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Stroud Honors Haskins As The Buckeye Offense Prevails In The Annual Spring Game

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Former Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins' first touchdown pass in Columbus was a beauty. With his Buckeyes sitting well ahead of an overpowered UNLV team in the first half of their Sept. 23, 2017, matchup, the then-redshirt-freshman signal caller entered the game to take his first significant collegiate snaps, relieving starter J.T. Barrett – who had done enough to push the Buckeyes ahead 37-7 with 3½ minutes to play in the first half.

Haskins largely kept things simple on his first drive. He handed the ball to tailback J.K. Dobbins and tried his hand at only two passes – one connected with Terry McLaurin for 9 yards, the other bounced off Austin Mack's chest and fell incomplete – as the Buckeyes worked their way down the field. He kept the ball on a third-and-short read option and rumbled forward for the first down.

With a new set of downs from the UNLV

28-yard-line, Haskins took the snap and faked a handoff, dropped to survey the field and fired a rocket to C.J. Saunders, thrown hard enough to split two defenders and carry the walk-on wideout into the end zone. He would throw 53 more touchdowns in the scarlet and gray, but he may not have launched a single one harder than he did that first.

A little less than five years later, Haskins threw his final touchdown in Ohio Stadium with some help from Ohio State's latest gold-en-armed, Heisman-contending signal caller – a lineage that started with Haskins' 50-touchdown, 4,831-yard 2018 campaign.

Wearing a black No. 7 uniform emblazoned with "Haskins Jr." across the nameplate and a "DH" decal on the back of his helmet, redshirt sophomore quarterback C.J. Stroud directed Team Scarlet down the field on its first drive of Ohio State's 2022 spring game April 16 and capped it with a 29-yard touchdown pass

to Jaxon Smith-Njigba, opening the scoring in what would eventually be a 34-26 victory for Team Scarlet in the offense vs. defense scrimmage.

The incumbent starter swapped out uniforms after the play, making sure that Haskins' last moment in Ohio Stadium was, fittingly, a touchdown pass.

"I just wanted to honor his last moment in the 'Shoe," Stroud said after the game of the gesture. "That's a big brother of mine. I just wanted to honor him. I thought it was important for him to go out the right way, and I'm glad his last play at the 'Shoe was a touchdown. I'm excited for that."

Stroud's connection to Haskins, who tragically passed away at 24 years old on April 9, goes deeper than the succession line at quarterback in Columbus. He spoke at length after

**BSB'S 2022
SPRING
FOOTBALL
WRAP-UP**

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FAN FORUM

Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State took the field for the first time in four months on April 16 for its annual spring game, and afterward, the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff and members of the BuckeyeSports.com Forum assigned their Buckeye leaves to the top players from the game.

Chase Brown, BSB: Evan Pryor auditioned with Miyan Williams for the backup to rising star TreVeyon Henderson next season, and he made a solid case to fill that role for the Buckeyes.

While Williams looked strong in a 15-carry, 101-yard performance, Pryor displayed his versatility, significantly impacting the team on the ground and through the air.

Pryor carried the football nine times for 62 yards and a touchdown in the spring game. He also caught four passes for 44 yards from quarterbacks C.J. Stroud, Kyle McCord and Devin Brown.

The former four-star from Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos High School can be a complementary change-of-pace back for Henderson in the future. He'll need more showings like this to make that a reality. For now, he gets my Buckeye Leaf for a stat-stuffing afternoon in Columbus.

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: It's hard to pull much of anything from a spring game without feeling a little sil-

ly about it, especially on the side of the ball so severely kneecapped by the tackling rules, but early-enrollee safety Kye Stokes impressed regardless of the limited defensive freedom.

The four-star athlete out of Seffner (Fla.) Armwood has earned praise throughout the spring for his athleticism and ability as a fast learner, and he showed why in Ohio Stadium.

Lining up all over the field in defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' trio of safety spots, Stokes racked up nine tackles and broke up a pair of passes, but his impact went beyond the counting stats. It seemed that his name was being called all day, impressing both in coverage and as a tackler.

He'll have quite a bit more to prove when the opposing offense is representing a different school than his own and when half of the plays aren't blown dead at contact, but he looked every bit the budding contributor he's been touted as since his January arrival in Ohio State's final practice of the spring.

Braden Moles, BSB: Ohio State's defense stood little chance in the spring game – partly due to the offensive firepower as well as the format that favors the offense – but one of the stars was sophomore defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau.

Tuimoloau finished the exhibition with two sacks and came off the edge with ease, establishing his continued rise and likely starting role heading into just his

second season.

Despite being on campus for less than a year, he's primed to break out on Ohio State's defensive line where the Buckeyes have needed someone to stand out since the departure of defensive end Chase Young, who was also on hand for the spring game along with several former teammates.

If Tuimoloau's performance in the spring game was any indication, he's ready to take that next step.

Terrier Buck: Number 37. Is his name Kye?

Mcarr: With no names on the backs, it was hard for me to keep track, but Kye Stokes' name kept coming up.

Byron McNutt: Kye Stokes and Jordan Hancock were impressive on defense. They played with speed, quickness and great reaction.

I agree with Mcarr. Why no names on the backs of the jerseys? That was hard watching on TV. Must have really been hard watching in the Shoe.

Like Coach Day, I hope the five starting offensive linemen stay healthy. I thought the 5-6 tight ends that saw action showed promise.

Bob Cody: Definitely Kye Stokes!
Cameron Kittle > Bryson Shaw. When I texted that to a friend, he replied: Traffic cone > Bryson Shaw.

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BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN.COM From The Message Board

Ohio State football ended spring practices with its annual spring game on April 16. We asked readers and staff members on BuckeyeSports.com what keeps them occupied during the spring and summer months when the Buckeye football team isn't practicing or playing. Here are some of their responses:

"I will count the days until Ohio State vs. Notre Dame and count even more days until the Buckeyes play 'That Team Up North' in Ohio Stadium. Welcome to big-time college football, Marcus Freeman, and paybacks are tough, Jim Harbaugh and company."

- Mcarr

"What do I do after the spring game? Sometime in the mid-summer, I will look for a national football magazine to read about the opponents and see every team's schedule. I also want to know who's expected to be strong within the Big Ten."

- Terrier Buck

"I hope to take in some games with the Columbus Clippers. Maybe I will catch a game or two at Great American Ball Park. The summer goes by so quickly it seems like football season comes faster than I expect every year."

- PeyoteBuck

"I'll enjoy the NBA/NHL playoffs in passing, but if the Cavs and Blue Jackets aren't involved, I only watch once the games get really big. Conference finals or better, basically. The big summer sporting event that I've always liked is Wimbledon, and I'll probably catch some of that. I used to wake up early with my dad and watch the early rounds while eating breakfast, so I'll always have an affinity for it."

"Beyond that, though, there aren't a ton of sports for me in the summer. I have no inter-

est in baseball, and the only sport that I'll sit down and watch all the way through consistently is college football."

- Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

"Not sports-related, but I will be traveling to the great state of Ohio to visit as many craft breweries as I can. I use an app that tracks your progress and sends you gifts for reaching different milestones. We are currently at 77 visited with a little over 200 to go."

- Bstu9

"I like to follow recruiting during the off months as best as possible."

- Tiffin Buckeye

"Normally, I will follow Buckeye baseball and the NHL Playoffs. Unfortunately, the Ohio State baseball team isn't much to follow this year (again)."

- Luckeeman

"While I was an American League fan since I was six years old, when we took over Reds Report – however long ago it was – I got into the Reds, and baseball fills my summer nicely. I really enjoy listening to baseball on the radio, and it makes my drive home much more pleasant each evening. Besides, by the time Ohio State football starts, the Reds are out of the hunt, so I can transition smoothly."

- Frank Moskowitz, BSB

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Weakened NCAA Changes Grid Landscape

As much of a pain in the posterior as NCAA investigations have been over the years for certain member institutions, at least the governing body of college athletics made everyone at least put on the appearance of rules compliance.

Three programs at Ohio State – fencing, women's golf and women's basketball – were recently in the NCAA's crosshairs for varying violations, and part of the punishment for each was to vacate victories, championships and national tournament appearances. Pretending wins, titles and tournament appearances never happened could be the most feckless punishment ever devised because it means nothing.

Back in the bad, old days when the NCAA actually had some muscle, players could be suspended and coaches could actually be fired for running afoul of the rules. But somewhere between a decade ago when Jim Tressel was hounded out of college football for looking the other way while his players traded jerseys for tattoos and now when such unrepentant cheaters as Bruce Pearl and Kelvin Sampson resurface at new schools with multimillion-dollar deals, things have changed radically. With the exception of bringing the hammer down on so-called Olympic sports, the NCAA has morphed into a toothless behemoth struggling to remain relevant in an ever-changing landscape, and that is especially true where college football is concerned.

When university presidents and athletic directors decided it would somehow be a benefit to bring free agency to college athletics (a.k.a. the transfer portal) and then brought hundred-dollar handshakes out of the shadows to recruit players through the cash-soaked Name, Image and Likeness program, somehow you knew the rules had changed. Perhaps, however, you didn't know just how much the game had changed.

Longtime Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick recently told Sports Illustrated writer Pat Forde that the breakup of college sports at the Division I level is inevitable. Swarbrick believes that change will occur by the mid-2030s, and the only reason it will take that long is because so many schools must wait until the end of their existing conference contracts. After that, there will be a split between universities that continue to operate athletics within a traditional educational structure and those that tie sports to the university in name only.

"On one end of the spectrum," Swarbrick said, "you license the school name and run an independent business that's engaged in sports. The other end of the spectrum, you're integrated into the university in terms of decision-making and requirements, and some (will) follow that."

One can envision such high-minded institutions as Notre Dame and Northwestern sticking to the old way of tying its athletics to the educational mission of the school and having the athletic program still answer to its president and academic administration. Others would essentially be spun off from the university, retaining the school name, colors and nickname for branding purposes only. Ohio State Buckeyes Football Inc. might be one example.

What is the driving force? Money, of course, although it seems foolhardy to believe any program believes it can continue under the old rules and hope to compete with what will essentially become a football or basketball factory.

The only thing holding anyone back right now are conference media rights contracts. The SEC media deal runs through 2033-34, and the ACC has one that goes through 2035-36. The Big Ten is currently negotiating a new deal with Fox Sports, and the Pac-12 and Big 12 are next in line on the

docket.

The expectation is that the SEC and Big Ten will continue to outpace the other Power Five conferences in terms of revenue, and that gap is going to lead some schools to move away from their existing conference affiliations. The ripple effect might also lead some leagues to jettison longtime members that don't generate as much revenue.

As traditional conference affiliations begin to

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

disappear, so will the way college football determines its national champion. The current four-team playoff structure is already on life support according to most experts, including Swarbrick, who said the College Football Playoff field will be expanded to 12 teams when the current contract expires following the 2025 season. Some critics believe that might lead to a watered-down champion, but that criticism will be drowned in the increased revenue stream from having an extra weekend or two of playoff games.

Predictably, there will be a fight of titanic proportions when it comes to determining who gets what share of that increased revenue. More money always seems to be a great answer to any problem until that increase creates new problems of its own. For example, when Forde asked Swarbrick if the NIL legislation was sustainable in its current form, the answer was a blunt no.

"This morphed so quickly into talent acquisition fees that it's just stunning," Swarbrick said. "Two things happened. The schools that have been doing this (under the table) for a long time just had a way they could describe it now and be covered. That created a whole bunch of pressure on other schools that said, 'Oh my god, we've got to do that, too.'"

"We went from what people thought was an overly restrictive market to the most unrestricted labor market in the history of sports."

Swarbrick said NCAA enforcement has no chance to rein things in, going so far as to predict that most future rules compliance and enforcement will be transferred to conferences. Meanwhile, the NCAA will try to hang onto power by lobbying for help from the U.S. Congress. But anyone with even a passing interest in what goes on in Washington should realize the majority of men and women who inhabit the halls of Congress these days have little inclination for governing.

If the NCAA is powerless, and most of Congress is too busy publicly posturing for re-election, then what happens to college athletics over the next decade? It's not too much of a stretch to believe Ohio State football will continue pretty much as it has, but will the Buckeyes continue as members of the Big Ten or will they decide branching out as an independent entity would be the more lucrative path to follow?

What will become of the so-called Olympic sports, the ones we used to call non-revenue sports for obvious reasons? With most of the NIL money funneling its way toward football and men's basketball programs, what chance do those other sports have of long-term survival?

Perhaps the university presidents will come up with a solution, although Swarbrick claimed that is also unlikely.

"It's interesting to see how challenging it is to get the university presidents to work together," he

said. "It's not that they're resistant to it. They've just got too many other things going on."

It's entirely possible that football fans – especially those at Ohio State, Alabama, Oklahoma and Clemson – won't even notice when the sea change comes. Each game their favorite team plays will still be televised, and more often than not, their favorite team will be in the hunt for the national championship.

In other words, most of the drama that makes the college football season so special will be gone. Then you will be the ones to decide whether or not that's a good thing.

Some Springtime Musings

Another edition of Ohio State spring football has come and gone, and the best news was that new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said it went "as (well) or better than I could have expected."

Obviously, Knowles was intimately involved on a day-to-day basis with the OSU defense, so if he was pleased, the rest of us should be pleased as well. However, because the spring game involved only a little more contact than usual, it left me unsure about how much better the Buckeyes will actually be on defense this fall. It was a little hard to tell how good the unit will be against the run – a middling sixth among Big Ten rush defenses last year – based upon witnessing only one "game" which was little more than a glorified 7-on-7 scrimmage.

Here are a couple of other observations gleaned from the annual spring game.

- How many other teams could lose a pair of surefire first-round draft picks at receiver and never miss a beat? Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave are gone, but returning this fall are Jaxon Smith-Njigba (who led the team in receptions and receiving yardage) along with Marvin Harrison Jr., Emeka Ebufa and maybe even Xavier Johnson, heretofore largely MIA until three receptions for 50 yards in the spring game. Talk about an embarrassment of riches.

- Ohio State also has what appears to be plenty of depth at running back. But let's pump the brakes a bit on how many meaningful carries Evan Pryor is going to get this fall. TreVeyon Henderson is a game-breaker while Miyan Williams can provide a change of pace as a power runner with speed. The Big Ten schedule has a way of taking its toll on running backs, and Pryor will undoubtedly get his carries in 2022. But the bulk of his work is slated for the future and likely not at the expense of the two guys currently in front of him on the depth chart.

- Count me among those underwhelmed by the move of Paris Johnson Jr. to left tackle. I realize that one of the strengths of the OSU defense is at defensive end, but there really should be no excuse for Johnson being so badly beaten a couple of times in the spring game. Again, I know it was a glorified scrimmage, and perhaps Johnson's motor wasn't at full throttle. Still, scrimmage or not, protection of C.J. Stroud's blind side should get his left tackle's full attention 100 percent of the time.

- Despite a handful of defections via the transfer portal, the secondary appears improved. (It had better be after ranking 97th nationally against the pass in 2021.) The addition of former Oklahoma State DB Tanner McCalister should help with the transition to Knowles' philosophy, and youngsters such as Jordan Hancock and Kye Stokes had good spring game showings. They join such holdovers as Ronnie Hickman, Josh Proctor, Cameron Brown and Denzel Burke as the Buckeyes try to rebuild their reputation as DBU.

OHIO STATE INSIDER

Haskins' Wife Tells Of April 9

Former Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins was hit and killed by a dump truck near Fort Lauderdale, Fla., on April 9. According to audio released by the Broward County Sheriff's office on April 20, his wife, Kalabrya, told a 911 dispatcher that Haskins was walking to get gas on the morning he died.

She told the operator that her husband called her early on April 9 and told her he was getting out of his vehicle to acquire gas and that he would call her when he returned to the car. When she didn't hear back from him, she called 911 and requested that dispatch check his last-known location.

"I kept calling and calling," she told the dispatcher. "He wasn't answering. Eventually, after 10 minutes of calling the phone, eventually it cut off. It's not working now. I had his location. I just want somebody to go in the area and see if his car is there and if he's OK and if anything happened to him."

The dispatcher told her that an accident was reported near where she said her husband had left his vehicle. However, she could not confirm if Haskins was involved. The audio released on April 20 also included calls from eyewitnesses who said they saw a dump truck hit a pedestrian.

The Florida Highway Patrol released a crash report revealing that Haskins was walking on the westbound side of I-595 when he entered the travel lanes and into the path of the truck. The vehicle was traveling in the center lane when it struck Haskins.

According to the investigators' judgment, the report concluded that Haskins improperly used the roadway, and the dump truck driver was found not to have taken actions that contributed to the accident. Haskins was also struck by a second vehicle traveling beside the dump truck. That vehicle took evasive maneuvers to avoid him, but the car partially hit him on its right-side undercarriage, according to the report.

Based on one witness' account, a third vehicle may have been involved in the accident. Haskins was pronounced dead at the scene by Captain Rod Watkins of the Fort Lauderdale Fire Department at 6:48

a.m.

"My husband was more than a great football player," Kalabrya wrote in a statement after his death. "He had the smile of a rainbow that touched the diversity of so many. He will forever rest and remain in our hearts until the end of time."

At the Ohio State spring game, the football program honored Haskins with a moment of silence before kickoff. They also showed a seven-minute video tribute, including montages of the late quarterback during his historic 2018 season and a now-famous clip from Haskins' first trip to Columbus as a child, where he called his shot and said he'd play for the Buckeyes in the future.

Cowan, Potter, Turrentine In Portal

Ohio State defensive linemen Jacolbe Cowan and Noah Potter and defensive back Andre Turrentine entered the transfer portal in mid-April, putting the Buckeyes at the 85-man scholarship limit.

Cowan's time in Columbus was mainly spent fighting for playing time. He redshirted as a true freshman and played sparingly in 2021, recording 44 snaps as a reserve in Larry Johnson's line rotation. He recorded three tackles on the season, making his most significant impact in the early-season stretch of games against Akron, Maryland and Tulsa. He played only 13 snaps in the final half of the season and missed out on much of this spring camp with an injury.

In his absence, sophomores Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimolou continued their surge for playing time in the defensive end spots, as did 2021 signees Mike Hall Jr. and Tyleik Williams at defensive tackle.

The No. 163 overall player and No. 17 tackle in the class of 2020, Cowan will look to find playing time elsewhere, perhaps closer to his home state of North Carolina.

Potter primarily played at defensive end during his three seasons with the Buckeyes, appearing in seven games and accruing three tackles. He appeared in just one game this past season as he recovered from several injuries, including foot surgery and a detached retina in October, for which he required emergency surgery.

He lined up for Ohio State's spring game April 16 and finished as one of the defense's top contributors, picking up two sacks and six tackles. Potter likely would have struggled to see the field with several entrenched starters and rotational players ahead of him on the depth chart with a deep defensive line group.

A four-star prospect out of Mentor, Ohio, Potter joined Ohio State in the 2019 class. His brother, Micah, played with the men's basketball team from 2016-18 before transferring to Wisconsin to finish his collegiate career.



FILE PHOTO

LOOKING ELSEWHERE — Ohio State defensive end Noah Potter was one of five Buckeye defenders to hit the transfer portal in April, joining Lejond Cavazos, Jacolbe Cowan, Bryson Shaw and Andre Turrentine. The Buckeyes now have 85 players on scholarship.

Turrentine's impact in Columbus was limited. A four-star prospect out of Nashville (Tenn.) Ensworth in the class of 2021, he redshirted for his lone season in Columbus but impressed on April 16 in the spring game with nine tackles and a pass breakup.

He was expected to battle for reserve time at safety. He's the second member of his class to depart from Columbus along with quarterback Quinn Ewers, now at Texas. He'll have four years of eligibility remaining for his new school.

Four other Buckeye transfers also found new homes in the portal. Cornerback Sevyn Banks joined Brian Kelly and Louisiana State, cornerback Lejond Cavazos transferred to North Carolina, defensive lineman Cormontae Hamilton is off to Memphis and safety Bryson Shaw will play for Lincoln Riley at Southern California.

Findlay's Keys Joins OSU Staff

University of Findlay head football coach Rob Keys has resigned his position to join Ohio State's staff in a special teams role. Keys led the Oilers, a Division II school in the Great Midwest Athletic Conference (G-MAC), to a 75-42 record during his 11 years at the helm.

"I appreciate all of the players and staff that allowed us to have such great success over the past 11 seasons here at Findlay," Keys said. "I feel that the program is in a better position today than it was the day I was hired. It's hard to put into words what has been accomplished over the past 11 years, and that could not have been done without everyone, directly and indirectly, involved with the program. There's no doubt I will miss all the players that have made my time here so special, and I wish them all future success. I'm excited about my new

coaching opportunity at Ohio State."

This most recent season had the Oilers capture their first conference title since joining Division II in 1998. Keys was named G-MAC Coach of the Year and was also voted the NCAA Division II Region 3 Coach of the Year.

In his 11 years as head coach, Keys led the Oilers to two appearances in the NCAA Division II playoffs (2017, 2021) and had 10 players earn NCAA Division II All-American honors.

Before becoming head coach at Findlay, he spent time as the school's co-defensive coordinator and special teams coordinator. Also, he coached at his alma mater, West Virginia, and at Indiana State University, Slippery Rock University and the University of New Hampshire.

Two Freshmen Lose Black Stripes

When Ohio State returns to practice for fall camp, safety Kye Stokes and defensive end Caden Curry will have the university's primary colors on their helmets after becoming the only two freshmen to lose their black stripes during spring practices.

Stokes earned the prestigious distinction on April 8 after impressing the coaching staff with his energy, upbeat attitude and work ethic. Curry received the same honor three days later for his toughness and grit on the defensive line.

A student-athlete losing his black stripe in fall camp does not guarantee that player will make a significant contribution to the Buckeyes that season but is generally considered a good reflection of development.

The Buckeyes also recognized safety Tanner McCalister with new colors. He is a fifth-year senior who transferred

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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

from Oklahoma State in the offseason. He was the first player to lose his black stripe after the fifth practice of the spring on March 26.

Ward Is NFL's Highest-Paid CB

Former Ohio State cornerback Denzel Ward has a decorated résumé from his first four professional seasons with the Cleveland Browns, including an All-Rookie Team award and two Pro Bowl selections. On April 18, Ward added another accolade when he became the highest-paid cornerback in the NFL.

According to Tom Dandy of CAA Sports, Ward signed a new five-year deal with the Browns worth \$100.5 million with \$71.25 million guaranteed. With the new contract, he became the league's highest-paid cornerback – narrowly passing Jalen Ramsey's \$100 million contract with the Los Angeles Rams that he signed in 2020.

Ohio State now has a claim to two of the three highest-paid cornerbacks in the NFL with Ward and former Buckeye Marshon Lattimore (2014-17) of the New Orleans Saints. Lattimore signed a five-year, \$97.6 million deal last year.

Ewers Excited To Be At Texas

Former Ohio State quarterback Quinn Ewers spoke with Texas football beat reporters on April 14 to discuss the Longhorns' Orange and White Game. It was the first time Ewers has spoken with the media since he joined the program in January.

The former Southlake (Texas) Carroll Senior High School five-star initially committed to Texas on Aug. 14, 2020, but later decommitted and announced his intention to play for the Buckeyes on Nov. 19, 2020. At the same time, he became the highest-rated recruit in Ohio State history.

On Aug. 2, 2021, Ewers reclassified to

the class of 2021 and enrolled a year early at Ohio State. He made his collegiate debut against Michigan State last season, taking two snaps and handing the ball off twice. On Dec. 3, 2021, Ewers entered the transfer portal and decided to continue his athletic career at Texas.

When asked about his decision to transfer to Texas, Ewers said he wanted to return closer to home and play for the team he always rooted for as a child.

"I grew up always watching the Longhorns play, wanted to be in that burnt orange," Ewers said. "There was a little obstacle in between, but I ended up here, and I'm very thankful for all the opportunities God has given me. I'm just excited to be back in the home state."

Ewers also mentioned his proximity to his friends and family in Southlake as a significant factor in transferring to Texas. He appreciates the time spent at Ohio State. He thinks his experience with head coach Ryan Day, assistant coach Corey Dennis and quarterback C.J. Stroud will help him develop into a more well-rounded signal-caller.

"C.J. is a great player and a great human being," Ewers said. "We have a good relationship. I'm super pumped for what he has in store for the rest of his career."

Ewers will compete with Hudson Card for Texas' starting quarterback position. Card is a former four-star prospect and No. 2 dual-threat quarterback from Austin (Texas) Lake Travis. He started the Longhorns' first game against Louisiana in 2021, completing 14 of 21 passes for 224 yards and two touchdowns. Card lost his starting job to Casey Thompson after a week-two loss to

Arkansas.

Despite Card's familiarity with Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian's offensive scheme and system, Ewers believes he can win the quarterback competition and represent the Longhorns as QB1 and feels like he's right where he belongs in Austin.

"I feel like I kind of committed more emotionally. But at the end of the day, I ended up where I think I should be, and that's all there is to it," Ewers said. "It's all in the past. I try not to focus on all that. I try to just keep tunnel vision and focus on what's ahead."

Ewers' departure left Ohio State with just three scholarship quarterbacks this year. Still, Day thinks the position room is as strong as it's been entering his fourth season as head coach with Stroud, sophomore Kyle McCord and freshman Devin Brown in the mix.

"I feel really good about where we're at in that room right now," Day said April 14. "The guys have the right mentality. They're developing and they're getting better every day. Their focus is not on how quickly they can get on the field. It's more about how they develop to get better so that when they do get on the field, they're ready to go. It is good to know that Kyle's had some experience, and now it's good to get Devin in here mid-year and not in the summer because he's got 15 practices under his belt."

NCAA Adds Three Rules To CFB

The NCAA playing rules oversight panel

Continued On Page 6

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Lists Brutus-Level VIP Subscribers

In this issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, we list our Brutus level VIP subscribers, along with the other VIPs who help keep BSB 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."

You can join your friends and neighbors whom you see participating in the VIP program, and your VIP upgrade can easily pay for itself each year with special 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.

With the \$50 Brutus VIP upgrade, Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers will have their names and cities listed in two different issues annually as supporters of BSB.

Those who add \$100 to their subscriptions will have their names and cities listed in all 24 issues each year as BSB Scarlet patrons. Those who donate \$125 or more will be designated as Elite patrons in each issue.

To upgrade your existing subscription to VIP status, with all the benefits that come with that designation, go to buckeyesports.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, Scarlet and Brutus VIP subscribers.

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OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

on April 20 approved several new measures, including an appeal process for targeting penalties, as well as rules addressing fake injuries and limiting blocking below the waist.

These new measures will not impact players committing a targeting penalty in the first half of a game but will allow for an appeal if a targeting foul is called in the second half, forcing the player out of the first half of his next game.

If a team or conference disagrees with a call in the second half, the conference can submit a request to the NCAA national coordinator of officials. The call will then be reviewed and can be overturned, clearing the player for the first half of the next game.

A new measure also approved a reporting and investigation process to address teams given an injury timeout due to "deceptive actions." Schools and conferences can report a "questionable scenario" to

This Is The Last Biweekly Issue Of BSB Print

This is the last issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin's winter/spring biweekly publishing schedule. The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin (June cover date) is scheduled to be mailed on June 7, with another monthly issue in July and our big Football Preview issue scheduled to be mailed in August. The Ohio State sports action moves on, and there is no need to miss any of the action. The BSB staff covers the Buckeye scene daily on our website at BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers.

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

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.

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

the national coordinator of officials. If they determine that further action is required, penalties would then be up to the conference office or school involved, according to a statement from the NCAA.

The NCAA football rules committee also considered extending the number of plays that an injured player is required to sit out – the current rule is just one – but elected against it, not wanting to encourage players to stay in the game with an injury.

The panel also approved a proposal that allows blocking below the waist only by linemen and stationary backs inside

the tackle box, prohibiting it outside of the tackle box on scrimmage plays.

The panel also approved a measure stating that if a ball carrier begins sliding, he will be ruled down at that spot. This is in response to former Pitt quarterback Kenny Pickett's fake slide during last season's ACC Championship Game that led to a 58-yard rushing touchdown.

The panel also clarified that defensive holding will remain a 10-yard penalty but will always be an automatic first down. All rule changes will take effect this upcoming season.

B1G Title Game To Stay In Indy

The Big Ten announced on April 20 that the Big Ten Championship Game would remain in Indianapolis for at least the next three seasons. Lucas Oil Stadium, which has become a home away from home for Ohio State, has hosted the annual game between the conference's East and West divisions since its inception in 2011.

The conference also revealed future locations for the Big Ten basketball tournament. The Target Center in Minneapolis will

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host the 2023 Big Ten women's basketball tournament in addition to the men's and women's tournaments in 2024. The United Center in Chicago was already set to host the men's tournament in 2023.

"We are thrilled to bring marquee conference events such as the Big Ten Football Championship Game and the Big Ten Basketball Tournaments to world-class cities and venues within the conference footprint," Big Ten Conference commissioner Kevin Warren said. "Indianapolis and Minneapolis each have a strong history and tradition of hosting some of the world's premier events in cities with an exceptional base of Big Ten Conference alumni and fans. We look forward to creating new memories and experiences for our student-athletes, coaches, and member institutions, further expanding our fan base, cultivating relationships with the business community, and fostering a positive and lasting impact on these cities."

