi, Brown, Caleb Burton and Kyion Grayes — would need to separate themselves enough to round out the rotation.

Day, it bears mentioning, has little to no concerns about the wide receiver room despite the task at hand for Hartline.

"I feel good about the wide receivers," Day said March 29. "We'll have to watch the film and see continually where it's at. Anytime you lose two really good players like that on the outside, it's a lot of production to replace. While the guys here are talented, they're going to have to step up and make those plays. Those are two players who made a lot of clutch catches. We counted on them to make plays on third down, make tough catches when it mattered most.

"We think we have some really good candidates to push forward and be those types of players, but we'll see. It's going to take a lot of hard work. It won't just happen in five or six practices. It takes time and will develop through the season, but I think we do have some really talented players in that room and the depth is being built."

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# First-Round Hopefuls Lead OSU Draft Class

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Ohio State isn't expecting quite the output in the 2022 NFL draft that it has seen in recent years, after producing 10 picks apiece in 2021 and 2020 and another nine in 2019.

But like in the 2017 and 2018 draft classes, a decline at Ohio State is quite the day at the office for just about every other program. Those groups each saw seven Buckeyes drafted following a record-setting 12-man class in 2016 (all of whom went in the first four rounds, the most of the common era, which started in 1967). This bunch of departing Buckeyes is expected to hit a similar figure to follow the program's highest three-year total (29 from 2019-21) since 1974-76, which produced 32 picks but did so in drafts with quite a few more selections (442 in 1974 and 1975, 487 in 1976).

If they do reach that 2017-18 level, that will give Ohio State nine straight classes with at least five players selected, the longest such streak in program history, and 24 with at least three picks going back to the 1999 NFL draft. The Buckeyes have had at least one pick in every draft since its inception in 1936, save for 1998.

The headline of this recent decade of draft dominance in Columbus has been Ohio State's presence atop the board, placing prospects in the first round, and that's no different for this class. The Buckeyes have had 18 players drafted in round one since 2014 and look primed to place another pair among the top 32 players in the class of 2022, while shattering a 15-year positional drought in the process.

If Chris Olave or Garrett Wilson is selected in the first round on April 28, he would become the first Buckeye wide receiver taken in the top round since 2007. If they're both picked, they'll match the efforts of that 2007 bunch, which saw Ted Ginn Jr. selected by the Miami Dolphins with the No. 9 pick and teammate Anthony Gonzalez plucked off the board with the No. 32 pick by the Super Bowl champion Indianapolis Colts.

For position coach Brian Hartline – who himself was picked in the fourth round of the 2009 draft – snapping the streak would serve as proof of the impact his efforts have had in Columbus since taking over the position in 2018. It would also make some history, because that 2007 class stands alone as a Buckeye draft group to see two wide receivers picked in the first round.

"Everything I teach is always geared for the next level," Hartline said. "I don't coach anything at a reduced rate for the college level. I have no interest in that. If you're going to be an elite NFL receiver, you will be more than good enough for college. I do not try to coach guys to be great receivers in college. I'm trying to coach you to be a great NFL receiver."

"Anything that applies to that, that's what we coach. That's the standard we hold to. That extra step might seem good. One foot inbounds will get you good in college, but we will always aim for two when it comes to sideline work. I think this program, we are always setting these guys up for success outside of our building whether it be in the NFL or in life. Talking about our philosophy in the receiver room, that's our approach."

Wilson, however, doesn't expect that he and Olave will be the last to emerge from Hartline's room as top prospects.

"I don't think it's going to stop anytime soon," Wilson said. "When you've got Coach (Hartline) at the helm in the receivers room and guys like Jaxon (Smith-Njigba), Marvin (Harrison Jr.) and Emeka (Egbuka) all filling up the room and being an example for the young guys, I don't think it's stopping anytime soon."

The pair of receivers are at the top of the class for the Buckeyes and serve as the only products drawing serious interest in the first round, but they aren't alone as products from the nation's highest-scoring offense expected to hear their names called from April 28-30.

In fact, if the draft experts are to be trusted, fellow pass-catcher tight end Jeremy Ruckert could be the next Buckeye to come off the board. Ruckert has been identified

largely as a third-round prospect, touted for his impressive 6-5, 252-pound frame and athleticism, of which NFL teams feel Ruckert has only begun to scratch the surface.

"If you look at it that way, maybe the production isn't there, but inside that locker room and on that team, if you play tight end at Ohio State you are doing every single job and you make an impact in every single way," Ruckert said. "I knew that going into Ohio State that maybe the production wouldn't be there but what I was going to get out of that program, the person I'd become, the player I'd become, the versatility I've been able to adapt to, I don't regret that at all. I've learned how to play in a really competitive environment, great competition every week, winning championships. I wouldn't trade that for the world."

The New York native isn't without questions to answer, missing much of the pre-draft cycle with a foot injury and coming out of college as one of the least statistically productive tight ends in an especially deep class at the position (54 receptions for 615 yards and 12 touchdowns in four seasons), but he hopes to hear his name called on day two regardless.

Offensive guard Thayer Munford and offensive tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere are hoping they'll have the chance to join him in coming off the board on April 29, but expert projections have them as borderline fourth- and third-round players, respectively.

Tailback Master Teague III, who backed up freshman TreVeyon Henderson and sophomore Miyan Williams in 2020, is hoping that an electric pro day performance can overcome a relatively sparse career stat line (323 carries, 1,764 yards and 17 touchdowns in four seasons) and earn him a look either in the final rounds or as a top-tier undrafted free agent.

On the other side of the ball, the Buckeyes are without a premier prospect as they've so often had defensively in recent years (13 of those 18 first-round picks were defenders)



SONNY BROCKWAY

**DYNAMIC DUO** — Ohio State is expecting to see a receiver selected in the first round of the NFL draft for the first time in 15 years and could match the efforts of that class by placing both Chris Olave (2) and Garrett Wilson (5) in day one, as Ted Ginn Jr. and Anthony Gonzalez were in 2007.

but are hoping to place a pair of defensive linemen in the later rounds. Defensive tackle Haskell Garrett and defensive end Tyreke Smith have each earned day-three projections.

This year, Buckeye Sports Bulletin is looking in total at eight players who hope to be selected in the 2021 NFL draft. The following capsules feature accolades, projected round, quotes from players, measurements from that pro day, recruiting rankings and expert analysis from Dane Brugler of The Athletic, whose NFL draft guide covers and ranks more than 400 draft prospects.



**HASKELL GARRETT**  
Defensive Tackle  
6-2 • 300

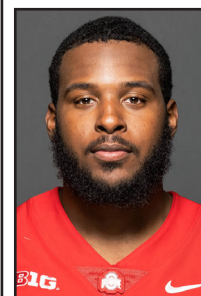
Recruit Rank: Overall 68; DT 6  
NFL Combine 40: 5.07 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Garrett recovered from a gunshot to the face before the 2020 season and played in all eight games for the Buckeyes, earning CBS Sports first-team All-American honors. He played in every game of the 2021 regular season and earned an All-Big Ten first-team nod.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Sixth to seventh round

**GARRETT SAYS:** "I'd say without the adversity, I'm not who I am today. It really fuels and drives me, and going through that has made me a better person, a better teammate and overall better man in this world. Both as a leader and as a person, I think I did exactly what I came back to do. I set new records for myself. I made more sacks than I did the previous year in our COVID year, and I lived up to expectations."

**BRUGLER'S TAKE:** "Although he is short-armed and his rush arsenal lacks variety, Garrett is quick out of the blocks to penetrate with initial burst and consistent effort. However, he is more of a hugger than striker at the point of attack, and his inconsistent power will make it tough for him to anchor or defend the run vs. NFL talent. Overall, Garrett flashes the upfield quickness and flexibility to threaten gaps, but he needs to get stronger and expand his pass rush options to have more of an impact on the game. He has NFL rotational value as a three-technique tackle."



**THAYER MUNFORD**  
Offensive Line  
6-5 • 328

Recruit Rank: Overall 285; OT  
28 • Pro Day 40: 5.33 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Munford was a four-year starter at Ohio State, playing his first three seasons as a starter at left tackle before kicking inside to left guard in 2021. He was named a captain and earned Ohio State's "Block O" honor as a redshirt senior.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Fourth to fifth round

**MUNFORD SAYS:** "I think my legacy is basically (that I never) gave up. Coming from an inner-city community in Cincinnati, Ohio, Lincoln Heights, is the biggest accomplishment for me. Everybody comes from different backgrounds, but I feel like I have one of the greatest stories (of someone) that's ever been through Ohio State. Having the right people in my corner and having the right people to help me out, that's a big journey. Going through adversity, a lot of adversity, it's wonderful. It kind of sucked during it, but I appreciate it right now."

**BRUGLER'S TAKE:** "A wide-bodied player, Munford keeps his feet beneath him and works hard to stay between the ball and defenders. However, he is a heavy-legged waist-bender with inconsistent hand placement in the run game and as a pass blocker. Munford wins with size and length and has played a lot of football, but he struggles to stay balanced and his inconsistencies create opportunities for pass rushers. His experience at tackle and guard boost his chances of making the NFL as a backup."



## CHRIS OLAVE

Wide Receiver  
6-0 • 187

Recruit Rank: Overall 399; WR 68 • NFL Combine 40: 4.39 secs

**ACCOLADES:** Olave was a three-year starter at Ohio State, twice earning first-team All-Big Ten honors (2020, 2019) and finishing his time in Columbus as the Ohio State leader in career touchdown receptions with 35.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** First round

**OLAVE SAYS:** "I developed (my route running) going into my freshman year. My first year playing receiver in high school was my senior year, so just playing for the best receiver coach in the country in Coach (Brian) Hartline, getting developed by him and seeing a lot of older guys like Terry McLaurin, Parris Campbell, Johnnie Dixon and C.J. Saunders in front of me, I kind of learned from them, took some stuff from their game and tried to put it into mine."

**BRUGLER'S TAKE:** "Olave is a smooth route runner with the downfield speed and tracking instincts to consistently win as a deep threat. He knows how to create spacing in his routes and won't waste steps out of his breaks, but he isn't a tackle-breaker and doesn't show the same elusiveness after the catch. He has an average body type and marginal play strength, but he is a polished pass catcher with dependable ball skills and a unique feel for pacing coverage. He projects as a starting Z receiver and a productive WR2 on the depth chart in the NFL."



## NICHOLAS PETIT-FRERE

Offensive Tackle  
6-5 • 316

Recruit Rank: Overall 7; OT 1  
NFL Combine 40: 5.14 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Petit-Frere was named a second-team All-American and a first-team All-Big Ten tackle in 2021 after moving from right tackle to left tackle in his second season as a starter.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third to fourth round

**PETIT-FRERE SAYS:** "For me, my mind-set is I get this opportunity to reach my dream and play in the NFL. I'm applying for a job to play for one of the best 32 teams in the world. All of the things that I love about football, just talking ball, meeting people, creating new families, new relationships, it's all happening (in the pre-draft process). This has been the best time of my life."

**BRUGLER'S TAKE:** "Petit-Frere has excellent foot quickness and bend through his lower half, especially in pass protection and as a zone blocker. However, his anchor/play strength issues are concerning, and he must do a better job staying centered on the move and establishing his base once he's engaged (something Michigan defensive end Aidan Hutchinson exposed). He's a (project) because of the development still required in his game, but he has the size, quickness and big-man twitch that NFL coaches covet. He has the talent to grow into an NFL starter for a patient coaching staff."



## JEREMY RUCKERT

Tight End  
6-5 • 252

Recruit Rank: Overall 37; TE 2 • Pro Day 40: Did not run (foot injury)

**ACCOLADES:** One of the highest-ranked tight end recruits in program history, Ruckert was a four-year contributor with Ohio State, playing in 47 games and starting 16 in four seasons as a Buckeye. He was a Big Ten honorable mention in 2021, his lone season as a full-time starter.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Third round

**RUCKERT SAYS:** "All the jobs that you do at Ohio State as a tight end, you're doing everything. You're flexing out, you're (on the) line, you're in the backfield moving around, and I think being able to do that in college at such a high level, playing in big-time games, big-time practices during the week, I'm proud of that, and I think that's truly made me who I am, why I'm here today."

**BRUGLER'S TAKE:** "An athletic big man, Ruckert was a standout soccer goalie growing up, which helped develop his ball skills on the football field, showing the toughness and concentration to finish catches through contact. He fires out of his stance as a blocker, but often to the detriment of his balance, struggling to establish point-of-attack leverage. He must become a more consistent blocker, but he is a strong-willed athlete and ball-winner who can make natural adjustments because of his flexibility and focus. He is a strong candidate to be a better pro than college player with a skill set reminiscent of (Saints TE) Adam Trautman."



## TYREKE SMITH

Defensive End  
6-3 • 254

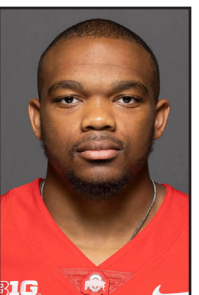
Recruit Rank: Overall 34; WDE 4  
NFL Combine 40: 4.86 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Smith was second-team All-Big Ten in 2021 despite missing three games with an injury, recording a career-best 26 tackles in 10 starts (also the most of his four seasons with Ohio State).

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Fourth to fifth round

**SMITH SAYS:** "I feel like this year was the year I was ready to come out (for the draft). A lot of people asked why I didn't come out last year, but I feel like I just needed one more year with the brotherhood, seeing all my brothers every day and just pushing them and letting them push me, so it was great. Statistical-wise, I didn't really get where I wanted to be. But I pushed myself hard as hell. And I go hard every time I step out on the field, so I really didn't have any regrets."

**BRUGLER'S TAKE:** "A physically gifted athlete, Smith has the get-off burst, arc quickness and active hands to challenge blockers. However, his inconsistent contact balance and slow recognition give an early advantage to blockers and disrupt his timing/counters. Smith has athletic developmental traits to be an NFL pass rusher, but he must improve his pass rush plan and learn how to string moves together to have more of an impact. He projects as a developmental role player with starting potential if he can stay healthy."



## MASTER TEAGUE III

Running Back  
5-11 • 221

Recruit Rank: Overall 228; RB 11 • Pro Day 40: 4.44 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Teague played in 32 games as a Buckeye but started in just six, all in 2020. He earned third-team All-Big Ten honors in 2019 and was an All-Big Ten second-teamer in 2020.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** Undrafted free agent

**TEAGUE SAYS:** "A lot of times people second-guess with big backs, asking, 'Can you catch?' I can catch, for sure. It might not be as pretty as some of the receivers like Olave and them, but I can work towards that. It's just the body type is a little different. But I can definitely catch. Hopefully I showed that (at Ohio State's pro day). I'm confident in my hands, and so hopefully they saw that and can dispel some of the second-guessing on that end."

**BRUGLER'S TAKE:** "Teague finished his OSU career with 5.5 yards per carry and plenty of tread left on his tires. He is built like a tank to run with downhill power but also has the speed of a race car to out-leverage pursuit. Though straight-line explosive, he isn't slippery or shifty enough to patch together multiple moves. Despite his thick frame, he can be run over in pass protection because of his poor base and fundamentals. He has underwhelming film, but there is meat still left on the bone, and his height/weight/speed have NFL teams interested for offense and special teams."



## GARRETT WILSON

Wide Receiver  
5-11 • 183

Recruit Rank: Overall 20; WR 2  
NFL Combine 40: 4.38 seconds

**ACCOLADES:** Wilson was a first-team All-American in 2021, his second season as a starter at Ohio State but his first playing on the outside after starting in the slot in 2020, when he was a first-team All-Big Ten pick.

**PROJECTED ROUND:** First round

**WILSON SAYS:** "You can't forget about who came before you, and you've got to realize the ones coming after you are looking (at you). It was important for me to leave a legacy (at Ohio State) and have something to remember you for. The fact that me and Chris have a chance to be first-rounders – the first at wideout in a long time at Ohio State – it would be really special and it's something that we will hold dearly."

**BRUGLER'S TAKE:** "Wilson credits basketball (his favorite sport) for developing the route athleticism and fluidity in and out of his breaks that makes him a true three-level threat on the football field. With his long arms and uncanny adjustment skills, he catches the ball well outside his frame and is comfortable operating with bodies around him. He needs continued route refinement, but he makes the playbook come alive with his ability to get open before and after the catch thanks to his athleticism and instincts. With his slender frame, elite body control, and catch-point skills, he reminds me of (Dallas Cowboys WR) CeeDee Lamb."

# OSU Hopeful Stover's Positional Carousel Is Settling

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Cade Stover burst onto the scene because of his versatility. A multi-sport – and within those sports, multi-position – athlete with a lean and muscular frame, Stover rose to the top of the board of Ohio's best high school prospects in the class of 2019, catching the attention of Ohio State offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson and defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

The Mansfield (Ohio) Lexington four-star recruit signed with the Buckeyes after an All-America senior season at linebacker that also saw him add almost 1,500 yards and 17 touchdowns at running back.

When Stover arrived in Columbus, he immediately got to work with linebackers coach Al Washington and strength and conditioning director Mickey Marotti to become a more well-rounded college athlete. He played in three games as a true freshman – at both linebacker and defensive end – including a two-tackle performance against Cincinnati.

But in 2020, after the departures of Rashod Berry and Jake Hausmann, Ohio State needed tight end depth. Stover made the switch and filled in behind Luke Farrell and Jeremy Ruckert.

After the Jacksonville Jaguars selected Farrell with a fifth-round pick in the 2021 draft, the Buckeyes returned Ruckert as a starter, but the offense needed a backup who could block and help establish the line of scrimmage in the running game.

Stover stepped into the role, playing in every game and recording 223 snaps as Ruckert's reserve. He recorded only five receptions for 76 yards, but coaches praised his development as a blocker and an overall player in a new position.