The men's tournament started in 1998. It has been held 12 times in Indianapolis, 10 times in Chicago and once each in New York (2018) and Washington, D.C. (2017).

The women's tournament dates back to 1995 and has been held 25 times in Indianapolis, twice at the Sears Center



HE'S BACK — Former Ohio State running back Mike Weber (25) has returned to football, catching on with the New Jersey Generals after they picked him in the USFL draft. The league started play on April 15.

FILE PHOTO

in Illinois in 2013 and 2015 and once at Van Andel Arena in Grand Rapids, Mich., in 2001.

Former Buckeyes In The USFL

Former Ohio State football players Marcus Baugh, Matthew Burrell Jr., Johnnie Dixon and Mike Weber have found their new football homes with the United States Football League, an upstart organization for professional football in the spring.

Baugh is a tight end for the Michigan Panthers, and Burrell is an offensive lineman for the Tampa Bay Bandits. Both players were selected in the league's supplemental draft in early March and have kept their roster spots into the season.

The New Orleans Breakers selected Dixon, and Weber was taken by the New Jersey Generals in the first USFL draft in mid-February. Former Ohio State defensive end Jonathan Newsome, who left the Buckeyes and finished his career with Ball State, was drafted by the Birmingham Stallions in the same draft.

The USFL's inaugural season began on April 15 and will feature a 10-game season, with a regular-season finale on June 19. The first round of the playoffs will include the two top teams in each division and start on June 25.

From The Pages Of BSB

40 Years Ago - 1982

The eyes of Ohio were on six young men when Ohio State's spring football practice opened on April 6.

Everybody's attention focused on which of the six Buckeye gridgers could move front and center and replace four-year starter and all-time leading OSU passer Art Schlichter at quarterback.

Jim Karsatos, Walt Norley, Brent Offenbecher, Tim Stephens, Mike Tomczak and Scott Woolf were all in line to take over the signal-calling duties from Schlichter and his primary backup Bob Atha.

When the quarterbacks broke from the gate, it was Tomczak who was a nose ahead of the rest of the field.

At one point in mid-April, Buckeye coach Earle Bruce said there had been no change in the quarterback situation, that the race was still close but that Tomczak had a slight edge over Stephens, who was quite impressive during the second week of drills.

35 Years Ago - 1987

The teams in Ohio State's spring game, played before 38,123 fans, which brought to a close spring practice at Ohio State, were not really meant to resemble the Buckeye grid squad which would take on West Virginia in the season opener on Sept. 12.

And they didn't. Playing things rather close to the vest, and playing veteran players only briefly, the Scarlet half of the Buckeye squad edged the Gray team, 10-7. All the scoring came in the first half.

"The defense most certainly ran to the football today and continued to get turnovers," Bruce said. "They just raked the ball out of our backs' hands down the field. It wasn't as impressive to the offense."

"The pass rush was good. They put some pressure on the quarterbacks, made them get out of the pocket to throw the football. We've got a lot of work to do on the offensive line, especially the center position. We've got a lot of work to do at the quarterback position, in throwing the ball for completions and not interceptions."

The defense picked off four passes on the day.

30 Years Ago - 1992

Experience appeared to win out over youth in the race for Ohio State's starting quarterback coming out of spring practice.

Senior Kirk Herbstreit was given the nod over redshirt freshman Bobby Hoying despite the fact that Herbstreit went just 3-for-14 passing in the spring game. Hoying was 6 for 14 in the contest and guided the Scarlet team to a 22-13 win on April 25, but he evidently lost out because of experience.

Ohio State passing game coordinator Ron Hudson said that while the two had been very evenly matched in the spring, seniority was a factor in the final decision.

"In handling the team, Kirk has more experience," he said. "Bobby's just a little behind right now. In the long run we'll have a competitive situation, but right now, Kirk Herbstreit is our quarterback."

25 Years Ago - 1997

Head coach John Cooper and his staff divided Ohio State into two squads, Scarlet and Gray, for its annual spring game. The

Gray team, which included the first-team defense and the second-team offense, defeated the Scarlet bunch 20-7 on April 26.

Although the game was set up as quarterback Mark Garcia's coming-out party - the junior was placed on the Gray, while 1996's 1-1A tandem of Stanley Jackson and Joe Germaine split time on the Scarlet - the issue of who would play quarterback for the Buckeyes remained a hot one.

"We're looking at three right now," Cooper said. "I think all three of those guys can play. I've made the comment all spring long - I don't care which one of them starts. I'm more concerned about who finishes the game than I am about who starts the game. I think it's a real dogfight between Stan and Joe, and Mark got some good reps here today."

20 Years Ago - 2002

The spring-ending Scarlet and Gray Game on April 27 may have been a 6-3 snoozefest, but it was a success, according to OSU coach Jim Tressel.

"We got the two most important things done - we didn't get anybody injured and we had fun competing," Tressel said.

In the same vein, Tressel believed the Buckeyes made progress during their 15 days of spring practice.

"The kids have worked hard, the coaches have worked hard and there has been incremental improvement," said Tressel, who wrapped up his second spring as the OSU coach. "How much? You line up against someone else and find that out."

"Do we have the answer to the ultimate questions? No, not yet, but time will tell that."

15 Years Ago - 2007

Tressel had a message for those fans hoping he would have named a starting quarterback by the end of spring practice.

Stay tuned.

Todd Boeckman, Antonio Henton and Robby Schoenhof entered the spring locked in a three-way battle for the right to succeed Heisman Trophy winner Troy Smith at the controls of the OSU offense, and although none of the three distinguished himself, no one dropped way behind either.

"I'd say if we had a game tomorrow (Boeckman followed by Schoenhof and Henton) would probably be the order we put them in," Tressel said after spring ball wrapped April 21 with the annual Scarlet and Gray Game. "I don't know that anyone lost any ground, that anyone took any steps backwards. I think the guys progressed."

"If we had a game tomorrow, I would start Todd. But I know that I'd probably have some guys get some other opportunities, just like we probably will in the first week and the second week (of the season). We'll see. We've got to have a guy emerge. I know how we'd like to christen someone, but we have to have a guy emerge."

10 Years Ago - 2012

The final tally was not as high as Urban Meyer had hoped for, but the Ohio State football coach was happy to see 81,112 fans inhabit Ohio Stadium for the spring football game April 21.

The Scarlet took a 20-14 victory against the Gray thanks in large part to a 7-yard touchdown run by Rod Smith and an interception by Christian Bryant in the fourth quarter, but that was not of much consequence to the people who filled the stadium with

scarlet on a day the weather was mostly gray.

After reading for nearly four months about Meyer's impact on the program, they wanted to see for themselves the changes the state's native son had put in place as head coach.

Meyer did not leave them waiting long.

Before the game began, he gathered the entire team at mid-field, where they formed a circle around the Block "O" at the 50-yard-line. Meyer called for pairs of players to step forward into the middle to face off. Each match seemed to get the players and by proxy the crowd more and more excited until the exercise culminated with the unexpected pairing of quarterbacks Braxton Miller and Kenny Guiton, which saw Guiton get the better of Miller with a bull rush.

"That was real fun," Guiton said. "We do that before practice almost every day to get hyped up. I thought it was good that we both got called in there today."

Five Years Ago - 2017

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from Ohio State's spring game on April 15 was that the Buckeyes really did have at least three quarterbacks who could play at a high level.

Leading the bunch was J.T. Barrett, the returning starter. He was followed by sophomore Joe Burrow and redshirt freshman Dwayne Haskins, who combined to throw for six touchdowns in the spring scrimmage.

For other positions, having multiple high-level players leads to an easy solution - play them all. At quarterback, only one guy plays at a time, and problems can arise if more than one player rotates throughout a given game.

But new offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, who had deployed a two-QB system before, said he had given it no thought despite the room at his disposal.

"I don't know," Wilson said. "That's hard, and that's Coach (Urban) Meyer - I haven't talked to Coach about that."

One Year Ago - 2021

Ohio State fans - just under 20,000 strong - didn't spill onto the field after Ohio State's 2021 spring game in the way they had the last time they were in Ohio Stadium, nearly two years prior on Nov. 23, 2019, against Penn State.

But the jubilation in the stadium on April 17, 2021, more than rivaled the last Buckeye home game that hosted fans, 511 days prior.

Head coach Ryan Day described the 2021 gathering, aptly, as "almost normal" rather than a full return to form, but every bit as important as a return to normalcy after the devastation wrought by the coronavirus pandemic.

"I think the most exciting part was getting back in the stadium and seeing the Best Damn Band in the Land, having some fans around, and it felt almost normal out there today," Day said. "I just want to thank the band for being out there. It made it feel like we were back in the 'Shoe again with a full crowd. I know usually we're used to about 85,000 for a spring game, but even 20,000 was nice."

Knowles Pleased With Defensive Progress

Continued From Page 1

the game about Haskins as one of his greatest inspirations.

"He's an inspiration," Stroud said. "He always has been. I even watched him when he was in high school. I used to watch the Elite 11 documentaries all the time, and he was one of those dudes on there, so I used to watch him in that. I looked up his highlights after and just went from there, started studying his career. He was a big-time player, a big-time dude. Not just on the field but off as well.

"He inspired me, of course, being a Black quarterback as well. He expressed himself in many different ways, and I respect that. He left a legacy here. He changed the culture at quarterback, throwing 50 passing touchdowns. That's (part of) what intrigued me to come here. Dwayne's legacy will live on."

Haskins' passing hovered over all of Ohio State's annual spring-ending scrimmage. Along with the helmet decals and Stroud's personal acknowledgment, the Buckeyes played on a field donning the same "DH" logo and, at the end of the first half, met for a lengthy team prayer – led by super senior Kamryn Babb, who played with Haskins in 2018 – while a memorial video played on the large end-zone screen for all 60,007 in attendance to see.

His impact was even apparent in the game itself. With the offensive and defensive sides of the ball split into their own teams, Ohio State was able to provide ample opportunities to all three of its former blue-chip quarterbacks, and all three showcased the kind of throwing ability that Haskins played a large role in bringing to Columbus.

Stroud completed 14 of 22 passes for 120 yards and that score, ending his day early to avoid any injury and to allow more playing time for backups Devin Brown and Kyle McCord. Brown, an early enrollee from the class of 2022, completed 11 of his 24



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PLAYERS ON THE SPOT

Junior wide receiver Julian Fleming: The feeling on Fleming through spring camp was overwhelmingly positive, but the third-year wideout didn't get the chance to showcase his ability in the spring-ending spring game on April 16. He dressed and warmed up with his teammates, but Ohio State ultimately decided to hold him out of competition as a precaution.

"We were just being smart with (Julian)," head coach Ryan Day said April 16. "He was day-to-day, and we decided it wasn't worth putting him in the game today."

That's not enough to sound the alarms, but it is at least a bit troubling. Fleming's first two seasons at Ohio State were marred by nagging injuries, and he cannot afford another, making this the most critical offseason of his time in Columbus. The young receivers gunning for a starting job in his place are too good for Fleming to hold off while missing significant playing time. He remains the favorite to take over a starting spot out wide, but another injury could prove disastrous for the Pennsylvania native with sophomore Emeka Egbuka hot on his heels.

Junior left tackle Paris Johnson Jr.: Johnson hasn't faced any real resistance in establishing himself as the starter at left tackle after spending last season at right guard, but the biggest tests for him won't come until the fall when the defenders opposite him don different uniforms. Notre Dame is expected to come into Columbus as a top-10 team and returns a veteran and talented defense. Ohio State can't afford weakness in protecting C.J. Stroud's blind side against the Fighting Irish, meaning Johnson will need to be his best from day one.

If the spring game was any indication, he's on the right path but there's work to be done. Johnson looked every bit the physical specimen he's been touted as for several years, but he struggled in pass protection against Ohio State's best defensive ends and was most notably beaten badly by a Jack Sawyer spin move, ultimately allowing a sack. Johnson's bona fides as a run blocker are unquestioned. His pass protecting, though, remains a question mark for the Buckeyes entering the summer.

Fifth-year senior right guard Matthew Jones: Jones has jumped from the left side of the line to the right side to make room for sophomore Donovan Jackson and showed no ill effects of that switch in the spring game. Ohio State is counting on the veteran to be an immediate stalwart in the starting line after two years as a top reserve and has turned to him too as a leader. He's the oldest starter on the offensive line.

The Buckeyes are hoping that he can make the jump from contributor to full-time starter, and through the spring, all indications are that he can.

"We're hoping this is a great opportunity for Matt, being thrust into this role," Day said March 29. "So far, he's done a great job, but he's got to keep growing. Like every position at Ohio State, the expectation is that you're one of the best players in the country at what you do."

Senior defensive end Zach Harrison: Harrison doesn't enter this season with the external expectations of replicating Chase Young's 2019 efforts, but Ohio State is still leaning on him heavily to bolster the defensive line. After all, he's one of several veteran members of a defense in need of serious improvement.

"There are a bunch of guys who have played a lot of football," Day said after the spring game. "There are the two defensive ends in Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau. You have Tyler Friday, Zach Harrison, Javontae (Jean-Baptiste), inside there's Taron (Vincent) and Jerron (Cage) have both played, same with Tyleik (Williams). Mike Hall hasn't played as much but Ty Hamilton certainly has, he's had a very good camp. These guys have played a lot of football."

Exiting spring practice, Harrison looks primed to fill that veteran contributor role. He earned a starting nod at defensive end opposite Jean-Baptiste in the spring game and was consistently involved, though he didn't record any stats. The former five-star may have trouble holding off sophomores Sawyer and Tuimoloau, but if he can contribute significantly and help to lead the Buckeye defense, he will have achieved his expectations this season.

Junior tight end Cade Stover: Stover entered the spring on the spot at linebacker and exits it on the spot at tight end. It's been that kind of career for the Mansfield, Ohio, product through four seasons. Both Stover and his coaches are optimistic that this is the last move, though, and that he can establish himself not just as a valuable piece at tight end but as the outright winner of the starting job that Jeremy Ruckert vacated with his departure to the NFL.

"I think Cade saw moving forward, he has a huge ceiling at tight end," Day said. "When you look at the work he's put in the past year and his skill set, he has the chance to be a really good tight end. The thing he would tell you is that he wants to bring that same defensive mentality to the offense. He's strong, he's powerful, really athletic, has really good ball skills. He was a really good high school basketball player. He's back over at tight end and had a good couple of practices."

Stover didn't record any catches in the spring game, but he enters the summer as the presumed favorite for the job and will need to hold off Mitch Rossi, Joe Royer and Gee Scott Jr. to keep it.

— Patrick Mayhorn

attempts and threw the lone interception of the day, but he also showed off a rocket arm, picking up 141 yards and cashing in a 19-yard second-half touchdown pass to Reis Stocksdale. McCord rounded out the group with its most efficient performance: 14-of-20 passing for 129 yards, with a 24-yard score to tight end Joe Royer in the first quarter.

"Certain people are meant to spend time together," head coach Ryan Day said April 11. "We (Haskins and Day) ended up on the

same path together. I don't think any of us would be here and the program would be where it is without Dwayne and the way that it all happened.

"There's a lot of people who are involved, but Dwayne certainly kick-started it with the way we've thrown the ball and the passing game here. He left a legacy even at 24 years old. And I think that says so much about who he was as a person, because of that. I just think the outpouring of support shows what type of special person he was."

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Youngsters Flash On Defense

About half of the spring game was played at "thud" tempo, essentially a more physical version of two-hand touch – the other half was spent tackling – but Ohio State was still able to make known the work it put in through the spring under new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. Operating out of a self-described "very vanilla" version of Knowles' defensive scheme, Ohio State flashed dozens of unique coverages and several brand-new positions and formations.

Notably, on several occasions, defensive ends Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau set up outside an offensive tackle, feigned a pass rush at the snap and then bolted back into an eight-man coverage look, forcing Ohio State's young quarterbacks to decipher a loaded defensive backfield and, in many cases, settle for check-down passes. That was a challenge to Stroud specifically, as Day explained after the game, but it applies to all three signal callers.

"Jim does a really good job of changing up looks," Day said after the game. "There



SONNY BROCKWAY

COMING ON STRONG — Second-year defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau (44) impressed his coaches throughout spring camp and turned heads in Ohio State's spring game with a pair of sacks. He and classmate Jack Sawyer are expected to push for starting snaps this season.

are times when he's going to drop eight players into coverage and say, 'You have to check the ball down.' As a quarterback, especially somebody as competitive as C.J., he has to force himself to take what the defense gives him, take the check down, get 5 or 6 yards and then move on. I think he's learning to do that."

The Buckeye defense didn't do any blitzing — all quarterbacks donned the off-limits black uniforms, so it wouldn't have been much good — and have just begun the complete install of Knowles' system, but he came away from the game, and the spring in general, pleased with what he saw.

"Before the game, we were very vanilla and didn't do anything really," Knowles said after the game. "Going into the game, I felt great about how far we have come, what we've accomplished and how much we installed. The players really took to it. I thought it was as good or better than I could have wished.

"Regardless of talent, these players that we have want to learn, and they soaked up everything I did. They were into it. They were into football and into change — the way

we run meetings. They picked it up at high speed. It's a football-intelligent group that wants to be coached and led. I was really happy about that."

No members of this new-look defense inspired more excitement leaving the event than the bundle of first- and second-year players who saw significant playing time. Ohio State turned frequently to class of 2021 products on defense last season and it was again those youngsters who shone brightest to open their second seasons in town. From the sound of it, it was the same story through spring camp — but the focus now is on sustaining momentum and learning how to operate as complete collegiate athletes.

"Young guys to me, as I've seen it, always have to learn how to take care of their bodies," Knowles said. "They spend their whole high school career being great because they're talented. They get to the top of college football and all of sudden they have the best nutritionists and strength staff in the country. Now they have to sleep and go to school. To me, it's about taking care of their bodies.

"Something clicks in their mind that they are an Olympic athlete. They need to train and take care of themselves like an Olympic athlete. You see that light switch go on for a lot of guys. We have a lot of talented guys. We will continue to work with them when they get done with exams. We'll take the time off and come back, and we'll be working with them. We'll work with them all summer because I think a lot of them can play for us."

Among the class of 2021 standouts, none made a larger impact on the stat sheet than Tuimoloau. A unique case a season ago because he arrived only weeks before the start of fall camp, the former five-star defensive end drew frequent praise for making such a quick adjustment to the college game, earning significant playing time in the defensive line rotation by the end of the season without an offseason of work to precede it.

As he exits his first spring as a Buckeye, the hype has only grown around Tuimoloau. He notched four tackles in the spring game, twice bursting around offensive tackles to record a sack — tied for a game high with redshirt junior Noah Potter, who has since entered the transfer portal. Ohio State often bookended the second-team defensive line with Tuimoloau and classmate Sawyer — who had a sack and two tackles of his own — and sees that pairing could not only be a valuable rotational piece this season, but a potentially game-changing duo.

"J.T. and Jack have both had very good off-seasons," Day said. "They've gotten stronger and faster, their techniques are better, and we saw that today. If they continue to build this summer, they're going to be a force in

the fall. I think they've really taken to (defensive line coach Larry) Johnson and this system. Jim has a great way of changing up the looks too, to keep the offense guessing.

"The minute you think they're moving, they come at you with a bull rush. That combination of really good technique with Coach Johnson and the style and scheme that Coach Knowles has put together really fit those guys and a lot of guys on defense. Those two have been strong."

The class of 2021 reigned in the back end of the defense, too. Breakout cornerback Denzel Burke is as secure a starter as any member of the defense after his performance as a true freshman and reminded those in attendance of his ability as he matched up largely against Marvin Harrison Jr. and limited him to one catch for 9 yards.

But it was a trio of new faces in the secondary from Burke's class who most turned heads. Safety Andre Turrentine recorded nine tackles, second to only linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, and seemed to be in the right place at the right time all game long. Cornerbacks Jordan Hancock and JK Johnson have worked their way into the two-deep this spring and proved themselves deserving with almost equally impressive performances, looking long and athletic in man coverage roles while acquainting themselves well in zone and even as tacklers. With the spring transfer of Lejond Cavazos, both will be trusted as the top cornerbacks off the bench this season.

"I was very pleased," Knowles said of the young defensive backfield. "We are con-

Continued On Page 10

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Offense Withstands Late Push To Claim Victory

Continued From Page 9

tinuing to work on playing close to people, throwing punches and being aggressive with our coverage. That may be a bit of a change for them. We are going against the best receiving corps in the country. It will be a reason for them to get better because of who they see every day in practice. We will continue coaching aggressive coverage.”

The true freshman early enrollees didn't hesitate to get in on the fun, either. Linebacker C.J. Hicks recorded seven tackles and teamed up with redshirt sophomore defensive lineman Jaden McKenzie for a TFL. Gabe Powers spent plenty of time next to Hicks at linebacker and had five tackles of his own. Jyaire Brown and Ryan Turner didn't see the lion's share of snaps at cornerback, but both had the chance to take snaps later in the game and showed off the talent that made them four-star prospects coming out of high school. Defensive lineman Camden Curry made light work of Ohio State's depth offensive linemen and found his way into the backfield on several occasions, earning one sack and three tackles.

But none shone brighter than safety Kye Stokes. One of the lowest-rated members of the class, the Florida athlete has found a home in Ohio State's new Adjuster position behind Ronnie Hickman – which is essentially a free safety role in the deep center of the defense – and made himself particularly comfortable in front of the fans in Ohio Sta-

dium. He recorded nine tackles and broke up a pair of passes, nearly snaring both for interceptions.

Breaking into the starting lineup is a long shot for the freshman because of the presence of Hickman, fifth-year senior Josh Proctor and Oklahoma State transfer Tanner McCalister, but Stokes impressed his new coaches with his athletic ability and work ethic all spring and will challenge for playing time in the fall.

“Kye has had a good spring,” Knowles said. “Without watching the film, I thought he had a great game because he showed up and flashed and looked like he rose to the occasion, which you worry about with a young guy. You worry about the bright lights. He looked like it was no problem for him. He stepped up, and I'm looking at good things for him. I liked him all along, but I was impressed today.”

Knowles still has concern about the depth in the back end, but like with much of the spring game, he left pleased with what he'd seen.

“The biggest concern for me is in the back end,” Knowles explained. “The safeties were banged up this spring. I love (Proctor) but he didn't get to work much. When you see a little bit of him you get excited, but I am always worried about depth back there. You have to move guys from position to position, and it becomes a challenge if you don't have enough guys. That's why I was really excited to see what Kye did today. I thought

that could help us a lot in our depth.”

That's a microcosm of how Ohio State's coaching staff is feeling across the board as it enters the long summer layoff before a return to fall camp in August. There's work to be done – much of the spring was spent on building a foundation, not in furnishing – but the Buckeyes are optimistic about their developing roster, and they're excited to get back to work.

“Today was very basic as you could see, on both sides of the ball,” Day said. “But what I liked was the physicality, guys running around, tackling. That was something that we wanted to get done in this game, and I thought we saw it. It was good to see those guys run around and tackle. We'll take a look at the film, but this was more about fundamentals, tackling and playing with effort today.”

Spring Game Box Score

Scarlet 34, Gray 26*

April 16, 2022 – Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
GRAY	0	0	0	0	0
SCARLET	14	10	10	0	34

First Quarter

SCAR – Smith-Njigba, 29-yard pass from Stroud (Seibert kick), 10:42; 10 plays, 65 yards, 4:18 TOP.

SCAR – Royer, 24-yard pass from McCord (Fielding kick), 4:52; 11 plays, 65 yards, 5:50 TOP.

Second Quarter

SCAR – Pryor, 22-yard rush (Smith kick), 4:54; 11 plays, 65 yards, 5:30 TOP.

SCAR – Seibert, 42-yard field goal, 2:29; 5 plays, 41 yards, 2:25 TOP.

Third Quarter

SCAR – Stocksdale, 19-yard pass from Brown (Fielding kick), 7:09; 8 plays, 65 yards, 3:58 TOP.

SCAR – Smith, 38-yard field goal, 2:19; 12 plays, 45 yards, 4:50 TOP.

Att. – 60,007

Weather – 48 degrees, cloudy, wind NNW 9 mph

Scarlet had ball on offense entire game. Gray was on defense entire game.

Final score was Scarlet 34, Gray 26.

*Gray was awarded points for certain benchmarks.

Team Statistics

	GRAY	SCAR
First Downs	0	37
Rushing	0	13
Passing	0	22
Penalty	0	2
Rushes-Yards	0-0	51-185
Passing Yards	0	390
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	0-0-0	39-67-1
Offensive Plays	0	118
Total Net Yards	0	575
Third Down Efficiency	0-0	11-24
Punts-Avg.	0-0	6-34.2
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties	4-35	4-30
Time of Possession	0:00	51:00

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Williams 15-101; Pryor 9-62; Saunders 11-32; Henderson 3-12; Brown 6-0; Stroud 2-(-3); McCord 5-(-19).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Brown 11-24-1-141-1; Stroud 14-22-0-120-1; McCord 14-20-0-129-1; TEAM 0-1-0-0-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Scott Jr. 5-40; Pryor 4-44; Egbuka 4-39; Johnson 3-50; Smith-Njigba 2-38; Royer 2-37; Stocksdale 2-25; Wiglusz 2-21; Burton 2-17; Grayes 2-15; Gurd 2-13; Ballard 2-10; Christian 2-8; Williams 2-2; Hart 1-17; Harrison Jr. 1-9; Henderson 1-5.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: Mirco 3-38.3; TEAM 2-26.0; O'Shaughnessy 1-38.0.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

MISSED FIELD GOALS – GRAY: None. SCAR: Fielding (38).

FORCED FUMBLES – GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – GRAY: None. SCAR: None.

INTERCEPTIONS – GRAY: Kittle 1-9. SCAR: None.

SACKS – GRAY: Potter 2.0-14; Tuimoloua 2.0-12; Sawyer 1.0-6; McKenzie 1.0-4. SCAR: None.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – GRAY: Potter 2.0-14; Tuimoloua 2.0-12; McKenzie 1.5-5; Sawyer 1.0-6; Hancock 1.0-4; Curry 1.0-2; Z. Prater 1.0-1; Hicks 0.5-0. SCAR: None.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – GRAY: Eichenberg 6-4-10; Turrentine 6-3-9; Stokes 3-6-9; Hicks 2-5-7; Potter 5-1-6; McKenzie 3-2-5; Powers 3-2-5; Kittle 3-1-4; Proctor 3-1-4; McCalister 3-1-4; Tuimoloua 2-2-4; Chambers 2-2-4; Johnson 3-0-3; Brown 2-1-3; Mitchell 2-1-3; Hickman 2-1-3; Turner 2-1-3; Curry 2-1-3; Sawyer 2-0-2; Burke 1-1-2; Trayanum 1-1-2; Hancock 1-1-2; Hall 0-2-2; B. Prater 1-0-1; Z. Prater 1-0-1; Pace 0-1-1; Vincent 0-1-1; Hamilton 0-1-1; Williams 0-1-1. SCAR: Gurd 1-0-1.

Players In The Game

GRAY – N/A.

SCAR – N/A.



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Spring Game Offers Peek At Upcoming Season

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The weather on April 16 was a reminder of a late November day in Ohio Stadium. So, too, were the tailgating, the band, cheerleaders and the rabid scarlet-clad fans cheering for their beloved Buckeyes.

Of course, there were differences: The announced crowd of 60,007 was perhaps generous, given that Ohio Stadium looked to be housing about 40 percent of its usual turnout when Ohio State takes the field. Also, there was no opponent to root against, not in this intrasquad scrimmage. Yet, for one afternoon football was back and the public got their first look at the 2022 team.

The spring game was the unofficial start to the season, which commences for real when Ohio State hosts Notre Dame on Sept. 3.

Under cloudy skies and a 48-degree temperature at kickoff, those in attendance or watching on the Big Ten Network got a first glimpse – somewhat – of new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' defense, as limited as it was.

Afterward, he said the defense was "very vanilla," but he's been impressed by how quickly the players are learning his schemes.

"Going into the game, I felt great about how far we have come, what we've accomplished, how much we got installed, how the players took to it," he said. "It was as good or better than I could have wished."

Head coach Ryan Day pitted the offense (Team Scarlet) vs. the defense (Team Gray) instead of a more traditional splitting of the players for equal teams or pitting the first-unit offenses and defenses against the second teamers.

As such, the scoring was altered. The offense got usual scoring for touchdowns, field goals and extra points, but the defense was rewarded with six points for a TD, three for a takeaway, two for a sack and one for a



SONNY BROCKWAY

IN COMMAND — Starting quarterback C.J. Stroud (7) played sparingly to avoid injury in Ohio State's spring game but completed 14 of 22 passes for 120 yards and a touchdown.

punt.

For the record, the final score favored the offense, 34-26.

The gloomy weather matched the atmosphere around the Buckeye community as a moment of silence was held before the

game in memory of quarterback Dwayne Haskins, the 2018 Heisman Trophy finalist who was struck by a vehicle and killed on a

Top Performers At The Spring Game

Redshirt freshman running back Evan Pryor – Pryor made his case for a rotational spot in Ohio State's backfield after a breakout performance in the spring game. He rushed for 62 yards and a touchdown on nine carries and caught four passes for 44 yards. Pryor showed impressive agility and burst when he took a handoff toward the right sideline, weaved through the defense and broke a handful of tackles before leaping into the end zone for a 22-yard score.

Sophomore quarterback Kyle McCord – McCord had equal opportunities to shine next to quarterbacks C.J. Stroud and Devin Brown in the spring game. Stroud is in no danger of losing his starting job, but McCord did enough in the scrimmage to plant his stake firmly as the team's backup signal-caller. He finished the afternoon 14 of 20 for 129 yards and a touchdown, making Ohio State's already talented receiving corps look even better with more than one on-the-money throw.

Sophomore defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau – Tuimoloau made his collegiate spring-game debut with two sacks and two tackles for loss. He and teammate Noah Potter, who has since entered the transfer portal, were the only defensive linemen with multiple sacks. Tuimoloau has his feet underneath him in his second season with the Buckeyes. He made quick work of the Ohio State offensive line and feels confident that he can complete the same task against the team's 2022 opponents.

Sophomore defensive end Jack Sawyer – Sawyer received his first opportunity at the "Jack" position in first-year defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' scheme,

acting as a defensive end/linebacker hybrid on the Ohio State defense. Sawyer delivered his best play when he spun past left tackle Paris Johnson Jr. to reach Stroud and record a sack.

Sophomore tight end Joe Royer – In the penultimate week of spring practice, reporters asked Stroud to identify potential breakout candidates for the Ohio State offense in 2022. He named super senior wide receiver Kam Babb and Royer. Early in the spring game, Royer made an impressive midair adjustment to catch a 24-yard touchdown pass from McCord. He finished with two receptions for 37 yards and a score.

Redshirt freshman cornerback Jordan Hancock – Hancock made two standout plays in a row late in the first half of the spring game. His first came on first-and-10 at Team Scarlet's 37-yard line when he broke up a pass from Stroud. He followed that up with a TFL, bringing down running back Miyan Williams in the Team Scarlet backfield. Hancock's sequence helped set up Sawyer's sack mentioned above.

Junior linebacker Tommy Eichenberg – Eichenberg finished the 2021 season with a 17-tackle performance against Utah in the Rose Bowl. His encore outing saw him record 10 tackles in the spring game. He has established himself as a front-runner for a starting linebacker spot in 2022 by frequently putting himself in a position to make plays at the second level of Ohio State's defense. Eichenberg will look to continue building momentum when Notre Dame visits Columbus on Sept. 3.

Spring Scholarship Roster - Offense

QUARTERBACK				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
7	C.J. Stroud	6-3	218	Jr./So.
6	Kyle McCord	6-3	220	So./So.

Other scholarship players: Devin Brown (Fr.)

Comments: Stroud is as entrenched as any signal-caller in the country and is considered by many to be the odds-on favorite to bring home Ohio State's first Heisman Trophy since Troy Smith in 2006. The point of intrigue here is in the battle to back up Stroud, which seems to be tilted strongly in McCord's favor but will continue through the fall and come to a head in 2023 as it shifts into a fight for the starting role, assuming Stroud departs.

RUNNING BACK				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
32	TreVeyon Henderson	5-10	215	So./So.
3	Miyan Williams	5-8	225	Jr./So.
21	Evan Pryor	5-10	198	So./Fr.

Other scholarship players: Marcus Crowley (Jr.)

Comments: Henderson returns as the unquestioned leader of the running backs room after a record-setting freshman campaign that he's hoping to build on after struggling at times with the physicality and grind of the Big Ten. The Buckeyes have a great luxury behind him with the return of Williams and the emergence of Pryor this spring, giving them a trio of running backs who would start just about anywhere else in college football. With Dallan Hayden arriving in the summer and Crowley continuing to rehab a leg injury that ended his 2021 campaign, the Buckeyes have little in the way of depth to worry about here.

WIDE RECEIVER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
11	Jaxon Smith-Njigba	6-0	198	Jr./Jr.
18	Marvin Harrison Jr.	6-3	205	So./So.
2	Emeka Egbuka	6-1	205	So./So.

4	Julian Fleming	6-2	207	Jr./Jr.
1	Kamryn Babb	6-0	205	5th/Sr.
9	Jayden Ballard	6-2	195	So./Fr.

Other scholarship players: Caleb Burton (Fr.), Kyion Grayes (Fr.)

Comments: Smith-Njigba might be America's best wide receiver, and Harrison all but claimed a starting job on the outside with his three-touchdown performance in last season's Rose Bowl. Egbuka is looking to join his classmate in a starting role and took those reps in the spring game as Fleming dealt with an injury that Ryan Day said Ohio State didn't want to risk aggravating. Fleming has a year on Egbuka but is in for quite the battle to claim that role heading into fall camp. The Buckeyes will add four-stars Kojo Antwi and Kaleb Brown come summertime.

TIGHT END				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
8	Cade Stover	6-4	255	Sr./Jr.
88	Gee Scott Jr.	6-3	235	Jr./Jr.
84	Joe Royer	6-5	245	Jr./So.

Other scholarship players: Bennett Christian (Fr.), Sam Hart (R-Fr.), Mitch Rossi (5th-Sr.)

Comments: The departure of Jeremy Ruckert has left this room without an established starter, and spring practice did little to alleviate that. Stover is back at tight end after a brief foray back to the defensive side of the ball, and he looks to have the inside track, but Scott led all Buckeyes in receptions at the spring game with five and Royer has drawn praise for his improvement entering year three. Rossi will be a factor in the tight end room as well but missed spring practice with an injury.

LEFT TACKLE				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
77	Paris Johnson Jr.	6-6	310	Jr./Jr.
65	Zen Michalski	6-7	305	So./Fr.

LEFT GUARD				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
72	Donovan Jackson	6-4	310	So./So.
70	Josh Fryar	6-6	315	Jr./So.

CENTER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
53	Luke Wypler	6-3	300	Jr./So.
78	Jakob James	6-4	295	Jr./So.

RIGHT GUARD				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
55	Matthew Jones	6-4	310	5th/Sr.
66	Enokk Vimahi	6-4	310	Sr./Jr.

RIGHT TACKLE				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
79	Dawand Jones	6-8	360	Sr./Sr.
73	Grant Toutant	6-6	320	Jr./So.

Other scholarship players: Ben Christman (R-Fr.), George Fitzpatrick (Fr.), Trey Leroux (So.)

Comments: Ohio State could have entered the season with battles galore on the offensive line after the departures of Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere, but the presence of Jones as a stopgap wherever needed in 2020 and 2021 and the ability of Johnson to kick back out to his natural position at tackle left just one spot to be filled. Despite his youth, Jackson looks to have all but locked up that last spot at left guard, especially as Fryar missed spring camp with an undisclosed injury. The drama here will be in determining the second unit – and how much of that second unit the Buckeyes feel comfortable deploying. This group will be joined by Avery Henry, Carson Hinzman and Tegra Tshabola this summer.

Florida roadway on April 9.

The players wore a "DH" helmet decal, and "DH" was written on the field at the 7-yard lines. Third-year sophomore QB C.J. Stroud, who wears No. 7 as Haskins did for the Buckeyes, played the first series in a jersey with "Haskins Jr." as the name plate.

Also, a video tribute was shown at half-time, and the team gathered for a brief prayer.

Offense Showcased

The opening series used the "thud" format, which is essentially touch football, and Stroud took the Scarlet 65 yards in 10 plays and 4:18, capped by a 29-yard TD pass to junior Jaxon-Smith Njigba at 10:42. Stroud was 4 for 6 for 53 yards, and Smith-Njigba had two of the catches for 38 yards.

Meanwhile, Knowles' defense kept to the basics, but fans on the first drive saw sophomore Jack Sawyer start at the defensive end/linebacker hybrid position called the "Jack."

While it wasn't named for Sawyer, he looked a natural playing it and was credited with a sack of Stroud in the second quarter.

The second series employed tackling, except for the QB, which was sophomore Kyle McCord. All series started at the Scarlet 35 after a non-returned kickoff.

Tackling has been a rarity in recent spring games, but Day wanted it in preparation for the season opener.

"What I liked was just the physicality and guys running around, tackling. That was something that we wanted to get done in this game," he said.

McCord tossed a 24-yard score to third-year sophomore tight end Joe Royer at the 4:52 mark of the first period. Royer had a 13-yard grab two plays earlier.

After the defense forced a punt by the Stroud-led offense, freshman Devin Brown took over for the fourth series. The drive stalled with the help of sophomore defense end J.T. Tuimoloua's 4-yard sack, the first of his two for the game.

The offense took a 21-5 lead at 4:54 of

the second quarter on a shifty 22-yard run by redshirt freshman Evan Pryor. Earlier in the series, Stroud had a 10-yard completion to junior tight end Gee Scott Jr. on a third-and-7 from the Scarlet 38.

The lead went to 24-5 at 2:29 before the break on a 42-yard field goal by third-year sophomore Jake Seibert, filling in for super senior Noah Ruggles, who took the semester off. Third-year sophomore Miyan Williams had a 36-yard run to the

Gray 29 to start the series, but McCord was unable to get the ball into the end zone.

The halftime score was 24-9.

In the half, Stroud was 14 of 21 for 114 yards; McCord went 7 for 7 for 64 yards and Brown completed 4 of 7 for 39 yards. Scott's five catches totaled 40 yards, and sophomore Emeka Egbuka had four catches for

Continued On Page 14



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Knowles' Defense Added Flavor In Spring

Continued From Page 13

39. Williams gained 73 yards on 11 carries, and Pryor added 48 yards on seven totes. Henderson rushed for 12 yards on three attempts.

Stroud and Henderson did not play in the second half.

Defense States Case

Brown upped the score to 31-13 at 7:09 of third quarter with a toss to the left corner to sophomore walk-on receiver Reis Stockdale. Freshman Jayden Fielding kicked the extra point. Williams had three runs for 24 yards on the drive, and junior tight end Patrick Gurd had a 5-yard catch.

McCord returned to take the snaps, and he guided the Scarlet to the Gray 13 but suffered a 7-yard sack by fourth-year junior defensive lineman Noah Potter and settled for a 38-yard field goal by sophomore Garrison Smith to make it 34-15. Graduate Sam Wiglusz had two catches for 21 yards, and graduate Xavier Johnson added a 21-yard reception.

Early in the fourth quarter, Brown tried

to connect with freshman Kyion Graves in the back of the end zone, but it was broken up by junior cornerback Cameron Kittle and on the next play Tuimoloau had an 8-yard sack of Brown back to the 20. Fielding then missed a 38-yard field-goal attempt.

Later, Kittle intercepted Brown at the Gray 11 and returned it 9 yards with 3:27 left to make the score 34-26.

Brown was 11 of 24 for 141 yards, a TD and the one pick. McCord threw for 129 yards (14 for 20) with a TD.

Williams finished with 101 yards on 15 carries. Pryor gained 62 yards on nine rushes and had four receptions for 44 yards.

"If he continues to grow and can hang onto the ball, he's going to have an impact on this offense," Day said of Pryor.

Fourth-year junior linebacker Tommy Eichenberg had 10 tackles (six solo) to lead Team Gray. Kye Stokes had nine tackles and two passes broken up, and Tuimoloau and Potter had a pair of sacks each.



SONNY BROCKWAY

BROKEN UP — Sophomore defensive back Denzel Burke (29) delivers one of the plays of the afternoon in defending a pass to classmate Marvin Harrison Jr. (18).

Spring Scholarship Roster - Defense

DEFENSIVE END				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
9	Zach Harrison	6-6	272	Sr./Sr.
8	Javontae Jean-Baptiste	6-5	255	5th./Sr.
44	J.T. Tuimoloau	6-4	272	So./So.

Other scholarship players: Caden Curry (Fr.), Tyler Friday (5th-Sr.)

Comments: Tyreke Smith is the only departure from Ohio State's defensive end rotation, so many of the names here are familiar. Harrison and Jean-Baptiste return as the elder statesmen in the room, hoping to hold off the surging sophomore Tuimoloau - who recorded a pair of sacks in the spring game. Friday missed spring camp as he continues to deal with the leg injury that ended his 2021 campaign before it began. Curry will be joined by fellow freshmen Omari Abor and Kenyatta Jackson Jr. in the summer.

LEO				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
33	Jack Sawyer	6-4	260	So./So.
20	Mitchell Melton	6-3	245	Jr./So.

Comments: It's a bit tricky to split the Leo room from the defensive end room, because there is plenty of overlap between the two. Some players will do both, some formations will call for two ends rather than a Leo, and usage in general will rely largely on Ohio State's opponents. However, Sawyer and Melton have been the two getting buzz here in the spring, and if Melton's spring-game injury isn't too serious, these two will be the leaders to fill the role come fall.

DEFENSIVE TACKLE				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
6	Taron Vincent	6-2	300	5th/Sr.
86	Jerron Cage	6-2	310	6th/Sr.
91	Tyleik Williams	6-3	315	So./So.
51	Mike Hall Jr.	6-2	292	So./Fr.

Other scholarship players: Ty Hamilton (So.), Jaden McKenzie (So.)

Comments: Like at defensive end, the defensive tackle room is defined by its generational gap. Cage and Vincent both have starting experience and enter the summer months as the projected starters, but Williams came on strong as a freshman and reshaped his body in the months since to spend more time on the field. Hall

has earned high praise in the spring too. Hamilton and McKenzie have seen some playing time but are in need of big fall camps to earn more snaps. Hero Kanu's arrival in June will round out the group.

LINEBACKER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
22	Steele Chambers	6-1	232	Sr./Jr.
35	Tommy Eichenberg	6-2	236	Sr./Jr.
19	Chip Trayanum	5-11	227	Jr./Jr.
30	Cody Simon	6-2	233	Jr./Jr.

Other scholarship players: Reid Carrico (R-Fr.), Palaie Gaoteote IV (Sr.), C.J. Hicks (Fr.), Teradja Mitchell (5th-Sr.), Gabe Powers (Fr.)

Comments: A logjam, as described by Ryan Day, pushed Cade Stover back to tight end and out of the linebackers room, but there's still a significant clog of talent in the position, especially with only four spots to be had in the two-deep because of Ohio State's shift to the 4-2-5. Incumbent Chambers is locked in as a starter, but the remaining spots remain up in the air entering the summer. Eichenberg may have a slight edge for the second starting spot, but it won't likely be formally decided until the final days before Sept. 3.

CORNERBACK				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
29	Denzel Burke	6-1	190	So./So.
26	Cameron Brown	6-0	190	5th/Sr.
13	Jordan Hancock	6-1	185	So./So.
32	JK Johnson	6-0	179	So./Fr.

Other scholarship players: Jyaire Brown (Fr.), Ryan Turner (Fr.)

Comments: The transfers of Lejond Cavazos and Ryan Watts have all but settled the cornerback room. Burke and Brown return as starters, and the second-year pair of Hancock and Johnson were impressive enough to fend off those departing transfers for slots inside the two-deep. Ohio State may be scraping a bit for depth with true freshmen in Brown and Turner rounding out the room, but the top four is as solidified as any position on the roster.

ADJUSTER				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
14	Ronnie Hickman	6-1	205	Sr./Jr.
37	Kye Stokes	6-0	185	Fr./Fr.

Other scholarship players: Jantzen Dunn (R-Fr.)

Comments: Hickman has caught Jim Knowles' eye as a deep safety, slotting him into the "Adjuster" role, which is essentially a free safety. It will be a switch for Hickman after playing largely as a nickel in 2021, but it's a change the Buckeyes seem confident in. With the transfers of Bryson Shaw and Craig Young and an excellent spring-game showing, Stokes jumps into the two-deep - but Dunn is close on his tail and he was very well thought of in practice before an injury ended his 2021 season and held him out of this spring session.

BANDIT				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
41	Josh Proctor	6-2	205	5th/Sr.
2	Kourt Williams	6-1	220	Jr./So.

Other scholarship players: Marcus Hooker (5th-Sr.)

Comments: The bandit works more as a strong safety in Knowles' defense, which always seemed the best fit for the hard-hitting Proctor - back now from a compound fracture that ended his 2021 season in week two. Knowles has made clear that Williams will play a large role too. Hooker has served largely as a reserve after a brief foray into the starting lineup in 2020 and will do battle with freshman Sonny Styles when he arrives in June for the No. 3 spot behind Williams.

NICKELBACK				
No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Cl./Elig.
15	Tanner McAlister	5-11	192	Sr./Sr.
10	Cameron Martinez	5-10	190	Jr./So.

Other scholarship players: Jaylen Johnson (R-Fr.), Lathan Ransom (Jr.)

Comments: McAlister was hand-picked from Oklahoma State to serve as a leader out of the nickel spot in this defense and offered no reason to expect any other result this spring. He has a strong connection with Knowles and can work as a coach on the field. Martinez broke into the rotation in the slot last season and will have plenty of chances for snaps this season, while Johnson works to recover from a torn ACL and Ransom from a Rose Bowl leg injury that required surgery.



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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
- WED. - "MILITARY & FIRST RESPONDERS" GAMES**
- \$5 Reserved Seats for active & retired Military & First Responders
Buy up to 4 tickets at \$5 each
"DOLLAR DAYS"
- \$1 concessions including regular hot dogs, small popcorn, 12 oz Pepsi soft drinks & potato chips
- THU. - "COPA DE LA DIVERSION" - Clippers transform into Los Veleros "THIRSTY THURSDAYS"**
- Beverage Specials on Beer, Margaritas & Soft Drinks
"COLLEGE ID NIGHT"
- \$10 includes Reserved ticket AND \$5 in Clippers Cash for food, beverage or souvenir purchase
- FRI. - "\$5 FRIDAY"**
- \$5 for a slice of Donatos Pizza & a Small Pepsi
- \$5 Beers (small)
- \$5 Wine
- SAT. - "PARTY-AT-THE-PARK" - Starting May 28**
- Pre-Game live music from 5:30p-6:45p on the Yueng-Wing Stage on the RF Concourse
- SUN. - "FAMILY DAY & SENIOR DAY"**
- \$18 Bleacher or \$27 Reserved Family Pass for 2 Adults & up to 4 Kids (18 & under)
- \$3 Bleacher or \$5 Reserved Seat (60 & Over)
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Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on Jordan Hancock, J.K. Johnson and the young defensive backs: "All those guys have had a really good spring. I've been impressed with the corners and safeties. They've shown up and put their hands on balls, being aggressive. I think we saw some of that today and saw some potential. There's certainly a long way to go as we get into May, June, July and then August, but I think they've grabbed on to what coach (Perry) Eliano and coach (Tim) Walton have been doing. They're playing with confidence, they're aggressive, and you can see their talent level."

Day on why he's excited about the defense in 2022: "There are two things here with the defense. One, many guys have played a lot of football. There are the two defensive ends in Jack (Sawyer) and J.T. (Tuimoloau). You have Tyler Friday, Zach Harrison and Javontae Jean-Baptiste. Inside, Taron Vincent and Jerron Cage have both played - same with Tyleik (Williams). Mike Hall Jr. hasn't played as much, but Ty Hamilton certainly has. Ty has had a good camp. These guys have played a lot of football. Tommy Eichenberg has now played a lot of football. Josh Proctor too. They've played a bunch, which we didn't have last year, and that's exciting."

"The second thing is that combined with the new scheme and some of the stuff that we're doing on defense, it comes at you fast, and it's exciting to watch, to see these guys have energy, being decisive and physical. When you combine the two of those things, it's exciting going against them every day. With the offense and defense, it's been a good back and forth. It's been fun."

Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles on safety Josh Proctor, who is bouncing back from a leg injury: "It took him a couple of practices to get back on his feet. I really saw improvement in the last couple of practices when he was out there. When you're away from practice for so long, and it's a new system, you get back out there while everyone else is ahead, and you have to catch up, and I'm not very patient because I think he's great. I saw a surge, and he started picking it up, and I think he can be great for our defense."

Knowles on the defensive line and its depth: "I love those guys. I love the depth. I don't really care who starts, to be honest. We are going to play a lot of guys up front, and I want them fresh and hungry. The more the better. I see us playing a lot of guys up there."

Defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau on his development this spring: "One thing I've been working on most with coach (Larry) Johnson is technique and pre-snap reads. Looking on ahead, that's one thing I'm going to critique now is getting my technique down and working on those pre-snap reads, and keep learning from my older brothers as well as coach J."



SONNY BROCKWAY

COUNT IT — Ohio State redshirt freshman tailback Evan Pryor (21) leaps past safety Andre Turrentine (34) and into the end zone for six of Ohio State's 34 offensive points in the April 16 spring game. Pryor was praised after the game as one of Ohio State's three "really good" running backs by head coach Ryan Day.

"In my first year, I'm not going to lie, it was trying to get my feet on the ground. I came here so late, but being here with Jack Sawyer and having a full offseason and seeing what we did out there, we have our feet on the ground and it's going to be a special year for us."

Tuimoloau on the defense's momentum coming out of spring camp: "We came together. A lot of the older dudes stepped up and took a lot of the younger boys under their wing. After that, we just continue to come with different energy and continue to push each other. Holding each other accountable is a big thing for us this year, too."

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud on the back-and-forth between the offense and defense: "I think this spring was really good to see both offense and defense make plays. The defense has been challenging the offense and, of course, we've been challenging them. It's been good to see back and forth. Our defensive line looks amazing, our defensive backs are doing really well, and the linebackers are communicating well, so hats off to them and the defensive side of the ball. And then offense, of course, we're just trying to build chemistry,

get that running game going to work with the play action and things like that. I'm definitely excited for this year."

Day on running back Evan Pryor: "Evan has had a very good spring. He has a lot of wiggle. He can change direction in short areas, and he's good with catching the ball out of the backfield. He gives us a little wiggle in there, which is nice. It's a little bit of a change of pace with the offense, and if he continues to grow and he can hold onto the ball, he's going to have an impact on the offense this year."

Day on the Ohio State running back room:

"I think we have three really good running backs, and we have a fourth coming in this summer with Dallan Hayden. They've had a good spring, and I feel solid about that room."

Pryor on working with TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams out of the backfield: "A lot of people see three running backs and it's like, 'Is there enough carries for them or can all three fit into the system? Are there enough balls?' I feel like we all complement each other well, and throughout the season you'll be able to see that as well. All three of us are going to eat and have a great season."

Pryor on what went through his head during his 22-yard touchdown run in the spring game: "There was nothing too much going through my head other than, 'Just score.' I had to find a way to score. That's what coach (Tony) Alford tells me, 'Just find a way.' That play was a good play for me to just score. That's the only thing that goes through my head every time I touch the ball. Just score."

Day on Cade Stover's growth and the tight end room: "It's a developmental position. You look at when Cade made that investment about a year ago, and you're starting to see him get the fruits of that now. It's the same thing with Gee (Scott Jr.) and with Joe (Royer). That's what a tight end is. It's very difficult to come in and play as a young player. Those guys are developing, they're putting in the work, and we're hoping that'll be a position of strength for us moving into August."

Offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson on Scott and Royer: "They've been really good. I told them after the first week and then after last week that I don't need them to do better, but I need them to keep doing what they're doing. They need to keep stacking up good days. We're basically playing tackle and receiver, so we have a lot of jobs. If you keep having a good day, you'll get more competent and confident, and your role will grow. They've started well."

Stokes Has Breakout Potential In 2022

By **CHASE BROWN**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Kye Stokes arrived on campus in January as an early enrollee from the class of 2022, he felt there was one path toward playing time as a first-year Buckeye.

“Hard work,” Stokes said on Feb. 2. “That’s a generic answer, but that’s how I got here. It was with hard work, putting in the extra work and doing what nobody else wants to do. I feel like that’s what will get me on the field. When I talked to (then secondary coach Matt) Barnes when he was here, he told me to attack it and come in like my life depends on it, and that’s what I am going to do.”

Two months later, Stokes proved that a bit of toughness and grit could take a player far within the program. Despite coming to Columbus as the Buckeyes’ third-lowest-ranked signee in 2022, the former Seffner (Fla.) Armwood High School four-star safety prospect has separated himself from the other 10 early enrollees in his class, using the team’s 14 spring practices plus the annual spring game as his first auditions for a significant role with the defensive backs room this fall.

Stokes began his Ohio State career with high praise from the coaching staff when he became the first freshman to have his black stripe removed. Only defensive end Caden Curry has earned that distinction since. Head coach Ryan Day said Stokes earned the honor from his playmaking ability in practice and his positive attitude displayed in the Woody Hayes Athletic Facility.

“The first thing you notice is his smile, and his attitude every day is excellent,” Day said on April 14. “It’s just contagious. He constantly has a lot of energy. On the field and athletically, he has a high ceiling. His movement is excellent. His range, ability to change direction, ball skills and covering skills are excellent.”

Stokes proved those qualities in a breakout performance for Team Gray in the program’s spring game. The former high school track star flew around the field as the Adjuster, a new safety position in defensive coordinator Jim Knowles’ scheme.

While the intrasquad scrimmage didn’t feature live tackling for every play, Stokes frequently put himself near the ball carrier. He tied with redshirt freshman safety Andre Turrentine for the second-most tackles on the team with nine, behind junior linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, who recorded 10 take-downs in the contest.

Stokes also made a pair of pass breakups from the safety spot. The first occurred with under a minute left in the second quarter when quarterback Devin Brown escaped the pocket to the right sideline before tossing a touch pass to wide receiver Sam Wiglusz. Stokes kicked himself into second gear to disrupt what would have been a 19-yard gain.

His second came while running step-for-step with slot receiver Emeka Egbuka, breaking up a would-be 30-yard play with 32 seconds remaining in the first half.

Knowles said after the spring game that he was impressed with Stokes’ first collegiate performance in front of live spectators. He believed Stokes didn’t hesitate to step into the spotlight, putting on a show for the 60,007 fans in attendance at Ohio Stadium.



SONNY BROCKWAY

STOKING THE FLAMES — Freshman safety Kye Stokes (37) surprised many this spring, becoming the first member of his class to shed his black stripe and recording nine tackles in the spring game. The Seffner (Fla.) Armwood product was one of the lowest-rated members of the class.

“Kye has had a good spring,” Knowles said. “Without watching the film, I thought he had a great game because he showed up and flashed and looked like he rose to the occasion, which you worry about with a young guy. You worry about the bright lights. He looked like it was no problem for him. He stepped up, and I’m looking at good things for him. I liked him all along, but I was impressed today.”

Knowles said he welcomes Stokes’ meteoric rise in his first semester on campus, believing that the young talent on Ohio State’s roster will need to heavily contribute to the team’s success should it want to reach its goal of winning a national championship.

The first-year coordinator didn’t commit to naming any starters. Still, he’s offered continual support to safeties Ronnie Hickman — the program’s leading tackler in 2021 — veteran Josh Proctor and Oklahoma State transfer Tanner McCalister throughout spring practices. He also championed Kourt Williams II and Cameron Martinez for their athletic ability and work ethic since he arrived in January.

But Knowles also noted that he wants as much depth as possible at the back end of Ohio State’s defense. With three safeties on the field at all times, it’s a necessity to have a next-man-up mentality. Therefore, finding

playing time for Stokes might not be that hard.

“My biggest concern is in the back end,” Knowles said. “We had a lot of safeties banged up this spring. You have to move guys from position to position, and it becomes a challenge if you don’t have enough guys. That’s why I was really excited to see what Kye did today. I thought that could help us a lot in our depth.”

Since coming to Columbus, Stokes said his biggest inspirations were sophomore cornerback Denzel Burke and Proctor — for different reasons. Stokes’ ascension in his first months has mirrored that of Burke, who flew under the radar before arriving at Ohio State as a four-star recruit from Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguardo. Burke turned heads in his early-enrollee spring, which led to his emergence as the Buckeyes’ No. 1 cornerback last season.

“He’s a big inspiration for me to push myself,” Stokes said. “To see him come in and be as successful as he was, it gives me that much more drive to hopefully be on the field this year.”

Stokes believes he will become like Burke and make an immediate impact if he learns from those above him.

He spent time around Proctor in spring practice, soaking up his knowledge and learning what it means to be a college athlete

at a highly touted Division I program.

“I have a lot of opportunities to learn,” Stokes said. “I’ve been hanging around Josh Proctor and picking up his wisdom and the little things that he did to get in the position that he is in. It’s that type of thing. It’s learning the game, the speed of the game and the do’s and do not’s of the game. That’s what I feel like is a benefit to me — it’s having those kinds of older guys around me to guide me and lead me to the right path.”

“Everybody I’ve been around (at Ohio State) calls me ‘Mini-Proctor.’ Even all the guys in the locker room walk around like, ‘You’re Mini-Proctor, you’re Mini-Proctor!’ and, honestly, I wouldn’t mind playing like him. He’s a great athlete, and that’s my big brother. I’ve been mirroring him. I’ve been learning from him, so that’s not a problem at all.”

He also studies film from NFL Hall of Fame safety Ed Reed and the late Sean Taylor, an All-Pro with the Washington Redskins before his untimely death in 2007. Stokes said he wants to play with the same intellect, passion and physicality as the two legendary defensive backs. He hopes to bring those qualities and more to the Buckeyes as soon as next season and desires to make an impact early in his career.