In February, though, Stover explained he missed playing linebacker – a desire reignited after he filled that spot in the Rose Bowl because of injuries at the position – and

thought he could return to that position this fall. He started there in spring practice, but his stint remained brief. Ohio State head coach Ryan Day revealed about halfway through camp that Stover would be moving back to tight end.

"At the end of the day, it was really up to him," Day said on March 29. "And I think he saw – moving forward – he's got a huge ceiling at tight end. When you look at the work he put in the past year and his skill set, he's got a chance to be a good tight end. I think he would tell you that he wants to bring that same defensive mentality to the offense, and he can do that. He's strong. He's powerful. He's athletic, got really good ball skills and was a good high school basketball player. He's back over at the tight end position and had a good couple of practices."

Day and Wilson won't call Stover's latest position change permanent but have signaled that barring a major change, this will be the fourth and final move for Stover after he opened his career at linebacker, moved briefly to defensive end, jumped to offense and then made a quick return to defense before this.

Whatever happens, the Buckeye coaches want Stover to become comfortable in his role, and they're hoping that having a set position will help his development.

"Now that he's a veteran in the program, he has a voice, and we want to put him in the best position to be successful," Day said. "There's always been conversation about it, and now that he's been there for a couple of practices, we'll continue to talk about it. But he needs to focus on something for a while in order to be successful. We can't keep bouncing around."

Day referred to a "logjam" created at linebacker because of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' scheme that includes four linemen, two linebackers and five defensive backs. Ohio State has nearly a dozen players who will fight for playing time at the second level, while the tight end position is just



COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**JUMPING AROUND — After stops at defensive end and linebacker, junior Cade Stover appears to have settled in at tight end, where he suited up as a backup in both 2020 and 2021.**

about wide open as Ruckert departs.

Still, Stover doesn't regret his second look at linebacker. He felt he needed to take one more shot, claiming he wanted to make his final decision on where to play with clear eyes and without any doubts. He offered a clear response when asked if he would have second-guessed his decision had he not taken more reps of defense.

"One-hundred percent," he said. "It had to be on my terms. I had to be at peace with it because I knew if I wasn't, then it would always be a, 'What if this was that or what if this was that?' I felt good about it. We (Day, Stover and Wilson) had many conversations, and we felt good about that."

Stover will still face plenty of competition for playing time at tight end, with freshman Bennett Christian, redshirt freshman Sam Hart, redshirt sophomores Joe Royer and Gee Scott Jr. and super senior Mitch Rossi also in the mix.

However, Rossi has been described as more of an H-back or fullback, while Ohio State feels that Royer and Scott are still in need of extra size to fit as blockers. Christian and Hart would need serious breakthroughs to find the field so soon in a position that has been veteran-heavy at Ohio State in recent seasons.

Stover has the experience and body type the Buckeyes desire for the position and looks poised to step into a more hands-on role in the offense with the coaching staff's support.

"I think he has the skills to be very, very good," Wilson said. "I probably have more respect for him after he went to defense. The way he played defense and worked out in the winter, he became one of the premier leaders of this team with the way he approached our workouts and all that."

Ohio State isn't known for significant tight-end usage in the passing game, but Stover's frame and toughness can be a vital part of the Buckeyes' rushing attack

– an area of the offense that the coaches feel could use improvement this fall after Ohio State struggled with grinding out tough yards against stronger defenses last season.

He hopes to do that by bringing a defensive tenacity to the offense. That mentality has already yielded a shift, as Stover called his performance in drills, scrimmages and workouts a "night and day" difference from last season.

"I feel a lot more comfortable," Stover said. "Down the road, if you look at tight ends and the way I move, that's what tight ends do. I don't know how many people love a 6-4, 260-pound middle linebacker anymore. I had a good time on defense, and I love playing defense. But I'm trying to bring what I did on defense over to the offense, and so far, I've done that. I'm a lot happier."

He feels, too, that Ohio State's offense is designed specifically for that kind of tight end. He wants to use his balance, leverage and strength to put opposing defenses on their heels – or, rather, on their backs.

"I want to maul people," Stover said. "Whoever is in front of you, you're just trying to really flat-out put them on their back. It's like a street fight."

"You're probably going to hear it more than you see it as far as heads knocking and helmets bashing. There's going to be a lot of energy, a lot of (stuff) flying around."

Wilson said he's looking forward to seeing Stover's physicality on the Ohio State front. But that Stover has much to learn to establish techniques that will make him a more versatile threat has been a common refrain among coaches this spring.

"My thought if he came back (to the offense) was I wasn't going to tie his hands," Wilson said. "I was going to try and get him to play with the energy and passion that he likes on defense. But we have to play under control. We can't be reckless, and we have to have some fundamentals."

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# Bucks Have Not-So Guarded Optimism For Jackson

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State sophomore Donovan Jackson is his own sharpest critic, but he also knows others will be watching just as closely when he lines up at left guard this season, his first as a starter.

"Offensive linemen are only noticed when it's not working," he said. "I would watch myself on film, and I realized I had to do better. I came in and asked other guys what I could do to get better. At the end of last year coming into this year, I had to mature as an individual and as a football player, and I felt I wasn't at that point I needed to be if I wanted to be a starter at Ohio State.

"Now I feel like I'm ready. I'm learning every day," he added. "Obviously the expectations are there, but when you come to Ohio State, there's always expectations. I don't really let that bother me too much."

The Buckeyes have been known to shuffle personnel from their natural or learned position on the line, and Jackson (6-4, 300) is no different. At one point he appeared to be slotted at right guard, and he has taken reps in the second-team tackle spots – he was a left tackle at Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal – to be used in emergency situations, but ultimately it was decided his spot for now is at left guard.

Matt Jones will be opposite him, Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones will be the left and right tackles, respectively, and Luke Wypler is the center in what is shaping up as the starting lineup.

"Having Matt and Donovan in there at guard now, it's a little bit of a different skill set and size in there," coach Ryan Day said. "In a perfect world you'd like to have a little more of the squared away, thicker guards to be able to handle some of the bull rushes and things that defenses do against bigger guys on the inside.

"That doesn't necessarily mean that it happens, but that's the idea. I think those guys will give us something on the inside this year, and that's what we're counting on."

Jackson was even used at tight end/line-man in the jumbo scheme to get him snaps as a freshman. He sees the upside of being able to fill in at multiple spots.

"We have guys who can play every position," he said. "We had Paris playing guard last year and he was phenomenal, and now he's playing tackle and he's just as good at it. I've just got to fill the expectations as an Ohio State offensive lineman, keep it going.

"If they need me to play tackle, I'll pop out to tackle."

Being a left guard means Jackson has the responsibility of protecting quarterback C.J. Stroud and creating gaps for backs such as TreVeyon Henderson.

"When the snap is going to happen, I feel like I go into some type of zone almost," said Jackson. "I feel the team is relying on me, the O-line is relying on me to get a push, Tre is relying on me to make a lane. I feel like I have to put it on my back as an Ohio State offensive lineman to get that person out of there. The strain of it is what I really appreciate."

Jackson's strength is, well, his strength.



PHOTO COURTESY OF OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

**GREAT EXPECTATIONS** — Sophomore Donovan Jackson is the presumed starter at left guard entering his second season in Columbus and has drawn praise from his coaches for maturity and intelligence beyond his years.

"He's a freak athlete," Wypler said. "He's probably one of the fastest, strongest guys I've seen at his size. It's unbelievable, and I'm just excited to be able to share a field next to him and get to see him move in action this year."

Jackson agrees with his teammate's assessment.

"I feel like I'm one of the stronger guys on the team," Jackson said. "So I feel like getting them off the ball is what I have to do as someone who's strong.

"I want to crush (my assignment). I want to run through him. I want to go to him and get to the second guy past him. But having that responsibility is what I really love."

Jackson was a five-star recruit and the No. 1 player in Texas. He was not an early enrollee in January 2021, instead arriving

on campus six months later, so this is his first spring camp.

"He's a fast learner, and he's tough and fast," Johnson said. "He's the type where he makes one mistake and then he never makes it again. I tell him all the time, 'I'm so glad you're over here.' because I can play and I'm not thinking about anything else except my job because I know that he's going to be there (doing his), whether it's a run or pass play or anything."

Offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson sees the same rapid progress in Jackson.

"He didn't practice last year like a first-year guy," the coach said. "He didn't practice like a guy that just got here out of high school. He's not practicing now like it's his first spring. He's a very mature kid – very, very smart. He's got a high cognitive ceil-

ing, but he's got a high skill set. He's got some developing to do, but he is as talented, as gifted with as high a ceiling as anybody walking on this field today. He's got a chance to be a real player."

What excites Day and his staff is the potential for growth by Jackson.

"Donovan is very athletic, very smart, a great young man," Day said. "Now it's about acquiring that discipline and skill needed to play guard at the highest level. He can do it. He's very gifted athletically, very smart and conscientious. The more reps he gets, the better he's going to be.

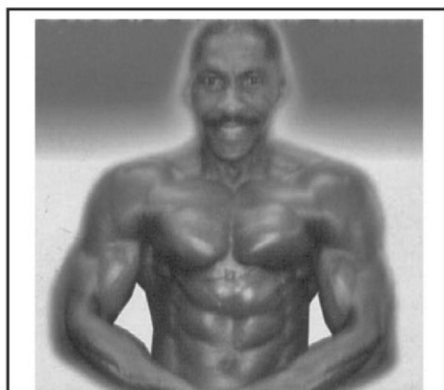
"I would say Donovan was probably offensive lineman No. 7 or 8 last year. Athletically we felt great about putting him in the game, but the experience of a true freshman who came in during the summer, didn't have a full year, that's a tough ask. I'm not saying he couldn't have done it, but that's why we had him do some of that on-the-ball tight end stuff. We felt there was something there, but we didn't want to overwhelm him."

Wilson has seen enough of Jackson to compare him to San Francisco 49ers All-Pro offensive tackle Trent Williams, whom he coached at Oklahoma.

"He's not 6-6 like him," Wilson said, "but I had a guy who plays for the 49ers named Trent Williams – he's probably the best player I've ever been around. He still is like that. It was ridiculous. Donovan's not there, but he's got some skills that are like, 'Wow, that's not an O-line skill. That's an athletic skill.' He showed up with skill, he showed up with a lot of maturity."

Wilson can't wait to see how Jackson develops this fall.

"I expect him as a first-year potential starter right now to be a guy that plays at a very high level," he said. "He is a very gifted, talented player, and not just physically. He's got some stuff in his heart. He's got a chance to be a special player."



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# South Florida Express Descends On Columbus

Ohio State held a major recruiting weekend from April 1-3 with dozens of prospects making appearances, but none more important than a certain 7-on-7 program: South Florida Express.

SFE had several coaches and players from Florida schools stop by campus, including Fort Lauderdale American Heritage five-star wide receiver Brandon Inniss (6-0, 190) and high school teammates four-star safety Daemon Fagan (6-2, 180) and four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225), Jacksonville Bartram Trail four-star cornerback Sharif Denson (5-11, 170), Titusville

ceiver Joshisa Trader (6-1, 170). Not only did these prospects get time to chat with the coaching staff and current Buckeyes, but they got to take in the Student Appreciation Day on April 2, in which Ohio State staged an open practice for students.

Recruits got to see quarterback C.J. Stroud throw all across the field to his superstar team of receivers, and with fans in attendance, the atmosphere was a taste of what things may be like in Ohio Stadium on game day if they elect to attend Ohio State.

"I thought Saturday was great," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said of Student Appreciation Day. "I think with all the students coming out, it was a great atmosphere. And it's great to feel those guys and their support. Certainly, it's year-round. I had a chance to thank them after practice, but I publicly want to thank them for all their support, the whole student body, because it means a lot to our team."

Beyond Hawkins' commitment, Ohio State has made significant inroads with the entire SFE team, and the most recent visit only helped to improve the Buckeyes' standing.

"I asked some guys in the (Woody Hayes Athletic Center) what progress was made, what happened (the weekend of April 1), if there are any commitments," Rivals.com recruiting analyst Zack Carpenter told BSB. "I was told there was no immediate payoff or no immediate commitments, whether it's the South Florida Express guys or anyone else, but there's a lot of optimism that they've made some great steps over this



SONNY BROCKWAY

**FUTURE IS BRIGHT — Ohio state wide receivers coach Brian Hartline (center) showcased his current batch of standouts to the next generation of highly touted wide receivers at Ohio State's Student Appreciation Day on April 2, including 2024 five-stars Jeremiah Smith and Joshisa Trader.**

weekend. It was huge.

"They were able to showcase Emeka (Egbuka)'s one-handed catch. They were able to showcase on the field the receiver talent they have and even though it's a loaded room, you still have this opportunity to get in there and compete for early playing time."

Receivers coach Brian Hartline was able to show off in front of the talented collection of receivers, coaching several likely future NFL draft picks in Egbuka, Marvin Harrison Jr. and, of course, Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

"Jeremiah Smith for instance, he's their No. 1 receiver target in the 2024 class, and he was talking about Hartline and seeing him for the first time coaching in person, he sees that he's not just teaching them how to run the routes," Carpenter said. "He's going out there and doing it for them to show like, 'All right, this is exactly how you break off that top step at the top of the route. There are little things like that — not just the coolness of seeing these receivers go out and

perform — but to see the nitty-gritty and talk to them after and to see exactly how Hartline teaches and coaches."

The recruits also had the chance to hang around Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, who will soon be off to the NFL but have spent plenty of time around the program of late as they prepare for the next step in their careers.

"(Ohio State) had all these five-star receivers on campus, and Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson are also in the building and talking to those guys and taking them through position meetings and breaking down a little bit of film too," Carpenter said. "It's a great strategy. There's a lot of optimism coming out of the weekend."

Ohio State is currently the leader in the 247Sports crystal ball predictions for Smith and Tate.

## Ohio Safety Hartford Commits To OSU

Ohio State gained its sixth commitment

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

Cocoa four-star safety Cedrick Hawkins (6-0, 175), who is committed to Ohio State, and Bradenton IMG Academy four-star receiver Carnell Tate (6-2, 185).

Lakeland (Fla.) Lake Gibson five-star cornerback Cormani McClain (6-1, 165), the top cornerback prospect in 2023, was also expected to visit, but according to several reports, his flight was canceled and he was unable to make the trip.

Some 2024 Florida prospects from SFE also made the trek to Columbus, including Hollywood Chaminade-Madonna Prep five-star wide receiver Jeremiah Smith (6-3, 185) and Miami Central five-star wide re-

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## 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
Malik Hartford	SAF	6-3	175	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West
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

in 2023 on April 6 when West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star safety Malik Hartford (6-3, 175) issued a verbal commitment to the Buckeyes.

Hartford is the No. 205 overall prospect and No. 20 safety in the class – though the 247Sports in-house rankings have him at No. 90 overall – and committed to Ohio State over his other top schools including Cincinnati, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Notre Dame and West Virginia.

“The overall program,” Hartford said of why he committed to Ohio State. “It’s a great program. I have plenty of opportunities going there. I want to get developed, and they can do that.”

“I’m going to be a hard worker, give effort on every play. I love the game so I’m going to give it my all.”

Hartford – who was ranked just the No. 225 prospect in November – saw his recruitment blow up as the calendar shifted to 2022. He held offers from Cincinnati, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan State, Nebraska and Purdue in early January, but after getting offered by the Buckeyes on Jan. 22, he received further offers from Michigan, Notre Dame and Tennessee in a matter of days.

He visited Ohio State in January to receive his offer and returned in early March, when he said he was much more comfortable with the new coaching staff in place. The addition of safeties coach Perry Eliano gave a boost to Ohio State because Eliano was Hartford’s recruiter at Cincinnati – which appeared to be the main competition for the Buckeyes.

“When I take a step back and think about

it, it’s all kind of surreal,” Hartford told On3 Sports after that visit. “(Ohio State) is a top program, and who wouldn’t want to play for one of those top schools? Every trip there is a great experience. The coaches always make it a great experience.”

Hartford is also the No. 4 prospect in Ohio, meaning that the Buckeyes have three of the top four in-state prospects committed. Findlay four-star offensive lineman Luke Montgomery (6-5, 270) leads the pack, while Huber Heights Wayne four-star offensive lineman Josh Padilla (6-4, 265) is the third-ranked prospect in Ohio. Mentor four-star defensive lineman Brenan Vernon (6-5, 275), No. 2 in the state, is committed to Notre Dame.

Ohio State is also in the mix to land Middletown Lakota East four-star offensive lineman Austin Sierveld (6-5, 315), who is ranked No. 347 overall and the seventh-best prospect in Ohio.

With Ohio State looking to take three safeties in this class, Hartford’s pledge leaves one spot remaining with Hawkins already in the fold. Some of the remaining targets include Danvers (Mass.) St. John’s Prep four-star Joenel Aguero (6-0, 195), Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star Caleb Downs (6-0, 185) and Fagan.

Hartford’s commitment currently gives Ohio State the No. 8 class in 2023 with 131.87 points, trailing No. 7 Louisville, No. 6 Baylor, No. 5 Georgia, No. 4 Penn State, No. 3 Arkansas, No. 2 Texas Tech and No. 1 Notre Dame, which has nine commitments and leads the class with 196.10 points.

## OL Alinen Has Bucks In Top Four

Windsor (Conn.) Loomis Chaffee School four-star offensive tackle Olaus Alinen (6-6, 315) is approaching a decision and has narrowed things down to four schools: Alabama, Georgia, Miami (Fla.) and Ohio State.

Alinen is the No. 110 overall prospect and No. 12 offensive tackle in 2023, as well as the top recruit out of Connecticut. He made his first visit to Ohio State in March.