Ultimately, Stokes recognizes that Ohio State is a program looking to win national titles right now. It’s fun for him to talk about the players he wants to be like in the future, but he understands the need to prove himself with each rep in practice and snap in a game.

“If I do what I am supposed to do, I feel like I can be on the field,” Stokes said. “I feel like I can have a big contribution to the team, but at the same time, I understand that there are older guys, and they know a little more than I do, and they’ve been here a little longer than me. If it takes a year, I’ll sit back and learn and develop, and I’ll be OK with that.”

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Early Enrollees Shine In Spring Practice

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's annual spring game is advertised as a sneak preview of the team for the upcoming season. While fans and media do get a glimpse of the Buckeyes' starters – a series or two for the starting offense and defense, usually – the majority of snaps are reserved for the reserves, as well as those getting their first experience in Ohio Stadium. This includes the early enrollees from the incoming class, of which Ohio State has 11 (not including transfers Tanner McCalister and Chip Trayanum).

Those early enrollees have been on campus since early January and recently wrapped up their first spring in scarlet and gray. Following 14 practices, everything culminated in the Buckeyes' spring game on April 16 in which several of the team's new additions gave those in attendance a preview of what is to come for Ohio State.

The talent among the early enrollees includes a five-star prospect in linebacker C.J. Hicks and more than a handful of four-star recruits, including battery mates quarterback Devin Brown and wide receiver Kyion Grayes and defensive end Caden Curry on the other side of the ball.

Although few are likely to see the field in a major capacity early in this upcoming season, this spring helps set the foundation for their time at Ohio State, and several took advantage of the opportunity over the past few weeks to impress coaches and fans alike.

Ohio State will welcome 10 more members from the class this summer, including five-star safety Sonny Styles and a pair of four-star, top-100 defensive ends in Omari Abor and Kenyatta Jackson.

But those early enrollees that have been on campus for the past few months will have a leg up on their fellow freshmen once the Buckeyes regroup for fall camp in August. In alphabetical order, we take a look at how the early enrollees have progressed this spring.

QB Devin Brown

As it often happens with incoming quarterbacks, much of the attention throughout the spring was on Brown (6-3, 205), a four-star prospect out of Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon. Despite his brief time on campus, he has looked the part of an Ohio State quarterback so far as he begins pushing sophomore Kyle McCord for the backup job behind incumbent C.J. Stroud.

Brown, who worked with the third team all spring, finished 11 of 24 for 141 yards, one touchdown and one interception in the spring game. He led Ohio State's quarterbacks in yards and snaps, continuing a strong developmental spring.

"It can be a little tough sometimes with the threes, but he's making it work," head coach Ryan Day said. "You saw his athleticism with what he can do pulling the ball (and running). (He's) got a strong arm. The more reps he gets, the better he's going to be."

Unless something surprising happens in the battle between Brown and McCord, Brown will likely see action in just a handful of games and could be on watch to receive

a redshirt. Pressure is low right now as he learns how to carry himself as a quarterback at Ohio State.

"They're trying to get me flustered and trying to jump on me," Brown said. "They want to see how I react. A lot of times, they're not angry at me. They know I'm a freshman. They know I'm going to make mistakes, but they want to know why I did things. They want me to process everything and be able to communicate everything."

CB Jyaire Brown

Brown (5-11, 180) has had a positive spring as he looks to earn some playing time this upcoming season. He finished the spring game with three tackles and was flying across the field during Ohio State's final exhibition of the spring.

Brown is on the outside looking in regarding playing time right now with cornerbacks Cameron Brown, Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock and JK Johnson firmly entrenched as the top four, but it takes just one injury for Brown (or fellow early-enrollee cornerback Ryan Turner) to suddenly see the field in an important capacity.

While the four-star West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West product waits to potentially see the field, he's focused on improving his game before the Buckeyes reconvene for fall camp.

"It's been what I expected, just coming in here knowing that it's going to be hard," he said. "I'm just fighting through it every day, working hard, trying to get better."

WR Caleb Burton

Perhaps one of the most underrated recruits in his class due to injuries, Burton (5-11, 169) got involved in the spring game, bringing in two receptions for 17 yards on five targets.

The four-star out of Lake Travis in Austin, Texas – also the alma mater of former Ohio State receiver Garrett Wilson, whom Burton has been compared to since being recruited by Ohio State – is one of several Buckeye receivers to come out of the Longhorn State in recent years, and Burton is looking to keep that pipeline strong.

"I just want to work every day," he said. "Get stronger, faster, just do what I can in my first year."

Burton finds himself low on the depth chart given Ohio State's stockpiling of top receivers, but once he does get on the field, he has several skills he'll want people to watch out for.

"(People will notice my) route running, what I can do after the catch," he said. "I'm working on my vertical jump right now, so hopefully I'll be jumping out of the roof."

TE Bennett Christian

An Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona three-star product, Christian (6-5, 245) is more in line with Ohio State's recent usage of the tight end position, preferring to block rather than going out wide, but it doesn't necessarily mean there will be an easy path to the field.

Cade Stover, Gee Scott Jr., Joe Royer, Mitch Rossi and even Sam Hart appear to be ahead of Christian on the depth chart, as he played just 18 snaps in the spring game – the fewest among Ohio State's tight ends – and had two receptions for eight yards. He will likely remain on the sideline for most

Ohio State's 2022 Early Enrollees

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Previous School
15	Devin Brown	QB	6-3	205	Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon
18	Jyaire Brown	CB	5-11	180	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West
12	Caleb Burton	WR	5-11	169	Chicago St. Rita
85	Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	245	Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona
92	Caden Curry	DE	6-3	250	Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove
68	George Fitzpatrick	OL	6-6	285	Englewood (Co.) Cherry Creek
17	Kyion Grayes	WR	6-0	175	Chandler, Ariz.
11	C.J. Hicks	LB	6-3	220	Kettering (Ohio) Archbishop Alter
36	Gabe Powers	LB	6-3	214	Marysville, Ohio
37	Kye Stokes	SAF	6-2	185	Seffner (Fla.) Armwood
24	Ryan Turner	CB	6-0	180	Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep

of this season as he continues his development, which is going well, according to Day.

"I've been impressed with the tight ends," Day said. "Losing Jeremy Ruckert certainly was significant, but to see Cade Stover come up and have the spring that he's had has been really good. Joe and Gee (Scott Jr.) both have been excellent, and we're excited to get Mitch (Rossi) back."

"When you look at those guys right there, that gives us some versatility in those packages, which is really exciting. And that's in the run game and the passing game. And then Bennett Christian has been really showing up too as a young tight end."

DE Caden Curry

Curry (6-3, 250) is one of two true freshmen to lose his black stripe, signifying that he's now an "official" member of the team after only a couple of months at Ohio State, and has turned in a positive spring as he looks to crack the rotation at defensive end.

His name has come up often with coaches when discussing players who have stood out during the spring, and he backed that up with three tackles and a TFL in the spring game, leading all defensive ends with 53 snaps.

"Caden plays with a high motor," Day said. "He's a really good football player. He plays a lot bigger than he is. You know, quick twitch. I think he's going to be a heck of a football player."

The four-star out of Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove is currently set at defensive end but also indicated some interest in playing at defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' Leo position. Regardless of where he lines up, he has high expectations for himself in his first season.

"I kind of just look at myself like Nick Bosa," Curry said. "That's how I kind of want to build myself and be like. Just everything, watching how athletic he gets on the outside, all the speed rushes and then using his power to kind of just have all the tools to be able to succeed."

OL George Fitzpatrick

Fitzpatrick is one of four offensive linemen in Ohio State's latest recruiting class, but he's the only one who arrived on campus as an early enrollee, giving him an early advantage for some playing time this upcoming season. He led all offensive linemen with 72 snaps in the spring game.

The four-star recruit out of Englewood (Colo.) Cherry Creek is likely not at playing weight yet, sitting at 283 pounds in an offensive line group where the starters tip the scales at 318 on average, but he could see

time with the third team this season if he can continue to bulk up. He projects as a guard for the Buckeyes given his 6-5 stature but has experience playing tackle in high school.

"Growing up I've always been a hard worker," he said. "It's just something my parents instilled in me, so being around other hard workers and seeing how the top dogs get down has definitely been super cool."

WR Kyion Grayes

Grayes (6-0, 175) got a good workout during the spring game, playing 47 snaps – tied for second most among the receivers – and hauling in two receptions for 15 yards on four targets.

While Burton is drawing comparisons to Garrett Wilson, Grayes, donning No. 17 and running some crisp routes, has already starting received comparisons to former Buckeye great Chris Olave, who is set to hear his name announced in the first round of the 2022 NFL draft.

It will be tough for Grayes to see the field this year with a solid top six of Jaxon-Smith Njigba, Marvin Harrison Jr., Emeka Egbuka, Julian Fleming, Kamryn Babb and Jayden Ballard, as well as the other three incoming freshman receivers, but he has a plan in place for his career at Ohio State.

"The one thing I want to do is try to be one of (Olave or Wilson)," Grayes said. "We plan on having two guys go out this year, two guys go out next year, and we're going to keep that going, like Chris and Garrett (Wilson) are doing right now."

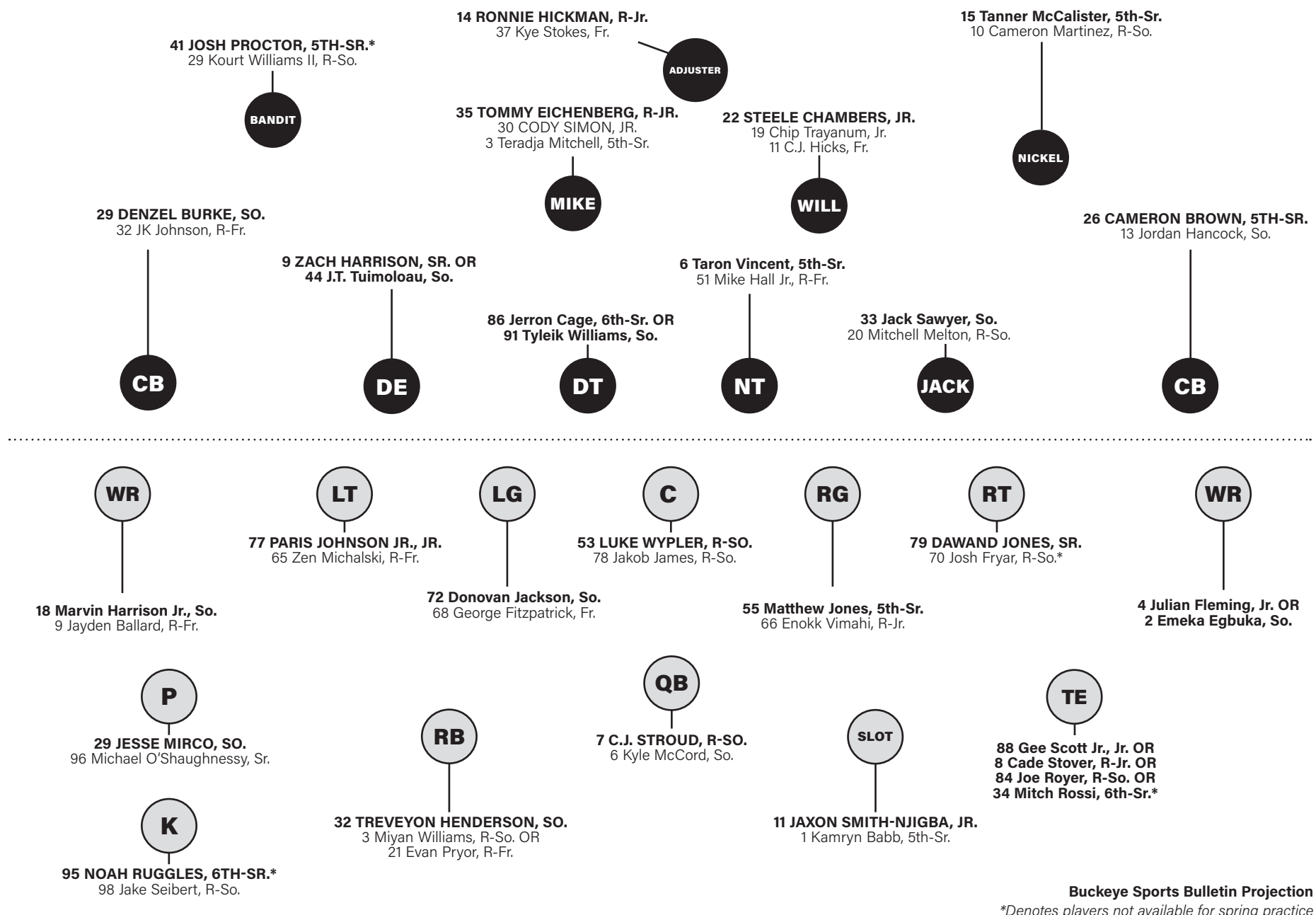
LB C.J. Hicks

Hicks (6-3, 225) turned in one of the standout defensive performances in the spring game, finishing with seven tackles and half a tackle for loss in just 30 snaps. Arriving on campus as a five-star prospect out of Kettering (Ohio) Alter, expectations were high for Hicks to make an immediate impact, and his coaches are impressed so far.

"C.J. shows a lot of short-space quickness, and his feet are excellent," Knowles said. "He has an outstanding ability to break on the ball, so I'm seeing from C.J. a lot of the quickness and speed that I expected."

Ohio State has several returning starters at linebacker, including Steele Chambers, Tommy Eichenberg and Cody Simon, but Hicks is one of the few freshmen – along with Styles when he arrives this summer – who has the talent to immediately push for playing time. Even with the pedigree of being the nation's top-ranked linebacker in his class, Hicks knows nothing will be given

OHIO STATE PROJECTED SPRING TWO-DEEP DEPTH CHART



Buckeye Sports Bulletin Projection

**Denotes players not available for spring practice*

JIM KNOWLES' JARGON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DE: Traditional defensive end.

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

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

JACK: Knowles' speciality position. Ohio State has yet to install the "Leo," which can be moved all over the defensive front, but is instead using the "Jack," a modified version of it.

to him.

"I think everybody kind of paid attention to the rankings here," Hicks said. "But at this point, it really doesn't matter, because you can be the No. 1 recruit in the country and you come here and play horrible and you won't even touch the field. It's all about giving 110 percent."

LB Gabe Powers

Although Powers (6-3, 214) wasn't as heralded as Hicks in recruiting circles, the four-star out of Marysville, Ohio, is already making a strong impression in his first few practices with the Buckeyes.

"He's quiet, but I think he's one of these guys that gets better every day," Knowles said earlier in the spring. "I mean, he is a serious student of the game. I just see his trajectory in six practices as being completely upward. He's a guy who just wants

to learn, wants to grow and he makes that transition from the classroom to the field."

Powers led the linebackers with 42 snaps in the spring game, finishing with five tackles. Even with Cade Stover's move to tight end, Powers still faces an uphill battle to see the field with so many players vying for playing time.

"It would take a lot (to start), especially the linebacker position," he said. "The biggest thing right now honestly is probably my weight, getting that up, and also just staying in the film room and studying."

SAF Kye Stokes

Perhaps no early enrollee made more of an impression in spring practice than Stokes (6-2, 185), a four-star prospect out of Seffner (Fla.) Armwood who has been the talk of coaches over the past few weeks.

Despite facing a logjam at safety,

Stokes has been able to rise above the pack as a true freshman with just a couple of months on campus under his belt. He and Curry are the only two incoming freshmen to shed their black stripes, but beyond Stokes' play, he's been noted as bringing an infectious attitude to spring ball.

"Kye Stokes, the first thing you notice is a smile and his attitude every day is just excellent," Day said. "It's just contagious. I mean, he's constantly just shown a lot of energy."

Stokes had his coming-out party at Ohio Stadium for the spring game, picking up nine tackles (just one off the team lead) and breaking up two passes, which tied the team high. With his positive spring performance and the transfers of Bryson Shaw, Andre Turrentine and Craig Young, Stokes is in line to see the field sooner rather than later.

CB Ryan Turner

It's been a quiet spring for Turner (6-0, 180), who is entering one of the team's most solidified position groups.

The four-star prospect out of Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep has still been able to make an impact, though, playing significant time in the spring game and accruing three tackles. He led all cornerbacks with 62 snaps, with 27 coming in the fourth quarter.

Turner said during spring ball that he has few expectations for this season other than getting on the field at some point and said that he feels at home at Ohio State.

"I feel like I'm a very good fit for Ohio State and they're a very good fit for me, and I want to win a natty," he said. "So I came to a school that can win the natty."

Haskins' Buckeye Career Brief But Impactful

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Dwayne Haskins provided many memories for someone who had such a short career at Ohio State.

The quarterback started all 14 games in 2018 as a third-year sophomore and had one classic relief appearance in the 2017 Michigan game that will be linked to his name forever.

Haskins, who died at the age of 24 on April 9 after being struck by a vehicle while crossing a Florida highway, set 28 OSU and seven Big Ten records en route to becoming a 2018 finalist for the Heisman Trophy.

Almost every game of his short career was a highlight, so it wasn't easy whittling the list to seven – the number he wore for the Buckeyes.

This is not just about top performances but the significance of them in the bigger picture and how one situation, or outcome, shaped another.

That's why his explosive outing against Northwestern in the 2018 Big Ten Championship Game is an honorable mention despite Haskins teasing the 500-yard passing mark.

7. Rose Bowl vs. UW, Jan. 1, 2019

Haskins threw for three touchdowns, at the time the program record for the Rose Bowl that was surpassed by the six of C.J. Stroud on Jan. 1 of this year vs. Utah, as the Buckeyes defeated Washington 28-23 in Urban Meyer's last game as Ohio State coach. Haskins was 25 of 37 for 251 yards. Six days later he declared for the NFL draft.

He set the program single-season record with 50 TD passes, breaking the OSU mark of 35 by J.T. Barrett and the Big Ten standard of 39 by Drew Brees.

Haskins also had 4,831 passing yards, smashing both the conference (Purdue's Curtis Painter; 3,895 yards) and school (Joe Germaine; 3,330 yards) records.

His performance came after he had a school-record 499 yards and five touchdowns against Northwestern for a 45-24 win in the conference title game.

In that game, the Buckeyes were ahead 24-21 midway through the fourth when Haskins threw three TDs in a little more than 12 minutes. He was 34 of 41 with one interception.

"The Rose Bowl and the Big Ten championship get lost in the shuffle," said former Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff writer Marcus Hartman, now of the Dayton Daily News. "The championship game, they were trying to make the College Football Playoff so you're thinking about style points and all that stuff. The Rose Bowl is the Rose Bowl."

6. At Penn State, Sept. 29, 2018

Happy Valley has never been an easy place for the Buckeyes to win, and it took a momentous comeback to pull this one out, 27-26, before a Beaver Stadium-record crowd of 110,889 in University Park, Pa.

Trailing 26-14 in the fourth quarter, Haskins threw touchdown passes of 47 yards to junior Binjimen Victor and followed with a 24-yarder to junior K.J. Hill with 2:03

to play, although the two-point try failed, for the final score.

What made the comeback so remarkable was that the winning drive went 96 yards, three yards more than the Buckeyes had in the entire first half.

Haskins finished 22 of 39 for 270 yards and three TDs after starting 5 for 14 for 31 yards and an interception. More importantly, on the two fourth-quarter scoring drives, he went 6 of 8 for 133 yards as the Buckeyes improved to 5-0.

"That was just one of many great games he had and coming early in the season showed what he was capable of doing," said Columbus Dispatch columnist Rob Oller.

5. At Purdue, Oct. 20, 2018

One thing Haskins couldn't do was play defense, and apparently neither could his teammates on the other side of the ball as the Buckeyes had their worst defensive season in recent memory, lowlighted by the 49-20 loss to Boilermakers, dropping the No. 2-ranked Buckeyes to 7-1.

Haskins was 49 for 73 for 470 yards (all school records to that point) with two TDs and an interception, but it wasn't nearly enough.

While individually he had a game to remember, it was one that Buckeye fans everywhere want to never relive. Ohio State would finish 13-1, but this one cost the Buckeyes a shot at playing in the College Football Playoff.

4. Spring Game, April 14, 2018

A crowd of 47,803 came to Ohio State to witness the QB battle between Haskins and Joe Burrow (Tate Martell was a distant third) to replace J.T. Barrett.

Haskins was considered the incumbent based on his replacing the injured Barrett and rallying the Buckeyes to an improbable win at Michigan the previous fall (more on that later).

In the spring game, Joe Burrow was 15 of 22 for 238 yards and two touchdowns while Haskins (9 of 19) threw for 120 yards and two scores.

Whoever was designated the backup to start the season by Meyer and offensive coordinator Ryan Day had to decide whether to stick around or consider transferring.

The rest is history. Burrow transferred to LSU when Haskins was handed the keys to the offense. From there Burrow in 2019 would win the Heisman Trophy while leading the Tigers to the national championship.

Revisionists will say Meyer made the wrong choice in going with Haskins after the spring game, but Hartman said that was not the case while adding that Burrow's departure was inevitable at that point.

"Haskins was OK and Burrow was good in the game," he said. "If Haskins had come out and flopped maybe it would have been different. I think one of the things was that Haskins was better early in spring practice and then Burrow came on and made it more of a debate.

"It was always going to be that he had to clearly beat Haskins out, and that didn't happen. I don't think anybody made the wrong move in all that. I understand everybody's decision making in this process. It



FILE PHOTO

MEMORIES GALORE — Although he started just 13 games in scarlet and gray, former Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins left a lasting legacy in Columbus with several historic performances, many of which came on the biggest stage.

makes a lot of sense."

3. Michigan, Nov. 24, 2018

It was a beatdown for the No. 10 Buckeyes against the fourth-ranked Wolverines when Haskins threw six TDs in a 62-39 whupping.

Ohio State torched the nation's best defense for 567 total yards, and Haskins had 396 of them through the air, completing 20 of 31 attempts.

"For an Ohio State quarterback, that might be the finest single-game performance I ever saw in all the many, many years I've watched Ohio State football," Buckeye football historian Jack Park said. "It was just really something to watch."

2. At Maryland, Nov. 17, 2018

Haskins returned to his home state to face the school he once committed to by engineering a pulsating 52-51 overtime win the week before hosting Michigan.

"If they lose that game, the rest of the season is ruined," Hartman said. "Then

who knows if the feeling going into '19 is different. Maybe Urban tries to keep coaching."

Yes, Haskins was 28 for 38 for 405 yards, three touchdowns and a pick-six, but he also ran 15 times for 59 yards and three scores. He had one rushing TD for the season prior to the game.

"He had to do some things he hadn't done in terms of carrying the team," Hartman said.

Haskins scored on a 5-yard run on the first possession of overtime for a 52-45 lead with the extra point by Blake Haubeil. Prior to that, Haskins had an 11-yard pass to tight end Rashod Berry on fourth-and-1 from the 16 that may have saved the season.

After the OSU score, Maryland got a TD to pull to within one and went for the win, but a pass by Tyrrell Pigrome to an open Jashaun Jones was off target.

1. At Michigan, Nov. 25, 2017

The game that defines Haskins.

IN MEMORIAM

It's likely Haskins' OSU career would have been different if not for Barrett leaving in the third quarter after aggravating a right knee injury when he was bumped on the sideline, allegedly by a media member, while warming up for the Buckeyes' first series.

With his team trailing 20-14, Haskins came on and helped the Buckeyes secure a 31-20 victory and ultimately pave the way for his ascension to starting quarterback the following season.

"I'll go to my grave saying the No. 1 reason that Urban picked Haskins (in 2018) was that Michigan game, and he deserved it based on that to a certain extent," Oller said. "In the crucible moment he came through, and Burrow hadn't done much in his career to that point.

"It's No. 1 because maybe Haskins doesn't win the starting job if he doesn't play in that game."

Going back further, a broken bone in Burrow's throwing hand several weeks before the 2017 opener gave Haskins the edge as the backup. Otherwise it could have been Burrow who bailed out the Buckeyes in Ann Arbor.

But it wasn't. Haskins was 6 for 7 for 94 yards and ran three times for 24 yards.

He guided the Buckeyes to a 21-20 lead with 1:34 remaining in the third quarter. Facing a third-and-13 from the OSU 47 after consecutive false starts, Haskins drilled a 27-yard strike to Austin Mack between two defenders to place the ball at the 26.

J.K. Dobbins ran for 3 before Haskins



PHOTO COURTESY THE PITTSBURGH STEELERS

CUT TOO SHORT — Dwayne Haskins passed away only a month before his 25th birthday when he was struck by a vehicle in South Florida on April 9. He had months earlier signed a one-year contract extension with the Pittsburgh Steelers and was expected to factor into their impending quarterback competition.

avoided the rush and ran 22 yards to the 1. Dobbins then went behind the blockers for a 1-yard TD and the lead after the PAT by Sean Nuernberger.

Later, Haskins had a 29-yard, third-down strike to K.J. Hill, but the drive stalled and Nuernberger made a 44-yard field goal for a 24-20 lead with 10:21 to

play. Mike Weber sealed the win with a 25-yard run with 1:44 left to play.

Hartman said the ramifications went far beyond Haskins' future, noting that was the sixth straight OSU win in the series and 13th in 15 games. The Wolverines would not end their skid until 2021.

"If Michigan wins that game – and they

outplayed OSU to that point – they build up momentum," Hartman said. "They had a good team coming back in '18. If they won that game, maybe Michigan's really on the ascent before (last season) – although I don't really think Michigan is on the ascent now – then what happens in '18 to the two programs?"

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Haskins Set The Standard For Other QBs To Follow

By **CRAIG MERZ**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Dwayne Haskins left a mark on the Ohio State football program that will endure the passage of time, say those who know Buckeye history well.

"He helped usher in a new era with a lot of help from Ryan Day," Columbus Dispatch columnist Rob Oller said, referring to the current OSU head coach, who was the offensive coordinator for Haskins' lone season as a starter in 2018 when he set 28 school and seven Big Ten records.

Haskins, 24, was killed crossing a Florida highway in the early hours of April 9 when he was struck by a vehicle. The shock waves still reverberate in the Ohio State community.

"I never had the privilege to meet or talk with Dwayne, but what an incredible talent he was," said Rex Kern, who as a sophomore quarterbacked the Buckeyes to the 1968 national title under coach Woody Hayes. "He spent only one year with us, and he rewrote everything in the record books. It was just an amazing accomplishment.

"When I heard the news, it was just like a punch in the stomach. My goodness, a young kid like that going out the way he did.

"It is just a great tragedy and a great loss of life. I know that all Ohio State people and the lives that he has touched are mournful about the situation. There's nothing more that I could say other than it's just a tragedy for a great young man. As a former Buckeye quarterback, he'll be greatly missed."

Haskins set the conference season marks by throwing for 4,831 yards and 50 touchdowns in 2018.

"It's still sinking in how singular and interesting it is, all things he accomplished," former BSB staff writer Marcus Hartman of the Dayton Daily News said. "Ohio State records falling are becoming more common, but it is still really unique what he did. He broke the single-season passing record by about 1,500 yards. He threw 50 touchdowns passes, and as good as people have been since then, it's still that much better."

C.J. Stroud was a Heisman Trophy finalist in 2021 and had an outstanding season, but his 4,435 yards are nearly 400 fewer than Haskins had and his 44 TDs fell short as well.

"Just look at (Haskins') numbers at Ohio State," Hartman said. "As great as Stroud was last year, he was still six touchdowns short. Passing yards, he was still fairly far off from Haskins, so his records might stand up pretty well because a lot of times they're going to be a more balanced team than they were that year in 2018.

"I think we've hit the ceiling of what offense might be in terms of raw numbers."

It was not only the statistics that Haskins will be remembered for. His most famous performance may be the 2017 Michigan game when he replaced an injured J.T. Barrett with the Buckeyes trailing 20-14 in the third quarter on the road and helped them to a 31-20 victory.

"Until that game, up until the third quarter of that game, I don't think anybody – unless you're following the program really, really closely – knew who Dwayne Haskins was," said Ohio State football historian Jack Park. "He came off the bench and was just really a

tremendous player. He's one of the great Ohio State quarterbacks, but he only started about 13 games.

"His passing was just a very, very unfortunate thing. He probably would have had a pretty good pro career. We don't know that. That doesn't make any difference whether he would have or not. The fact that the young man lost his life, that's the most paramount."

Yes, Haskins struggled in the NFL after being the 15th pick in the 2019 draft by the Washington (then) Redskins. He was cut near the end of the 2020 season and later signed with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Although he did not take a snap in the 2021 season, he was looking forward to the challenge of competing for the starting job this season following the retirement of Ben Roethlisberger.

"It seemed like he had stabilized things," Hartman said. "You can put a good baseline if you want to and maybe think he really would have turned it around with the Steelers. Obviously, they weren't assuming he would because they signed Mitch Trubisky, but he was still on the roster. He was still somewhat in the mix. You can fill in your own adventure there."

Legend In The Making

His time in the NFL will only be a small part of his story as far as OSU followers are concerned, said Oller.

"Five years from now, I don't think Buckeye fans will really care about his NFL legacy, and 10 years from now it will be even less," he said.

What will be remembered is Haskins the OSU quarterback.

"He was the best pure passer I've seen in terms of quick release, reading the field fairly well," Oller said. "I don't think he reads the field as well as (Justin) Fields or Stroud, but he's close in the conversation."

Said Hartman, "He's the best pure thrower that I have seen at Ohio State.

"He and Joe Germaine are sort of interesting and unique, the two guys who are pure passers and so much better than everybody else. They both had one great year and Germaine played some in other years, but it's kind of funny the marks they left on the record book"

Until Haskins came along, Germaine owned the school record for season passing yards (3,330). He also threw the go-ahead TD in the 1997 Rose Bowl victory over Arizona State.

Oller noted Haskins had another trait that separated him from most Ohio State quarterbacks.

"The bottom line is he was one of the most arrogant quarterbacks they've ever had," he said. "Competent, cocky almost, very sure of himself. That's what made him tick in a good way. But you go back to almost any quarterback they've had and I can't think of anybody who was that confident in his abilities and willing to say it."

Coincidentally, another QB was like-minded as Haskins and Joe Burrow battled to be the starter in 2018 to replace Barrett. Haskins was the chosen one following the spring game, and Burrow soon after transferred to LSU.

"He was pretty confident, not cocky, but he was pretty arrogant too," Oller said of Burrow. "I went back and looked when I was looking up the Haskins stuff, and I remember talking

to Joe after the spring game in '18 and I asked him whether he thought he should be the starter.

"It basically was, 'Hell, yes. I deserve it. I believe I should lead this team. I can lead this team,' so Joe Burrow doesn't lack for confidence, but they didn't see it that way."

While the debate of who should have been the starter in 2018 continues to this day, especially since Burrow has by far had the better pro career, taking the Cincinnati Bengals to the Super Bowl in January, the outcome seemed more cut and dried at the time.

Haskins' play in the 2017 Michigan game gave him a decided edge with head coach Urban Meyer and Day.

"I think if Joe Burrow had not broken his hand in the (2017) preseason that Dwayne wouldn't have been the backup and Joe might have been the backup just by default and he's the guy who comes in and leads them to victory over Michigan," Hartman said. "Once Haskins had that skin on the wall with that victory over Michigan, it was pretty clear Urban was not going to supplant him unless Haskins just fell on his face in the spring game and Burrow was awesome."

Oller had an interesting perspective on the Haskins-Meyer relationship.

"What is funny is if you go back to Urban, he wasn't really big on him because Urban likes the J.T. (Barrett style), big screaming leader, (Tim) Tebow type guy, and that was not Haskins," Oller said. "Maybe he got a little better at it, but I went back and looked at Urban's quotes and he said, 'I'd like him to be more of a leader, more vocal,' early in that season in 2018."

Another issue that will never be settled is what would have happened if Burrow had won the QB battle in 2018. Would he have been as good or better than Haskins and leave for the pros after the season? What if he stayed a Buckeye the following season to enhance his pro prospects? Maybe Haskins would have been the one to transfer?

One thing is clear: If Burrow had been around in 2019, the Buckeyes would not have snagged Fields when he transferred from Georgia.

"I think it's pretty much a certainty Fields isn't coming if they have a returning starting quarterback," Hartman said. "That's why he left Georgia. So, they wouldn't have had Fields but they would have had Joe Burrow and maybe he would have been good in '18 and awesome in '19.

"If Burrow was the starter those two years, would Dwayne have stayed around to be the starter in 2020? Who knows? He might have hung around."

As much as Haskins and Burrow are linked in the annals of OSU football, so too are Haskins and Day, the offensive guru who's producing NFL-caliber quarterbacks.

The dynamic season Haskins had in 2018 is credited with luring Fields, and in turn Haskins influenced C.J. Stroud to leave California to be a Buckeye.

"It's kind of amazing because lot of times we contrive stories and narratives, but when we got to talk to Day about Haskins' role in getting them Justin and getting them C.J., that felt pretty direct," Hartman said. "I think that's significant. (Day) talked to Fields when he was looking about where he was going to go, and

the season (Haskins) had made Ohio State more appealing to a throwing quarterback and it gave Day a lot of credibility.

"Justin comes in and he obviously threw the ball really well as an athletic guy," Hartman continued. "Then C.J. has said that Ohio State being a place where they threw the ball like that made them an appealing destination. It's amazing all those things came together."

Oller is not quite convinced it was all Haskins' doing that Fields and Stroud landed in Columbus.

"I think there's a little bit of, I don't want to say embellishment, but I think if Joe Burrow had the same numbers as Haskins had (in 2018) it's Joe Burrow and not Dwayne Haskins," he said. "That said, it was Haskins. I know he had some relationship, that may be blown out of proportion too, with Stroud.

"It shouldn't be underestimated what Day did with it looking like he's going to be 3 for 3 with Haskins, Fields and Stroud. It's the chicken and the egg. How much is Day and how much is it the quarterback?"

Park has a simple answer as to why Fields and Stroud followed Haskins.

"What we're really saying here is success breeds success," he said. "Ryan Day's an excellent quarterback coach. It was just a fine marriage, really, with Dwayne."

It doesn't matter in the big picture who recruited whom because Haskins' status is secure.

"He's going to go down as the first in the run of (quarterback) draft picks," Oller said. "That is the separator. He was first round. Fields was first round. Stroud is going to be first round more than likely."

Buckeye Forever

There will come a time when the mourning for Haskins will end, the healing will start and life moves on to start a new cycle, yet Kern said Haskins will have a place among the Ohio State immortals.

He told BSB an anecdote to illustrate how Buckeye fans never forget. Kern, about 20 years after his playing days at OSU were over, was staying at a ski resort in Switzerland with his wife and two young sons. They were walking along the street when one of the kids said he thought people following them knew his father.

"I said, 'C'mon, we're in Zermatt, Switzerland,'" Kern said.

Turns out an older couple did.

"They asked are you Rex Kern? I said it depends on if you're from Ann Arbor or Columbus," Kern said with a chuckle. "They were from Columbus and they hadn't missed an Ohio State game since the mid-'50s."

Kern added that he was also recognized the next year vacationing in Hawaii.

"Having said all of that, it's unbelievable the following that our Ohio State alumni have," he said. "I will guarantee you somewhere down the line 20 years from now, they're going to say you know it was a shame that Dwayne was killed and died so young but look what he did here in one year as a Buckeye. He was one of ours.

"Our heart goes out to his wife and family and friends and everybody that knew him and was touched by his life. He died far too young, but he will not be forgotten. I will guarantee you that."

Haskins' Journey Began With Recruiting Carousel

By **BRADEN MOLES**

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In the weeks following former Buckeye quarterback Dwayne Haskins' untimely and tragic death, perhaps no memory is more prevailing than the now immortalized video of an 11-year-old Haskins proclaiming that he would one day attend college and play football at Ohio State.

Haskins followed through on his younger self's promise, becoming a member of Ohio State's 2016 class just six years after calling his shot. His legacy at Ohio State has been well-chronicled, but before all the accolades and before stepping onto campus and becoming one of the most prolific signal-callers in both Big Ten and team history, Haskins was originally set to stay home and attend college at Maryland.

It wasn't a surprise that the former four-star prospect out of Bullis School in Pottomac, Md., wanted to stay home given the full-court press being applied by the Terps and head coach Randy Edsall during his recruitment. He attended Maryland's junior day on Feb. 21, 2015, and was told by the staff that he was one of their top priorities.

"Coach Edsall was saying how interested they are in me, where they are as a program, where Maryland stands right now and where it wants to be in the future," Haskins said. "He was talking about the brand at Maryland and how you can build your brand there. He was saying how you can intern at places right around there, go to the NFL from there and get a great job after college. He said Maryland is just a great university to be a part of, aside from football."

Ohio State had plenty of interest in Haskins, offering him on April 28, 2014, and hosting him on a pair of unofficial visits that year. The Buckeyes seemingly could not contend with the Terps, however, who had Haskins in for at least seven unofficial visits before he eventually committed to Maryland on May 15, 2015.

"This decision was based on my relationships with the coaching staffs of all 41 college programs that offered me a scholarship," Haskins told Bleacher Report. "It came down to who I was most comfortable with. It was about joining a group of great people."

Haskins' commitment to the Terps seemed rock solid, and to this day he would have been one of the top three quarterbacks ever brought into the program according to the 247Sports composite rankings.

The situation quickly changed when Edsall was fired on Oct. 11, 2015, and offensive coordinator Mike Locksley was promoted to interim head coach (with the full-time position later filled by D.J. Durkin). Despite the change at the top, most believed that Haskins – along with most of the class – would stay put at Maryland.

"I don't think I spoke with many recruits who said the reason they were going to Maryland was Randy Edsall or Mike Locksley," recruiting analyst Brian Dohn said at the time. "You can bet that Maryland is on the phone with recruits telling them to stay with them and that everything will be OK. You may have one or two players who leave,



FILE PHOTO

LATE ADDITION – Dwayne Haskins (7) spent months committed to his home-state Maryland Terrapins in the class of 2016, but the departure of assistant and interim head coach Mike Locksley and an increased interest from Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer made him reconsider. He flipped to Ohio State on Jan. 18, 2016, only weeks before signing day.

but for the most part these guys (are) committed to the school and are loyal."

Haskins weathered the initial storm, staying committed to the class despite interest from several schools looking to flip him. Ohio State was certainly involved given its original recruitment of Haskins, but things had changed since the Buckeyes were first interested. DeSoto, Texas, four-star quarterback Tristen Wallace committed to Ohio State shortly before Haskins committed to Maryland, filling the position in head coach Urban Meyer's class. A potential courting of Haskins was feared for potentially scaring off Wallace.

"Dwayne tweeted out that he committed to the school and not the staff and that he was a Maryland guy, and when you're dealing with quarterbacks, most schools already have theirs in place because you tend to see earlier commitments at that position," Dohn said. "If you're all of a sudden going to bring in Haskins as a second quarterback, that could make your existing commit a little on edge. You have to be careful."

Ohio State was willing to take the risk, inviting Haskins in for an official visit on Dec. 11, 2015, his first visit to the school in over a year, and reports indicated that it was a successful trip. The fallout was immediate, however, as Wallace – who was also beginning to lean toward playing wide receiver instead of quarterback, giving Ohio State pause – took an official visit to Oregon just two days later and ultimately flipped to the Ducks, briefly leaving Ohio State without a quarterback in the class.

Following the carousel, Haskins announced that he – along with Olney (Md.) Good Counsel four-star linebacker Keanre Jones, who remained committed to Maryland – would jointly announce their

college decisions at 10 a.m. on Jan. 18, 2016. The time for this announcement came and went, however, as Maryland was working behind the scenes to make a last-ditch effort to retain two of its top prospects in the class.

The Buckeyes did receive some good news around noon that day when Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Coconut Creek four-star wide receiver Binjimen Victor committed, but the Ohio State staff anxiously awaited news on Haskins and Jones as Locksley attempted to prevent a mutiny from his class. Unwilling to lose out on Ohio State's quarterback and linebacker of the future, Meyer reportedly hopped on a plane to Washington, D.C., to close things out, and by 4 p.m. both Haskins and Jones had flipped from Maryland to Ohio State.

"It created such a buzz throughout the recruiting world and put all eyes on Ohio State," Ohio State recruiting analyst Bill Greene said. "To get one guy like that would be amazing because they're all among the highest rated at their position, but then to land three in a matter of hours created a lot of buzz and (contributed) to the perception that Ohio State can get whoever they

want. They're right up there with Alabama in terms of being able to do what they want and get who they want."

While Haskins was coy during his recruitment, he said in 2020 that his decommitment was due in part to Locksley being passed over for the head coaching job at Maryland and not being retained when Durkin took over following the 2015 season.

"I don't really want to talk about what happened with the other coaching staff," he told NBC Sports. "I was committed to Locksley. Committed to the idea of making a better Maryland and then that changed and that's why I had to change my decision."

Haskins later signed his letter of intent on Feb. 3, 2016, and enrolled later that summer, set to compete with Joe Burrow for the opportunity to back up J.T. Barrett. Every indication during his recruitment was that he would go on to break records as the jewel of Maryland's 2016 class, but the record books were instead rewritten at Ohio State, where Haskins fulfilled his childhood dream of being a Buckeye.

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Spring Game Visits Net Two Commitments

Ohio State rolled out the red carpet for recruits during the spring game on April 16, and the returns started coming in within a day of the exhibition's conclusion. The Buckeyes gained two commitments on April 17, with Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star cornerback Dijon Johnson (6-1, 190) and Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch three-star wide receiver Bryson Rodgers (6-2, 170) giving verbal pledges to Ohio State.

Johnson is the No. 270 overall prospect in his class and the No. 29 cornerback prospect, and he chose Ohio State

Ivins scouted Johnson and said he is a "big-time cornerback prospect" who can shut down one side of the field.

"He fires out of his breaks with ease more times than not and is able to change directions better than most with his length," Ivins said. "He does a nice job of feeling out routes and putting himself in position to make plays, which he did frequently as a junior picking off six passes and returning four of them for touchdowns. Those interceptions helped a Tampa Wharton program, which is coached by former NFL first-round pick Mike Williams, make a deep run in Florida's state playoffs."

It's the first cornerback commitment for Ohio State's 2023 class, in which the Buckeyes will look to take two or three, depending on how things shake out. Some other priority targets for the Buckeyes include Lakeland (Fla.) Lake Gibson five-star Cormani McClain (6-2, 165), Phenix City (Ala.) Central five-star AJ Harris (6-1, 180), St. Louis DeSmet four-star Christian Gray (6-0, 175) and Ellenwood (Ga.) Cedar Grove four-star Kayin Lee (5-11, 185).

The other commitment that day was Rodgers, who became the first wide receiver in Ohio State's 2023 class. He was offered by the Buckeyes earlier this year on Jan. 26 and made his first visit to Ohio State on March 8 before making a return trip for the spring game.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Braden Moles

over other top schools including Georgia, Oklahoma and USC. The Buckeyes offered Johnson on Jan. 25, and he made his first visit to the school for the spring game.

"The culture, the people, the players, the networking, the fan base – Ohio State has it all," Johnson told On3 Sports. "I went up there to see how the vibe was, and I knew early in the visit that I was going to Ohio State. It is about family there, and I felt that."

247Sports recruiting analyst Andrew

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
Mark Fletcher	RB	6-1	225	★★★★	Ft. Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage
Malik Hartford	SAF	6-3	175	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West
Cedrick Hawkins	SAF	6-0	165	★★★★	Titusville (Fla.) Cocoa
Dijon Johnson	CB	6-1	190	★★★★	Tampa (Fla.) Wharton
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
Bryson Rodgers	WR	6-2	170	★★★	Zephyrhills (Fla.) Wiregrass Ranch
Will Smith Jr.	DL	6-3	260	★★★	Dublin (Ohio) Coffman

"I have dreamed of this day and saying these words since I touched a football," Rodgers said in a tweet. "With all that being said, I am coming home. I am happy to announce my dream has come true, and (I) will be committing to The Ohio State University."

He's the No. 365 overall prospect in the class and the No. 47 wide receiver, though the staff feels higher on Rodgers than recruiting services, as he's one of just 14 receivers to be offered by Ohio State in 2023. He held offers from several other top schools, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Michigan and Penn State, among others.

The soon-to-be-senior hauled in 42 receptions for 645 yards and 17 touchdowns in his junior season at Wiregrass Ranch, averaging 15.4 yards per catch. Rodgers is a solid route runner and uses his height and speed to dominate outside matchups, but he also has experience in the slot, displaying the kind of versatility that makes a player go far at Ohio State.

The Buckeyes will look to bring in at least three receivers in 2023, and other targets include Folsom, Calif. four-star Rico Flores (6-1, 190); Longview, Texas, four-star Jalen Hale (6-2, 175); Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage five-star Brandon Inniss; Rolesville, N.C., four-star Noah Rogers (6-2, 180); and Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Carnell Tate (6-2, 185).

QB Raiola Becomes Top Target In 2024

Recruiting moves quickly, and there is perhaps no better example than the speed at which Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola (6-3, 225) has become Ohio State's top target in 2024. Since BSB last went to press, Raiola – who visited Ohio State the weekend of April 1 – returned for the spring game where he told 247Sports that the environment was second to none.

"I don't think I've ever seen a spring game that packed and that many fans coming to watch a spring game," he said. "That speaks volumes because that shows how loyal the fans are, and for them to be that involved with the team is special."

After Raiola's visit in early April, it was expected that he would continue

his spring tour of several top schools, including Alabama, Georgia, Oregon and USC. However, just days before the spring game, he announced that he would be returning to Columbus for a second visit in just three weeks. Prior to his announcement, several 247Sports crystal ball predictions came in for him to Ohio State.

Raiola was not the only quarterback expected for the spring game. Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School five-star Jadyn Davis (6-0, 190) had previously announced he would be in attendance. That visit reportedly did not happen, however, as Davis was not seen during the exhibition, signifying that he may have received a tip – either from Ohio State's coaching staff or Raiola himself – that Raiola was in for the class.

As for Raiola, he spent extensive time during the spring game talking with quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis and also got the chance to speak with several recruits and former players on the sideline, including former quarterback Justin Fields.

"He's very down to earth and very easy to talk to," Raiola said. "The game was very physical. Walking down the tunnel into the 'Shoe was so special. Ohio State is such a special place, and I love where I'm at with them."

Several reports have indicated that Raiola has no further visits on deck, indicating that it might be a question of when, rather than if, he becomes Ohio State's first commitment in 2024.

Four-Star RB Fletcher Commits To OSU

It took only six days after West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star safety Malik Hartford's verbal to the Buckeyes, but Ohio State found another commitment in its 2023 class with Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage four-star running back Mark Fletcher (6-1, 225), who committed to the Buckeyes on April 12.

Fletcher is the No. 154 overall prospect and No. 8 running back in the class, according to the 247Sports composite rankings, and Ohio State's first commitment at running back in the 2023 class.

Ohio State's recruitment of Fletcher was a fast-developing process. He was only recently offered on Jan. 21. After receiving his offer, Fletcher made a visit to Ohio State the weekend of April 1, and what he saw was enough to convince him. Fletcher chose Ohio State over his other three finalists: Miami (Fla.), Michigan

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Dylan Raiola



and Penn State.

"The first time I met coach Tony Alford, I could tell that he was different from a lot of other running back coaches that I have met," Fletcher told 247Sports. "Just the way that he approached me and the things that he was saying – I can tell that he wasn't just trying to sell some dream. I knew he was authentic and everything was real about him. All I heard were great things from multiple people about him. So that was a big thing for me."

"They also say don't fall in love with coaches because coaches get new jobs all the time, but when I went up there – and you know, I have never been to Ohio before, I'm from all the way down at the bottom of the map – but I didn't expect it to be as nice as it was, just with the city and the town and all the nice facilities. Everybody in that building was just connected. It was just real pure love, and I fell in love with it. I just got that feeling that they say you get."

At American Heritage, Fletcher rushed for 779 yards and 13 touchdowns his junior season, averaging 7.1 yards per carry. His sophomore season had him go for 1,411 yards and rush for 11 touchdowns, helping the Patriots win the Florida 5A state championship.

"He's a big, physically imposing back that has produced for three straight years at one of South Florida's top NFL facto-

ries in American Heritage," said Ivins. "(At 6-1, 225), he carries the weight well and should be able to lean out once lifting in a college weight room as he adds even more strength. He owns a bit of an upright running style but is very difficult to bring down in the open field once he's got a full head of steam with the combination of his size and power. He is quick to hit the hole and does a nice job of using swift cuts to evade would-be tacklers and can also get out of trouble with a stiff-arm here and there."

"He hasn't been asked to catch a ton of balls throughout his prep career but has shown that he's capable of moving the chains via swing passes or screen passes. He has also proven to be rather effective in pass protection as he can chip large defenders while buying time for his quarterback. His top-end speed is a bit of a concern, but he does his best to make up for it by making a difference in between the tackles."

With Fletcher in the fold, Ohio State's next best option is Lehigh Acres (Fla.) Senior five-star Richard Young (5-11, 200) to fill the other spot in this class. Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater four-star Cedric Baxter Jr. (6-1, 215) was a target for the Buckeyes, but he did not include them in his top five of Arkansas, Florida, Miami (Fla.), Texas and Texas A&M on April 23.

Young, meanwhile, is trending toward Alabama. He's made several trips to the

Crimson Tide in the past few months and has not been on Ohio State's campus since last October. The Buckeyes are not out of it, however, as Young plans to take one of his five official visits to Ohio State on June 24 along with Oklahoma (June 3) and Georgia (June 17), with an official visit planned but unscheduled for Alabama at some point this summer.

QB Board Takes Shape For 2023

One of Ohio State's 2023 quarterback targets is off the board, with Birmingham (Ala.) Briarwood Christian four-star signal-caller Christopher Vizzina (6-4, 207) committing to Clemson on April 12. Vizzina is the No. 52 overall prospect and No. 7 quarterback in 2023, according to the 247Sports composite rankings, and selected the Tigers over his other finalists, including Auburn, Georgia, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Ole Miss.

Ohio State offered Vizzina on March 12 following a visit with the Buckeyes, but he never made a return trip, opting to commit to the Tigers following a pair of unofficial visits in April.

"(I) just really wanted to play for Coach (Dabo) Swinney after thinking about it," Vizzina told 247Sports. "All the values they have and the way they coach, it really fits who I am. My faith is really big to me. To see how they can help me grow in my faith and help me grow as a

person and grow my character, it was an easy decision thinking about it."

Ohio State has offered all three five-star quarterbacks in 2023, but only one – Detroit Martin Luther King five-star Dante Moore (6-2, 195) – remains uncommitted, and Notre Dame appears to be the school to beat in addition to LSU, Michigan and Michigan State. Another target for Ohio State in Zachary, La., four-star Eli Holstein (6-3, 226) is now a heavy favorite to end up with the Crimson Tide, according to On3 Sports, with Florida and Texas A&M as the two other teams in serious contention.

This leaves one realistic option on the table for Ohio State at this time: Snellville (Ga.) Brookwood four-star Dylan Lonergan (6-2, 215). He is the No. 100 overall prospect and No. 9 quarterback in the class and had the Buckeyes in his most recent top five on April 22. Ohio State was included along with Alabama, Florida, South Carolina and Stanford.

In addition to being one of the nation's top quarterback prospects, Lonergan is also a top baseball prospect and is expecting to be a dual-sport athlete at whatever college he chooses. Lonergan visited Ohio State on April 8 and was also on campus last season for the Oregon game.

"The offense might be the most

Continued On Page 26

ASK AN ANALYST

With Marc Givler of Buckeye Scoop

With Chandler, Ariz., five-star quarterback Dylan Raiola's (6-3, 225) seemingly imminent commitment, what does this do for Ohio State's quarterback situation in 2023?

"2023 was always going to be difficult for whatever reason. It didn't line up well for Ohio State as far as having a great chance at one of the top guys, so it's been a slow go anyway. I expect them to have a 2024 commit before they have a 2023 commit, and that may make things even a little more difficult for them. My guess would be their 2023 quarterback ends up being a high school prospect that we are not really talking about right now."

"They're going to try with Detroit Martin Luther King five-star Dante Moore (6-2, 195). They're going to try with Snellville (Ga.) Brookwood four-star Dylan Lonergan (6-2, 215) from Georgia, another guy there they're looking at and there is mutual interest there. That might be their best shot at a top-100, top-150 type of guy. Zachary, La., four-star Eli Holstein (6-4, 226) opened his recruiting process up several weeks ago, and they're kicking the tires there, but no real indication yet that that's going to be legitimate."

"It's an interesting cycle for them. There just wasn't a guy that they connected with right off the bat. The one thing that's kind of funny about that, though, is if you look at two of their last three quarterbacks, C.J. Stroud and Devin Brown, we weren't talking much about them at this point. It's not so much that they can't get a good one. I just don't know that it's going to be any we're really talking about right now."

"I don't know that they've put less of a focus (on a 2023 quarterback). They understand it to be more challenging, but they worked out a bunch of guys last summer. Will getting Raiola maybe take a little pressure off? Yes, you could argue that. The strategy – it sounds obvious – but it's just to sign the best guy you can every single year because you don't know what's going to happen with the transfer portal. You see these programs turn over their entire quarterback rooms in 12 months. Ohio State basically did that as well at one point. If you take a cycle off saying, 'I don't know that we really need a quarterback this year,' that can really burn you if on top of that you lose a transfer or something."

Tampa (Fla.) Wharton four-star cornerback Dijon Johnson (6-1, 190) gave Ohio State its first commitment at cornerback for 2023. How many do they plan to take, and how do you see the secondary playing out?

"It's going to be another big defensive backs class. I think they're going to take four safeties, and that may sound crazy to people, but if you look at the room right now there is a talent shortage at safety across the board in terms of young up-and-comers. With Jim Knowles they're essentially playing three safeties, so I think they're going to take four safeties. In fact, they could take five if they would get their top guys there. There's a way this could work (with) Lynn (Mass.) St. John's Prep four-star safety Joenel Agüero (6-0, 195) and Hoschton (Ga.) Mill Creek five-star safety Caleb Downs (6-0, 185). If they get a couple of those guys, they would push this to five but I think it's going to end up at four."

"At corner, the urgency is not quite as bad, but they will take at least two and maybe three. This could be a six- to seven-man defensive back class when it's all said and done. I was talking about this the other day with someone – we still view guys as young players who aren't young players anymore. Lathan Ransom is not a young player anymore. He's a third-year player. Cameron Martinez is a three-year guy. Time flies – we're old – but he's going to be out of the program in 18 months. You have to get the replacements now, not in 2024. You're going to lose Josh Proctor at the end of the year. Bryson Shaw is in the portal. Again, Martinez, Ransom – Ronnie Hickman is not going to be here after this year. There's a massive turnover at safety happening right now with not a ton behind it. Kye Stokes looks legit, but you're playing three safeties right now with Knowles' defense. They will take at least four safeties, and they're going to take least two, probably three corners."

Tennessee appears to have surged in the recruitment of Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star wide receiver Carnell Tate (6-2, 185) with NIL rumored to be a major factor. Does Ohio State still have a chance here, and if so, what does Brian Hartline need to do to secure Tate's commitment?

"It's an interesting dynamic. I think Tennessee is definitely past Notre Dame as Ohio State's biggest threat, but Ohio State has a really good chance to sign Tate. We just saw Stroud and (Jaxon) Smith-Njigba get new NIL deals within the last few days; they both signed a pretty big money deal. (Ohio State) is going to lay out the NIL stuff with Carnell. They already have."

"Will it match the rumored Tennessee money? I don't know. It's really hard to say all that. But it's not a situation where he

gets millions at Tennessee and he gets nothing at Ohio State. It's going to come down to, if there is a money gap, you're talking about development, ultimately the NFL, and Brian Hartline is going to put two guys in the first round this year. He's going to put another one in the first round next year. He's probably going to put another one or two in the first round the year after that. So, there's a lot that Ohio State has going for it here."

"One thing that might be a bigger hurdle for them – the NIL thing is a something, for sure – but the other thing is that Tate can go to Knoxville and probably start next year. That's not happening at Ohio State. That as much as anything is appealing to Tate. Then not only can he get that type of money at Tennessee but now he's a freshman starter. That combination is helping Tennessee a lot right now, but the short answer is yes, Ohio State can still get Tate."

For the second straight cycle, defensive line recruiting seems to be off to a slow start with only Dublin (Ohio) Coffman three-star defensive end Will Smith Jr. (6-3, 260) committed. Is this just the reality of things now with the constant retirement rumors swirling around defensive line coach Larry Johnson, and do you believe they're still in a good spot?

"There's a few factors that go into this. First of all, Larry Johnson historically moves slow on his evaluations. Maybe more than any other coach on the staff, he loves to work guys out at camp, so he historically goes a little bit slower with his evaluations. But at the same time, yes, the retirement rumors were probably at their height this past winter. I do think there are a lot of discussions going to take place about that in the coming months in terms of him relating to recruits what his plan is."

"The other thing here – Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco five-star defensive end Matayo Uiagalelei (6-4, 255) is not going to make an early decision. That's a top guy on the board. Tampa (Fla.) Berkeley Prep five-star defensive end Keon Keeley (6-5, 240) is committed to Notre Dame and they're trying to flip him, that's another top guy on the board, and that's going to be something that's going to take some time to play out. It's not going to be too different from last year where a couple of his guys got added late. Last year, maybe it was a little bit extreme, but I could see it playing out similarly (this year) where it's one or two guys in the fold early and then they have to add their final two or three down the stretch."

Several Schools Challenging OSU For Tate

Continued From Page 25

quarterback-friendly to play in," he told 247Sports after his most recent visit. "Coach (Ryan) Day does a great job with the quarterbacks. The baseball program also does well developing pitchers."

While Lonergan is the most likely option for Ohio State among its seven quarterback offers, it seems just as likely that other targets could emerge throughout the year and even as the early signing period approaches like in recent classes with C.J. Stroud and Devin Brown. Additionally, if Lonergan does opt for a different school, Ohio State could look to the portal to help fill out the quarterback room if the current crop of high school

prospects does not line up for the Buckeyes.