“They’ve been recruiting me hard,” he told 247Sports. “It’s a great program. I’ve had a chance to develop a really good relationship with (offensive line coach Justin) Frye. Coach Day has been in touch frequently and I think it is a program that is going to have a good future.”

Alinen has visits scheduled to Miami (June 3), Alabama (June 10), Georgia (June 17) and Ohio State (June 23), and does not have a decision date set. While getting the final visit bodes well for the Buckeyes, both 247Sports crystal ball predictions – one from national recruiting analyst Brian Dohn, albeit from last November – for Alinen have him joining the Crimson Tide.

Ohio State offered on Dec. 16, 2021, just three weeks before former offensive line coach Greg Studrawa parted ways with Ohio State. Alabama has been the leader in Alinen’s recruitment, offering him on Nov. 12, 2021, and getting him on campus for an unofficial visit just 11 days later, so it would be a major win for Frye to enter the game late and pull the Finland native out of Connecticut.

“He combines impressive strength and athleticism,” Dohn said in a scouting report. “He is forceful with his initial punch and is physical. He plays aggressively and remains engaged on blocks and is tough for defenders to disengage. He sinks his hips and uncoils well when engaging defenders.”

## DL Overton Joins A&amp;M’s Historic Class

The saying is that the rich get richer, and

## Two 2023 Prospects To Announce April 12

As BSB was preparing to go to press, two 2023 targets for Ohio State – Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225) and Birmingham (Ala.) Briarwood Christian four-star quarterback Christopher Vizzina (6-4, 207) – announced that they would be committing on April 12. BSB will have more on their announcements in our next issue, but in the meantime, stay tuned to BuckeyeSports.com for the latest on these commitments and Ohio State’s 2023 class.

that has never been truer in college football recruiting than it is for Texas A&M’s 2022 recruiting class. After National Signing Day on Feb. 2, the Aggies had already signed the best class in terms of 247Sports composite points in modern recruiting history.

The dust appeared to have settled, and then Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton five-star defensive lineman Lebbeus Overton (6-4, 265) decided to reclassify from 2023 to 2022 on Feb. 3. He instantly became one of the top prospects in the class and named several top schools, including Georgia, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon and Texas A&M.

Though he named five schools, it appeared that only Georgia, Oregon and Texas A&M were truly in the mix as they were the only three to receive official visits, and he committed to the Aggies on April 1.

“I saw a place I can fit,” Overton told 247Sports. “I think I can make a great impact there, especially with Shemar (Stewart) and Walter (Nolen) still coming in. Playing that weakside end, that would be a great spot for me.”

With Overton joining the class, it further

Continued On Page 26

ASK AN ANALYST  
With Zack Carpenter of Rivals

**Ohio State’s spring game is set for April 16. How much of a red carpet does the staff roll out for this type of event for recruiting?**

“My expectation is that it’s going to be a lot like the (Student Appreciation Day) where it’s a recruiting showcase. They’re showing off the fans, they’re getting live reps and everything. (Student Appreciation Day), they opened up so much for an hour-long practice, and not just to give fans excitement. It’s not a coincidence that they had an explosive and electric one-hour practice session where Emeka Egbuka is catching one-handed passes and Jaxon (Smith-Njigba) is flying up the field in all the highlights.”

“It’s not a coincidence that they had all that going on while, oh, look at that, there are four- and five-star receivers that are in attendance and seven or eight other big-time priorities. I imagine it’s going to be the same way at the spring game where they’re going to want to showcase the offensive firepower they have, showing recruits that, ‘If you come here, this is who you’re going to be surrounded with.’”

**It was reported that Lakeland (Fla.) Lake Gibson five-star cornerback Cormani McClain (6-1, 165), the nation’s No. 3 overall prospect, was supposed to visit Ohio State over the weekend of April 1 but his flight was canceled and he did not make it. Do the Buckeyes still have a chance?**

“Not until he visits. I thought they were sort of a long shot before coming into the weekend. There are going to have to be some things with Tim Walton, they are going to have to show

him the way they use their corners. Walton was going to do his thing (during a potential visit), but until he visits I don’t see that happening.”

**Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225) has come on strong of late and was on campus on April 3. Lehigh Acres (Fla.) Senior five-star Richard Young (5-11, 200) is Ohio State’s No. 1 target at running back, but whom might the Buckeyes look to for a second option?**

“Richard Young is definitely the number one running back target, and he has been for a while, but they’re still looking. They’re trying to sign two running backs in this class. That’s their goal again, just like they did in the 2021 class. I don’t think it’s a situation where they would wait on Richard Young no matter what. If Mark Fletcher and Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater four-star running back Cedric Baxter Jr. wanted to commit, I am not sure that they would wait on Richard Young. Now, I don’t know that for certain, so I’m not reporting that. I do know that there’s not a ton of separation between Richard Young and some of their other guys, so I’m just not confident that they would wait on his decision.”

“I think Fletcher and Baxter both visited (the weekend of April 1), and I think a two-back class of those guys would be a home run. It would be kind of similar to TreVeyon (Henderson) and Miyan Williams, where you’ve got a power back and speed back.”

**Another guy on campus in recent weeks was Titusville (Fla.)**

**Cocoa four-star safety Cedrick Hawkins (6-0, 175), who is committed to the Buckeyes. People are often concerned about early commitments from Florida prospects and an eventual flip down the line. Do you see this as a possibility with Hawkins?**

“I do. I mean, we saw it last cycle. Jaheim Singletary commits early without having visited and then he comes up here and it’s like, ‘OK, it’s not a fit. It’s not a culture fit, not a fit with the coaches.’ Obviously, that was the previous defensive coaching staff, but it’s got to be the same concerns with Cedrick Hawkins just because of the track record of that happening. He committed out of nowhere during the first half of the Rose Bowl. Not many people saw it coming. I think even some of the Ohio State coaches were a little surprised to hear about that when they found out.”

“He did visit (the weekend of April 1), and he committed to an old coaching staff that had Kerry Coombs and Matt Barnes, so this was a crucial weekend for him to not just get up to Ohio State for his first visit, but his first time coming up to see the coaches at Ohio State. I think he’d met them previously, but to see Perry Eliano, Jim Knowles, Tim Walton in person (is important). Based on everything I’ve heard and all the returns on those guys, there’s a lot of respect that these high school players have for those guys. “With Cedrick, it was important for him to come up and meet those guys in person. I know that it was a good first meeting, but now you have to continue that and carry that forward, especially when you’re about to have a three-safety class. Do the personalities mesh between coach and player, and does the new defensive scheme and style mesh with the player? That’s what he was figuring out.”

# OHSAA Set To Vote On NIL Legislation

Continued From Page 25

extends Texas A&M's lead for the highest-rated recruiting class in modern history, now at 332.87 points. The next best is Alabama's 2021 class, which came in at 327.76 points, and Urban Meyer's 2010 class at Florida is third with 324.62 points.

In total, the Aggies signed 30 recruits in the 2022 class, with eight five-stars, 19 four-stars and three three-stars. An astounding 18 prospects check in as top-100 prospects.

## Ohio State Offers Top 2024 Prospect

The Buckeyes have offered Bradenton IMG Academy five-star cornerback Desmond Ricks (6-1, 170), the No. 1 prospect in the class of 2024 according to the 247Sports composite rankings. Ohio State issued the offer on March 29, joining over 30 Division I schools to have offered Ricks.

"It would mean a lot because they're one of the top powerhouse programs and it's a family atmosphere," Ricks told Eleven Warriors last August of potentially getting an

Ohio State offer.

Ohio State is already involved with several top prospects in 2024, including Ricks and SFE's Smith and Trader. The Buckeyes are also targeting Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 225), who was on campus in early April.

"Coach Day is a very special coach, especially when it comes to developing quarterbacks," Raiola told On3 Sports. "And the way his offense is designed creates great opportunities for success in many different ways. He was the one that offered me, and

he told me before he offered me that he's so glad that I came up for the gameday visit because he said there's something about looking a man in his eyes and speaking face to face.

"That shows a lot about how Coach Day runs his program. Respect is earned not given. I've spoken to him two other times after my visit, and I just loved talking with him about football and about when I'll come back up for my visit. Speaking with the head coach is a big deal to me. That's the head man and he runs everything around that program. To hear it directly from the source is special."

If not Raiola, then Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star quarterback Jacy Davis (6-0, 185) could be the other signal-caller in Ohio State's sights. He's made four visits to Ohio State – two coming last season for games against Oregon and Penn State – and plans to be in attendance for the spring game on April 16.

## OHSAA To Vote On NIL Rules

The Ohio High School Athletic Association will vote in May on whether or not to allow high school student-athletes to enter into commercial agreements to profit off their name, image or likeness. According to a release from the OHSAA, the bylaw would mirror the NIL changes made at the collegiate level.

"This proposed addition would now allow student-athletes to sign endorsement agreements so long as their teams, schools and/or the OHSAA logo are not used and provided there are no endorsements with companies that do not support the mission of education-based athletics (casinos, gambling, alcohol, drugs, tobacco)," the release said.

Additionally, the bylaw states that student-athletes cannot "engage in any NIL marketing/endorsements during 'official team activities'" and that the agreements should only provide money for the student-athlete and not for their school or team.

These agreements must be disclosed to the student-athlete's school, and a violation of any rules in the bylaw can lead to a loss of eligibility for the student-athlete.

Comments from the OHSAA included with the bylaw state, "The reason the proposed language is being put forth for consideration is because of the action taken by the general assembly regarding collegiate NIL contracts and the overall shift of opinions surrounding this issue. If NIL is going to enter the Ohio interscholastic landscape, the (executive director's office) wants the member schools to be the ones with the final say on the issue, as opposed to legislative intervention imposing the changes."

Much like the current rules within the college football landscape, school representatives – whether that's an athletic director, coach or booster – cannot broker deals for student-athletes. Member schools can still enter into their deals with businesses but cannot use a student-athlete's name, image or likeness.

Several states currently allow for high school students to capitalize on NIL, including Alaska, California, Kansas, Nebraska,



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Voting will take place from May 1 and will run through May 16, with the bylaw immediately going into effect if passed by a simple majority. Other potential changes being voted on include clarifying rules around students transferring schools, students at public schools playing sports at neighboring schools and adding an exception for students to transfer if they are subject to inappropriate behavior by adults.

### Archie's Grandson Commits As PWO

The next generation of Griffin is on the way to Ohio State. Lima (Ohio) Senior defensive back Dianté Griffin (5-10, 170), the grandson of two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin, committed to the Buckeyes as a preferred walk-on on April 3 as part of the 2022 class.

"My Dad, my papa Archie and my uncle Adam have all been my biggest inspirations when it comes to this game, and they all have this one thing in common," Griffin said on Twitter. "With that being said I am blessed and excited to announce that for these next years of my life, I will be accepting a walk-on opportunity to continue my academic and athletic career at The Ohio State University."

Griffin completed his senior season at Lima Senior with 10 tackles, five pass breakups and one forced fumble, and he was named an All-Three Rivers Athletic Conference second-team selection. He also played lacrosse and basketball.

He is a third-generation Buckeye. His father, Andre, was a running back at Ohio State from 1998-2001. He's also one of several from the Griffin family to play with the Buckeyes, including grandfather Archie (1972-75), father Andre, uncle Adam (2010-

13) and Archie's nephew, Kevin (1994-98). Archie's brothers Duncan and Ray also played at Ohio State.

Dianté will be one of several legacy Buckeyes walking on to the roster, joining tight end Zak Herbstreit (son of Kirk), linebacker Jalen Pace (son of Orlando) and running back Cayden Saunders (son of Cedric).

### OSU Among Top Schools For Several

Offensive line target Chase Bisontis (6-5, 290) out of Don Bosco Prep in Ramsey, N.J., released a top eight on April 2 that includes Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan State, Ohio State, Rutgers, Texas and Texas A&M.

Bisontis is 247Sports' No. 58 overall prospect and No. 5 offensive tackle in 2023. He made it to Ohio State last summer for a visit but hasn't returned since.

"I like OSU because of the top offensive linemen they've produced in the past years," Bisontis told 247Sports. "I trust Coach Day and where he could put the program. I also have some good friends on the team like (Ohio State defensive end) Tyler Friday, who went to Don Bosco, and (Ohio State offensive lineman) Luke Wypler, who is a New Jersey offensive lineman. Me and Luke talk a lot, and whenever I have a question, I can always ask him. He also talks very highly of Justin Frye."

The Buckeyes were also among the top schools for Warner Robins, Ga., five-star defensive lineman Vic Burley (6-5, 276), who released a top 12 on March 26 that included Ohio State along with Alabama, Clemson, Georgia and Tennessee, among others. He is 247Sports' No. 33 overall prospect and No. 5 defensive lineman in 2023.

Clemson and Tennessee appear to be the favorites, with a 247Sports crystal ball prediction from Steve Wiltfong for Burley to

join the Tigers.

Ohio State also found itself in the top 10 for Houston Langham Creek four-star wide receiver Jaquize Pettaway (5-11, 170) and in the top 12 for Jacksonville (Fla.) Westside four-star defensive lineman Jordan Hall (6-4, 300).

Some 2024 prospects have already started trimming down their offer lists as well. Moultrie (Ga.) Colquitt County four-star wide receiver Ny Carr (6-0, 170) had the Buckeyes among his top eight schools.

Carr's other top schools included Arkansas, Georgia, Michigan, Penn State, South Carolina, Tennessee and USC. He holds only 12 Division I offers, with Coastal Carolina, Georgia Southern, Iowa State and Western Kentucky not making the cut.

He was offered in March by Ohio State during an unofficial visit and is already planning some return trips.

"Ohio State on my meter is hot," Carr told 247Sports. "I will be back in the summer, and I will make three games: Toledo, Rutgers and Michigan."

### Dozens Expected For Spring Game

Ohio State's numerous spring visitors have been chronicled throughout the past several issues of BSB, but as a reminder, the Buckeyes are expecting to pack Ohio Stadium with prospects on April 16.

According to several reports, the following prospects are expected to be in attendance, beginning with 2023 recruits:

Hawkins, Uniontown (Pa.) Laurel Highlands four-star athlete Rodney Gallagher (5-10, 160); Folsom, Calif., four-star tight end Walker Lyons (6-4, 230); Cleveland Glenville three-star linebacker Arvell Reese (6-3, 212); Rolesville, N.C., four-star wide receiver Noah Rogers (6-1, 180); Siereveld; and

Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco five-star defensive end Matayo Uiagalele (6-4, 255).

In 2024: Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward offensive tackle Devontae Armstrong (6-5, 270); Buford, Ga., five-star wide receiver KJ Bolden (6-1, 185); Jefferson, Ga., five-star linebacker Sammy Brown (6-2, 215); Davis; and Cincinnati Princeton three-star running back TJ Engleman (5-9, 170), who is committed to Georgia Tech.

Continuing in 2024, expected are Rome, Ga., quarterback Reece Fountain (6-0, 167); McKinney, Texas, running back Bryan Jackson (5-11, 215); Westerville (Ohio) North defensive end Demetrius John (6-4, 255); Avon, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Luke Hamilton (6-5, 290); Gadsden (Ala.) City cornerback Dre Kirkpatrick Jr. (5-11, 175); Belle Vernon, Pa., five-star athlete Quinton Martin (6-2, 180); Summerville, S.C., linebacker/safety Jaidyn Penix (6-0, 192); Lakewood (Ohio) St. Edward four-star offensive tackle Ben Roebuck (6-7, 320); Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic four-star defensive end Elijah Rushing (6-5, 225); Melissa, Texas, four-star defensive lineman Nigel Smith II (6-5, 260); Cleveland Glenville four-star cornerback Bryce West (5-11, 177); King George, Va., three-star athlete Mekhai White (6-3, 182); Buford, Ga., four-star safety Tyshun White (5-11, 187); and King George, Va., four-star wide receiver Chanz Wiggins (6-3, 185).

2025 will also have some representation with Westerville (Ohio) North offensive lineman Jake Cook (6-4, 290). As always, these schedules are subject to change

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## A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

### 30 Years Ago - 1992

OSU's first verbal commitment for the 1992 class decided to attend Bowling Green instead.

Offensive lineman Chris Holbrook of St. Paris (Ohio) Graham did not sign a letter of intent in February to play with the Buckeyes because he had yet to achieve freshman eligibility under Proposition 48, a regulation that stipulated minimum high school grades and standardized test scores that student-athletes must meet in order to participate in college athletic competition.

Holbrook's original plan was to wait to enroll at OSU until he had passed either the ACT or SAT, but he said BGSU had offered him a scholarship regardless of his eligibility status.

### 25 Years Ago - 1997

It took until almost the end of the football signing period, but Ken-Yon Rambo, at long last, was officially a Buckeye.

Rambo and his family faxed a signed copy of his letter of intent to Ohio State on March 31, allowing the Buckeyes to finally rejoice about luring one of the nation's top high school wide receivers out of USC's back yard.

"We can talk about him, finally," OSU coach John Cooper said of Rambo, a product of Long Beach (Calif.) Poly. "I like Rambo. I liked him from the first time we started talking to him. He is, apparently, one of the best wide receivers in the country. He's got the height and speed. I like his attitude."

Rambo was glad to have his college choice solidified. He had favored OSU since his official visit to the school in January, but rumors persisted that USC or San Diego State would swoop in and sign him at the last minute.

### 20 Years Ago - 2002

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

Gonzalez was a standout two-way player for St. Ignatius' Division I state championship team.

"I wanted to get it out of the way early," Gonzalez told BSB. "I sat down with my parents, and we evaluated everything. We looked at all the possibilities, including the football program, the

education, how close it was to home, how well we liked the coaches and the situation of playing time.

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

### 15 Years Ago - 2007

With the OSU spring game nearing, the list of recruits planning to attend the exhibition kept expanding. Headlining the list was a group of four offensive linemen.