SEC Schools Making Plays For WR Tate

Tate long seemed like Ohio State's most coveted wide receiver prospect in 2023 – and may still be – but the Buckeyes are facing a sudden challenge from several SEC programs, including LSU and Tennessee, which have taken big steps in recent weeks to get to the forefront of Tate's recruitment.

He was last on campus for the Buckeyes on April 2, but Tate has since taken an official visit to Tennessee on April 8 and had an official visit at LSU on April 22. Regarding his latest visit to Tennes-

see, Tate said the Volunteers "stand at the top" with his other finalists.

"People think Tennessee doesn't have a chance," he told 247Sports. "They do have a chance, especially with Nico (Iamaleava) at quarterback and (coach Josh Heupel's) offense. It's a receiver-friendly offense, the air-raid offense, that I love."

As for the interest in LSU, it stems from his relationship with head coach Brian Kelly, who previously recruited Tate at Notre Dame. It should be noted that the Tigers were not in Tate's initial top five schools – those honors were reserved for Alabama, Georgia, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Tennessee.

"BK, that's my guy. I know him from Notre Dame," Tate said. "He was just tell-

ing me that he wanted to take the next step and he's doing that by going down there. He wants me to come be part of something great."

Don't forget about the Fighting Irish, either, where Tate has visited since head coach Marcus Freeman took over. Even with interest from LSU and Notre Dame, it still looks to be a two-man race between Ohio State and Tennessee. The Buckeyes were viewed as the clubhouse leaders for Tate dating back to last year, but it's looking like wide receivers coach Brian Hartline will need to apply some serious elbow grease to get the job done.

OSU Gaining Favor With Georgia Decommit Lee

Ohio State is off to a solid start in the secondary with Cocoa, Fla., four-star safety Cedrick Hawkins (6-0, 175), Hartford and Johnson, and the Buckeyes could be looking to add another cornerback shortly in Georgia product Lee.

Lee, who is ranked the No. 172 overall prospect and No. 22 cornerback in 2023, is a former Georgia pledge who decommitted from the Bulldogs on Feb. 22. Since then, he's taken unofficial visits to Arkansas, Florida, Florida State, Georgia Tech, Nebraska and UCF, as well as Ohio State on April 6.

"I was still considering Ohio State even when I was committed to Georgia," Lee told 247Sports.

The Buckeyes initially offered Lee last June, and he had Ohio State in his top 10 along with Georgia, Miami (Fla.) and Notre Dame, among others. When he committed to Georgia on Sept. 29, 2021, the Buckeyes were viewed as the runner-up, but it now seems they are in the driver's seat.

"It was good," Lee said of his visit. "I came up with my dad and my brother. I landed after practice so I didn't get to see that. But (the visit) was still amazing. I liked the stadium. I meshed with the people. I loved the campus. Everything was very nice."

Siereveld Has Ohio State In Top Three

Middletown (Ohio) Lakota East four-star offensive lineman Austin Siereveld (6-5, 315) is taking his time with his recruitment, much to the chagrin of some Buckeye fans wondering why the Ohio product hasn't popped yet for OSU.

There is some movement on that front, however, as Siereveld cut his list of schools down to just three in early April, with Alabama, Notre Dame and Ohio State among his final contenders. Siereveld – who is the No. 346 overall prospect and No. 20 interior lineman in the class, as well as the No. 7 prospect from Ohio – was also in attendance for Ohio State's spring game.

"It was great," Siereveld told Buckeye Scoop. "The highlight of the trip was getting back into the 'Shoe, seeing all of those fans, and watching the game. I also got to tour campus a bit more and have lunch with the offensive line."

Siereveld was also in attendance for

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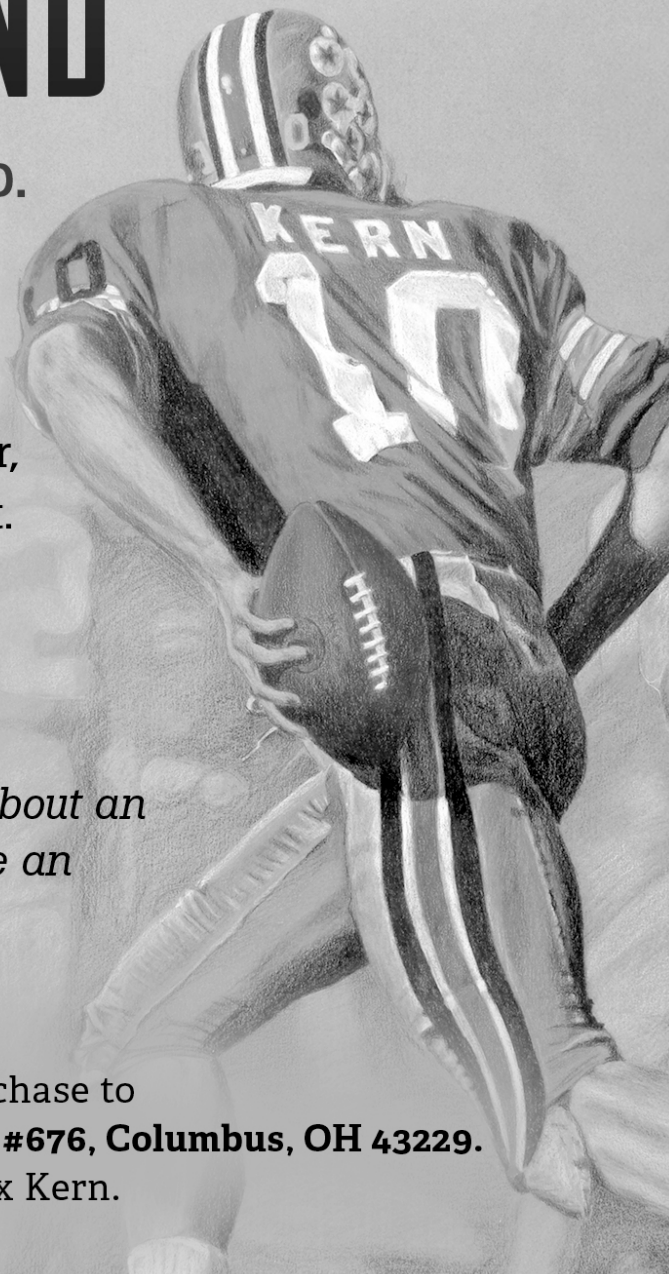
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Notre Dame's spring game on April 23, so this appears to be building toward a battle between the Buckeyes and Fighting Irish. Ohio State already has two commitments on the offensive line in 2023 with Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Josh Padilla (6-4, 265) and Findlay, Ohio, four-star Luke Montgomery (6-5, 270).

Beyond Siereveld, targets include Windsor (Conn.) Loomis Chaffee School four-star tackle Olaus Alinen (6-6, 315), Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep four-star tackle Chase Bisontis (6-5, 290), Braintree (Mass.) Thayer Academy five-star tackle Samson Okunlola (6-6, 295) and Austin (Texas) Vandegrift four-star tackle Ian Reed (6-6, 290). The Buckeyes are looking to take either four or five offensive linemen in this class.

Flores, Reed Set Commitment Dates

Two Ohio State targets in 2023 are set to announce their college of choice during the upcoming Independence Day celebration. California receiver Flores will announce on July 3 while Columbus (Ga.) Carver four-star defensive lineman Darron Reed (6-5, 260) will make his choice on July 4.

Flores is the No. 193 overall prospect and No. 26 receiver in the class. Along with his decision date, he also announced a top five of Georgia, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Texas and UCLA.

He was offered by the Buckeyes last November and visited for the first time

on April 8, after which he tweeted that it would be hard for any school to top Ohio State.

"They made (the top five) because they make me feel like family," he told 247Sports. "The all-around offensive staff and what they've produced throughout the years. The university is great with what they offer also."

While he is likely to take an official visit to each of his top five schools, the only trip on the schedule right now is Notre Dame on June 10.

Reed, meanwhile, is the No. 323 overall recruit in the class and the No. 47 defensive lineman. He holds offers from Georgia, Michigan State and USC in addition to his top five of Clemson, Florida State, LSU, Miami (Fla.) and Ohio State.

After receiving an offer on Jan. 21, he made his first visit to Ohio State the weekend of April 2 and met with Day and defensive line coach Larry Johnson, leaving Columbus with the Buckeyes at the top of his board.

"It was great," Reed told Eleven Warriors. "I loved all the love the coaches showed. Really, I saw everything. The campus, the facilities, they really have a lot of stuff, a little bit of everything."

Unlike Flores, Reed already has his summer planned out. He'll take a visit to Clemson from June 3-5, LSU from June 10-12, Miami from June 17-19 and Florida State from June 21-23.

Ohio State will get the important final visit from June 24-26, just over a week before he is set to commit.

Other Notes And Tidbits

- Fort Worth (Texas) North Crowley three-star linebacker S'Maje Burrell (6-0, 215) elected to stay home, committing to Texas on April 2. He's the No. 392 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 36 linebacker in the class. Ohio State offered Burrell in December.

- Gretna, Neb., three-star quarterback Zane Flores (6-2, 190) committed to OSU – Oklahoma State, that is – on April 17. He is the No. 787 overall prospect and No. 41 quarterback in 2023. Though Ohio State had not offered Flores, it was expected the Buckeyes might show some interest as the quarterback situation in 2023 developed.

- Gilbert (Ariz.) Williams Field four-star wide receiver Kyler Kasper (6-5, 195) committed to Oregon on April 17. The Buckeyes offered Kasper last year, but his recruitment came down to Oregon and Tennessee, with the No. 149 overall prospect and No. 25 wide receiver in 2023 opting to stay out west.

- Washington Court House (Ohio) Washington three-star tight end Tanner Lemaster (6-6, 235) committed to Kentucky on April 15. He's ranked the No. 28 tight end in 2023 and the No. 13 prospect out of Ohio. The Buckeyes had shown some interest in Lemaster, working him out at a camp last year, but never offered the local product.

- Milton (Mass.) Academy four-star tight end Andrew Rappleyea (6-5, 225) flipped from Michigan to Penn State on April 3. He had been committed to the Wolverines since Jan. 16 but told

247Sports that he felt more comfortable at Penn State. He is the No. 261 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 15 tight end and had Ohio State in his top seven before his commitment carousel.

- Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep three-star linebacker Josiah Trotter (6-2, 230) committed to West Virginia on April 15. He is the No. 361 overall prospect in 2023 and the No. 31 linebacker in the class and was offered by Ohio State last summer.

- If things do not work out with Folsom, Calif., four-star tight end Walker Lyons (6-4, 230), Ohio State could have a backup in Fairburn (Ga.) Langston Hughes four-star tight end Jelani Thurman (6-5, 230), who had the Buckeyes in his most recent top eight along with Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Michigan State, Ole Miss, Oregon and Tennessee. He is the No. 133 overall prospect and No. 9 tight end in 2023.

- Ohio State has recently offered a handful of 2025 prospects, including Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei running back Jordon Davison (5-11, 210); Evans, Ga., offensive tackle Mason Short (6-7, 280); and Ellaville (Ga.) Schley County linebacker Zayden Walker (6-3, 220). Other 2025 offers include Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) Dillard defensive lineman Armondo Blount (6-3, 230); Findlay, Ohio, quarterback Ryan Montgomery (6-3, 200); and Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep safety Anthony Sacca (6-3, 200).

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

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago - 1987

James "Scotty" Graham, a 5-10, 205-pound running back out of Long Beach (N.Y.) High School who rushed for over 1,600 yards and scored 17 touchdowns as a senior, was thrust into adulthood a little earlier than the average youngster.

Although he was somewhat reluctant to tell all, Graham touched on his past during a telephone interview from his home, where he was running and lifting weights and preparing to enroll at Ohio State for summer quarter.

"Mom was sick when I was young," said Graham, who averaged 10.4 yards per carry and scored 13 of his touchdowns on runs of 40 yards or more during his final prep campaign. "I helped take care of her when I could."

As the youngest of four children in a fatherless home, Graham was only 15 when he had to assume some adult responsibilities.

"I found myself jumping into a man's shoes," said Graham, "making my own decisions and things like that. Just like during recruiting. I was finding my own ways to get to airports, talking to recruiters. I did it on my own. The average 18-year-old in the country doesn't have to do that."

"Then there was the worry about playing football and keeping my grades up, too."

"It was hard to accept it. It was going to be hard for me more times than it was going to be easy. So I just took it like that. I expected everything to be hard. I've worked hard, and I'll keep working hard."

25 Years Ago - 1997

A number of players from Canton (Ohio) McKinley traveled down to Columbus for a spring practice session.

The Buckeyes already had a commitment from McKinley defensive end Kenny Peterson.

But OSU was also interested in fullback/linebacker Jamar Martin and running back/defensive back DeMarlo Rozier.

Martin was a standout at fullback (500 yards, eight TDs) and inside linebacker (96 tackles, two sacks) as a junior. He held a 3.1 GPA. His top schools were OSU, Auburn, Michigan State and Penn State.

Rozier played both tailback and free safety for McKinley. He rushed for 805 yards, while on defense he had 101 tackles and four interceptions.

Rozier, who carried a 2.8 GPA, was looking at OSU, Michigan, Michigan State and Penn State.

20 Years Ago - 2002

OSU had an offer on the table to Lancaster (Pa.) McCaskey offensive lineman Joel Holler following the Penn State Nike camp held April 21 – at which Holler was the largest participant, standing at 6-6 and tipping the scales at 330 pounds.

He already had offers from Duke, Maryland, Miami (Fla.), Michigan State, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Purdue and Vanderbilt. He also was looking at Boston College, Michigan, Notre Dame and Syracuse.

"Miami just came up (April 30) and offered verbally," Holler told Ohio State recruiting analyst Bill Kurelic. "I like Ohio State's football tradition. I like their style of play. And it's the Big Ten. I'm not sure who I like best. All of the doors are open."

15 Years Ago - 2007

Klein, Texas, offensive lineman J.B. Shugarts, who took an unofficial visit to Columbus for Ohio State's spring game, announced his intention to attend OSU. It turned out he had known for some time that he would eventually become a Buckeye.

"Me and my dad had been discussing it for like two weeks, just comparing and contrasting schools," he told BSB. "And then I had my mind made up for a little over a week. For almost two weeks I knew I was going to go there. I just hadn't really told anybody. Then when I went up there, that was like the icing on the cake and I was for sure then. I was 110 percent."

10 Years Ago - 2012

If March was agonizingly slow on the recruiting trail for the Ohio State coaching staff, April turned out to be more than enough to make the verbal commitment dry spell a distant memory. It looked as if all Urban Meyer and the rest of his staff were doing was setting themselves up for yet another remarkable run filled with a strand of impressive verbal commitments.

After not picking up a single verbal commitment during the month of March, Meyer secured eight pledges during the first 23 days of April, including a half-dozen during the two-week period between April 10-23.

Hopping aboard the bandwagon were Wyomissing (Pa.) Area linebacker Alex Anzalone, Wichita Falls (Texas) Rider quarterback J.T. Barrett, Riverside (Calif.) John W. North tight end Marcus Baugh, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas

defensive end Joey Bosa, Wilson (N.C.) James Hunt linebacker Lewis Neal and Elyria, Ohio, defensive end Tracy Sprinkle.

Five Years Ago - 2017

At halftime of the spring game, four-star safety Josh Proctor (6-2, 185) of Owasso, Okla., announced via Twitter that he was joining Ohio State's other commits as the seventh member of the Buckeyes' 2018 class.

Proctor, who was the nation's No. 130 overall player and 15th-ranked safety according to Scout, had been expected by many to stay home and play for Oklahoma, although Scout national recruiting expert Greg Powers told BSB he had felt Ohio State was the leader for Proctor as far back as The Opening in Dallas on March 5.

"He kind of gave an indication that Ohio State could possibly be the team to beat for his services over Oklahoma," Powers told BSB of what Proctor said at The Opening regional. "He came into that camp all decked out in Ohio State gear. So a lot of people who I think were surprised by his decision probably thought he would just stay in state because OU offered him (but they didn't) really take the time to look deeply into his recruitment or ask him if there was a chance he could go play in Columbus."

One Year Ago - 2021

Bloomington (Ind.) South four-star athlete Dasan McCullough announced he would be joining three of his family members in Indiana after he flipped his commitment from Ohio State to the Hoosiers on April 25.

McCullough joined his father, Deland McCullough, who signed on as Indiana's associate head coach and running backs coach on Feb. 8. Along with Deland Sr., Dasan would ultimately be joined by two of his brothers, Deland McCullough II and Daeh McCullough, who were both set to play for the Hoosiers.

Dasan McCullough took to Twitter with a note explaining his decision to flip to Indiana with the caption, "Respect it or not. I do not care."

"First off, I would like to thank Ohio State for the amazing opportunity they gave me. Being a kid from Ohio (born in Cincinnati) it was a true blessing. Special thank you to Coach (Al) Washington for believing in my abilities as a player. With that said I have decommitted from Ohio State," McCullough said in the tweet. "Indiana, I'm staying home. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity I refuse to pass up. The chance to play under the man I looked up to my whole life is truly amazing, along with the opportunity to play with my best friends."

OSU Shuffles Guards After Johnson's Departure

Ohio State guard Meechie Johnson Jr. has entered his name into the transfer portal after two seasons in Columbus. He announced his decision on Twitter on April 12, roughly a month after Ohio State's 2021-22 season came to a close in the round of 32 against Villanova.

"Since I was a kid, I've always dreamed of playing at The Ohio State University, and I will always be able to say that God gave me what my heart desired," Johnson shared.

COURT REPORT Patrick Mayhorn

"First, I would like to thank God for all of the opportunities he's allowed me to have and also my friends and family who have been there for me throughout this long journey.

"Second, I want to thank the entire coaching staff, strength coaches, trainers, alumni, and professors for contributing to me having a wonderful experience while attending Ohio State. With that being said, I will be entering the transfer portal."

Johnson's time at Ohio State will come to an end less than two years after it began. Formerly a member of the class of 2021,

Johnson reclassified to 2020 on Nov. 8, 2020, and announced his intention to enroll in school and join the Buckeyes a season early. He suited up for the Buckeyes for the first time on Jan. 9, 2021, playing four minutes against Rutgers, and contributed sparingly throughout the remainder of his abridged freshman season.

He was expected to step into a larger role in his first full season this past year but found himself trailing freshman Malaki Branham and senior Jamari Wheeler at point guard and averaged only 17.7 minutes per game, contributing 4.4 points, 1.5 rebounds and 1.2 assists per contest in 26 games.

A starting role could have been in the cards this season with Wheeler graduating and Branham a likely NBA draft pick, but with class of 2022 four-star Bruce Thornton joining the team this summer, Wright State transfer Tanner Holden selecting the Buckeyes in the portal and several other transfer guards eying Columbus, he'll instead try his luck elsewhere.

Johnson finishes his Ohio State career having scored 136 points in 43 career games, starting five of them. His finest hour came in the 2021 Fort Myers Tip-Off. With only seconds remaining in a tie game between the Buckeyes and Seton Hall on Nov. 22, Johnson drilled a long three-pointer to lift Ohio State to a 79-76 win, his eighth point of the game.

He had scored 13 points against Bowl-



SONNY BROCKWAY

MOVING ON — Ohio State didn't wait long to replace transferring guard Meechie Johnson Jr. (0), signing Sean McNeil on April 24.

ing Green and 14 against Xavier in the two games prior and seemed to be turning a corner, averaging 8.0 points in 23.2 minutes per game in Ohio State's first six matchups of the season, but injuries and shooting woes held him back from a breakthrough. He averaged just 16.1 minutes and 3.4 points per game in his final 20 appearances, capped by a 16-minute showing against Villanova in which he generated three points, two rebounds and an assist and was dinged for three fouls.

Johnson announced his commitment to South Carolina on April 25 after taking visits to DePaul, LSU and Pittsburgh.

Buckeyes Land WVU's McNeil

Ohio State's search for a transfer guard is over. Only a day after one of the program's top portal targets, Kansas State point

guard Nijel Pack, announced his intention to play his next season at Miami (Fla.) over the Buckeyes and Purdue, the Buckeyes secured a pledge on April 24 from former West Virginia guard Sean McNeil (6-3, 210) during his official visit to Columbus.

Ohio State had been in hot pursuit of the former class of 2019 three-star out of Union (Ky.) Sinclair Community College since he announced his intention to depart from West Virginia after three seasons following the conclusion of a 16-17 campaign for Bob Huggins' Mountaineers. He was ranked by 247Sports as the nation's No. 35 transfer portal prospect when he announced his pledge to the Buckeyes.

The addition of McNeil gives Ohio State its second transfer-portal addition of the off-season along with Holden and offers a potential answer in a suddenly very thin point guard room after the departure of Johnson

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to the portal.

McNeil started 32 games for the Mountaineers this past season and another 23 in 2020-21, averaging 12.2 points, 1.4 assists and 2.5 rebounds per game this past season while shooting 41.4 percent from the field. Notably, he knocked down 36.8 percent of his three-point tries in 2021-22 and 38.8 percent of his attempts from deep in 2020-21. Ohio State is hoping that he can provide a much-needed shooting spark to a roster without an especially strong deep-ball shooter.

An All-Big 12 pick in 2020-21, McNeil picked the Buckeyes over Cincinnati, Indiana, Louisville and Virginia, having taken a visit to Bloomington in the days prior to his April 24 visit to Columbus that ultimately culminated in his commitment. He has two seasons of eligibility remaining for the Buckeyes.

Towns Will Return To OSU

Ohio State forward Seth Towns will be returning for his third season with the Buckeyes and his seventh in college basketball.

He last played for Ohio State in the 2020-21 season, missing last year with a back injury that required surgery. Ohio State and head coach Chris Holtmann hoped to see Towns return at some point, but he was officially ruled out for the year on Feb. 8.

Towns is expected to be fully healthy this season after suffering several season-ending injuries, including a knee injury that cost him two seasons at Harvard before his transfer to Ohio State.

In his only season on the floor with Ohio State in 2020-21, Towns appeared in 25 games, averaging 11.0 minutes, 3.8 points and 2.2 rebounds per contest. He hit double-digit scoring five times, scoring 12 points (his Ohio State career high) in a conference-tournament win over Purdue.

Who's In, Who's Out?

It can be a little tricky to keep track of who is and isn't returning for the Buckeyes in the portal era, especially with a group seeing as much as attrition as this one. As a quick refresher, Ohio State's scholarship situation and departure plans are as follows.

Center Joey Brunk, shooting guard Cedric Russell, point guards Jimmy Sotos and Wheeler and forward Kyle Young are gone. They've exhausted their eligibility and couldn't return to Ohio State if they wanted to. Forward E.J. Liddell has declared for the NBA and signed with an agent, making him ineligible as well. Former walk-on Harrison Hookfin, who was put on scholarship for the second half of the 2021-22 season, is not returning to Columbus despite holding one more season of eligibility if he wanted it.

Guard Justin Ahrens and Johnson have both entered the portal, and though they could technically return to Ohio State, they aren't likely to.

That's eight players who are all but assuredly departing from Ohio State's 15-man roster. The NCAA's maximum for roster size is 13 scholarship athletes, but players using their COVID eligibility did not count against that number a season ago. That won't be true moving forward, which is important to note because of the return of forward Justice Sueing. His scholarship will count this

season, as will the return of Towns.

Branham is the only Buckeye with a decision to make regarding his plans, but it would likely require a major shift for the Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary's product to return to Columbus. He declared for the NBA draft on April 1 and told ESPN that he would remain in the draft with a first-round projection, which he has at this point. He has until June 1 to officially decide.

Meanwhile, on the other side, Ohio State has added Holden and McNeil in the transfer portal and will be welcoming in a five-man recruiting class of shooting guard Roddy Gayle Jr., shooting guard Bowen Hardman, center Felix Okpara, forward Brice Sensabaugh and Thornton this summer.

Rising junior forwards Eugene Brown III and Zed Key and redshirt freshman forward Kalen Etzler have given no indication that they plan to depart from Columbus this off-season, meaning that with those five freshmen, Holden, McNeil, Sueing, Towns and the three incumbents, Ohio State sits currently at 12 scholarship players. Branham returning would push it to 13. Assuming he does not reverse course and return, Ohio State has one scholarship remaining to allot to a transfer prospect. N.C. State forward Manny Bates is likely the top name remaining on the board for the Buckeyes.

Griffith Sets Pledge Date

There is still high school recruiting to be done, even in the portal era, and Ohio State has its sights set on 2023 Cincinnati Taft four-star shooting guard Rayvon Griffith in the coming weeks after he included the Buckeyes in his final five and announced a May 1 decision date.

Ohio State will need to topple Alabama, Cincinnati, Kansas, and UCLA for Griffith's pledge.

"Those are the five schools that I feel recruited me the best," Griffith told 247Sports. "I feel they would be a great fit for me."

The 6-7, 180-pound guard – ranked No. 42 nationally, No. 8 among shooting guards

and No. 1 in Ohio – has yet to provide any indication on the direction he's leaning. There were no crystal ball projections as of publication, and though Ohio State and Cincinnati have the home-state advantage, Griffith has indicated that he's not wedded to the Midwest. Alabama was considered a favorite in his recruitment for much of the last two years but seems to have regressed to the pack.

Holtmann and new assistant Jack Owens have handled his recruitment recently and will hope to make a final push and earn his pledge, which would give the Buckeyes three verbals in the class of 2023 along with four-star George Washington III from Christian Academy of Louisville, Ky., and three-star St. Marys (Ohio) Memorial center Austin Parks.

Russell Leads T-Wolves To Playoffs

Former Ohio State guard D'Angelo Russell led the Timberwolves over the Los Angeles Clippers, 109-104, on April 13, securing Minnesota the No. 7 seed in the 2022 NBA playoffs.

Russell scored 29 points, secured five rebounds and tossed six assists in the five-point win. His biggest shot of the night came with 4:39 to play in the final frame, his Timberwolves trailing by a point. The former Buckeye dribbled into an offensive set and, without hesitation, rose and fired a transition pull-up three-pointer to claim a 97-95 lead.

"You go into a game like that, you know the preparation, you build up all the pressure in your own head," Russell said after the game. "You want to perform, it's our first (national) TV game. It's all or nothing. You put your own pressure on yourself. I try to treat it like I've been there before and attack that situation, like tonight, just trusting my preparation."

The Timberwolves faced the No. 2-seeded Memphis Grizzlies in the first round of the postseason and were tied 2-2 entering game five as BSB went to press. Russell averaged 13.3 points and 7.0 assists across

the first four games of the matchup.

The former No. 2 pick in the 2015 NBA draft has operated largely as a third offensive option for Minnesota next to All-Star forward Karl Anthony-Towns and 2020 No. 1 pick Anthony Edwards. The Timberwolves have been one of the NBA's surprise teams, with their young core leading the franchise to a 46-36 record and their first playoff berth since 2018.

Russell has acted as Minnesota's de facto point guard, a new role for him at the professional level and one much closer to the job he filled for his one year in Columbus back in 2014-15. He averaged 18.1 points, 7.1 assists and 3.3 rebounds in 65 regular-season games.

Matta Hires Oden, Diebler

There will be a scarlet tint to Thad Matta's first season back at the helm of a college basketball program. The former Buckeye head coach, hired this offseason as Butler's head coach, will be hiring a pair of former players from his stint in Columbus. According to published reports, Matta is hiring former Ohio State guard Jon Diebler and center Greg Oden to support-staff roles at Butler.

This is Diebler's first foray into coaching, while it marks a career progression for Oden. The big man spent the last two years around Holtmann's program in Columbus, serving as a graduate assistant. He graduated with a degree in sport industry in 2019.

Diebler isn't a stranger to coaching, though, as his brother Jake is entering his fourth season as a full-time assistant under Holtmann and was promoted to offensive coordinator this offseason after the departure of Ryan Pedon to Illinois State.

"Jake will be elevated to Ryan's position," Holtmann said in March. "He will also take the offense over from Ryan, and we'll continue to construct the staff here in the coming weeks."

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NCAA Vacates 52 Wins, Big Ten Titles From 2016-19

The NCAA Division I Committee on Infractions released findings on April 19 from its investigation into the Ohio State fencing, women's basketball and women's golf programs, finding several violations from 2015 to 2019 resulting in several severe penalties, including the vacating of 52

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Braden Moles

wins and multiple Big Ten championships for the women's basketball team.

These vacated championships include the 2017 and 2018 regular-season Big Ten titles, the 2018 Big Ten tournament championship and NCAA tournament appearances in 2017 and 2018 as well as a WNIT appearance in 2019. The vacated wins include 10 in 2016-17, 28 in 2017-18 and 14 in 2018-19.

As previously reported in BSB, the violations and vacated wins stem from former associate head coach Patrick Klein, who was initially involved in an internal Title IX investigation for violating Ohio State's sexual harassment policy through text messages and social media interactions with at least 13 student-athletes. Throughout the course of that investigation, the NCAA found several recruiting violations and instances of Klein providing impermissible benefits to student-athletes at Ohio State.

From May 2015 to August 2017, he asked six current or former players to assist in the recruitment of six prospects, asking them to send texts or direct messages to the recruits to encourage them to commit to Ohio State. Since the student-athletes did not have prior relationships with the recruits, it constituted an NCAA violation.