Dublin (Ohio) Coffman's Mike Adams (6-7, 308) was scheduled to be in attendance, as was his friend Michael Brewster (6-6, 305) of Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater. Adams was already committed to the Scarlet and Gray, while Brewster had the Buckeyes at the top of his list.

The two were set to be joined by J.B. Shugarts (6-7, 299) of Klein, Texas, who was also a friend of theirs and held an OSU offer, and Isaac Anderson of Upper Sandusky, Ohio, who had not received an offer from the Buckeyes.

### 10 Years Ago - 2012

After a quiet March, Ohio State football recruiting picked up again as the calendar turned when the Buckeyes picked up April 1 commitments from Toledo Central Catholic safety Jayme Thompson and running back Ezekiel Elliott from John Burroughs School in St. Louis.

It was Elliott, a 6-0, 195-pound prospect, who first announced his decision to join the Buckeyes.

"It was the right school for me, both for football and academically," Elliott told BuckeyeSports.com.

Elliott had rushed for 1,800 yards, had 400 receiving yards and scored 42 touchdowns as a junior. Ranked the No. 9 running back in the nation by Scout.com, the four-star prospect was a big get for OSU head coach Urban Meyer, who had repeatedly said he was in search of offensive difference-makers.

### Five Years Ago - 2017

Fairfield, Ohio, four-star offensive tackle Jackson Carman held offers from many of the elite programs in the country, but the top two schools for him were Clemson and Ohio

State.

"I would say that right now Clemson is 1A, and Ohio State is 1B," Carman said. "I was at Clemson recently, and it was great. Everyone knows the facilities and the people are great there, but what stood out to me were the players and the recruits. I like who they're recruiting and how they recruit."

"I just think I fit in there, and I just felt at home when I was there. I probably talk to the O-line coach (Robbie Caldwell) almost every day, and I can tell he cares about his players. (Head coach Dabo) Swinney and I had some long conversations in his office, and he's a great guy. I could definitely see myself being there the next four years."

The biggest difference between Clemson and OSU for the No. 1 offensive lineman in the state of Ohio? Pressure.

"I just feel more comfortable at Clemson in a sense," Carman said. "I don't feel like there's as much pressure on me at Clemson. When I go to Ohio State, people automatically assume I'm a Buckeye. I'm just making sure the people around me aren't dictating or influencing or making my decision."

### One Year Ago - 2021

Ohio State was well-represented at the Under Armour Columbus camp on April 11. Showing up at the camp were five Buckeye commits, an Ohio State coach and various other targets from the 2022, '23 and '24 classes.

Though coaches were not allowed at the camp to scout, assistant coach and running backs coach Tony Alford was there to watch his son, Braydon, a 2024 prospect at wide receiver. Another running backs coach, Indiana's Deland McCullough, was also there in support of Bloomington (Ind.) South four-star linebacker Dasan McCullough - an Ohio State pledge - as well as his brother, 2023 linebacker Daeh McCullough, who had committed to the Hoosiers on April 13.

Dasan told his brother congratulations on Twitter, while also stating "let the rumors begin" about him potentially flipping to Indiana to play with his brother and under his father. But he had consistently stayed firm in his commitment, saying at the Under Armour camp that he had never looked back on his decision to commit to Ohio State.

# Freshman Branham Will Test NBA Waters

Ohio State freshman guard Malaki Branham told ESPN on April 1 that he will enter the NBA draft but maintain his college eligibility.

"I will be testing the draft waters while keeping my college eligibility intact," Branham said. "I want to find the best situation and the right fit for me. I am staying in the draft if I'm in the first round because I believe if someone gives me four years to prove myself, I have no doubt that they will love what they're getting."

## COURT REPORT Patrick Mayhorn

Branham was one of the nation's best freshmen in 2021-22, averaging 13.7 points on 49.8 percent shooting while adding 3.6 rebounds and 2.0 assists per game. For his efforts, he was named Big Ten Freshman of the Year and third-team All-Big Ten in the coaches and media poll.

His best work came in the back end of the season as the Buckeye rotation slimmed down, scoring 16.3 points per game on 52.3 percent shooting in conference play. In Ohio State's two NCAA Tournament games, Branham racked up 37 points on 57.7 percent shooting while pulling down seven rebounds, earning himself even more buzz from the professional ranks.

"I was absolutely expecting this type of Big Ten campaign," Branham said. "I know what I'm capable of, and I work hard at it. I attribute it to me being able to settle in and see the game. As you go up in levels, the speed of the game changes, and I was able to slow things down with the help of my coaches and teammates. Breaking down film with coaches and gaining a better understanding of making the right reads, offensively and defensively, allowed me to excel even more

in the second half of the season. I believe NBA teams will learn that I'll be a sponge. No matter how things are going for me I'm willing to learn and take the time to be better. As I do those things, I can then apply what I've gained in understanding."

The highlight of his season was a 35-point outing in a win over Nebraska in which he shot 13 of 19 from the field and was 6 of 10 from deep. He had another 30-point game later in the season, posting 31 points on 10-of-14 shooting at Illinois.

"The season was exciting, we had our ups and downs, but we battled all year," Branham said. "We stayed together throughout and did our best. To receive Big Ten Freshman of the Year was definitely an honor. It showed me that the work was worth it. Advancing in the NCAA tourney was fun. I just wanted to make sure I did my part to help the team.

"I think NBA teams were able to learn that I don't quit and I'm going to work. The beginning of the season wasn't ideal for me and my standards, but the work is what got me through."

Ohio State junior E.J. Liddell had already declared for the draft, and both he and Branham are projected as first-round selections if they follow through with the NBA draft process. Branham has until June 1 to remove his name if he decides to return to Ohio State.

The NBA Draft Combine will be May 16-22, and the draft will be held on June 23.

## Sueing Returning To Ohio State

Ohio State has plenty of attrition to sort through this offseason, but it's not all bad news for head coach Chris Holtmann and the Buckeyes. After confirming the day prior that he would be playing one more season of college basketball after missing nearly all of the 2021-22 season, winger Justice Sueing announced on Twitter that he'd be doing so in Columbus.

The initial reporting from Jon Rothstein of CBS Sports had indicated that Sueing was considering all of his options, including a potential transfer away from Ohio State for his final collegiate season, but that will not come to pass.

"I can't think of anywhere else I'd rather be," Sueing said, noting that he has "unfinished business" at Ohio State.

Sueing's return is significant for the Buckeyes beyond the baseline importance of adding a veteran force to a team that, as it stood before his declaration, was assured just two seniors – Wright State transfer Tanner Holden and former walk-on Harrison Hookfin. He leaps immediately into the role of elder statesman in the Buckeye lineup and could be joined by forward Seth Towns if he chooses to make the same choice to return after missing the past season, but Sueing's value expands beyond that.

Before suffering the groin injury that severely limited him in the two games he did play and held him out of the rest of Ohio State's season, Sueing was projected as one of the best players on the roster after an encouraging opening effort in Columbus the year prior, with two seasons of strong play at California preceding his 2019 transfer.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**EARLY GOODBYE? — Freshman guard Malaki Branham confirmed on April 1 that he would be entering his name into the NBA draft and plans to return to Ohio State only if he's projected to be picked outside of the first round.**

In his first season in town, Sueing served as the No. 3 option behind Liddell and guard Duane Washington Jr., averaging 10.7 points a contest on 49.1 percent shooting while pitching in 5.5 rebounds and 1.5 assists per game. He was expected to step in as the No. 2 scorer next to Liddell in 2021, but his injury forced Branham into that role while bumping senior Justin Ahrens and sophomore Eugene Brown III into much larger roles than anticipated – especially in the latter's case – on the wings.

If his health can hold in 2022 with a full offseason of recovery and rehabilitation, Sueing's job may now be not just that of a sidekick to a star but as the outright offensive leader of the Buckeyes.

He has yet to shoulder that burden at Ohio State, but it's not a new role to the 6-7 super senior. He led Cal in scoring as a sophomore in 2018-19, scoring 14.3 points on 43.2 percent shooting from the field with 6.0 rebounds and 2.0 assists per game. That team produced four double-digit scorers and went 8-23, but directing an offensive charge is not unfamiliar to Sueing.

## Wright State G Holden Picks OSU

Holtmann has his first big get of the 2022 offseason. Staring down what could potentially be double-digit departures from the 2021-22 roster depending on the decisions of Branham and Towns – not to mention any other potential transfer out of the program – the Buckeyes entered the offseason knowing that they would be active players in the portal. And on April 2 they nabbed a major piece, picking up Holden, a guard out of Wright State.

"A couple minutes after (entering the portal), Ohio State was the first call," Holden told The Columbus Dispatch. "While I'm talking to Ohio State, other schools are calling, so it was definitely a stressful first day because your phone is blowing up. You'd rather have your phone blowing up than no one calling.

"When I went to (visit) Ohio State, it felt like home. I'm still close to home, and all the

resources we were looking for were all right there in your back pocket. It was definitely a joy to see that and to be able to have that."

Holden, a lifelong Ohio State fan, was a junior with the Raiders this past season and led them to a 22-14 record and a berth as a No. 16 in the NCAA Tournament after claiming the Horizon League title and knocking off Bryant in a First Four game. That match-up served as a bit of a coming-out party for Holden, who scored a game-high 37 points on 11-of-15 shooting, adding 11 rebounds and 14-of-16 shooting from the free-throw stripe.

It was a season of scoring for Holden, a native of Wheelersburg, Ohio, who signed with Wright State in the class of 2019. He averaged 20.1 points per game on 49.7 percent shooting from the field (34.1 percent from deep), with a 78.9 mark from the line. He also averaged 7.1 rebounds per game and pitched in 2.6 assists as an off-ball guard.

The 6-6, 185-pounder was considered one of the nation's top transfers, ranked No. 4 in the BartTorvik.com rankings, based on the player's advanced stats profile. Holden's indicate an elite, high-usage scorer (3.2 offensive box plus-minus on 27.9 usage) but a player who won't add much to the Buckeye lineup defensively (-0.9 defensive box plus-minus).

In Columbus, he could find an immediate starting role. Starting point guard Jamarie Wheeler is graduating and Branham seems a likely departure, meaning that Holden would have third-year guard Meechie Johnson Jr., Brown and freshmen Roddy Gayle and Bruce Thornton to compete with. Sueing could fill a guard spot as well but has played traditionally as more of a small forward.

## Owens Tabbed To Join Staff

According to several reports, Holtmann has hired former Miami (Ohio) head coach Jack Owens to fill one of two open assistant coaching positions in the program.

Owens spent the last five seasons as

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coach of the RedHawks, collecting a 70-83 record. Before his time at Miami, Owens worked under Matt Painter at Purdue for nine seasons, spending three seasons as an assistant coach and six as associate head coach. The Boilermakers made the tournament seven times with Owens on staff.

Before West Lafayette, Owens was an assistant for five seasons at Southern Illinois and spent time at his alma mater, Eastern Illinois, as well as Barton County Community College and Howard Community College, where he got his start in coaching. He played college basketball at Murray State and Howard Community College before finishing his collegiate career at Eastern Illinois, averaging 11.7 and 6.5 assists per game as a senior.

Owens and Miami agreed to part ways following this most recent season in which the RedHawks finished 14-18. Owens was replaced by former Xavier coach Travis Steele.

Owens' hiring leaves Ohio State with one more assistant coaching hire to make. Former assistant Ryan Pedon left to become the coach at Illinois State, and Tony Skinn left to join Kevin Willard's staff at Maryland. In-house assistant Jake Diebler is taking Pedon's responsibilities as offensive coordinator. Owens is expected to replace Skinn as Ohio State's shooting and advanced scouting coach.

A top candidate to fill that other spot is reportedly internal pick Mike Netti. Netti is a longtime Holtmann assistant, back to his days at Gardner-Webb, and has served as the special assistant to the head coach since Holtmann took over at Ohio State.

## Ahrens To Transfer From Ohio State

Ahrens will be using his COVID year of eligibility, but he won't be doing it in Columbus. The Versailles, Ohio, native announced on April 4 that he'll be entering the transfer portal as a graduate and playing his final season elsewhere after four years with the Buckeyes.

"These past four years have been nothing short of the best times of my life," Ahrens wrote on Twitter. "I want to thank my family and those who have supported me along this journey. I'm extremely grateful for my teammates, all of the relationships I have made, and I want to personally thank Coach Holtmann and his staff for giving me the opportunity to represent The Ohio State University, it has been a blessing and I thank God I was given the opportunity."

"I am excited for the next chapter, wherever that may be!"

Ahrens was not expected back in the scarlet and gray for the 2022-23 season. He was recognized along with six others on senior day despite his remaining season of eligibility and had all but announced that his time with the Buckeyes was coming to a close, though he had not made clear if he planned to test the professional waters, step away from basketball or head elsewhere for one more season.

He averaged 4.8 points, 2.3 rebounds and 0.8 assists per game in 2021, starting in 19 games and playing in all 32, though he saw his playing time dwindle as the season waned. His struggles in shooting – 34.6 percent from the field and 35.4 percent from

three-point range – severely limited his offensive capacity as Ohio State's de facto sharpshooter, and as he struggled to break from a drought that took hold as the Buckeyes returned from a 22-day COVID rest in January, Ohio State looked elsewhere to fill his minutes.

Still, Holtmann consistently praised Ahrens' work ethic and considered him a leader on the team.

"I know how much work he has put in," Holtmann said in February. "He's a phenomenal kid, a pro's pro, an incredible kid and an incredible teammate. I told the team, he played however many minutes against Purdue (on Jan. 31). Nine, 10, maybe 11 minutes. Not much. I don't think he scored. And yet you would never have noticed any difference in Justin Ahrens the next time we came to practice. He was the loudest, the most energized, the best talker in practice, and that is a mature kid. When I talk about a pro's pro, that's exactly what it looks like."

Had he returned, it might have been as a reserve with Sueing returning to Columbus and Brown back as well, joined by Gayle and freshman Bowen Hardman and with the new addition of Holden – all of whom can play at shooting guard or small forward, Ahrens' usual stomping grounds.

He finishes his Ohio State career with 487 points in 114 career games, having started in 41 of them. He was the last remaining member of the 2018 recruiting class, Holtmann's first full cycle in Columbus, but his recruitment to Ohio State began a year prior under the guidance of Thad Matta.

With Matta now at Butler, Ahrens could be a target in the portal there. He could also see interest from several Buckeye assistants turned head coaches, including Elon's Mike Schrage or Pedon, who departed after this past season and was Ahrens' primary recruiter at Ohio State. Skinn, now in the same role at Maryland, could be in the market as well as he and Willard look to flesh out a depleted roster.

## Matta Returning To Butler As HC

After five seasons out of the spotlight – four spent in retirement and one, the 2021 season, as the associate athletic director for basketball at Indiana – Matta was announced on April 3 as the new head coach at Butler.

"The success that Thad has achieved at every one of his programs speaks for itself," Butler athletic director Barry Collier said. "He is a championship-caliber coach and recruiter who brings valuable experience and contagious energy to Butler. I have seen that personally in Thad as a player, assistant coach and head coach. The Matta Family – Thad, Barb, Ali and Emily – has a deep appreciation for Butler, and I know they join all of the Butler community in how excited we are for what's to come."

Matta began his head coaching career at Butler in 2000-01 with a 24-8 campaign before jumping to Xavier and eventually Ohio State. He spent 13 seasons with the Buckeyes, appearing once in the national title game, twice in the Final Four, three times in the Elite Eight and five times in

the Sweet 16 in nine NCAA Tournament berths. He also won the NIT in 2008 and claimed six conference titles, either regular season or conference tournament (and three times as both).

His time in Columbus came to an end after the 2016-17 season, a 17-15 showing and his first season in Columbus without a postseason berth since his first season in 2004-05, when the team went 20-12 but was ineligible. He finished his tenure with the second-best winning percentage in school history (73.3 percent) behind only Thomas Kibler (91.7 percent in two seasons).

He resigned after the 2017 season, making clear that the move was not originally his idea in his farewell press conference, after several years of struggles on and off the court with back issues that hampered his ability to recruit and coach. He underwent back surgery in 2007 and has faced complications from it since. But, after a year with the Hoosiers, he's indicated that he's comfortable enough with his health to return to the sidelines.

"Butler is a special place, one that Barb, Ali, Emily and I each chose as our school," Matta said. "I'm grateful for the opportunity to return to Butler and lead our men's basketball program. There is a solid foundation in place, and I'm confident that Butler will consistently be among the top programs in the Big East. I can't wait to attack the work we have in front of us and to be back on the sidelines at Hinkle Fieldhouse."

Matta's career all but started at Butler. He was a two-year starter for the Bulldogs

in 1988-89 and 1989-90 after transferring from Southern Illinois and had two separate stints as an assistant in 1991-94 and 1997-00 before taking over for Collier – who had coached Matta in his final season and twice hired him – as he departed for Nebraska. He returned as Butler's AD in 2006 and has filled the role since. The two live across the street from each other and have maintained a strong connection.

Still, returning to the game was not a given for Matta according to ESPN's Jeff Borzello, who tweeted that efforts between Butler and Matta had all but stagnated before former head coach LaVall Jordan was fired on April 1.

"Word in the industry back in February was that Butler had sounded out a potential return for Thad Matta, and there didn't seem to be much momentum for it," Borzello tweeted. "Perhaps he would come back to Butler, but not in a coaching role. Things began to shift on (April 1), though, and now he's back."

The Bulldogs went just 83-74 in five seasons under Jordan, and Matta will inherit a bunch that went 10-15 in 2020 and 14-19 in 2021. Jordan made one NCAA Tournament (2017-18) and won 20 games just twice (2017-18, 2019-20) as Butler has struggled to find its place in the Big East, which it joined in 2013-14 and has yet to win – though it did finish second twice, both times under Holtmann, who preceded Jordan and replaced Matta in Columbus.

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# Sweet 16 Run Motivation For Mikesell's Return

Ohio State senior guard Taylor Mikesell spoke March 30 for the first time since electing to return to the Buckeyes for a fifth season, and she said the team's run to the Sweet 16 was a motivating factor in her return.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

"I think just getting that close and knowing that we had what it takes to win that Sweet 16 game, and then looking even to Stanford and knowing that we were talented enough to play with them is obviously really motivating," she said. "I took that into account. I'm just looking forward to next year and the returners that we have coming back and what we're capable of accomplishing."

Mikesell transferred to Ohio State this past offseason from Oregon and slotted right into the starting lineup, helping lead the Buckeyes to a Big Ten co-championship and the school's first Sweet 16 appearance since 2017.

She was one of the nation's best three-point shooters this season, and for that reason, it was in the cards for her to explore declaring for the WNBA draft, scheduled for April 11. A 47.5 percent shooter from

deep would certainly receive plenty of draft consideration, and it made the decision difficult for Mikesell.

"I went back and forth every single day, honestly. I was kind of 50/50, weighed my options a little bit," she said. "Some days I thought it was best for me to stay. Some days I thought it would be best for me to enter the draft. Once we started the tournament, I wanted to be present for the tournament and not worry about what was going to happen next year, months from now, whatever it was."

Mikesell said the coaching staff was great as she contemplated staying or going, and she said they wanted her to do what was best for her.

"Them bringing me in here was a blessing for me, just being able to redevelop the love I had for the game and just coming here to be closer to home and everything, I think it's been a great journey," the Massillon, Ohio, product said. "I think that was just on par with how they've been all year with me. Just super accepting, super willing to help with whatever I needed. Once I decided to come back, I called them right away and made it clear that I wanted to come back."

Mikesell said she didn't go into this past season thinking about an additional year, but as the season progressed and she began getting feedback from the WNBA, a fifth season presented itself as an option.

The return will be welcome in Columbus, as she and soon-to-be senior guard Jacy Sheldon will operate in one of the country's



SONNY BROCKWAY

**ONE MORE — Guard Taylor Mikesell (24) cited Ohio State's run to the Sweet 16 as a primary motivator behind her decision to return to Columbus.**

best backcourts, and that's before considering the expected return of guard Madison Greene.

"She's been working, just trying to get back on the court every single day," Mikesell said of Greene. "I actually got to play with her a little bit in AAU, I played with her my junior year of high school. I'm excited to play with her again and see how much better we're going to be with her on the court."

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff is also excited for Mikesell's return and seeing what she can bring to the team in her second season with the Buckeyes.

"I'm incredibly excited to welcome Taylor Mikesell back for another season," McGuff said. "She's obviously a terrific player and an even better person. I'm looking forward to another impactful season from her."

### Sophomore Guard Jones To Transfer

Ohio State sophomore guard Anyssa Jones confirmed on March 29 that she will enter the transfer portal. Jones was a three-star prospect out of Westerville, Ohio, and a member of Ohio State's class of 2020.

In two seasons with Ohio State, Jones appeared in 15 games, averaging under five minutes and under one point per game. She mostly appeared in the final minutes of games and rarely saw extended minutes, with a career high of 10 minutes played in Ohio State's 110-58 win over Bellarmine this past season.

She appeared just once in the back half of the season, checking in during Ohio State's game against Wisconsin on Feb. 20. She had not played since facing Alabama State on Dec. 15.

Jones is the second transfer out of the program this offseason, joining sophomore guard Kateri Poole. Even with the transfer of two guards, Ohio State's roster still heavily favors the backcourt with return and two guards joining in the 2022 class.

### Miller Says Goodbye To Ohio State

Senior guard Braxtin Miller played in her final game in Ohio State's loss to Texas in the Sweet 16, and just days after the loss, she penned a letter reflecting on her time with the Buckeyes.

Miller, a native of Dayton, spent her first two seasons at Oklahoma State before transferring to Ohio State prior to the 2019-20 season. She joined the Buckeyes with two years of eligibility remaining but received an extra year due to the pandemic.

Now, after spending the last three years close to home, she's thankful for the support of her coaches and fans as she reflects on her career.

"I feel so blessed to be a Buckeye and have represented this university," she said in a statement posted on social media. "I feel even more blessed to be a part of a team that became my best friends. I couldn't have survived without them and even though I'm so sad it's over, I can't wait to watch them be great on their own journey now."

"To my teammates – my annoying little children – thank you for trusting me, giving me the best laughs and memories and being the best family I could ask for. You guys helped me climb mountains you didn't even know. I love you all so much"

Miller, wanting to "turn the page the right way and on (her) terms," also spoke

## Plank's Cafe



**Braxtin Miller**  
Senior Guard  
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## WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

about the circumstances of her transfer from Oklahoma State due to a "severe domestic violence relationship."

"I went from a happy and hopeful teen, starting as a freshman, winning many accolades and being a leading scorer, to finding myself depressed, distraught, and wondering if and how I would ever make it out of this situation knowing basketball must go on the back burner," she said. "When I transferred to Ohio State I was a totally different person. Timid, severe social anxiety and a complete loss of trust of anyone. I knew basketball couldn't be what I loved most anymore because I had to learn to love me first again.

"I dropped off, became a role player, but started to heal and find myself. There were many ups and downs, but I began to grow and recognize myself as no longer a victim of domestic violence, but a strong and hopeful survivor. In these three years, however, I had so many ask me, 'What happened?' and, 'Why I wasn't the player I was at Oklahoma State?' as I was wanting so bad to tell everyone the nightmare I was suffering in. I wasn't ready and never gave much of an answer (and would) rather be quiet and let the public talk.

"Now, ending my career, I want to say to all the people wondering, 'How I got here as a player' and telling me I'm, 'Not cut out like that,' to be kind to others. You never know what one is going through in the shadows. There were so many times through my recovery I could have quit, dropped out, gave up, but I didn't. I don't have it all figured out, and I still have bad days, but I'm stronger and better than I could have ever imagined myself to be."

Miller said to anyone who has battled or is battling domestic violence that she understands and believes them.

"You can and will get through this and out of that situation," she said. "It's far from easy, but you are worth it. You are so much stronger than you believe yourself to be."

### Williams-Jeter Named Coach At UD

Former Ohio State women's basketball assistant Tamika Williams-Jeter was announced March 26 as the new head coach of the Dayton women's basketball team. A Dayton native, Williams-Jeter is returning home to become the 10th coach in program history.

"Dayton represents my family, my foundation, and my heart," Williams-Jeter said. "The University of Dayton is a stellar academic institution immersed in a vibrant community where excellence is a standard. I am excited and honored to have the opportunity to lead this program full of phenomenal young women. I am grateful to President (Eric) Spina, (UD vice president and director of athletics) Neil Sullivan, and (senior associate A.D.) Angie Petrovic for giving me the opportunity to continue to guide UD women's basketball to greatness. Lastly, I want to thank my husband, Richard Jeter, for allowing me to bring my sons back to the city that made me."

Williams-Jeter spent last season as head coach of Wittenberg in Division III, finishing with an 18-8 record, an NCAC tournament championship and an NCAA Division III tournament berth.

Before her first head coaching stint, she

was at Ohio State from 2002-08 as a graduate assistant and an assistant coach, then coached at Kansas, Kentucky and Penn State before returning to the Buckeyes from 2019-21.

She played college ball at UConn, winning two national championships in 2000 and 2002, averaging 10.6 points and 5.8 rebounds per game in her four-year career. She was then drafted with the No. 6 overall pick in the 2002 WNBA draft by the Minnesota Lynx, where she spent six seasons before a one-year stint with the Connecticut Suns.

With Williams-Jeter's hiring, it expands the coaching tree of Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff, who is now up to at least 11 former assistants who have gone on to earn head coaching positions.

Though not all assistant coaching data is available from McGuff's time at Xavier from 2002-11, he had at least three go on to become Division I head coaches, including Mike Bradbury (Morehead State, 2007-10; Wright State, 2010-16; New Mexico, 2016-present), Tasha Pointer (University of Illinois at Chicago, 2018-22) and Amy Waugh (Xavier, 2011-13). Assistant Amber Stocks also became head coach of the WNBA's Chicago Sky for two seasons from 2017-18.

From his two seasons at Washington in 2011-13, McGuff had three assistants go on to become head coaches. That includes Mike Neighbors, who also coached under McGuff at Xavier and went on to become the head coach for Washington (2013-17) and then Arkansas (2017-present), Adia Barnes (Arizona, 2016-present) and Fred Castro (Eastern Michigan, 2016-present).

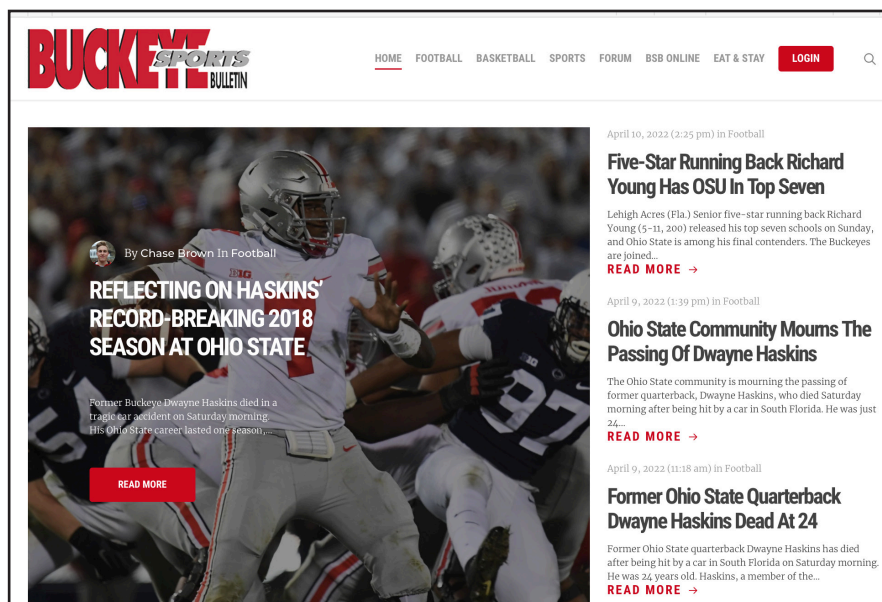
In his nine seasons at Ohio State, McGuff has had four former assistants – Williams-Jeter included – take head coaching positions. The others are Carrie Banks (Omaha, 2020-present), Simon Harris (East Tennessee State, 2021-present) and Jennifer Sullivan (Florida Atlantic, 2021-present). Former assistant Mark Mitchell, father of former Ohio State great Kelsey Mitchell, is also the head coach of the Wilberforce men's basketball team, an NAIA program.

### Miller Is March's Lady Buck Of The Month

She didn't lead the team in scoring like Mikesell or Sheldon – who alternated as recipients of the Plank's Lady Buck of the Month award this season – but Miller was undoubtedly at the heart of this Ohio State team this past season and helped to provide veteran leadership during the Buckeyes' tournament run. For those contributions, Miller has earned the Plank's Lady Buck of the Month award for March.

Miller started in all but one of Ohio State's games last season, averaging over 30 minutes and 6.6 points per contest. In March, she played in two Big Ten tournament games and three NCAA tournament games, scoring 35 points and pulling down 19 rebounds, helping Ohio State to a 1-1 trip to the conference tournament and two NCAA tournament wins before falling to Texas.

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The screenshot shows the Buckeye Sports Bulletin website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for HOME, FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL, SPORTS, FORUM, BSB ONLINE, and EAT & STAY, along with a LOGIN button and a search icon. Below the navigation is a large featured article titled "REFLECTING ON HASKINS' RECORD-BREAKING 2018 SEASON AT OHIO STATE" by Chase Brown in Football. To the right of this article is a list of other news items, including "Five-Star Running Back Richard Young Has OSU In Top Seven", "Ohio State Community Mourns The Passing Of Dwayne Haskins", and "Former Ohio State Quarterback Dwayne Haskins Dead At 24". Each article has a "READ MORE" link.

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# Terrapins Hit Hard By Portal Departures

The week of April 4 was not kind to the Maryland women's basketball program that head coach Brenda Frese has shaped into a perennial Big Ten and national contender.

## BIG TEN NOTES Patrick Mayhorn

Only a few weeks removed from a season-ending 72-66 loss to Stanford in the Sweet 16, the Terps have seen five athletes enter the transfer portal, including the 2021-22 team's top two players.

Point guard Ashley Owusu kicked off the attrition on the morning of April 5, announcing her intention to finish her career elsewhere after three seasons with Maryland.

"I have never started anything I haven't

finished, and finishing was the plan when I decided to come to College Park," Owusu shared on Twitter. "My goal was to have a great career here and to win a national championship alongside an amazing team. I could picture my jersey hanging up in the rafters at the Xfinity Center.

"Unfortunately, events that have transpired off the court this year have led me to make the very difficult decision to continue my education and my basketball career elsewhere. I want to thank the University of Maryland, my teammates and Terp Nation for accepting me and supporting me for the past three seasons. I ask that you please respect my privacy and pray for me and my family as I place my name in the transfer portal."

Owusu was the director of Maryland's offense for essentially all three of her years in town, ranking fifth in the nation in assists with 171 (5.9 per game) while adding 17.9 points and 5.6 rebounds per game

to earn third-team All-America honors in 2020. She saw a slight statistical decline this season, averaging 14.2 points and 3.7 assists – both second on the team.

According to InsideMDSports.com, Owusu and Frese butted heads on and off the court.

"From what I'm told, (Owusu's) family was very insistent about how she was managed on and off the court, and the relationship fell apart," 247Sports' Jeff Ermann wrote. "That explains why many have said she seemed tuned out and distant during games."

Later that same day, leading scorer and 2021-22 third-team All-American forward Angel Reese announced that she too would be entering the portal after two highly impactful seasons as a Terrapin. Ermann reported that her issues too were largely with Frese and that the two saw differently Reese's best placement on the floor. The former No. 2 overall recruit in 2020, Reese wants to spend more time on the perimeter in her next spot after serving almost exclusively on the inside with Maryland, averaging 17.7 points and 10.6 rebounds per game as a sophomore.

The Maryland pair were immediately placed as the top two players in The Athletic's ranking of players in the women's basketball portal, with Reese leading the way.

"Reese led Maryland in points and rebounds this season and would be a productive addition to every roster in the country," Chantel Jennings of The Athletic wrote. "At 6-3, she has good size, and though she still needs to mature a bit (of her three fouls per game some could be categorized 'immaturity fouls'), she has three seasons of eligibility remaining. When the Baltimore native picked Maryland, it was a no-brainer, but with Reese back on the market – with college production to show – it'll be fascinating to see where she lands."

Their departures leave Frese with just one returning starter, guard Diamond Miller, who will undergo offseason knee surgery requiring 3-6 months of recovery. Katie Benzan and Chloe Bibby, who filled out the rest of the lineup, are graduating.

The Terps weren't done losing talent to the portal, though. Redshirt junior forward Mimi Collins, a former transfer from Tennessee who started at Maryland in 2020-21 and came off the bench this past season, announced on April 6 that she is also entering the portal. Kareem Copeland of The Washington Post reported that her decision is "education-based." She averaged 7.9 points and 4.8 rebounds per game.

Joining her on April 6, reserves Taisiya Kozlova and Channise Lewis also announced their intentions to enter the portal.

"We wish these student-athletes all the best as they continue their basketball careers and education elsewhere," Frese said. "Every team has been impacted by the transfer portal on both ends of it. Maryland basketball is bigger than any one lineup or person. Our staff is committed to bringing the best student-athletes to Maryland."

New men's head coach Kevin Willard has largely kept his team together, but big man Qudus Wahab is in the portal after just one season in town. He transferred in from Georgetown last offseason and averaged 7.7 points, 5.6 rebounds and 0.8 blocks per game for the Terps while starting 31 of 32 games.

"Personally, I would like to thank the University of Maryland for welcoming me and giving me the opportunity to represent the school," Wahab said in his announcement. "I would also like to thank Coach (Mark) Turgeon, Coach (Danny) Manning, assistant coaches, graduate assistants, tutors, managers, administrative staff, and especially my teammates for sticking and fighting through all the adversities we faced all season long.

"After speaking with the new coaching staff, I believe it's of my best interest to enter my name in the portal while keeping my options open for the possibility of returning to the University of Maryland."

Willard has managed to dodge a potential transfer behind Wahab in the big man rotation, though, as Julian Reese – brother of Angel – is confirmed to be returning for his sophomore season after averaging 5.7 points and 4.4 rebounds as a freshman.

"Julian is not transferring this year," Julian's mother, also named Angel, told InsideMDSports. "That's not even on his mind."

Finally, on the gridiron, Mike Locksley has a pair of highly touted defensive recruits to replace. On March 28, rising sophomore edge rusher Demeioun Robinson, a four-star in the class of 2021, announced that he would be entering the portal. He played in all 13 games as a true freshman, tallying 19 tackles, 2½ tackles for loss and two sacks.

On April 8, rising sophomore defensive tackle Darrell Jackson announced his departure as well. A three-star in the class of 2021, Jackson also played in all 13 games, racking up 22 tackles.

These departures continue the decimation of what was at the time considered the No. 18 class in the nation. Five-star linebacker Terrance Lewis, the top player in the class, has transferred to UCF, while four-star linebacker Braden Jennings departed for Kansas State. With Robinson also gone, the top three members of the class are no longer with Maryland, and Jackson makes it four of the top 10 after one season.

"It didn't come as a surprise," Locksley said of the losses. "As I've said before, we have to recruit our current roster. You have to recruit sophomores, juniors and seniors. We're recruiting all the time. And we hate to see players leave our program, but as I've said before, this is the landscape of college football. The transfer portal giveth and taketh away. I'm sure we'll enjoy the fruits of the transfer portal during my time here."