Further violations took place in spring

2018 when Klein paid \$100 for two prospects on an official visit to receive bottle service at a local club and, shortly after, attempted to communicate with three prospects prior to Sept. 1 of their junior years by contacting a nonscholastic coach who knew the recruits. At Klein's request, the coach forwarded the recruits text messages from September 2018 to May 2019.

Other impermissible benefits included purchasing \$500 worth of textbooks for a student-athlete not on scholarship and providing two student-athletes with \$20 meals on three occasions, both in spring 2016, and spending \$50 on manicures for the same student-athletes in November 2017. Roughly a year later, he provided a student-athlete with \$70 to pay for a rental car.

Klein's numerous violations resulted in several student-athletes competing while ineligible. He was interviewed by the NCAA on July 31, 2019, and resigned from Ohio State just two days later, and he declined to take part in further interviews. As part of the penalties, Klein was served a 10-year show-cause order.

While Klein was not cooperative in follow-up interviews with the NCAA, the committee acknowledged Ohio State for "its notable compliance monitoring systems" and for "exemplary cooperation" during the investigation for its "superior self-report" and "spending substantial time and resources to investigate this matter."

In a statement, athletic director Gene Smith said he was proud of the university, athletic department and involved programs for its management of these violations.

"We are committed to our proactive and pre-existing system of compliance methods and rules education," he said. "A comprehensive compliance program ensures adherence and institutional control over the athletics department and furthers the mission of the university. We are pleased that this matter is now behind us, and our

focus remains on our student-athletes."

The vacated wins, championships and tournament appearances leave Ohio State with a program record of 1,046 wins and 475 losses. The Buckeyes will recognize 14 regular-season conference championships (1983-89, '93, 2005-10 and 2022) and four conference tournament championships (2006, '09-11). The program now has 23 recognized NCAA tournament appearances, including 1984-90, '93-96, '99, 2003-12, '15-16 and '22.

Hutcherson's Transfer Leaves Questions Inside

Ohio State sophomore forward Gabby Hutcherson announced on April 12 that she has decided to enter the transfer portal.

"I would like to say thank you (to Buckeye Nation) for the unwavering support the past two years," she said in a statement on social media. "I would also like to thank the coaching staff for the opportunity to be here at this amazing university. I want to say thank you to my teammates for the constant support and love through the many hardships I have endured, I will never forget the sisterhood that we created."

"Thank you to my friends and family for always sticking by my side and always having my back no matter what, I love you all. Ohio will always be home but with that being said, I have decided to enter the transfer portal."

Hutcherson leaves Ohio State having appeared in 36 games over two seasons and averaged 3.3 points and 2.3 rebounds in just over 10 minutes per game last season.

She scored a career-high 13 points on 5-of-6 shooting in Ohio State's win over Mount St. Mary's this past season and tied her career high of six rebounds on three occasions. She did not appear in Ohio State's final six games of the season, spanning from its regular-season finale against



SONNY BROCKWAY

PORTAL BOUND — Ohio State women's basketball forward Gabby Hutcherson is transferring.

Michigan State to the Buckeyes' Sweet 16 loss to Texas.

The Westerville, Ohio, native was a five-star prospect coming out of high school and was a member of Ohio State's 2020 recruiting class. Hutcherson was a legacy recruit for the Buckeyes, as her mom, Mindy Smith, played at Ohio State from 1987-90.

Hutcherson's transfer is the third of this offseason from Ohio State, joining sophomore guards Kateri Poole and Anyssa Jones. Poole remains in the portal, while Jones announced on April 8 that she will be transferring to Dayton to play for head coach and former Ohio State assistant Tamika Williams-Jeter.

"I want to start off by saying thank you to buckeye nation for accepting me for the past two years," she said on Twitter. "You guys were such a supportive group and I can't thank you enough. I also want to thank my OSU teammates as well for being so accepting and loving. They are all my sisters for life and I couldn't have asked for a better group to be surrounded by."

With Hutcherson's transfer, Ohio State suddenly finds itself short on forwards heading into next season. She likely would have played a bench role behind rising junior forward Rebeka Mikulasikova (6-4), who acted as the team's de facto center last season in a guard-heavy lineup. She rarely played outside of the paint other than some

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WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

occasional shooting from beyond the arc where she is just 26.3 percent in the last two seasons.

The only other players on the roster at six feet or taller are incoming freshman forward Cotie McMahon, who stands at 6-1, and soon-to-be senior Hevynne Bristow, who is listed as a guard at 6-1 but has played sparingly in her two seasons with the Buckeyes following her transfer from Providence. She has appeared in just 15 games for Ohio State, averaging around 7.5 minutes per contest.

Assessing Transfer Options For OSU

Hutcherson's transfer means head coach Kevin McGuff will likely need to scout the portal for some forwards and some height this offseason. Ohio State's scholarship numbers are not entirely clear – it is unknown if transfer guard Emma Shumate has gained eligibility for the upcoming season – but even if she counts against the 15-person limit, and including Ohio State's three incoming freshmen, the Buckeyes would have three roster spots to work with.

Ohio State could also be viewed as a popular transfer destination given the recent Sweet 16 run and a clear path to the court for an incoming forward or center. With the influx of talent in the portal – according to WBBlog.com, over 1,000 players are currently looking to transfer – there are plenty of places for Ohio State to look, even within the conference.

Maryland transfer Angel Reese, a 6-3 forward who averaged 17.7 points and 10.6 rebounds per game, would make sense for the Buckeyes given her pedigree and how closely Ohio State has been able to watch her play. However, reports since Reese entered the portal have indicated that she does not want to play inside and would rather spend time on the perimeter. Ohio State is in no need of additional shooters.

McGuff could also raid Geno Auriemma's program at UConn and take a look at Piath Gabriel, a 6-5 sophomore forward and former three-star recruit who has fallen down the depth chart since arriving on campus in 2020.

She averaged just 3.0 points and 1.9 rebounds per game this past season but did so in just 4.8 minutes per contest and would have three seasons of eligibility remaining.

Could Ohio State also look to bring in a center from the portal?

Playing a true five has never been McGuff's preferred method, but this is a team that will be desperate for some presence in the paint come this fall. One of the few no-

table centers in the portal is Texas' Lauren Ebo, a graduate transfer looking for a new school for her final season.

"There aren't many experienced bigs in the transfer portal, so a 6-4 grad transfer post who started 59 games the last four seasons would be a nice addition to a team looking to plug a player into its lineup or use creative depth in its rotation," Jennings said. "This season was her best yet, averaging 8.0 points and 6.7 rebounds per game."

Beacham Continuing Career In Australia

Ohio State announced on April 11 that Tanaya Beacham will continue her professional career in Australia with the Sunshine Coast Phoenix. The Phoenix play in the NBL1 North, which is a semi-professional league in Australia's Queensland and Northern Territory.

Beacham appeared in 31 games for Ohio State last season, averaging 7.3 points and 4.6 rebounds per game in 18.9 minutes per contest.

"She plays so hard, she brings energy, she rebounds, she defends, she runs the floor," McGuff told The Lantern. "She does all the things that any coach would want or any team would want. I know she's going to take that with her to Australia for sure."

Beacham spent four seasons at Toledo before transferring to Ohio State for the past two seasons. She played the most minutes per game of any non-starter, and though not on the floor as often as others, she was a clear leader on and off the court for the Buckeyes.

"I'm like a general out there, just looking around and making sure everybody's in the right spot, seeing who needs help, calling out screens," she said last season. "I just want to talk everybody through everything, even if I'm not even in the action."

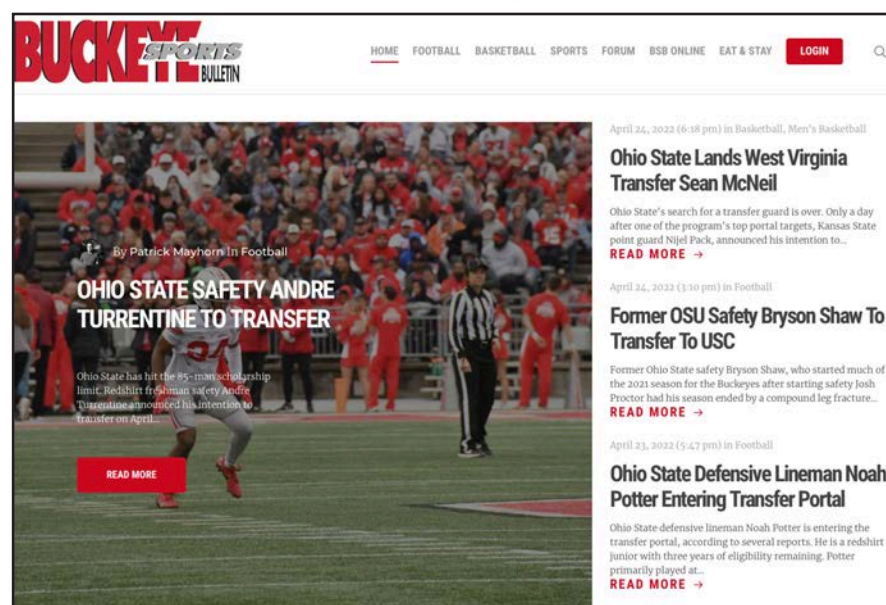
She was also pivotal down the stretch during Ohio State's tournament run, scoring 22 points and pulling down 20 rebounds as the Buckeyes marched to the Sweet 16.

McGuff told The Lantern that one of his program's roles is to help develop athletes for the opportunity to extend their playing careers past college, and he's excited to see Beacham's career develop in the land down under.

"That's one of the things that we want to do, certainly, is to put our players in position to play at the next level if they choose to," McGuff said. "I'm incredibly excited for Tanaya. She'll do a great job. She loves the game. She plays so hard. I'm going to be really excited to watch her career flourish."

The Phoenix are set to begin their season on April 29 against the Rockhampton Rockets.

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Nittany Lions Grab Divisional Transfer

Penn State signed a major transfer from a divisional rival on April 12, earning a pledge from former Maryland edge rusher Demeioun Robinson just weeks after he entered the portal following one season as a Terrapin.

BIG TEN NOTES Patrick Mayhorn

A former four-star prospect, Robinson played all 13 games for Maryland as a true freshman and racked up 19 tackles. Penn State head coach James Franklin said on April 6 that experience with a player prior to his entry into the portal can play a major role in that recruiting process, and Penn State recruited Robinson extensively when he was a member of the 2021 prospect pool.

"It always helps with the transfer portal if we recruited the young man on the front end, so we've known him longer and you're not trying to get to know him in two weeks," Franklin said.

Edge rusher has been a position of great intrigue for the Nittany Lions this offseason. New defensive coordinator Manny Diaz has spoken at length about the importance of strong pass rushers on the ends of his line in his first spring heading up the Nittany Lion defense, and Franklin told media before spring practice that Penn State needs more from that room after the departures of ends Arnold Ebiketie and Jesse Luketa.

"We need more consistent edge pressure," Franklin said. "Between developing the guys we have, and then obviously we're looking into the portal a little bit for that as well. Very similar to what we did with (Ebiketie, who arrived at PSU by way of Temple), we've got to find somebody that can come in and help us with edge pressure and affect the quarterback."

Cockburn Ends Illini Career

Illinois center Kofi Cockburn declared for the NBA draft for the third time in as many years, ending his career with the Fighting Illini after three seasons as their star center. He was twice named a consensus All-American (first team in 2022, second team in 2021) and led the Illini to a 68-27 record with a Big Ten tournament title in



Kofi Cockburn

2021 and a share of the regular-season title in 2022.

"This journey has been a very special one," Cockburn wrote on April 20. "Never did I ever imagine being a part of something so fun and extraordinary. So many people to thank but I don't know where to start, so many wonderful memories and bonds that I will cherish for a lifetime. I would like to thank my coaches, mentors, teammates and family for supporting me throughout this journey and offering unconditional love. I would also like to thank Illini Nation for welcoming me with open arms and bringing that electrifying energy every game."

"Last but not least, I would like to thank God for blessing me with amazing opportunities and most importantly for giving me the chance to experience something so wonderful. To play in the NBA has been a dream of mine, and I truly think it's time for me to take that next step. With that being said, I will be putting my name in the 2022 NBA Draft and signing with an agent. King out."

Head coach Brad Underwood called Cockburn the greatest center in program history in a statement thanking him for his time with Illinois.

"We wish Kofi the best as he prepares for his NBA career," Underwood said. "His growth and development over the last three years was remarkable. He leaves as the greatest center in Illini history, which is evident by his many accolades. But above those individual awards, it was his impact on winning that will leave a legacy. We'll always be grateful to Kofi for what he's meant to our program and know he has a bright future ahead."

DL Rogers Enters Portal

Fifth-year junior Nebraska defensive lineman Casey Rogers, who missed much of the 2021 season with an injury and was expected to fill a starting role this season, entered the transfer portal on April 20. He had missed spring practice with an injury – different from the one that caused him to miss the first five games of the 2021 campaign. He had broken through with 24 tackles, three TFL and a sack in 2020 and was projected to step into a larger role before his injury.

It's been a difficult offseason for the Cornhuskers on the defensive line. Star tackle Damion Daniels entered the NFL draft at the end of the season, while rotational pieces Deontre Thomas stepped away from the program and Jordon Riley transferred. Outside of tackle Ty Robinson, the Huskers are without any established starters up front.

"I had hair before spring ball started, and now it's all gone," defensive line coach Mike Dawson said during spring practice. "It's a fine line. Because the guys, they want to do well. No one wants to do well more than the guy that is out there."

"It's not like they go out there and are like, 'On this play I'm going to do the exact opposite of what he told me to do,' but sometimes it looks like that and feels like that as a coach. You're like, 'What in the world? How can you be doing that after this amount of time in practice?'"

UW Assistant Dead At 52

Wisconsin running backs coach Gary Brown, a former Penn State running back from 1988-91 who spent eight years in the NFL before starting a coaching career that spanned more than two decades, passed away on April 10 after an extended battle with an undisclosed disease at 52 years old.

Brown had twice been diagnosed with cancer, first in the early 2010s when he was

an assistant with the Cleveland Browns and again in 2019.

"I am deeply saddened by Gary's passing," UW head coach Paul Chryst said. "Though he was only on our staff for a year, he had a profound impact on our players and our program. We are all better people for having known Gary. He was a tremendous person, a terrific coach and a joy to be around. He had great energy and passion for life and that showed every day. My deepest condolences go out to his wife, Kim, his children, Malena and Dorianna and Tre, and his entire family, his friends and everyone who loved him."

Brown spent only a year with the Badgers after taking a year away from football in 2020, having previously worked for the Dallas Cowboys from 2013-19. He was unable to travel with the Badgers to their end-of-season bowl game as he underwent medical treatment and had been in hospice care in his hometown of Williamsport, Pa., for several weeks, before his death.

Hauser, Edey Returning To B1G

Michigan State big man Joey Hauser announced April 20 that he would be returning to East Lansing for one more season after averaging 7.3 points and 5.3 rebounds per game last year. He's started 45 times in 63 appearances in the last two seasons with the Spartans.

"I have loved playing college basketball, and being part of the Michigan State family has meant so much to me over the last three years," Hauser said. "There have been challenges along the way but getting to play a full season and have the experiences we did this past year helped me realize my decision to come to Michigan State was the right one for me."

"After talking with my family and to Coach Izzo and the staff, I've decided that I'm going to be back with my teammates on the court next year. We've got goals we want to achieve, and I can't wait for this season ahead."

Another imposing force in the paint is set to return to the league too, as Purdue center Zach Edey announced April 22 that he'd be removing his name from the transfer portal and heading back to West Lafayette. He was a second-team All-Big Ten pick last season, averaging 14.4 points, 7.7 rebounds, 1.2 assists and 1.2 blocks per game in 19.0 minutes per contest.

"I'm officially coming back for year three, love this campus and the people it has led me to so far," Edey said. "I'm definitely ready to get to work again. See you in Mackey."

Hoosiers Sign 2022 Five-Star

Malik Reneau, a five-star power forward in the class of 2022 out of Montverde (Fla.) Academy, signed with Indiana on April 18. Ranked the No. 28 prospect in the class, his pledge pushed Indiana's class to the top of the Big Ten, sliding just ahead of Ohio State into the No. 5 spot nationally.

He joins a class of No. 21 overall prospect Jalen Hood-Schifino (a point guard, also of Montverde), No. 74 overall prospect Kaleb Banks, a forward from Fayette County, Ga., and No. 141 overall prospect CJ Gunn, a shooting guard out of Indianapolis Lawrence North.

The Hoosiers picked up another boost in the frontcourt on April 14 when power forward Race Thompson announced that he'd be returning to Bloomington for his sixth season of eligibility. He was Indiana's third-leading scorer a season ago with 11.1 points per game and its second-best rebounder, grabbing 7.5 per game in 2021-22.

The Hoosiers turn their focus now to sophomore center Trayce Jackson-Davis. A second-team All-Big Ten pick who averaged 18.3 points, 8.1 rebounds and 2.3 blocked shots per game last season, Jackson-Davis entered the draft on April 9 but retained his eligibility and is expected to return. If he does, NCAA.com basketball analyst Andy Katz sees the Hoosiers as a serious contender in the Big Ten.

"He declared for the NBA draft, but he left open the window that he could return," Katz said. "If he does, then Indiana is going to be a top four or five team next season in the B1G. If he doesn't, the Hoosiers are going to have to find another big-time scorer."

Shrewsbury Nabs Transfer Pair

Penn State head men's basketball coach Micah Shrewsbury added a pair of transfers to his 2022-23 roster on April 14. Bucknell's Andrew Funk and Drexel's Camren Wynter are headed to State College to help fill out the PSU lineup after the departure of guard Sam Sessoms to Coppin State. Barring any more moves, these additions put Penn State at the 13-player maximum.

Funk led Bucknell in scoring with 17.8 points per game, shooting 43.2 percent from the field and earning second-team All-Patriot League honors as a starting shooting guard. He pitched in 3.6 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game, too. He has one year of eligibility remaining.

Wynter, a point guard who earned first-team All-Colonial Athletic Association honors, averaged 15.8 points and 5.3 rebounds per game, plus a team-best 4.6 assists per contest while shooting 43.4 percent from the field despite a down season from deep (27.8 percent three-point shooter in 2021-22).

He was ranked by 247Sports as the ninth-best transfer available in March. He also has one year of eligibility remaining.

Gophers Secure Hometown Transfer

Minnesota picked up a major transfer target on April 18, landing the commitment of former McDonald's All-American center Dawson Garcia. Garcia, a native of Prior Lake, Minn., picked Marquette out of high school as a four-star prospect ranked 37th nationally and averaged 13.5 points and 6.6 rebounds per game as a freshman but transferred to North Carolina after the season when head coach Steve Wojciechowski was fired.

He played in 16 games for the Tar Heels, starting 12 and averaging 9.0 points and 5.5 rebounds per contest, but he left the team during the season to return home to Minnesota, citing family hardship. He'll apply for a hardship waiver through the NCAA in hopes of being granted immediate eligibility after using his one-time free transfer to go to UNC.

"I just chose Minnesota because I am close to my family and my friends and my support group," Garcia told 247 Sports. "I am just excited to have a chance to play basketball around my loved ones. It means the world. I am filled with so much excitement and gratitude."

"I am a homegrown kid. I got a lot of love for this state. I am going to bring a lot of passion and energy, just a kid that wants to win, bring Minnesota back and to do right by everyone who has played here before and built it to what it is today."

Minnesota also picked up Morehead State point guard Ta'Lon Cooper on April 20. He averaged 9.1 points per game for the Eagles, adding 4.5 rebounds and 5.9 assists per game – the latter of which is among the

nation's best. He was named a first-team All-Ohio Valley Conference pick after leading his team to a 23-11 record and the OVC conference title game.

Hawkeyes Facing BBall Attrition

Fran McCaffery has some retooling to do this offseason. Having already lost star forward Keegan Murray to the NBA draft, the Iowa men's basketball coach has another standout player and now an assistant coach to replace, as Murray's brother Kris announced April 14 his intention to join his brother in the draft. A day later, assistant coach Billy Taylor was announced as the new head coach at Elon.

Unlike his brother's prospects, Kris Murray's entry into the draft process is not an assured departure. He played more of a support role a season ago, averaging 9.7 points and 4.3 rebounds per game, and is projected largely as a late second-round pick, whereas Keegan is largely considered a lottery pick. Kris will maintain his eligibility and is considered to have a strong chance of returning.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to play the game I love every day and to wear the black and gold," Kris Murray said on Twitter. "I will be taking this opportunity to enter my name in the 2022 NBA Draft while maintaining my college eligibility. My focus is being able to grow as a player in every way possible.

"The opportunity to get feedback and the experience working out for NBA teams will help me become the best player I can possibly be to take my game to the next level. I have big plans for next year and this experience will help me do that! I appreciate everyone's support and go Hawks!"

Taylor, meanwhile, departs after three seasons in town working under McCaffery – his second stint at Iowa, having previously served in the same role from 2013-16 before taking over as the head coach at Belmont Abbey from 2016-19. He was the head coach at Ball State from 2007-13 and Lehigh from 2002-07. He replaces former OSU assistant Mike Schrage, who went 33-52 in three seasons at Elon and departed to take an assistant job at Duke this offseason.

"I am humbled and honored to accept the head coaching position at Elon University," Taylor said. "I want to thank President Connie Ledoux Book and Director of Athletics Dave Blank for offering me the opportunity to serve the student-athletes in our basketball program. As a program, we will pursue excellence on the basketball court, in the classroom and in the community."

The news isn't all bad for Iowa, though. Guard Connor McCaffery announced April 21 that he would be returning to Iowa City for his sixth and final season of college basketball. He averaged 2.5 points, 2.5 rebounds and 1.9 assists per game in 2021-22, playing in 34 games and starting five. He's played 134 games with 67 starts over his five-year career.

"He's the kind of guy that does so many things to help you win," the elder McCaffery said of his son. "Now, if he's making threes, it's a game-changer for everybody because they're so worried about other people. If he's got a little bit of space, he can drive it, feed the post, move it – he's a gamer defensively and a communicator."

B1G Shows Out At WNBA Draft

The 2022 WNBA draft was held on April 11, and several former Big Ten players heard their names called to join the ranks at the next level.

Five former conference players – who either finished their careers with a Big Ten team or played for one at one point – were drafted, including one whom Ohio State fans will recognize: Kierstan Bell, who was drafted by the Las Vegas Aces with the No. 11 overall pick. She played for one season

at Ohio State before finishing out her collegiate career at Florida Gulf Coast, where the team was a 12 seed in the recent NCAA tournament.

Northwestern guard Veronica Burton was the first Big Ten player off the board, going to the Dallas Wings at No. 7. While the Wildcats did not have the season they were hoping for – a 17-12 record but just 8-8 in conference play – Burton was the clear star, averaging 17.8 points, 6.4 assists, 5.5 rebounds and 4.0 steals per game.

Burton's impact was felt all over the court, especially so on the defensive end where she was a three-time Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year.

The next pick was Michigan State guard Nia Clouden, whom the Connecticut Sun drafted with the No. 12 selection. If not for Iowa's Caitlin Clark or Michigan's Naz Hillm-



Naz Hillmon

on, Clouden might have been the talk of the town in the Big Ten this past season, averaging 20.0 points, 4.2 rebounds and 4.2 assists per game while shooting 42.7 percent from the field.

Hillmon was taken three picks later at No. 15 to the Atlanta Dream, one of the team's two draft picks along with Kentucky guard Rhyne Howard, who was taken with the first pick of the draft. Hillmon nearly averaged a double-double this past season, scoring 21.0 points and 9.6 rebounds per game.

She had double-doubles in 18 games, in-

cluding in the Wolverines' final six games of the season when Michigan made its first-ever run to the Elite Eight. Hillmon, in addition to becoming the first in team history to reach 2,000 points and 1,000 rebounds, also became the first WNBA draftee for the school.

With one of the draft's final picks, the Indiana Fever elected to keep Indiana guard Ali Patberg at home, selecting her with the No. 34 overall pick. Patberg played in her seventh collegiate season last year, scoring 11.6 points and dishing out 3.4 assists per game.

She was cut from the roster on April 21. The WNBA has strict 15-player roster limits and no G-League, so draft picks are not assured roster spots.



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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** YOUNGSTOWN 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.; 2nd/6 **16** NCAA Championships at Norman, Okla.; 5th/6

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

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 (22-2)

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, W 4-1; **17** MICHIGAN STATE, W 7-0; **29** Big Ten Tournament at Madison, Wisc.

May 6 NCAA First & Second Round; TBA **14** NCAA Regional; TBA **19** NCAA Championships at TBA.

WOMEN'S TENNIS (18-4)

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, W 4-0; **17** at Wisconsin, W 5-2 **22** MARYLAND, W 5-2; **24** RUTGERS, W 4-0; **27** Big Ten Tournament at Iowa, TBA.

BASEBALL (13-23)

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, L 0-6; **15-17** at Maryland, L 6-8, L 5-6, L 1-16; **19** MARSHALL, W 7-6; **22-24** at Michigan, L 8-9, L 13-16, W 6-5; **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 (28-12)

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, W 5-4; **15-17** at Iowa, W 7-3, W 6-4, W 10-5; **19** PENN STATE, Postponed; **22-24** at Michigan, W 6-2, L 3-4, L 4-5 **26** PENN STATE, 2 p.m.; 4:30 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 (13-14)

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, L 2-3

MEN'S LACROSSE (9-4)

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, L 19-12; **24** MICHIGAN, W 14-12; **30** MICHIGAN (Big Ten Quarterfinals), TBA.

WOMEN'S LACROSSE (9-6)

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, L 8-14; **23** at Johns Hopkins, L 14-17 **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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OSU To Lean On Vets In Back Half Of 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 modest NCAA tournament aspirations became a powerhouse in the sport.

In 2022, Ryan's program faces a critical offseason. Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke

ON THE MAT Chase Brown

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 two in breaking down next season's 10-man lineup, with the breakdown of the top half running in the April 16 print issue of BSB.

165 - Carson Kharchla

Carson Kharchla used the 2021-22 season to prove to the collegiate wrestling world that he is what everyone thought he could be at Ohio State. The Powell, Ohio, native started the season as the No. 10 wrestler at 165 pounds by InterMat. He only went up from there.

Kharchla finished the season with a 25-5 record, including a perfect 10-0 mark in duals with six wins over Big Ten opponents. He earned the No. 1 seed at the Big Ten championships, where he would finish fourth with a 2-2 record. Kharchla claimed the No. 7 overall seed at the national tournament two weeks later.

Despite a seventh-place finish in Detroit, Ryan said he was pleased with Kharchla's performance at the NCAA championships, recognizing the 165-pound weight class to be one of the toughest in the sport.

"Carson wrestled extremely well," Ryan said. "I would say 165 was probably one of the toughest weight classes in the country. You had a couple of junior world champions in the weight class and the reigning national champion in the weight class. I think he wrestled well."

"There was a controversial call in the quarterfinals, which without question was called the wrong way. Carson should have won the match, but he didn't get the call. That was frustrating for him, but he returned and made it to the podium. In his first year off an ACL tear, we couldn't be more pleased with his performance given the circumstances."

Ryan believes that Kharchla holds himself to a higher standard than taking seventh at the NCAA championships – a sentiment that the redshirt junior concurred with when he spoke with BSB. He thinks the next step isn't a second-, third- or fourth-place finish but an individual title on the biggest stage.

"I have to grow and evolve my wrestling," Kharchla said. "There is always something I can work on to improve because I can't remain stagnant. I can't keep doing the same things over and over again expecting a different result. That is the definition of insanity. I will keep learning from my mistakes and get better."

174 - Ethan Smith

Ethan Smith returned to the 174-pound weight class in 2021-22 with a high success rate. He finished the year 23-7, including a 5-2 mark against Big Ten opponents. Smith had seven major decisions, three technical falls and two pins last season, collecting a plus-67 win differential – second on the team behind Kharchla.

Smith also collected a first-place trophy at the Ohio Intercollegiate Open and a runner-up finish at the Cliff Keen Invitational. The Latrobe, Pa., native, took third place at the Big Ten championships and earned the No. 7 seed at the national tournament.

With all signs pointing to a strong outing in Detroit, Smith lost his opening-round match to No. 26-seeded Tyler Eischens, 13-12, and immediately fell to the consolation brackets. He won his next three bouts over Troy Fisher of Northwestern, Garrit Nijenhuis of Purdue and Anthony Mantanona of Oklahoma. However, he lost his final competition against Dustin Plott of Oklahoma State 9-7 in a sudden victory.

"Ethan hurt us," Ryan said. "We love Ethan because he's a leader. He's more than a wrestler. He's a great student, a black shirt and a real difference-maker for our program. Unfortunately, the NCAA tournament was a place where he wrestled below his potential, so that hurt us. He made some poor tactical decisions and didn't realize the circumstances."

Still, Ryan believes Smith has plenty left to offer Ohio State wrestling as a sixth-year senior and sees him as a foundational piece toward the Buckeyes winning the Big Ten and making a push for a national title next season.