## IU Guard Arrested After Car Chase

Indiana basketball senior guard Xavier Johnson was arrested on the morning of April 3 and charged with resisting law

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## Other Maryland Teams Also Face Transfers

Frese's squad isn't the only one in College Park facing attrition in the portal.



enforcement and reckless driving, according to Monroe County Correctional Center records obtained by The Indianapolis Star. He was released on bond that day.

According to a report from Ashley Fowler of WISH-TV, Johnson was engaged in a high-speed chase and refused to stop.

"Just after 3 a.m. Sunday, a Monroe County sheriff's deputy saw a Dodge Charger going 90 mph on North Walnut Street, a main thoroughfare through downtown Bloomington," Fowler reported. The deputy tried to pull the Charger over, but the driver refused to stop. The car drove into a parking lot at an apartment complex and ran a stop sign while trying to get away from the deputy.

"The car eventually stopped, and the deputy saw Johnson, 22, get out of the car and switch seats with a passenger, identified by police as Lee Marriotti."

Indiana released a statement on the incident but has issued no further information on Johnson's status. IU guard Parker Stewart, who is transferring from the program, was also in the vehicle but was not charged.

"Indiana University and the men's basketball program are aware of the charges involving Xavier Johnson," a team statement said. "IU Athletics will continue to gather facts, cooperate with and monitor the legal process, and take further action as the evolving situation warrants."

Johnson, the projected starter at point guard for the 2022-23 season, averaged 12.1 points per game and led the team with 5.1 assists per game. This past season was

his first with the Hoosiers after transferring from Pittsburgh last offseason.

**Illini Land  
Five-Star G**

Illinois added a cornerstone piece to its 2022 basketball signing class, jumping to No. 8 in the country and No. 3 in the Big Ten behind Ohio State and Michigan, with the addition of five-star Montverde (Fla.) Academy point guard Skyy Clark on April 7. The No. 27 player in the nation, Clark joins a class of three four-star prospects in Champaign (combo guard Jayden Epps, shooting guard Sencire Harris and power forward Ty Rodgers).

Only a month prior, Clark looked to be heading to Kentucky, where he had been committed since Oct. 22, 2020, and signed since Nov. 10, 2021. However, on March 6, 2022, he announced that he was reopening his recruitment after requesting and receiving a release from UK, with a top six of Illinois, Louisville, Maryland, Tennessee, USC and Washington. After conducting visits over the following month, he landed on the Fighting Illini, citing relationships with several Illinois coaches.

"(Illinois has a) super fiery coach (head coach Brad Underwood)," Clark told ESPN. "He makes you uncomfortable in practice so you will be comfortable on the road in Big Ten games. He lets his guards play, and he is a proven winner who I believe will help get me prepared for the next level.

"Adam Fletcher, the strength and conditioning coach, he was a big reason why

I chose Illinois. I believe he will help me get my body right and help me become the best version of myself athletically. He not only gives you a plan, he goes through the process with you. Also, assistant coach Tim Anderson. He is like an uncle to me. He recruited me in the eighth grade when I committed to DePaul."

Clark, who has spent the past year recovering from a July ACL tear, will look to slot into the Illinois lineup from day one with the departure of volatile but talented guard Andre Curbelo, who announced his intent to transfer on March 28.

Illinois was picked No. 17 in ESPN's Way-Too-Early 2022 college basketball rankings and could be in for a jump with Clark in the fold if center Kofi Cockburn decides to return.

"Another key pivot point in the pre-season rankings for next season will be whether Kofi Cockburn comes back to Champaign for another go-round," ESPN's Jeff Borzello wrote. "Because he's not projected to be selected, we have him returning – and that's essentially the lone reason Illinois is ranked in the top 25 right now.

"But Cockburn has made his NBA decision late in the process the past couple of years, and he might decide it's time to move on regardless of draft status. If that happens, Brad Underwood potentially has a huge rebuild on his hands with Alfonso Plummer, Trent Frazier, Da'Monte Williams and Jacob Grandison all seniors this past season. It's no surprise the Fighting Illini are in the mix for several remaining high schoolers and transfer targets."

No. 11 Michigan, No. 21 Indiana and No. 23 Purdue are the only other Big Ten teams included in the rankings, with Ohio State listed behind only Virginia among the "next in line" group outside of the top 25.

**Indiana Adds  
Wrestling Royalty**

Indiana football isn't getting into the professional wrestling business – at least not yet – but it has signed a member of wrestling's royal family as a walk-on in the class of 2022. Declan McMahon, the son of Shane McMahon and grandson of Vince McMahon – both of WWE fame – announced April 6 that he accepted a priority walk-on position from Hoosier head coach Tom Allen as a running back out of Brooklyn (N.Y.) Poly Prep Country Day.

He also had offers from East Carolina and Fordham and had most recently visited Duke and Rutgers.

The eldest McMahon, now 76 years old, is the chairman and CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE).

He was in the news only a few days prior to his grandson's commitment for making his first return to the ring in over a decade at WrestleMania 38, defeating former West Virginia punter Pat McAfee before toasting with longtime rival Steve Austin – who later hit his former boss with his signature "stunner" move. Shane has been in the wrestling business himself for more than 30 years.

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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 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; 3rd/5 **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. **31** NCAA Auburn Regional, 3rd

**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.

## 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: W 189-111; Women: W 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 (20-2)

**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 4-3; **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 4-0; **25** ILLINOIS, W 4-0; **27** NORTHWESTERN, W 4-0.

**April 1** at Indiana, W 4-0; **3** at Purdue, W 4-0; **9** at Penn State, 4-0; **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 (14-4)

**Jan. 21** Duke, L 4-3; **23** NC State, L 4-3; **29** ITA Kickoff vs. OKLAHOMA STATE, W 4-1; **30** ITA Kickoff vs. TENNESSEE, W 4-0.

**Feb. 11** North Carolina, L 4-1; **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, W 4-3; **3** MICHIGAN STATE, W 4-0; **8** NORTHWESTERN, W 5-2; **10** at Purdue, W 4-0; **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.

## BASEBALL (11-17)

**Feb. 18** Marshall, W 15-4; **19-20** Indiana State, W 9-3, W 9-8; **21** BYU, L 9-6; **25-27** at Texas State, L 9-1, L 8-5, L 6-4;

**March 2** at Cincinnati, L 5-4; **4-6** at Armed Forces Invitational, Campbell, L 7-2; Pitt, L 6-5; Army, W 12-7; **11** West Virginia, W 10-4, L 6-7 **14** MARSHALL, W 14-2; **17-20** at UNC Wilmington, L 12-4, W 9-7, L 2-0, L 7-2; **22** WRIGHT STATE, W 7-5 **25** at Purdue, L 7-5; **30** TOLEDO, L 7-6;

**April 1-3** NEBRASKA, L 5-3, L 10-5, L 17-5; **5** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 5-4; **9-10** MICHIGAN STATE, W 13-5, L 10-8, W 8-7; **12** at Dayton, 7 p.m.; **15-17** at Maryland, 6:30 p.m., 2 p.m., 1 p.m.; **19** MARSHALL, 6:05 p.m.; **22-24** at Michigan, 6 p.m., 2 p.m., 1 p.m. **29-30** RUTGERS, 6:05 p.m., 3:05 p.m.;

**May 1** RUTGERS, 12:05 p.m.; **4** at Kent State, 6 p.m.; **6-8** at Northwestern, 4 p.m.,

3 p.m., 2 p.m.; **10-11** CAMPBELL 6:05 p.m., 3:05 p.m., **13-15** PENN STATE 6:05 p.m., 3:05 p.m., 1:05 p.m.; **17** CINCINNATI, 6:05 p.m.; **19-21** USC UPSTATE, 6:05 p.m.; **25** Big Ten Tournament at Omaha, Nebraska

## SOFTBALL (23-10)

**Feb. 11** Northern Illinois, W 8-1; **12** Louisville, W 8-5; Bethune Cookman, W 7-2; **18** Butler, W 1-0; South Alabama, W 4-2; **19** Liberty, L 3-2; Stetson, W 10-2; 20 North Carolina, W 5-2; **25** Virginia Tech, L 1-0; **26** South Carolina, W 6-2; Troy, L 4-0; **27** Miami (Ohio), W 5-4;

**March 11** Stony Brook, W 6-3; **12** Army, 14-0; **13** UMass, W 8-0; South Florida, W 5-0; **15** Central Florida, L 11-3; **17** Lehigh, W 9-1; South Florida, L 5-0; **18** Canisus, W 3-0; St. Thomas, W 5-2; **19** South Florida, W 9-0; **22** at Ohio, W 6-1; **25** INDIANA, W 6-2, L 17-5; **26** INDIANA, W 6-4; **29** at Kentucky, W 3-0;

**April 1-3** at Michigan State, W 3-0, L 2-1, W 2-1; **8-10** NORTHWESTERN, L 12-3, L 9-8, L 7-1; **12** TOLEDO, 4 p.m.; **15-17** at Iowa, 5 p.m., 2 p.m., 12 p.m.; **19** PENN STATE, 3 p.m., 5:30 p.m.; **22-24** at Michigan, 6 p.m., 2 p.m., 1 p.m. **29-30** NEBRASKA, 6 p.m., 2 p.m.

**May 1** NEBRASKA, 12 p.m. **6-8** at Maryland, 6 p.m., 2 p.m., 1 p.m. **11-14** Big Ten Tournament at East Lansing, Michigan

## MEN'S VOLLEYBALL (13-13)

**Jan 7-8** CENTRAL STATE, W 3-0, W 3-0; **12** ST. FRANCIS UNIVERSITY, W 3-0; **21** at UCLA, L 2-3; at USC, W 3-1; **28** at Long Beach State, L 1-3; **29** at UC Santa Barbara, L 3-1;

**Feb 10** at McKendree, L 3-1 **12** at Lewis, L 3-1; **17** LOYOLA CHICAGO, L 3-2; **20** PURDUE FORT WAYNE, W 3-0; **24** QUINCY, W 3-0; **25** LINDENWOOD, W 3-0;

**March 5-6** LINCOLN MEMORIAL, W 3-0, W 3-0; **8** PENN STATE, L 3-0; **12** at St. Francis University, L 3-1; **13** at Penn State, L 3-1; **16** BALL STATE, L 3-2; **19** at Ball State, L 3-1; **25** at Lindenwood, L 3-2; **26** at Quincy, W 3-0; **31** LEWIS, L 3-1;

**April 2** MCKENDREE, W 3-2; **7** at Purdue Fort Wayne, W 3-2; **9** at Loyola Chicago, W 3-0; **16** at Lewis, MIVA Quarterfinals, 7 p.m.; **20** at MIVA Semifinals, TBA; **23** MIVA Finals, TBA;

## MEN'S LACROSSE (8-3)

**Feb 5** DETROIT, W 18-7; **12** CLEVELAND STATE, W 17-9; **19** at North Carolina, W 20-8; **26** Harvard, W 17-12;

**March 5** at Cornell, L 14-11; **12** NOTRE DAME, W 14-11; **20** DENVER, L 14-12; **22** DARTMOUTH, W 12-6; **27** at Rutgers, L 17-8;

**April 1** PENN STATE, W 18-9; **9** JOHNS HOPKINS, W 12-10; **16** at Maryland, 4 p.m.; **24** MICHIGAN, 7 p.m.

## WOMEN'S LACROSSE (9-4)

**Feb 12** ROBERT MORRIS, W 17-5; **16** CINCINNATI, W 18-9; **20** MARQUETTE, W 18-11 **25** at Denver, L 12-5; **27** at Colorado, L 13-10;

**March 4** JAMES MADISON, L 15-4; **10** at Duquesne, W 18-8; **12** MOUNT SAINT MARY'S, W 13-9; **15** MARIST, W 16-5; **19** at Northwestern, L 22-14 **26** PENN STATE, W 12-11; **31** at Louisville, W 13-12 OT;

**April 8** at Michigan, W 9-7; **17** MARYLAND, 12 p.m.; **23** at Johns Hopkins, 12 p.m. **28** RUTGERS, 8 p.m.

**May 6** Big Ten Tournament Semifinals at Piscataway, N.J., TBA; **8** Big Ten Tournament Final at Piscataway, N.J., TBA

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# Hammerberg Settling In As Ohio State's 'Fireman'

Like many other first-year college students, Ohio State right-handed pitcher Ethan Hammerberg lost the final months of his freshman year on campus because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Hammerberg was one of many players who went home, leaving the program's facilities behind for the spring and summer. After only 14 games in 2020, the Buckeyes were forced to cancel their season as COVID-19 became more prevalent in the United States.

## FROM THE STRETCH Chase Brown

"In my freshman year, I only got a taste of what college baseball was like," Hammerberg said. "We had been on the road for the start of the season and hadn't even played a home game yet because the first five or six weeks were all away games. We were here (at Ohio State) in a place with so much opportunity, but we barely got a taste of it."

Hammerberg said the months without baseball during his first season impacted his development as a college pitcher. However, it added motivation to improve during the time away from his coaches and teammates.

"Losing that season heightened the drive for many of us," he said. "It made us appreciate and love the game even more, and it made us work harder. I lifted in my basement and took my nutrition seriously at home. A lot of places closed down, so I had to put on my big-boy pants and take control of myself. It forced me to take it upon myself to get better."

The 6-5, 250-pound hurler returned to Columbus in better shape, feeling ready to make a significant impact in his second year with the program. While Hammerberg would still need to adjust to his new level of competition, he felt confident that he could take a step forward after all the hard work he had put forth in the offseason.

Hammerberg appeared in six games as a sophomore, striking out nine batters over 5 2/3 innings of work. He finished the season with a 6.35 ERA. However, Hammerberg didn't allow an earned run in his last four outings against Maryland, Michigan, Purdue and Northwestern, each lasting one inning.

He continued his dominant stretch in the Northwoods League – a summer developmental college baseball league played in Canada, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota and Wisconsin. He appeared in 15 games for the Duluth Huskies, posting a 2.12 ERA with a 2-2 record, three saves, 28 strikeouts and 10 walks.

This season, Hammerberg was leading the Buckeye bullpen through games of April 10 with 13 appearances and a 1.77 ERA. In 20 1/3 innings, he had allowed 12 hits and four runs with 30 strikeouts to only three walks. Opposing hitters had only mustered a .169 batting average against him.

Hammerberg attributes his early-season success to the confidence instilled by coaches and teammates. He understands that they believe in him, so he chooses to believe in himself.

"I want to go in and execute things, doing my job every time," Hammerberg said. "You want to do your job every time you go out there, but it's not something you think about when you're going into a situation. It's accepting that you have been trusted with the ball in this position. The coaches trust you to do a job, so you need to trust yourself and embrace that."

Hammerberg has impressed head coach Greg Beals with his production this season. The 12th-year head coach called him the team's most consistent and productive pitcher out of the bullpen. Beals describes Hammerberg as a "fireman," indicating that the righthander is capable of bringing the Buckeyes out from unfavorable circumstances and creating energy and momentum for the team.

"When you look at Ethan Hammerberg's line, what do you see?" Beals asked. "He has pretty low numbers across the board. He throws a lot of strikes and low walks, and he's getting strikeouts. His dependability when we go to the bullpen makes him a great option."

"The fireman means that we're trying to shut something down. The fireman comes in to put the fires out. You have to throw strikes to be that person for a team. Ethan has proven he's dependable in that role."

Beals explained that Hammerberg has a unique ability to remain calm in "helter-skelter" scenarios and keep his nerves in order despite the circumstances.

Hammerberg dismissed the ability as unique, telling BSB that he strives to appreciate every chance on the mound, making each less-than-ideal scenario less stressful.

"I'm just having fun," Hammerberg said. "Baseball is hard enough as it is. If you make it harder on yourself, you aren't doing yourself any favors. It's all about having fun and knowing that you put everything out there. There's no sense in going out there and leaving stuff on the table. When I go out there, I want to know that I attacked and embraced with everything I had."

That approach has taken Hammerberg a long way in the season's first weeks. He's continued progressing from his freshman to junior years, developing a mid-90s fastball and deceiving off-speed options. The work has paid off, something his teammates notice every day in the locker room.

"Hammer has some of the best stuff on the team," outfielder Kade Kern said. "He is one of the hardest throwers. His game just keeps building. He's got the confidence to be out there, and I think he was able to build that confidence this fall and build from it ever since. He just has the best stuff, so we like to have him out there on the mound."

### Bauer Delivers Walk-Off Win

Sometimes, you need a little luck to turn things around. That's what happened for the Ohio State baseball team when senior infielder Colton Bauer sent a 434-foot home run over the left-field fence in the bottom

of the 10th inning for a walk-off win over Youngstown State on April 5.

The Buckeyes started the extra inning with a pinch-hit walk from senior infielder Drew Reckart. Bauer strolled to the batter's box with no outs and saw four pitches bring him to a 3-1 count, so he swung for the fences. The Grove City, Ohio, native snapped the team's five-game skid with his first-ever walk-off home run.

"We just needed one, and we didn't know if we would play this game because it was raining," Bauer said. "The coaches said, 'Just stay with us,' and the boys stayed with them, and this is what happened."

Inclement weather kept the teams from completing their game on time, with the first pitch thrown nearly an hour after the regularly scheduled start after heavy rain forced a tarp to cover the mound at Bill Davis Stadium.

"It rained most of the afternoon and early evening," Beals said. "We warned our guys and told them we wanted to play. The guys found a way to get the ballgame in."

Ohio State wasted no time to score against Youngstown State, posting its first run in the bottom of the second inning with an RBI single from senior catcher Brent Todys. However, the Penguins used an unassisted double play from first basemen Padraig O'Shaughnessy to work out of the jam.