"We need Ethan back," Ryan said. "He is masterful on his feet, and he's a real leader. If Ethan Smith is wrestling like the Ethan Smith we know he can be, then he's as good as anybody in the country. Hopefully, he can prove that with another year here."

184 - Kaleb Romero

Kaleb Romero took a slow approach to his 2021-22 season. He started the year recovering from a leg injury he had suffered in offseason training. When Romero returned to the mat, he won the Cliff Keen Invitational at 184 pounds. The next weekend he won a match against Pittsburgh when he defeated Gregg Harvey in a 10-2 major decision.

Romero finished the year 17-6 with six major decisions and three pins. The Mechanicsburg, Ohio, native went 5-1 in duals with a 4-1 mark against Big Ten opponents. In the postseason, Romero took fourth at the conference championships and sixth at the national tournament.

"He wrestled great in his All-American weekend," Ryan said. "Here's a guy who's been knocking on the door for quite a while. He's been a leader here. He was a four-time state champion and a big recruit for us. We've seen that the bigger he's gotten the better he's done because of his speed. As he moves up in weight class and strength, it hasn't affected his speed, and that's become an advantage."

Ryan believes Romero can use his first All-American season as a building block toward future success. Romero will return to Ohio State's starting lineup as a sixth-year senior, leaving Ryan plenty of confidence in his ability.

"Kaleb was healthy for most of the year," Ryan said. "He was hurt a little early on, but unlike last year he was pretty healthy leading

into the Big Ten championships and nationals. He felt good, and his mind was right. He wrestled really well. We need more wrestling like that from him, and we will get it soon."

197 - Gavin Hoffman

Gavin Hoffman surprised the Ohio State coaching staff with his development last season. After limited action two years ago, Hoffman began 2021-22 as the starter at 197 pounds. Ryan tinkered with the idea of Tyler Stein or Rocky Jordan at the weight, but he ultimately stuck with his gut and chose Hoffman in the class.

Hoffman taught Ryan the beauty of delayed gratification, instilling confidence that he could perform well against the Big Ten's best 197-pound wrestlers. While his statistics don't stand out on paper – 16-13 record with two major decisions and a technical fall – Hoffman positioned himself to improve with every match.

After an eighth-place finish at the Big Ten championships, Hoffman entered the national tournament as the No. 21 seed. Ryan said he caught the entire collegiate wrestling world off guard when he won three consecutive matches and found himself in the NCAA semifinals.

"Gavin was the star of the show," Ryan said. "He was the lowest-ranked wrestler in the tournament to reach the semifinals in their division. I don't think his seed was right from the beginning, but he wrestled extremely well his first three matches and put himself in the semifinals by staying in those things mentally."

Hoffman lost his semifinals match to No. 2 Max Dean of Penn State, sending him to the consolation bracket for a chance at third place. In his next two bouts, Hoffman lost a narrow 3-2 decision to No. 7 Rocky Elam of Missouri and suffered a fall to No. 10 Yonger Bastida of Iowa State, leaving the Montoursville, Pa., native with a sixth-place finish.

"Gavin had been a mainstay in the lineup for the second half of the season," Ryan said. "We all watch him work so diligently. Day after day he does the right thing. He makes

great decisions outside of the wrestling room, and he's a great student. He's an easy guy to cheer for. Gavin was really happy with his performance, and we were, too. I think he has great things ahead of him."

Hoffman will return to Columbus in 2022-23 as a fifth-year senior, making him one of the most experienced wrestlers on the Ohio State roster.

HWT - Tate Orndorff

Tate Orndorff hasn't indicated whether he will stay or leave Ohio State before the 2022-23 season. However, if Orndorff remains on the Buckeyes' roster next season as a sixth-year senior, he should own the heavyweight division as a two-time All-American with 74 career wins.

Orndorff went 19-11 last year with an 7-4 dual record and 3-4 mark against Big Ten opponents. His conference competition included Olympian Gable Stevenson of Minnesota, United States Juniors national champion and All-American Greg Kerkvliet and other top talents, meaning Orndorff's road to the top of the conference and NCAA would be difficult.

Ryan acknowledged Orndorff's toughness as a significant factor in what he considered a terrific performance for the Buckeye wrestler at nationals.

"Tate wrestled extremely well in the tournament," Ryan said. "He lost to some people that were better than him, and he beat some people that were ranked higher than him. I thought the Air Force win (over Wyatt Hendrickson) was fantastic. He found a way to win that, and he put himself in a position to be in an All-American match"

"We'll knock on wood that he returns to us next season. If he does, we have a top performer in the weight class and someone we know can compete at a high level."

Nick Boykin is the only other heavyweight wrestler on Ohio State's roster. He was a United States Olympic qualifier in Greco-Roman at 97kg. In three seasons, Boykin hasn't competed much for the Buckeyes, collecting a 3-4 record with one pin. He also wrestled unattached in a redshirt season, finishing 4-2.



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Kade Kern Finding Consistency In 2022

There aren't many student-athletes who contribute to their respective programs as true freshmen, but some break the mold. One of them was baseball outfielder Kade Kern, who wasted little time in making a significant impact as a Buckeye.

In his first season on campus, he was a second-team All-Big Ten selection and Big Ten All-Freshman team member last season. Collegiate Baseball named him a freshman All-American. He led the team with 52 hits and a .391 on-base percentage and had

**FROM THE
STRETCH
Chase Brown**

nine steals in 11 attempts. Kern's .325 batting average, two home runs and 14 multi-hit games were also among the best on the roster.

With all of Kern's initial success, his coaches and teammates had high expectations for Kern's sophomore year. However, the lightning he captured in a bottle as a freshman ran out – at least temporarily.

Kern started 2022 without much success at the plate. He made the plays in center field, showcasing his athleticism and tracking, but he looked lost in the batter's box,

unable to connect his barrel to the ball. Kern had a stretch of eight games earlier in the season when he did not record a hit.

Ohio State head coach Greg Beals noticed his star outfielder's declining confidence. He chose to bench him, forcing Kern to see the game from a different perspective and allowing him to return to his fundamentals.

"We all have high expectations for Kade Kern," Beals said. "The game of baseball is built around failure. He came out of the lineup for a couple of games to sit and watch and slow down the game a little bit. But give him credit because he never changed whether he was in the game or out of the lineup. That will never change about him."

Kern agreed. He didn't allow the experience to alter his mentality and understood that returning to the field would require him to make minor tweaks and changes to his batting stance and swing. Even more, Kern realized that he needed to remind himself of his skill – the same talent the Big Ten coaches and Collegiate Baseball noticed when they honored him last spring.

"There's a lot of adjustments I needed to make," Kern said. "Having just one at-bat a game for a few games helped me assess and adjust what I needed to do. It gave me more time to work outside of the game as well. I figured out what I needed to work and improve upon."

Those adjustments worked wonders. In



PHOTO COURTESY OHIO STATE ATHLETICS

HITTING HIS STRIDE — Second-year Ohio State outfielder Kade Kern has found his swing after struggling to open the season.

the next 16 games after his absence from the starting lineup, Kern had 27 hits, including seven doubles, one triple, four home runs and 21 RBI, translating all of his modifications to the field.

Kern said the midweek games against nonconference opponents helped him ease into the changes. After playing a freshman season with an all-Big Ten schedule week-end-to-weekend, the Archbold, Ohio, native, has liked seeing teams that aren't that familiar with his tendencies. He said it allows him to play freely.

"I don't mind who I see," Kern said. "I have the same mentality going out there, and no matter who the pitcher is, I am trying to crush the ball. It's fun seeing guys we've never seen before. It's just fun going out there and having a good mentality every at-bat."

Beals claims Kern is one of the most consistent batters in the Ohio State lineup and considers him to be in the same conversation with senior Marcus Ernst as the Buckeyes' most valuable hitters this season. With the team looking for more dependability in

a frustrating year, Beals said he would need someone like Kern to continue showing up in big spots.

"I'm seeing a lot of different pitches than I saw last year," Kern said. "There's a lot more off-speed pitches and spinning sliders type of stuff. I haven't changed my approach from last season. I want to attack the fastball and adjust to the off-speed stuff. I can still hit the way I hit last year, and I know that's where I'm heading."

Dezenzo Leading Despite Injury

Like Kern, Ohio State infielder Zach Dezenzo had an unexpected start to the season but for different reasons. The Alliance, Ohio, native has dealt with a right elbow injury that's kept him from playing shortstop – his natural position – since the first games of the year.

Before the Buckeyes traveled south in the late winter and early spring, Dezenzo could field the baseball cleanly and make stops. However, when he would plant to make throws across the diamond, he started feeling tightness in his throwing arm, causing him to wince in pain.

Dezenzo monitored the soreness, choosing to involve Beals and the team's training staff and allowing them to decide his next steps. Under the guidance of team doctors and trainers, Beals chose to keep Dezenzo off the diamond and use him as a designated hitter until inflammation and swelling subsided.

As time progressed, Dezenzo worked his way back into a fielding role and took over first-base duties with redshirt sophomore Blayne Robinson. Through 33 games, Dezenzo said he's feeling more confident in his elbow and wants to return to the left side of the infield sooner rather than later.

"My elbow has gotten a lot better," Dezenzo said. "I can throw a lot more normally recently without any pain. After the series against Michigan (April 22-24), I think I can start to move back over to shortstop, but we will see what the timetable is for that."

Beals and Dezenzo see a potential move to second base as a possible step in the right direction. Second basemen require much of the same movement and tracking as shortstops but do not need as much arm strength.

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"I've played second base a couple of times, but I could only count on one hand the times I've played it in a game or actual competition," Dezenzo said. "I have the ability to play anywhere in the infield if need be. The elbow is obviously still healing and, in that process, is in the later stages, which is good. If that's what the team needs, I can do it."

Dezenzo said he'd adopted a servant-like mind-set while dealing with his elbow injury. He's not playing at 100 percent – something he thinks his teammates understand. Still, he's offering everything to help the program reach its goals. Dezenzo wants to be a leader and friend despite his ailment in the locker room.

He learned the mind-set from volunteer assistant Matt Carpenter, a second baseman who appeared in 74 games over four seasons with the Buckeyes. Carpenter graduated from Ohio State in 2020 and joined the Buckeye coaching staff the following year. He primarily works with the infielders.

"As a freshman, I had upperclassmen that took me under their wing and helped me in many different ways," Dezenzo said. "One of them is our infield coach, Matt Carpenter. I played with him for two years here before COVID-19 hit. He was always a positive role model in my life, and I look up to him a lot. Carp is one of my best friends, and he's been very influential."

"As an upperclassman and senior captain



TROUBLE BREWING — The Ohio State baseball team is searching for answers after a 13-23 start to the 2022 campaign. The Buckeyes were 3-10 in the Big Ten.

this year, I want to be like him. I can help the younger players and be their role model. I try to relate to them as much as possible and tell them about the ups and downs of baseball. It's a tough sport, but there are a lot of perks involved. It's hard with the injury, but that's been one of my goals this year."

Dezenzo told BSB of another goal he has

PHOTO COURTESY OHIO STATE ATHLETICS
this season: hearing his name called at the MLB draft. He explored that future in 2021

after he had a breakout year as a junior, hitting .302 with 11 doubles, nine home runs and 31 RBIs.

This year, Dezenzo has a .275/.368/.557 slash through April 21. He collected his 150th career hit against Marshall, and he leads the team with 28 RBI. Dezenzo has also smashed a program-leading nine home runs.

"I learned a lot last year about who I am as a ballplayer because of the draft process," Dezenzo said. "In summer and fall ball, I think I learned a lot, too. I am carrying that as far as I can this season. It's been one of my other goals, and I think I've done that. There's been a lot of good things to take away from this season so far and see how I've grown as a ballplayer and person."

"When I came here, I was a wide-eyed kid. I didn't really know a lot about who I was as a player, and I think I had some great influences in my life to help me, like the coaches here at Ohio State. I've been able to grow into a leadership role. I want to be someone that everyone knows plays hard and is a constant factor in the lineup and on the field."

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Buckeyes Feel Good Coming Out Of Spring

I have seen enough spring football at Ohio State that they tend to become a blur, tend to all blend together. It's gotten to the point where when people ask me what I thought of the spring game, I answer, "Well, it was one."

**THE FACTS
MAN
Mike Wachsman**

But April 16, 2022, was a bit different as there was actually a little of the unknown, a little bit of something to actually watch for. Everyone knows that the Buckeyes will field the nation's most lethal offense this fall, but what they don't know is just how much improvement the new-look defense will show. The thought is that if OSU increases to even a top-35 unit it can be one of the favorites for the national championship – which is the kind of thing that's expected at Ohio State.

It's hard to really make conclusions out of a spring game, which is why I tend not to. Had I been one to do so, then you would have heard from this corner that Bam Childress and Reggie Germany were going to be huge stars for the Buckeyes. It is not difficult to refrain from hyperbo-

le over what is little more than a glorified practice.

That the defense was under the microscope came as no surprise to ardent watchers of the Buckeyes. So much has been documented about last year's step-slow, bad-angle-taking, lining-up-wrong group that I won't pile on.

The Buckeyes were, by most accounts, pretty vanilla in the spring game, but mindful observers should have noticed that there were different looks (instead of just the standard Cover 3 and one-high safety look that has dominated most of the past two seasons) and more playmaking, which is a sign of guys understanding scheme and reacting rather than thinking about what they have to do.

New coordinator Jim Knowles likes the progress his group made this spring and looks forward to it continuing when fall camp opens.

"I felt comfortable with how much we progressed," Knowles said. "I was pleased with how much installation we got and how the players took to it and took to coaching. It was as good or better than I had hoped.

"They're just in it. They're in us and in changing the culture and the way we run meetings. They picked it up. I mean, they've picked it up at high speed."

Though the defense "lost" the spring game 34-26, there was enough evidence

for fans to believe that strides will be made this fall.

The linebackers were active and in the right spots, and the new three-safety look appeared to yield dividends as quite a few open-field tackles were made by the secondary. Especially impressive was freshman Kye Stokes, who maybe not coincidentally was the first newcomer to lose his black stripe. He flashed big-time potential, making a few big thud plays and not looking lost, the way many freshmen are in their first taste of "game" action.

"Without seeing the film, I thought he had a great game," Knowles said of Stokes. "He showed up and flashed and seemed to rise to the occasion. What you worry about with a young man is the flashing lights, and it seemed like no problem for him. He really stepped up. I'm looking for good things from him."

Stokes was one of the lower-rated recruits in the Buckeyes' stellar class, which goes to show that it isn't always the most talented but sometimes the one who takes coaching and is willing to put in the work.

But having talent doesn't hurt.

Joining Stokes in the "impressed me" club were fellow defensive backs Jordan Hancock and JK Johnson. Each had moments and appeared ready to go should anything happen to starters Cameron Brown or Denzel Burke.

The hardest area to grade was the defensive front because of the number of bodies in the mix and the inability to blast the quarterback, but J.T. Tuimoloau definitely looks to have taken a step up in terms of quickness and strength and explosion off the snap. It will be interesting to see how much he has added to his pass-rush game as college linemen are smart enough to stop players who rely on just one thing.

J.T. seems more comfortable now and appeared to take a big step forward in terms of leadership.

"I think we just got together, and a lot of the older dudes stepped up and took a lot of the younger boys under their wing," he said. "After that we just kept coming in with a different energy and kept pushing each other. Holding each other accountable was a big deal for us, too."

There were a few unknowns on offense to keep the spotlight from being entirely shone on the defense.

First and foremost was the makeup of the offensive line. Gone are Thayer Munford and Nicholas Petit-Frere, which meant some shuffling in the trenches. It was nice to see Ohio State utilizing a more traditional alignment (two tackles, two guards, a center) than the clunky four tackles it used last season. New faces Matthew Jones and Donovan Jackson didn't have their names called very often, which is usually a good thing. If a lineman is too prominent, it's often because of penalties or allowing their quarterback to get hit.

Though the bulk of the receiving corps is set, there is some jockeying for position going on behind the starters. Kyion Grayes flashed potential and seems in

line for more early reps than touted freshman Caleb Burton, and there should be a nice battle at Z receiver between Julian Fleming and Emeka Egbuka. Both have talent, but my money is on Egbuka as he has a bit more to offer after the catch, and he has been able to avoid the injury bug.

The real story, however, is the rise of walk-on Xavier Johnson, who is on the depth chart at the X spot and who was singled out by Ryan Day as having "a really good spring." He's a player who has filled in at running back and defensive back when there has been a lack of bodies, and he has routinely made plays in practice, according to those who would know.

"The depth is continuing to grow," Day said of the receivers room. "Eventually you want to get to six guys you feel good about putting in the game, which is where we've been the past couple of years. I think we're still working on getting to six, but these guys are working hard. The top four or five guys we feel really solid about."

Folks already know about running back TreVeyon Henderson, and to a lesser extent backup Miyan Williams. But now they also know about Evan Pryor, who exhibited eye-popping burst and speed on his way to a big day. Good either around the edge or between the tackles, Pryor is definitely in line for some touches this season, and it wouldn't be shocking if the coaching staff designs some packages for him so that he can get out in space.

A usual spring storyline at Ohio State is tight ends showing great ability and then not being used much during the season. The former was on display in the spring game as Joe Royer and Gee Scott Jr were impressive, and Mitch Rossi, Sam Hart and Bennett Christian add to the depth. If form holds, this group will combine for roughly 10 catches in 2022, which is why it was amusing to hear Day say, "We hope that's a position of strength for us moving into August."

Most people focus on the quarterback, and that's a good approach when your team doesn't have one established.

But the Buckeyes have C.J. Stroud, who is now a savvy veteran and one of the projected front-runners for the Heisman Trophy. He looked more confident in the pocket and distributed the football nicely, hitting eight different receivers. Both Kyle McCord and freshman Devin Brown had moments of bewilderment but also looked like they could handle the responsibility if called upon.

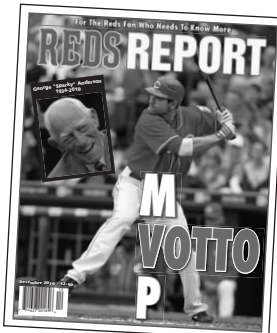
Day felt that the team did largely what it set out to do at the start of camp – continue to make plays on offense and establish a new, better identity on defense. Day knows that the Buckeyes won't achieve their goals if the defense doesn't hold up its end of the bargain, so he was happy with the effort and production this spring.

"We're going to have to be physical," he said. "If we're tough and we have good leadership next year, then we have a chance to reach our goals."

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Don't Jump To Conclusions From Spring Game

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

The recent April 16 affair was at the least my 40th spring game. They have taken all sorts of forms in that time and have even been played at locations other than Ohio Stadium.

I'm not sure what to make of a spring game where the biggest topic of discussion on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum was the fact that the Buckeyes did not have names on the back of their jerseys.

Like everyone, I was curious to see what the defense under new coordinator Jim Knowles looked like. I admit that I am not a sophisticated enough football observer to truly evaluate what was going on out on the Ohio Stadium field. My lack of complete comprehension was not helped by the fact that Knowles acknowledged we were getting a watered-down version of his package. It was a little harder for me to follow because of the lack of names on the back, and the ever-changing rules were distracting – was it tackle or touch, was it running clock or not running clock, was the defense getting credited with all their points?

I'll be the first to admit that it is a head coach's prerogative to do whatever he wants in a spring game, and coaches have certainly tinkered with the scrimmage in the past. This spring game just seemed a little more confusing than others.

As far as the defense, I have to go by whose name was called the most, and it seems to be pretty much a consensus that Kye Stokes was the big winner in this game. He was credited with nine tackles in the game and broke up two passes. As I stated previously, I am not that sophisticated a defensive analyst. But I take notice of players who are around the football making plays, and Stokes certainly seemed that.

The freshman safety out of Seffner, Fla., who was one of the more lightly regarded of the incoming recruits, seems to have caught the attention of his coordinator.

"Kye has had a good spring," Knowles said after the game. "Without watching the film, I thought he had a great game because he showed up and flashed and looked like he rose to the occasion, which you worry about with a young guy. You worry about the bright lights. He looked like it was no problem for him. He stepped up, and I'm looking at good things for him. I liked him all along, but I was impressed today."

Another Buckeye who impressed me was Jordan Hancock. He was credited with only two tackles, but one of them was for a 4-yard loss and, like Stokes, he broke up a pair of passes.

With the tackle/touch, touch/tackle format, it was a little harder for me to keep track of the defensive linemen, but Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimolouau seemed to get rave reviews.

"J.T. and Jack have both had very good off-seasons," head coach Ryan Day said. "They've gotten stronger and faster, their techniques are better, and we saw that today. If they continue to build this summer, they're going to be a force in the fall. I think they've really taken to (defensive line coach Larry) Johnson and this system. Jim has a great way of changing up the looks too, to keep the offense guessing."

"The minute you think they're moving, they come at you with a bull rush. That combination of really good technique with Coach Johnson and the style and scheme that Coach Knowles has put together really fit those guys and a lot of guys on defense. Those two have been strong."

I think some Buckeye fans were a little disappointed that the two – who will be forever linked by their high recruiting rankings and coming on board in the same class – weren't

more dominant last season. In the spring game, they made their presence felt on the stat sheet. Tuimolouau was credited with four tackles, two sacks and a quarterback hurry, while Sawyer had two tackles and a sack.

"In my first year, I'm not going to lie, it was trying to get my feet on the ground," Tuimolouau said. "I came here so late, but being here with Jack Sawyer and having a full offseason and seeing what we did out there, we have our feet on the ground and it's going to be a special year for us."

Like many of you, I am sure, I was less concerned about the offense. The Buckeyes, with C.J. Stroud and his many talented receivers, are going to score their points.

I would say that the big spring-game winner on that side of the ball was Evan Pryor. The redshirt freshman running back out of North Carolina ran nine times for 62 yards (6.9 average) and a 22-yard touchdown and added four receptions for 44 yards, including a long of 35. Pryor looks like he will offer a solid third option in the backfield, along with TreVeyon Henderson (who carried only three times) and Miyan Williams, who led all rushers with 15 carries for 101 yards. The coaches seemed satisfied enough with what they saw from the top three running backs that they let walk-on Cayden Saunders pretty much run out the second half. Saunders totaled 32 yards on 11 carries, all after halftime.

One comment from Day about Knowles and his defense caught my attention.

"Jim does a really good job of changing up looks," Day said after the game. "There are times when he's going to drop eight players into coverage and say, 'You have to check the ball down.' As a quarterback, especially somebody as competitive as C.J., he has to force himself to take what the defense gives him, take the check-down, get 5 or 6 yards and then move on. I think he's learning to do that."

I am left wondering if checking down by all three of the Buckeye quarterbacks – Kyle McCord and Devin Brown included – had them looking to the tight ends throughout the spring game. Gee Scott Jr., Joe Royer, Patrick Gurd, Bennett Christian and Sam Hart all got in on the receiving action to the tune of 12 receptions and a 24-yard touchdown pass from McCord to Royer.

Or is this the year Buckeye fans have been waiting for and the tight end finally becomes more than just a third tackle who is eligible to catch passes?

Urban And Spring

Those of you who enjoy our Reprint Thursdays on BuckeyeSports.com know that we have been looking back at Urban Meyer's first year at Ohio State, with reprints from 2012 issues of BSB. Those were exciting times for Buckeye fans, tired of the successful but bland era under Jim Tressel and ready to move past the tattoo scandal that all but scuttled the 2011 season.

"Enter Meyer in late November, and it was almost like the preceding 12 months had never happened," Mark Rea wrote in his Editor's Notebook in the May 2012 issue of BSB. "But it's not simply the dazzling glare of two national championship rings the coach won at Florida that has members of Buckeye Nation so starry-eyed. It is the enthusiasm of Meyer, who truly seems rejuvenated after taking a year away from the game to reconnect with his family and

recharge his inner battery.

"Meyer's enthusiasm turned out to be infectious and helped transfer what had become a stodgy four-week exercise under Tressel into one of the most interesting springs surrounding Ohio State football in recent memory."

Buckeye fans, 81,112 of them, got their first real taste of Meyer at the 2012 spring game, and the new coach caught their attention before the scrimmage even started. Meyer gathered the team in a circle at midfield, and Buckeye Nation was introduced to the now famous Circle Drill.

Our Mike Wachsmann did his best to capture the true excitement of the moment.

"Meyer showed that he isn't afraid to shake things up – and maybe start a new tradition in the process – by delaying the start of the spring game a few minutes with what the coaching staff calls 'The Circle Drill,' " Wachsmann wrote at the time. "Players go one on one in a collision of shoulder pads and arms, looking to drive the other to the ground. It was an aggressive drill, one the players seemed to love, and set the tone for the day. It also showed things were going to be a bit different and conveyed a toughness and togetherness that has been missing in the program for the past 18 months."

"The finale to the drill featured quarterbacks Kenny Guiton and Braxton Miller squaring off as teammates hooted and hollered around them.

"'It is really fun,' said Guiton, who looked like he got the short end of the brief tussle against Miller. 'It's something we do before practice most days. We both got caught in there today.'"

"Meyer said he was just looking for a jolt to give his players.

"'I just wanted some energy,' the coach said. 'I think it was fun for the fans, and I know the players came out of their shoes when we did that.'"

A picture of that first Circle Drill from the cover of BSB runs with the reprint of the story from the 2012 spring game and is absolutely worth checking out. Kerry Coombs is his usual animated self as Miller and Guiton spar, and Meyer couldn't look more intense. Go to BuckeyeSports.com and hit the BSB Online tab and when the menu drops down choose BSB Reprints. Click on the April 22 Reprints and enjoy the picture.

We at BSB obviously enjoyed the Circle Drill because we had it on the cover again in the spring of 2014. In this picture, Coombs again looks cranked up, but Luke Fickell even more so, as Ezekiel Elliott tangled with Raekwon McMillan in another marquee battle.

I think, 10 years later, we tend to think of Meyer as the no-nonsense guy he seemed to become toward the end of his tenure or picture him with that "what am I doing here" look he had when the university was addressing the Zach Smith issue.

But he obviously enjoyed making the spring game a happening, starting off with that one drill.

Another year he held a competition to see if students could outrun Buckeye football players. Doran Grant nipped student Malcolm Branson by a nose in the final back in 2014.

In 2015, Meyer held a quarterback skills competition for the entertainment of the crowd of 99,391, between J.T. Barrett, Cardale Jones and 2006 Heisman Trophy winner Troy Smith.

Barrett, still recovering from the ankle injury he had suffered in the previous Michigan game, won the accuracy portion of the competition. To no one's surprise, Jones won the long-throw competition with a toss of 74 yards.

With the recent tragic passing of Dwayne Haskins, this year's spring affair was a bit more somber. But in the future, going back to the days of having it be not just a spring scrimmage but a spring event might make the lack of contact and ever-changing rules more palatable.

Some Day QB Numbers

Any Buckeye fan knows of Haskins' record-setting numbers in his lone season as the Ohio State starter in 2018. He has been dubbed the godfather of the current streak of brilliant Buckeye quarterbacking, and rightfully so. He engineered a type of passing attack that Ohio State followers had never seen before.

Credit, of course, also needs to be given to now-head coach Ryan Day, who stewarded Ohio State's transition to a passing machine.

The transition actually may have started in Day's first year in Columbus in 2017.

Barrett had the best passing year of his career in '17, completing 240 passes on 371 attempts for a 64.7 percentage, 3,053 yards, 35 touchdowns and only nine interceptions. Meyer was still head coach, so Barrett also ran 165 times for 798 net yards, a 4.8-yard average and 12 touchdowns.

And thus, in 2017, the Day passing parade began, with Haskins shattering school and Big Ten record books the following season and Justin Fields and C.J. Stroud soon following. I took the liberty of projecting Fields' 2020 COVID-shortened season over 15 games, which the Buckeye would have played if they had made it to the CFP championship game, as they did in 2020, in a normal year.

The average numbers for the starting quarterback under Day in his five years running the air show, with 2020 numbers adjusted, would be 293 completions on 424 attempts for a 69.1 completion percentage, 3,906 yards, 42 touchdowns and just seven interceptions.

Compare that to some of the seasons that had previously been held up as all-time great Buckeye passing seasons. In 1998, Joe Germaine was 230 of 384 for a 59.9 completion percentage, 3,330 yards, 25 TDs and seven interceptions. In Smith's Heisman year he completed 203 of 311 passes for a 65.3 percentage, 2,542 yards, 30 touchdowns and just six interceptions.

I think the thing that strikes me the most about the stat line of the average Day quarterback is the touchdown-to-interception ratio of 42 to 7. That's efficient.

One more point I wanted to make about two of Day's disciples.

Haskins was kind of ridiculed for his performance as the starter for the then-Washington Redskins in 2019. On the other hand, Fields is seen as the potential savior of the Chicago Bears. Yet their first-year numbers were very similar.

Haskins was 119 of 203 passing for 1,365 yards, a 58.6 percentage, seven touchdowns and seven interceptions as a rookie. He was 2-5 as a starter. In 2021, Fields was 159 of 270 for a 58.9 percentage, 1,870 yards, seven touchdowns and 10 interceptions. He was 2-8 as a starter.

The sky would seem to be the limit for Fields. Sadly, we'll never know what the pinnacle might have been for Haskins.

FOR ATHLETES

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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.

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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



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