In the third, OSU freshman righthander Jacob Gehring, who made his first collegiate start, allowed a leadoff triple to Lucas Nasonti. Gehring later tossed a wild pitch that slipped past Todys, allowing Nasonti to cross home plate and tie the game. He closed the inning with two more outs and finished his outing with five strikeouts in three innings of work.

Both teams couldn't deliver runs until the seventh inning, when Ohio State loaded the bases twice and scored two runs. Youngstown State responded in the top of the ninth with two runs on base hits from O'Shaughnessy and his brother, Braeden,



Ethan Hammerberg

which tied the game at three-all.

Junior outfielder Mitchell Okuley led off the bottom of the ninth with a double to left field. Still, the Buckeyes squandered their opportunities to bring him home, forcing the game into extras – the team's first double-digit innings experience of the season.

Ohio State allowed a runner on in the 10th but answered with two consecutive outs, bringing the frame's end within reach. With one batter left to retire, YSU leadoff shortstop Seth Lucero delivered an RBI triple to right field on a 3-2 count, putting the Penguins ahead 4-3.

Youngstown State closer Nathan Ball put Reckart on first base with a five-pitch walk before Bauer smashed his two-run home run, giving Ohio State a much-needed ninth win of 2022.

"We needed that bad, so that (our players) have that feeling of winning right there. We haven't had that feeling very often," Beals said. "The win creates that feeling, but that feeling is what they need to get going and have those positive vibes – that idea that they can win more."

The win moved the Buckeyes to 9-16 on the season.



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# Carson Meyer Latest Buckeye To Skate In NHL

Until the first week in April, scoring four goals in a Big Ten playoff game for Ohio State against Wisconsin slightly more than two years ago was the career highlight for Columbus area native Carson Meyer.

That all changed April 4 when the former standout Buckeye forward made his

## IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

NHL debut for the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena. It was a notable achievement even with him seeing very little action in a feisty tilt with the visiting Boston Bruins.

The best was yet to come because the following night in Philadelphia he had his first NHL assist and moments later he scored his first goal to help the Blue Jackets to a 4-2 victory.

"It's still sinking in," Meyer said after the Philadelphia game. "Obviously, that's something I'll remember for the rest of my life. It's something you dream of forever. Just seeing the puck cross the line is a pretty awesome feeling.

"Scoring gave me quite a bit of confidence. I've always said if you could play every game like you scored a goal in the first period, you'd be the best player ever. It's like the puck just finds you, and you just feel better, knowing you've got a goal under your belt."

By the end of the week, he had played a total of four games with one goal, an assist, four penalty minutes and a plus-1 rating.

He had only 5:16 of ice time in the fourth game, a 5-4 overtime win at Detroit on April 9. That could mean he soon could be scratched from the lineup or returned to the American Hockey League affiliate in Cleveland, especially after the Blue Jackets on April 8 signed Michigan star forward Kent Johnson to a rookie contract. The fifth pick in the 2021 NHL draft joined the Blue Jackets after the Wolverines were eliminated in the national semifinal the day before. Johnson was set to possibly make his NHL debut April 13 against the Montreal Canadiens.

Whatever happens can't take away from the emotions felt by Meyer, who is from Powell, Ohio, and played for the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets junior team and spent two seasons at Miami (Ohio) before spending the final two with the Buckeyes

from 2018-20.

Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik said Meyer exemplifies perseverance. Meyer left Miami after what he felt was a misdiagnosis of a tapeworm issue that sapped his strength his sophomore season.

He was able to rebuild his career with the hometown Buckeyes. Meyer was part of the 2018-19 Big Ten regular-season championship and NCAA tournament team, and in 2019-20 the Buckeyes were headed to the NAAs for a program-record fourth straight season before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of the remainder of the season.

It was during the Buckeyes' 9-1 rout of Wisconsin on March 6, 2020, in the conference quarterfinal that he scored a program-record four goals and had an assist. He scored the first goal the next night in a 2-1 overtime win vs. the Badgers in what would be his last college game before the sports world was shut down.

He had 22 points (nine goals, 13 assists) in 36 games in his first season with the Buckeyes and 31 points (17-14) in 35 games as a senior.

### Step By Step

Meyer, a sixth-round pick by the Blue Jackets in the 2017 NHL draft, was not signed to an NHL contract but instead inked a deal with Cleveland in October 2020.

But his steady improvement led to his signing a two-way NHL/AHL contract (meaning he is paid a certain amount depending upon which league he plays) in April 2021.

"You've got to prove yourself at every level, and he's a prime example of that," Rohlik told BSB. "Some guys are willing to do it, and some guys are not, and he's been willing to put in that effort all the way from youth hockey.

"Even in pro hockey he had to prove himself at Cleveland in getting the contract. Now, he keeps knocking at the next door so all the credit in the world to Carson. He continued to believe in himself and continued to work hard and continues to do the right things. Those are the guys you feel really good about."

Meyer is the fifth former OSU player to play for the Blue Jackets, joining RJ Umberger, Nate Guenin, Zac Dalpe and Ryan Dzingel.

There have been 25 Buckeyes who made it to the NHL, including Meyer's former teammates Dakota Joshua (St. Louis) and Tanner Laczynski (Philadelphia), both of whom made the jump during the 2020-

21 NHL season.

However, Meyer is the first to have the Columbus hat trick of playing locally at the youth level and Ohio State before joining the Blue Jackets.

"It's unbelievable," Rohlik said. "It's just fantastic for hockey here in Columbus. I've seen the growth in what the AAA program has done, and I think there's just so much more room to continue to get better in both men's and women's hockey here.

"To see a guy like Carson come through this program, come through the Blue Jackets program, I mean all of a sudden you get to see many kids want his autograph and thinking about what he's done."

Meyer almost made his NHL debut on Feb. 10 at Buffalo. He was called up from Cleveland and skated pregame as a replacement in case Patrik Laine was unable to play because of an injury. Laine played and Meyer was sent back to the Monsters the next day.

Although disappointed at the time, it ultimately worked out better for Meyer that he could make his debut in front of the home fans.

"You're going to be happy no matter where your first game is, but it's that much more special," he said before the game against Boston. "It's the rink I grew up coming to and cheering on the Blue Jackets, coming to so many games with my dad here. Now my dad is going to be in the stands along with I don't even know how many family members that are going to try to come in, but they're all going to get to watch me tonight. It's hard to put into words."

Blue Jackets coach Brad Larsen said Meyer's promotion was not a gimmick to attract attention in a season in which the Blue Jackets will not make the playoffs. Meyer had 16 goals and 11 assists in 57 games for Cleveland this season.

"He's earned his opportunity to get up here," Larsen said. "I think he's a guy that understands what he's going to have to do to play in the NHL. It is an adjustment for him, but he has to be hard on pucks. He has to be tenacious. He should be noticed with his energy."

Unfortunately for Meyer, that first game got out of hand with 17 penalties, and with special teams so prevalent, he saw little action. He played just 3:16 on six shifts, only one after the first period, and took a penalty.

Larsen promised before the Philadelphia game that Meyer would see more ice time, and that's what happened.

Meyer was credited with the primary assist on Brendan Gaunce's goal 2:38 into the game against the Flyers for his first point. At 13:23 of the first, Zach Werenski, a former Michigan player, fed him on the rush for his first goal.

"I kind of just assumed he would be able to find me," Meyer said. "I didn't see him take a peek to see if I was there. I called for it once and after that, he's obviously got great vision and put it right on my tape for me. I just knew, 'I'm just going to go straight to the net as hard as I can.' He took care of the rest for me."

Meyer said postgame he had a plan with

what he was going to do with the puck from his first goal.

"Probably put it in my dad's (Todd Meyer) man cave in the basement," he said. "I owe it to him to give him that puck. It can go right next to his Cincinnati Bengals towel."

### Who's Next?

Could Georgii Merkulov follow Meyer to the NHL?

It's a possibility after the Russian forward left the Buckeyes following a stellar freshman season to sign a three-year entry-level contract with the Bruins on April 9.

He led NCAA freshmen this season with 20 goals and all players nationally with seven game-winners.

He was a first-team All-Big Ten selection and a unanimous pick to the Big Ten all-freshman team.

"Georgii made an immediate impact on our program and college hockey this season," Rohlik said. "We congratulate him on signing with the Bruins and wish him the best of luck as he begins his professional career. We look forward to following him at the next level."

Merkulov was listed on the Providence Bruins (AHL) roster as of April 10, as is defenseman Grant Gabriele, who finished his career with the Buckeyes in March and signed a professional tryout agreement on March 25 for the remainder of this season and an AHL contract for 2022-23.

Gabriele has yet to play for Providence.

### In The Pros

Two other Buckeyes turned pro following the 2021-22 season.

Forward Quinn Preston made his professional debut for the Double-AA level Toledo Walleye of the ECHL on April 2 and had an assist on his first shift. Through six games he has two goals and four assists.

Former Buckeyes Gordi Myer and John Albert are also on the team.

Defenseman Will Riedell signed a professional tryout agreement with Lehigh Valley, the Flyers' AHL farm team, on March 29 but has not played.

### Remember Me?

Laczynski, an All-American who helped the Buckeyes reach the Frozen Four in 2018, returned to play on Feb. 19 for Lehigh Valley. He was expected to miss this season after undergoing surgery on his left hip in September during training camp.

Just prior to the injury, Laczynski was cleared to resume training after surgery to repair a torn labrum in his right hip in April 2021 following his first five games of his NHL career. Going further back, he had core muscle surgery that caused him to miss training camp in September 2020.

"I don't ever question Tanner," Rohlik said. "He's going to put in the work. He's got a great work ethic and it's only a matter of time until gets another shot with the Flyers."

He has 14 points (six goals, eight assists) in 20 games.

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# New Faces Fill Out Top Half Of 2022-23 Lineup

Ohio State wrestling took a significant step forward when head coach Tom Ryan arrived in Columbus 16 years ago. What once was a middle-of-the-pack Big Ten school with frequently limited NCAA tournament aspirations became a powerhouse in the sport, consistently competing with programs such as Iowa and Penn State for championships.

## ON THE MAT Chase Brown

After the Buckeyes took both the conference and national titles in 2014-15, they never fell below third in either tournament for the next four seasons, winning two Big Ten trophies in the process.

In 2020-21, though, Ohio State suffered a rapid decline in its performance, sliding to ninth-place finishes in its postseason competitions.

A season later, Ryan led his program to a fourth-place finish at the Big Ten championships, qualifying eight wrestlers for nationals. At the NCAA championships in Detroit, the Buckeyes took 13th with 44 team points – over 87 points behind first-place Penn State.

Now, the Buckeyes face a critical offseason. Ryan has made clear that recent results aren't reaching the standard for Ohio State wrestling and that he's working to make a 10-man lineup capable of not only contending for team titles but winning them.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke with the veteran coach to hear his thoughts on who will suit up for next year's team, projecting which wrestlers offer the team the best chance to reach their goals. This story is part one of two in breaking down next season's 10-man lineup, with the back half coming in the next print issue of BSB.

### 125 – Malik Heinselmann

After an underwhelming performance as the No. 12 seed at the NCAA championships, Heinselmann will return to Ohio State for his fifth and final year in the scarlet and gray, exercising his extra year of pandemic-related eligibility.

"Malik looked a little nervous at nationals," Ryan said, "but he trains extremely hard and can wrestle free. He needs to wrestle free to compete at that weight and to start reaching some podiums. I thought he could do more for us this year, but he didn't. The good news is that he has one more shot at it. Hopefully, he can take a step forward."

Heinselmann did not place with a 2-4 finish at nationals. Still, the Castle Rock, Colo., native had a 10-2 record in duals and took fifth place at the Big Ten championships. In four years, he has amassed 74 wins with 10 major decisions, three technical falls and seven pins.

His challengers for the weight are rising sophomores Andre Gonzales and Chase Liardi and rising redshirt sophomore Alex Flerlage. Incoming freshman Gavin Brown, who attends Xenia (Ohio) Legacy Christian Academy, wrestled at 126 pounds in high school, but Ryan expects him to wrestle at a higher weight in college.

It appears Heinselmann will continue his

hold over the division for another season, looking to step forward against Big Ten competition and make a more significant mark at the NCAA tournament if he qualifies for his fifth consecutive trip to collegiate wrestling's biggest stage.

### 133 – Nik Bouzakis/Jesse Mendez

The 133-pound weight class was a weakness for Ohio State in 2021-22. Senior Dylan Koontz finished 4-12 with a 1-6 record in duals and 0-3 mark against conference opponents.

Ryan said he needs more production from the division next year and indicated he might turn to future Buckeyes to find answers, naming Nik Bouzakis of Kingston (Pa.) Wyoming Seminary and Jesse Mendez of Crown Point, Ind., as candidates.

"There's a style of wrestling required at the weight where you need to keep your opponent under tension," Ryan said. "The entire match is a choice. It starts with a belief system that creates opportunities that help you reach your full potential. You have to be an absolute savage. Everybody in this sport understands sleep, rest and recovery. You have to live an extraordinary life and be tough to win."

"I am very confident that some of the prospects we have coming in, knowing their history and lives, will compete at 133. We have someone coming in who will be ready to wrestle as a freshman if he continues to do what he did in high school. Nick Bouzakis has that mind-set I want there. If Mendez wants to trim down, he or Mendez will be our guy there."

Bouzakis is the top-ranked 132-pound high school recruit and No. 2 overall recruit according to FloWrestling. He won over 100 matches in high school and claimed Fargo, Super 32 and Ironman championships in four seasons.

Mendez is the No. 1 overall recruit in the 2022 class. His versatility could allow him to contend with Bouzakis, but he also could compete in a higher class if he packs on more weight. In February, he became the 10th wrestler in Indiana history to win four state championships with titles in three weights, including 126, 132 and 138 pounds.

### 141 – Dylan D'Emilio

D'Emilio took over the 141-pound weight class last year after Jordan Decatur suffered an early-season injury and the program dismissed Anthony Echemendia after he received felonious assault charges for an altercation with his wife.

The Curtice, Ohio, native went 21-11 last season with a 5-7 mark against Big Ten opponents. He had three major decisions, three technical falls and five pins in those outings. Ryan said D'Emilio had impressive production in his third year with the Buckeyes and thinks he could have had a higher finish at the national tournament had the cards fallen in his favor.

"Dylan ran into a tough spot at the NCAAs," Ryan said. "He lost a first-round match that we knew he had to win. He was the aggressor, and he was in the legs far more than his opponent. There were multiple attacks for D'Emilio and a few from his opponent, but the other wrestler found a way to win."

"He fell into the wrestlebacks and had to face Iowa's Jaydin Eiermann, who was upset, so he had to face the reigning national final-

ist in his weight. Eiermann beat an Olympic champion at that weight last summer. It was going to be a tough, tough win for D'Emilio."

D'Emilio lost a hard-fought match to Eiermann, which ended his NCAA tournament run. He will enter his redshirt junior season with 31 career wins, making him the most experienced wrestler in the class in Columbus by a wide margin. His fifth-place finish at the 2022 Big Ten championships also gives him a leg up on potential challengers.

"He'll be back and work hard," Ryan said. "We never question his toughness, and we look forward to another big year from Dylan."

### 149 – Sammy Sasso

Sammy Sasso is a lock to retain the 149-pound weight class in 2022-23. After two runner-up finishes and a title at the last three Big Ten championships, Sasso is one of the best wrestlers in the toughest conference in the country. He also has performed admirably in his national tournament runs, finishing second and fifth in his two trips while missing out on the third because of COVID.

"Sammy is a great leader here," Ryan said. "He balances the day-in and day-out mentality that our team needs. He's a great leader here and around the country. People follow him. He's likable, and he goes out of his way to help others. That's critically important. Sometimes you prepare and execute well, but it doesn't happen for you."

"We're proud of Sammy. He's competed and trained hard throughout his time here. We're excited about his coming role in this program. Ohio State is thankful to have a wrestler like Sammy and his commitment to this team."

Sasso's Ohio State tenure – whether fair or not – will be judged by the number of titles he produces. He reached that summit in 2021 at the Big Ten tournament but fell short at that year's NCAA championships. With two years of remaining eligibility, Ryan believes it's time for Sasso to take the next step.

The Nazareth, Pa., native has much left to prove in an Ohio State uniform, and the Buck-

eyes will need him at the top of his game if they want to push for team titles in the post-season.

### 157 – Paddy Gallagher

After a season that saw four different starters at 157 pounds, Ryan has no such doubts entering this offseason about the upcoming starter – even if he's just about the only 157-pounder on the team who didn't have a shot at starting last season. Rising redshirt freshman Paddy Gallagher, a former two-time state champion at Lakewood St. Edward, is the front-runner to take over the class next season.

"We're excited about Paddy," Ryan said. "He kind of reminds me a bit of Kollin Moore. In Kollin's freshman year, he didn't blow everyone out of the water, but we saw his workload, capacity to learn and desire to work. And Kollin went from an outstanding redshirt year to being a guy fighting for a national championship, and that's what we need to see."

In a redshirt season, Gallagher went 17-3 with the Buckeyes. He pinned his first collegiate opponent in 13 seconds at the Ohio Intercollegiate Open, finishing with a 4-0 record and first-place trophy at the event. Overall, Gallagher recorded four pins, four major decisions and three technical falls in his first year of college wrestling.

"Paddy works very hard," Ryan said. "He won't waste a day all summer. He loves the sport, and he's got great speed and toughness. Hopefully, we get a good year out of Paddy. We need that out of him."

Ryan described Gallagher as an ultra-competitor who loves to attack his opponents. His toughness, technique and tempo will make him a handful for nonconference and Big Ten competition in the future.

"Paddy will be challenged by Bryce Hepner, who was hurt most of the year and ended up winning the wrestle-off over (Isaac) Wilcox, who's back as well," Ryan said. "There are some people older than him that will provide a significant challenge for Paddy. He will need to be ready, and we think he will be."

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# Buckeye Cruise Has Another Fruitful Voyage

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Buckeye Cruise for Cancer was a success again with nearly \$4 million raised and countless memories made as Ohio State legends and passionate Buckeye fans gathered for a good cause and fun times.

More than 2,000 passengers departed Feb. 17 from Port Canaveral, Fla., on Royal Caribbean's Mariner of the Seas. The ship stopped at Royal Caribbean's private islands, CocoCay and Labadee, before returning to port on Feb. 22.

"We had both islands private this year, which made it different," said cruise founder Lisa Cisco of Travel Partners in Dublin. "We were the only Royal Caribbean ship to get both islands private for our 15th anniversary.

"The following week there were 7,000 people on one island and we had two (thousand), so it really was a private island."

She said \$3.85 million was raised on the cruise, pushing the 15-year total to \$32 million.

It was a welcome return to the waters after the 2021 cruise was held landside because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, more than \$3 million was raised a year ago.

Not that everything for the 2022 cruise was back to the normal of the pre-pandemic days.

"We had to sail at half capacity but that

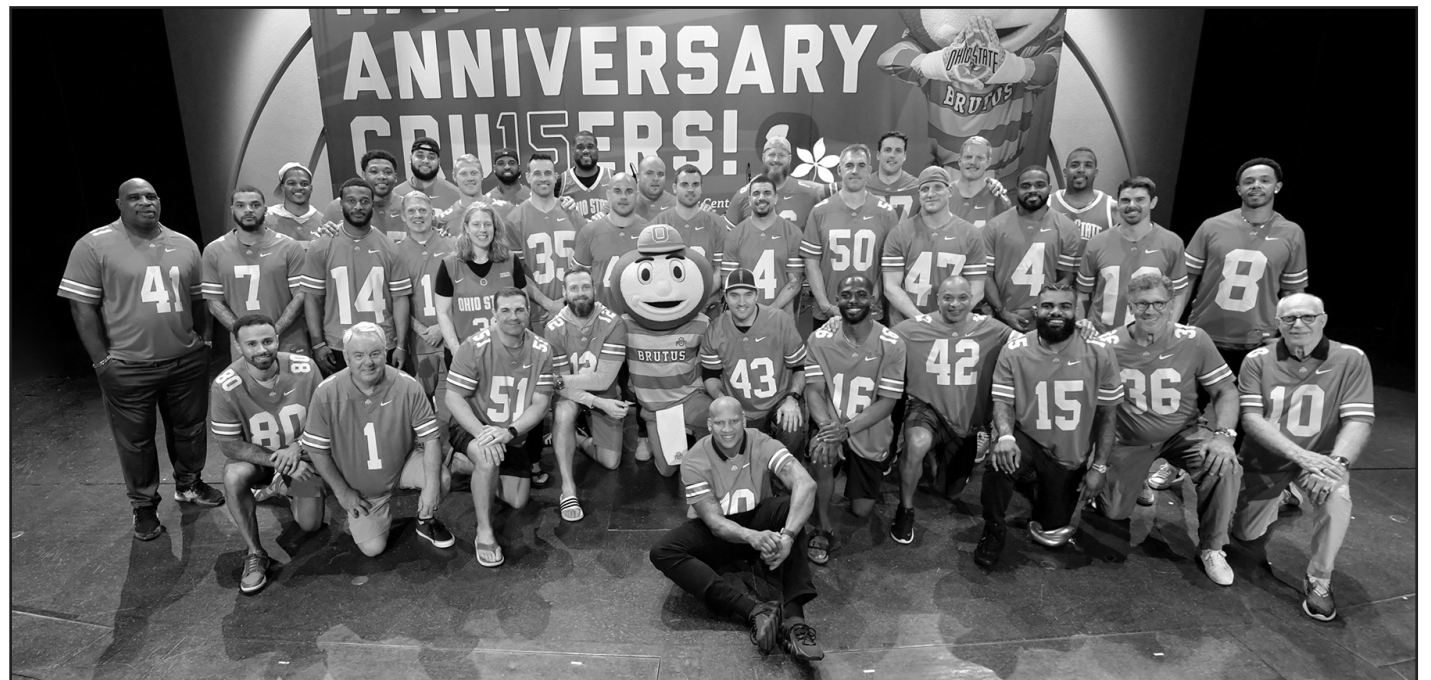


PHOTO COURTESY OF BUCKEYE CRUISE FOR CANCER

**CRUISE CREW** — The Buckeye Cruise welcomed more than 2,000 passengers, including dozens of former Buckeyes, on its 2022 voyage to CocoCay and Labadee, raising nearly \$4 million.

was amazing," Cisco said. "We had 2,000 people, zero tested positive for COVID and we didn't have to wear masks. We all had to be vaccinated and we all had to rest prior to getting on."

"And to raise almost \$4 million with half

the people was pretty amazing."

Since its inception, the Buckeye Cruise for Cancer has raised funds for The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center — Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute.

Another exciting aspect for Cisco is that \$1.5 million was raised for the Fund A Need program in three years, one year faster than the goal. Monies will go toward the Outpatient Care West Campus.

There were more than 40 former OSU football and basketball players along for the cruise including the likes of C.J. Barnett, J.T. Barrett, Zach Boren, Bobby Carpenter, Terence Dials, Ezekiel Elliott, A.J. Hawk, Kirk Herbstreit, K.J. Hill, Joshua Perry, DeVier Posey, Tyvis Powell, Anthony Schlegel, Ryan

Shazier, Katie Smith and Jared Sullinger.

Rex Kern, who quarterbacked the "Super Sophomores" to the 1968 national title, was aboard and held a signing for his book "The Road to the Horseshoe and Beyond: How a Small-Town Athlete Benefited from Ohio State Football to Build a Life."

There were numerous events daily, such as a Family Feud game with Team Herbstreit and Team Boren among those competing.

A highlight was a cancer survivors breakfast with all the former Buckeye athletes. There were raffles, beer tastings, concerts and games, not to mention alumni cheerleaders and band members.

Also, during the cruise the creation of the Lisa Cisco Endowment Fund In Cancer Research was announced, with hopes to raise \$500,000 by 2023.

To say she was floored would be an understatement. Cisco was called onstage to accept what she thought might be a gift for her years of work in putting the cruises together.

"I was so overwhelmed, I could not breathe," she said. "You talk about a surprise. It was a true honor to have an endowment in my name. That will be (amazing) for my grandkids, my great grandkids."

Planning is already well under way for the 2023 cruise, labeled "A New Dawn."

It will be different from past cruises.

"We're doing a yacht cruise this time, much smaller but much more luxurious," Cisco said. "We just need a year off, but we expect to make the same money for the James."

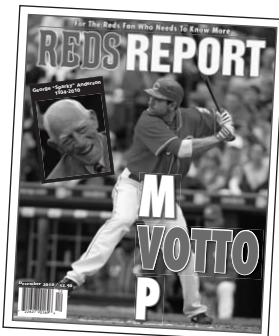
"Pretty soon were going to have some pretty exciting announcements about the next cruise, who's coming. Some big, big things."

The next Buckeye Cruise will sail Feb. 27 from San Juan, Puerto Rico, and return March 6. Among the six stops will be Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint John, U.S. Virgin Islands; and the Caribbean country of Dominica.

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# Dwayne Haskins' Buckeye Legacy Speaks For Itself

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

In preparing for this issue's column, I had a little of this and a little of that in mind (some of which will still follow), but I was at a bit of a loss as to what to lead with. Then, with deadline rapidly approaching, came the tragic news of the death of Buckeye great Dwayne Haskins.

From the now-famous video of a youthful Haskins announcing that one day he would play for Ohio State to his brief but phenomenal career as a Buckeye to his time in the NFL – not yet up to expectations and punctuated by off-the-field incidents – and culminating in his tragic death, there was always something going on with Haskins.

But there could have been so much more.

As the record-setting quarterback got off to a slow start among the play-for-pay set and he sometimes showed up in news reports for the wrong reasons, it became kind of fashionable among some Buckeye fans to bash Haskins. His status among those naysayers was exacerbated by the success of former Buckeye teammate Joe Burrow, both collegiately and as a pro. Haskins had famously beaten out Burrow for the Ohio State starting job in 2018, sending Burrow packing to LSU.

I have been on record many times as saying that I thought the lightbulb would ultimately go on and Haskins would become the pro quarterback that most of us predicted. If ever there was a college player who might have benefited from an extra year on campus (and I know Gil Brandt was criticized for saying this), it might have been Haskins. But his phenomenal 2018 campaign at Ohio State earned him first-round draft status, and it's hard to turn down that selection and the benefits that come with it.

He was drafted by a chaotic organization in the then-Washington Redskins, before he ultimately signed with the Pittsburgh Steelers, an organization where I believe he might have had a better chance to mature and grow. With the retirement of Ben Roethlisberger, he might have even had a shot at starting for one of the NFL's more storied franchises.

Instead, we will never know.

I do know this much. It would have been hard to accomplish much more than Haskins did in his brief stay in Columbus. The list of school and Big Ten records he set in 2018 are well documented elsewhere in this edition.

And let me set one thing straight. Unless Burrow was able to play defensive back in addition to quarterback, there is no way he could have led Ohio State, which was plagued by one of the worst defenses in school history, to a better record than the 13-1 mark Haskins posted that season. Burrow and Haskins were two great quarterbacks who led their respective schools to great heights.

It's a long-held adage at Ohio State that Buckeyes are ultimately measured by their play against archrival Michigan. Few were better against the Wolverines than Haskins.

As a redshirt freshman he came off the bench in place of an injured J.T. Barrett and led the Buckeyes to a victory in Ann Arbor, and he left a great pass and a great run – on one drive no less – etched in our memories. That performance probably punched Burrow's ticket to Baton Rouge.

As a starter in '18, he led Ohio State to a thrashing of Michigan, 62-39, in Ohio Stadium. In my more than 40 years of doing this, that victory over the Wolverines seemed to be among the most exciting and satisfying for Buckeye fans. It was one of Jim Harbaugh's best teams to date (including the victorious team last season), featuring one of the best defenses in the country as they came to Columbus on their self-styled "revenge tour."

All Haskins did was complete 20 of 31 passes for 396 yards and six touchdowns without an interception or a sack. The quarterback who never seemed particularly comfortable running the ball even added seven carries for 34 yards.

There is one thing I want to make clear. Some may have questioned Haskins' character or maturity. But as best as I can remember, he always represented Ohio State with dignity and class and seemed to be a model – and successful – teammate.

Rest in peace.

### But Will It Work?

The big story coming out of spring practice so far, and really since the end of last season, has been new – and colorful – defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and the defense he is installing in Columbus.

I don't know what the exact format will be for the spring game on April 16, but I have a feeling it will be difficult for us to tell how well Knowles' defense is taking hold with the team. In fact, we may not know the answer to that question until the Buckeyes take to the field against Notre Dame on Sept. 3.

I had reason to wonder about how things were going with the defensive installation when I was reading our April 7 edition of Reprint Thursday on our BuckeyeSports.com website. As many of you know, we have been looking back at Urban Meyer's first season as Ohio State head coach 10 years ago, and at this time in 2012 Meyer and new offensive coordinator Tom Herman were attempting to install their vision of Ohio State's offense.

To hear them talk in the BSB reprints, things weren't going that well.

"We're not where we need to be," Meyer said in the April 14, 2012, issue of BSB after the defense bested the offense in the second "winner/loser" day of the spring. "I am not upset. I just wish we would grasp it a little faster.

"And it's not just one position. On offense, anytime you're installing or you're doing something new, nine guys do it right and two guys do it wrong and it looks like the most disgusting thing you've ever seen. We just have to be a little more consistent."

Herman didn't seem to disagree with his boss, calling the performance of his unit disheartening, but he acknowledged the reality of the situation.

"As we start to install it, the kids' brains get overwhelmed a little bit with new terminology and new tempos – everything from stances to starts to formations to tempos. All of that is new," Herman said. "Once you get to day three, it gets to be a bit overwhelming (but) that's part of the plan. Let them get introduced to everything, and then after four or five or six days go back and re-teach the finer points of it. Are we anywhere close to where we want to be? No. Is this kind of the normal progression of things? Yes."

There is a cautionary tale here.

Maybe we shouldn't expect this year's defensive unit to be the 1973 Buckeyes overnight. A little patience with Knowles and the defense may be in order.

### A Funny BSB Story

As I said, Knowles has been the big story this spring, and he indirectly caused a bit of a hubbub at BSB world headquarters. I have to admit, I was involved in starting the ruckus and was finally the one who ended it.

As you may recall, we ran a projected football

two-deep in the last issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. Because Knowles has changed the names of some positions, or rearranged them, we ran a glossary of defensive position names with the projected lineup.

A reader – who I will not name because he would probably feel as goofy as we did – called in wondering what the initials "OR" after a player's name stood for. I could hear the affable Dave Breithaupt struggling to come up with an answer for the guy about what the initials meant.

"Dave, look at the legend underneath the two-deep," I said.

Still no luck and by now he had the other writers involved with no one able to figure out what OR after a player's name meant.

Finally, I pulled out a copy of the paper. It was immediately obvious that it was "or," as in projected starter Taron Vincent OR Jerron Cage. Zach Harrison OR J.T. Tuimoloua. We have all been so overwhelmed by the whirlwind that is Knowles that we missed something that obvious.

In fairness to associate editor Patrick Mayhorn, who put the depth chart together, he was out of the office when all this happened. He might have been able to solve the riddle right away.

Or maybe not.

### But There Is More

Like I say, Knowles has been pretty prominent since his arrival in Columbus. I'll just keep on rolling here.

As you may have seen in the story on pages 16-17 of this issue, Knowles is attempting to reduce violent collisions by teaching the "rugby form" of tackling, which if implemented correctly can also be quite effective.

But as I read the article on page 22 about Cade Stover switching back from linebacker to tight end, one of the few other big stories coming out of spring practice, I couldn't help but think that Stover may not have had much interest in rugby tackling and reducing collisions.

"I want to maul people," Stover said upon his return to offense. "Whoever is in front of you, you're just trying to really flat out put them on their back. It's like a street fight.

"You're probably going to hear it more than you see it as far as heads knocking and helmets bashing. There's going to be a lot of energy, a lot of flying around."

It doesn't sound like Stover will care if he doesn't catch a lot of passes out of the tight end position. And rugby tackling? Leave that to the defense.

### Don't Forget About Kerry

The last assistant coach to generate the amount of attention that Knowles has was probably the man he replaced as defensive coordinator – Kerry Coombs. Aside from any coaching or recruiting ability, Coombs stood out for his unbridled intensity and enthusiasm. I will always remember the almost maniacal look he would get when the Buckeyes did their infamous – but popular with players and fans – "circle drill."

As is the case with Haskins, some Buckeye fans come down with a case of amnesia when it comes to Coombs' accomplishments in Columbus. Because of the events of the past two seasons, when by virtually everyone's account he failed as a defensive coordinator, people tend to forget way back in the distant past, Coombs was such a favorite in Buckeye Nation.

I was reminded of his success when reading "From the Pages of BSB" for this issue.

Five years ago the Buckeyes were preparing to go into battle without their two starting cornerbacks from the previous season – or so it appeared. Gareon Conley and Marshon Lattimore had declared for the NFL draft but Coombs took exception to the notion that there were no starting cornerbacks returning, pointing to junior-to-be Denzel Ward.

"You guys keep saying he wasn't a starter last year," Coombs said of Ward. "I know he didn't walk out onto the field for the first snap of the game, but he played the same number of snaps as Marshon and Gareon. I would prefer it if you guys refer to him as the third starter at corner because that's what he was. We had a three-man rotation. There was never a series where he didn't play."

Coombs added that he thought Ward was of equal ability to the other two – both of whom ended up being drafted in the first round.

"What I would tell you is that from a production standpoint, the production was identical for those three kids," Coombs said of the play of Conley, Lattimore and Ward in 2016. "To somehow say we were less when one went on the field would be an incredible injustice. Go back and check the numbers – what we did was we kept guys fresh. Ward's as good as the other two. I played three guys of equal talent and ability."

His assessment proved correct when Ward was drafted in the first round the following spring.

Three first round draft choices playing at the same position simultaneously? Whether it was good recruiting, good coaching or both, Coombs was doing something right.

### You May Not Have Met Him

Maybe you didn't know who Rob Cohen was, but chances are you bumped into him at some time through the years. Cohen, who passed away on April 2, was one of the proprietors of Conrads College Gifts, the iconic Buckeye gift store located on Lane Ave. across from St. John Arena for decades. And for the majority of those decades, Rob was there working. There are very few of us Buckeyes who did not stop by the shop through the years.

Rob finally succumbed to a lengthy battle with pancreatic cancer. While that particular form of cancer is a tough one to fight, I actually thought he had licked it. But in the end the disease proved tougher than even Rob. In all the time he was battling, I never heard him complain. He just kept fighting.

The Cohens – starting with the late patriarch and matriarch Jack and Violet Cohen, and extending to Rob's brother Bennett and sisters Judi and Sue – have always been like family to me. They were always concerned about me and my own family but also quick to let me know, like family members do, when they were unhappy with me about something. Accordingly, the loss of Rob is a tough one for me.

I will try to be inspired by his courage and fight, and I will certainly miss him.

### Thanks For Your Thoughts

Speaking of passings, thank you to the many, many readers who reached out to me concerning the recent passing of my mother, Faye Moskowitz.

I want to assure you that my siblings and I are all doing fine, though there are those certain moments where you can't help but miss your mother. We are simply thankful that she passed peacefully in her own home.

Thanks again to everyone who took the time to care.

# 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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